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Ways to Err in Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam*

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Abstract: Ian McEwan's *Amsterdam* is woven around friendship and errors that people can make in life and in art. The novel itself, rightfully perceived as different from the others the author has written, can be considered a deviation from norms. The paper will tackle the types of error that can be identified in the novel as well as the discrepancy between authorial intention and art consumers' perception.

Keywords: *British literature, error, narrative devices, judgemental errors, moral errors, plagiarism*

Ian McEwan's novel *Amsterdam* was awarded the Booker Prize in 1998, which came unexpectedly for both the writer and his readers. Was it an error? The writer admits he worked with pleasure and the book came easily and naturally to him, unlike the previous novels and the ones to come which required much labour:

> It was a real pleasure to write *Amsterdam*. If I had to characterize my mood, I wrote in a state of glee. It was a very different kind of writing experience from *Enduring Love*, which was full of almost nightmare intensity – which in itself was exhilarating. But this had a quality of...I kept thinking, "If nobody else likes it, I don't give a damn, because I really am having fun." (*Interview* in Jordison, 2011)

McEwan's statement is a way to imply that a good book is generally associated with hard and difficult work, whilst the writing of *Amsterdam* breaks the pattern of the artist's 'suffering' during the process of creation as a result of the alienated identity he has to deal with or of the effort lying behind the right verbal vesture. The unusual 'state of glee' made him indulge in a sort of guilty pleasure and erroneously assume that readers might not like his novel.

1. Ways to err

Erring implies deviation from a generally accepted path or from accuracy and can be considered intrinsically unintentional as more factors, some of which uncontrollable, contribute to the undesired outcome.

According to Chris Forsythe et al., "error is the product of the dynamic interaction between a human and the system or task to achieve a specific goal in a specific context" (Forsythe et al., 2014: 168). The authors identify three factors underlying error: intention, cognitive and neurophysiological mechanisms and context (Forsythe et al., 2014: 168). It is admitted that there may be an intention that precedes an act and any deviation from it may be considered a mistake. If there is no prior intentionality, the error is seen as a slip, a term tracing back to Freud's "slips of the tongue" (1901), or a lapse, according to Reason (1990), Norman (1983), and Forsythe et al. (2014). Error is also related to the way in which the brain processes the information it receives, a process depending on more variables such as "visual perception" and "spontaneous fluctuations in the oscillatory activity of neural circuits" (Fox et al. 2005), and on factors like fatigue, age or emotions. These factors also determine the accuracy or lack of accuracy with recalled memories. Being palimpsestically stored, as it is known from Bergson's philosophy, memories can be recalled with erroneous contextual details or only partially recalled. Similarities between parts of the context, lack of interest in it or emotions often cause errors in recalled memories. As Forsythe et al. show in their example, the name of a person whom you have not seen for a long time may be "mistakenly retrieved": "In this situation, memory is accessed on the basis of the context in which you had known the person, but there were other people with the same context and in recalling the context, the wrong name is triggered" (2014: 170). On the other hand, the context within which the memory is recalled or the human acts may affect the correctness of the decision one makes, the lack of information or partial processing due to time pressure or emotions lead to deviation in decision making or accidental misunderstandings of the information. Therefore inner and outer factors contribute to human decision making and erroneous choices.

Considering the wide range of errors and error generating situations and contexts, various taxonomies have been proposed on the grounds of psychoanalysis and behavioural and management studies, among which the above mentioned distinction between mistakes and slips/lapses, and the four types of human errors in administration and management that are related to their origin as shown by Meister (1971) (quoted in Forsythe et al., 2014: 178): operating errors, design errors, manufacturing errors and installation/maintenance errors. Considering the moment when the error occurs, three other types have been identified: the *preinitiator human error* which happens "before the beginning of an accident sequence", the *initiator human error* which contributes to the initiation of an accident sequence and

the *postinitiator human error* which happens after an aggravating incident. (IAEA 1996 in Forsythe et al., 178)

There are two elements which require further attention to uphold the demonstration in this paper: the relation between accident and error and the negative connotation the concept of error hosts. Although both imply an undesired outcome, they may also echo the emergence of an idea in the writer's imagination, which is generally perceived as an accidental, unintentional occurrence sometimes leading to an error in the sense of deviation from the initial plan. There may be accidents such as slips from the initial plan which are recognized as potentially artistic deviations and preserved in the work. Irina Mavrodin (1982) referring to the artisan's work considers the errors occurring in the "manufacturing process", as artisans are known to create serial products, happy accidents which sometimes render the product more interesting and different, ensuring its uniqueness and artistry. Recognised and assumed errors/accidental deviations or hazards may be exploited as fruitful turning points by an artistic consciousness. There are, however, situations when accidents do not provide the artist with productive moments/ideas, which explains why Mavrodin considers that "only an artistic consciousness can identify and seize hazard as a gift and an inexhaustible source renewing the work, while hazard has no artistic quality in itself." (Mavrodin, 1982: 165)

The above theories provide a grid helping to the identification of various types of errors in Ian McEwan's novel which is a tragicomedy woven around errors acting like narrative engines. The novelist shows his surprise at the unexpected experience he had while writing the novel especially because he did not intend, anticipate or hope for critical recognition. The outcome, a 'felicitous error' considering the McEwan's expectancy, was largely debated, yet definitely set among the author's best novels. While some of the critics, among whom the ones who decided the novel deserved the prize, showed much appreciation for the book, considering the narrative devices and the easiness the author had put in it noteworthy, there were critics who could not understand why such a novel was rewarded, implying an erroneous decision on behalf of the judges, and considered it the worst McEwan had written. The plot was criticized for being too simple, "preposterous", "characters have no character" and "there is nothing to grasp in them", "the sly winking tone is irritating" (Jordison, 2011, *The Guardian*), etc.

The novel with an unusual making is built around accidental events leading to unexpected ways of processing and around emotions eventually generating erroneous decisions, actions and results. This is precisely what

McEwan wanted to do: a novel that could be read in a short period of time, even a sitting, a tragicomedy having the structure of a play, devoid of descriptions and therefore dynamic and easy to read, including moments of suspense, conflict and paradoxes whose presentation was deceptively clear, characters with disputable character, anti-models that paradoxically pass for models. The novel had emerged from a context full of joy and of positive and detached thinking and got under the lens of exigent, even carping critics, who found a fault where the author thought he had put a strength. Its emergence can be compared thus with the movement from the protective womb of the author's imagination to the outer world, where, unprotected, it had to meet the readers' expectations and find its place. Within the novel several types of mistakes, slips and lapses can be detected, among which errors of judgement, moral and ethic errors, as the protagonists do not hesitated to err while taking great care not to do it. McEwan creates an amusing contrast between the characters' apparently powerful and self-confident personality and the uncontrollable situations and contexts which make them drift along the novel while scattering their lives with errors.

2. Errors of judgement

Errors of judgement are related to both the contexts within which the decision is made and to the result of the decision which is different from the intended or expected one. In between the moment of the decision and the result various factors, some of them uncontrollable, act and deviate the intended course of events, annihilating a cause-effect relation. According to Forsythe et al., it is rather a "reversed causality (i.e. reasoning from effect to cause)" (2014: 166). McEwan's *Amsterdam* tells the story of two friends who meet at the funeral of a common friend, Molly, and who, impressed by her sudden death which was supposedly a result of her mental decline, make a vow to assist each other in euthanasia if they go the same way:

> "Just supposing I did get ill in a major way, like Molly, and I started to go downhill and make terrible mistakes, you know, errors of judgement, not knowing names of things or who I was, that kind of thing, I'd like to know there was someone who'd help me to finish it … I mean, help me to die." (McEwan, 2005: 49)

Clive finds the context in which Molly died so embarrassing and is so much affected by the way people perceived her that the intensity of his feelings determines him to draw his friend, Vernon Halliday, into the deal. His decision is emotionally made and is based on the analysis of Molly's life

and death. Her death is seen as an error contextually determined and poorly managed, but it constitutes the environment causing Clive and Vernon's decision and a series of unforeseen results which make their judgement of the situation be erroneous. They neglect precisely the contextual limits which hinder them from having a more detached perspective upon the event and the uncontrollable flow of future events in their lives. Their decision also shows insufficient knowledge of each other and of themselves in moments of crisis. In the economy of the narrative, when they entrust their lives to each other the reader expects an accident, an error which might bring the death of at least one of them. Time plays the well-known trick of changing the evolution of the characters, of twisting their lives so as to turn them into enemies who dispose of each other's life.

Another error of judgement comes when Clive makes the decision to send Vernon the poisonous letter. The moment Clive writes the letter he admits his strong feelings will produce a letter that might be used against him in the future: "He compromised with a terse postcard which he would leave for a day before sending. *Your threat appals me. So does your journalism. You deserve to be sacked. Clive*" (McEwan, 2005: 138). In the morning he perceives the letter differently: "He took a walk to clear his head, and post the card to Vernon which today read like a masterpiece of restraint" (McEwan, 2005: 140). The contexts within which Clive acts are different: while in the evening he sees his letter as a weapon in the hands of his enemy, the next morning, due to his having drunk too much, he does not see it as being so dangerous. The decision in the evening to postpone the gesture is reasonable, but the distorted perception of the text in the morning leads to an error of judgement. By sending the letter he challenges Vernon who acts in accordance, as Clive initially expected.

3. Moral errors

Moral errors derive from the deviation from moral principles while assuming to have a moral life. Clive and Vernon, both absorbed by their mission: the former as a musician and the latter as an editor, fail to obey moral principles several times. Clive decides to take a journey meant to bring him the creative energy he needed to finish the *Millennial Symphony* and walks along a route in the Lake District. Prisoner of the inspiring atmosphere and solitude and writing down the fragments which came from "the murmur of a voice" (McEwan, 2005: 84), Clive forgot to be human and help people in need. Although he sees a man and a woman having an argument he decides to be absent: "I am not here" (McEwan, 2005: 85). He

witnesses an attempt to rape, but he fails to help the woman, as he is inspired and has to jot down the notes that are coming to his mind, and also fails to tell the police about it. He finds himself in between an outer call and an inner one. The choice he makes is a feature of his lack of character showing his selfishness and egocentrism which are however disturbed by a week voice of his superego. It is the description of the struggle between the two and of the woman's voice that make the reader know Clive's awareness of the seriousness of the event. His decision and comments are defying of moral norms:

> He was crossing out notes as fast as he was setting them down, but when he heard the woman's voice rise to a sudden shout, his hand frozen. He knew it was a mistake, he knew he should have kept writing, but once again he peered over the rock. She had turned to face in Clive's direction now. […] He lay on his tilted slab, pencil between his fingers, notebook in his other hand, and sighed. Was he really going to intervene? He imagined running down there. The moment at which he would reach them was when the possibilities would branch: the man might run off; the woman would be grateful, and together they could descend to the main road by Seatoller. Even this least probable of outcomes would destroy his fragile inspiration. […] Their fate, his fate. The jewel, the melody. Its momentousness pressed upon him. […] What was clear now was the pressure of choice: he should either go down and protect the woman, if she needed protection, or he should creep away […] to find a sheltered place to continue his work – if it was not already lost. […] It was as if he wasn't there. He wasn't there. He was in his music. His fate, their fate, separate paths. (McEwan, 2005: 86-89)

The text is ironic and illustrative of absolute selfishness when Clive considers it a *mistake* to peer over the rock although he knows it would have been correct to intervene and invents childish excuses and interpretations of the situation: "if she needed protection." Although it would have been a moral duty to support the woman's statements by telling the police about the rape, Clive chooses again self-protection and non-involvement for the sake of art and imagines this exonerates him. He will be harshly criticised by Vernon for his immoral decisions.

Fancying his responsibility as an editor and having the chance to publish several pictures of the Foreign Secretary taken by Molly, pictures in which Garmony wears woman underwear and clothes, his friend, Vernon, ignores Clive's advice not to taint the memory of the woman in the name of their friendship. Clive, this time, is sensitive to a moral issue, which he could not adhere to when the woman in need was unknown. The impact of

the context, an uncontrollable factor in decision making, upon his behaviour explains Clive's and Vernon's different attitudes. Inebriated with the possible success of the newspaper *The Judge* whose editor he was, therefore a personal success too, Vernon imagines he is simply doing his duty which is above personal relations and feelings.

> "Clive! Listen to me. You're in your studio all day dreaming of symphonies. You've no idea what's at stake. If Garmony's not stopped now, if he gets to be a prime minister in November, they've got a good chance of winning the election next year. Another five years! There'll be even more people living below the poverty line, more people in prison, more homeless, more crime, more riots like last year. He's been speaking in favour of national service. …" (McEwan, 2005: 74)

Vernon hides beyond political reasoning while Clive switches the real and fictional planes and builds hypotheses based on a very clear situation. Yet, they are very harsh with each other and try to demonstrate the other's decision is wrong. The disagreement becomes a risky game considering the vow: Clive's card for Vernon is meant to criticise him for having published the photographs, with his awareness that this could make Vernon try to murder him (a poisonous card), when he receives the card Vernon tells the police Clive witnessed the rape and Clive is taken to the police to identify the man. Clive's failure in the identification, which shows his inability to retrieve the details of the man's appearance, may originate in his lack of interest for the event as he was concerned with his symphony and also started overlapping real and imaginary planes which included the woman only. He supposedly committed an error in reconstructing the contextual details of the past event. As a result, each of the two friends decides the other one is mad and should die, and invite each other to Amsterdam.

4. Professional errors

Errors can occur in professional decisions made as a result of exaggerated selfishness and overrating individual merits and performance in composition and journalism. McEwan's novel tackles the ethics of a work of art, mainly the principle of originality. Clive is very proud of his having been asked to compose what is called *Millennial Symphony* as it is a sign of public recognition of his 'genius'. This also imposes a standard which he takes very seriously, so seriously that, as we saw above, he ignores the woman who is raped. At the beginning of the novel the reader is announced that Clive had missed two deadlines and that he is aware that there is

enough time till the beginning of the new millennium. He actually makes a first mistake in assuming the deadline will be delayed until he finishes the symphony, overrating thus his ability to write it in time and his importance and influence, and he is eventually forced to send it without having worked on the variations. His self-centredness makes him more concerned with the process of creation, with what inspires him, with his moods and he keeps finding excuses for his delay in different unexpected events that disturb him by consuming his time and/or his creative energy. Clive as a reflector character offers us a radiography of authorial torments when a pressure that would probably make people compare him with Beethoven, as he himself does, rests on his shoulders. Beethoven becomes a reference element that ensures the cyclicity of the novel in terms of Clive's professional performance. Ironically, his unfinished symphony is criticised for plagiarism "They say you've ripped off Beethoven something rotten." which Lanark, an acquaintance, mockingly calls "sampling" or "post-modern quotation" (McEwan, 2005: 164). This resolution is anticipated by Clive himself in the first part of the novel: "In the small minds of the zealots, Clive insisted, any form of success, however limited, any public appreciation whatsoever, was a sure sign of aesthetic compromise and failure" (McEwan, 2005: 22). Clive, overrating his talent, eventually identifies with Beethoven and creates like him, failing to recognize the echoes of Beethoven's music in his own symphony. Clive lacks the ability to identify hazards, according to Mavrodin's theory, that can drive him away from Beethoven's influence and to build his own artistic identity.

Vernon, in his turn, makes a mistake when he assumes the publishing of the photographs would be a good idea, which demonstrates he has not enough experience and cannot make correct judgements, despite his experience as an editor for *The Judge*. Vernon hides beyond his duty as an editor who has to make the truth public when he is offered the chance while Clive hides beyond his duty to write the *Millennial Symphony* to be performed in Amsterdam, a unique chance for him. It turns out that both decisions were wrong as Vernon gets fired after having published the photographs (McEwan, 1998: 143) and Clive's symphony is a failure. Moreover, the newspaper now is brilliant and Vernon concludes: "Everyone was wrong." (McEwan, 2005: 147)

5. Conclusion

McEwan's novel – a tragicomedy, meant to delight and keep the readers in suspense at the same time, provides the reader with a net of errors

favoured by the context and the versatile, easily influential and uncertain personalities of the characters. It demonstrates that even a well thought plan can turn into an error as it depends on the uncontrollable context and on people's perception of it. To outline the postmodern man as a combination of selfishness and self-centredness in between plagiarism and make-believe, Ian McEwan lets him at the mercy of life-conducting errors.

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Rezumat: Romanul *Amsterdam* de Ian McEwan se ţese în jurul ideii de prietenie şi al erorilor ce pot apărea în viaţă şi în artă. Romanul însuşi, în mod corect perceput ca diferit de celelalte opere ale autorului, poate fi văzut ca o abatere de la norme. Lucrarea abordează tipurile de erori ce pot fi identificate în roman şi discrepanţa dintre intenţia auctorială şi percepţia consumatorilor de artă.

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The Modernist Tragi-Comedy of Errors

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Abstract: This paper intends to show a major change inside the development of the modernist movement: the passage from the high modernist writers' unreliable narrator to the emergence of a notably different handling of error that characterized a less known second generation of modernist writers now known as late modernists.

The latter's ignorance of the issue of epiphany, their incapacity or refusal to produce any structured vision of the world participated in the difficulty encountered by critics to give them a fair rank in the history of modernist literature, or even to grasp them as a collective entity.

Yet precisely, their specific handling of error can help today's scholars and critics to identify the originality of a late modernist generation of writers too often classified as decadent or weaker modernists.

Keywords: *modernism, late modernism, fiction, epiphany.*

The topic of this conference *Errors in Context* offers a particular insight into modernist modes of narration. 'Error' instantly sounds as a key word to decipher modernist narrative logics. A pre-modernist novel like *Lord Jim* (Conrad, 1900), for instance, can be viewed as an accurate exposition of erroneous judgements. More than a portrait of the eponymous character, or a list of his various adventures, what is unfolded is an analysis of opinions in the making, of common blindness, which has nothing to do with previous Victorian novels (if we think of Dickens, or Thackeray, or George Eliot), and foreshadows such novels as *The Good Soldier* (Ford, 1915), or *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 1925). What Conrad "lets us see", in the words of his Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Conrad, 1897), is what science cannot observe, namely: "[…] that part of our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence, is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and hard qualities – like the vulnerable body within a steel armour." Art, literature, rank on equal footing with science in the construct of knowledge: "The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal", Conrad says. And the method to achieve this goal consists in examining errors, the way they emerge, the way they survive and take ground. In each of the three novels I have just mentioned as examples (*Lord Jim, The Good Soldier, The Great Gatsby*), a narrator confronts ordinary blindness, trivial illusion. He chooses

to observe, he analyses his own misperceptions. In the wake of Conrad's creed, canonical novels of the modernist period are based on the logic of slow, attentive error-processing, in order to reach a better approach to reality. Facts no longer organize or regulate the plot. Virginia Woolf's formula: "Facts are a very inferior form of fiction" (Woolf, 1972: 1-11) gain the status of a true motto. The plot is structured by the various decisive steps taken by the narrator towards epiphanic moments, by visions leading to a better understanding of perceived phenomena. Looking back to the turn of the 20th century from our present-day standpoint, we must acknowledge the fact that never before had the human mind itself and its subjection to error been considered as the epitome of a hero, in the world of fiction.

And yet, throughout the evolution of literary modernism itself, this belief in the potency of fiction dwindled. The theme of error reveals a major fault-line in the development of the modernist novel, that is to say in the handling of narrative logic by modernist writers. A whole generation of late modernist writers can be characterized as the introducers of what could be called epiphanic fallacy. Their approach to narration gives error a totally different place, so that I propose to examine this change as a particular criterion to delineate periods inside modernism, and thus certainly do justice to a series of neglected novelists. One of the side effects of this re-consideration of the modernist legacy being a possible reflection on today's critical discourse on modernism, as we will eventually suggest.

1. The high modernist handling of errors

So let us first examine the status of error in high modernist novels, through one of the examples previously mentioned: *The Good Soldier*. Ford Madox Ford is known to have been one of Conrad's closest literary companions and what critics have characterized as "new realism", that is to say the detailed observation of the workings of human consciousness, determines the narrative logic of the novel. *The Good Soldier* displays two accounts of the same events and situations, the second account being a revised and corrected version of the first, which leads the narrator to some profound self examination.

The first part introduces a meditation on error with a basic aspect of the question, that is the absence of error when light is absent and cannot even be distinguished from darkness. Describing one of his first meetings with his wife, the narrator (Dowell) says:

> Why does one do things? I just drifted in and wanted Florence. First I had
> drifted in on Florence at a Browning tea, or something of the sort in

> Fourteenth Street, which was then still residential. I don't know why I had gone to New York; I don't know why I had gone to the tea. I don't know why Florence should have gone to that sort of spelling bee." (Ford, 1915: 21)

Innocence and blindness, a rather usual association, is transformed into a slightly different one in the final chapter: darkness then pairing with awareness. In the final chapter, the narrator declares: "I am only an ageing American with very little knowledge of life" (Ford, 1915: 219). What lies between the two slightly distinct situations, is a long series of errors, strenuously identified and even more laboriously corrected.

The narrator first realizes that he has failed to perceive a considerable share of his life's reality as a husband; then he realizes his own participation in such blindness, how unwilling to see he must have been. And the interest of the narrative lies in the way Dowell places the reader in the situation of falling exactly into the same traps as he did. From Part Two to the end of Part Four Dowell repeats the same story already narrated in Part One, this time with his eyes open. Part One is centred on the narrator's early, cloudless perception of his married life. Part Two starts with a thunder stroke, the unexpected discovery of Florence's long-term betrayal, which transforms the narrative into a maze of ensuing, smaller, embedded discoveries, the last step towards the centre of the maze consisting in self-analysis.

The result is a displacement of what Dowell himself calls "the tragedy", "the tragic story" or "the saddest story of all". The tragedy, like the narrative logic itself, passes from the world of facts into the sphere of perception. The tragic dimension does not emanate from the death of Dowell's wife Florence, or the death of most characters, but from the narrator's own blindness and belated understanding.

And it is a tragedy in which the reader finds himself trapped. Not trapped as he is may be trapped by Sterne or Diderot, that is to say through his own curiosity, or by intentionally misleading details in the narrative. The reader rather finds himself implied as the addressee of the narrative, and also implicated as a witness ready to sign a warrant for the narrator's honesty and total disarray. Dowell has broken faith with his own experience of reality. Telling his own story, he demonstrates, first to himself and then to any man endowed with common sense, that the errors he made as an observer of his wife and friends, the distorted image that took shape in his mind, could not be otherwise. He seeks support to face the disconcerting reality that lies beyond appearances: his entire life has escaped him, not because his wife betrayed him and his best friends were rascals, but because

he was betrayed by his senses and self-certainty. In the final chapter, he discovers and faces his own bigamous inclination, and the narrative eventually appears as an ultimate protection against madness and dislocation. He writes his own story to maintain the status of error distinct from that of a fault. When his pleading voice rebels against the overwhelming fatality of error, he in fact discards the very possibility of a fault:

> Supposing that you should come upon us sitting together at one of the little tables in front of the club house, let us say at Homburg, taking tea of an afternoon and watching the miniature golf, you would have said that, as human affairs go, we were an extraordinarily safe castle. We were, if you will, one of those tall ships with the white sails upon a blue sea, one of those things that seem the proudest and the safest of all the proud and safe things that God has permitted the mind of men to frame. Where better could one take refuge? Where better? (Ford, 1915: 13)

The words chosen by Dowell evoke the world of King Lear. He experiences homelessness, the loss of his castle and refuge, of his pride and sense of safety, of everything promised and safeguarded by God. But his wandering and wondering state of mind suggests an innocent King Lear, not one who has *decided* to divide his kingdom.

What transforms the story into a tragedy, in Dowell's own obsessive words, is not the sadness of the characters' destinies (though they all die off) but the cruelty of Dowell's realization of fatal errors. Dowell's naïve self dies too. The narrator experiences the cruellest death of all, slow conscious death followed by a painful awakening to a new monstrous, disquieting reality and identity: "Someone has said that the death of a mouse from cancer is the whole sack of Rome by the Goths, and I swear to you that the breaking up of our little four-square coterie was such an unthinkable event" (Ford, 1915: 13). Belated awareness is the major tragic agent at work in the narrative. And Dowell bears the brunt of its cruelty: "Permanence? Stability? I can't believe it's gone. I can't believe that that long, tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crashing days at the end of nine years and six weeks." (Ford, 1915: 13)

Error thus appears as a form of condemnation, a form of fatal self-betrayal. Observation is endlessly defeated, and knowledge comes too late or too violently to be exploited. What modernism adds to modernity (in the wake of Conrad's *Lord Jim*) is a radically new conception of the status and value of error, in which the role of the unconscious is central. But contrary to what one might expect, some sort of epiphany is maintained. The

narrative appears as a true ordeal. Writing leads to revelations from and about the innermost recesses of the narrator's mind. In the final chapter, Dowell sounds persuaded that the narrative has not been vain but beneficial in two different ways: firstly, he has reached a form of enlightenment, a new vision of his own self, however monstrous as it is; and secondly, through his courageous error-processing he has made his own errors profitable to the reader. The function of a first person narrator is precisely to show the collective dimension, the teachings of individual experience, and the philosophical quality of fiction becomes comparable to that of a tale. Dowell significantly resorts to such terms as 'happy ending', 'villains, heroes and heroines' (Ford, 1915: 225), or to judgements that seem to derive from the world of tales, such as: "a human heart is a very mysterious thing" (Ford, 1915: 184); or "it is a queer and fantastic world" (Ford, 1915: 213). Like most high modernist writers, Ford suggests surreptitious enlightenments exuding confidence in the possible, though fragmentary, transformation of error into experience. He deals with the unseen reality, rather than the invisible reality. Error is fatal, it is part and parcel of the human condition, but fragile belated visions and fragmentary enlightenments can be attained through the potencies of literary creation. Error is overwhelming *and* transcended at the same time, through the process of writing and gathering (if not assembling) the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle.

2. The late modernists and the end of the epiphanic fallacy

Such confidence dissolved towards the end of the 1920s. In the 1920s, and in the early 1930s, two different generations coexist in the literary sphere. The middle-aged generation of Ford Madox Ford, Woolf and Joyce on the one hand, and on the other hand a number of young novelists who were children or adolescents during WWI. What takes place in the novels of this new generation is far more disquieting and at the same time so profound that it seems to have remained undetected by the radars of modernist critique, and beyond record until very recently. One the most emblematic novels of the next generation starts with the portrait of a character who could never learn spelling. In *Dusty Answer*, Rosamond Lehmann's scandalous novel published in 1927, Mariella (the central character's neighbour and school mate) cannot spell properly and seldom speaks. There seems to be a return to conventional, simplistic conception of error in the form of misspellings. Mariella who neither spells properly nor expresses her feelings appears as a mirror image of Judith, the central

character and would-be writer. The members of the new generation step on to the literary stage as people who can neither speak nor write, despite their respective talents or ambitions.

Judith is depicted as a keen observer. She observes faces and their slightest changes. But faces deliver no secrets. Paradoxically, what she observes is an absence of signs or clues to understand the world as it is. Faces turn out to be as impenetrable as masks: "But Roddy only smiled. On his face was the mask behind which he guarded his personal pleasures and savoured them in secret" (Lehmann, 1927: 94). And the world around her can at best wear a mask of beauty but fails to make sense: "Everywhere the white blossom, as it rose, freed itself lightly from its roots in earth's pang of passion and contemplation, and, floating upon the air, kept but one secret, which was beauty, paid no heed, gave no sign." (Lehmann, 1927: 87)

Judith experiences some similar dismay when she considers her own thoughts and feelings: she wants to write and finds nothing to say:

> Each morning she thought:
> "Today I will begin to write – start practising again – apply through College to some post . . .
> But each morning found her still folded in the golden caressing solitudes of the garden, mindless and inert. There was no subject that could conceivably provide material for a book; no music that was not too difficult to learn to play; no post that did not seem entirely distasteful. (Lehmann, 1927: 280)

The narrative ends with the contrary of a revelation, a moment qualified as "no-thought, no-feeling":

> She was rid at last of the weakness, the futile obsession of dependence on other people. She had nobody now except herself, and that was best.
> This was to be happy – this emptiness, this light coloured state, this no-thought and no-feeling.
> She was a person whose whole past made one great circle, completed now and ready to be discarded.
> Soon she must begin to think: What next?
> But not quite yet. (Lehmann, 1927: 303)

The last words of the novel thus exemplify what appears as the late modernist refusal of the epiphanic fallacy. The world amounts to myriads of surfaces, all treacherous and beyond understanding. The late modernists discover a world in which opposites tend to merge and madness threatens.

Life and death, to start with, are hardly distinguishable. Death contaminates life. Remembering Charlie's departure to the Front, Judith thinks: "There seemed nothing now in life but a waiting for his death." (Lehmann, 1927: 43) and when her father dies, this is how the narrative voice evokes the event:

> As she hung up the receiver silence in a vast tide flowed in and drowned the house, his house, as if for ever. (Lehmann, 1927: 104)
> […]
> Then death, lovely death, lay at the heart of enchantment. It was the core of the mystery and beauty. Tomorrow she would not know it, but tonight no knowledge was surer. And he whom they were to mourn was – in one minute she would know where he was, - one minute.
> She leaned out of the window.
> Now! Now!
> But the cherry tree was nothing but a small flowering cherry tree. Before her straining eyes it had veiled itself and withheld the sign. (Lehmann, 1927: 106)

The reality lies beyond Judith's understanding and handling of language, and so much so that she cannot fix her mind in the mental attitude of reflecting.

Then, past and present also mingle. *Dusty Answer* can be seen as an impossible *Bildungsroman*. The narrative no longer challenges the world of appearances, it rather skids, stammers, and thus displaces signifiers and tropes to render the unbridgeable gap between past and present, the pointlessness of experience. What Judith calls "the darkly-shining enchanted shadow-stuff of remembered childhood" (Lehmann, 1927: 9) collides with the present and makes the present unreal. The narrative voice is not flexible but jerky, changing subjective pronouns to enhance Judith's difficulty to tackle her own feelings. The narrative voice even quits the narrative at times, and disappears behind anonymous or anonymized quotations of poetry or songs in various languages (English, French, Latin), exemplifying the famous definition René Char gave of the condition of young writers in the 1930s, saying that they received: "a heritage without a testament". (*Feuillets d'Hypnos* no. 62)

Mariella's silence and incapacity to spell properly appear as a pendant to Judith's incapacity to create. The younger authors of the 1930s, Rosamond Lehmann, Elizabeth Bowen or Christopher Isherwood, Evelyn Waugh, Henry Green, Aldous Huxley, Laurie Lee, George Orwell, William Plomer, V. S. Pritchett, Jean Rhys, Rex Warner, Anthony Powell, to quote but a few, challenge the reader that has been shaped by high

modernist aesthetic inventions. Their staunch disbelief in epiphany has drawn critics into a series of ensuing judgemental errors. Judgemental errors that I would like to examine now.

3. Erroneous readings of fatal errors

The late modernist vagary of epiphany reveals a radical fault-line in the literary output of the late 1920s and following decades. The novels of the younger generation describe the world as a surface and society as a gallery of masks. And the change was so brutal that critics were deceived or misled in a number of ways. For late modernist authors, error is no longer what characters have to identify, go through and overcome. Error can no longer be processed. Characters survive through a humble return to the genuineness of sensation, that is to say the genuineness of the moment preceding thought or interpretation.

Walter Benjamin described the return to the narrative mode of the chronicle, to a narrative mode meant to postpone judgement. In 1922, Benjamin conceived a project named *Angelus Novus*, a literary magazine which he never actually launched. But he wrote the opening text of presentation (Benjamin: 200, 267-273), in which he describes the magazine as a chronicle of the present times, and he justifies its title, *Angelus Novus*, in reference to the impenetrable surface of novelty, and the necessity for his generation to concentrate on the present despite its opacity. He evokes a Talmudic legend describing multitudes of angels being created permanently. Ephemeral angels emerging to sing their song before God and disappear instantly to be replaced by new angels, and so indefinitely. In his magazine, contributors are invited to leave a trace of a present that they fail to understand. Traces of any kind: fiction, poems or essays, indifferently.

Late modernist writers therefore address the reader of the future. They expect the next generations to add to their works the meaning that is escaping them. The absence of epiphany is a new tragic aspect of fiction, but one that momentarily defeats the essence of writing, or at least delays the question of its value. Late modernist writers renounce the possible meaning of their enterprise, and they partly renounce the aesthetic dimension of their works. They write in a period of particular danger for literature as such, a period when the end of art has not been identified yet, and is simply lurking. What matters to me as a final point in this paper is that the tragic impotence of late modernist authors to produce a vision of the world (instead of just a sensation of the world) was interpreted by critics and

historians of literature as a particular weakness, a harbinger of decadent modernism. A judgement both false and unfair, based on irrelevant criteria.

The present-day unearthing of modernist magazines perfectly illustrates the injustice. The now well-known literary magazines that emerged in the 1910s and early 1920s were all experimental, avant-garde magazines with small circulations targeting restricted readerships, whereas the two major magazines of the 1930s and 1940s, *Horizon* and *New Writing*, reached much larger readerships[1] and, curiously enough, they still remain almost unnoticed. Indeed, they display a less attractive profile. The age of manifestos was well over. And the dwindling share of aesthetic invention led Cyril Connolly, the editor of *Horizon* (launched in 1939) to call the 1930s 'the disastrous decade' (Connolly, 1965: 67). John Lehmann, the editor of *New Writing*, was more optimistic and opened a path to a new crop of talents in 1936, but he grew more and more desperate till the mid 1950s when he acknowledged "We are living in an age without giants" (Lehmann, 1957: 2). He ended up profoundly disappointed not to have been able to publish the masterpiece he had kept expecting all along, especially through the war years. Lehmann dreamt of publishing what he called "the true epic of our times"[2], a true *tes*timony of "the fury of destruction and denial" and "the bleeding spirit of humanity"[3]. And as Benjamin had planned before him, he offered an outlet for emerging voices in a historical moment that he

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[1] The magazine *New Writing,* founded by John Lehmann in 1936, was first hosted by The Bodley Head, then by the Marxist firm Lawrence and Wishart, and eventually published under the imprint of the Hogarth Press from 1938 to 1946. Three years after its launching, *New Writing* was published in two parallel formats: the book form issues published by the Hogarth Press, affordable to the middle and upper-middle classes, were relayed by a Penguin series, the first pocketbook version of a cultural magazine, targeting a more popular readership. *The Penguin New Writing* launched in 1939 prolonged the life of the hardbound *New Writing* until 1950, outliving the Hogarth Press version by four years.In 1941, the magazine stabilized with a circulation of 75,000 copies. During the war, each issue of *The Penguin New Writing* swallowed the same amount of paper as was accorded to the Hogarth Press for one year.

Horizon, launched by Cyril Connolly in 1939, was *New Writing'*s self declared competitor but never overpassed a circulation of 8.000 copies. Unlike *New Writing*, it kept a regular format all along its 80 issues, all published by The Curwen Press. It came to an end the same year as *New Writing* with a closing issue conceived as an index of contributors and comprehensive list of contents.

[2] John Lehmann, « The Armoured Writer », Part 3, (p. 179). "The Armoured Writer", is an essay published in instalments : Part 1, *New Writing and Daylight*, summer 1942, (p. 153-160); Part 2, *New Writing and Daylight*, winter 1942-43, (p. 165-176); Part 3, *New Writing and Daylight*, summer 1943, (p. 170-180); Part 4, *New Writing and Daylight*, winter 1943-44, (p. 162-168); Part 5, *New Writing and Daylight*, autumn 1944, (p. 164-175).

[3]*Idem*, Part 5, (p. 175).

failed to understand: "There is no true and complete vision of existence in which the unseen, what lies beyond our five senses and logical proof, does not play a part […]. We are lived by powers we do not understand"[4]. He was doubtful about the capacity of any text he had published to stand the test of time and become what he called "the modern tragedy", a longed-for novel (rather than poem) which he imagined as "the cathedral for an age that has broken up with all the old settled shapes of belief, [an age] that must turn to art or die"[5]. But we can now understand that the two magazines *are* the cathedral they expected and failed to see because their editors were inside it.

Walter Benjamin, Cyril Connolly and John Lehmann address a category of readers we belong to, readers who have gained sufficient distance to understand the 1930s and 1940s better than they did. We have indeed put a name on the haunting fear of the end of art, but we have not yet totally discarded an erroneous reading of late modernist writers and late modernism in general as a decadent period of modernism. Contemporary critics have so far failed to identify it rather as the dawn of postmodernism. With the distance that the turn of the 21st century has brought about, high modernism appears more and more as a form of Victorian twilight, characterized by a strong belief in aesthetics and an even stronger belief in the superiority of literature over the social and political dimensions of History; whereas the late modernist output appears as the first evidence of a profound, tragic experience of the end of art. The end of art, not the death of art, since the end of art is something to be indefinitely postponed.

In this paper, I have chosen to speak about well-known high modernist writers and far less known late modernist writers, in order to pose the problem of error in our own approach to the 20th century. A whole period of modernism has remained under-estimated, therefore uncharted and misread until the last few years. Considerable corpuses of unexplored writings are still expecting students and scholars whose task will consist in clearing errors from the current narrative of modernism.

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[4]John Lehmann, « The Armoured Writer », Part 3, (p. 179). "The Armoured Writer", is an essay published in instalments : Part 1, *New Writing and Daylight*, summer 1942, (p. 153-160); Part 2, *New Writing and Daylight*, winter 1942-43, (p. 165-176); Part 3, *New Writing and Daylight*, summer 1943, (p. 170-180); Part 4, *New Writing and Daylight*, winter 1943-44, (p. 162-168); Part 5, *New Writing and Daylight*, autumn 1944, (p. 164-175).
[5]*Idem*, Part 1, (p. 156).

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Rezumat: Prezentul studiu descrie o schimbare esențială în dezvoltarea curentului modernist: trecerea de la naratorul necreditabil al scriitorilor aparținând modernismului înalt la apariția unei sesizabil diferite abordări a erorii, care a caracterizat cea de-a doua generație de scriitori moderniști mai puțin cunoscuți, etichetați astăzi drept moderniști târzii. Ignorarea epifaniei de către aceștia din urmă, incapacitatea sau refuzul lor de a produce o viziune structurată a lumii au contribuit la dificultatea criticilor de a-i clasifica echitabil în rândul literaturii moderniste, sau chiar de a-i percepe ca entitate compactă.
Și totuși, modalitatea lor specifică de abordare a greșelii îi poate ajuta pe cercetătorii și criticii de azi să identifice originalitatea generației de moderniști târzii, prea adesea considerați moderniști decadenți sau de calibru inferior.

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Romantic Errings and Wanderings: A Celebration of Error?

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Abstract: Starting from the etymological meaning of the verb "to err", this paper focuses on the wanderers that are often pictured in poems from the Romantic Age. I argue that because of this significant presence of "erring" figures, romanticism could be considered as a turning point in the treatment of error, which can be seen as more due to a political background than to any personal failing. The romantic celebration of the imagination as the creative faculty illustrates the same point, since imaginative thinking provides a form of revelation, thanks to which truth is reached directly, without any possibility of error. The question raised is whether we can consider the Romantic Age as a celebration of error, in all its forms.

Etymologically speaking, error is not completely erroneous: the Latin verb *errare* has as its primary meaning the action of wandering or roaming, which only in modern times became narrowed to going astray from the truth. Keeping this etymological origin in mind, I would like to focus on English Romantic poetry and thought, and on some of the Romantics' works concerned with error. My argument stems from the observation that many characters in romantic poetry can be characterized as erring, often moving geographically, as vagrants or beggars; they appear condemned to walk the roads because they have nowhere to stay, but in some cases also because they have made mistakes and reduced the number of choices open to them. Of course the treatment of error is not limited to wandering in Romantic writing, thus I will also refer to texts which argue in favour of a new way of reaching the truth, and which denounce rational thought itself as erroneous. In other words, while focusing on erring characters, Romantic thought simultaneously tries to promote a new conception of truth, and consequently of error.

That is why I propose to consider Romanticism as a turning-point in the representation of error, which may explain why at the time error occupied centre stage, both literally and metaphorically. I will begin with the metaphorical dimension, which is so strongly present in the poems, especially the ones composed by the first generation of Romantics. The

Lyrical Ballads celebrate vagrants at a time when they were considered as potential criminals, for failing to meet society's dictate that one have a proper job. The poets' fondness for wandering finds its way into the very texture of their poems, and can be seen as one of the structuring principles of numerous romantic poems and essays. In this respect, erring can be interpreted as going astray in all senses of the word, as the historical and political context plays a decisive part in shaping contemporary thought.

Romanticism is often defined as a reaction against the Industrial Revolution and the materialistic culture that entailed. Foregrounding erring characters in poetry is a form of resistance, and so is the recourse to the imagination as a manner of reaching truth, which is one response to the prevailing scientific discourse of rational improvement.

Let us first meet the wanderers who walk the paths of Romantic poems. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, which is commonly considered as marking the beginning of the Romantic Age in Britain, the speaker of the poems often meets vagrants. Quoting just a few titles will show my point, although other poems stage wanderers without heralding the fact in their title: *The Female Vagrant*, *The Old Cumberland Beggar*, *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman*, all these ballads introduce characters who have been met by the speaker on the road, and whose entire lives now appear to be spent roaming the countryside, unable as they have been to keep to the more conventional paths of life. Meeting these forsaken people, the speaker learns their story, very often the story of a fall. The religious connotation sometimes associated with error pervades the texts, since these people have literally and symbolically gone astray. The question then arises of regarding the reason for their fall; have they made errors, which they are now paying for, or in other words, is their situation their own fault, or have they just failed to adapt to a new social context, for which they were not prepared? That is where the context becomes a defining element in shaping our interpretation.

To take just one example, a poem written by Wordsworth and published in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Female Vagrant*, proves emblematic of the whole collection: the speaker is the female vagrant herself, who tells her story to an unspecified audience: she lived happily in a quiet cottage with her father, until a rich neighbour, newly-arrived, wanted to buy the cottage so as to own more land, and ruined the farmer when he refused to sell it. They found a respite when the young woman married her former sweetheart, who welcomed the old father into their home. They rediscovered quiet happiness, until the lack of work made them leave the country when the man joined the army to fight in the war against American

independence. From then on, the situation worsened for the woman, who, once in America, lost her husband, her three children, and finally her self-respect, until she came back to Britain, reduced to erring in her present sorry state, and to tell her story over and over again, in an effort to lighten her burden. Here is the concluding stanza:

> Three years a wanderer, often have I view'd,
> In tears, the sun towards that country tend
> Where my poor heart lost all its fortitude:
> And now across this moor my steps I bend –
> Oh! tell me whither – for no earthly friend
> Have I. – She ceased, and weeping turned away,
> As if because her tale was at an end
> She wept; – because she had no more to say
> Of that perpetual weight which on her spirit lay. (Wordsworth, 2005: 98-99)

The woman is shown as the "error" of a political system which fails with individuals, and not as a wilfully erring creature; she was forced to wander by circumstances, or in other words by the social and political context, and not by some shortcoming of her own. Indeed, the poem is meant to arouse pity and compassion, not reproval. Her downfall is only due to her father's failing to give up his hereditary rights, which triggers the whole series of tragedies. By giving the woman a voice, Wordsworth follows the rule he sets out in his preface, and centres on "low and rustic life", "because in that situation our elementary feelings exist in a state of greater simplicity and consequently may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated" (Wordsworth, 2005: 290); in other words he is aiming for the universal value of such characters' experiences. Moreover, he is also, as some recent studies have stressed, allowing the voiceless to speak out and defend themselves. That is why the last words of the poem matter, and why telling the story might be considered as correcting part of the error. They point out that the female vagrant has now lost all sense of purpose, and this is what leads her to err, both geographically and morally. Thus, telling her tale is a form of therapy.

There are other instances of Wordsworth's benevolent foregrounding of vagrants in *Lyrical Ballads*, most of which follow the same pattern, the vagrant having been led to err – very literally mis-led – by external circumstances upon which he/she can have no control. Their number is particularly striking in the collection, and the figure obviously carries a symbolic role. Nor is the wandering restricted to physical movements, as a few of the characters also wander psychologically, like "The Mad Mother",

or Martha Ray in "The Thorn", who can no longer think correctly after having suffered too much.

In the same collection, still in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, we find the most famous wanderer of all, the Ancient Mariner. The situation is slightly different here, since the mariner has committed an error, actually characterised as a sin in the poem: he has killed the albatross, and his later wanderings represent a form of penance: he is condemned both to err, and when he finds a suitable listener, to tell his story over and over again; the repetition prevents him from ever reaching closure. Much has been written on this famous poem and its Christian dimension[1]: the Mariner escapes death, unlike his fellow-mariners on board the ship, because he ultimately unconsciously blesses the water snakes that surround the ship, thus leading to the moral conclusion of the poem: "He prayeth well who loveth well/Both man and bird and beast[2]." In this poem the original error remains unjustified, just like the final blessing of the water snakes which brings the Mariner back to his little village and the rest of humanity: "With my cross bow/I shot the Albatross" (79-80). Coleridge chooses a declarative line which leaves no room for motive or consequence, ignoring logical causality; it merely states a fact, relating an act. Unlike the Female Vagrant, the Mariner has not been led by external circumstance to commit his crime, but the effect of error on him is the same: like the woman in Wordsworth's poem, he is condemned to wander, forever trying to find absolution. Like the woman, too, he has to find an audience to tell the story to: narrating the succession of events that has led him to his point plays a significant part in the process.

Erring is however not limited to characters, since some poems may be considered as wandering in their very structure. This poetics of digression, of refusing to come to the point, which I will return to later, has been studied before in the field of romanticism[3], but first I would like to emphasise the relationship between the thematic and the stylistic dimensions of these texts.

One of the advocates of wandering is Thomas de Quincey, a great admirer of Wordsworth, who wrote in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* of the pleasures he felt while wandering through the streets of London

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[1] One of the sources for the poem was supposed to have been Coleridge's incomplete poem, *The Wanderings of Cain*, whose Canto II was first published after *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1828.
[2] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, « The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere », 647-8, in *Lyrical Ballads*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.
[3] See for instance *Le Voyage romantique et ses réécritures*, ed. Christian La Cassagnère, centre du romantisme anglais, fascicule 26, Association de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Clermont II, 1987.

after taking opium[4]. He sees the act of erring as an aesthetic pastime, another manner of claiming some respectability for going astray, and De Quincey takes his reflexion one step further in *Suspiria de Profundis*, when he compares his writing in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* to a caduceus:

> … I tell my critic that the whole course of this narrative resembles, and was meant to resemble, a *caduceus* wreathed about with meandering ornaments, or the shaft of a tree's stem hung round and surmounted with some vagrant parasitical plant. The mere medical subject of the opium answers to the dry withered pole, which shoots all the rings of the flowering plants, and seems to do so by some dexterity of its own; whereas, in fact, the plant and its tendrils have curled round the sullen cylinder by mere luxuriance of *theirs*. (…) … the ugly pole – hop pole, vine pole, espalier, no matter what – is there only for support. Not the flowers are for the pole, but the pole is for the flowers. (…) The true object in my 'Opium Confessions' is not the naked physiological theme – on the contrary, *that* is the ugly pole, the murderous spear, the halbert – but those wandering musical variations upon the theme – those parasitical thoughts, feelings, digressions, which climb up with bells and blossoms round the arid stock; ramble away from it at times with perhaps too rank a luxuriance; but at the same time, by the eternal interest attached to the subjects of these digressions, no matter what were the execution, spread a glory over incidents that for themselves would be – less than nothing[5].

The last sentence is both long and digressive, thus providing an apt illustration of De Quincey's argument. This description of his style could be read as a celebration of error, in its etymological sense. In fact, De Quincey is here trying to rectify a potential misreading of his *Confessions*, by putting his readers onto the right path of interpretation. He warns them about the danger of wishing to reach the main point and feeling impatient with his digressions, and the stress that he places on a wandering style of writing echoes Wordsworth's focus on characters who have gone astray. What is at stake here is the status of narrative discourse, which is being subverted by De Quincey and several romantic poets. The very title "Lyrical Ballads" challenges the established categories of poetics, since a ballad is

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[4] "I used often, on Saturday nights, after I had taken opium, to wander forth, without much regarding the direction or the distance, to all the markets, and other parts of London, to which the poor resort on a Saturday night, for laying out their wages." Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Oxford: Oxford's Classics, 1996, p. 47.
[5] Thomas de Quincey, *Suspiria de Profundis*. In *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

traditionally an impersonal narrative (moving towards a conclusion), and not a lyric piece of poetry (expressive of a state of mind). We may even argue that by entitling their collection *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth and Coleridge were making a claim – largely supported by Wordsworth's 1800 preface – to stray deliberately away from poetic conventions. I will return to the effect of this subversion of established forms, which is an essential part of Romantic writing.

De Quincey is here speaking as a writer, but at the beginning of one of Keats's letters to his friend John Reynolds we find the same exaltation of wandering, this time seen from the reader's point of view:

> My dear Reynolds,
> I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner – let him on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it – untill <sic> it becomes stale – but when will it do so? Never –When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting-post towards all "the two-and-thirty Pallaces" How happy is such a "voyage of conception", what delicious diligent Indolence![6]

Indolence, an "error" not too far from the sin of idleness in an age of productivity, is here celebrated as leading to happiness and to wisdom and creation, as also expressed in Keats's ode on the same topic, "Ode on Indolence". If there is no purpose, there can be no error, because there is no goal to be reached, other than the pleasure given by the words and images of the poem, regardless of its conclusion, especially in lyrical poetry. If we keep to the metaphorical significance of erring, deliberately wandering with no purpose guarantees that one will not get lost.

Can we then consider the Romantic Age as celebrating error, or should we rather see the texts written at the time as denouncing erroneous policies, by depicting their unfortunate consequences? In order to answer this question, we have to turn to the relationship between error and context, or more precisely to "a context of error". As I have hinted, characters like the female vagrant are foregrounded so as to illustrate the misleading effects of societal attitudes. However, some of the poets also explicitly denounce the errors of the world they are living in.

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[6] Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 19 February 1818, in Hyder Edward Rollins, ed. *The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958, 2 vols. I, p. 231.

Thus, in "The Old Cumberland Beggar", published in 1800 in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth argues that beggars play a useful role in society, and he directly challenges the "statesmen" to contradict him:

> But deem not this man useless. – Statesmen! Ye
> Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
> Who have a broom still ready in your hands
> To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud,
> Heart-swoln, while in your pride ye contemplate
> Your talents, power, and wisdom, deem him not
> A burthen of the earth.[7]

This formal invocation was made more personal when a year after the publication of the poems Wordsworth sent a copy of the *Lyrical Ballads* to Charles Fox, an MP known for his positions in favour of radical ideas. In his letter to Fox, the poet commented upon the effect of government policies on what he called "domestic affections": "It appears to me that the most calamitous effect, which has followed the measures which have lately been pursued in this country, is a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society. This effect the present Rulers of this country are not conscious of, or they disregard it."[8] We have no mention of error as such in the letter, but Wordsworth is clearly finding fault with the policies carried out by the British government, which have brought about the move of so many of his countrymen to the newly-developing towns. He expresses the same idea in his preface, as the reason which has led him to focus on rural characters in *Lyrical Ballads.*[9]

Wordsworth is not known for his revolutionary ideas, and he was to become far more conservative in later years, but the letter, read side by side with the meaning constructed through the use of vagrants in *Lyrical Ballads* as well as the 1800 preface, does suggest his disapproval of a society which proved detrimental to the "common" people he championed as the best subject for his poetry, because they represent "the primary laws of our nature". Moreover, the romantic scholar John Bugg has recently revisited the poet's early work in the light of new studies of the political context, and

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[7] William Wordsworth, « The Old Cumberland Beggar », 67-73, in *Lyrical Ballads*, *op. cit.*, p. 251.
[8] Letter to Charles James Fox, 14 January 1801, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. The Early Years 1787-1805*. Ed. Ernest de Sélincourt, Second Edition Revised by Chester L. Shaver. London: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 313.
[9] See the preface in *Lyrical Ballads*, *op. cit.*, p. 294 ff.

he argues quite convincingly that because of censorship and repression, what he calls the "poetics of gagging" (after the Gagging Acts of 1795) was the only device left to writers who did not want to glorify the *régime* and were afraid of being imprisoned. According to Bugg, the choice of a character or the staging of what he calls "silent thought" amounted to a denunciation of current politics. He uses a quotation from "Tintern Abbey" as a title for his book, *Five Long Winters. The Trials of British Romanticism*.[10]

If Wordsworth remained light-handed in his criticism of the socio-historical context, his contemporary William Blake was not so subtle in denouncing errors when he found them, as the opening of "Holy Thursday", one of the *Songs of Experience*, makes it clear:

> Is this a holy thing to see,
> In a rich and fruitful land,
> Babes reducd to misery,
> Fed with cold and usurous hand?[11]

The tone has changed, instead of having a poor, distraught woman telling her tale of woe, an angry speaker wields rhetorical questions to stress the unacceptable situation of some children, and to accuse the unnamed people who are responsible for this state of being. Thus, the problem again seems to emerge from a political context which fails to provide for the people, or in other words to be the outcome of political errors.

In the second generation of Romantics, Keats spent much of his short life looking for truth, and trying to reconcile his calling as a poet with his yearning for truth. There have been debates about the depth and strength of his political awareness, and he was certainly far less given to interpret the world in political terms than his contemporary Shelley. Perhaps partly for personal reasons, and because his lack of higher education made him particularly prone to doubt, he was ever ready to question his own findings. When confronted with what he considered to be an error, he constantly endeavoured to widen the scope, in other words to enlarge the context, so as to suggest that the mistake did not arise from the situation, but from the viewer, who lacked the knowledge necessary to see things within the right context. That is what made him yearn for "continual drinking of

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[10] John Bugg, *Five Long Winters. The Trials of British Romanticism*. Stanford University Press, 2014.
[11] William Blake, « Holy Thursday », 1-4, in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant eds., New York, London: Norton, 1979, p. 42.

knowledge"[12], and at a time when he was full of doubts, to compare human life to a mansion of many apartments, only some of which he had yet discovered, because he was in a dark passage, which would ultimately lead to new, yet-undiscovered rooms.[13] In the times of strong change which characterised the Romantic era, he preferred to believe he himself knew too little to make sense of what was happening, than to look for blame in the circumstances.

In March 1819, Keats was writing to his brother and sister-in-law a very long journal letter in which he had been discussing "disinterestedness of mind", which he considered as a typically human quality, since in wild nature it would lead some animals to starve. After comparing animals with men, and commenting on his own amused pleasure when he sees a stoat hurrying in a field, he adds:

> Even here though I myself am pursueing the same instinctive course as the veriest human animal you can think of – I am however young writing at random – straining at particles of light in the midst of a great darkness – without knowing the bearing of any one assertion of any one opinion. Yet may I not in this be free from sin? May there not be superior beings amused with any graceful, though instinctive attitude my mind may fall into, as I am entertained with the alertness of a Stoat or the anxiety of a Deer? Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel – By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone – though erroneous they may be fine–"[14]

Keats is here making his usual distinction between beauty and truth, which the last lines of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" have made famous. The inventor of the concept of "negative capability, the ability to remain in doubt" appears to consider that error does not really matter, as long as one can view what is happening with aesthetic pleasure. We can easily see the relation between this letter and the one I quoted earlier about indolence. It shows that for Keats, if someone makes an error, the reason has to be found in his own apprehension of the context, not in the context itself. He believes in evolution and progress, his own as well as humanity's. Thus what appears erroneous today may be found right later, and Keats's letter implies that error is relative. Moreover, his focus on aesthetics in relation with error – here seen as a moral shortcoming – is not surprising in an age that was still

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[12] Letter of 24 April 1818, to John Taylor. *The Letters of John Keats*, *op. cit.*, I, p. 271.
[13] See his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 May 1818, *Ibid.*, p. 280-1.
[14] Letter to the George Keatses, 19 March 1819, *Ibid.*, II, p. 80-81.

very much influenced by Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas Concerning the Sublime and the Beautiful*, where the philosopher tried, after other thinkers, to distinguish aesthetic pleasure from moral concerns.

Thus far we have seen that the context may be political, historical, human, or intellectual. I now turn to a poem which denounces errors committed on a metaphysical level. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, written as an ironical reference to Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell*, Blake sets out to denounce errors and to rectify them with a list of proverbs he calls "Proverbs of Hell"; he introduces these proverbs with the following lines, supposedly uttered by the voice of the Devil, a persona who partly shares Blake's own beliefs:

All Bibles or sacred codes have been the causes of the following Errors: –

1. That Man has two real existing principles, viz. a Body and a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body; and that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True: –

1. Man has not Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is eternal delight.[15]

One could argue that most of Blake's poetry denounces errors committed in the name of religion. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he is intent on stating that religious systems have led to what he considers as a perversion of human nature; hence his criticism of Swedenborg along with more traditional religious systems. What I find interesting here is the tone and form used by Blake. He presents both errors and corrections in the same manner, as declarative sentences which sound like scientific axioms. Thus, like Keats, he illustrates the relativity of error: what one system finds

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[15] William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Plate 4, in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

erroneous is considered as the truth by another system. Blake spent his life denouncing the established order, but unlike Wordsworth, who thinks the present unfortunate state of society is due to political decisions, Blake looks higher (or deeper) to find who or what is to blame: he finds fault with religion for shaping the thought of man, and mis-leading him.

Thus, the vagrants we met at the beginning of this article have been led to their wandering condition by circumstances which are thought to be historical, social, political or metaphysical according to what each poet focuses on. However, besides looking for the source of error in the context, whether it be a political, metaphysical or personal context, all Romantics agree on another treatment of error, which the wanderers also illustrate.

In his letter to Bailey of November 22nd, 1817, Keats voices a belief that most of his contemporaries agree about, although each of them has his own way of formulating it. "The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth.[16]" Confronted with the prevailing rational discourse of science and industry, which increasingly led to productivity and materialism and consequently condemned indolence and intellectual wanderings as errors bred by idle minds, the Romantics claimed to be using another mode of reaching the truth, the imagination. Just after his famous statement on the imagination, Keats added:

> "I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning – and yet it must be – Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at this goal without putting aside numerous objections – However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!"[17]

If we remember Bugg's arguments about censorship and gagging, we might find a historical reason for the celebration of imagination at the time; presenting certain events as dreams or visions might be a way of avoiding repression. However, the fear of repression cannot on its own account for the new faith in the imagination, which I prefer to see as a reaction against the growth of materialism. The defensive tone Wordsworth uses in the argument to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (49) as well as the title of Shelley's essay, *A Defence of Poetry*, prove that these poets felt they needed to defend their work against potentially violent reviewers. Indeed, Keats was so ill-treated by the critics that Byron, after Shelley, believed the

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[16] Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817. In *The Letters of John Keats, op. cit.,* I, p. 185.
[17] *Ibid.*, I, p. 185.

reviews to have been the cause of his death. The Romantics had certainly as much to fear from the reviewers as from the spies of Pitt's government.

In other words, imagination as Coleridge conceives it is organic and dynamic, and it has its own language, which does not depend on narrative teleology, but relies on metaphorical association. Saussure opposed the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic axes of language, and we can apply his distinction to the narratives I have referred to so far, where constant recourse to the paradigmatic axis of language is necessary to make sense of the significance of the poem, which is not always clear from the succession of events. Moreover, the definition from *The Statesman's Manual* describes imagination as a self-relying faculty, which obliterates the context altogether.

A belief in the creative powers of the imagination led these poets to sidestep error, as it were, since by no longer relying on rational thought, they felt truth was reached through a process of revelation, which left no room for error. The following definition of the imagination, given by Coleridge in *The Statesman's Manual* in December 1816, shows what is at stake: the imagination is "that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*"[18].

With Coleridge we have one formulation of the theory of the imagination, which is clearly at work in some of the poems I have already discussed. One of the effects of the recourse to the imagination is to subvert narrative discourse, which is logical and syntactically organised towards a conclusion. The Romantics did not write only lyric poetry, and they used narrative forms extensively, but in their hands narrative poetry was subverted by the heavy recourse to metaphorical associations and symbolism – a symbol being one of the products of imaginative thought, according to Coleridge's definition. This may account for the number of fragments present in romantic poetry: the narrative outcome did not matter as much as the metaphorical connotations established at the beginning of the poem. One example of this is Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, which was never completed, like his former poem on the same argument, *Hyperion*. The argument of this epic poem refers to the overthrowing of the Titans by the Olympian Gods, but the poem is filtered through the eyes of a poet-

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[18] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual or the Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight: A Lay Sermon, Addressed to the Higher Classes of Society, With an Appendix Containing Comments and Essays, Connected with the Study of the Inspired Writings*, London: Gale and Fenner, 1816, p. 35.

narrator who delays the beginning of action until the poem stops, without ever telling the story. By including parts of his earlier fragment, Keats transforms his poet-narrator into a reader, deciphering meaning and guiding other readers.

I have argued elsewhere[19] that this fragmentary state leads the reader to look for the significance of the poem in the tapestry woven by the narrator and in the images it creates. In so doing, one occasionally comes across contradictory meanings: Keats's imaginative creation blends together the notion of historical progress with the sadness induced by the disappearance of a world. Thus what appears impossible in rational discourse, thinking contradictory thoughts at the same time, is here fused into poetry, and leads to another form of meaning, where the notion of error no longer applies.

Likewise, if we are to make sense of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, we cannot only rely on the narrative plot: Mariner kills bird, is punished, does penance, goes home and tells his story whenever he can catch hold of a listener. The significance of the poem depends on readers being able to apply the process analysed by Coleridge in *The Statesman's Manual*, and to decipher the system of symbols created by the poet. Thus, our interpretation of the moon, of the killing of the albatross, or of the blessing of the water snakes is essential in our construction of the meaning, more than our awareness of the succession of events that befall the mariner.

Going one step further, in his *Book of Urizen*, Blake uses the style of the Book of Revelation to narrate the events of Genesis, which he interprets as a Fall because it means that man's soul has become separated from his body (as he puts it in the proverbs of Hell). Blake is here offering an inverted version of Genesis, in which each traditional step of creation is portrayed as destructive thanks to the style, as this direct allusion to Genesis makes it clear, towards the end of the poem: "Six days they shrunk up from existence/And on the seventh day they rested"[20] (158). The ironic use of a Biblical allusion undermines the narrative and leads the reader to reconsider its meaning.

Such subversion of narrative is present in other poems, but to conclude this article, I would like to go back to where I started, to another poem taken from *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's favourite poem in the

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[19] See Sylvie Crinquand, « Une poétique du tissage : *La Chute d'Hypérion*, de John Keats (1821) ». *Texte, texture, textile. Variations sur le tissage dans la musique, les arts plastiques et la littérature*. Eds Françoise Bort et Valérie Dupont. Dijon: EUD, 2013. pp. 57-66.
[20] *The Book of Urizen*, Chap. IX, 39-40, in *Blake's Poetry and Designs*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

collection, "The Idiot Boy", tells the story of a woman who lives alone with her son Johnny, repeatedly named the idiot boy – "her idiot boy whom she loves", by the obtrusive narrator; late one evening, her neighbour being very ill, the mother sends the boy to find the doctor in town on a pony, but the boy does not come back. She is extremely worried, and in the middle of the night she eventually goes to look for the boy, in vain. As she is on her way back home, she finally finds her son, who has apparently wandered all night, and whose only answer to her questions about what happened is, "The cocks did crow, to-whoo, to-whoo,/ And the sun did shine so cold." The boy thus makes the mistake of confusing cocks and owls, sun and moon, but the final words of the poem refer to Johnny's glory ("Thus answered Johnny in his glory,/And that was all his travel's story").

Critics have stressed how unlikely this story is, and how many errors the poem stages: the mother lets her idiot boy go on an errand which is certain to go wrong, the ailing neighbour finds herself much better once the boy fails to come back, and the narrator is extremely obtrusive, constantly undermining the tragic mood established by the circumstances of the ballad. Now to make sense of the poem, we have to include these "errors" in our interpretation, and this shows that the only reasonable character is the boy who does not apply the organised logic of rational thought. Like the children Wordsworth praised in "Intimations of Immortality: an Ode", he has kept his powers of imagination intact.

Thus, what the romantic focus on the imagination offers is a new way of reaching the truth, which leaves no room for error in its defenders' minds. The context has utterly disappeared, and is no longer liable to be mis-leading. Like the mystics, the poets think they have direct access to a form of transcendence, and the strength of this feeling eradicates the possibility of error, as Wordsworth put it in "Tintern Abbey" when he was discussing the power of the landscape on his state of mind:

> That blessed mood,
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight

Of all this unintelligible world
Is lighten'd.[21] (157)

Seen in this way, the imagination offers a direct path to truth, because there is no context left, merely harmonious communication between the human mind and its surroundings. Whether we consider this view itself to be erroneous is another matter, which was amply discussed by later thinkers.

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[21] "Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798", 38-42, in *Lyrical Ballads*, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

Rezumat: Pornind de la etimologia cuvântului 'to err' (Lat. *errare*, a cutreiera, a greşi), lucrarea de faţă analizează personajele pribege din poeziile romantismului englez. Teoria pe care vreau să o dezvolt este că, datorită acestor figure rătăcitoare/rătăcite, romantismul poate fi interpretat ca un punct de cotitură în dezvoltarea conceptului de 'error', ce poate fi văzut mai degrabă drept consecinţă a unui context politic decât a vreunei abateri individuale. Acelaşi lucru este ilustrat şi de proclamarea imaginaţiei drept facultate mentală creatoare, deoarece gândirea creativă produce o revelaţie prin care adevărul este accesat direct, înlăturându-se posibilitatea vreunei erori. Problema ridicată este dacă putem considera romantismul drept o celebrare a ideii de 'error' (pribegie/eroare), sub toate aspectele sale.

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Heroism through Errors in *Lord Jim*

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Abstract: In *Lord Jim* (1900) the ultimate moral foundations of a man's essential character are explored through a series of errors, which lead to the discovery of a heroic identity of Lord Jim.The errors are apparently the collapse of the "sovereign power," the hardest thing to stumble against, that draws Marlow to Jim's case as he fails the supreme moral test in the face of an imminent threat of death on board the Patna. As Marlow gradually recognizes in his attempt to understand Jim, the moral becomes the existential. It is not simply a question of moral identity but of self-discovery and of self-fulfillment that is connected to a possible heroic identity. One's relation to a capital error made in the face of an inescapable danger and its prevalent consequences dictate the emergence of heroic character in its aftermath in the novel. Thus, in this paper, it is explored that Conrad delineates the thin line between an erroneous character and a "potential hero" who benefits from his past mistakes.

Keywords: *collapse of morality, heroism, self-sacrifice, errors*

1. Introduction

Jim is introduced as a traveling salesman, successful and well-known which is an indication that this was misleading publicity. The followingquote is an indication that one can be in a conflict of Jim's inner world and his world is a testament strong enough to hide what happened in the individual's outward appearance:

> He was an inch, perhaps two under six feet, powerfully built, and he advanced straight at you with a slight stoop of the shoulders, head forward, and a fixed from-under stare which made you think of a charging bull. …He was spotlessly neat, appareled in immaculate white from shoes to hat, and in the various Eastern ports where he got his living as ship-chandler's water-clerk he was popular. (Contrad, 1995: 3)

Jim, the protagonist of the novel, has led a peaceful life where no critical problem was tackled. Being a son of a father composed of vast knowledge of the worldly issues as made of the rights of the people, he took the examples of righteousness and valor in his raising. Jim can overlook the challenges believing that his inherited qualities will empower him to do so. As a young naval officer, he makes his choice without being in the

cognizant of his actions. He sails as the chief mate of the Patna with a large cargo of passengers joined by the call of an ideal.

Conrad gives us the shallow representation of Jim's dreams. The superficiality of Jim's ideals is not assisted by the private life that Jim inhabits. His ideals are beset with the indefinite solitude of a gentle narcissism, and the triviality of a conventional mind that aspires to get the ideals in an unfamiliar world. Jim is not educated in a full preparation to compete with the hardships of actual life.

2. Patna – Source of Errors

A brief summary of the traumatic events on the Patna is necessary. Amazingly, rather than alerting many people around him to save the ship and pilgrims on board, Jim withdraws to the bridge like the other officers. There, he realizes that the three other officers are already negotiating a sole lifeboat for themselves. Initially, he disapproves to assist them and curses their cowardice. He again neglects to tell the others of the remaining lifeboats on the ship, denying their only means of escape. A storm follows the horror; however, the ship is towed unharmed to Aden by a French gunboat. Subsequently, the four of the crew are taken to Bombay where they face punishment for their desertion.

The novel advances with Jim as a ship-mate persuading the captain to make trades with the dealer. Readers get to know Jim mainly at the hearings after the Patna incident, where he presents himself and in his dinner and conversation with Marlow. When he hears someone say "look at that wretched cur" (Conrad, 1993: 17), he is sure that these words have been uttered for him. He has the chance to counter the accusations due to the Patna incident. However, he is rejected to do so by the presence of a dog that blocks his self-defense. Thus, what remains for Jim is his open promise of his expectations that he will be remembered as a cur. Jim is proud of not running away: "From no man, not a single man on earth" (Conrad, 1993: 9). There is one man he does not consider; it is himself that he is running away.

As Price states in his article (1986: 182), after the disaster of Patna, Jim has a history that he is concerned with acquiring an identity. We learn that the ship has been towed to the harbor, which clears away Jim's prospects for a future career. The failure to realize the long-cherished ambitions to become a hero in romanticism has become a major incident, according to the codes of seamanship. It has unleashed the ugliness rather than the aspired glory in his dreams. Despite all, Jim seems to display some

assuredness of innate innocence derived from his family. He cannot make severe judgments of his actions.

What Conrad wants to tell here is that Jim tries to escape from port to port in the deep fear of his guilt also fearing his true identity might be revealed. He does not belong to any place as a misplaced and homeless fugitive. Loneliness and inferiority are accompanied with shame increase in Jim continuously. It is a big mistake for him to think that his error will be cleared by merely keeping the external appearance tidy and neat (Conrad, 1993: 3). This is a conflict within the self, as the clean exterior does not cover the true identity and stained-self. Jim, starting from childhood, is lived away from real life. With most of the time spent in the romantic sense of adventure and reality, Jim is lost. He is trapped in the dream itself becoming a real outsider. He spent his life in an inner alienation. He lives in a romantic dream and is far from their peers: "He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane, swimming through surf with a line; or as a lonely cast away, barefoot and half naked, walking on uncovered reefs in search of selfish to save off starvation" (Conrad, 1993: 5). In this sense, he exhibits an abstract entity and is not part of social order. To be a part of the society is an indicator of belonging; yet, alienation cannot adapt to being in the society in harmony with others. For example, while training seafarers, he hesitated to jump into the boat left for them to rescue survivors from the ship that collided during a storm, and thus, missing the opportunity of making a hero that he had cherished in his dreams for years: "He stayed where he was, motionless" (Conrad, 1993: 5). Later, Jim falls in the same error for the second time while discussing that other crew might escape from the boat in the time of chaos and danger. Even if seeing himself much different from the others, Jim does the same and jumps into the lifeboat. The fact that Jim does not see himself in the same group of the crew displays his alienation from the society that he is embedded in, which is one of his errors:

> But he kept his distance. He wanted me to know he had kept his distance; that there was nothing in common between him and these men. Nothing whatever! It is more than probable he thought himself cut off from them by a space that could not be traversed, by an obstacle that could not be overcome, by a chasm without bottom. (Conrad, 1993: 65-6)

Jim claims that he is made from some other fabric. Conrad underlines once more that Jim is quite away from realities of life at sea despite previously having received his two-year training. In his second aboard on the ship he states his disillusion. He does not refrain from fulfilling his dreams; he has

expectations from life and sea, yet he is not tested by the hardships at sea: "He was steady, tractable, with a thorough knowledge of his duties; and in time, when very young, he became chief mate of a fine ship, without ever being tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, …" (Conrad, 1993: 7). It is very important for Jim to go to court to defend himself after the Patna and be justified because the other members of the crew fled. He regards them as disgusting, loathsome, and not worthy of honor or naval codes. Yet, his error here is that they live in the real world whereas Jim, whose mind is laden with imaginary heroes, only shares their world serving in the same boat: "I loathed them. I hated them. I had to look at all that, Was ever there any one so shamefully tried!" (Conrad, 1993: 66)

Subsequently, Jim feels guilty because he has come to be aware of his errors by jumping off the Patna. He feels meaningless and drawn into emptiness. An error of a second leads him to a lifelong remorse. In addition, his world composed of values, romantic ideals now seems void of many cherished deeds. He has transformed into one of the crew who has already betrayed and been seen unworthy of naval codes. Jim is the victim of narcissism. He is defenseless in the face of ultimate error, of being isolated from naval society and of failing to reciprocate the trust of others. Engrossed into hopelessness and shame, he is nobody without his profession: it is so much that he even thinks of committing suicide. As Jim knows that he is socially erroneous, he escapes from people whenever the Patna incident is mentioned. He is drawn into an everlasting exile. Marlow cannot justify his escape and becomes upset in Jim's weakness to safeguard his resilience. Stein, his trustable friend, advises him not to give up the ideals in order to deserve social respect. He advises: "That was the way. To follow the dream, and again … The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as a horizon" (Conrad, 1993: 134). Comprehending Jim's profound agony, Stein holds the principle of struggling despite hardships. In this case, Conrad depicts Jim as deserving one more chance in order to fulfill his expectations in life.

Marlow sees the realities of Jim's fierce internal conflict. Jim is disturbed with a struggle against an antagonistic invisible personality and inseparable partner of his existence. Marlowe's experience about Jim provides a deeper sense of what they share with Jim while he is desperate with occasions when the truth is rather severe: Jim's own helplessness between his innocence and erroneousness (Price, 1986: 185). He cannot remember the order why he had to leave the ship, as he gives his account in the court.

The problem that Jim has been disturbed with cannot be ignored at all. The codes for the naval staff, a common faith, loyalty that tie seamen together are the main reasons for his failure in his profession (Price, 1986: 190). All these bonds are essential to Jim's imaginative valor. He gains a moral existence from pledging acceptance to codes as other seamen should do. However, the demands that are placed on Jim within his existing character are corrupt, a blend of coercion and dependence that lead to the nightmare of unfulfilled ambitions. Such a void in ideals is associated with Patna incident and continued to Patusan. There, Jim is seen struggling against the truth trying to retreat into dream. He gains self-confidence by what has taken place as a result of fortunate admission by the society. He remains humble in his ranks, which is the cause of cleavage of his feelings between imaginative romantic triumph and realities.

As Conrad states, from his childhood, Jim lived away from real life. He spent most of his time in a romantic nature, and thus, he lost his sense of reality. In his inner soul, he lived with heroes, so he became erroneously marginalized. As an example of the case, we can refer to the incident where Jim is tasked to rescue the survivors of the ship that collided during a storm. By failing to do the necessary, Jim cannot transfer into the real world from the imagination. He is not aware of the conflict in his inner world that makes him live through realistic and romantic elements. Subsequently, Jim accepts his cowardice and tries to justify himself by plunging imaginatively into the heroic deeds.

Conrad's reflection is that man is helpless in his fight against Nature. Faced with futility of realizing his dreams, Jim does not hesitate accusing the powers beyond his control in order to get some credit for heroismthat makes another error. Later on, falling in the same mistake once again, Jim jumps into the rescue boat just to save himself rather than to salvage the ship. Earlier he used to criticize other sailors of acting selfishly in the face of danger; he now acts in the same way that deserves criticism. Even though Jim many times repeats that he is not a part of social order, the act of jump, which is not admissible in naval rules, indicates he is not much away from the social order or different from other seafarers. (Conrad, 1993: 16)

3. Patusan - Heroism through Errors

Conrad uses comparison and contrasts with telling effect. Stein, in order to enhance Jim's hopes for unfulfilled dreams, allows Jim to go to a different environment giving him a second chance. Patusan, a far-distant location, would be a place for him to redeem from his past sins. He would

get rid of his despair, unhappiness and bury the past errors with the hope of starting a new life. In Patusan no one could dig and find out his past: "His fate, whatever it was, would be ignored, because the country, for all its rotten state, was not judged ripe for interference. Once he got in, it would be for the outside world as though he had never existed" (Conrad, 1993: 145). Jim seizes Patusan as an opportunity in which he can leave behind his past and where he can set his imagination free: "He left his earthly failings behind him an what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon" (Conrad, 1993: 137). Jim flees from the consequences of his jump. His Patusan affair helps him to transcend his fears with new meanings in life; in this sense, Jim is not running away" (Ross, 25). That it is not a flight to a world of idyllic romance is made clear by the physical danger, the real threat of violent death, associated with Jim's mew milieu.

Although he is trusted by his employees, he does not trust them enough to believe that they will respect him when they find out the truth about the Patna incident. He needs to know that people have faith in him and to prove it. Because he feels that he has failed in his trust in the Patna affair, he must prove to himself that it is only a single accident and not a way of life he has chosen. His positions thus far have not given him that self-confidence.

In Marlow's perspective, Jim has always struggled in a meaningless environment of romantic existentialism. In their last meeting, Jim is seen to have adopted into the new environment in Patusan, which is an indication that Jim is no longer estranged. He finds that Jim has won the trust and affection of the people. Jim says: "Look at those houses; there's no one where I am not trusted" (Conrad, 1993: 155). He likes to see people go to sleep in his presence because it indicates that they are "confident in the security of tomorrow" (Conrad, 1993: 156). This helps ease the pain of his memory of the sleeping pilgrims on the Patna who also trusted him, but whom he deserted. (Conrad, 1993: 24)

Jim considers Patusan a proper environment in which he might redeem himself. The tangle of affairs in Patusan is a new test.In Patusan under great stress and without much planning ahead, he leaps into all-engulfing mud and drags himself out to find respect and friendship. He was unable to drag out of the Patna mud, but he found two things he needed; friendship and trust by his people and the respect of his enemies.

Jim has become a member of a prestigious society in Patusan. He gains self-confidence through a series of events. He is under the impression that he has compensated for earlier errors. Marlowe finds Jim in his highest

point of career and personal happiness. Jim is now freed from alienation, which is needed in the community and which is a basic principle for trusted and respected individuals. In Patusan he is an authority full of personal pride being responsible for soil productivity and peace of the country. Jim is known as the hero of Patusan as he reacts against the sufferings of the Patusanpeople. Marlow utters: "Immense! No doubt it was immense; the seal of success upon his words, the conquered ground for the soles of his feet, the blind trust of men, the belief in himself snatched from the fire, the solitude of his achievement" (Conrad, 1993: 170). Marlow takes pride in Jim's ability to manage his destiny. Although Conrad highlights the idea of man's incapacity against universal force, he underlines individual struggle for success. Jim becomes a beacon for success recovering innate error of estrangement in his society. He is redeemed of loneliness and sins, which leads to the fulfillment of ideals of heroism.

Jim successfully manages Patusan for full three years. Yet, his heroic world collapses with the arrival of Gentleman Brown. Jim's world could only be harmed through exterior forces, and Nature has brought Brown to Patusan to give Jim the most formidable test for heroism. Betrayed by Cornelius, Jim is forced to fight against Doramin, in which his death takes place in a heroic action, just for the sake of defending his people. He could have escaped or avoided the fight; but, he displayed courage like a hero that he had cherished in his romantic ideals for many years:

> The crowd, which had fallen apart behind Jim as soon as Doramin had raised his hand, rushed tumultuously forward after the shot. They say that the white man sent right and left at all those faces a proud and unflinching glance. Then with his hand over his lips he fell forward, dead. (Conrad, 1993: 260)

Jim triumphed at last over his fear and his inability to face responsibility. He might have evaded death by running away or by waiting, but instead he went to face it. Although Jim has served Patusan faithfully and honorably, his very dedication to its welfare has brought him a danger. Doramin and his wife fear that he will affect Dain Warris' chances for friendship and Cornelius cannot continue his thieving, scheming ways as long as Jim functions as the protector of the people. Rajah Allang is humiliated because he has been made means of convincing the others of Jim's steadfastness

Jim risks danger and death in order to satisfy his romantic self-conception as a hero searching his true identity. The goal of his quest is self-discovery, not only redemption. As Ian Watt discerns, atonement is not

relevant for Jim as there is no one to whom he could make reparation (126). Still, the pursuit of his quest invites the charge of foolhardiness, which is a fanciful romantic indulgence. But the sublime conception of heroism that is the motive force behind his quest cannot be denied. Jim's willingness to sacrifice himself for his heroic ideal distinguishes him from mere adventurers who are driven by material greed.

Jim convinces Marlowe that he is not afraid of death: "Do you think I was afraid of death? ... I am ready to swear I was not – I was not" (Conrad, 1993: 53). Michael Weston argues that Jim's flight is from a terrible scene rather than a leap to personal safety (Conrad, 1993: 12). H.M. Daleski is more critical, for Jim's imagination transforms possibility to the fact, jumping first (Conrad, 1993: 13). Perhaps the mystery of Jim's jump will forever remain a mystery. Mitchell points to his death fear, Allan Hunter and Redmond O'Hanlon to the instinct of self-preservation, Weston to the imagined panic. Jim himself may not know his true motivation, conscious or unconscious, although he insists that it is a physical reflex. What is important, however, is the earnestness of Jim's belief as he is aware that his leap into life boat has destroyed his cherished conception of himself as a hero who will be able to face death valiantly, an image that is glimpsed for a moment on the Patna: "He waited upstanding, without a sound, stiffened in the idea of some sort of heroic discretion." (Conrad, 1993: 61)

Lawrence Thornton makes a transition to the positive valuations of Jim's death; Jim's narcissism is linked to heroism, both originating from the ache of cosmic specialness. Jim's end represents a celebration of self, a consummation with his ego-ideal, which no narcissist can resist (Conrad, 1993: 72). As Kim states in his article, this celebration of self can be put into existentialist terms. Heroism can just consist in endorsing a code of honor which endows Jim's death with heroic resonance, possessing an unmediated directness of personal application though fated to failure in a modern world (Conrad, 1993: 13). Thus, Jim perishes by his word, resembling a true biblical or mythical hero. He becomes what he has always imagined himself to be. Watt points out that romance is replaced by tragedy as Jim meets his fate, the fatal outcome that has been immanent (Conrad, 1993: 77). Jim's end is not simply a tragic outcome, but a return to identity; he recovers his original self-image that has been shattered by his jump from the Patna and by the trial that has presupposed the wrong identity.

Kim Sung in his article comments that Jim's death seems the collapse of the sovereign power. Marlow states Jim's case is the fail of the supreme moral test in the face of an imminent threat of death on the board of the Patna. It is not a question of moral identity but self-discovery and

self-fulfillment. Lord Jim is viewed as a defense of traditional Western cultural values and practices. Courage is equal to heroism based on the physical fearlessness of violence and death. In the same manner Giles Mitchell says; "His ego-ideal demands that he be heroic; the problem is that he cannot acknowledge that death fear is a problem. Thus, he must arrange his death without admitting what he is doing, and the way to do is to disguise his suicide as a heroic death." (Conrad, 1993: 5)

4. Conclusion

Jim's leap from the Patna burns like a wound in his conscience, making him concerned for others. It is not necessary that he pledge his life on the safety of Brown's departure, but he feels that it is the only way to save Patusan, His evasion of responsibility in the Patna affair has developed in him a stubborn desire to be responsible. He has achieved that in the respect and honor the villagers give him because he keeps his word. His own sense of guilt helps to produce in him deep feeling that he is liable for the welfare of Patusan. He must save them to prove to himself his own integrity.

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Rezumat: În *Lord Jim* (1900) sunt explorate fundamentele morale ultime ale caracterului uman printr-un șir de erori care duc în final la descoperirea identității eroice a personajului eponim. Greșelile sunt aparent legate de eșuarea conceptului de "putere

suverană," cel mai grav lucru ce ți se poate întâmpla, motivul pentru care Marlow e și atras de cazul lui Jim după ce acesta pică testul moral suprem în fața iminentei amenințări a morții la bordul vasului Patna. După cum Marlow realizează treptat în încercarea de a-l înțelege pe Jim, miza morală devine una existențială. Nu este o simplă problemă de identitate morală, ci una de revelare și împlinire a sinelui legată de o posibilă identitate eroică. Relația individului cu o eroare capitală în fața unui pericol de neevitat și consecințele acesteia impun apariția personajului eroic în roman. În lucrarea de față este analizată demarcația fină trasată de Conrad dintre un personaj căzut în greșeală și un "potențial erou" care profită de erorile din trecut.

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A Troublesome Reunion in Shakespeare's
The Comedy of Errors

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Abstract: Errors are commonly associated with unpleasant events and consequences. Shakespeare suggests an unnatural combination, where errors caused by mistaken identities are eventually the key elements of a sparkling comedy, in spite of previous painful episodes.

Keywords: *error, identity, reunion, comedy.*

William Shakespeare changed and improved significantly the story of the shipwrecked family, bringing it to a new level of confusion. By increasing the number of identical twins, the playwright was free to puzzle events and characters altogether. He turned into the perfect puppeteer, ready to throw his characters into a planned chaoswhich seemed very stable until the final act of the play. Nevertheless, order must be restored, and Shakespeare has the ability to postpone the moment. Shakespeare tricks his audience into making them believe, at least in the first scenes, that we are dealing with a tragedy. Despair, chaos, threat, and evil forces, all are put together to create a nightmarish background. "Fall" and "death" are common words used to mislead the spectator. The comedy, although filled with tragic features at its beginning, excels in romantic elements as compared to its source "Menaechmi", which is primarily a farce. Antipholus of Syracuse lives an identity crisis, ready to find his family, no matter the costs. Just surviving is no longer an option as he believes that it is his mission to seek his lost relatives. He proves a true philosopher – the reader will easily notice that many characters possess a superior level of wisdom -, aware that his enterprise is almost an impossible one, given the huge dimension of the world: "I to the world am like a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop." (1.2.34-6)[1]

Even if he is overwhelmed by uncertainty, he is willing to risk everything: "in quest of them, unhappy, lose myself" (1.2.40). The sentimental Antipholus of Syracuse has reached a period of his life when

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[1]All *The Comedy of Errors* citations are to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* ed. Peter Alexander

family represents the unity of the universe. He somewhat feels a divine force, beyond his will, which pushes him to act. This quest has nothing to do with the psychological concept of what people speak behind one's back. It is just the desire to be with his twin brother again, a desire which can be explained through some psychic or spiritual connection. At the same time, the reader meets Egeon, the father of the two Antipholuses, who appears to be a quite pathetic old man, "helpless and hopeless" (1.1.157). He blames his present state on Fortune and he has no desire to live given the fact that he lost his beloved family. We may strongly affirm that Egeon and his Syracusan son share the same feelings, being characterized by the despair of isolation. Egeon can be considered the real victim of the arbitrariness of some unknown forces. He cannot understand the cruelty he has to endure and that is why he is ready to meet the merciless fate. A common feature of the main characters of the play is given by the fact that they keep on enquiring, even if they know they get nowhere since there are no answers. Another aspect which should be taken into consideration when talking about identity crisis is the marriage issue. Adriana is the representative of the married women who appear to have lost their liberty. Shakespeare is the legitimate voice of his time. We must not forget that Queen Elizabeth I died unmarried because she refused to lose the power of making decisions. Adriana does not understand the reason why men and women are not equal: "Why should their liberty than ours be more?" (2.1.10). In this stressful atmosphere, Luciana is the one who does not worry like the other characters. Moreover, she has the ability to find explanations for everything that happens. Her serene attitude and wise philosophy makes it possible the happy ending of the play, despite the numerous discouraging episodes. "The Comedy of Errors" reveals a wide range of states, depending on the actions the two pairs of twins take, illusion and disillusion marking the well-thought mixture of love. The success of the play heavily relies on the "know" issue. The mistaken identity makes the main characters think they know what they actually do not know. The reader is fully aware of this thing and enjoys every single piece of it. The resemblance is so striking that not even the loyal servants can tell the difference.

The second scene of the first act marks the beginning of the confusing events. Antipholus of Syracuse is initially shocked after the first encounter with the wrong Dromio. Nevertheless, he does not lose hope, since he was warned about the strange things that can change one's mind in Ephesus:

> As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
> Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,

> soul-killing witches that deform the body,
> Disguised cheaters, prating, mountebanks,
> And many such-like liberties of sin.
> (1.2.97-102)

Even if Ephesus is the land of perdition with so many liberties of sin, Antipholus must go to the very end with his expedition. It is very easy for our seeker to lose his mind but there is no way back for him. He willingly accepts the challenge as he considers it the last chance to find the truth. Until the final reunion of the brothers, the dream-like episodes push some of the characters to question their sanity, taking into account the fact they do not have a rational explanation for everything that happens to them: "This is the fairy land. O spite of spites, we talk with goblins, owls, and sprites" (2.2.180-2). Antipholus of Syracuse is totally lost in this realm he does not understand. Appearance and reality, dream and awakening, moral and immoral, they are all successive themes within his quest: "Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? Sleeping or waking, mad or well-advised?" (2.2. 205-7).

The reaction of the other characters involved in the play is understandable as they consider everything a piece of madness. The Duke himself sees it as a work of sorcery, clearly stating "I think you all have drunk of Circe's cup." (5.1.271-2)

Even if, here and there, the play does have some tragic elements, nothing is taken too seriously and Shakespeare is an expert in avoiding things going totally wrong. The end of the play highlights the fact that the problem of mistaken identity is far from being solved, as the wife of Antipholus of Ephesus asks: "Which of you two did dine with me today?" (5.1.369). This leads to the displacement of identity which, in the case of men, is a very dangerous thing that causes the insecurity of man's rationality and being. Once a man's name usurped, his existence becomes pointless and absurd because he loses his roots.

At the beginning of the play, the two Antipholuses display opposite behavior because of the environment they live in. Antipholus of Ephesus appears as a merciless person who does not care about his Dromio's feelings and he considers him nothing but a slave who must be punished whenever the master pleases, no matter what he does. Therefore, Dromio's attitude in Act IV is justified as he sees no escape from his animal/object-like status:

> "I am an ass, indeed; you may prove it by
> my long ears. – I have served him from the hour
> of my nativity to this instant, and have nothing at
> his hands for my service but blows. When I am

cold, he heats me with beating; when I am warm,
he cools me with beating. I am waked with it
when I sleep, raised with it when I sit, driven
out of doors with it when I go from home, welcomed
home with it when I return. Nay, I bear it
on my shoulders as a beggar wont her brat, and
I think when he hath lamed me, I shall beg with
it from door to door". (4.4.29-40)

The reunion of the two pairs of twins has its price. On the one hand, it is a happy event but on the other hand our Syracusan characters are subject to confusion and madness, since their initial attitude towards life is totally changed when faced with the Ephesus realities. At the same time, while one of the Antipholus brothers is striving to regain his identity, the other one is gradually losing his because of the attempts of his twin brother. Antipholus of Ephesus lives a peaceful life until the appearance of his twin brother who, unwillingly, ruins everything. The plot's manifold errors have a major role in developing a hostile atmosphere, the mistaken identity being more and more highlighted.

According to John Creaser, the characters "are in no position to work out their salvation, and escape merely by good fortune" (Creaser 2001:90). The reader realizes that they cannot decide upon their own fate, and the more they struggle, the more problems they get into. "The Comedy of Errors" is mainly based on confusion, which is not always comical. The errors occur from one end to the other of the play, interfering in three main issues: identity, marriage and possession. This permanent confusion that reigns within the play gives birth to various states, such as madness, depression, melancholy, despair, which most often turn into feats of violence. It is no wonder that Dr. Pinch accuses the presence of Satan:

I charge thee, Satan, housed within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers,
And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight:
I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven. (4.4.49–52)

Actually, we witness a false exorcism, because, as Paul Olson noticed "No one fights a serious spiritual battle" (Olson 2008:141). It is rather the natural state of Antipholus of Ephesus who is obviously a quite violent person who treats both women and servants that surround him as mere instruments, subject to his will and pleasures. It is no doubt that Shakespeare wants to make use of the Biblical meaning of the Ephesus society. According to

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Ephesus was a place with many believers and represented a moral model for the whole world. The Epistle relies on the major theme of unity and reconciliation. Shakespeare makes the city, at first, a place where one can easily lose faith and hope, but he ends it biblically, restoring the Christian values. The play also underlines the importance of being integrated in society and the danger of being excluded. Various scenes in the play suggest a nightmarish atmosphere which sometimes turns into absurd situations, with things nobody can explain.

Antipholus of Syracuse starts his journey as an almost hopeless seeker and manages to end it with a double success, which heavily relies on love. On the one hand, it is the joy caused by a reunited family. On the other hand, the most important thing Shakespeare wanted his spectators to see is the love Antipholus of Syracuse finds in Luciana who seems to be his saviour:

> mine own self's better part,
> Mine eye's dear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,
> My. food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,
> My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim. (3.2. 61-64)

However, this declaration of love is a strange combination of spiritual and material elements. When referring to her as "my food", we sense the danger and destruction that accompanied Antipholus throughout the play. Avoiding terms like flowers and stars, Antipholus displays, in his love talk, a different nature imagery, which emphasizes the problems he had to face in order to achieve his goal.

In order to surprise his spectators who seemed, at one moment, to know everything about the course of the play, Shakespeare makes the Abbess reveal her true identity, a major event which nobody expected. We might regard it as the religious element of the play which defines and points out the significance and power of pray: if you are a true believer, you should have faith and never give up.The great playwright was criticized for introducing Emilia so late in the play, just eighty lines before the end of it. Bertrand Evans, for example, accused Shakespeare of having influenced the spectator's level of awareness: "By introducing Emilia early in the action, Shakespeare could have added another level to the structure of awareness and thus have increased the complexity of our responses" (Evans, 1960: 8). But, if Shakespeare had done that, the comedy would have surely lost its magic moments, and everything would have turned predictable.

Even if the reunion is troublesome, "The Comedy of Errors" ends in a very optimistic way, and turns everybody into happy and hopeful

individuals. The play can be considered, as Kathleen McCarthy noticed, "a comedy of lost love and found trust." (McCarthy, 2004: 75)

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Rezumat: Erorile sunt deseori asociate cu evenimente si consecinţe neplăcute. Shakespeare ne propune o combinaţie neobişnuită, unde erorile apărute ca urmare a identităţilor greşite sunt, in cele din urmă, elementele cheie ale unei comedii savuroase, in ciuda unor episoade nefericite.

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Error, Sin, Deviance or None? A Case Study in Literary Sociology

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Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between error, sin, deviance, and their representation in Tennessee Williams's oeuvre. It will also discuss the question of relativity, namely, how the notions of error, sin and deviance have changed in recent decades, a phenomenon that has had certain ethical consequences as well. Homosexuality, for example, was considered both a sin and a mental illness at the beginning of the playwright's career, while it became a simple civil rights issue towards the end of his life. The perspective of literary sociology gives ample opportunity to examine this truly interdisciplinary field.

Keywords: *sociology of literature, Tennessee Williams, homosexuality, gay characters, queerness.*

The starting point of my analysis is the question of how a relatively marginalized interdisciplinary approach like the sociology of literature can contribute to critical theory by studying the sociology of the writer and his characters, the social determinants of the characters' behavior or personality traits, and the social background of the author's work in general. These aspects may be especially significant when the author or his characters must face the constant scrutiny of social judgment, as it is in the case of homosexuality.

In his plays and short stories, Tennessee Williams created a panoramic picture of the gay subculture in the post-war United States, long before the discipline "gay studies" was born, and sociology or literary theory began to examine the question of homosexuality. Both the author and his gay characters lived in an era when gay people were ostracized and stigmatized by society. Williams's public coming out took place on the David Frost Show in January 1970, when to Frost's question concerning homosexuality, he reacted with the classic remark, "I've covered the waterfront."[1] This witty riposte has a double meaning and its underlying irony is characteristic of Williams; on the one hand it refers to one of his favorite pastimes that is cruising along the wharf looking for sailors, on the

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[1] "Tennessee Williams on the David Frost Show." January 1970. 12 March 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KN3icAgw9LI>.

other hand, it means that as an artist he had meticulously covered the topic of homosexuality by describing and analyzing its most important aspects in his works. He did it in a more covert way in his plays where the topic of homosexuality usually runs in the background like a fine thread, but he was fairly explicit about the subject in his short stories, many of which openly deal with the gay subculture: their way of life and the different types of queerness – from closeted "sissies" to drag queens or sadomasochistic relationships.

1. Homosexuality in the social context

First of all, let us have a brief survey of how the phenomenon of homosexuality has been traditionally linked with the notion of error, sin, and deviance. According to the dictionary definition, *error* is not only a deviation from correctness, but can also be a *moral offense*, *wrongdoing*, or *sin*. Among the synonyms of *wrongdoing* we can find *law-breaking*, *criminality*, *immorality*, *sinfulness*, *delinquency*, *fault*, *error*, *transgression*, and several similar expressions. All of them are deeply rooted in the common religious heritage of mankind, the core of which for the Western world is the Bible. In the Old Testament, sin is interpreted as the act of violating God's will or the relationship between an individual and God. Accordingly, Chapters 18 and 20 of Leviticus list the prohibited forms of sexual intercourse:
"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." (Leviticus 18: 22)
"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them." (Leviticus 20:13)
The New Testament also refers to the sinful nature of homosexuality in St. Paul's Epistles (Romans 1), in Matthew 8 and 19, Luke 7, and so on.
With very few exceptions – like the ancient Greek society – the religious approach to homosexuality had an impact on its negative judgment for long centuries in the history of mankind. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries psychology became one of the first disciplines to study homosexuality scientifically but for decades it was still considered to be a pathological perversion and/or mental illness.
Sigmund Freud explained bisexuality as a normal part of the libido development by which he meant that all humans are born bisexual but because of cultural taboos homosexuality is repressed in many people. One of his most influential theories explaining homosexuality was the inverted

Oedipus complex where male individuals begin to identify with their mother and take themselves as a love object. In his opinion, narcissistic people are more likely to develop homosexuality because loving the same sex is like an extension of loving oneself. Freud's ideas and psychoanalysis itself had a great impact on Williams's thoughts about homosexuality. Not only did he himself go into analysis during the 1960s, but also his plays and short stories often portray narcissistic "fairies" and sissy boys closely attached to their mothers, sometimes even putting on their mother's clothes.It is also a classic Freudian theory that the emotional development of children is the result of parental influences. Domineering and over-protective mothers combined with weak or distant fathers were perceived to make a hindrance for a young boy to go through the normal heterosexual development. Williams's own domineering mother, Edwina Dakin Williams, served as a model for the long row of over-protective mothers in his oeuvre from Amanda Wingfield in the *Glass Menagerie* to Mrs. Venable in *Suddenly Last Summer*, while his own aggressive and emotionally but physically also remote father is also portrayed in a number of his works.

Freud tried to treat homosexuality by analysis and hypnosis, but with no success. That is why he arrived at the conclusion that homosexuality was "nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness, but a variation of sexual function."[2] In spite of Freud's tolerant and accepting views of homosexuality, his institutional followers in the United States viewed homosexuality as a negative and abnormal deviance caused by family issues and/or some kind of developmental arrest. Accordingly, the manual of the American Psychiatric Association conceptualized it as a mental disorder and further stigmatized the gay people in society.

A kind of paradigm shift and the subsequent emergence of the gay liberation movement took place after the famous Stonewall Riot in Greenwich Village, New York, on 28 June 1969. This was the era when Williams's above mentioned public coming out could happen. Throughout his oeuvre as well as in his bestselling *Memoirs* (1972) the playwright alluded to the gay subculture with the euphemistic term "Bohemia": "My place in society [. . .] has been in Bohemia. I love to visit the other side now and then, but on my social passport Bohemia is indelibly stamped, without regret on my part" (Williams, 1975: 100). He divided the American society

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[2]Freud's letter written in 1935 to a mother who was worried for her son's homosexuality, published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*in 1951. 11 June 2015
<http://www.lettersofnote.com/2009/10/homosexuality-is-nothing-to-be-ashamed.html>.

into two parts in this respect, and despite the emerging gay rights movement he has retained a certain kind of skepticism in this respect.

> I had the Quixotic notion that I could continue to enjoy all kinds of society, the bohemian and the elite, the straight and the gay. I know many persons in the "gay world" who accomplish this trick with apparent ease: however, I think it still requires a good deal of hypocrisy, even now that society, in the Western world is presumed to have discarded its prejudices. My feeling is that the prejudices have simply gone underground. (Williams, 1975: 203-04)

The American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973, and since then the official consensus of the behavioral and social sciences and the mental health professions globally is that homosexuality is a normal variation of human sexual Orientation, although the World Health Organization declassified it only in 1990. But of course there may be individuals, groups or even professionals who still maintain that it is a disorder.

While the study of the scientific basis of homosexuality has been mainly left to psychology and sociology, nature scientists sometimes have also come up with explanations. Newer and newer theories have appeared but most of them have remained unverifiable. During the 1930s, for example, scientists believed that homosexuality was a genetic error or defect and this notion was used by the Nazis to justify the extermination of homosexuals in the concentration camps. In recent decades, studies of twins and brothers who are gay have also shown that there may be a genetic component to homosexuality. Sometimes sensational headlines appear with the possible solution of the "gay gene"[3] but later Dean Hamer's efforts to identify the genetic factors of homosexuality were dismissed as unscientific.

The nature vs. nurture dilemma is also a constant source of debate. Is homosexuality genetically predetermined or can the consequences of the genes be completely erased by the effects of the environment? Or vice versa, can a heterosexual individual be "homosexualized" by the environment, for example being raised by a gay couple or being exposed to the gay subculture at an early age? Many people argue that although

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[3] "The gay gene: What has been found and what does it actually mean? How do homosexuals feel about the discovery? What is a gene anyway?" *The Independent* Sunday 18 July 1993. 10 Oct. 2014 <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/the-gay-gene-what-has-been-found-and-what-does-it-actually-mean-how-do-homosexuals-feel-about-the-discovery-what-is-a-gene-anyway-answers-provided-by-steve-connor-and-tom-wilkie-1485604.html>.

homosexuality may have a genetic component, this fact in itself has nothing to do with the moral or social status of homosexuality. Right-wing activists also have their say in the nature vs. nurture debate and sometimes they come up with hair-raising theories like Bryan Fischer, an anti-gay pundit, who claims that homosexuality may be a genetic "birth defect" or a "genetic abnormality" but "not even homosexual activists today want the gay gene to be found" because – similarly to Down syndrome babies – "that could lead expectant parents to abort fetuses." (Brian Fischer 2012)

It seems to be sure that lots of gay people believe that their sexuality is not the result of a free-will decision, but comes out of an act of nature, indicating that homosexuality is natural. Thus, from time to time, the dilemma of "born this way" vs. choice comes to the forefront of arguments as it is brought up in Marcia Malory's article originally published in *Scientific American* and republished in *Huffington Post*. Besides summarizing the earlier gene- and more recent brain studies in connection with homosexuality, she points out that the somewhat apologetic "gays can't help being that way" (Malory 2012) approach "is reminiscent of the old view of homosexuality as a psychiatric illness"(Malory 2012). She also argues that there may also be people "who are gay by choice" and they "have the right to remain that way (Malory 2012). This approach, according to which "people have the right to engage in gay sex and have homosexual relationships if they choose to do so" (Malory 2012) is also popular nowadays, interpreting homosexuality as a civil-rights issue.

Summing up, while the judgment of homosexuality used to be quite stable and overwhelmingly negative for centuries, in recent decades it became the hot spot of debates and differing opinions. Williams, who was born in 1911 and died in 1983, lived in an age when he could experience the effects of both the deeply rooted prejudices of the past and the emerging gay liberation movement of the future as well. Thus, his oeuvre can mirror all the contradictions of the American society in this respect during the twentieth century. In the following I will depict some of his plays and short stories in which homosexuality appears along the line of the error-sin-deviance logic, and finally some examples where the playwright defies the negative concept of homosexuality and becomes a forerunner of the conscious and proud gay man.

2. Homosexuality as error or mistake

In Scene 6 of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), during a conversation with Mitch, Blanche is talking about her late homosexual husband, Allan, and her big mistake regarding their marriage.

I was unlucky. Deluded. There was *something different about the boy*, a nervousness, a softness and tenderness which wasn't like a man's, although he wasn't the least bit effeminate-looking – still – *that thing was there* [. . .]. He came to me for help. I didn't know that. I didn't find out anything till after our marriage [. . .]. I didn't know anything [. . .]. Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. *By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty – which wasn't empty, but had two people in it . . .* [. . .] Afterwards we pretended that nothing has been discovered. (Williams 1991: 182, emphasis added)

But somewhat later on the dance-floor Blanche was unable to stop herself and she humiliated her husband by shouting, "I know! I know! You disgust me . . . ." After this scene Allan ran out of the casino and a few moments later he stuck the revolver into his mouth and committed suicide (*Streetcar* 184). Blanche makes the discovery of her husband's homosexuality by mistake, by entering the room she thought was empty. But it was also a double error to think that her husband was heterosexual, because he wasn't, she found him in bed with another man. Later she made the third mistake or error when she couldn't help condemning and publicly humiliating him by expressing her disgust. No wonder that after her husband's suicide she was filled with remorse. Her moral downfall also began with Allen's suicide; she took to drinking, became promiscuous, started flirting even with her own students. One mistake or error thus was just leading to another, like a chain of consequences.

Williams has a curious strategy in this case, because we know nothing more about Blanche's dead husband apart from the fact that he also made a mistake, cheated on his wife with a man, and when he was confronted with its consequences, he killed himself. By doing this, he becomes the silent victim of verbal abuse and moral condemnation, but by sacrificing his life, his error and responsibility are shifted on to Blanche. With this strategy Williams displaces the moral burden from the "sinful homosexual" to the hypocritical heterosexual individual and society alike.

3. Homosexuality as abnormality and deviance

In Scene 6 of *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) Amanda, the domineering mother, while talking to Laura, cries out like this, "Why can't you and your brother be *normal* people?" (Williams 1991: 279, emphasis added). The hint is quite clear as regards Laura, the "unmarried sister, who's crippled and has no job" (Williams, 1991: 312). But the question arises: what is "abnormal" about Tom Wingfield, the poet-narrator of the play, who

is seemingly an ordinary young man, no matter how unhappy he is with his job at the warehouse or however trapped he feels in his female-dominated nuclear family.

At first sight Amanda's biggest problem with her son is the fact that he goes to the cinema too frequently and usually late at night. His movie-going is a constant topic of argument throughout the play. The importance of this subtle but recurrent motif is overshadowed by Laura's tragedy, and has not been given too much critical attention. In the following, I would like to examine Tom Wingfield's inner dilemma, what his constant going to the movie actually may mean and hide, and to analyze the deeper sense that the movie as a metaphor symbolizes in Williams's oeuvre in general. In fact, due to Williams's cunning sub-textual strategy, Tom's movie-going is burdened with suspicion from the very beginning through Amanda's strong disbelief: "I don't believe that you go every night to the movies. Nobody goes to the movies night after night. Nobody in their right mind goes to the movies as often as you pretend to. People don't go to the movies at nearly midnight, and movies don't let out at two a.m." (Williams, 1991: 251). Later she adds, "I think you've been doing things that you're ashamed of." (Williams, 1991: 251)

Amanda also refers to Tom's "restless," instinctual nature, especially in the context of his nightly wanderings. Her suspicion recalls the atmosphere of some of Williams's poems and short stories, in which the writer openly talks about his homosexual way of life and the nightly cruising in search of carnal love. In his poem entitled "The Siege," he calls himself a "reckless voyager" who "builds a tottering pillar of his blood." While walking up the streets led by his instinct, he "must that night go in search of one / unknown . . . ." Then, before dawn, he "follows back the street companioned," his "veins in crimson cabins keep / the wild and witless passengers of love." (Williams, 1964: 20)

In The Glass Menagerie we do not get a straight answer whether Tom Wingfield is cruising at night or not, but at the end of the play there are certain allusions to this possibility. In the epilogue, Tom tells the audience what happened to him after Laura's incident with the gentlemen caller:

> I traveled around a great deal. [. . .] I would have stopped, but was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise.
> Perhaps it was a familiar bit of music. Perhaps it was only a piece of transparent glass.
> Perhaps I am walking along a street at night, in some strange city, before I have found companions. (Williams, 1991: 313)

This monologue shows us the adult narrator's clearly established gay identity: he is led to the streets by his instincts, but he consciously chooses this promiscuous way of life searching for companions.

Another interpretation of Tom's compulsive going out may be that he goes to the movies indeed, but has the same experiences as Williams's cruising heroes have in the street. Again, there is no direct proof to this assumption in *The Glass Menagerie*, but in Williams's short stories the movie often becomes a special place for the secret pleasures of homosexuals, an erotic space of gay love.

In "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio" (written prior to *Menagerie*, in 1941, published in 1954) Pablo Gonzales, a "very strange" man (Williams, 1986: 103) regularly goes to a third-rate cinema called the Joy Rio which "specialized in the showing of cowboy pictures and other films of the sort that have a special appeal to children and male adolescents" (Williams, 1986: 105). Even the name of the Joy Rio was "peculiar enough," and in its "unlighted . . . peculiarly dusky" galleries (Williams, 1986: 105) "furtive practices of a lifetime" (Williams, 1986: 104) could be pursued. As the narrator informs us, "there was something . . . special and obscure about Mr. Gonzales' attendance at the Joy Rio," a habit inherited from his late "protector," the old homosexual, Mr. Kroger (Williams, 1986: 106). In "the forbidden region of the upper galleries" (Williams, 1986: 111) "every device and fashion of carnality had run riot in a gloom so thick that a chance partner could only be discovered by touch" (Williams, 1986: 107). There was "an almost sightless existence where the other senses, the senses of smell and touch and hearing, had to develop a preternatural keenness in order to spare one from making awkward mistakes, . . . a mistake of gender" (Williams, 1986: 107). This sultry and erotic space was Mr. Gonzales's "earthly heaven" (112), the site of his "lifelong pursuit of pleasure" (Williams, 1986: 109). The motto of the premises – also inherited from his gay protector – reveals the exciting nature of the hunt: "Sometimes you will find it and other times you won't find it and the times you don't find it are the times when you have got to be careful." (Williams, 1986: 109)

In another short story, "Hard Candy" (written in 1953, published in 1954), the homosexual protagonist, Mr. Krupper, also habitually goes to the movie theatre. He seeks the company of nameless "shadowy youths" Williams, 1986: 360) whose love he can buy for money and a fistful of hard candies kept in a paper bag in his pocket. Mr. Krupper's "otherness" is also carefully delineated, the suspicion is gradually aroused. He has a "certain air . . . of being engaged in something far more momentous than the ordinary meanderings of an old man retired from business and without close family

ties" (Williams, 1986: 356). Williams even warns the reader to be alert so as not to miss Mr. Krupper's real nature: "To notice something you would have to be looking for something" until "meeting your observation that would strike you as a notable difference" (Williams, 1986: 356). While approaching the Joy Rio, Mr. Krupper "undergoes a certain alteration" (Williams, 1986: 357). He does not want "to betray some outward signals" but has "an air of alertness" (Williams, 1986: 357-58). Making "various little gestures, fishing in his pocket for something," he has "that mysterious attitude of expectancy," "painful, wheezing concentration" till he reaches his destination, "the place where the mysteries of his nature are to be made unpleasantly manifest to us" (Williams, 1986: 358). In order to disguise himself, he puts on "a pair of dark-lensed glasses, lenses so dark that the eyes are not visible behind them" (Williams, 1986: 358). Then he goes up to the gloomy galleries furtively "to explore the physical mysteries of the place" (Williams, 1986: 359), while on the screen – with an ironic Freudian allusion – "an epic of the western ranges, full of loud voices and gunplay." (Williams, 1986: 360)

As we have seen, the symbolic setting of the movie has special, metaphorical importance to Williams; it is first and foremost the site of gay love, the meeting place of the gay subculture, a safe haven for the homosexual protagonists. Tom Wingfield's emphasized and compulsive going to the movies does not seem to be accidental; it reflects the adolescent quest for self-identity, in this case, gay identity. Since the play clearly has a strong autobiographical quality, the model for Tom's inner turmoil must have been the writer himself.

Williams's portrayal of the furtive and hidden practices of his strange little homosexual protagonists who persistently pursue illicit sex in public places even exaggerates their abnormality and deviancy so as to lend an air of irony and mysticism to them.

4. Homosexuality as sin

Similarly to the street and the movie-theater, the beach is a public space full of erotic connotations for the gay subculture. In *Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) Sebastian Venable, the persecutor of young blond boys on the beach and in the bathhouse (Williams, 1962: 276) finally becomes the persecuted and devoured victim himself. Catharine talks about his abusive nature as follows, "Cousin Sebastian said he was famished for blonds, he was fed-up with the dark ones and was famished for blonds. . . . – famished for light ones: that's how he talked about people, as if they were – items on

a menu – "That one's delicious-looking, that one is appetizing." (Williams, 1962: 255)

With an ironic but tragic twist, Sebastian's blond objects of desire pursue him into a nightmarish death on Cabeza de Lobo, the "beach that's named for Sebastian's name saint . . . San Sebastian" (Williams, 1962: 274), the patron saint of persecuted homosexuals. The protagonist is wearing a white silk suit, a white silk tie, a white panama hat, white shoes, white lizard-skin pumps, a white silk handkerchief, and popping little white pills into his mouth (Williams, 1962: 276-77). Although white is the symbolic color of moral purity, its exaggeration has an inverse effect and underlines Sebastian cold, abusive and morally corrupted nature. When Mrs. Venable describes her forty-year-old son, Williams makes a pun on the words "chaste" and "chased": "My son, Sebastian, was chaste. Not c-h-a-s-e-d! Oh, he was chased in that way of spelling it, too, we had to be very fleet-footed I can tell you, with his looks and his charm, to keep ahead of pursuers, every kind of pursuer!" (Williams, 1962: 247). It remains obscure whether Mrs. Venable refers to her son's male pursuers here, but it is clear that by stressing his chastity she fails to consider some serious "homo-textual" allusions to the bathhouses that Sebastian frequents.

As Catharine remarks, "Sebastian came out of the bathhouse, followed" (Williams, 1962: 276). The mother also neglects the fact that her son exploits Catharine selfishly so as to attract the attention of young males that is to procure boys for him. There are ominous hints at the "bands of homeless young people that lived on the free beach like scavenger dogs, hungry children" (Williams, 1962: 276), elsewhere "a band of frightfully thin and dark naked children that looked a flock of plucked birds" (Williams, 1962: 277). Desire and fear go together: "each day the crowd was bigger, noisier, greedier! – Sebastian began to be frightened" (Williams, 1962: 276). Terrified of "those little monsters" (Williams, 1962: 278), he tries to flee but is soon overcome by his attackers. No matter how cruel Sebastian's death scene is, Williams's strategy goes beyond the fact of mere shocking and elevates it to the sphere of aesthetics. He often attempts to portray the "homosexual sublime" by lending an air of transcendence to the death of his homosexual protagonists. While chasing Sebastian, the children are "all crying out, 'Pan, pan, pan!' [. . .] the word for bread" (Williams, 1962: 277), and Sebastian's flesh serves as their bread when they devour him.

Blasphemous it may sound, but Williams often stages the brutal death of his homosexual protagonists as a kind of Last Supper, where the homosexual hero offers his body as holy bread in an act of self-sacrifice. In

his most Gothic short story, "Desire and the Black Masseur" (1948), for example, sexual desire and death are so closely entwined that the masochistic little clerk, Anthony Burns, is literally pummeled to death by the sadistic black masseur in the Turkish bath. "Desire lives constantly with fear," Williams comments, and there is "no partition between them" (Williams, 1986: 218). The sinister tone foreshadows the hellish scene: "the baths were a tiny world of their own. Secrecy was the atmosphere of the place and seemed to be its purpose" (Williams, 1986: 218). The bathhouse gradually becomes a Gothic torture chamber with its milky glass doors, labyrinth of partitions, corridors and cubicles curtained off from each other: "everywhere were agencies of concealment. The bodies of patrons [. . .] white and noiseless as ghosts" (Williams, 1986: 218). In the steam-room "the blank walls heaved and sighed as steam issued from them. It swirled about Burns' naked figure, enveloping him in heat and moisture such as the inside of a tremendous mouth, to be drugged and all but dissolved in this burning vapour which hissed out of unseen walls" (219). The trembling Burns is laid on "a bare white table" (Williams, 1986: 219), the altar of his self-sacrifice, while he is offering his body to be beaten and eaten by the black masseur.

In Anthony Burns' death "the principle of atonement" is placed in the center, "the surrender of self to violent treatment by others with the idea of thereby clearing one's self of his guilt" (Williams, 1986: 217). Williams is obsessed with "the sins of the world" that sufferers must atone for (Williams, 1986: 217). As he explains, "these sorts of incompletions are usually covered up," and man devises a mask "to cover his incompletions" (Williams, 1986: 217). Atonement compensates for the lack of man's courage to face his own self and sins, motivating Anthony Burns to seek death in the hands of the black masseur. Pleasure and suffering go together in this sadomasochistic story. As Gregory Woods explains, "the power of Gothic fiction" is the "constant yoking of sexual desire with the threat of violence [. . .] to titillate the audience" (Woods, 1998: 135). The victim's torment is abstracted since the death scene takes place on Good Friday while from the church across the street Christ's passion and the priest's homily can be heard, "Suffer, suffer, suffer, the preacher shouted. Our Lord was nailed on the cross for the sins of the world!" (Williams, 1986: 222). Thus the author interprets and values suffering as the transcendent road to God. Williams echoes Christ's last word on the cross, "there was an air of completion . . . Yes, it is perfect, he thought, it is now completed!" (Williams, 1986: 223). In this short story the gay bath – with its sultry eroticism and

brutal pleasures – becomes not only the sanctuary of forbidden desires and sins but also the site of redemption for the gay character.

5. Atoners vs. revolutionaries

With a remarkable turn, Williams wrote one of his most disillusioned plays regarding the topic of homosexuality in parallel with the emergence of the gay rights movement and his own public coming out. The plot of *Small Craft Warnings* (1972) takes place in a gay bar along the Southern California coast. It is "like a community club," and most of "the regulars spend the whole evening there" (Williams, 1976: 225). The bar owner – ironically called Monk – laments on the unpredictable future and vicissitudes of his business:

> I've got no moral objections to them as a part of humanity, but I don't encourage them here. One comes in, others follow. First thing you know you're operating what they call a gay bar and it sounds like a bird cage, they're standing three deep at the bar and lining up at the men's room. Business is terrific for a few months. Then in comes the law. The place is raided, the boys hauled off in the wagon, and your place is padlocked . . . (Williams, 1976: 264-265)

One of the characters praises the proprietor, "Monk . . . you're running a place of refuge for vulnerable human vessels" (Williams, 1986: 229). And indeed, all the customers are seeking "that solace, that comfort of companionship" (Williams, 1976: 226). Williams's gay bar in *Small Craft Warnings* is a dark place not because it is "dimly lit" (Williams, 1976: 225), but because of the general disillusionment of its guests. This mood is in stark contrast with the decade when the play was written, just three years after the Stonewall Riot, in an era when the gay pride movement was emerging, with more and more gays coming out of the closet. The ageing playwright, however, does not seem to follow the new trend of political correctness, and calls his gay characters "faggots," "fruits," "sissy boys," the pejorative terms he had suffered from all through his life. Leona tries to interpret the disillusionment of these drifting characters while turning to Quentin and Bobby:

> There is some kind of tension between you. What is it? Is it guilt feelings? Embarrassment with guilt feelings? . . . Naw, I know the gay scene. I learned it from my kid brother. He came out early. . . . I know the gay

scene and I know the language of it and I know how full it is of sickness and sadness; it's so full of sadness and sickness of a gay boy. (Williams, 1976: 254)

The motif of atonement comes up again when Leona predicts, "he cuts out of here to make another pickup. He wants to pay you, it's part of his sad routine. It's like doing penance . . . penitence" (Williams, 1976: 258). Quentin's soliloquy on the homosexual experience is not comforting either: "There is a coarseness, a deadening coarseness, in the experience of most homosexuals. The experiences are quick, and hard, and brutal, and the pattern of them practically unchanging . . . Their act of love is . . . more and more empty of real interest and surprise" (Williams, 1976: 260). He also states that "this lack of variation and surprise" gives him "the feeling of panic" and bewilderment about his "worn-out passion." (Williams, 1976: 261)

No wonder that during the following decades the emerging gay criticism has often accused Williams of self-hatred and built-in homophobia. Yet, I think his case is a bit more complex than that. Williams made no secret of his homosexuality, and his private life was quite happy with some long-term partners and several good friends. As an artist, especially as a dramatist, however, he knew that "unclouded happiness" could not provide suitable material for his writings. He needed the spiritual turmoil and the inner conflicts of his protagonists, and homosexuality could serve as a source of such tension. Being an artist, he was much more interested in the secrecy, even mystery of the closet than in the explicit forms of homosexuality or gay pride.

But in spite of his disillusioned homosexual characters, he was also able to show the revolutionary potential of gay people. The fact, for example, that Tom Wingfield could find ideological support for his escape from home in *The Glass Menagerie* is hidden between the lines, but the subtle motif is definitely there. While describing the latest stage show to Laura, he talks about a certain Malvolio the Magician, "a very generous fellow" who gave him a souvenir, a shimmering rainbow-colored magic scarf he is now pulling out of his pocket. He tells Laura that waving the magic scarf she can get what she wants. What is more, Malvolio has a famous coffin trick: "We nailed him into a coffin and he got out of the coffin without removing one nail. [. . .] There is a trick that would come in handy for me – get me out of this 2 by 4 situation!" (Williams, 1991: 255). It is clear that Tom regards his present – closeted – way of life as a nailed-up coffin. However, the appearance of the rainbow – with its strong gay associations as a signifier of diversity and gayness – in the context of escape

and liberation from this coffin/closet is a brave and clear hint at his real identity more than a quarter of a century before the gay liberation movement. The motif of the rainbow subtly reappears again and again in the play. In the Paradise Dance Hall opposite the Wingfield house the large glass sphere "would turn slowly about and filter the dusk with delicate rainbow colors [. . .], here there was only hot swing music and liquor, dance halls, bars, and movies, and sex that hung in the gloom like a chandelier and flooded the world with brief, deceptive rainbows" (Williams, 1991: 265). The close connection of sultry eroticism with the rainbow finally comes up in the context of Tom's nightly cruising and search for companions as well, "I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of colored glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colors, like bits of a shattered rainbow." (Williams, 1991: 313)

The Magician's souvenir scarf deserves some further intertextual attention and a closer look at Williams's oeuvre. The protagonist of his short story "The Knightly Quest" (a kind of gay utopia written in 1965) is the homosexual Gewinner Pearce who fights against a mysterious organization, the Project, which works on the invention of an annihilatoryweapon. In the end he leaves the earth towards a new planet, an imaginary gay paradise. In Edward A. Sklepowich's apt formulation,

> Gewinner succeeds in destroying the Project in a victory for individual freedom and identity, and then sails off in a spaceship to establish a new, rare community of love and enchantment. His elegant white scarf which doubles as a trysting sheet on his nightly quests for sexual partners is to be enshrined in a special museum, an emblem of his search for love and beauty in this disenchanted world. (Sklepowich, 1977: 537)

The nightly quests of this "Gawain of homosexuality" thus become "knightly quests," placing "Gewinner's homosexual cruising in as positive a light as possible." (Sklepowich, 1977: 537)

We have every reason to presume that the Magician's rainbow scarf is the early precursor of Gewinner's white one that symbolizes peace, and both of them have a liberating effect on the individuals who come into contact with them. This liberation of the self always depends on the degree of the individual's own self-acceptance, inclusive of all his errors, sins and follies. This state may be the result of a long and difficult process for every human being regardless of the fact that they are straight or gay.

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Rezumat: Lucrarea analizează relațiile dintre greșeală, păcat, deviație precum și ilustrarea lor în opera lui Tennessee Williams. Va fi, de asemenea, discutată problema relativității, în sensul evoluției pe care au cunoscut-o conceptele menționate în ultimile decade, un fenomen cu evidente consecințe etice. Homosexualitatea, de exemplu, era

considerată atât păcat cât și boală mintală la începutul carierei dramaturgului, pentru ca, spre sfârșitul vieții acestuia, să devină o simplă problemă de drepturi civile. Perspectivele sociologiei literare oferă ample oportunități de analiză a acestui domeniu interdisciplinar.

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Bloomian Concept of Error and Rui Zinc's Postmodernism in *O Anibaleitor*

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Abstract: According to Bloom's literary canon, one of the three aesthetical principles is the anxiety of influences, namely the original or wrong interpretation of classic great literary works. Postmodern poetics corresponds to this idea, in the sense that it reinterprets the previous literature, often resorting to pastiche, intertext, ludic elements and oral character. The present paper aims at analyzing the manner in which Rui Zinc, voluntarily, interprets in a wrong manner the classical epic genre and explores the postmodern elements he resorts to in order to accomplish this task.

Keywords: *Bloomian literary canon, anxiety of influences, postmodern poetics, intertext, pastiche, ludic elements, oral character.*

According to Bloom's literary canon, any literary work is based on three aesthetical principles: the strangeness of ideas, the anxiety of ideas and the anxiety of influences. The first principle refers to the originality of a literary work, the second one points to the fact that any literary work must somehow trouble the readers, whereas the third principle refers to the manner in which a literary work is created. According to Bloom, any writer is consciously influenced by the literary works of the previous great writers and any new valuable literary work must consist in the original or wrong interpretation of classic great literary works: "Any important literary work is a creative-wrong reading and a wrong interpretation of a classical text or of several such texts." (Bloom, 1995: 11)

Postmodern poetics is connected to the Bloomian concept of error in the sense that it reinterprets the previous literature, often resorting to pastiche, intertext and ludic elements. There is a paradox at the very heart of postmodernism: it both "enshrines the past" and "questions it', it marks both a difference from the past and a connection with it by means of intertextuality (Hutcheon, 2004: 125-126). The world of the postmodern text is "a world of discourse, the world of texts and intertexts" and postmodernism itself is "a theoretical exploration of the vast dialogue between and among literatures and histories" (Hutcheon, 2004: 125). Within and behind any given text there is a plurality of other texts. (Kristeva, 1969: 72)

We are going to analyze the manner in which Rui Zinc, voluntarily, interprets in a wrong manner the classical epic genre and what are the postmodern elements he resorts to in order to accomplish this task.

The theme of reading is a postmodern theme along with the themes of daily life, commuting, ordinary urban experiences, hostels, etc. The novel is a meditation on the act of reading nowadays.

1. Pastiche-Hypertextuality

The novel *O Anibaleitor* can be considered a pastiche as it is a take on *Moby Dick* by Hermann Melville and on Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*. It is very important to mention the fact that these two sources of imitation are named by Rui Zinc himself at the end of the novel, in the *Author's Note*.

In G. Genette's terms, the novel *O Anibaleitor* is a hypertext or a B-type text, whereas the two texts *Moby Dick* and *The Hunting of the Snark* are hypotexts or A-type texts, namely earlier texts upon which other texts are grafted: "Hypertextuality refers to any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary." (Genette, 1997: 5). This process is called transformation and can be rendered graphically as follows:

A (hypotext) →B (hypertext)

Hypertext derives from hypotext without mentioning it. It is only in the *Author's Note* that Rui Zinc mentions these two references.

Discussing about *Moby Dick* (1851) by Hermann Melville, Rui Zinc shows that the name of the character Queequeg is taken from there, too. To make the reference even more visible, Zinc's character has lost one leg because "it was ripped off by a white whale" (20) and he also has "a story about a white whale tattooed on his body" (20). Mention should be made of other similarities, too: as Rui Zinc's novel is mainly based on two characters, the child narrator and the monster Anibareader, Melville's novel is structured around the two main characters, Ahab and Ishmael, who are contrasted with each other, with Ishmael the observer and narrator; *Mobby Dick* can be read as a "narrative of education" (Robert Milder, 1988: 434) and so can be read *O Anibaleitor*. The former refers to education referring to rather practical issues, whereas the latter is an education in the art of reading; Ahab, the captain in *Mobby Dick*, is a "force of linearity" (Bryant and Springer, 2007: xvi) and so is the captain in Zinc's novel: "He had the

annoying habit of believing that he is never wrong and of having only seldom doubts." (20-21)

Both the child narrator in Zinc's novel, on the one hand, and the main characters in Melville's novel, have a hole in their hearts and feel they are somehow incomplete beings. Thus, the child narrator's parents are preparing to divorce and both Ahab and Ishmael are orphans.

Anibareader is similar to Snark – an imaginary animal created by Lewis Caroll in the absurd poem *The Hunting of the Snark*. The story goes like this: A crew made up of ten people set sail to hunt the Snark. They are guided by the leader Bellman, who uses a map which is, in fact, a blank sheet of paper. (In Rui Zinc's novel, the captain uses a map, too, but this one is said to be made of human skin (28): "It is said that, in order to make this map, a brave cast away used his own skin, scrathing it with a sharp stone" (29). The crew are told that some Snarks are dangerous Boojums and that, if the Snark is a Boojum, then the hunter vanishes away. They split up to hunt the Snark. At the end of the poem, the Baker cries that he has found the Snark but when his shipmates arrive, he has disappeared. The narrator concludes that the Snark was a Boojum.

At the same time, it should be underlined the fact that the manner in which Rui Zinc coins the word that gives the name of the monster is an imitation of the portmanteau words in Caroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*, as we are going to demonstrate further on.

Mention should also be made of other textualist elements. Rui Zinc, in *The Author's Note*, gives a definition of intertext "a text can hide another text. Even unwillingly, a book is always engaged in a dialogue with other books." (105)

Textualist references can be seen in *Author's Note*: "Now, the texture of these details deliberately intersects with other textures. Here are some of the most shameless references…" (105). Zinc also mentions (apart from *Moby Dick* (1851) by Hermann Melville and *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876)) *Kong* by Merian C. Cooper; *Dune* (1985) – a song; *Esteiros* (1941) by Soeiro Pereira Gomes, *Aventuras Maravilhosas de João Sem Medo (1963)* by José Gomes Ferreira, *Dinosauro Excelentíssimo* (1972) by José Cardoso Pires, *O Malhadinhas* (1922) by Aquilino Ribeiro, *O labirintodonte* (1970) – a poem and a book by Alberto Pimenta, *A Reinvenção da Leitura* (1975) by Ana Hatherly – a visual poem. He also indicates that in *Canto V* in *Lusiada* there is "a talking cliff", but its name is Adamastor (In *O Anibaleitor* the monster appears to the child narrator under the shape of a cliff, at the beginning: "One of the walls of the cave has a huge hunchback, a black, prominent cliff. The cliff moved" – 39) and that

there is also "a certain dr. Hannibal Lecter", "the main character of three novels by Thomas Harris, among which *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988)." (p. 107)

2. Intertext

Rui Zinc makes use of ample intertext, in a wide variety of forms: authors mentioned in the novel: Garrett (49), Aquilino (56), Saramago (75), Fernando Pessoa (75), Bocage (79), Jorge Luis Borges (105); books mentioned in the novel: *1001 Nights* (55), *The Three Musketeers* (56), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (56), *The Karamazov Brothers* (56), *Crime and Punishment* (56), *The Town and the Mountain* (56); books mentioned in the *Author's Note* that are written by Rui Zinc himself: *The Waiting* (2007) and *O Suplente*, *Lusitano Hotel* (1986), *Apocalipse Nau* (1996); authors and books mentioned in the novel: King Solomon - *The Song of Songs* (19); Rubem Fonseca - *And from the Middle of the Prostitute World I've Kept Love Only for Cigar* (*Do Meio do Mundo Prostituto Só Amores Guardei ao Meu Charuto)* (55); Jules Verne – *Around the World In Eighty Days* (p 55-56); Julio Cortazar – *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds* (56); Guimarães Rosa – *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands (Grande Sertão: Veredas)* (66); Proust – *In Search of Lost Time* (67); Tolstoi – *War and Peace, Anna Karenina* (67); Virginia Woolf – *Orlando* (74); books mentioned in the novel but whose writers are revealed by the author himself later on, in the *Author's Note*; they are not mentioned in the text*: O Dinosauro Excelentíssimo* by José Cardoso Pires (56), *Aventuras Maravilhosas de João Sem Medo* by José Gomes Ferreira (56), *Esteiros* by Soeiro Pereira Gomes (56), *O Malhadinhas* by Aquilino Ribeiro (56); quotations without mentioning the author or the book: 49,   82; quotations mentioning the author: Bocage (40) and (79-80), Álvaro de Campos (Fernando Pessoa's heteronym) (50), Luíz Vaz Camóes (62), Augusto Monterroso (68); references without mentioning the author or the book and later on revealed by one of the characters or by the author himself:

-Anibareader asks the child narrator: "Are you willing to exchange some ideas with me on a theme?" (54) and, later on (55), the child reveals the title of the book, *We'd Better Exchange Some Ideas on This Theme*, as well as the name of the author, Mário de Carvalho;
-we find out that the visual poem on p. 73 is written by Ana Hatherly and belongs to *A Reinvenção da Leitura* (1975), a fact which is revealed by the author himself in the *Author's Note*;

-on page 26, the child asks: "Hey, Queequeg, isn't this similar to the hunting of the Snark?" Later on, in the *Author's Note*, Zinc himself reveals the source of imitation: Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*;

-on page 34, the child says: "Then, if we should come across this Animal Hector…" clearly making a confusion of name. Later on, in the *Author's Note*, Zinc himself reveals the source of imitation: "the main character of three novels by Thomas Harris, among which *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988)" (107): dr. Hannibal Lecter.

Intertext can also take the form of references without mentioning the author or the book and never revealed afterwards: "I must learn that, according to some people, the world was contained in a mere letter" (60); the readers infer that it is a reference to Borges; the story about the stone soup (102), which ends the novel, can be read as a reference to *The Bible*: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?"; "I had had the luck to embark on a ship of fools" (19) – there is a hint to Katherine Anne Porter's *Ship of Fools;* the name of the monster (Anibaleitor, in Portuguese) points to the main character of three novels written by Thomas Harris (out of which *The Silence of the Lambs* is the most famous), namely Hannibal Lector, (it is very interesting to notice the manner in which Rui Zinc coins the word giving the name of the monster: "So, Anibareader wants to say only that…". "Animal Reader, that is Reader, added the captain. Only that: it is a hairy brute that reads." (33)

In Portuguese, the name of the hunted monster is Anibaleitor (animal→ anibal+ leitor) which can easily be translated into Romanian as Anibalector (animal→anibal + lector), keeping the pun obtained by fusing the meanings of two different words. In English, joining "animal" and "reader" we obtain Anibareader. The name of the monster was taken from a map and the one who wrote it used "b" instead of "m" throughout the entire text, thus a humourous effect being obtained. The author obtains a humourous effect replacing the right letters with others:

m→b (animal → anibal);
f→p (awful→awpul)
m→ b (main→bain)
q→g (quality→ guality)
r→g (reading→geading)

This manner of building portmanteau words is an imitation of Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*. There, in the *Preface*, Carroll explains how such words are formed: "This also seems a fitting occasion to notice the other hard works in that poem. Humpty-Dumpty's theory, of two meanings packed into one word like a portmanteau, seems to me the right explanation for all. For instance, take the two words "fuming" and "furious". Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards "fuming", you will say "fuming-furious;" if they turn, by even a hair's breadth, towards "furious", you will say "furious-fuming;" but if you have the rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say "frumious." Supposing that, when Pistol uttered the well-known words: "Under which king, Bezonian? Speak or die!" Justice Shallow had felt certain that it was either William or Richard, but had not been able to settle which, so that he could not possibly say either name before the other, can it be doubted that, rather than die, he would have gasped out "Rilchiam!." (Carroll 2011)

Mention should be made of the fact that Lewis Caroll borrows in *The Hunting of the Snark* eight portmanteau words from his earlier poem *Jabberwocky* (which is found in his children's novel *Through the Looking Glass*): *bandersnatch, beamish, frumious, galumphing, jubjub, mimsiest* (which previously appeared as mimsy in "Jabberwocky"), *outgrabe* and *uffish*. Therefore, it could be said that Rui Zinc's imitation is an imitation to an imitation, or a second degree imitation.

Here are a few examples of **comic elements** in Zafon's novel: "Today's youth is extremely damaged to the head" (16); "I (because of the age, I supppose) was rather on the moon than on the crow's nest" (25); "Poison…I don't like the idea, either. What the hell, we would have used cloroform if it had already been invented" (34); "Come on, get on the crow's nest, otherwise I risk a rebellion of the crew for preferential treatment given to a clandestine" (35); "Had I been older, I would have collapsed right there, at that very instant, stricken by a pathetic (and somehow humiliating) heart attack." (40)

In the *Author's Note*, discussing about the reference *Kong* by Merian C. Cooper, Zink concludes humorously: "Unfortunately, its creators (…) have died, therefore (to my great regret) I can't sue them." (106)

Mention should also be made of the **oral characteristics** that can be identified in the novel: the large use of dialogue – the second part of the novel, *The Island*, is mostly a dialogue between the child narrator and the monster Anibareader; the use of interjections: "Oops, they have found me"

(14); "Shh, little boy!" (24); "Aha. "(29); "Oops!" (29); "Hey, Qeequog, isn't this similar to the hunting of the Snark?" (26); "Ahh! I wanted to scream but the sound got stuck in my neck" (39); "Ahhhhhhhhh!" (40); "Well…" (42); "Oh! That is an entirely different thing" (44); "Ho! Ho!" (44); specific features of oral character: "as the saying goes" (25); proverbs and sayings: "People say that behind a big fortune there is a big theft" (9); "Like the gardener's dog, that neither eats cabbages himself, nor lets anybody else" (26); folk verses or rhythmic sentences: (12); "Here comes the ship Catherine/ Which has plenty to narrate./ Now, listen, my lords,/ A bewildering story" (17); "Little monkey, little monkey, climb up, don't be afraid! Hit yourself in the chest, like a birdie!"(18); unexpected combinations of words: "happy panic attack" (10); "small trouble – big trouble" (11); repeated words/sounds or pauses (there are cases when both are used together): "S-s-skin?" (28); "Human s-s-skin?" (28); "I-is it really true?" (29); "W-what?" (40); "W-who are you?" (40); "Y-yes, I muttered very slowly" (43); "Se-seventeen" (43); "A-are you…Are you Anibareader?" (42); "No…no" (41); "But…poison?" (34); "But…" (33); "A-are you really talking?" (42); "As regards the reading…it would be absurd" (33); "So, Anibareader wants to say only that…" (33); "Is this…Is this old Portuguese?" (31); "And…can you talk?"(42); "Are you…you God?." (44)

3. Conclusions

At the end of this brief analysis of the postmodern elements used by Rui Zinc in order to interpret in a wrong manner the classical epic genre, we can conclude the following: he imitates the content of another famous literary work, namely *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville and Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*, lending a humorous tone to the novel; he creates the monster character imitating Lewis Carroll's monster figure, namely Snark, he makes use of quotations to a large extent; he employs bookish references (namely quotations without mentioning the author or the books and references without mentioning the author or the book and never revealed afterwards: "I must learn that, according to some people, the world was contained in a mere letter" – 60); he uses textualist references which appear in the *Author's Note*; he explores the imaginary realm by creating the Anibareader monster; he uses many ludic elements; regarding the oral character of the novel, mention can be made of the large use of dialogue (the second part of the novel, *The Island*, is mostly a dialogue between the child

narrator and the monster Anibareader); the use of interjections, specific features of oral character, proverbs and sayings, folk verses or rhythmic sentences, unexpected combinations of words, repeated words/sounds or pauses.

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Rezumat: Conform canonului literar propus de Harold Bloom, unul dintre cele trei principii estetice este anxietatea influenţei, respectiv interpretarea originală sau greşită a operelor literare clasice. Poetica postmodernă se conformează acestui principiu, în sensul că

reinterpretează literatura din epocile anterioare, recurgând adeseori la pastişă, intertext, elemente ludice sau caracter oral. Prezenta lucrare are ca scop analizarea modalităţilor prin care Rui Zinc, in mod voluntar, interpretează eronat genul epic clasic şi discutarea elementelor postmoderne la care el apelează în acest sens.

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Error and Humour in David Lodge's *Small World*[1]

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Abstract: In his *Campus Trilogy*, David Lodge shapes an academic world filled with humorous and ironical situations. As he is a Literature Professor, Lodge has thorough knowledge of the world of the academia, as well as an excellent manner of employing the mechanisms of creating humour. He craftily uses error as a means of conveying humour. This paper focuses on the second novel of the Trilogy, *Small World. An Academic Romance* (1984) analyzing the relationship between error and humorous situations. These are triggered mainly by the characters being placed in unexpected situations, committing, facing and solving errors.

Keywords: *Humorous situations, qui pro quo, campus novels, error solving, irony.*

Introduction

David Lodge is a British contemporary author, mainly known for his work as a literary critic. He was born in 1935 in London and he was Professor of English Literature at the University of Birmingham until 1987. His best-known and most successful fiction works form the *Campus Trilogy*. The first novel of the trilogy was published in 1975 and it is entitled *Changing Places. A Tale of Two Campuses*. The second one is entitled *Small World. An Academic Romance* and was published in 1984. Finally, the last novel of the trilogy, *Nice Work*, was published in 1988.

David Lodge's campus novels are strongly influenced by the author's personal experience as an English Literature Professor. The characters are academics and the settings change from one country to another, not shifting from the University context (lectures, conferences, campuses). This paper focuses on the second novel of the Campus Trilogy, *Small World. An Academic Romance*. It will be argued that in this particular novel errors serve as a narrative device craftily employed by the author in order to create a humoristic effect, through situational humour.

A very important emphasis has to be made here, for clarifying the distinction between humour, irony and satire. Gérard Genette's analysis will

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be presented and employed further in the argument. In his work *Palimpsests*, the French structuralist thinker explains the relationship between irony, humour, and satire through a circular chart in which he places irony in between playfulness and satire (1997: 29). According to him, irony and humour are separated by playfulness, whereas satire is situated on the other half of the circle.

playful

ironic

humorous

polemical

serious

satiric
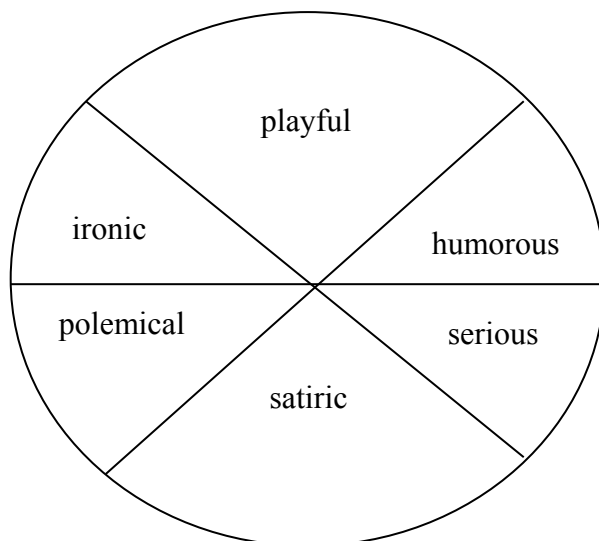
Genette's circle starts from humour and goes to seriousness. As it can be seen, playfulness is opposed to satire, as humour to polemic and irony to seriousness. Both irony and humour are closer to playfulness than to satire, as they do not intent any attack upon their target. Moreover, humour and irony imply that the person who uses them has a certain degree of affection towards the target person (or object, or situation).

As it will be further discussed, Lodge employs error in order to create situational humour; he sometimes also shapes ironical characters or situations, but he very rarely uses satire in his novels. He seems to be too close to the characters to satirize them. Lodge's narrative devices never lack a certain degree of playfulness which is the feature to draw the distinction between irony and humour, on one hand, and satire, on the other.

1. Situational Error

In every volume of the Trilogy, Lodge describes plenty of situations where a humorous effect is created through the means of errors. Situational humour plays a very important part, as the characters have to face various unexpected situations. In the second novel of the Trilogy, *Small World*, these situations arise mainly due to the characters travelling all over the world and committing errors when placed in various foreign contexts which are strongly unfamiliar to them.

In his 1989 interview, Lodge calls *Small World* a "modern comedy of academic manners" (Lodge, 1989). This includes achieving situational humour mainly through error as well as shaping humorous situations through the errors and fallacies of characters' academic ideas and theories.

A very good example of a humorous situation based upon a character's ideas is the case of the elderly retired Cambridge professor Miss Sybil Maiden who always finds phallic symbols. She finds these symbols everywhere: in Van Gogh's cypresses (Lodge, 1984: 197) as well as in Puss in Boots, as it "represents the same combination of male and female principles as the cup and spear in the Grail legend" (Lodge, 1984: 36), and its name mixes "pussy" and "boots", which are a phallic symbol. Miss Sybil Maiden underlines the phallic symbolism of the quest for the Holy Grail and she is contradicted by an Oxford medievalist who stabs the air with his knife to emphasize his point (Lodge, 1984: 12). It is both the error of the medievalist and the irony of his phallic gesture which triggers humour in this particular situation.

When he was in Turkey for delivering a paper, Phillip Swallow finds himself in an unexpected situation triggered by an error of his. The British Professor learns that he could have chosen between various broad topics for his paper, "such as Literature and History, or Literature and Society, or Literature and Philosophy" (Lodge, 1984: 181). Unfortunately, due to some problems with the telex transmission, the message was cut and the word "literature" was heard only once at the beginning. Thus, Swallow thought he was supposed to lecture on literature, on one hand, and history and society and philosophy and psychology, on the other hand. Prom the point of view of globalization, which is one of the main topics of the second volume of the trilogy, this particular humorous situation takes a critical side by presenting the ups and downs of progress through the errors which might occur. A professor can be rapidly asked to lecture in a foreign country through a telex transmission; however an error might happen and the transmission can lack accuracy so the message can be misunderstood. The story of Swallow's

paper ends on a note of an even higher irony, when the professor errs again and uses the pages to wipe himself while having diarrhea during a power cut in the middle of the night. "The situation is hilarious: in the contemporary society, a power cut makes an English professor mistake his lecture paper on literature and history and society and philosophy and psychology for toilet paper in a Turkish hotel" (Diaconu, 2015: 271). The ups and downs of globalization determine errors which create irony as well as unmistakably humorous situations.

2. Error in Persona

The narrative structure of *Small World* follows a grail quest pattern. Every character is in search for something: personal happiness, money, fame, wide recognition. While the main plot can be said to revolve around the quest for the UNESCO chair of literary criticism, which will be discussed in the next and last section of this paper, the most important subplot presents Persse McGarrigle's unrequited love for Angelica Pabst and his grail-like-quest for her hand and love. In his quest for Angelica, Persse commits maybe the most hilarious *error in persona* in the entire novel.

Persse pursues Angelica all through the development of the plot and she keeps on escaping him. Lodge uses plenty of intertextual references when describing their missed encounters. There can be found intertextuality on the structural level, as the narrative structure follows the romance pattern. When Persse first meets Angelica, at the Rummidge annual Conference for University Teachers of English Language and Literature, Lodge includes intertextuality at the surface of the narrative, as Angelica mentions John Keats' poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1820). She asks Persse to re-enact the poem together: he was to enter her hotel room, hide there, and watch her going to bed (Lodge, 1984: 55). But he finds himself to be a victim of the pun that Angelica played on both him and Robin Dempsey, who was another suitor. She told Persse the number of Robin's room, and she told Robin to wait for her in his room. Therefore, when the two men find each other in Robin's room, they both realize that their error was a result of Angelica's game.

After this episode, Persse finds out that Angelica never paid for a room at the hotel and was never allocated one. What is more, Bob Busby, one of the conference organizers, tells Persse that he does not even knew how Angelica got to the conference at all, as she "doesn't seem to belong to any university" (Lodge, 1984: 56). This motif of the mysterious female

character strengthens the structural connection to the grail quest narratives and emphasizes the complex aspect of the plot which can twist and turn and lead the characters into unexpected errors.

Near the very end of the novel Persse finds Angelica and they make love. He then finds out that he had been in error once again and that the girl was Angelica's twin sister, Lily Papps (an intertextual allusion in the shape of a cross-textual borrowing from Edmund Spenser's sonnets). It is an obvious case of *qui pro quo*, or *error in persona*. Persse mistakes his true love for her twin sister. After the fact is consumed, Lily tells Persse the truth but he keeps on disbelieving, thinking that Angelica was playing games on him again. Finally, Lily tells to a very distressed Persse that there was only one way to tell the difference between the twins. "'We both have a birth mark on the thigh, like an inverted comma. Angie's on the left thigh, mine on the right.' […] 'When we stand hip to hip in our bikinis, it looks like we're inside quotation marks'" (Lodge, 1984: 325). The idea of the Angelica and Lily being "inside quotation marks" gives the twins a surreal aura. Even though they look the same, they are so different: Angelica is preoccupied with academia and research, whereas Lily used to work in Amsterdam in the Red Light District. Lodge emphasizes the dichotomy between the twins and then he crowns it with the "quotation marks", the symbol of non-reality, of fictionality. Persse made a big error this time and he feels it so powerful over his mind.

Lodge admits that the literary allusions hidden in his novel *Small World* can be decoded and enjoyed only by *les connoisseurs*. In an interview, he mentions that he hopes the novel to fell like an invitation for his non-academic readers "into a world which may not be familiar, but still is comprehensible enough to give pleasure" (Lodge 1989). The next section will focus more on the literary theory dimension included in the novel and will discuss the episode of the professors' competition for the UNESCO chair of literary criticism, emphasizing the subjective concept of error as a difference of opinion.

3. Diversity and Error

Following the grail quest narrative pattern, the plot of *Small World* consists of a quest for "the Holy Grail of the academia", namely the UNESCO chair of literary criticism. There are six competitors for this chair: each of them comes from a different country and each of them represents a different school of thought. The only woman is Fulvia Morgana, an Italian Marxist Professor who represents a case of a very strong dichotomy of the

"practice what you preach" type. She and her husband Ernesto "support Marxist ideas, but they live luxuriously, contradicting the principles they advocate" (Diaconu, 2014: 77). Another competitor for the UNESCO chair is the French Structuralist Professor Michel Tardieu, who is also homosexual and embodies many stereotypes of the French people. The third competitor, Siegfried von Turpitz, is a German Professor who supports reader-response criticism, a gloomy and somehow mysterious character who never removes his black glove from his right hand. Two other competitors are the main characters from Lodge's first novel of the Campus Trilogy, *Changing Places*, namely Morris Zapp, an American Post-structuralist Professor, and Philip Swallow, a British Professor who embraces Samuel Johnson's Humanism. The differences between the ideas of these two characters are very craftily emphasized, as each of them considers the other one to be in error and will be further discussed.

In his lecture, Morris Zapp brings forth important ideas for the field of literary criticism. Just like Vianu states in her introduction to *David Lodge. A Reader*, Lodge is one of the very few critics who "can boast with illustrations of critical statements taken from [his] own fictional work" (2012: 6). Through the voice of Morris Zapp, Lodge puts forward the bold idea that the perpetual changes caused by the passing of time affect the way in which people communicate with each other. Zapp's words seem controversial for an academic conference:

> Time has moved on since you opened your mouth to speak, the molecules in your body have changed, what you intended to say has been superseded by what you did say, and that has already become part of your personal history, imperfectly remembered. (Lodge, 1984: 25)

Zapp's idea can be traced back to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who argued that the world is in a perpetual change and "you cannot step twice into the same stream." (Plato 2008 Web)

It is in this lecture that Morris Zapp introduces his famous phrase: "Every decoding is another encoding" (Lodge, 1984: 25). Ironically, Zapp's paraphrase of Heraclitus' idea (though the philosopher is not mentioned) is a decoding of his concept, thus another encoding of it. To enhance the irony, the audience seems not to grasp Zapp's meaning in its entirety, thus proving his point that "meaning is constantly being transferred from one signifier to another and can never be absolutely possessed." (Lodge, 1984: 25)

Phillip Swallow believes that Zapp "succumbed to the virus of structuralism" (Lodge, 1984: 26), and when the American states that his opinions belong to post-structuralism rather than structuralism, emphasizing

that the British was in error, Swallow makes it clear that he does not care that much about the distinction between them, as both schools put forth "that fundamental skepticism [sic] about the possibility of achieving certainty about anything" (Lodge, 1984: 26), plainly considering his American friend to be in error.

Finally, Arthur Kingfisher is the last competitor for the UNESCO chair of literary criticism. His name represents an intertextual reference both to King Arthur and to The Fisher King, so he must be a much acclaimed theorist. Indeed, he is doyen of the international community of literary theorists, and Emeritus Professor of Columbia and Zürich Universities. Lodge presents him as "a man whose life is a concise history of modern criticism" (Lodge, 1984: 93). Arthur Kingfisher was born at the turn of the century in Vienna, and then he studied in Moscow during the Revolutionary period with Shklovsky and in Cambridge in the late twenties with I. A. Richards. He collaborated with Jakobson in the thirties in Paris then became a leading figure of the New Criticism in the United States, being considered afterwards a pioneer of Structuralism by the Parisian critics. Thus, just like his name suggests, Arthur Kingfisher is the exponent of literary criticism in its entirety, the starting point of all the ideas embraced by every other theorist in the novel.

Arthur Kingfisher plays a very important part in shaping irony through the contrast between his image as an academic and his humanity. The character is introduced in a manner slightly inappropriate for such a big academic figure: lying on his back, getting a massage from Song-mi Lee, his Korean secretary and companion. The narrator includes all his academic titles and achievements, and then mentions the detail that Arthur Kingfisher is no longer able "to achieve an erection or an original thought" (Lodge, 1984: 94). Later on, Morris Zapp mentions that Arthur Kingfisher was such a great man that "to many people he kind of personifies the whole profession of academic literary studies" (Lodge, 1984: 119). This allegory develops as the plot unfolds and the reader observes that the entire competition between the professors for the UNESCO Chair of Literary Criticism has brought the field to a stop, so that nothing truly valorous can come out of their intellectual struggle. All the theorists do is argue with each other and consider that the differences between their ideas mean only that everyone else is in error and cannot realize it.

The academics' competition for the UNESCO Chair represents the climax of the main plot in the novel. It also gives the impression that the professors competing lose their selves and become only advocates of their theories. "Losing not their souls but their identities, the academics have

successfully reduced themselves to the theories they propound" (Morace 1989: 203-204). The young and inexperienced character, Persse, asks a very simple question which underlines the fact that what matters in the critical field is difference and argumentation, and therefore one critical theory could not provide the universal answer. His words are "'I would like to ask each of the speakers,' […] 'What follows if everybody agrees with you?' […] 'What do you *do* if everybody agrees with you?'" (Lodge, 1984: 319). It is this question that brings enthusiasm back to Arthur Kingfisher and inspiration to his mind. Through Persse's question, the ancient theorist understands that "what matters in the field of critical practice is not truth but difference. If everybody were convinced by your arguments, they would have to do the same as you and then there would be no satisfaction in doing it" or, more to the point, "to win is to lose the game" (Lodge, 1984: 319). This episode makes Arthur Kingfisher feel that both his potency and his creativity are back, so he decides to marry Song-mi and to claim his right to the UNESCO Chair. Through the fact that Arthur Kingfisher received the UNESCO chair, it can be argued that there was no particular school of theory who won the game. The main idea of the end of this competition is that the person who embodies all the theories received the award and that there is no theory to rule over the others, but all of them share the first place. There is no error in different theories.

Conclusions

Along with humorous characters and humour in language, David Lodge also uses situational humour in *Small World* and builds it mainly upon errors as narrative tools. He employs situational errors in order to create situational humour and *error in persona* in order to shape hilarious *qui pro quo* situations. Finally, the resolution of the main plot brings forth the hidden idea that discrepancies between thoughts and ideas cannot and must not be counted as errors, but rather as diversities which make their unity stronger. There is no dominant school of theory which can condemn the others as erring; there is a unity which manifests itself in different ways with different ideas. This conclusion can be applied in every other situation when one considers that others think differently because they are in error.

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Rezumat: În *Trilogia Campusului*, David Lodge creează o lume academică ce abundă în situaţii ironice şi pline de umor. Fiind profesor universitar de Literatură Engleză, Lodge are cunoştinţe solide despre lumea academică, precum şi o abilitate excelentă în utilizarea metodelor şi mecanismelor de creare a umorului. Romancierul se bazează pe eroare ca mod de expresie pentru situaţiile umoristice. Prezenta lucrare se axează pe cel de-al doilea roman al trilogiei, *Ce mică-i lumea!,* publicat în 1984, şi analizează conexiunile dintre eroare şi situaţiile umoristice. Acestea din urmă sunt determinate în principal de personaje care ajung în situaţii neaşteptate în care comit erori, le înfruntă sau le rezolvă.

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The Importance of Error in William Faulkner's *Light in August*

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Abstract: *Light in August* is one of William Faulkner's diversions from what omniscient narrators or the more modern unreliable ones mean, as he created omniscience as unreliability, intentionally deceiving the readers and creating error in an active manner. The reader is brought into the plot as an important part in fulfilling the entire process. The breaks that the author uses in his writing are meant to interrupt the thinking process and confuse the readers at times making them analyse more the trace of events or the information they are provided in order to grasp the importance of events and people, not only their projections.

Keywords: *unreliability, doubt, error, confusion, mistake*

William Faulkner's masterpiece, *Light in August,* written in six months and published in October 1932, has been read all over the world while both critics and readers felt intrigued about the overwhelming plot twists the American writer offered. His intention seems to be that of changing the traditional South especially regarding the emancipation of black individuals and poor white people (women being his target). The characters the author chooses to portray are individuals who had had their hearts broken at one time or another and have to carry the burden of the past like a ghost invading their present. His main characters are a young man trying to find out whether he is of biracial origin or not and a poor young woman, who is pregnant and has no father for her unborn child:

> *Light in August* begins Faulkner's stunning explorations of that question, explorations that would lead him deeper into his own past and into the past of his own first fiction; deeper into a history that came more visibly and paradoxically into focus as his career became more public and his native country more stridently recalcitrant on the question of race; and deeper into a moral and psychological problem that engulfs the promise of freedom. It would lead him next to an epic rendering of his country's epic trauma: the trauma of the house divided. (Sundquist, 2008: 114-5)

The way Faulkner considers it best for the readers to encounter his protagonists is not a traditional one and as the portraits of the two are

created through what we know from the voices of the novel there is not always a certainty about what readers are faced with. The flashbacks used by the author help put the pieces together and explain how the current situation came into being revealing that it was a life-changing time during the month of August. The two main stories although do not intertwine have a crucial beginning of August, the month when their fate is decided upon:

> In *Light in August* Faulkner diverges from Fielding's omniscient narrators or Conrad's or James's unreliable ones by exposing omniscience as unreliability. The unreliability is an active deception. There is no deficiency, of either intelligence or perspicacity: the narrator is actively creating error. Society here turns arbitrary codes of dominance into "fact." To make matters worse, the reader helps to accomplish the entire process. (Snead, 1986: 85)

His desire of approaching subjects, which are rather sensitive, shows his intention of entering a new side of the stories and the impact they had on the physical and psychical development of his characters. The human relationships and the personal identity are two themes that made Faulkner inquire about the politics of the South and the fact that they had no changed although the times required them to do so. The writer's living all his life in the southern area made him involved with the issues of the time and many of the events taking place intrigued him in such ways that he had to take a stand and write about such topics:

> In a manner strikingly parallel to how Southern liberal politics remained at all times white – with blacks as signs and symbols of white political structures, as subsidiary figures but never as independent actors – Faulkner's novel utilizes Joe Christmas, a character whose blackness is always invoked but never actually established definitively, in the service – indeed, the *redemption* – of a white community that misunderstands him, alienates him, and finally kills him. (Hale&Jackson, 2007: 34)

While there are several parallel stories in the novel the most notable ones are that of Joe Christmas and Lena Grove. Although they are quite different and their experiences seem to have little resemblance, they never quit their dreams and do not lose focus. Critics have even argued at times that there is not enough intertwining of the two lives moments presented by Faulkner. Human relations are very important in the novel highlighting both those between sexes, but also the ones between races. Faulkner's protagonists are from the lower class and their struggle is also defined in relation to money.

In a time when the middle-class was taking shape there were certain changes that society was facing. Joe Christmas' background also shows his travelling to northern areas and the impact it had on him as the differences were quite remarkable and the reactions of the people were not what he had expected.

Joe Christmas is one of the novel's protagonists and he is the type of man who never finds himself at home, he is never peaceful enough to stop searching for his self. His struggle makes him uncomfortable around almost everyone. There is always doubt in his heart, especially regarding his origin and probably his trail in life. His thirst for finding his identity makes him quite misunderstood, a rather dark character, who is not easy to read. The first details offered about Joe Christmas are the words of someone else, the memory of another human being meant to introduce the readers to this particular individual in a rather mysterious manner:

> Byron Bunch knows this: It was one Friday morning three years ago. And the group of men in the planer shed looked up, and saw the stranger standing there, watching them. . . . He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town or city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And that he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud. "As if," as the men said later, "he was just down on his luck for a time, and that he didn't intend to stay down on it and didn't give a damn how much he rose u". (Faulkner, 1990: 31)

The narrative voices used by Faulkner in his work are no surprise for the readers and that is why the way in which Joe is introduces does not seem as odd as one might think. He is like a sort of legend, a recollection of Byron's mind. He is not exposed from the very beginning and details about him are offered slowly as the plot unfolds.

> This approach is important: rather than just tell us about Joe, the authorial voice tells us about an individual perception of a collective consciousness of him, immediately foregrounding his existence in dialogue. The reader is probably inclined to come from this passage with an initial impression of Joe, but we are not "given" this by the authorial voice: rather, we are presented with a dialogue out of which we must come to our own conclusions. We might say that our impression is validated by the men's words, but the "rootlessness" we sense is all the more striking through our inability even to place Joe firmly in this narrative construct. Faulkner's decision to give *ideas* of Joe, rather than Joe himself, is a recognition that

this is necessarily all he *can* do, as well as pointing to his own role as a reader as well as writer. (Robinson, 2007: 128)

From what the readers are introduced with one can notice that Joe Christmas is a character fighting to find identity from the very beginning of his life. Even though he has no knowledge about his ancestors and is probably at some level aware that all the children who would have been left on the steps of the orphanage on the same day he was abandoned would have received the same surname – Christmas, he finds comfort in it and even mentions it in several talks. His way of speaking is not the most well-mannered one and that is why he finds it useful to yell at both his foster parent, Mr. McEachern, and to his lover Bobbie that "My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas" (Faulkner, 1990: 145). The name is given by strangers and it may be considered common, but Joe wants to keep it. If offers him a sense of owning something, of having received something he has to keep and maybe cherish. "His name may signify a lack of identity, or a nebulous identity imposed by others, but his adherence to it and to the ambiguities and connotations it has is another conspicuous example of the various ways language turns even formlessness into defining characteristics." (Robinson, 2007: 128)

The protagonist's reflection is actually a compilation of voices trying to describe him, as he is not completely aware of who he is and who he wants to be. All the vents he encounters, all the people that come into contact with him leave a mark on his personality and on the way he perceives the things around. He feels fragmented and always tries to put the pieces back together but the confusion existing in his life makes him struggle until the very end:

> Joe's reflections here encompass virtually all the participants in his make-up, whether explicitly or otherwise: himself, others, places, God – we might add to the list the author and the reader of *Light in August*. Joe is aware of his life as a kind of linguistic democracy, a product of voices, including his own, all of whom are contingent in themselves and none of which has individual authority. To consider the identity of Joe Christmas, therefore, is to engage with a network of voices each trying to "write" him, and each consciously and unconsciously "reading" him simultaneously, receiving the influence of other elements of his dialogic presence. (Robinson, 2007: 129)

What is important in depicting Christmas' story is the fact that he is constantly regarded as a foreigner and people never seem sure of his origin.

There are situations when he is considered an Italian immigrant creating doubt in the minds of the ones he has contact with. "Faulkner identifies transience with the immigrant male worker who poses a threat to the local community in economic, racial, and sexual terms. Due largely to ambivalent feelings in the region about the (Italian) immigrant's racial identity and his economic utility, immigrants represented either a promise or a threat to an impoverished, post-Reconstruction South" (Boyagoda, 2008: 99). Depending on whether Italians were wanted in the area the could be considered on one hand a type of white men or some individuals related to the Negros, mainly an inferior social grou

The protagonist was viewed as inferior from the age of five when the dietician threatened that she would sent him to a nigger orphanage and by uttering these words she introduced to him the idea of inferiority, of racial discrimination and of his belonging to a group, which is not well regarded, his only salvation being the McEacherns. Even though their relationship was not an idyllic one from his stay with the foster family and from his curiosity of having the first experiences with sex and love by showing that there exists "that apparently unbreakable chain of associations of men with light, power, and punishment and women with secrecy, darkness, food, and nausea." (Towner, 2008: 33)

However, this is not only his case as there are several other characters who struggle to find meaning in their lives to go on and not look back with desperation even though the situations they experience scar and mark their existence for life. "*Light in August* depicts a crisis of unhoming. Its main characters leave homes, lose them, never have them, steal them, create makeshift ones – and, in a spectacular instance, burn one down. The novel's whole world whirls in perpetual motion, its unmoored occupants struggling to catch up to new lives they can imagine but cannot quite take possession of." (Matthews, 2009: 159)

The other protagonist of the novel is represented by a young woman who refuses to take into account the state she is in and travels through the country looking for the father of her unborn child. The world where Lena Grove lives can be considered one in which people expect her to live in a certain way. People who do not obey the rules are perceived as rebels and are not well-regarded. "You just let one of them get married or get into trouble without being married, and right then and there is where she secedes from the woman race and species and spends the balance of her life trying to get joined up with the man race. That's why they dip snuff and smoke and want to vote." (Faulkner, 1990: 14-15)

Even though the people who surrounded her were no the ones thinking that women's emancipation could represent something beneficial for society they continue to give a helping hand to a young woman who has no other support than that of strangers. This leads to Lena's being looked upon with pity by some, with contradictory feelings by others, and with love from Byron who "fell in love contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability" (Faulkner, 1990: 49). Byron told his confident, Gail Hightower, the failed minister, about Lena and her character and the latter believed that she was looking for a father, no matter what father, to have by her side when her baby came. However, when he actually had the chance to talk to her he immediately understood why Byron had felt so connected to her. The real feelings she had for him and her candour impressed Hightower and helped him give her the benefit of the doubt. "Not only does she live and bring life into the world, but she also follows her own path right out of the book. Lena seems as well to bring out the best in a xenophobic and racist community within which the men and women generally fail to understand one another." (Towner, 2008: 36)

The family, who Lena lived with after her parents' death is that of her brother's where the female model she could follow is that of her sister-in-law, the person she feels closer to. Her family does not seem at all impressed by her getting pregnant or does not even appear concerned by her leaving them and trying to reunite with Lucas Burch for the sake of their future baby. The protagonist cannot be regarded as an emancipated woman in a time when certain values were not respect by people and family ties were not always guarded. The innocent trust that Lena displays is what attracts strangers to help her. Although they are confused about her situation and might have a tendency to be judgemental they still help her and as they get to know her a little better they realise the mistake they had made by judging her before coming in contact with her story and her background. What is overwhelming is the fact that Lena feels no harm done to her in a world full of hatred, violence and destruction.

Both Lena and Joe are associated with the road and the way they travel in order to find a meaning for their life, to discover and re-discover themselves and others. The connection they had with the vertical space is contrasted with the third character the novel brings to the attention of the readers, the failed reverend, who is confused and seems to have lost self-esteem and courage to live – Gail Hightower. He is viewed as a victim of the past, being outside the present time just flows by him.

The paranoia of the people inhabiting the novel against the ones not following the rules society imposed is one of the major themes revealing that even though the protagonist may fail and make errors of judgement they continue living, working and, up to a point, hoping for something to change. Joe's violent and troubled life is contrasted by the events taking place in Lena's, when she moves away with her baby and Byron in the hopes of getting married and starting a family. Hightower by witnessing troubling events is shaken from his state and he is redeemed. "*Light in August* is not primarily about history as such at all, but about different kinds of being, different ways of being in and out of time, different kinds of time, and different kinds of relationships between selves, being, and time." (Rueckhert, 2004: 70)

Faulkner's characters try to move forward or are carried away into some else's story and forced to do so. The errors they may or no have committed show that they are simple human begins, their search for something is what keeps them alive and the connection the author longs to create between the two protagonist is finally achieved through another character in search for meaning:

> Linking their stories is that of Gail Hightower, a defrocked minister who, on the same day, assists with the birth of Lena's baby and witnesses the killing and mutilation of Joe Christmas. A birth and a death, the comic journey of a white girl juxtaposed with the tragic odyssey of a man who thinks he may be part black – this novel is like a loose bag of carefully opposed elements that only partially meld. (Anderson, 2007: 62)

In spite of the different and contrasting stories the readers are presented with there is the opposition between the light offered by Lena giving birth and presenting the renewal of the human beings, of the continuity of communities and societies and the light of Joanna Burden's house in flames, which is firstly noticed by the young woman giving birth on her property. Joanna's death, that of a woman who is barren and cannot give birth or life is the contrasting image of what happens to Lena who is young, has a baby and is loved by Byron. Joanna is tormented in her own way not completely accepting her fate. Her search much like Joe's, even though not as violent as his is one, troubles her and makes her question her deeds and thoughts, errors and doubts, good and bad actions all together. August is the month influencing all their lives bringing forward bitter ends but also sweet beginnings:

> Just as Lena becomes light in August when she gives birth to the baby, so Joanna Burden becomes light in August when she is killed by Joe Christmas. This implication of the title, including death as the ultimate and only final unburdening, operates everywhere in the novel. Joe Christmas, the most heavily burdened of all the characters because of his racial schizophrenia, also – finally – becomes light in August when he is shot and castrated by Percy Grimm. (Rueckhert, 2004: 72)

The end of the novel offers a new life for Lena and Byron together with her new-born baby, a possibility for Hightower to find a deeper meaning to his life and give up the feeling of uselessness he carried around before, but it also brings a violent end to Joe's suffering. Faulkner's depiction of people's problems and the turmoil they had to encounter until reaching an end to their suffering brings upon the reader and avalanche of voices and feelings drawing them closer to the characters and the stories.

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Rezumat: *Lumină de august* este una dintre diversiunile lui William Faulkner de la ce reprezentau naratorii omniscienți sau cei moderni demni de mai puțină încredere, deoarece el a creat omsciența ca nesiguranță, inducând în eroare în mod intenționat cititorii și a creat eroare într-o manieră activă. Cititorul este adus în intrigă ca o parte importantă care îndeplinește întregul proces. Pauzele pe care autorul le folosește în scrierile sale sunt menite să întrerupă procesul de gândire și să deruteze cititorii uneori facându-i să analizeze mai mult firul evenimentelor sau informațiile care le sunt oferite pentru a putea înțelege importanța evenimentelor și a oamenilor, nu doar proiecțiile lor.

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Beyond Enlightenment Error:
The Christian Dimension of Francis Bacon's
Novum Organum

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Abstract: This article explores the religious dimension of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and of the Baconian method formulated within by looking at the various prayers, prophecies and divine invocations that are present in the treatise. In conversation with Stephen A. McKnight and Steven Matthews, I argue against the Enlightenment understanding of Bacon as an irreligious scientist *avant la lettre* and contend that the book's religious dimension is not solely reducible to rhetoric, but is a constituent part of its philosophical system.

Keywords: *Francis Bacon, Christianity, Novum Organum, Prayer, Prophecy.*

The work of Francis Bacon is often suffused with Christian themes and imagery – from prayers to prophecies to religious motifs – and this stands true even for texts that do not strike the modern eye as overtly theological. The preface to the *Novum Organum*[1], his masterful treatise on natural philosophy, where he lays down the foundations for what would come to be known as the scientific method, ends most puzzlingly on a prayer to the Christian God. This article is predicated on the premise that any ahistorical analysis of Bacon – what Marina Leslie has referred to as reading in the "future indicative" (qtd. in McKnight 1) – dissolves when faced with the religious actuality of his writing, which is to say that it presumes and argues that Bacon was not an irreligious scientist *avant la lettre*, but rather a writer deeply informed by the intellectual context of his time (a context which brooked no quarter for the clear separation of religion and science).[2] The prayer in the preface to the *Novum Organum*, as well as the other divine invocations and references that follow, should not merely be read as a shrewd attempt at garnering legitimacy in the eyes of his

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[1] All quotations from the Clarendon edition, unless otherwise specified.

[2] Which is not to say that they were considered one and the same. Bacon does in fact differentiate between religion and science – or rather theology and natural philosophy – with regards to their essential benefits: the former serves to restore man's prelapsarian innocence, while the latter serves to recover his dominion over nature (*NovumOrganum,* CUP, 221); but what is important is that both religion and science fundamentally serve the same *final* purpose: the restoration of the proper relationship between man and God.

audience (although that is, by and large, their rhetorical effect), but as a kind of statement of purpose, prefiguring or incorporating many of the themes further developed in the treatise, and offering a religious foundation for the means and goals behind the Baconian method.

But it would be disingenuous – or, at least, naïve – to ignore the fact that the prayer does indeed have a rhetorical function, one rooted in the intellectual discourse of the time; as Peter Harrison notes in "Curiosity, Forbidden Knowledge, and the Reformation of Natural Philosophy in Early Modern England":

> At the turn of the seventeenth century, assessments of the relative merits of methods of inquiry were expressed in terms of these ethical and theological considerations. The particular virtues required of the earnest natural philosopher were thus an important feature of evaluations of rival proposals for natural knowledge, and a variety of vices could be attributed to proponents of competing viewpoints: curious, proud and puffed up, vain, ambitious. For this reason, the *argumentum ad hominem* was considered a legitimate tool in early modern controversies about knowledge claims. (273)

Bacon, the shrewd political operator, would have certainly been aware of the rhetorical conventions of his time, and he does indeed abide by them; to counter claims of vanity, he prays that God will "they will think fit through [his] hands to endow the human family with new mercies" (23) situating himself as a conduit of divine wisdom; and to counter claims of pride and curiosity he claims that following his method we should not "aspire to know what is too exalted or beyond the bounds of discretion, but to cultivate the truth in charity" (23) – thus differentiating between curiosity, an intellectual vicein thrall to the original sin of pride (Harrison, 2001: 268), and the pursuit of knowledge for the betterment of mankind, which he sees shepherded by the theological virtue of charity. But this does not entail that Bacon was cynically exploiting the religious discourse of his time, but merely that he was situating himself within it: as this essay will argue, the biblical narrative (both the Book of Genesis and the prophecy of Daniel which adorns the frontispiece of the *Instauratio Magna*) is not denuded of its essence and employed to legitimate a post-Christian agenda; in fact, Bacon interprets the biblical narrative much like his respected contemporary, the divine Lancelot Andrewes (Matthews 72), and furthermore, as we will later see, it becomes the foundation of the Baconian method, prefiguring its method of inquiry and itstelos.

Stephen A. McKnight, in his book *The Religious Foundations of Francis Bacon's Thought*, identified four key Baconian themes: instauration, providence, vocation, and charity (151); we have already observed the latter two within the body of the prayer (although we will return to them in greater detail later), but the former require a more nuanced reading of the text. Steven Matthews comments upon the meaning of the term instauration, explaining,

> The word itself is theologically charged. Although it could be translated as "restore," "re-establish," "renew," or "begin again," and it could refer to many acts of renovation, it was also a word characteristically associated with there-establishment of religious rites in the classical world. There are also architectural overtones to the word, but even these are theologically conditioned. In the standard Vulgate translation of the Old Testament, *instauratio* referred specifically to the rebuilding of the temple on the return from the Babylonian captivity. […] The event of the Instauration, according to the word itself, was a divine action of restoration which could not be dissociated from its implications in theological Latin. (51-52)

For Bacon, the instauration of natural philosophy is not to be separated from its religious origins; it presupposes a return to the kind of knowledge afforded to man in his prelapsarian condition: "the knowledge by which Adam gave names to things according to their kind" (23) – due to our fallen nature, this type of perfect knowledge of the natural world is no longer available to us directly, but must be reconstructed via *the Interpretation of Nature* – the new empirical method Bacon proposes for the attainment of epistemological truth (27); and this method is itself predicated on the one traced by God in the act of creation:

> Now the first day of creation God made light alone and gave over a whole day to it, and mode no materiate work that day. In the same way we should first educe from experience of every kind the discovery of real causes and axioms, and search for experiments that bear light not fruit[3]. For axioms

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[3] This passage is prefigured in the prayer to God at the end of the "Plan of the Work": "Father, who has given us visible light as the first fruits of Creation, and breathed intellectual light into the face of man as the culmination of your works, protect and reign over this work which, proceeding from Your goodness, returns to Your glory." – the same conceptualization of the instauration (as a return to edenic knowledge by following the path outlined by God in *Genesis*) is present here, although without the mechanism of the inductive method.

> properly discovered and established do not inform practice in a superficial but in a concentrated way, and bring floods of works in their wake. (113)

The inductive method is thus proposed as legitimate precisely because of its Christian foundation, because of its imitation of the divine process by which God created the natural world. And whence follows that to uncover the "Creator's footprints and impressions upon His creatures" (45), as Bacon puts it, one would need to tread a similar path; this implies a gradual, sequential process – much like God's firm chronological creation of the world – that starts not from scholastic presupposition, but from direct analysis of creation itself, so as "to deduce axioms successively and step by step, and not to reach the most general ones until last" (31). Bacon thus posits his *new logic* against the old one of Aristotle and the scholastics, namely syllogism:

> But I reject syllogistic demonstration for it works haphazardly and lets nature slip through its fingers. For though no one doubts that things agreeing in a middle term agree with each other (which is a kind of mathematical certainty), yet this conceals sleight of hand, for the syllogism is made up of propositions of Words, and Words are the tokens and signs of notions. Thus, if the very notions of the mind […] are ineptly and recklessly abstracted from things, and vague, insufficiently delimited and circumscribed, and indeed rotten in many ways, everything collapses. (31)

Syllogism is thus associated by Bacon with the *Idols of the Market* (93) as the mechanism which perpetuates the barrenness of natural philosophy, by making the intellect (its faculties already weakened by the Fall) vulnerable to the idols imposed upon it by words: the names of things that have no real object and are but fantasies ("fortune, first mover, planetary orbs," (93) etc.) and the names of things which have a real object, but whose names have become muddled and distorted; both types of idols serve to further distance man from the proper knowledge of the natural world. But this, of course, presupposes that things have true names[4] – (re-)discoverable by man, and this, I would suggest, only makes sense if we return to the preface to the *Novum Organum* and remember that Adam in his prelapsarian condition

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[4] A similar preoccupation with true names is found in Lancelot Andrewes, his friend and editor, who suggested that: "The end, to which God gave & imposed sundry names was, that we should do as he hath done, that is, when things have a true being, then to give names to them accordingly, and not to our fancies. ... for as mandraweth good Liquor out of the Cask, so out of the meaning of the Word, and denominations given by God, we may draw out the hidden nature and knowledge of the thing." (qtd. in Matthews 62-63)

"gave names to things according to their kind" (23). It is precisely this type of original knowledge that the inductive method is supposed to recover – to instaurate.

Still, it is important to differentiate between natural knowledge (which is attainable by man) and moral knowledge (the knowledge of good and evil which belongs to God). The former is the domain of charity and of working towards the progress of mankind, while the latter is the aim of errant curiosity. This has to be understood a reinterpretation of the narrative of the Fall, especially in its then dominant Augustinian/Calvinist form; for the latter, the Fall – engendered by Eve's desire to better understand the Garden of Eden to the extent of disobeying God (Matthews, 2008: 64) – brought with it an irredeemable corruption of the human faculties. These are the two main points where Bacon most clearly breaks with the conventional interpretation: for him, the Fall was engendered not by the desire to further our knowledge of the natural world (the garden), but by our desire to usurp God's moral knowledge, by "that ambitious and importunate craving for moral knowledge to judge of good and evil so that man might revolt from God and give laws to himself." (23) And nor our faculties as debased as the Calvinists claim – true, our intellect is still to some extent corrupt: we are beset by various idols both extrinsic (the received dogmas of schools and sects) and intrinsic (its own inherently biased nature), the first of which "can be rooted out with difficulty; the second not at all" (35), but Bacon nevertheless offers induction as a way of mitigating the intellect's inherent fallibility and of reaching the certain knowledge of the natural world that we once possessed; and for us to be able to employ the inductive method, the postlapsarian frailty of the sense must be mitigated by the experiment (35) – it is only after we have empirically established the correct attributes of our particular object of study that we can reasonably derive general propositions from it.

But the point of *the Interpretation of Nature* is not just to recover edenic knowledge, but also to "bend nature to works" (23); as such it bears remembering that the proper relationship between man and the natural world was also destabilized by the Fall:

> Bacon regarded the fall as an event which disrupted the entire cosmos, and damaged the chain of causes itself. Among the consequences of the fall, nature had also entered into a state of rebellion or waywardness. In the Valerius Terminus, Bacon described the difficulty of humanity regaining mastery over nature as the result of nature being "turned to reluctation. (Matthews, 2008: 57)

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Human control over nature is thus another goal of the *Instauration* – and its success is predicated on first gaining proper knowledge of the natural world: for Bacon, light, as we have already seen, must always precede fruit – experimentation and induction must always precede genuine scientific innovation. There is indeed a utilitarian dimension to Bacon's writing here, but the bending of nature to works is not an end in itself; rather, it must be undertaken so that mankind can resume its rightful place in relation to God and the universe.

It is thus important to note that the search for knowledge has a moral component as well, as the reader is urged to strive for

> the true ends of knowledge; that we seek it not for personal gratification, or for contention, or to look down on others, or for convenience, reputation, or power, or any such inferior motive, but for the benefit and use of life, and that it be perfected and regulated in charity. (23)

Charity here should not be understood as only a rhetorical flourish, a way of legitimating the search for knowledge in a time when such endeavors were frowned upon; rather, it, along with piety, are central to the success of the *Instauratio Magna* – it is only through their moderation of the will – and its penchant for erring into curiosity – that Bacon's grand project can fathomably be achieved, given that its success requires successive generations to strive together:

> Then again I ask them to be of good hope, and not imagine or suppose that my Instauration is limitless and beyond the capacity of mere mortals, when in fact it is really a lawful end and termination of limitless error; but it makes allowances for mortality and human frailty, seeing that its completion is not confided entirely to a single age but to a succession of them. (25)

Bacon thus associates his Instauration with another theological virtue: hope[5]. If charity is to serve as the impetus behind the restoration, then hope must be engendered to safeguard the process and keep despair in abeyance. To this end, Bacon details a series of means of instilling hope, which include: the union of the experimental and rational faculties (153), the

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[5] Interestingly enough, there is little discussion in the *Novum Organum* about that third theological virtue, faith. The only direct reference to its benefits lies at the very end of the second book, where Bacon states that only through "religion and faith" (CUP, 221) can man regain the state of innocence that he enjoyed before the fall. Faith is thus primarily consigned to the domain of religion proper.

systematic (re-)organization of natural history and its purification of scholasticism (157), the undertaking of light-bearing experiments (those that reveal causes) followed by fruit-bearing experiments (those with genuine material benefits) (159), and others. These reasons to hope are not new to us, but are an integral part of the *new logic* and of the methodology that it proposes – the locus of hope is not situated outside of the Instauration, but within the very mechanism that it is supposed to safeguard.

But the one reason that underlies all others and justifies his optimism with regards to the endeavor is his belief that he is living in an age of divine providence, which (unlike previous ages) potentiates the transformative power of charity and serves to instill hope; this is most evident in his interpretation of the prophecy of Daniel (12:4) as referring to his own age of discovery:

> And we must not forget the prophecy of Duniel concerning the last ages of the world: that many shall go to and fro and knowledge shall be increased which manifestly hints and signifies that it was fated (i.e. Providence so arranged it), that thorough exploration of the world (which so many long voyages have apparently achieved or are presently achieving) and the growth of the sciences would meet in the same age. (151)

The scientific progress promised by the *Interpretation of Nature* is not a telos in itself, but is part of a wider event in secret history preordained by God: the golden age ushered in by the restoration of man's prelapsarian condition; there is thus a pronounced eschatological dimension to Bacon's endeavor, although it is not the literal millennialism of his more radical puritan contemporaries. Rather, as Steven Matthews observes,

> […] a golden autumn of what Bacon defined in the *Confession of Faith* as the third age of creation. There would be no fires and cataclysms, and no reign of the Antichrist other than what may have already occurred. There would be no dubious resurrection of the righteous and no earthly reign of Christ prior to the end. These features, all of which marked the more radical millennial systems, were absent from Bacon's golden age, which was, by comparison, far more orthodox. It bore the marks of catholic tradition in the context in which this tradition was being recast by men such as Lancelot Andrewes. It differed from Andrewes' eschatology only in its optimism regarding human knowledge. From Bacon's perspective there was nothing innovative about the Instauration. Prophecies which were once strange were visibly being fulfilled in his own day. This had been the plan from the beginning of the age. (116)

The religious dimension of Bacon's instauration has a fairly unobjectionable Christian genealogy. He does not seek to transcend it or to place his new logic outside of its discursive formation, but instead chooses to situate himself within it – and in the process gains both rhetorical legitimacy and structural consistency (for his philosophical system to truly cohere, I would argue, one has to place it within this historical and intellectual context – only then is the full extent of his endeavor genuinely apparent).

The *Novum Organum* and the Baconian method formulated within are both products of a world permeated by religious thought. The beauty of the *new logic* is that it works even when it is denuded of this context – as it occurred with the onset of the Enlightenment with its image of Bacon as an irreligious scientist, whose religious rhetoric was, at best, disingenuous (Matthews 139). But this entails a reductionist reading of the *Novum Organum*, picking and choosing the elements palatable to the reader's agenda. Following Matthews and McKnight, this article has attempted to shed light on the book's religious dimension – one that is not solely reducible to rhetoric, but is a constituent part of its philosophical system. It is Christianity – with its tension between man's pre-and-post-lapsarian conditions – that serves as its impetus and telos, and it is the Christian God that Bacon chooses as a model for his gradual, systematic project. Prophecy and prayer pervade the text and evidence the reasons that make his project both providential and achievable, while the whole endeavor reveals an eschatological dimension – one, ultimately, in tune with the religious discourse of its time.

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Rezumat: Acest articol explorează dimensiunea religioasă a tratatului filozofic *Novum Organum* de Francis Bacon, analizând diversele rugăciuni, profeții și invocații divine prezente în texte. În dialog critic cu Stephen A. McKnight and Steven Matthews, pledez împotriva perspectivei iluministe asupra filozofului englez ca om de știință liber-cugetător și susțin că dimensiunea religioasă a cărții nu poate fi redusă la retorică, ci reprezintă o componenta importantă a sistemului său filozofic.

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The Politics of Tourism: Translating, Correcting and Remediating Difference in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies*

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Abstract: The present paper aims to shed light upon the perpetuation of the power relations between former centres and former colonies in today's post-colonial world as reflected in the short story *The Interpreter of Maladies* by JhumpaLahiri. My claim is that tourism maintains the cultural hegemony of the former metropolises by having former colonies, which are now tourist destinations, enact the images constructed by tourist agencies. In order to rise to the culturally constructed expectations of the westerner, tourist guides have to provide tourists with domesticated translations of their homelands and native culture, thus submitting to the cultural prestige of the former metropolises.

Keywords: *tourism, power relations, cultural prestige, mimicry, cultural translation*

What constitutes an error is the fact that it is a deviation from an ideologically imposed norm. Error is always relative to the norm and is subject to cultural construction via discourse, which is why its meaning can overlap with that of *difference*. Hegemonic discourse will always try to correct error / regulate difference, as it was the case with colonization and the various strategies employed to enlighten the other. In today's post-colonial world, the centre is still preoccupied with correcting difference by using new strategies. One of the substitutes of 19th century aggressive pedagogical cultural imperialism is tourism, which is characterized by a constant domestication of the other, by the taming of difference. In my paper I wish to dwell on the issue of domestication in tourism by focusing on JhumpaLahiri's short story *The Interpreter of Maladies*.

The premise of this essay is that the power relations between India and the western world place the latter in a position of power from a cultural point of view. How did this state of affairs come to be and how come it is still perpetuated today? One answer is provided by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Although Said's argument can easily be turned on its head, his claims shed some light upon the perception of the post-colonial other. Basically, Said believes that the hegemonic discourse on the Orient, i.e. Orientalism, emerged along with the Romantic predilection for the exotic and foreignness. The abundance of travelogues and texts of fiction dealing

with the Orient constructed a hetero-image of the Oriental, which misrepresented its object. It was natural for people to have a false image of the Orient, since their experience of it was only textual and not factual. Furthermore, the geographical borders of the Orient were becoming fuzzier and fuzzier in the times of colonization, to the extent that eastern otherness came to be placed under the now almost umbrella term *the Orient* (52-53). While Said does reveal some valid aspects, such as the rhetorical construction of the other and the discrepancy between cultural maps and geographical maps, his asserting the falseness of the culturally constructed image of the other goes against the very theoretical framework he employs. By deconstructing the hetero-image of the Oriental he should necessarily imply that identity is a matter of rhetorical construction and, therefore, cannot be essential. By arguing that the hetero-images are *false,* he implies that there is a correct image of the other independent of context. Said fails to see that error is context-bound, and falls into the pit of essentialization.

Another view on the emergence of western cultural hegemony is revealed by Charles Taylor in his essay, *The Politics of Recognition.*

> The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1994: 25)

Taylor argues that negative hetero-images can be interiorized by the groups of people they represent, to the point that the groups take them for granted. In the case of the colonized peoples, the hetero-images they were facing rendered them as pre-modern, irrational, primitive, and lacking individual identity. In fact, all these traits were negative definitions relative to the dominant western auto-image. Facing these rigid so-called universal standards of modernity, the colonial other could not but start believing that he actually was inferior to the western man. Therefore, in order to be accepted as a subject in the western gaze, the colonial other had to relinquish his native identity and adopt a Western one by subduing himself "to the technologies of the formation and disciplining of subaltern populations, with effects for the process of subjectifiation/subjection" (Venn, 2000: 19). Nevertheless, the attempt to civilize the other was an ambivalent in nature, because, while the West wanted to make the other more familiar, there did persist a fear that, should the other be *as same as*

the modern Western man, he would end up denying the West's hegemony and claim an equal status. Lest they should become equals, modernity actually sought to make the colonial "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha, 1994: 86), thus constraining them to a lower status of hybridity or "mimicry." (Bhabha, 1994: 86)

Although I agree with Bhabha that the Western world did regard the thoroughly civilized other as a threat to the status quo, I would like to go even further and claim that, in fact, the civilizing mission (or what we today might call assimilative politics) would have failed even if it had not been aimed at only partially civilizing the other. Because identity is liquid and multifaceted, shifting the identitary model almost always implies a negotiation between the one given up and the one taken u At most the outcome can be a new identity where the new model is prominent, yet the existence of the former one can never be wiped out. Moreover, in terms of perception, even Homi Bhabha admits that external signs such as skin colour become cultural markers for otherness, onto which the dominant culture will project its anxieties (Bhabha, 1994: 91). As a result, irrespective of how suppressed one's native identity is, his physical traits will always be woven in the cultural fabric of dominant anxieties about otherness.

To sum up my argument so far, colonial subsidiary was buttressed firstly on a dominant discourse on colonial otherness that rendered the other as the opposite of modern man, and secondly on the inevitable interiorization of the negative hetero-image by the colonial other, whose native identity wasn't recognized by the West. Today's post-modern world seems to have relinquished its homogenising ideals and is keen on recognizing difference. Nevertheless, stereotypical representations of former colonial otherness seem fall back on the same pre-modern tropes, only this time with an emphasis on the idyllic and the exotic. In the industry of tourism, these stereotypes seem to be the heart and soul of a thriving business that is lucrative especially for the former colonies. However, tourism comes at a price: the former colonial other has to re-enact the colonial power relations and assume the pre-modern stereotypes that tourist agencies construct about him. From this point of view, tourism becomes an issue of cultural translation. The Western tourist has a series of expectations that his destination has to meet. A crucial figure here is the tourist guide, who, like a translator, tries to render his world so as to fit the tourist's bias.

The Interpreter of Maladies brings into question many issues related to cultural translation. The role of translation and its problematics are embedded in the main character, Mr.Kapasi, whose life has always been marked by cosmopolitanism – ever since he was young he has wanted to

have a career in diplomacy and studied foreign languages, only to fail in his attempt, and become an interpreter for a doctor and a tourist guide, which is why it is safe to say that with Mr Kapasi, the short story posits translation as its main theme in a very straightforward manner. The main idea associated with translation is that it is the place where differences are mitigated, where a negotiation between cultural differences takes place. This is valid on a macrocultural level, where Mr Kapasi has to translate Indian culture for his tourists, as well as on a microcultural level, where Mr Kapasi has to bridge Mrs. Das and the rest of her family – here translation functions as remediation.

As far as the macrocultural level is concerned, we see that the Dases' perception of India is a very Western one, in that the other is the fascinating exotic that brings pleasure to the Western voyeur. Capitalism, a Western product, supports the exoticization of India, while India itself does its best to look exotic and meet the expectations of the West. In this respect, too, Mr.Kapasi is a key figure, as well as the book about India that Mr. Das reads, since both the tourist guide and the book for tourists construct Indian culture as an exotic one; they translate India in such a way so that it becomes familiar to Westerners and confirms their preconceptions of it. To put it in translation terms, Mr Kapasi and the book Mr Das reads bring India to the reader. The domestication of India done by Mr Kapasi is a mark of the power relations, which are supported by the industry of tourism. Because the West is the hegemonic centre not only culturally, but also politically and financially, Western tourists are not to be faced with any cultural specificity, which would make their reading of India difficult and un-entertaining. The hegemonic status of the west necessitates a familiar version of India.

> [I]n both literary translations and original literary works, the necessity to make cultural materials explicit and to foreground potentially unfamiliar cultural materials affects primarily the movement of a cultural substratum from a marginalized culture to a dominant culture and it is associated with a negative cline of power and cultural prestige. (Tymoczko, 1999: 28)

The tourists themselves seem incapable of transcending their cultural background, as suggested by some cleverly inserted details regarding eye sight. For starters, Mr Das sees most of the time through his camera, the symbol mostly associated with tourism. His taking pictures of everything is in tune with the idea of India as an exotic spectacle that merely entertains.

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The scene when Mr Das wants to take a picture of the ragged old man speaks volumes in this respect:

> Mr. Das asked, rolling down his own window all the way. "Hey, do you mind stopping the car. I just want to get a shot of this guy." Mr.Kapasi pulled over to the side of the road as Mr. Das took a picture of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks. (Lahiri, 1999: 57)

The deplorable state of the Indian doesn't trigger any feeling of pity or compassion in Mr. Das; instead, he is excited to have met the man and takes a photo of him, suggesting the reification of the other. Mrs Das wears her glasses most of the times, having an indirect sight of India. Nevertheless, the tourists are in for a surprise. The entertaining show provided by India turns into brutal reality, when the hungry monkeys attack Bobby. The violence of the monkeys disturbs the exotic remoteness of the reified India that tourists enjoy and makes it just as real and '*down-to-earth*' as the world of the tourists. From a multiculturalist perspective, this event can be interpreted as a cry for recognition. Being exotic and otherworldly implies the absence of political importance and recognition, which condemns India to a status of political subsidiarity, which privileges the West.

It is worth noting that these tourists are ethnic Indians themselves, yet, being second generation immigrants, they have abandoned their roots and assimilated American culture. However, their assimilation is not perfect. When hearing the Dases speak, Mr Kapasi says "[t]heir accents sounded just like the ones Mr. Kapasi heard on American television programs, though not like the ones on Dallas" (Lahiri, 1999: 55). We are obviously dealing with a case of mimicry, where, try as they might, immigrants are inevitably imperfect copies of the locals, the accent being only one of the things that give away their imperfection.

On a microcultural level, translation is the place where disappointments and broken feelings are resolved. Here translation reveals itself as remediation. Mr Kapasi's role as assistant to the medic adds a healing connotation to this job as a translator. It is this function that Mrs Das seeks, when she confesses her secret to Mr Kapasi. In this respect, the two characters evince a psychoanalyst – analysand relationship: Mr Kapasi has to come up with an interpretation of the patient's biography and present to her a solution to her problems. His interpretation of her private life and issues is invested with scientific / professional authority, thus rendering his interpretation as reality. This becomes evident in the short story when Mr Kapasi asks Mrs Das whether it isn't in fact guilt she feels. The next

moment she gets out of the car, changes her sullen attitude, and joins the family in the family picture.

Interestingly enough, the psychoanalyst – analysand metaphor is one often used by post-modern thinkers to criticize modern anthropology. Their claim is that the ethnographer endowes himself with discursive authority and, in a performative manner, imposes his interpretation of the native's own culture on the native, in a manner similar to that in which the psychoanalyst imposes his interpretation of the patient's dreams on the patient. (Asad, 2006: 499-500)

In *The Interpreter of Maladies* the position of power is no longer filled by the Westerner, but by Mr.Kapasi. This overturn suggests that the microcultural level is the place where dominant positions can be taken over, and where hegemonic discourse can be turned on its head, because, once economy and finances are taken out of the way, the power relations are cancelled, and hegemony and subsidiarity become liquid. In dealing with Mrs.Das's marriage issues, the two characters stop being tourist and tourist guide; hence the politics of tourism is bracketed. Having shunned the constraining economic framework, the power relations become unstable and discursive authority migrates from Mrs Das, representing the centre, to Mr Kapasi, representing the margin.

Moreover, the text seems to go as far as to suggest that cultural hegemony undermines itself. The discourse on the Orient as pre-modern, with all its emphasis on intuition, fortune telling and other ways of achieving knowledge than reason, may determine the Westerner to resort to a pre-modern epistemological alternative, when reason fails to account for his situation and provide a solution. In *The Interpreter of Maladies* Mrs Das, whose cultural remedies have failed, asks Mr Kapasi, who is stereotypically associated with superstition, fortune telling and alternative medicine, for a remedy. By doing so, she lets herself be beguiled by the hetero-image of the other that her very hegemonic culture produces and paradoxically ends up asserting the superiority of Mr Kapasi's pre-modern culture. The microcultural level, then, undermines the macrocultural level, since it highlights the instability of discursive authority and cultural hegemony, and goes on to suggest that the cultural prestige of the western world is indebted to its economic status only.

To sum up, *The Interpreter of Maladies* is a strongly politically geared short story, which tackles important post-colonial issues such as cultural prestige, cultural translation, and otherness as error in an almost allegoric manner. The unravelling of the plot evinces two levels – a macrocultural one and microcultural one. On the former, the author opposes

the exoticization and commodification of India imposed by tourism and speaks in favour of multiculturalist recognition. On the latter, the short story focuses on translation as remediation. While overtly referring to the remediation of love issues, the text also hints at the remediation of broader political issues, such as western hegemony, by showing that discursive authority becomes liquid in the absence of the economic constraints engendered by the global business of tourism.

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Rezumat: Lucrarea de faţă îşi propune să scoată în evidenţă perpetuarea relaţiilor de putere dintre fostele centre şi fostele colonii în lumea post-modernă de astăzi, prin referire la nuvela *The Interpreter of Maladies* de Jhumpa Lahiri. Susţin că turismul întreţine hegemonia culturală a fostelor metropole obligând fostele colonii, care acum sunt destinaţii turistice, să îşi însuşească imaginile construite de agenţiile de turism. Pentru a putea satisface aşteptările construite cultural al occidentalului, ghizii turistici sunt obligaţi să producă traduceri domestice ale propriilor patrii sau culturi, subjugându-se astfel prestigiului cultural al fostelor metropole.

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Urizen's Body and the Proliferation of the Primordial Error: A Biblical, Gnostic, Hermetic and Blakean Perspective

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to reveal the manner in which through The Book of Urizen, William Blake parodies the Old Testament version of Genesis, using both Gnostic and Hermetic elements with regard to the myth of creation in order to forge a body for the principle of Error, the root of which can be said to lie in selfishness, in the shape of his character Urizen. The paper will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will trace the principle of the primordial error, as well as its consequences through the doctrines of Christianity, Gnosticism and Hermeticism, while in the second part, the discussion will deal with William Blake's version of the origin of the material world as the foundation for the embodiment of primordial Error.

Keywords: *Urizen, body, error, selfishness, matter.*

At the end of his work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), William Blake warned his readers that he would create a Bible of Hell and reveal it to the world, regardless of whether it would be accepted or not: "I have also the Bible of Hell, which the world shall have, whether they will or no" (Blake, *A Critical* "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" 19). This promise is often perceived as having been materialized in Blake's epic poem *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794). However, far from considering himself to be of the Devil's side, the author wanted to reveal an alternative story to the Biblical view upon the creation of the world and of the human being, which, he knew, would most likely be viewed as heretical, for it did not concur with the traditional reading of the Christian Church Fathers: "Thy Heaven doors are my Hell gates . . . Both read the Bible day and night,/ But thou read'st black where I read white" (Blake, *A Critical* "The Everlasting Gospel" 54). But what was the Error that Blake saw both in the Christian tradition and in the world around him and was so adamant in putting forth? The aim of this paper is to reveal the manner in which through *The Book of Urizen*, William Blake parodies the Old Testament version of Genesis, using both Christian-Gnostic and Hermetic elements with regard to the myth of creation in order to forge a body for the principle of Error, the root of which can be said to lie in selfishness, in the shape of his character Urizen. The paper will be divided into two parts. In the first part, I will trace the principle of the primordial error, as well as its consequences through the doctrines of Christianity, Gnosticism and Hermeticism, while in the second

part, the discussion will deal with William Blake's version of the origin of the material world as the foundation for the embodiment of primordial Error.

The Bible portrays the act of creation as a good work, made by a benevolent deity. The initiation of error had nothing to do with God, but with the pride of his angel Lucifer and the weakness of man. In the first chapter of Genesis, the reader is not given much information on the nature of the creator, but we know that God is the first entity revealed by means of voice, not of body, who has been there from the beginning, and whose first act of creation starts with an utterance that divides: "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light"[1] (Genesis 1:3). "God divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4), waters from waters and Heaven from Earth. As it is often repeated throughout the chapter, "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10) and during the six days of creation, the planets take shape, after which come the fish, birds, animals and eventually, after a gradual increase in significance, the Hexaemeron ("the Greek title . . . for the 'six days [of creation]'" (Vanhoozer et al. 248) peaks with the coming into existence of man. All beings are provided with food and shelter and are blessed by God to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), with man having dominion over all, for he is created in God's image.

It is interesting to note the plural used by God "Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), implying that creation was not a solitary activity and was maybe the product of the Holy Trinity (Jensen 15). Further evidence of the multiple nature of God is his being called all throughout Genesis LORD God (the Hebrew: Yahweh Elohim), with Elohim being the plural for El (God). All "was very good" (Genesis 1:31), so God rested on the seventh day and blessed it, so that man would follow this example as well. The material from which God formed the human body was "dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7) or, as Isaiah states[2], a lump of clay, which alongside the word "bärä" (to form, particularly a special creation), reinforces the image of God as skillful and sovereign potter (Jensen 28) and thus personally and physically involved in the act of creation (Mickelsen 317). However, what makes man special is that after the creation of his body, he is given a spirit: "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). The creation of the first woman is also relevant, for she is taken from Adam's side not head

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[1] All biblical quotes are taken from King James Bible Online.
[2] "But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand" (Isaiah 64:8) – this verse is in reference to God being the potter of Israel in particular.

nor feet, implying that the woman "was not to lord it over him nor to grovel at his feet" (Jensen 30), but should be by his side as a helper and as an equal. "The idea is that the sexes complement and support each other" (Wenham, 2003: 40). The fall of human beings into error is presented as a completely separate event from that of creation and death falls upon the primordial couple first spiritually then physically, for they are cursed to endure mortality.

If the original sin is said to be man's disobedience of God, the primordial error that preceded it can only be Lucifer's pride, but also his envy and selfishness. Despite having been gifted with perfect beauty and wisdom, Lucifer, the son of the morning, wanted to be better than his creator and his rebellion resulted in him being cast out of heaven: "Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, though hast corrupted thy wisdom because of thy brightness" (Ezekiel 28:17). The selfishness and ambition of the fallen Satan can be perceived in his repetition of the phrase "I will": "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of god: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). Consequently, starting with the primordial error of Lucifer, even before its creation, the world was to further deteriorate by means of man's first sin and then proliferate error with Cain's first murder, proof of the inheritance of man's corrupt nature.

Gnosticism maintained the Platonic dualism, but infused it with anti-cosmic conceptions. For these thinkers, the Error was the creation of the material world itself, for everything that was visible was "a kingdom of evil and darkness" (Rudolph, 2001: 60) and could only be the work of an equally evil creator. The Yahweh of the Old Testament was a deceitful, jealous and wrathful demiurge ("demiourgos"meaning artisan) who only wanted to enslave mankind and withhold knowledge from man. As a false prophet and a copy of the real, true God that had preceded it and that remains beyond all that is visible, unknown, "incomprehensible, unbegotten . . . incorruptible, immeasurable, invariable, unnamable, etc." (Van Meurs, 1997: 7), the demiurge could only create a universe as illusory as himself. After creating a psychic body for man, he created a material body to lock it in. Hence, Adam and Eve's rebellion was a good one and Eve acquires a special, positive status in the myth of creation, for she was the one to convince Adam to open his eyes and awake to knowledge. As Kurt Rudolph succinctly puts it: "the world is the product of a divine tragedy, a disharmony in the realm of God, a baleful destiny in which man is entangled and from which he must be set free" (Rudolph, 2001: 66). While death came

only as a punishment in The Old Testament, the Gnostics saw death as an initial transgression, for the demiurge wanted to create a deathless world and ironically only managed to create death. According to the Gospel of Philip: "The world came into being through transgression. For the agent that made it wanted to make it incorruptible and immortal. That agent fell, and did not attain what was expected. For the world's incorruptibility was not; furthermore, the incorruptibility of the agent that made the world was not ("What is Gnosticism").

Usually Gnostics lay much emphasis on the androgynous nature of the creator, who was both male and female. The state of androgyny was considered perfect and the earthly separation into two sexes was among the first errors in the multiplicity of transgressions that followed the creation of the material world. In some versions, God and Sophia-Pistis (wisdom-faith) are complementary consorts, but the latter's demise is brought about by her error of selfishness (like Lucifer) in the attempt to create a new world by herself without the knowledge and help of God (Valantasis, 2006: 21), for she wished to become equal to God. The result, according to Valentinianism, a main type of Gnosticism, was that Sophia split between a higher and a lower, fallen form and she only formed an abortive creation that did not become a world, but merely a demiurge who in turn formed the material world and the false-god established himself as tyrantand became an impediment between the world and the true, unknown God, also described with respect to Pleroma (perfection, fullness). Upon realizing her error, Sophia manages to implant a divine spark in man. Sometimes, Sophia and the demiurge are described as weeping and being ashamed of their erroneous creation, realizing at the same time their ever-permanent duality as both incorruptible and fallen gods: "I am knowledge and ignorance. /I am shame and boldness. /I am shameless; I am ashamed./I am strength and I am fear./ . . . I am sinless and [yet] the root of sin comes from me" ("The Thunder, Perfect Mind"). Therefore, Yahweh's plural form is understood as the demiurge and his possible helpers or even Sophia and as opposed to the Old Testament, where error comes from free will (that of Lucifer and later that of man), here man "is sinful by nature" (Walker, 1983: 188) and it is not him, but the Demiurge that is responsible for the primordial error that brings about cosmic tragedy.

Hermeticism[3] has often been associated with Gnosticism, for it developed during the same period of time and it followed similar patterns,

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[3] Throughout this paper I will refer to Hermeticism instead of Hermetism in order to designate the movement as a whole and not limit it to the period before the Renaissance: "the term 'Hermetism' usually refers to the practices of the Hermetic path in the ancient

maintaining the stress on dualism and on the saving power of knowledge, as well as the position "between Greek rationality . . . and biblical faith" (Ralls, "Hermeticism"), between paganism and Christianity. However, Hermeticism is believed to be more optimistic than Gnosticism, for it is procosmic and "its dualism is complementary not antagonistic" (Ebeling, 2007: 36). Furthermore, the Hermetica doctrines revolve around the Egyptian god Thoth (representative of wisdom, inventor of writing and magic, but also guide for the soul in the underworld, connected with alchemy and occultism). Toth is remembered as Hermes Trismegistus via an association with the Greek god Hermes and "trismegistus" meaning "thrice great" (Ralls, "Hermetism and Hermeticism" 2). The negative theology of the Gnostics is weakened in Hermeticism, as it is believed that a certain comprehension of God can be achieved by means of "nous" (reason) and a contemplation of the world, yet redemption could not come "from philosophical reasoning but [from] divine revelation that leads to the truth" (Van Meurs, 1997: 3). Most importantly, the primordial error could not be considered to be the creation of the universe, as Hermeticists trusted that the creation was good and beautiful. It could not be otherwise because it was a reflection of the order and beauty of Heaven: "as above, so below" (Ralls, "Hermeticism"), was their famous dictum: "What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing" ("Tabula Smaragdina").Everything was seen as interconnected, God was in all things and contraries[4] such as matter and spirit only existed in order to form one whole. The archetypal figure for the mediation and reconciliation between two contraries was the Greek Hermes, the messenger between the two levels of creation, their intermediary and unifying figure, "prefiguring the role of the alchemical Mercury as the 'medium of the conjunction'" (Hoeller, "On the Trail").

The body was no longer the Gnostics' "garment of ignorance" (Van Meurs, 1997: 12), for it was a miracle of God, yet the soul was superior to it and if the former was asleep and drowned in forgetfulness, the body inevitably became sinful, turning man into a "slave of the lower essence" ("The Nature of Hermetic Wisdom"). In addition, an important myth of creation for Hermeticism was that the Supreme Mind (Nous) created both a second nous (who in turn created the planets) and a Heavenly Man, who

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world before the Renaissance, while 'Hermeticism' refers to Renaissance and modern Hermetic work" ("Hermetism and Hermeticism" 2).

[4] I prefer the term "contraries" to that of "opposites", for while the latter entails that the two sides might annihilate each other (for example water and fire), the former allows for an understanding of their complementary nature (for example left and right).

was his beloved child and was equal to him (Ebeling, 2007: 13). But the latter's initial error was to see his reflection in the chaos-waters around him, fall in love with it and perform a sexual union with nature that would render him mortal (Van Meurs 15). In this version too, selfishness, love of oneself, as well as sexual desire and the subsequent separation into male and female as different, no longer androgynous forms that followed are the main catalysts for the fall of man.

Now let us turn to William Blake and see how he blends elements of all these three spiritual directions and adds his own vision of error. Just as the title of the Book of Genesis was also translated as "The First Book of Moses", for it was believed that Moses had written it, from the beginning, *The [First] Book of Urizen* implies an association of Urizen with Moses and draws the reader's attention to the fact that the work is a parody of the Biblical version of creation. In addition, the Gnostic belief that the coming into existence of the material world and the fall into error are one event, but that there are two creators: one true God, extended by means of a Pleroma of gods who created spirituality and one false, evil god who created the material side of the world, with the "debilitating effects of materiality" (Valantasis, 2006: 30) among which the corporeal part of man, can be found in Blake's *The Book of Urizen* as well. From the first words attributed to the protagonist, the idea that he is an evil, devil-like, inept creator is prefigured: "Of the primeval Priest's assum'd power,/ When Eternals spurn'd back his religion/ And gave him a place in the north,/ Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary" and "Lo, a shadow of horror is risen/ In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific/ Self-clos'd, all repelling. What Demon/ Hath form'd this abominable void?" (Blake, 1978: 44). Rising, that is rebelling, from the group of gods that are called here Eternals, Urizen wants to assume a place that is not his, in the north, and just like Lucifer or like Sophia, he wishes to be one step above his creators and one of his first errors is that of selfishness, out of which pride and envy stem. Like Lucifer's "I will…", Urizen's "I alone, even I . . . Here alone I" (Blake, 1978: 46-47) shows his egocentric nature and his inability to care for anyone else but himself. Such a god cannot create a world out of benevolence, but only to gain an advantage by becoming its absolute ruler, its tyrant.

Solitary, and self-closed, all-repelling, desolate, Urizen believes he can create a world on his own, without help from any of the other gods, but he is unprolific and can initially only form a void and bring about "abominable chaos" (Blake, 1978: 44) where there once was unity and harmony. This is in tune with the Gnostic-Hermetic warning against the possibility of a positive creation as the work of only one god. Just like the

Bible presented a creator-god that is Trinitarian in nature, Gnostics trusted that the Father was surrounded by a Pleroma and therefore was not alone in his creation. It is only the demiurge whose selfishness brings him to the ambition of attempting a solitary creation that can only result in tragic, universal unbalance. Moreover, the multiple references to the impossibility of knowing this evil god expressed through the adamant repetition of words such as: shadowy, obscure, unknown, unseen and secret go beyond the theology by way of negation of the Gnostics, for here it might not be the case of the inability of other entities to perceive Urizen – because unlike the man-god relationship where the former is incapacitated by his lack of knowledge, the Eternals cannot be said to be lower and incapable of understanding their fellow God – but rather of Urizen's unwillingness to show himself. As opposed to Yahweh, who does all his work in the open, Urizen desires to keep his work a secret, unbeknownst to the Pleroma, possibly out of shame or out of fear of reprisal: "Brooding secret, the dark power hid" (Blake, 1978: 44). The Demiurge knew that his intention would not be well received and indeed the Eternals showed indignation, fury and horror upon seeingUrizen's actions.

While the God of The Old Testament creates utterances that divide the world without any negative consequences, Urizen's first articulate words roll like thunders over the universe and despite their hypocritical expression of good intention, they are meant to divide what was once whole into separate parts: "I have sought for a joy without pain,/ For a solid without fluctuation" (Blake, 1978: 46). In view of Hermeticism, this separation represents a pivotal error for no things can nor should exist without their contraries. The effects of this wish for division are felt when Urizen separates himself from the Pleroma which brings the whole of Eternity to "roll[x] wide apart" (Blake, 1978: 48) and creates a contagious chain of separation where Urizen's counterpart, Los, divides into a man and then further divides into a separate, female form, breaking the perfection implied by the androgynous state and showing the clear impulse towards nature and simultaneously an alienation from the perfection of divinity, leading only to disequilibrium.

The fact that Urizen's actions bring friction and chaos to a once perfectly ordered cosmos is proven by the description of the state before his rebellion "Earth was not . . . death was not, but eternal life sprung" (Blake, 1978: 45). Urizen did not create life. On the contrary, along with Urizen, death is bestowed upon the universe just like it is proven to happen after Adam and Eve's disobedience of Yahweh. Death is a consequence of the world of matter and proof of the demiurge's impotence in the act of

creation. Nevertheless, the character's hypocrisy surfaces again when he is the one to ask: "Why will you die, O Eternals?" (Blake, 1978: 46). The difference is that the Eternals did not die in the physical sense of the word, they only changed form, vanished and reappeared, "expanded/ Or contracted [their] all flexible senses" (Blake, 1978: 45). Hence, by creating the body of man, Urizen hopes to insure stability where there was only fluidity. Yet, ironically, the only certainty that arises is that of death and in a similar manner to the demiurge of the Gnostic Gospel of Philip who wanted to create a deathless world, Urizen fails. Thus, it is little wonder that the Eternals characterize him as the personification of death: "The Eternals said: 'What is this? Death. /Urizen is a clod of clay' (Blake, 1978: 49). This statement establishes Urizen's inferiority with respect to the other Gods; he is their creation, just like Adam is Yahweh's; he is only a clod of clay, a material copy of divinity that cannot create life, but only bring death into the world. Further evidence of the demiurge's responsibility for creating death is the fact that he is depicted as "A self-contemplating shadow" (Blake, 1978: 45), perhaps in reference to the Hermetic myth of the creation of the world of matter.

The abnormality and inverse ratio of Urizen's work is also evident in his creation of the shapes "Of beast, bird, fish, serpent, & element, / Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud" (Blake, 1978: 45), which seems to be inversely proportional to the order in which the world is created in The Old Testament *ex-nihilo*, with the heavens being created first, followed by fish, birds, reptiles, animals and eventually man. This order is not random, for Yahweh's creation becomes increasingly more significant with each element and culminates with man, whereas Urizen's project is described as a regression into nothingness, in which man no longer holds a privileged position, but can only appear as an element of a deteriorated and deteriorating world.

The Biblical Hexaemeron is paralleled by Blake's seven ages of creation in which the members of the body are individually formed. But the creation of the first man coincides with the embodiment of Urizen performed by his complementary god, Los. Just like Eve was formed out of Adam's side, we learn that "in anguish/ Urizen was rent from his [Los'] side" (Blake, 1978: 49), so they are the two Hermetic contraries that form two sides of the same entity: reason and imagination, ice and fire, death and life and when they are separated, only anguish can follow. When Urizen transgresses the heavenly order, he falls and Los can only fall along with him and be part of the same process of decay: "Los suffer'd his fires to decay" (Blake, 1978: 55). This gave rise to another instance of separation

between the incorruptible and the fallen side of the same god that that is most evident in Blake's distinction between Urthona and Los (the eternal and the fallen name for the same character). This concept can be recognized in both Gnostic and Hermetic myths and is disapproved of in both instances. As a seemingly positive character, Los is forced to create a physical body for Urizen in order put an end to the fall and to the proliferation of error by limiting it into a clearly distinguishable form so that it could be more easily recognized, entrapped and cast off: "And Los formed nets & gins/ And threw the nets round about" (Blake, 1978: 50). Perhaps Los' intervention was meant to bring to the "Cold, featureless, flesh or clay" (Blake, 1978: 50) the breath of life of the God of The Old Testament or the divine spark that the Gnostics acknowledged as having been implanted in the human body. As the representative of imagination, Los stands for the positive core that can be activated in order for man to wake up and hear the call of Eternity again, the only hope for his Salvation and reunification with God. Los can also be interpreted as taking the role of Hermes and being a mediator between the Eternals and Urizen, a mandatory link between the two worlds.

Before the actual creation of the primordial body, Urizen falls into a deep sleep: "But Urizen laid in a stony sleep, /Unorganiz'd, rent from Eternity" (Blake, 1978: 49). This is the Gnostic perception of the class of people called "hylic" (from *hylē*, the Greek word for matter), who were "asleep and unaware, completely entrapped in the material world. Hylics existed as animated corpses" (Valantasis, 2006: 26). Moreover, Urizen is disorganized because in the attempt to create a new order, the demiurge "disturbed the harmony of the divine realm" (Valantasis, 2006: 21) and now he is drowned in chaos. It is noteworthy that he is only "rent", not cut off from Eternity and that he is merely "asleep" and not dead, because both of these words used by William Blake imply a provisory state which can be mended, but which nonetheless is a horrible thing. Also, after Urizen's body is formed, its creator is contaminated and completely forgets about his eternal nature: "And now his eternal life/ Like a dream was obliterated" (Blake, 1978: 54). As the Gnostics associated sleep with forgetfulness and ignorance, two instances of deficiency that can be overcome through gnosis, Blake allowed for the possibility of Urizen to be returned to the Eternity from which he was rent and to awaken from his sleep by acquiring true knowledge and realizing the divine core of humanity and the necessity for the union with the true God. But the contagious nature of the acts of separation previously mentioned is visible once and this time with respect to Los, when the character separates the hours of the night, in anticipation of a

vast system of material constraint: "Pouring sodor of iron, dividing/ The horrible night into watches" (Blake, 1978: 51) and then creates precise temporal measurements: "forging chains new & new, / Numb'ring with links hours, days & years" (Blake, 1978: 51). This process is perceived of in terms of the formation of chains in order to stress the constraining nature of earthly time with regard to the human body: "Restless turn'd the immortal inchain'd" (Blake, 1978: 52). In the attempt to limit error, the now fallen Los creates another error in the act of limitation itself that is entailed by the shaping of the body.

During the seven ages of creation (that are not thematic parallels to the six days of Genesis), the skeleton, organs and limbs of man are molded. As opposed to the Biblical satisfaction of Yahweh-Elohim that repeatedly observes the goodness of his creation, after each day: "God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10), the only repetition that Blake allows after the passing of each age is: "And a state of dismal woe" (Blake, 1978: 52), making it abundantly clear that this is not a positive creation, nor is there anything to be satisfied about. On the contrary, the physical creation of man is a tragic event. This perspective is rooted in Gnostic pessimism and just as "a gnostic felt . . . imprisoned by his or her body and by the physical world" (Valantasis, 2006: 15), the adversity towards the body, seen as material entrapment of the spiritual nature of man is expressed by the multiplicity of words referring to the state of being imprisoned throughout the process of creation: chains, caverns, nets, bounded, locked, inclos'd, closed and so forth.

The first age comprises the torturous formation of the spine and bones, the solidity and inflexibility of which is underlined along with the pain that they bring about: "A vast Spine writh'd in toment . . . And bones of solidness froze" (Blake, 1978: 52). A feeling of confinement begins to set in as the ribs are presented to be "a bending cavern" (Blake, 1978: 52). This is a reminder of Plato's allegory of the cave, in which man's senses can only reach a simulacrum of reality for men are akin to prisoners enchained in a cave and forced to observe only shadows of true forms. ("Allegory of the Cave"). William Blake proved to have a similar attitude when he maintained in his "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" that "Man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through the narrow chinks of his cavern" (Blake, 1988: 14). In *The Book of Urizen*, the creation of a cavern of bones is the first step in man's entrapment by his body. Next, the heart and the circulatory system are formed, as a red globe with thousands of branches and this time the fragility of the trembling heart that is "sunk with fright" (Blake, 1978: 52) into the abyss of the ribs is emphasized. The third age is

particularly important in revealing the inadequacy and shortcomings of the senses, specifically of sight in the attempt to know the truth: the eyes are "two little orbs; And fixed in two little caves" (Blake, 1978: 52) and thus can neither gaze the reality beyond the cave, nor comprehend it, for the adjectives "fixed" and "little" show the limitation of man's physical characteristics, which stand in opposition to "the expanding eyes of Immortals". (Blake, 1978: 55)

The ears are created in the fourth age by means of heavy pain and struggle, and they too are petrified, acquiring the rigidity and solidity that Urizen sought after from the very beginning. The nostrils of the fifth age are bent down and there is no reference to them being infused with the breath of life as they were described in The Old Testament and the stomach, throat, and tongue of the sixth age are connected to the pain and suffering of hunger and thirst. Finally, instead of resting on the seventh day, the dissatisfaction of the creator with his work is shown by the fury that caused his newly formed limbs to stretch over the entire universe in deep anguish and pain: "Enraged & stifled with torment, /He threw his right Arm to the north, / His left Arm to the south, / . . . And his Feet stam'd the nether Abyss/ In trembling & howling & dismay" (Blake, 1978: 53-54). Hence "error (planē) gained strength" (Rudolph, 2001: 83) along with the creation of the primordial human body, as the author stressed the limitation, fragility, suffering and alienation from Eternity that result from it.

The last erroneous separation that Los undergoes is that between male and female, which is triggered by the Pity he feels upon seeing Urizen's body. Enitharmon, the first separate female form is formed from a round globe of blood, milk and tears and the Eternals who are androgynous are so scared and shocked of this new creature that they call her Pity and flee: "All Eternity shdder'd at sight/ Of the first female now separate, / . . . They called her Pity and fled" (Blake, 1978: 56). Hence, the generations that developed from the primordial couple and populated the earth inherited this state and Urizen's infectious error along with their physical bodies, and the references towards the shrinking of their senses can be seen as proof of their smallness as well as of the regression of creation by the enclosure of what was previously limitless spiritually.

To conclude, in *The Book of Urizen* William Blake used the frame of Christian Genesis in order to infuse it with Gnostic and Hermetic beliefs about the creation of the world and of man and to show that the principle of Error preceded man's free will and was proliferated like an infectious wound throughout the cosmos starting with Urizen's rebellion from the other Eternals and worsening with the creation of the first human body. In a

similar manner to Lucifer and Sophia, Urizen is not self-begotten but is preceded by other divine entities, which makes him a false god and leads him to follow a similar ambition to that of the devil or the goddess of wisdom when attempting to establish himself as the ruler of a new world. Like Sophia's work, Urizen's project is solitary, created in secrecy and selfish isolation and therefore results in an abortive creation and, like the Hermetic nous, the demiurge's self-reflection creates an illusory material world. Furthermore, if Yahweh's separation of the world in the beginning of time gives rise to a good creation, the act of separation of Urizen from Eternity is amplified by a contagious chain of divisions that throws humanity ever deeper into error because it goes against the complementary dualism of Hermeticism in trying to establish entities that are not perfect in their wholeness, but divided and therefore unbalanced: Urizen is separated from Los, Los from his Eternal side, Urthona, Los from Enitharmon, and spiritual man from God. This leads to Urizen's and eventually man's sleep and forgetfulness of true gnosis. If in the Christian version, the Biblical couple's disobedience brings about death, in the Blakean perspective, Urizen himself is death because he is too self-centred and unprolific to create true life and therefore only manages to bring about the mortality of man. The latter is not a triumph of a good creation, and therefore the responsible God is not satisfied but tormented and the Hexaemeron is transformed into seven ages of suffering and dismal woe followed by no rest. The result is an embodiment of error that equates the creation of the human form with the universal fall into error, as the product of a regressive world that confines man within a physical body, the finite, shrinking perception of which diminishes the understanding of eternal truth

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Rezumat: Scopul acestei lucrări este de a dezvălui maniera în care, prin *The Book of Urizen*, William Blake parodiază Geneza Vechiului Testament, folosind elemente gotice şi ermetice. Astfel, se conturează un mit al creaţiei propriu scriitorului britanic, care oferă un corp fizic principiului Erorii, a cărui rădăcină este egoismul şi a cărui formă este însuşi personajul Urizen. Lucrarea de faţă va fi împărţită în două părţi. Pentru început, voi schiţa principiul erorii primordiale, precum şi consecinţele acesteia în doctrinele Creştinismului, gnosticismului şi ermeticismului. În cea de-a doua parte, mă voi concentra pe versiunea lui William Blake asupra originii lumii materiale ce stă la baza intruchipării erorii primordiale.

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Poe versus James de-faulting/tecting/texting

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Abstract: The present study is articulated as a comparative analysis in the field of detective fiction, in two representative cases, namely those of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter* and Henry James's *The Figure in the Carpet*, performing as indicatives of a common privative and reversative nuance in the associated processes of *de*textualization and *de*tection. The term resulted by attaching the prefix *de-*to the notion of *fault* performs as a hermeneutical and structural instrument through three complementary acceptations, namely *absence*, *excess*, and *neutrality*, which encourage a reconsideration of the negative connotations of error, a de-faulting approach of error as a requisite in creating, interpreting, and understanding.

Keywords: *default, detect, absence, excess, neutrality*

Let me tell you a little story. There once was a young man who dreamed of reducing the world to pure logic. Because he was a very clever young man, he actually managed to do it. And when he'd finished his work, he stood back and admired it. It was beautiful. A world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy. Countless acres of gleaming ice stretching to the horizon. So the clever young man looked around at the world he had created, and decided to explore it. He took one step forward and fell flat on his back. You see, he had forgotten about friction. The ice was smooth and level and stainless, but you couldn't walk there. So the clever young man sat down and wept bitter tears. But as he grew into a wise old man, he came to understand that roughness and ambiguity aren't imperfections. They're what makes the world turn. He wanted to run and dance. And the words and things scattered upon this ground were all battered and tarnished and ambiguous, and the wise old man saw that that was the way things were. But something in him was still homesick for the ice, where everything was radiant and absolute and relentless. Though he had come to like the idea of the rough ground, he couldn't bring himself to live there. So now he was marooned between earth and ice, at home in neither. And this was the cause of all his grief. (Eagleton and Jarman)

To err is human**.** A rather threadbare yet vindicating half formula. The deliberate omission makes it easier to reorientate the moral and religious acceptation of the statement (about the divine act of forgiveness) in an epistemological direction, to question once more the limits of human knowledge, inspired by the belief that error is a condition for the exercise of

free will, for decision making and exploration, for knowledge and understanding. In Heideggerian terms, it clears - in a circular and not at all vicious advancement - the view of a vaster purer truth, while enhancing the noble yet tormenting human quest for perfection.

The (pre)texts for the present study of error belong to two American authors, namely Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James. In confronting the two on the territory of detective fiction, I rely heavily on an already classical association between detection and text interpretation or detextualization, as illustrated by *The Purloined Letter* and *The Figure in the Carpet* (both instances of implicit aesthetics). The comparative analysis explores the function of error, while challenging its negative connotations, in the associated processes approaching it as a perfectly legitimate means and natural stage of knowledge, more specifically as both a hermeneutical and a structural instrument.

It is worth mentioning that the former case is a detective story proper, a so-called "tale of ratiocination" written in a "new key", as rightfully intuited by its author and the very inventor of the genre, whereas the latter is closer to what Merivale and Sweeney call a "metaphysical detective story", due to a poignant self-reflexive quality, as it represents "allegorically the text's own process of composition" (Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 2), it launches epistemological issues and it mobilizes the interplay between author, work, and reader on a hermeneutical ground.

By attaching the common privative and reversative prefix *de-* to the term *fault*, we apparently force our way into a topic of interest to the present occasion. However, the etymology of the resulting notion will gradually reveal the relevance of such merging artifice and smoothly adjust the ternary reference from the title.

Thus, *default*, in its verbal and nominal trajectory, bears multiple meanings, as provided by the Etymological Dictionary:

> late 14c., "be lacking, be missing," also "become weak," from default (n.). Related: Defaulted; defaulting.
> early 13c., "offense, crime, sin," later (late 13c.) "failure, failure to act," from Old French defaute (12c.) "fault, defect, failure, culpability, lack, privation," from Vulgar Latin *defallita "a deficiency or failure," past participle of *defallere (, from Latin de- "away" + fallere "to deceive, to cheat; to put wrong, to lead astray, cause to be mistaken; to escape notice of, be concealed from". The financial sense is first recorded in 1858; the computing sense is from 1966. (Online Etymology Dictionary)

These meanings of *default* are themselves *de-faulting*, as they undo this notion of error/fault, they seem to decompose an otherwise three-way opposition. Thus, this notion can refer to a lack/ an absence, an excess, or a neutral state (or in-betweenness, understood as a state of compromise or passivity).The aim of the paper is to observe how the two texts in question traverse these acceptations, demanding a reconsideration of the notion of error.

1. De-faulting absence

Probably the most transparent association is that between fault/error (which stands for lack, gap, shortcoming, handicap, etc.) and a notion of deficiency or absence. In this sense, the two texts in question capture one of the rather vicious pleasures of fiction, a pleasure of the trick (a joke that reveals the fictive structure of truth), functioning on a productive as well as on a receptive level, a pleasure responding to a deliberate omission, which after all serves two basic purposes, namely those of delay and selection.

Given the fact that this genre, that is detective fiction, addresses most explicitly the reader's interpretative abilities and that its popularity relies on the pleasure of their exertion, the hermeneutical encoding is most obvious precisely in its obscuring artifices, founded on expectation and the prolonged desire of a postponed resolution. According to Roland Barthes, who emphasizes the interdependence between the semiotic and the hermeneutical code, delay is such an artifice, leading to a paradoxical and static "dynamics of the text", an effervescent countercurrent cutting the linguistic flow:

> the problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's "unfolding" and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of stoppages: between question and answer there is a whole dilatory area whose emblem might be named "reticence," the rhetorical figure which interrupts the sentence, suspends it, turns it aside. (Barthes, 1974: 75)

In general terms, delay is a kind of indirectness that essentially characterizes the literary act. These "obstacles, stoppages, deviations" can be seen as strategies that allow the reader to linger on the words themselves as both means and carriers of meanings, meaningful units, otherwise taken for

granted, wasted in a facile and precipitated practical purpose. As narrative short-circuits, they interrupt the causal flux, requiring a reconsideration of what is relevant and what is not. However, in the case of detective fiction, the delay through absence refers more likely to the challenge imposed on the investigator to find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Moreover, Dennis Porter speaks of a "state of anxiety", in which suspense "depends on such factors as the length of time elapsed between the initial moves in a sequence and the approach to a conclusion, the sympathy evoked for the characters concerned, the nature of the threat represented by the obstacles, or the desirability of the goal" (Porter, 1981: 329). Judging by this aspect, there might be a tendency to evaluate the skill of the writer of detective fiction according to the capacity to sustain and guide this state of anxiety throughout a longer narrative, case in which the kind of story that is readable "at one sitting" might not stand as particularly illustrative for the achievement. Yet, the short form probably proves more adequate for the challenges of the genre (approached even by a long-run writer such as Henry James in the *Figure in the Carpet*, a "long short story"), as its tension derives from a process of contraction (delay and selection), in a fragile interplay of form and content. It works on the subjective experience of time, marked by the intensity of the process of detection, of identification with the characters, by threat and desire, through the art of suspense, dependent on a mastery of time.

Suspense resides on suspension, either reactive or purely temporal, not only that of the reader's disbelief, but also the suspension of the text or the suspension of the author. Thus, both *The Purloined Letter* and *The Figure in the Carpet* deal with a missing text, a text that refuses to give itself, in its simplicity, to the interpreter, as long as he is trapped in its aggressive condition of interpreter, of subject directed towards an object, yet not prepared to confront a clear returning gaze, in the phenomenological sense: thus Dupin points out the complicated nature of simplicity and Vereker meets with a certain condescendence the awkward, obsessive, and devious endeavours of interpretation.

In the case of Poe's work, the letter has been perceived as a gap, "what Lacan might have called a repression of the written word" (Johnson, 461), a symbol of an absence, triggering the continuous withdrawal of the signified. Derrida performs an inversion in observing how, in Lacan's view, the absence of meaning turns into the very meaning of absence, how the absence of a signifier becomes a signified itself, a meaningful element in the short story. In other words, "the displacement of the signifier is analyzed as a signified, as the recounted object in a short story" (Derrida, 1975: 48).

Furthermore, he points out Lacan's omissions (the narrator, the non-dialogue parts, the other two tales of ratiocination founding the genre, namely *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*), becoming thus vulnerable to his own criticism, as Barbara Johnson notices.

On the other hand, if this pleasure of delay resides in an unspoken assurance of resolution, an essential attribute of a mystery story in Robert Champigny's opinion – according to which "A narrative that attracts the reader's attention to some undetermined events but avoids determining them at the end is not a mystery story" (Champigny, 1977: 13) –, James's open formula seems unsatisfactory. However, this loose end curves into a hermeneutic cycle with a re-reading requirement, a loop delimiting an absent centre – the content of the novel.

An epistemological consolation and release of tension derives from the emphasis on the process, not on a finite product, which up to a point reminds of James' view of literature as an autonomous yet a living and lively organism, in a continual process of becoming. As James points out:"A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like every other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts" (James, 1927: 36). In other words, a novel is something animate, unsteady, it cannot be artificially labeled in chunks, yet it must rest the reader on a minimal degree of predictability, on an internal fractalic coherence, "one general effort of expression" or a "unity of effect", from which it actually extracts all its narrative vigor.

The two texts also denounce another absence with a delaying function, namely the absence of the author.

In what concerns *The Purloined Letter*, the notions of authorship and authority become variables suspended between "to possess" and "to hold", "to carry", the latter having a slightly more material/spatial/palpable nuance: the letter as object, as pure signifier, endowing with signification its „holders". The power of the letter's author is transferred to its holders, fact which can be read as a shift from the writer to the digressive series of pseudo-receivers, which value it according to its potential effects. Authorship is irrelevant, whereas authority, status is spatially conditioned.

The letter, in its scriptural material form, is also experienced by the author as a state of threat, as an ultimate act of exposure, of vulnerability. In Kafka's words: "Writing letters is actually an intercourse with ghosts, and by no means just with the ghost of the addressee but also with one's own ghost, which secretly evolves inside the letter one is writing" (Kafka, 1999: 223). Under such circumstances, the crisis is triggered by an absence and a

transgression, a violation of intimacy, the threat of penetrating the barrier between private and public, of tainting a sacred space of communion. However, the reader is not actually allowed to "enter" the letter, but rather witnesses or is recounted certain scenes meant to suggest its importance. For the holders, the meaning is transitory, it consists in the power the letter exerts and which disappears in its very exertion. In other words, its meaning is exhausted in the purpose, however distorted by particular interests, as it becomes simply a tool of extortion. If the letter is otherwise reduced to being a channel between a sender and an addressee, Lacan observes how it is drawn in a vicious series of triangular relations, of the three glances, which remind of the trinomial author-work-reader.

The same authorial absence can be explored in the Jamesian text, starting from Roland Barthes's statement: "It is not that the author cannot "come back" into the Text, into his text; however, he can only do so as a 'guest,' so to speak. If the author is a novelist, he inscribes himself in his text as one of his characters, as another figure sewn into the rug" (Barthes, 418). But in order to be able "to come back", the author must first leave the Text. This makes possible a more authentic appreciation of alterity (Hale, 1998: 86), solving intentional and affective fallacy. In Dorothy Hale's view, "the greatest subjective investment results in a representation so objective (because so completely other) as to seem an actual object" (Hale, 1998: 87). The opposition between subjectivity and objectivity is solved in a state of artistic wonder that suspends personal identity. In a phenomenological shift, "Finding the secret of the object of wonder, 'the thing,' transforms the interesting object into a subject – almost a subjectivity – capable of self-expression." (Hale, 1998: 88)

The narrator's obssessive "intentional fallacy" is radicalized with the author's death, the beginning of a rapid succession of deaths. All the sources that might have revealed a meaning gradually shut under a definite seal of signification: Vereker, Corvick, Gwendolen. Under such circumstances, an interpretation can only be validated by the interpreter's own argumentative effort, the stage of reception that accounts for the shareability of a verbal meaning (Hirsch, 1967: 94). In fact, the disappearance of the author is a most adequate withdrawal, as James dismisses – in his theoretical works on the art of fiction – the interference of the author as intrusive, an indelicate voice of disbelief destroying the illusion of another reality through unnecessary metanarrative interventions.

Moreover, Vereker himself contradictorily, after weaving this mystery of signification around his novel, distinguishes between the writer's and the critic's different approaches, both imperfect and insufficient: one is

incapable to paraphrase, pushing his work at the border of language, the other is too bound to the means of a cheap journalese. This explains the tension exerted on the narrator, a pressure that tightens inter-dependence between form and content, meant to confirm the work's consistency.

Another purpose of these deliberate omissions is the need of selection. Thus, the deductive method employed by the analyst Dupin relies on the selectivity of memory manifested in a retrospective and somewhat linear game of associations. Needing precision, he attempts to bridle through witty serpentines, links in a logical chain, an apparently chaotic world to playfully defy the elusiveness of experience in a game of memory and forgetfulness. With an analytical mind, he derives pleasure from "that moral activity which disentangles" (Poe, 2003: 141). In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, there is a more elaborate demonstration of Dupin's method, in which he manages to compensate for the lack of actual communication, to fill the silence by reconstructing a causal chain through pure reasoning and sharp observation of external facts.

If in the case of Poe's story there is this sense of linear selectivity, *The Figure in the Carpet* is imagined as a pattern, a texture, a net of infinite relations in which the narrator is alured by his own obssessive curiosity. The terminology of hunting is in fact recurrent throughout the story, while Vereker's text becomes a sort of "bait on a hook", a misleading object of desire. Although apparently enacting the passage from work to text (Barthes), in its dilatory nature and combinatorial secrecy, it preserves an organic appearance, a vitality of its own that allows a rupture from the author but resists the same phenomenon as dissection.

2. De-faulting excess

Serving similar purposes of suspenseful delay and selection, there is what might be qualified as a fault of excess, meant to lead astray, to cause to be mistaken, to put wrong. Thus, "the laying of equivocal clues in the investigative phase of the narrative, so that the delay in the revelation of the secret [...] becomes an integral instrument of illusion, a misprision invented solely for the working out of the plot" (Cook, 2011: 6). The reversative nuance manifests in a temporal and spatial displacement, a backward construction, serving „to create a space where clues could be read and false trails laid." (Cook, 2011: 5)

Given both Poe's and James's revolutionary writing theories, it is worth examining how exactly this selection in excess is conceived in their explicit aesthetics. For this purpose, we shall consider at this point two

representative theoretical works: *The Philosophy of Composition* and *The Art of Fiction.*

There is an enumerative passage in Poe's aforementioned essay that reflects one significant way in which Poe has revolutionized and questioned the Romantic claims concerning the creative process, situating the literary production somewhere between art and craft:

> the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought- at the true purposes seized only at the last moment- at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view- at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable- at the cautious selections and rejections- at the painful erasures and interpolations- in a word, at the wheels and pinions- the tackle for scene-shifting- the step-ladders, and demon-traps- the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches. (*The Philosophy of Composition*, 431)

Poe is critical of a kind of excessive attitude, manifested as literary histrio, in the Romantic tradition. His rather comprehensive enumeration insists upon the complexity of more or less conscious mechanisms behind this apparent simplicity. There is a transfer of responsibility from the sacred to the profane. The artist goes from being the chosen one, an instrument of divine inspiration, to being the rational performer in the artistic process, in full control and awareness of his skills.

Henry James, on the other hand, writes in *The Art of Fiction*: "Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive". Moreover, he states that: "Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet" (James, 1927: 39). In other words – and as widely acknowledged –, details help build the illusion of reality, not necessarily in the sense of a flawless faithfulness, but in the fierce competition between art and life: "to render the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business" (James, 1927: 39). James's commitment is not to reality, but to"the air of reality": "The novel can be crammed with facts and detailed descriptions in an attempt minutely to represent the real world. But much more is necessary for it to be a work of art" (James, 1927: 39). In these terms, Jamesian realism surpasses a purely mimetic stage and interferes with the conventional notion of reality, through a certain intensity and the selection of material from life, according to a basic criteria of what is supposed to be interesting. Moreover, his particular type of realism is achieved through consistent characters and plausibility. Plausibility - or verosimilitude - is one of the aspects apparently

sustaining the opposition between Romanticism and Realism, were we to define it in Aristotle's terms as veridicity, conformity with the order of reality. However, professor Ovidiu Ghidirmic points out the limits of this definition, which disregards the internal coherence of the work of art, its internal motivation, making every creation, regardless of its nature, a plausible one (Ghidirmic, 2008: 46). In this sense, one can say that sometimes there is more truth/truthfulness in the great works of art, either fantastic or realistic, than in life itself.This greater truthfulness derives also from the very plot, from a more coherent and therefore reassuring (in the sense that is leads to a catharsis) disposition.

Poe and James also meet, on a theoretical ground, in the explicit discipline of their writing, revealed in the act of selection. As Henry James states: "To be life-like, novels (like bodies) need to be carefully organized and good at excreting waste" (Rawlings, 2006: 42). There is a requirement of vital economy that prevents the novel from slipping into endless digressions and allows it to follow the rhythms of life, to compete with life, up to the point that the novel starts resembling a living organism in the fulfilment of biological functions, rejecting the excess, ajusting deviant tendencies.

This fake truthfulness achieved through selection denounces a complicated simplicity. As Dupin states:"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault (...) Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain (...) A little too self-evident" (Poe, 2003: 282). Thus, the error throughout the procedure is based on a conventional understanding of mystery as something hidden, difficult to access. Moreover, true knowledge is verifiable through the capacity of simple expression. However, "what is complex is mistaken (a not unusual error) for what is profound" (Poe, 2003: 142). There is a challenge and a tension between the scarce means of expression and the richness of the content.

There is an ascetism of knowledge, of meaningfulness, to be counterbalanced by (and released in) the vicious pleasure experienced in deceit, in make-believe, which is the very foundation of fiction. Vereker admits this kind of satisfaction: "he confessed that it was indeed with him now the great amusement of life" (James, 2013: 131). In other words, the joy of living resides in a playful deceit. D., like Vereker and in his status of poet, is "only one remove from a fool" (Poe, 2003: 285), which preserves on the one hand the simplicity in the "simple minded" acceptation of the term, but on the other hand it refers to his similarly beguiling, treacherous nature, which makes the letter a corresponding piece of evidence of betrayal. Significant is the fact that he is not the author, but a temporary possessor, a

fact which transforms the hermeneutical process from a quest of authorial intentionality a matter of localization, of finding a legitimate position in interpretation.

The simplicity contrasts with an excess of experience. One form of excess is the compulsion of repetition, which in the case of *The Purloined Letter*, moves from an intrapersonal to an interpersonal dimension, through the development of certain patterns of behaviour, which Lacan identifies as "the three glances". This compulsion is hardly liberating. From a position of hunters of others' mistakes rather than detached and therefore wiser contemplators, the characters become blind to their own faults and they get caught in similar roles.

On the other hand, this experiential excess leads to a failure of transference in James's work. This is indicative of the incommunicability (or rather the limited communicability) of experience: thus, Corvick discovers the secret while travelling to India, in a place of tranquility and contemplation, away from the aggression of the Western space. This secret of love and death remains enclosed within the narrow intimacy of the couple Corvick- Gwendolen.

3. The Fault In-between

"Default" has also been defined as "the way that something will appear or be done if you make no other choice, especially on a computer" (Macmillan Dictionary for Advanced Learners). This final acceptation of default comes as a conclusion of the present study. By applying the computational reference of "default" as "preselected option" to the field of text interpretation, I reach the Heideggerian notion of the inevitability of interpretation.

In the particular case of *The Purloined Letter*, this association between the scientific and the artistic reveals the error in the police's investigation, which is a search guided by "accurate rules", "by the aid of a most powerful microscope". Thus, the police launches the investigation from the presumption of an initial order that was disrupted by the letter – "any disorder in the glueing – any unusual gaping in the joints" (Poe, 2003: 287) –, whereas D. relies on this misconception to place the letter in full view, to insert it so harmoniously in the field of investigation that, in its studied carelessness, it escapes notice. As Lacan points out, Poe moves between two registers, from the exactitude of science to the approximate truth of fiction (Lacan, 2005: 13), which explains how the poet manages to outwit the police's mechanical precision.

This change of registers might as well illustrate the distinction made by Heidegger between information and culture, and the superior understanding granted by the latter. The letter, as a subunit of the word, addresses spirit and reason, not simply the intellect, mediating between subjects, not merely between subject and object. However, the two approaches, as shown by Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* are supposed to complement each other.

This neutral quality of default can also be understood as a passivity consisting in the power of non-use. The situation is under control as long as the object of control remains a hypothetically harmful device. The power thus exerted is derived from its preservation at the level of fictional threat.

In what regards *The Figure in the Carpet*, passivity can be understood as helplessness. James exemplifies an inertial state of criticism that might have lost "the secret of perception", this „odd numbness of general sensibility" with the case of a "limping curiosity", reaching a point of self-consciousness and tension that will not be released through a final resolution, precisely due to an obsessive manifestation (wrongly interpreted as an active function of the reader) and an erroneous orientation, outside the work itself. His declared purpose was "to reinstate analytic appreciation, by some ironic or fantastic stroke, so far as possible, in its virtually forfeited rights and dignities" (James, 2013: 218). Through the challenges imposed by the figure, he seems to illustrate an act of overbiding the active/aggressive role of the reader in an obsessive chase, an excess, even a demonism of vision, failing to grasp the bigger picture due to a painfully invasive method, a detailed dissection that threatens the work's integrity. A healthier attitude seems to be passivity in interpretation, a passivity which is not however absolute or to be understood as minimalizing the role of the reader. It opposes aggressivity rather than activity, it stands for distance, detachment, contemplation of literature as a self-sufficient and self-explanatory act, towards which the reader needs only cultivate a greater responsiveness and sensitivity.

All in all, the two works converge in various points, starting from their labbeling as detective fiction, to a more subtle attempt to legitimize the concept of fault in interpretation, distributing responsibilities in a more playful and relative interpretation of absence, excess, and neutrality.

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Rezumat: Studiul actual este articulat ca analiză comparativă aplicată ficţiunii detectivistice, în două cazuri representative şi anume *Scrisoarea furată* a lui Edgar Allan Poe şi *Desenul din covor* al lui Henry James, servind drept indicatori ai unei nuanţe comune privative şi reversative în procesele asociate de detextualizare şi detectare. Termenul rezultat prin ataşarea prefixului *de* la *fault* (greşeală, eroare, vină) este un instrument hermeneutic şi structural prin trei accepţiuni complementare şi anume *absenţă, exces, neutralitate*, ce încurajează o reconsiderare a conotaţiilor negative ale noţiunii de eroare, o încercare de legitimare a erorii ca o condiţie necesară în procesul de creaţie, interpretare şi înţelegere.

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Hubris and *Hamartia* in the Modern Rewriting of Classical Tragedy

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Abstract: Though rarely debated in explicit terms, *hubris* and *hamartia*, two key-concepts of Greek tragedy, underlie even the modern versions of classical tragic myths. The corpus analysed here (Jean Anouilh, Jean Cocteau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Christa Wolf, Steven Berkoff) reveals a new understanding of what determines the tragic in human life. The paper argues, from a comparative perspective, that the implications of this important metamorphosis are considerable, as far as the modern mindset is concerned, but also with respect to the tragic genre itself, which will be ultimately redefined by these intertextual reworkings. The contexts wherein the rewrite takes place (especially the political one) are important in each case.

Key-words: *hubris, hamartia, tragic palimpsests, modernity*

Introduction

Hubris and *hamartia* are basic concepts in the "grammar" of classical tragedy, both pertaining to the issue of the tragic flaw, i.e. the voluntary or involuntary transgression which sets in motion the tragic machinery. In many twentieth-century palimpsests which have their starting point in Greek tragedy, from the avant-garde and existentialist versions of the tragic canon to Christa Wolf's narrative recasting of Euripides' *Medea* or Steven Berkoff's iconoclastic *Greek*, these notions undergo a radical rethinking. Human error is no longer assessed against a metaphysical, religious, or even ethical background and standard but is instead investigated through the lens of a particular ideology or philosophy.

The pervasiveness of error as a theme in world literature across the centuries testifies to its centrality for the human experience and the human condition regardless of culture or era. While the answers provided by various literary products are definitely context-bound and context-sensitive, the basic core of this experience turns the literary landscape into an "imaginary court of law" (Mathieu-Castellani, 2006), starting with the Biblical *Book of Job* or with Greek tragedy, where both divine and human judgment are explicitly thematised (as in *The Oresteia*, by the foundation of the Areopagus).

I have in view a series of modern texts which acknowledge their indebtedness to the Greek models and avow their intention of putting a new spin on very old tales. The corpus only allows what Franco Moretti (2013) calls "distant reading", but I intend to focus on the common denominator of all these rewrites. They are less interested in some sort of cultural archaeology for the sake of the original text, and more in using for their own purposes and even "highjacking" the meanings of the prototypes. The rationale behind the transformative textual operations is as important as the alterations proper. The logic of palimpsestic rewriting allows them, in fact, to appropriate the original structure and remould it within a new context and for a new readershi Sometimes, the rewrite involves a strategic, deliberate "misreading" of the pre-text. Modern literature is, by and large, demystifying and subversive with respect to traditions, canons and myths. By revisiting and reshaping Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Oedipus King* and *Electra* or Euripides' *Orestes* and *Medea*, Jean Cocteau, Jean Giraudoux, Jean-Paul Sartre, Steven Berkoff and Christa Wolf engage in "genuine dialogue" (cf. Fishelov, 2010: 28) with the classics.

Rewriting and the historical and artistic tribulations of *error*

The exemplary nature of Greek tragedy resides in its open-endedness and ambiguity: it did not claim to provide definitive and apodictic answers to the aporias of human condition. The moral dilemmas were treated less in legal or forensic terms (or even in a strictly religious or ethical context) and more in ontological terms. Even *hubris* and *hamartia* are somewhat ambiguous notions: granted, we traditionally understand by *hubris* a behaviour denoting excessive pride, arrogance and a behaviour who would offend the gods and by *hamartia* the mistake or sin, but the scholars who probed the semantics of the two terms argue that their meanings vary a lot, historically and contextually. For instance, in Greek law, *hubris* was a form of violence, the shaming or humiliating treatment applied to another person, and not necessarily a deed of impiety. It did not involve the transcendental element. *Hamartia*, from a Greek verb meaning *to err* or the act of "missing the target", was also the term later used for *sin* in New Testament Greek: "The Greek word used to translate the Hebrew *chattat* (sin) was […] *hamartia*, referring to the missing of a mark with bow and arrow: a lack of skill, not a morally culpable act" (Paulson, 2007: 34). We could use this etymological curiosity for better understanding the *ontological* nature of sin as perceived by Christianity (and, to a certain extent, Greek tragedy gives us a foretaste of this Christian meaning).

There have been various interpretations of Aristotle's use of *hamartia* – as moral flaw, flaw of character or as an error of judgment. The last one appears to be the most appropriate. In Chapter 13 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle explains that *hamartia* is more a feature of the plot than of the character, and it is what engenders the change of fortune likely to arouse the feeling of *phobos* (fear) and *eleos* (pity) in the audience. At the same time, the concept is closely linked to the type of character that is best suited for tragedy: one which is not entirely good or innocent, but neither is he entirely bad, so as not to generate indignation instead of pity and fear:

> There remains, then, the character between these two extremes, - that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error [hamartia] or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous, - a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families. (Aristotle, 1997: 23)

Larry D. Bouchard details the interplay between *hubris* and *hamartia* in connection with the outward and inward nature of evil. The Greek notion of *ate* (blindness, delusion) should also be taken into account:

> The symbols of *ate* and *hamartia*, of blindness and faultless error, disclose first what Ricoeur calls the externality of evil. Evil is already there; it is experienced in tragic crises as transcending the horizon of our own autonomous freedom. There is, second, the internality of evil, symbolized by *hubris*. Internality appears first in the persisting sense of our accountability not only to culpable fault but even to unwitting errors where there is little question of culpability. A god may distort our minds and incline our deeds, but they are still our minds and our deeds. Internality appears most strikingly in *hubris*, with its connotations of angry violence and pride which erupts furiously from the depths of the human spirit and which may be rationalized in ritual, legal systems, and art. (Bouchard, 1989: 48)

Most scholars today agree that we should not approach tragedy with any preconceived notions, even if they bear the stamp of authoritative figures like Aristotle, Aristophanes (the author of *The Frogs*, where a view on the history of tragedy as grandeur and decadence is for the first time advanced) or Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*)[1].

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[1] To these, I should add George Steiner's *Death of Tragedy* (1996) and the whole "death of tragedy myth". For this argument, see Thomas F. Van Laan (1991).

Many tragedies from the corpus of extant 32 plays do not actually fit in the scheme of the "perfect" or ideal tragedy as outlined by Aristotle in the *Poetics*: "There is no single pattern for the tragic action" says Ruth Scodel (2010: 12) and the "*hamartia* plot" (Scodel, 2010: 16) seems to be one among others (the revenge plot or the recognition plot…).

Aesthetically rich and non-dogmatic as it was, Greek tragedy was no less a "genuine theatre of ideas" (cf. Arrowsmith, 1964: 1), without becoming discursive, for the playwrights would use the *scene* as a vehicle for thought: "a theatre of dramatists whose medium of thought was the stage, who used the whole machinery of the theatre as a way of *thinking*, critically and constructively, about their world" (Arrowsmith, 1964: 1). *Problematization* was thus an „in-built part of the genre", which was also a "privileged locus of religious exploration" (Sourvinou-Inwood, 2003: 12). The myths exploited by the tragic poets dealt with error and sin in a way that went beyond the scope of individual significance. Incest, parricide or anthropophagy were acts whose consequences affected the perpetrators but also the community they belonged to. The very meaning of culture (civilization) was put into question: "In many ways, tragic form has always explored the barbarism at the core of the democratic polis." (Taxidou, 2004: 8)

Lately, rewriting has been theorized mostly in connection with postmodernism (cf. Moraru, 2001, Cărăuş, 2003). Only two items of the corpus are likely to be assimilated to a postmodernist poetics, due to their revisionist propensity: Steven Berkoff's *Greek* and Christa Wolf's *Medea*. But for the purposes of this analysis, I am working with a looser concept of modernism and modernity, which includes, in fact postmodernity, putting aside, for now, the finer distinctions between the two literary movements. In fact, Matei Călinescu has discussed the notion of rewriting in this more general framework:

> Of course, modern (modernist, postmodernist) modes of rewriting add some new twists to older kinds of textual transformations: a certain playful, hide-and-seek type of indirection, a tongue-in-cheek seriousness, an often respectful and honorific irony, and an overall tendency toward oblique and even secret or quasi-secret textual reference. (Călinescu, 1997: 243)

When tackling the central issue of error, either in the form of *hubris* or of *hamartia*, modern drama rarely surpasses the classical models, in terms of subtlety and complexity (and hence, the *literariness* of drama). With the great tragic poets, the tragic *per se* results from ambiguity and ambivalence in that *no man's land* situated between fatality and freedom, between

predetermination and the freewill of individuals. It is also where *tragic irony* (cf. Popescu (Pascu) (1999) is born, as, for instance, in Oedipus's paradoxical situation, of being at the same time guilty and innocent. The terrible events befalling Oedipus involve *hamartia* in the most typical sense: Oedipus's is a tragic error, because he really strives to hinder the fulfilment of the prophecy (predicting that he will kill his father and marry his own mother) but it is his efforts that eventually bring about the much dreaded destiny. Oedipus's heroic stature and presumed innocence were such that Nietzsche did not even admit that there was a connection between Oedipus's story and the Greeks' ideas about sin:

> Sophocles saw the most suffering character on the Greek stage, the unhappy Oedipus, as the noble man who is predestined for error and misery despite his wisdom, but who finally, through his terrible suffering, exerts a magical and beneficial power that continues to prevail after his death. The noble man does not sin, the profound poet wishes to tell us: through his actions every law, every natural order, the whole moral order can be destroyed, and through these actions a higher magical circle of effects is drawn, founding a new world on the ruins of the old, now destroyed. This is what the poet, insofar as he is also a religious thinker, wishes to say to us: as a poet, he first presents us with a wonderfully intricate legal knot which the judge slowly unravels, piece by piece, to his own ruin; such is the truly Hellenic delight in this dialectical unravelment that it casts a sense of triumphant cheerfulness over the full work, and takes the sting from all the terrible premises of the plot. (Nietzsche 1993: 46-47)

The most important thing is that although Oedipus is regarded as a victim of the cruel gods, he still takes responsibility for his actions. This fact becomes obvious at the end of the play, when he inflicts a terrible punishment upon himself, by gouging his eyes out. The inescapable nature of fate (and sometimes, the ancestral curse plaguing later generations) does not annihilate human agency. Oedipus is not a puppet of destiny, but remains a full ethical subject, even in his downfall. The humbling effect of divine *nemesis* suggests, in fact, a rebirth of the innermost self, which is finally able to shed the pompous mask of self-reliance and self-righteousness. The Greeks believed in what they called *pathei mathos*, "learning through suffering" (cf. the Chorus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*). This epiphanic moment, this sudden insight into the workings of destiny that is gained by the protagonist is a version of what Aristotle called *anagnorisis* or *recognition*, except that in this context it has an exclusively inward, spiritual meaning. Oedipus has blinded himself so as not to endure the shame and

horror of seeing his parents in the underworld, or the offspring he had produced:

> […] uttering words like these:
> "No more shall ye behold such sights of woe,
> Deeds I have suffered and myself have wrought;
> Henceforward quenched in darkness shall ye see
> Those ye should ne'er have seen; now blind to those
> Whom, when I saw, I vainly yearned to know." (Sophocles, 1912: 52)

This Greek culture of guilt and accountability will be, however, deconstructed in modern rewrites, which are more convergent with a culture of deculpabilization and even lack of responsibility; or what the French sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky (1992) termed the "twilight of duty" (explained in the subtitle of the book as "the new, pain-free ethos of the democratic era"). That is why, in most cases, the playwright's irony is directed not just, intertextually, towards the canonical model, but also, satirically, towards the contemporary characters who can no longer elicit an Aristotelian response, the fear and pity of the audience, let alone their admiration. This is the case of Jean Cocteau's *Infernal Machine* (*La Machine Infernale*), first published in 1934, a reverential parody to Sophocles' *Oedipus King*. Humour, grotesque and anachronism[2] are a few devices employed by the avant-garde author in order to emphasize the distance between the unworthy present and the mythical past. Contamination of intertextual references is also used as a means to enhance the meanings of the play, but also the comic effects: thus, Laius's ghost "haunts" the walls of the city just like the ghost of Hamlet's father, except that poor Laius is not able to get his message through (he wants to warn Jocasta about the unlawful wedding that destiny has in store for her), due to the guards' stupidity and Jocasta's frivolity.

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[2] This strategy, in particular, allows Cocteau to obtain some interesting effects. For example, when a mother talking to the Sphinx invokes a cliché more appropriate for European countries in the inter-war period than for fifth-century Athens: „The Matron: I tell you, my dear, what we want is a man of action. […] What we want is a ruler to fall from the sky, marry her, and kill the beast; someone to make an end of corruption, lock up Creon and Tiresias, improve the state of finance and liven up the people, someone who would care for the people and save us, yes, that's it, save us. ..." (Cocteau, 1981: 856). Anachronism is also used in Giraudoux' *Electre* and in Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*. In the latter play, for instance, Antigone and Ismene drink coffee, Eteocles and Polynices frequent night clubs, but all these modern details are projected on the same ancient tapestry inherited from Sophocles, the combination of features giving a more "universal" and timeless quality to the plot.

Some elements of the original are exaggerated by a method of caricature: Jocasta has become the ideal candidate for psychoanalysis, with her unhealthy inclination to fall in love with younger men (first, a soldier, and then Oedipus himself, the saviour of the city). Cocteau's Oedipus is not just proud, reckless, overconfident and unaware of his own shortcomings, but is also shallow, a coward and downright ridiculous:

> Tiresias: […] My
> lord, your auguries look black, very black.
> I must put you on your guard.
>
> Oedipus: Well, if I didn't expect that!
> Anything else would have surprised me.
> This is not the first time the oracles have
> set about me and my audacity has thwarted
> them. (Cocteau, 1981: 866)

He cynically refuses to accept responsibility for the killing of the old man who would later be revealed to be his own father. He therefore tells the Sphinx, in the same style totally devoid of solemnity, that he believes in his star:

> The Sphinx: Yes, isn't it ... it's dreadful to kill.
>
> Oedipus: Oh, well, it wasn't my fault and
> I think no more about it. The thing is to
> clear all obstacles, to wear blinkers, and not
> to give way to self-pity. Besides, there is
>   my star. (Cocteau, 1981: 859)

His main motivation for leaving Corinth is not merely to avoid the fulfilment of the oracle (while still believing that his adoptive parents were his biological parents), but his irrepressible thirst for adventure:

> Oedipus: […] At first this
> oracle fills you with horror, but my head is
> firmly fixed on my shoulders! I reflected
> on the absurdity of the whole thing. […] Briefly, I soon forgot my
> fears, and, I own, profiting by this threat of
> parricide and incest, I fled the court so that
> I might satisfy my thirst for the unknown. (Cocteau, 1981: 859)

The characters have a totally new take on destiny, conveyed by the impersonal *Voice* at the beginning of the play. Fate is not only arbitrary or disproportionate in relation to the characters' mistakes or conscious transgressions, but it is in fact preposterous and justified only by the sadistic propensities of the gods. What in Greek drama could appear as fatalism and a pessimistic belief in absolute predestination has been contaminated by the desperate nihilism of a certain variety of modernism:

> The Voice: For the gods really to enjoy themselves, their victim must fall from a great height. […] Spectator, this machine, you see here wound up to the full in such a way that the spring will slowly unwind the whole length of a human life, is one of the most perfect constructed by the infernal gods for the mathematical destruction of a mortal. (Cocteau, 1981: 843)

Several decades later, Eddy's reaction after realizing his crime (Eddy being the modern avatar of Oedipus) in Steven Berkoff's *Greek* is symptomatic of the new hedonistic mindset:

> poor Eddy […] hold on to me / hold on to me and I will hold on to you and I'll never let you go, hold on to me, does it matter that you are my mother, I'll love you even if I am your son / do we cause each other pain, do we kill each other, do we maim and kill, do we inflict vicious wounds on each other? We only love so it doesn't matter, mother, mother it doesn't matter. Why should I tear my eyes out Greek style, why should you hang yourself / have you seen a child from a mother and son / no. Have I? No. Then how do we know that it's bad / should I be so mortified? (Berkoff, 1994: 137-38)

Not only is he not appalled at his own incest, but he even chooses to remain with the woman who is his natural mother, all in the name of "love". One could say that Steven Berkoff's *Greek* (first performed in 1980) is a bawdy, shocking retelling of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which glorifies incest. Berkoff's own note does everything to ensure that the spectators will feel empathetic to the character and thus to his new anti-cultural ideology (as the play will make clear, Eddy is not only unrepentant about his parricide and incest, but also a racist and a man with Nazi sympathies, "inherited" from his adoptive father):

> Oedipus found a city in the grip of a plague and sought to rid the city of its evil centre represented by the Sphinx. Eddy seeks to reaffirm his beliefs and inculcate a new order of things with his vision and life-affirming energy. His passion for life is inspired by the love he feels for his woman,

and his detestation of the degrading environment he inherited. If Eddy is a warrior who holds up the smoking sword as he goes in, attacking all that he finds polluted, at the same time he is at heart an ordinary young man with whom many I know will find identification. The play is also a love story. (Berkoff, 1994: 97)

In writing my 'modern' Oedipus it wasn't too difficult to find contemporary parallels, but when I came to the 'blinding' I paused, since in my version it wouldn't have made sense, given Eddy's non-fatalistic disposition, to have him embark on such an act of self-hatred – unless I slavishly aped the original. (Berkoff, 1994: 98)

Somehow predictably, modern dramatists are prone to rethinking the moral casuistry of well-known tragedies in psychological terms. In *Mourning Becomes Electra*, his 1931 re-enactment of *The Oresteia*, Eugene O'Neill was looking for a modern equivalent for the Greek sense of doom, but opted for a Freudian drama of incestuous desire and mother-daughter rivalry. In his 1937 *Electre*, Jean Giraudoux portrayed Agamemnon's daughter as a young woman ambivalent and even hostile towards her mother, even before she knew about Clytemnestra's murder of her husband and her adultery with Aegistheus.

But some writers go beyond psychology in their palimpsestic endeavours. To Jean-Paul Sartre, the texture of the sole extant trilogy of the Greek corpus, Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, becomes, after significant transformations, the vehicle of his new existentialist philosophy, but in literary guise. His 1943[3] play *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*) reframes the theme of crime and retribution in a totally new ideological context, where freedom, responsibility and commitment are the key-words. At the same time, the archaic and seemingly innocuous topic was meant as a veiled critique against the French establishment's attitude during the Nazi occupation. Just as Aegisthus and Clytemnestra succeeded in instilling fear and repentance in the hearts of the inhabitants of Argos for their own murder of 15 years ago, the Vichy government expected France to repent and assume responsibility for their own defeat. The tyrannical rule of Aegistheus in Argos, which is endorsed by Jupiter, the "god of flies and death", relies on a twisted sense of guilt and repentance. Contemporary viewers and readers were easily able to draw the parallel between the mythical context (where Sartre inserts an unusual element) and the historical context of the German occupation, as Nicolae Steinhardt does in *Electra contra Pétain (Electra Opposing Pétain)* from his volume *Articole burgheze (Bourgeois Articles)*: "The flies that

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[3] This is also the year when Sartre published his philosophical opus magnum, *Being and Nothingness.*

Orest takes away with him by an operation of magic incantation will be driven away by France in 1944 through military force. Under occupation, Sartre could not give a different ending to his tragedy." (2008: 393)

Sartre's many subtle allusions to the situation of occupied France might be lost on readers today, especially if they fail to reconstruct this multi-layered context. In this case, I think Orestes' choice to murder his mother while refusing to feel any remorse might seem bizarre or even perverse. But his motivation is not revenge, as with his ancient counterpart. He feels no desire to kill Aegistheus and Clytemnestra, but he does it willingly when he realizes that it would be the only means to free the people of Argos by taking with him the flies and the Furies. Right before striking Aegistheus, when the latter shows his amazement that Agamemnon's son can kill without fear, knowing that Zeus himself condemns this act, Orestes replies: Justice is a matter between men, and I need no god to teach it to me. It's right to stamp you out, like the foul brute you are, and to free the people of Argos from your evil influence. It is right to restore their sense of human dignity to them. (Sartre, 1989: 57)

Obviously, since justice has no longer any connection with religion, *hamartia* is not conceived as the transgression of a divine law. This is another aspect whereby modern appropriations of tragedy differ greatly from their textual archetypes, because in the mind of the ancient Greeks the laws and customs, which were part of the social fabric, had their origin in the will of gods or were sanctioned by those. Of course, to the atheist Sartre, such a context of *hamartia* and retribution does not make any sense. Orestes tells Zeus that "The most cowardly of murderers is he who feels remorse." (Sartre, 1989: 64)

Even when Orestes wants to spread the "gospel" of inner freedom and take upon himself the sins which tormented the inhabitants, he does not become by this a Christ figure: he will not atone for people's wrongdoings and he refuses to suffer, in the process. His revelation of being born free and able to give himself meaning, apart from any external ethics, is what threatens both the repressive regime in Argos and Jupiter's domination. Thus the classical plot becomes a possibility of conveying basic tenets of existentialism, as when Orestes claims that "human life begins on the far side of despair." (Sartre, 1989: 66)

Sometimes, the palimpsestic revision takes the form of a radical rehabilitation of a villain. Thus, Medea, whom we are used to identify as the paragon of infanticide mothers, at least since Euripides' theatrical version of the myth (431 B.C.), is regarded by the German author Christa Wolf as a victim of slander and scapegoating in a patriarchal society. Clearly rooted in

a particular ideology, namely, feminism, Wolf's novel *Medea. Stimmen* (1996)[4] has some genuine arguments extracted from ancient sources prior to Euripides' play: the children were killed by Corinthians, who then spread the rumour that their exiled mother had done it. The writer imagines that Medea had discovered the body of a sacrificed child, the awful secret of "civilized" Corinth. One original method that Wolf employs is the juxtaposition of voices and therefore of perspectives on the same topic. However, this device emerges, eventually, as a monologic orchestration of a pseudo-polyphonic apparatus which is, besides, less flexible and interactive that the rhetorical *agon* we find in drama.

A few observations on the poetics of modern palimpsests

There is a great diversity of intertextual strategies in the corpus of rewrites and each of the authors understands to embellish or, on the contrary, simplify the classical hypotext in a different manner. The French authors tend to preserve the original plot in its broad outline while adding many details, inventing new characters and lending the protagonists a deeper, richer subjectivity. Such a detail meant to humanize the tragic hero for the taste of the modern readership is the one provided by Anouilh in Antigone's confession that she had used Polynice's toy shovel to cover his body with dirt (Anouilh, 2006: 28). O'Neill and Berkoff "modernize" differently, by finding different cultural settings, in later times: New England in the aftermath of the Civil War, and London during the seventies, respectively. The area where most of these authors manifest their appetite for textual metamorphosis is the one concerning *motivations*. It is also the field where the issue of *error* is touched upon in the most consistent way: once the motivations ascribed to the characters' acts are changed or nuanced, the vision on their sin or guilt also changes. Sometimes the very core of that personality is transformed accordingly, and, in this respect, the two notions used by Genette in *Palimpsestes*, *transmotivation* and *transvaluation* (1982: 418) are inextricably connected. In the corpus in question, a negative character can become a positive character (or, at least, not as bad as before), while a hero can acquire some sinister overtones (and thus, gain in complexity and realism): for the first situation, one can think of Egistheus in Giraudoux's *Electre*, because he reaches a point where he is ready to redeem his past, and also Sartre's Aegistheus in *Les Mouches*, because, tired of his own alienating public role, he allows himself to be

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[4] The German title means *Medea. Voices*, but the English version (1998) has been renamed *Medea. A Modern Retelling.*

killed by Orestes, refusing the way out proposed by Jupiter. Another example is Creon in Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*: he genuinely wishes to save his niece, and gives her many arguments to renounce her intransigence, but ultimately, the statesman prevails and he puts her to death. He is a reluctant tyrant: "Kings, my girl, have other things to do than to surrender themselves to their private feelings" (Anouilh, 2006: 31). It is very questionable if his attitude makes him less hubristic than his ancient prototype, in Sophocles' model (especially when we take into consideration that Sophocles' Creon eventually realizes his transgression and repents, whereas his modern correspondent, after his son and wife commit suicide because of his own stubbornness, goes on to attend another council meeting).

For the second situation, when the stature of an outstanding character is diminished, we can invoke the example of Oedipus, both in Cocteau's and Berkoff's versions. Giraudoux's Electra and Anouilh's Antigone have become less perfect and more ambiguous[5], but also easier to empathize with. Without a clear ideology or a creed which would be worth sacrificing her life for, Antigone was still meant to symbolize French Resistance (the play was for the first time performed in 1944). In this context, Antigone's resistance to Creon's tyrannical edict acquires a new resonance. But Anouilh pays attention to all the factors involved in the drama, including the (formerly) unreasonable Creon, who has now become a symbolic figure for the collaborationists making excuses for themselves.

In modern palimpsests, the intertextual and hypertextual transformations operated upon the classical models are, mostly, ideologically driven and ideologically motivated. The underlying theodicies are equally divergent: by *theodicy* we understand, of course, the justification of evil and sufferance in the world. Two other important elements of tragedy are overturned by modern rewriting: social elitism and religious piety. Concerning the first aspect, many twentieth-century theatrical palimpsests are illustrations of the so-called "bourgeois tragedy", while Berkoff has even turned the lofty habitus of classical theatre into a "cockney carnival" (Cross, 2004:132). In fact, all modern palimpsests will raise the issue of a more *democratic* cast of characters, with commoners having sometimes greater importance or displaying deeper insight than kings and aristocrats.

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[5] For example, Antigone admits Creon's argument that the ritual of burial is in fact a "litany of gibberish" (Anouilh 36), but this doesn't make her change her mind about her duty towards her brother, just as she remained relentless when her own sister Ismene reminded her that Polynice was not a good brother and he never thought about her. Contrary to her Greek model, Anouilh's Antigone does what she does "For nobody. For myself" (Anouilh 36). Genette has argued that the conflict between Creon and Antigone becomes one between a "cynical politician" and an "infantile nihilist" (Genette 469).

As a rule, common people acquire choral functions in this type of rewriting. Or, one could say that their presence compensates for the absence of a proper chorus: thus happens with the Beggar (Le Mendiant) in Giraudoux's *Electra*. Contrary to the ancient chorus, which usually conversed with the protagonist, offering support or trying to dissuade them from immoral and unreasonable acts, this character, invented by Giraudoux, is a sort of prophetic consciousness, who also has access to the other characters' inner worlds. Even though he is no longer a representative of the community, of the city (like the chorus of elderly men in *Oedipus King* by Sophocles or the chorus of Corinthian women in Euripides' *Medea*) the Beggar functions more as a *raisonneur*, the author's mouthpiece. In Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, a somewhat similar strategy is used, since a single actor called the Chorus (Le Prologue in the original) is used in order to introduce characters or interact with Creon. He also, at some point, launches into a metatheatrical tirade, taking pains to distinguish between genuine tragedy and melodrama. (cf. Anouilh 26-27)

Concluding remarks

These palimpsests are not simply derivative or repetitive, but innovative and re-creative. Of course, true *literariness* is incompatible with a pre-existing ideology. Fortunately, even the writers whose allegiance to a certain "cause" is well-known (existentialism for Sartre and feminism for Wolf), do not mechanically apply a thesis to their literary worlds, but make the ideas derive from the characters' interactions among themselves or from their inner musings and ruminations. The writers' skill in preserving the ambiguity of literature is crucial for ensuring the readers' freedom and autonomy in interpreting the works and drawing their own conclusions, even if the "feast" of (explicit) ideas is much more lavish in the modern rewrites than it was in the classical models.

According to modern authors taking up the tragic myths in a totally new form, the *hubris* belongs in fact to the gods, that is, to transcendence, or the universe, and, most often than not, to society itself, which, because of its many norms and prohibitions, ends up by crushing the individual. Human error is no longer the means of distinguishing barbarism from civilization (as in the case of the – sometimes unwitting - violation of cultural taboos in Greek tradition) but a reaction to (what they perceive to be) the pathological condition of culture itself. In aesthetic terms, modern revisions of the canonical texts might not generate the tragic emotions analysed by Aristotle as pity and fear or the cathartic sublimation of these emotions, but they

often stimulate intellectual debate while still allowing a degree of empathy with the characters, even in their new, anti-heroic (and almost farcical) disguise.

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Rezumat: Deşi rareori dezbătute în termeni expliciţi**,** *hubris* şi *hamartia*, două concepte-cheie ale tragediei greceşti, fundamentează chiar şi versiunile moderne ale miturilor tragice clasice. Corpusul de texte analizate aici (Jean Anouilh, Jean Cocteau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Christa Wolf, Steven Berkoff) revelează o nouă înţelegere a ceea ce determină tragicul în viaţa omului. Articolul argumentează, dintr-o perspectivă comparatistă, că implicaţiile acestei importante metamorfoze sunt considerabile, atât în ceea ce priveşte mentalitatea modernă, cât şi cu referire la genul tragic în sine, care va fi în cele din urmă redefinit prin redimensionările intertextuale la care este supus. Contextele în care are loc rescrierea (în special cel politic) sunt importante în fiecare situaţie.

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The Framework of Truth and Error in
George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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Abstract: Expanding the moment in which beautiful speculations stand on the border between truth and error is a common feature of George Orwell's work that unlocks the distance between fact and fiction, truth and error, definiteness and indefiniteness. In an epoch where nothing different could be made publicly or lived openly, a Ministry of Truth employee, Winston Smith, encouraged himself to glance at the spaces in between language and discover another variant of the world he knew. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* uses the errors of human behaviour, echoes the very essence of post modernism and transcends the drama form.

Keywords: *error, truth, fiction, experience.*

By the time of the publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) George Orwell was already known as the author of *Animal Farm* (1945) and the instant success of the dystopian work in the United States of America and Great Britain came as no surprise. Although the novel is basically the product of Orwell's political experience, critics debated over its sources as ranging from William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, to Yevgeny Ivanovich Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) or even Jack London's *Iron Heel* (1908). Written toward the end of his literary career the two above mentioned dystopian novels that also brought him his fame encompass best his political beliefs. However, his life experiences were the ones that stood at the base of his imaginative force since he apparently underwent vicious torments at his preparatory school, St. Cyprian's in East Sussex: "It is not the case, by any means that these relatively mild forms of tyranny are worthy of any close comparison with Big Brother's nightmarish rule, but all of these elements helped to give Orwell a certain feel for the life which he describes in the novel, a life which is ultimately the work of his imagination, but which is based on real experience" (cf. Shelden, 1991); he also faced brutality and violence as a member of the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) encapsulates the experiences he lived during the 1920s and 1930s, period when he deliberately moved from place to place and voluntarily lived in poverty in order to acquire the taste of the lower class existence.

Told from a third person omniscient point of view, limited to Winston Smith's perspective, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is made up of three sections that slowly escalade to Winston being captured and his loss of humanity. Humanity, the core of the narrative skeleton, is not to be ignored even when thinking about the author and the construction of his work. The main text of the novel is backed up by an appendix that offers explanations about the origins, development, and aims of Newspeak, the language of INGSOC, whose purpose is to minimize the English language to a few hundred words: "[the appendix is] a symbol that the novel does not, in a sense, *end*, but loops back on itself, the eternal story of any member of the novel's (non-)culture. The perfunctory nature of the description constructs language as a machine – a characteristically Orwellian denial of the human element." (cf. Bloom, 2009)

Having left no clue to the origin of the title, it is hard not to speculate on the influence Orwell's life and political philosophy had on the piece of work and shortly after its publication the author had to defend himself against the accusations from the lefties:

> My recent novel is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter) but as a show-up of the perversions to which a centralized economy is liable and which have already been partly realized in Communism and Fascism. I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily will arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it could arrive. I believe also that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences. The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, if not fought against, could triumph anywhere. (Orwell, 1968: 502)

The novel introduces first the initiatory steps of Winston's treason and the feelings and inner struggles he passes through in building his rebellion against an oppressive system. The middle section presents Orwell's protagonist in the position of a man in love and the dynamics of his relationship with Julia while the last part foreshadows his capture, exhibits in detail the tortures he is submitted to and shows how his reprogramming finally discloses any connection to Julia or his own humanity. When looking closely at the protagonist, we find out little about his background: he is a thirty-nine-year-old Outer Party member who at the time of the narration has already committed the "thoughtcrime" that dooms him to perdition. He

works for the quizzically called Ministry of Truth as a rewriter of historical facts and events that do not serve the Party's interests. Whereas for his physical appearance it seems that his body perfectly incarnates the oppression he feels from the Party – he is bald and pale:

> He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended. (Orwell, 1968: 5)

and has a hunch and a varicose ulcer just above his ankle: "The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way" (Orwell, 1968: 5). Still married to his wife, he is reluctant to divorce due to public attention. Winston has little memory about the existence prior to Big Brother's dreadful rule but has a fascinating inner life that he transposes into his diary, the first sign of rebellion:

> The thing that he was about to do was to open a diary. This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour cam Winston fitted a nib into the penholder and sucked it to get the grease off. The pen was an archaic instrument, seldom used even for signatures, and he had procured one, furtively and with some difficulty, simply because of a feeling that the beautiful creamy paper deserved to be written on with a real nib instead of being scratched with an ink-pencil. Actually he was not used to writing by hand. Apart from very short notes, it was usual to dictate everything into the speak-write which was of course impossible for his present purpose. He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was the decisive act. In small clumsy letters he wrote: April 4th, 1984. (Orwell, 1968: 6)

From the first section we also learn that life in 1984 Oceania is hard, starting from the lack of electricity for household purposes (it is only available to constantly run the telescreens that could not be muted or turned off unless one wanted to be the subject of a Thought Police investigation) to propaganda slogans that appeared everywhere in an obsessive manner (the pyramid shaped building of the Ministry of Truth has three slogans inscribed on its façade: "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength") and the control of the Party over the language. The

ironic titling is present throughout the entire novel: The Ministry of Truth manipulates facts in the Party's favor, The Ministry of Peace handles the necessity of war with the enemy, The Ministry of Love keeps the law and order while The Ministry of Plenty limits the food rations and destroys the surplus. Even if the Party advertises the benefits it brings to the people, the reality of the inferior everyday products and of the restrictive circumstances they have to endure destroys the Party and the way it is perceived by the oppressed people. The definite characteristic of Winston Smith's personality stands in his inability to doublethink, transforming him into "Oceania's last humanist" having no remarkable feature "except for his unique inner life:"

> Behind these aspects of Winston's inner sense of values is the larger idea that individual feeling is the most essential and desirable reality available. It is this idea that leads Winston, at his first and only real meeting with O'Brien until his arrest, to propose his toast, "To the past." The Party has persuaded people that "mere impulses, mere feeling, were of no account"; on the other hand, Winston is loyal to the values of an earlier generation – like his mother, who had assumed that "what mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself." (Watt, 1983: 108)

It is also through an error in the design of his apartment that Winston comes to actually accomplish his act of treason. Crouched inside the space that is out of the telescreen's reach Orwell's protagonist, driven by the events from the daily Two Minutes Hate, starts filling half a page of his diary with the words: "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER." His rebellion is interrupted by a knock on the door and the request of his neighbor, Mrs. Parsons to help unclog her sink. This time a foreshadowing truth is uttered and lingers in the mind of the protagonist; the two indoctrinated children of the neighbor, observe the fear present in Winston's attitude and behaviour and call him Goldstein, anticipating the end of the novel and even making Winston acknowledge that he was "already dead": "It seemed to him that it was only now, when he had begun to be able to formulate his thoughts, that he had taken the decisive step. The consequences of every act are included in the act itself. He wrote: Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death" (Orwell, 1968: 74). His greatest pleasure in life however was to work although the socialist idea that the future of society lies in the hands of the common workers is once again deceiving; his job of rewriting history contributes to the corruption of the society he belongs to:

> Most of it was a tedious routine, but included in it there were also jobs so difficult and intricate that you could lose yourself in them as in the depths of a mathematical problem – delicate pieces of forgery in which you had nothing to guide you except your knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say. (Orwell, 1968: 27)

Winston realizes that his actions of handling the historical truths, since he is aware of the reality that he can still remember, actually give birth to different layers of untruths.

The romance that begins to take place between Winston and his co-worker Julia on the corridor, at the canteen and at a parade must be concealed from the rest of the world since interpersonal bonding is strictly forbidden. The crowd that has gathered to watch the transportation of war prisoners into the city is the perfect shield for the two lovers, psychological prisoners themselves, to arrange a romantic meeting. Their loneliness and alienation in the middle of a crowd of humans reveals Orwell's totalitarian narrative line:

> [T]he regime strives to become the heir of the moribund family and systematically appropriates the emotional capital of that institution. Its leader, Big Brother, combines the qualities of disciplinarian father and loyal sibling. Even the invented conspiracy against him is called 'the Brotherhood'. (Zwerdling, 1984: 95)

As Julia and Winston's affair gets stronger he confesses about his lack of hope for the future:

> We are the dead,' he said. 'We're not dead yet,' said Julia prosaically. 'Not physically. Six months, a year – five years, conceivably. I am afraid of death. You are young, so presumably you're more afraid of it than I am. Obviously we shall put it off as long as we can. But it makes very little difference. So long as human beings stay human, death and life are the same thing.' (Orwell, 1968: 31)

while she tries to convince him of the opposite: "Oh, rubbish! Which would you sooner sleep with, me or a skeleton? Don't you enjoy being alive? Don't you like feeling: This is me, this is my hand, this is my leg, I'm real, I'm solid, I'm alive! Don't you like THIS?'" (Orwell, 1968: 31). After their inevitable seizure Julia is beaten up and taken away (this representing also the last time he ever sees her) and Winston is taken to Miniluv where he is interrogated and disciplined by O'Brien who convinces him he is "mentally deranged." O'Brien further explains to him that the Party commands the

past because it also supervises the physical evidence of the past, as well as the memories of individuals. Winston's inability of mentally disciplining himself makes him undesirable and not "sane" according the Party's standards. This is why he has to be changed and made to learn humility and retribution. When asked by his torturer how many fingers he is holding up, Winston answers truthfully – four – but O'Brien accentuates the need of being attentive of his senses as the answer may vary depending on the wish of the Party:

> 'You are a slow learner, Winston,' said O'Brien gently. 'How can I help it?' he blubbered. 'How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four.' 'Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane.' (Orwell, 1968: 166)

At the end of the process of reeducation, Orwell's protagonist is reprogrammed to do everything the Party wants except for actually loving Big Brother. This has to be accomplished in Room 101 where Winston's worst fear takes place: he is locked inside a cage that permits rats to access his face. This is also the moment he betrays Julia and surrenders. Some critics however defend the idea that his submission takes place because of his own will and not necessarily because of the unbearable fear:

> Orwell makes it clear that at a deeper level Winston wills his own degradation because of his wish to submit. He knows he will be caught, has no chance of escape, yet deliberately chooses a path that can only lead him to a place where he will be – in his own words – 'utterly without power of any kind.'... And when O'Brien stands revealed not as a fellow conspirator but as an agent of the regime, he says to Winston in words that ring true, 'You knew this.... Don't deceive yourself. You did know it – you have always known it.'" (Zwerdling, 1984: 100)

In the end Winston Smith the individual is not only crushed but entirely rewritten and his failure reverberates George Orwell's own apprehension against the lack of power of the individual to define his own reality:

> Orwell's fixation with 'telling the truth' and standing against the crowd, are the response of a man who personally felt the power of the crowd over his own mind. Broader historical experiences of his time must have convinced Orwell that the power of collective solipsism was great indeed. (Zuckert, 1989: 57)

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Rezumat: Dezvoltarea momentului în care speculațiile stau la granița dintre adevăr și eroare reprezintă o trăsătură comună a activității lui George Orwell, care deblochează distanța dintre realitate și ficțiune, adevăr și eroare, precizie și imprecizie. Într-o epocă în care nimic diferit nu poate fi spus în mod public sau trăit fățiș, un angajat al Ministerului Adevărului, Winston Smith se încurajează să privească spațiile din interiorul limbii și să descopere o altă variantă a lumii pe care o știa. *O mie nouă sute optzeci și patru* folosește erorile comportamentului uman, rezonează însăși esența postmodernismului și depășește forma de teatru.

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Frailty and Error in Paul Auster's *The City of Glass*

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Abstract: This paper focuses upon the various narrative and metaphoric strategies Auster uses in *City of Glass*, the first novella of *The New York Trilogy*, in order to expand on the significances of the archetypal error and the possibilities of ontological redemption as represented in this short-story that deceivingly adopts the detective story formula.

Keywords: *metaphysical detective story; meta-error; negotiable truth; ontological fallacy.*

The permanent search for truth and meaning in a postmodern world that condemns the human beings to alienation and confusion, to misunderstanding and incompleteness, and confronts them with their own failures and errors is one of Auster's favourite topics.

Unanimously acknowledged as a major representative of late twentieth century absurdism and existentialism, a skilled translator and literary critic, and generally appreciated for his original and intriguing narrative experiments, Paul Auster proposes his readers a fictional universe where modernism meets postmodernism and where realism, surrealism, fiction and metafiction overla This infinite interplay engenders infinite possibilities of reading and interpretation. The obsessive attempt to solve all mysteries at hand and make sense of every absurd circumstance in which his characters find themselves trapped, far from anchoring Auster's fiction in concreteness and objective realism makes it fully embrace ontological pluralism and ambiguity. The failure of this attempt belongs both to the protagonist who cannot find his way in a labyrinthine reality/metafiction and to the reader who gets lost in a palimpsestic text. Perhaps this is why all characters in Auster's novels and short stories fall short of grasping the definite answers they so desperately search for. This is the reason for which there is always something that escapes the reader's grasp, something which is either left unsaid or is simply indefinitely deferred. That is also why an entire range of errors, mistakes and failures permanently mars all characters' endeavours and searches inviting the reader to close analysis and problem-solving.

Looking for the elusive truth

This preference for enigma-solving and continuous epistemological search for truth inspired Auster to choose the attractive formula of the detective genre that usually appeals to the readers with the promise of offering credible answers to all the questions raised by the text. The concrete, palpable universe of the classic detective story with its meaningful clues and precise answers to precise questions seem to completely vanish in Auster's world where nothing is as it seems to be, no clues can be totally reliable and no answer seems to match the impossibly numerous questions and mysteries arisen in the course of a meandering, highly subjective adventure.

> The world of appearances which the crime discloses is the world of everyone except the villain, who has constructed the false appearances, and thus dissociated what seems to be from what is; and the detective, who deconstructs the false appearances and realigns seeming with being […] The narrator's world is one of happy normalcy, with normal explanations for all that normally happens. But the crime – the crime without a normal explanation – shatters this normalcy. Because the crime is inexplicable – how could this have happened? why? how could he (or she) have done this? – the safe, familiar world cracks, and chaos and old night threaten to descend. But then the detective intervenes and restores the light; he assimilates the anomalies into a reasonable, irrefutable narrative of quotidian causes and effects. (Van Dover, 2005: 131)

Auster reverses and changes the classical conventions of the detective story so that the entire search for truth the story relies on becomes in the end a desperate search for a sense of selfhood. The elements the metaphysical detective story relies upon are the general failure of the detective's endeavour, the textual fabric of the story/space/world, the objectification of the text, the elusive significance of the clues, the ambiguous identities and the openness of the ending (see Merivale and Sweeney, 1999: 8). The hero is asked to perform the difficult task of operating a disambiguation of the conflicting clues the story provides him with and deriving a range of valid significances out of the labyrinthine text that combines physical, metaphysical, textual or metatextual dimensions.

The *anti-detective story* formula, so whole-heartedly embraced by Paul Auster, is nothing but new in spite of its unconventional use of the traditional elements of crime fiction. McHale claims that, owing to its complete breakdown of detection rationality, Eco's *The Name of the Rose* could be taken as an anti-detective story, one among the first and the best

productions of the kind, that undermines the "adequacy of reason itself" (McHale, 2002: 150). The anti-detective story nourishes on most of the twentieth century philosophical trends and critical approaches of the text: the poststructuralist decentralisation of meaning, its distrust of clear cut binarisms (good/bad, victim/perpetrator, hero/narrator), of historic accuracy and historical textual truth, of uniqueness of truth, interpretation, reading etc. and of the conventional understanding of subjectivity, epistemology and reality. Unhappy with the term "anti-detective story", considered to be prone to confusions and misinterpretations, Merivale and Sweeney offer instead the formula of *metaphysical detective story*, deemed better fit to render the new problematic postmodern inquiring self.

Auster's idiosyncratic approach and unusual treatment of the detective genre transform it into something more challenging on different levels though still relying on its typical elements Merivale and Sweeney enumerate in their analysis of the metaphysical detective story: "the defeated sleuth", "the world, city, or text as labyrinth", "the purloined letter, embedded text, [and] *mise en abîme*", the "sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence", "the missing person [and] the double", and "the absence [. . .] or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation" (8). The *metaphysical detective story* Auster imagines is thus based on a strategy of pulverizing the truth and creating a circular fictional pattern which engenders a confusing sense of subjectivity and relativity. Nonexistent objectivity is said to be the central element at the core of Auster's metaphysical detective story along with a "plurality of subjective possibilities" (Nealon, 1999: 120). These possibilities play upon the ambiguous and problematic relationship between author and detective that renders the authorial intent the real generator of the narration to the detriment of logic deduction and rational judgment. The situation is further complicated by various other relations the author establishes with his own text, his fictional detective, his fictional narrator and with his diegetic or nondiegetic reader.

Factual mistakes

In *City of Glass* everything starts from the most common mistake of dialing a wrong number. "It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of the night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (Auster, 1987: 3). This is only the first mistake in a long series that will end in confusion, failure and ambiguous openness. The next mistake placed on the verge of ontological

and epistemological error is that of assuming a different identity, out of curiosity, and starting inhabiting and coping with a different world meant to change the hero/writer-now-turned-into-a-detective into an eternal hunter of the Truth.

The problem is that the high degree of ambiguity revealed by the metaphysical detective story does not allow the fictional detective/writer, or the reader himself, to be absolutely sure his acts are erroneous or not. There is a general dissolution of certainty and blurring of the definite boundaries between the white and black areas of a far from ideal world. "In our collective imagination, error is associated not just with shame and stupidity but also with ignorance, indolence, psychopathology, and moral degeneracy… Of all the things we are wrong about, this idea of error might well top the list. It is our meta-mistake: we are wrong about what it means to be wrong" (Schulz, 2010: 11-12). This meta-error seems to be the prevailing form of slippage in this elusive world Auster creates on the old, solid foundations of the detective genre, where people assume and discard identities as layers of dead skin and ambiguity becomes the norm.

In Auster's polymorphous universe where identities are mistakenly assumed, invented or re-invented, the person who answers the phone is a writer of mystery novels named Daniel Quinn. On picking up the phone he is surprisingly and disturbingly asked a simple question: "Is this Paul Auster?" (Auster, 1987: 7). He initially says no but on the second call he assumes the identity of this Paul Auster, who turns out to be a detective, and he is invited to undertake a tricky investigation based on the declaration of a man, Peter Stillman Jr. who suspects that his father, Peter Stillman Senior, a famous linguist, just released from prison, is going to kill him. Out of curiosity Quinn accepts to work on the case and follow the old scholar around New York, once he recognizes him, in order to prevent him from killing his son. The linguist had been imprisoned for having submitted his son to a strange linguistic experiment by having him isolated for nine years in the attempt to rediscover and bring his son back to the prelapsarian language.

Quinn is sent to the railway station in order to find Stillman with just an old photo as the only clue to recognize him. Trying to discover vague traces of resemblance Quinn finally settles on a particular person whom he suspects is the old linguist yet uncertain whether he was following the right Stillman or not. Quinn, the writer-turned detective, tries to find out the truth by disentangling the loose ends of so many premises, false hypotheses and conflicting clues; the final answer the reader is expected to be offered at the end of the story, in virtue of his putting together the ambiguous pieces of

more or less reliable information he is given, is whether the junior was lying or the old man was really mad.

In following the old man around the city, Quinn also tries to make sense of his random walks. There seems to be a concealed meaning in the old man's chaotic wanderings in the city and in his picking up discarded objects. Quinn meticulously puts down every little detail in a red notebook, especially bought for this task, a textual element meant to offer coherence and order, as well as a sense of cohesion to the three short stories in the volume. He closely analyses the trajectories of the old man's walks discovering in their physical traces on the map a series of odd letters OWEROBAB which he rearranges into the TOWER OF BABEL. After doing some research at Columbia Library Quinn discovers that the linguist's lifelong interest in recreating "man's true 'natural language'" (Auster, 1987: 33) is not a novelty since many other writers and philosophers of all times had the same idea and attempted to do the same thing with no significant positive results.

The utopian attempt to metaphorically rebuild the Tower of Babel, the object of his lifetime research, by reconstructing its original language and a prelapsarian sense of coherence, comes down to total failure. When Stillman disappears, Quinn is unable to go on with his detective work and asks "the real" Auster, the detective, for hel He discovers that Paul Auster is not really a detective as he had been told in the beginning, but a writer (whose wife happens to bear the same name as the wife of Paul Auster, the American writer himself – another confusing mixture of textual and factual information) who is investigating the problem of authorship in Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Ignorant of the fact that the old Stillman has committed suicide and Peter, the son, and his wife, have left the city, Quinn decides to resume his operation, now turned into a personal matter, and survey the Stillman residence, hidden in a blind alley. Reduced to destitution, homeless and broke, he takes shelter in the deserted house and soon finds himself prisoner in a dark chamber, with no desire to ever leave the place and animated by the strange wish to keep an accurate account of all his innermost thoughts. As his memory gradually fails him the only thing he is still able to do besides sleeping and thinking is writing in his red notebook, now turned into his only anchor to reality or to what is left of it. As the light begins to dwindle in his chamber (daylight is allowed to enter his room for ever shorter periods of time) and he gets closer to the end of his notebook he desperately attempts to simplify his words reducing them to the essential, to a sublimated idiom akin to the perfection of the original language.

The Tower of Babel functions as a permanent subtext in *The City of Glass* determining the way in which this novella might be read. Starting from its biblical connotations related to human excessive pride and fall, the myth of Babel seems to undermine any epistemological or ontological human endeavour undertaken in *City of* Glass that inevitably ends up in dissipation if not in utter failure. It comments on the futility of an obsessive search for a unique Truth and on the multiplication of views, perspectives and standpoints, the inevitability of the pulverization of identity as parallel to that of language and communication.

In *Crime Fiction,* an analysis of the main theoretical dimensions of recent detective stories, John Scaggs sees the symbol of the Tower of Babel in Auster's novella as achieving two functions: that of suggesting not only "the impossibility of a universal language, but more specifically, the impossibility of natural, unproblematic, and unmediated communication and interpretation" and that of hinting on a metatextual level at "the limits that the fall of the biblical tower signifies in relation to the reader's engagement with Auster's novel itself, and with crime fiction in general" (Scaggs, 2005: 142). For Auster, the Tower both reiterates and prefigures something in the history of humanity. "According to Stillman, the Tower of Babel episode was an exact recapitulation of what happened in the Garden – only expended, made general in its significance for all mankind" as the two send back to the idea of fall: fall from grace, fall from Eden and "fall from language." (Auster, 1987: 43)

Ontological and epistemological errors

Quinn's attempt to play the detective leads him to an ontological error triggered by his assuming a plurality of identities and his commuting between different physical, fictional and metafictional worlds. The proliferation of spaces matches the "triad of selves" (Auster, 1987: 6): the fictional persona of Daniel Quinn, a mystery novels author who writes under the pseudonym of William Wilson. His strange choice of a pseudonym, reminding us of Poe's eponymous character, is explained by his assuming this new identity at the moment when a part of him had died along with his son and wife, both killed in a tragic accident. This alien identity gives him the illusion of a double, offers him the possibility to go on living but living his life as a totally different person and hints at the same time at the process of creative impersonality and at the mask behind which he preferred to hide himself. He managed to somehow reinvent himself by giving up writing literary essays and making translations and taking up

mystery novels. "He was alive, and the stubbornness of this fact had little by little began to fascinate him – as if he had managed to outlive himself, as if he were somehow living a posthumous life." (Auster, 1987: 5)

Being the author of the fictional detective Max Work, he assumes a second fictional mask behind which he conceals his bitterness and disappointment.

> In the triad of selves that Quinn had become, Wilson served as a kind of ventriloquist. Quinn himself was the dummy, and Work was the animated voice that gave purpose to his enterprise. If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work. (Auster, 1987: 6)

Mystery novels on the other hand open up for him the possibility to accumulate new layers of identity, to lay the foundations of a mathematically coherent, logical and reliable narrative universe he is utterly in control of, thus further receding beyond ever proliferating masks.

The third identitarian layer he adds to his personality is the identity of Paul Auster, a name that refers both to the real and to the fictional writer. The final identification leads to a confusing multiplication of auctorial selves and to the symbolic identification between writer and detective, both of them engaged in a thorough search of the truth. Their roles become interchangeable, both being perceived as "private eyes" understood in a triple sense: "I" as standing for an Investigator of the mysteries of reality, art and life, somehow placed at their intersection, "I" as standing for the self, always a problematic, protean and multiple entity and I/eye as the physical organ of perception. The surprise comes from the fact that neither Quinn nor Auster is the implied author of the novella but a completely new auctorial person, one of Quinn's friends, inspired by the notes jotted down in the red notebook.

> Private eye. The term held a triple meaning for Quinn. Not only was it the letter "I" standing for "investigator", it was "I" in the upper case, the tiny life-bud buried in the body of the breathing self. At the same time, it was also the physical eye of the man who looks out from himself into the world and demands that the world reveal itself too him. For five years now, Quinn had been living in the grip of this pun. (Auster, 1987: 8)

The ontological fallacy comes from an incessant play of assuming and shedding identities, of bridging or overlapping them. From this perspective the Tower of Babel comes to represent a burial ground of shed identities and

remnants of former selves that go haunting their former possessors. Even in this regard, Auster reveals his mastery, skillfully creating a "hall of mirrors" (see Kennedy 2008) where writer, narrator and reader find it difficult to disentangle their overlapped, distorted images and tell them apart. "The achievements of Paul Auster's fiction" – Charles Baxter highlighted in his contribution to the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* – "is to combine an American obsession with gaining an identity with the European ability to ask how, and under what conditions, identity is stolen or lost." (Baxter in Smith, 2003: 22)

The ontological mistake of reconciling disparate selves – that makes Quinn come to the realization that he "had been one thing and now he was another. It was neither better nor worse. It was different, and that was all" (121) – is doubled by an **epistemological fallacy** as Quinn turns out incapable to solve the enigma he deliberately set out to solve. All Auster's writers/detectives fail in the classic endeavour of finding clues and putting them together in a coherent solution of the enigma. In their case the challenge is complicated by the acknowledgment of the general instability of the world, of the self and of language itself. This leads to a general relativity of meaning and to the decentralization of a unique truth within the textual space. The negotiable truth Quinn is faced with becomes a life-and-death challenge that sends him beyond the verge of sanity. The element that evades complete understanding is always insinuated at the core of Auster's short stories or novels, adding new nuances to the text and multiplying the possibilities of interpretation. He confessed his preference for such things left unsaid in one of his interviews: "A book is composed of irreducible elements" and "to the degree that the writer does not understand them, that is the degree to which the book is allowed to become itself, to become a human being and not just a literary exercise." (Auster in Irwin, 1994: 114)

What makes the text a metaphysical detective story is the complete blurring of the traditional categories of author, narrator and reader, the reduction of the self to a textual construct prone to various erroneous interpretations and (mis-)readings, and located in an indefinite space-time continuum. All ontological levels, fictional spaces and epistemological considerations are relativised and accordingly receive a poststructuralist treatment. The "transparency" suggested by the title, *City of Glass*, refers both to an illusory truth that is permanently reflected back in a constant effect of "deferral of perspective" and to the fragility of any human endeavour, as well as to the idea of the panopticon and of an incomplete solitude paralleled by eternal surveillance.

In the wake of Stillman's suicide Quinn relies only upon the city to provide him with palpable proofs of the old man's existence and with a symbolic space where to look for an elusive truth. The Tower of Babel, so implicitly present in many of Auster's texts, becomes here the symbolic connection between past and present – a present that still seems to be striving for a long shattered coherence – between error and language, communication and identity. The human fatal mistake engendered by excessive pride and leading to the fall from grace is identified in Auster's text to "a fall from language" as well as a "fall from coherent selfhood". The "fall" refers both to the shattered human communication and to the ultimately fragmented self. Undoing the fall by recreating the prelapsarian language can be achieved, in Stillman's view, through the restoration of the now ossified words to their former power to signify.

The symbolical identification operated between the Tower of Babel and New York, the fallen city, leads to a very unflattering description of the metropolis as "the most forlorn of places, the most abject" where "the brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal" and as a "junk heap" (Auster, 1987: 78). This space engenders an extreme fragmentation of the self (multiple identities) and of the text (proliferation of textual and metatextual spaces as well as of intertextual references), decenteredness and absence. "You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts" (Auster, 1987: 78). It becomes "a hermeneutic circle" as we have to read the city in order to solve the mystery and the reading of the city is made possible by solving the mystery.

Stillman works his entire life on the story of the Babel Tower trying to find the ultimate meaning of life, of all human aspirations and the remedy for our primordial mistakes. It is the story of ultimate error, of excessive ambition and fall: "The Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of the earth" and "confounded the language of all the earth" (11: 9). Quinn discovers that ambition is still inscribed in human nature but any overambitious attempt is most likely doomed to fail. He also discovers that the remnants of the Tower of Babel still exist in the fabric of our postmodern metropolis: "New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. Lost, not only in the city, but with himself as well" (Auster, 1987: 3). They also exist in our fragmented identity and our vain attempts at coming back to a meaningful pattern of human communication. The fatal error and the proneness to err seem also to be inscribed in our

postlapsarian/post-Babel nature and "wrongness" becomes "a window into normal human nature" (Franklin in Schulz 13). What Auster's characters teach us in the end of their mostly absurd adventures and vain endeavours is that "however disorienting, difficult, or humbling our mistakes might be, it is ultimately wrongness, not rightness, that can teach us who we are." (Schulz, 2010: 13)

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Rezumat: Articolul analizează diversele strategii narative și metaforice pe care Paul Auster le folosește în *City of Glass*, prima nuvelă din volumul *The New York Trilogy,* pentru a evidenția unele semnificații și consecințe ale greșelii primordiale și eventualele posibilități ale unei salvări ontologice prezente în nuvela concepută după formula romanului polițist.

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In-Betweenness and Error in *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract: Rushdie uses *magic realism* to negotiate historical perception and explain comprehension errors. All of the author's efforts are made in order to preserve memory – he calls it the "chutnification of history" – and to give ascendancy to personal memory, no matter how flawed, unreliable or subjective it might be.

Saleem, the protagonist of the novel, does not adopt the role of an objective chronicler. He intentionally fragments and distorts history/reality so that he may turn the situation to his advantage. Therefore *Midnight's Children* should not be perceived as a history lesson, but as an innovative text willing to play with facts/reality and inviting the readers to be open-minded to errors of perception.

Keywords: *error of perception, the "chutnification of history", magic realism*

Salman Rushdie – the writer who became notorious because of the violent reaction that the Muslim fundamentalists had to his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988) – is often perceived as a controversial novelist, born under the star of scandal. His whole literary canon is meant to deconstruct consecrated systems of ethical norms and traditional beliefs. In fact, Rushdie represents more than that. As a contemporary British author, originally from India (Pakistan to be more precise), Rushdie finds himself in-between these two cultures to which he belongs simultaneously. He therefore approaches both cultures from a postmodern, anticanonical perspective.

Midnight's Children was the book which made Rushdie into a consecrated practitioner of a new narrative technique, magic realism. Although positioned outside the Latin cultural space, which was deemed to have monopoly over this literary form, Rushdie demonstrates that *magic realism* occupies a legitimate place in both postmodern and postcolonial fiction.

Magic realism is an amalgamation of realism and fantasy, without feeling the urge to justify the fantastic element. If dreams, surreal distortions of reality or imaginary worlds occur, they are always built out of the deconstructed ingredients of the real, objective world. All of these are seen as additions to reality, which never affect its logical coherence. A particularity of magic realistic texts is that this addition to reality is made by presenting usual/common things in an unusual manner highlighting their

inherent magic properties. This is based entirely on the Russian formalists' idea of 'defamiliarization'.

Consequently through a process of creating supplementary illusions, these textual strategies produce an apparently realistic text. On the other hand, the reverse phenomenon also takes place: unusual things and events are presented in an extremely natural way, and placed in a normal context, without any distortions. An inversion is thus created between natural, on the one hand, and the miraculous/strange elements, on the other. A bizarre sensation results from this combination of fantastic and realistic texts. Rushdie uses *magic realism* to negotiate historical perceptions and to make metafictional comments.

> A comic allegory of Indian history, the tale in *Midnight's Children* is told with such exuberance, and such a vast variety of images, colours and smells, that many critics have described it in terms of an exotic dish or feast. This is no accident, as Rushdie uses food as a recurrent motif in the novel. As he tells his story, the narrator Saleem is dying in a pickle factory near Bombay; his various organs are likened to cucumbers, and his genitals are curried and fed to dogs near the end of the book. Saleem's pickles and techniques for preserving foods are an allusion to the importance of preservation of memory. As the fruits, vegetables and various spices are mixed together and their flavors are allowed to blend, so Saleem mixes his memories of himself and of India until they are indistinguishable. (Allen, 2003: 687)

In *Midnight's Children* memory is symbolized by using the metaphor of the pickles, which are a magic realistic device of proving the "chutnification of history", as Rushdie calls it. The term originates in the typically Indian sauce, called chutney. Chutney is a mixture of fruits, vegetables, sugar, spices and vinegar which is served with cold meat and cheese. The novel is highly intertextual and at times its linguistic magic turns it into an unreliable narration.

As Rushdie himself confesses in his essay collection, *Imaginary Homelands*: *Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*, his novel is not meant to be taken literally. The narrative is indeed unreliable and Saleem often makes puerile, non-factual additions to the text. The author accepts that *Midnight's Children* contains a large number of historical errors but he insists on clarifying the fact that they are all intentional. He equally attributes these mistakes to himself and to his narrator, Saleem. Rushdie also rejects all accusations of not having properly documented his text by explaining that all the apparent mistakes have been introduced on purpose.

In the same essay collection, Rushdie relates how his initial goal was to create a Proustian novel. According to Rushdie time and emigration (the physical distance from his native India) formed a double filter between himself and the topic of *Midnight's Children*. He found it challenging to overcome these two obstacles and manage to represent India in a vivid, lively light, as if time had not passed and he had never left his homeland to live in the West. But he soon realized that his main interest had gradually turned to the filter itself. Therefore the subject changed and Rushdie was no longer searching for the lost time. Instead he was trying to rebuild the past, using memory as his unique tool.

In the novel, Saleem, does not adopt the role of an objective chronicler, who does not get involved. On the contrary he shapes the story so that the reader may immediately acknowledge his central role. He intentionally fragments history so that it suits him. Furthermore the mistakes in the text can be interpreted as clues that Saleem is capable of deforming reality to turn the situation to his advantage. His recollections are thus unreliable or may even be false. Memory sometimes plays tricks on Saleem and on occasions he clings onto false memories just to avoid reality. Rushdie himself confesses in his essays that whenever a conflict appeared between subjective memories and the factual truth, he always chose to trust the former. He continues by saying that only a mad man would favour somebody else's history over his own, individually true memories.

In conclusion Rushdie adds the fact that Saleem's story shouldn't be considered a history lesson, it should simply be enjoyed because of its playful, childish character and unusual ability to play with historical forms. Rushdie condemns some readers' obstinacy to turn *Midnight's Children* into a material, historical documentary or text book and recommends open-mindedness.

Rushdie's novel is experimental by definition. Numerous details lie on the verge between magic realism and postmodernism: the childish innocence of the narrative; the narrative technique of repetition, which is often set into motion by the symbolic usage of mirrors to create a continuous atmosphere of magic; the frequent metamorphoses, based on the Indian belief in reincarnation; the revival of ancient systems of beliefs, myths and superstitions all across rural India; the ancestral magical connection between the individual and the community's dreams or visions; the carnivalesque spirit; the extravagant, flamboyant usage of language.

Moreover *Midnight's Children* is extensively autobiographic. Both Saleem Sinai, the narrator, and Rushdie himself were born in 1947, the year of India's independence. Rushdie as well as the narrator were born into

wealthy, trading Bombay families and benefited from a bilingual education. The autobiographical elements are essential for a better understanding of the social criticism in the novel. As a palimpsest of history, mythology and religion, the novel has got a strong magic dimension, justified by the traditional Indian spiritual inclination. This magic dimension is reinforced by the presence in the novel of 1001 children born at midnight on Independence Day, who possess exceptional magic powers.

> Saleem and the other 1000 children born at the time at the Declaration of Independence have all been given some magical property which increases in strength according to how close to midnight they were born. Born on the very stroke of midnight, Saleem has a large and very sensitive nose that allows him to see into the hearts and minds of men. (Allen, 2003: 687)

However, Saleem is not just a representative of this new generation of free Indians, he also stands, on a symbolic level, for identity loss and mistaken identity. On India's great night, two children were born at the exact time when "clock-hands joined palms" (Rushdie, 2006: 6). A nurse reversed their destinies by swapping their name tags. Shiva is thus denied his birth right to luxury and riches and he is condemned to a life of poverty. Saleem unknowingly replaces Shiva, who will out of frustration and spite become his greatest rival. With the passing of time Shiva grows into a malevolent antagonist for Saleem. His magic gift is superhuman physical power and excellent warfare skills. Saleem and Shiva are built in contrast. The former is endowed with exceptional psychic attributes whereas the latter has got unlimited physical strength. They could be seen as two halves of the same whole, antagonizing twins of India's independence or even as a foreshadowing of the further fragmentation and division of the country's body.

"From the moment of his birth on the stroke of twelve, Saleem sees his fate as being indissolubly chained to that of India" (Allen, 2003: 688). The novel begins with Saleem's direct contribution and active involvement into his country's history "thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks" which had "mysteriously handcuffed (him) to history" (Rushdie, 2006: 6). However Saleem's story is highly unreliable as he keeps confusing memories of his own past and that of his country. All of his energy goes into building neat causal relationships, which always place him at the center of all the important events.

For instance he narrates about a parade in Bombay he participates in and he declares that "in this way I became directly responsible for triggering off the violence which ended with the partition of the state of Bombay" (Rushdie, 2006: 58). Another similar episode, in which Saleem allegedly

plays a key historical role, is that of his school mate's disappearance. According to Saleem his present to his school mate, some Superman comics, helped the latter find his inner gift for prophecy. He then proudly remarks: "I found myself obliged, yet again, to accept responsibility for the events of my turbulent, fabulous world" (Rushdie, 2006: 65). However there are times when he starts doubting his own narrative and wonders: "am I so far gone, in my desperate need for meaning that I'm prepared to distort everything to rewrite the whole history of my times purely in order to place myself in a central role?" (Rushdie, 2006: 103)

Another important aspect of the novel, which shouldn't be neglected, is that of its multiculturalism. The postcolonial critic Aijaz Ahmad accuses Rushdie of Orientalism. *Midnight's Children* is a typical representation of the oriental world with a flavor of colonial exoticism that the West enjoys reading about so much nowadays. No matter how harsh some of these accusations may be, and leaving aside the fact that the novel's starting point is the Indian cultural space, we cannot ignore the book's multiculturalism and the obvious Western ideology it pays tribute to.

Midnight's children opens with a prologue in which we find Saleem Sinai writing just like Scheherazade, under the threat of death. He introduces himself to the readers, saying that he's a thirty-one year old man, whose body is disintegrating. We soon find out that his bodily disintegration coincides with India's disintegration, starting from 15th August 1947 at midnight when India's independence was officially declared, and continuing with the successive divisions of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Through an emphatic transfer of magic realism, Saleem can feel all of these maimings and mutilations of his body, which eventually lead to his impotence. His impotence symbolizes an empty nation, with no hope for the future. Magic realism becomes a useful tool in Rushdie's able hands. It formulates the postcolonial allegory of the individual's fate that turns into the fate of a nation. The numerous ambiguities in the novel can also be explained through the usage of magic realism and the relentless oscillation between the concrete and the imaginary. The presence in the novel of Saleem, who performs so many different roles, is also utterly confusing. He is the narrator of a personal history with an autobiographical resonance, at times he may be viewed as an objective chronicler and then suddenly he becomes a protagonist in the book, the center of the novel's narrative universe.

The *double* is an essential motif in the novel. The chubby nurse, Mary Pereira, subversively swaps the two babies at birth, creating a multiple identity conflict. However identity seems to lack in authenticity; everything is double and infinitely multiplies generating characters and events, whose

identity is based on lies. Saleem, for instance, seems to be but is not Ahmed and Amina Sinai's son. In a similar fashion Saleem's son is not truly his, but in fact Shiva's son, which makes him the real grandson of Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz. This is the reason why the child shares his grandfather's name. In *Midnight's Children*, characters are rebaptized as grown-ups, under the pretext of converting to Islam: Mumtaz-Amina, Nadir-Qasim, Parvati-Laylah. However this is just another strategy of hiding one's identity. It is all a carnivalesque exchange of names, or masks, going hand in hand with a history undergoing constant transformation.

The idea of dismembered identity is suggested by the 1001 children born at midnight. These are the offsprings of independent India, endowed with magical powers, which to others look like physical defects. For example Saleem is deaf in one ear and has got swollen sinuses, which prevent him from using his sense of smell, but at the same time connect him to a magic world where he is able to telepathically communicate with the other midnight's children. On the other hand, the huge nose inherited from his true English father, is immediately associated with the elephant-like noses in Aadam Aziz's family, and automatically with the elephant-headed god Ganesha, the patron of literature. Family noses, inherited through magical genetics, exclude blood lineage. Young Aadam, Saleem's son (in reality Shiva's son) is endowed, unlike his father with a sharp sense of hearing, which is ironically combined with muteness, a feature that has become in time vital for survival. The majority of the midnight's children remain anonymous, with the exception of Saleem, Shiva, and Parvati the Witch and their apparent physical flaws suggest they are different in a magical way.

Number 1001 is shrouded in the oriental mystery of Scheherazade's fairy tales. But beyond that, it stands for an infinite of Indian national identities. On a narrative level all of these anonymous identities are reflections of Saleem's personality. Out of the 1001 children only 581 survive. 420 die in infancy. In her study *Unending Metamorphoses*: *Myth, Satire and Religion in Salman Rushdie's Novels*, Margareta Petersson shows that number 420 is frequently repeated in Rushdie's works. She explains that the number does not actually make reference to infant mortality in India, being in fact directly connected to article 420, in the British Penal Code. This article refers to fraud and deception in India. Therefore Rushdie's allusion questions what hope there is left for the new Indian nation. In the book there is a Midnight's Children's Congress which may be interpreted as an ironic reply to Indira Gandhi's Congress Party, but also as a metaphor for unity through diversity. The government fears this strange

party and towards the end of the novel all of its members will be sterilized. Rushdie thus attacks Indira Gandhi's policy of ruling by force, suggesting it resembles fascism.

Midnight's Children is symmetrically structured, assimilating both the Western and the Eastern/Oriental literary traditions. Therefore the narrative begins 31 years before the protagonist's birth (clearly alluding to Thomas Sterne's novel *Tristam Shandy*) in the paradise-like region of Kashmir. Saleem's grandfather, whose name is not by coincidence Aadam, lies at the center of the action. The novel ends, when the hero, Saleem, who is 31 and heads back to Kashmir with his new wife, Padma. However, this time paradise cannot be reached. On the way to Kashmir, Saleem is crushed under history's burden, charged with all of its infernal valences.

For the duration of the novel, Saleem assumes the role of story-teller, whereas his wife Padma is the patient listener. In the novel, the relationship between story-teller and listener is very similar to that of Scheherazade and Shahryar in *One Thousand and One Nights*. The dialogue between Saleem and Padma forms a *frame story*, which in turn contains an infinite of historical and mythological palimpsests – Saleem's stories.

The theme of the *double*, which is central to the novel, introduces the fantastic motif of the two-headed child. The motif is obsessively repeated throughout the book, being an allegory of divided India. Two heads but only one body – this suggests that although India and Pakistan were separated because of religious conflicts, they will still forever be one. Saleem shows there is a wide variety of magic children and assorted freaks, spread all over India:

> Only last week there was a Bengali boy who announced himself as the reincarnation of Rabindranath Tagore and began to extemporize verses of remarkable quality, to the amazement of his parents; and I can myself remember children with two heads (sometimes one human, one animal), and other curious features such as bullock's horns. (Rushdie, 2006: 94)

Saleem and Shiva seem to continuously change into one another, in a series of metamorphoses of the *double*. Because of the nurse, Saleem who is the natural son of a white, English colonizer and a dark-skinned Hindu servant-woman, becomes the son of a wealthy Muslim family. As a consequence of this unfortunate swap, Shiva loses all of his rights. Shiva is named after the almighty Hindu god of constructive and destructive cosmic power and creativity. By contrast, Saleem, plays the role of the trickster and the clown. His grotesque physical deformities and his tendency towards isolation and alienation turn him into a carnivalesque, magical figure. Once one manages to see through the layer of irony, the whole story is tragic. Its deeper

meaning, although hidden behind the mask of irony and multiple identities, extends to encompass the tragedy of an entire nation. Saleem therefore becomes India's voice:

> And there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives, events, miracles, places, rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. (Rushdie, 2006: 7)

An important ingredient which adds to the wealth of *magic realism* is the presence of objects, which are not what they seem to be, just like in surrealist paintings. The perforated sheet is such a fantastic, wonderful object in the novel. It appears at different times in the plot, as a metaphor which stands for the feminine mystery, either revealing or hiding women. Additionally the perforated sheet is an allegory for fragmentary identities, which is after all the main theme of the novel. Saleem's flashbacks are triggered by the memory of the perforated sheet, which becomes a window into the past. Through the hole he can see his family's history:

> Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me; and guided only by the memory of a large white bedsheet with a roughly circular hole some seven inches in diameter cut into the center, clutching at the dream of that holey, mutilated square of linen, which is my talisman, my open-sesame, I must commence the business of remaking my life at the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as present, as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth. (Rushdie, 2006: 7)

However, the perforated sheet plays a complex role in the novel, being not just Saleem's lucky talisman, but also an object of revelation/epiphany for his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. As a doctor Aadam is only allowed to look at his patient, and future wife, Naseem, through a perforated sheet. Whenever Naseem complains about a certain ailment, Doctor Aadam Aziz is called. On each occasion he has the chance of seeing another part of his future wife's body. Consequently his biggest challenge is to put all the pieces together. Unfortunately he falls in love with a fragmented woman, and the whole doesn't seem to entirely correspond to the sum of the parts. After her divorce from Nadir Han, the husband who hadn't managed to give her any children, Mumtaz Aziz changes her name into Amina Sinai. After that she starts loving parts of her new husband, and soon learns she can't love him otherwise. Later in the novel, Jamila Singer, Saleem's sister, can be

metonymically identified with Pakistan, the assumed land of purity. As she stands for chastity, Jamila never reveals her body on stage (which would be unacceptable behaviour for a Muslim woman). She always sings behind a perforated sheet, which however does not impede her heavenly voice from enchanting the audience.

Loaded with various Eastern and Western elements, *Midnight's Children* remains stuck on the threshold between two completely different cultures. In a typical celebration of the postmodern world, submerged in cultural diversity, Rushdie emphasizes the religious and linguistic barriers which remain untranslatable from one culture into the other. At the same time *Midnight's Children* tolerantly puts together events and characters, showing that there is no such thing as cultural error.

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Rezumat: Rushdie foloseşte *realismul magic* pentru a negocia modul în care este percepută istoria şi pentru a explica greşelile de înţelegere. Autorul face eforturi pentru a conserva memoria – ceea ce se numeşte "transformarea istoriei în murături" – şi pentru a dovedi superioritatea memoriei individuale, indiferent cât de subiectivă sau predispusă la erori ar putea fi.

Saleem, protagonistul acestui roman, nu adoptă rolul unui cronicar obiectiv. El fragmentează şi distorsionează în mod intenţionat istoria/realitatea, astfel încât întoarce orice situaţie în favoarea sa. Astfel, *Copiii din miez de noapte* nu trebuie percepută ca o lecţie de istorie, ci ca un text inovator, dispus să se joace cu faptele/realitatea şi care invită cititorii să fie deschişi la minte în ceea ce priveşte erorile de percepţie.

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Norman Manea's Clowns versus Herta Müller's Marionettes[1]

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Abstract: The topic of the paper I proposed, Norman Manea's Clowns versus Herta Müller's Marionettes, is generous and can be contextualised from an error's perspective, understood here as a history error in line with the idea that totalitarianism is an example of 20th century extremism. In this context, two 'export' writers of Romanian culture attempt to outwit censorship (Norman Manea) or to express an absurd reality using an expressly chosen typology of characters: clowns and marionettes. The question is predictable: WHY do the aforementioned authors directly or indirectly appeal to these prototypical figures? Incompatible with their forced living environment – communist Romania –, they become messengers of an original world, imposing through their game a set of new rules by ridiculing the given. The clowns and marionettes also represent generic masks of the narrators, based on which the identity hiding-revealing dichotomy is achieved alongside the reconstruction of a page our country's history.

Key-words: *error, clowns, marionettes, prototypical figures, censorship*

As writers who succeeded in overcoming the mechanisms of self-censorship and Ceausescu's censorship, Manea and Müller managed to send the West an image of a drifting Romania during the years of communist dictatorshi In the totalitarian era, Norman Manea, according to his own statements, was constrained to inevitably discover *the word as a weapon*, a logos ahead of which the self activated its caution and defense mechanisms. In the ensemble of Manea's work – which counts several novels, correspondence works, epistolary writings, autobiographic collections, essays – is visible a mechanism of refreshing memory through a corresponding character: Augustus the Fool – the receiver/recipient of envelopes and maker of portraits, the exiled, the nomad, the hooligan, the child caught in the closure of an *October, eight o'clock* and the clown-artist.

In the given context, resorting to the figure of a clown – of Augustus the Fool – can be explained through this state of vigilance, in fact, in *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool*, Norman Manea appeals to a large array of instruments to deceive the vigilance of censors: subversive irony, fable and anecdote, Aesopic language, the technique of collage. What

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is interesting is that this collection of essays, printed in 1979 by the Cartea Românească publishing house, benefitted from two reissues, in 2005 and 2010, from Polirom publishing house. If Manea refers to explicit, caricatured figures, the narrative universe of the German-speaking author is not populated by carnival characters, but by ones deprived of the freedom and own will to act, which come close to the Bergsonian definition of marionettes or 'string puppets'. The French theorist calls the latter instances lacking personality, actors who are under the impression of acting freely, but who, when perceived from a different angle, "appear as a simple toy in the hands of a different character." (Bergson, 1998: 69)

The clown, a recurrent character in Manea's literature, appears, as I have mentioned, particularly in the first editions of the essay collections *The Apprenticeship Years of Augustus the Fool* (1979) and *On Clowns: The Dictator and the Artist* (1997), being the messenger of an original world, capable of instituting through his game a new set of rules, by deriding the given one.

At the other end, using a minimalist and objective discourse, Muller offers the impression that the grand majority of her characters are nothing more than marionettes, the term being used with its basic dictionary meaning of dummy, straw man and string puppet. Unlike Manea, the German-speaking author's marionettes, subjected to an implacable destiny of living under communist terror, become lost in theorisation without taking action *per se*.

From a diachronic perspective, centred on autochthonous literary theory research, it is observed that the clown figure has not arisen much interest among specialists. On the other hand, most reference titles were published in the USA, the UK and France. Apart from the first cultural area, the preoccupation could have a historical basis in the case of the other two: both were great monarchies during the times court jesters flourished. With regards to the historical avatars of the clown, the debut is ensured by the Mediaeval fool, become buffoon, then Harlequin in the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, Pierrot in French literary tradition and autonomous circus character at the beginning of the 19th century.

In his first writing, Manea details the condition of a writer, A., during Ceausescu's era, his drama being so significant, that his character gains increasingly more of the personality of a clown. Using the same elementary logic, we can intuit that A.'s destiny is that of Manea himself before his departure into exile or that the two overlap as well as up to

complete identification[2]. The outraged figure of the creator by excellence gains significance under the grotesque mask of the buffoon.

Augustus is defined from as early as the first pages of the book as a "sort of zany which in figure and buffoon actions comes close to Polichinelle, in contrast with the clown, related instead with Pierrot."[3] Built on the basis of a paradox, 'Augustus' alludes to a noble genealogy with imperial resonance, which is counterbalanced by the second element, the substantivized adjective with pejorative valence "the Fool(ish)". The authenticity of the terms' combination to name Augustus the Fool has an effect both comical and ridiculous.

It is interesting that, unlike the prototypical figure to which it corresponds, Manea's Augustus does not have revenge at the end of the circus act as a defining feature, as the figure of this clown is defined in cultural dictionaries. Thus, the figure of A. the writer becomes illustrative for the gradual degradation of the protagonist, similarly to how the portrait of Dorian Gray reflected the interior tribulations of the model it represented. The writer has no access to the normality that even life's "slackers" during university reached, living inside a surrogate day-by-day existence. Manea insists on the images and scenes in which A. is placed among workers in the brimstone pits, party activists, the Javanese and drillers, whom he hinders and in the middle of whom he becomes lost.

In addition, his inadaptability in society is doubled by his personal failures. With Elise, A. only has a tumultuous and dysfunctional relationship, his affair with Tia proves painful. Not even his attempts to reconcile with Mona do not succeed, the relationship ending up being as complicated as it is difficult due to the sentimental inconstancy and the distance that the writer places between himself and not only his partner, but the world. 'A knight […] of social defeat' through his evolution, the protagonist (A.) transitions from an apparently dull, nameless individual to 'our friend', then to the designation A.. However his tragic condition becomes more clearly outlined and concretised, more palpable one might say, meaning 'real' to the reader,, as it would become in the context of a discussion between two strangers. At this point, the texts gains some orality

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[2] In supporting my point of view, I will mention one of the definitions of the character, identified in the *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Psychology (p-z)*: "the character as a mask, beneath which the individual seeks to appear in front of others, or seek refuge with relation to himself", in Ursula Șchiopu (coord.), Vol. III, Editura Universității din București, Faculty of History-Philosophy, Department of Psychology, Bucharest, 1979 p. 52.

[3] Concept defined in the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo (The Encyclopaedia of the Performance)*, Editrice le Maschere, Rome, 1954, used by Manea in the two editions of the work *On Clowns, the Dictator and the Artist*.

through the use of a corresponding linguistic registry – somewhat lacing academic considerations – and of a nearly conversational style with specific elements (addressing, rhetoric, first person verbs and pronouns).

In a dialogue published in Robert Escarpit's work, *From the Sociology of Literature to the Theory of Communication*, published one year apart from Manea's book, the American sociologist Armand Lanoux analyses the writer profession from a sociological perspective. Lanoux's observation – "The writer dreams, in fact, to be considered, from a social and professional point of view, equal to the surgeon. […] He would like to be considered as a writer, and not dispersed, fragmented, atomised by a society that is analytical up to insanity" – marks, in relation to the definition offered by Manea, the difference in perception over a profession exercised in two societies: the democratic France and the totalitarian Romania of the '80s.

Many times the character's lack of fulfilment is surprised through powerful images – of an A. who, for example, awaits shrivelling in front of the Athenaeum to catch a seat after those with tickets finish entering, being the poor artist, sensible and vulnerable. "A teenager who reached adulthood", "the village idiot" or "someone out of the race" are just some of the labels the author gives to the writer, in direct and indirect relation to the clown's figure.

The similarities between the characters are obvious, both A. and Augustus are practically incompatible with the social environment in which they are forced to live, being generic masks of the narrator on the basis of which the dichotomy between *identity hiding and revealing* is achieved. Depending on these two variables, the author chooses to juggle with several identity constructions in a game until A. and Augustus the Fool become confounded.

Even if we may have the illusion of identifying or overlapping the character and the mask, this subtlety could mislead an inexperienced reader. The distinction is clarified by the author himself:

> The artist is not a buffoon […] even when society forces him to the grimaces of paint and antics. But when the pressure of the environment, itself split, twisted […] disfigures him, the derisory mask that the artist wears is not an acceptance, but a refusal"[4] of imposed conventions.

The dissimulation of naivety through tricks and somersaults is not a way of removal from the rules of an absurd society, but an inverted

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[4] Cf. Norman Manea, in Gheorghe Grigurcu, "The Norman Manea Case", in *Familia*, no. 1, 1981, pp. 6-7.

reinterpretation of it. In fact, Bahtin[5] equates folly to buffoonery, a state inscribed in human nature, as it represents an innate attribute of it, which is reactivated during a celebration or in a rigid context.

Under a discursive aspect, the author theorises one by one the justifications, purpose, benefits of art as a justification towards the self, a moment in which the style becomes interiorised ad rigid, distant towards the reader, vaguely academic, marked by quotes or paraphrases of the works of other authors, the impersonal style, argumentation and justification techniques, and erudition.

The decor – totalitarian Romania – is one anchored in absurd and without escape. By proliferating the *metaphor of emptiness*, the writing outlines the escapist character of totalitarianism, defined as 'an extreme situation whose limits can always be extended, whose malignant potential creates a cancerous social pathology'[6]. Manea uses the same mechanism of decoupling reality perceived by an artistic conscience in the brute material of a drifting world.

'Eyes aloof and thoughts absent' becomes the ontological state of the writer in this crisis period (and period of the crisis at the same time). The retreat in the non-secure space of the house is not a solution, but rather a sentencing to a Spartan-like hell. 'Reaching, finally, your personal cage, you remain lost, mute, staring into nothing for an indefinite time which seems, only this way, the infinity of despair', *Romania in three (commented) phrases*.

In any case, Manea's clown-characters are built in various ways and by appealing to several textual artifices. Under a discursive aspect, Manea rebuilds his past, but also an entire page of history lived inside the totalitarian state. Besides, the historical reconstruction is subjectivised and finds a parallel in the personal one. The past is described in fragmentary form, more akin to a slideshow than a film. Repeated transitions take place between the first and third persons and vice versa, as if the author is trying sometimes to detach himself from an inescapable past. The focalisation is combined with ambiguity, like a view through the pinhole of a handmade camera, in which the details (photographs, episodes registered in memory) are imprinted with obscured borders.

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[5] Mihail Bahtin, *François Rabelais and popular culture…*, p. 86.
[6] Cf. Emil Moangă, Mihai Iovănel, in Eugen Simion (coord.), *The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature*, edited under the supervision of the Romanian Academy, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2005, p.196.

As spectators, we witness a pulverisation of the identity, understood in the terminology of Vera Călin as "the process of substituting characters"[7], a relation between the theme of losing personality and the one symmetrical to it – of seeking a new personality.

The author's option of placing, even at a discursive level, the leader's figure at the same level as that of his subject has as an immediate consequence the agglutination of these two instances in the buffoonery magma, thus accomplishing a "taming" of the totalitarian evil. By analogy, we bring to mind the perception of unknown and unpopulated spaces, represented by white surfaces in Middle Age maps.

The hidden place was imagined like a terrifying one, through its enigmatic note itself, of a bestiary. However once explored, it became accessible and freed from the governing of this preconception. In addition, I cannot omit the clown's function as an expiatory substitute, which has its origin in a ritual past: in the late Roman Empire, the patrons would pay the mountebank troupe to remove, through their presence, the evil in the court. Also interesting is the clown's function as a "scapegoat", killed in many instances instead of an old sovereign.

As the name of the essay volume itself indicates, the representation of both characters – the dictator and the artist – ultimately provokes laughter, which denotes their interchangeable, substitutive character. The carnival-like laughter is mocking, liberating of any form of interdiction, power or enclosure. Adopting the mask, a social one, after all, becomes a natural option. Through the clown hypostasis, Manea attempts to cheat reality, to deride totalitarianism, enclosed positions, dogmatism, and to reiterate the attitude of the jester from the times of monarchy. As we know, "the king's jester represents the ironic conscience, meant to ridicule authority in all its conceit and sufficiency"[8], in the same way the artist borrows the mask of the clown to parody imposed rules, clown being a generic term, as it is more identifiable as a trickster[9], a sham by excellence.

Manea is afraid of evil, he amplifies any form of restriction on his own liberty placed in his personal past (totalitarianism perceived as an extension of the concentration camp), this reflection on the past being

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[7]Vera Călin, *The Metamorphoses of Comic Masks (Processes, Motives, Modalities)*, Editura pentru Literatură, Bucharest, 1966.
[8]Ivan Evseev
[9]"Trickster is a colective shadow figure, a summation of all the character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out it continually", from *On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure(Despre psihologia figurii tricksterului)*, in C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster,* R. F. C. Hull, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1972, p. 150.

equivalent to a revival of evil. Because of that, writing becomes in this context the sole form of catharsis for the self and, via extrapolation, for an entire past. And what better mask could he have chosen than a clown (and here not necessarily for strictly aesthetic, literary considerations, but especially for human ones)?

"The White Clown's figure and that of Augustus the Fool corresponds not only to the history of the game, but to history itself. If we walk along the entire history, we find the damaging artist, or not only the artist, but the damaging outcast and we find the representative of power, of authority, who not just once is an even more grotesque clown than the outcast." (Vlădăreanu 2008)

In addition, alongside this resizing of the dual or, better said, collective link (in the idea that history cannot be limited to a single Augustus, or a single White Clown), the author reconfirms the validity of the interchangeability that we emphasised during this study.

In the case of Manea's aesthetics, we operate with a couple of clowns. The dictator is a clown, thus a boring individual, not a monster: he causes laughter, is comical and grotesque. But the artist is also a clown, and he hides, is submissive to the dictator and also causes laughter. More so, by being a clown like the dictator, he resembles him. We therefore obtain a couple of clowns. If both are buffoons, does that not mean, perhaps, that they could be interchangeable? Here we are, thus, in front of a question as simple at a logical level as it is complex on a philosophical one. We stated this hypothesis, thinking that the status of the clown resides in a mask and that that mask can be changed at any time. Moreover, the clown, through the acceptations he represents (hiding, superficiality, makeup as a surrogate of the face) can be reduced to being considered a simple actor or, better said, interpreter of various roles.

To note the entire network of similitudes between the two, one characterised by the destructive evil he exerts through his absolute power, the other, on the contrary, belonging to a completely opposite pole – art, a creative act by definition, we will pause at the notion of "banality of evil" (Arendt 1997) a concept offering us an overturned perspective on appearances, or a closer view of the essence.

To define it, we will concisely nuance the premises of the apparition of this concept. When Hannah Arendt notices that the Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, who had a close overlook of the Nazi camps, ensuring their proper functioning, is not a monster:

"It had been comforting to consider him a monster", says the author, "[but he was] an average person, normal, neither mentally disabled, nor

indoctrinated or cynical […], incapable of defining good or evil" (Arendt, 1997:35), an ordinary bureaucrat who exercised his work functions ("he perfectly remembered that he would have had a heavy conscience only if he hadn't done what he was ordered to do" (Arendt, 1997:35)) who, even more, was born in Palestine and a speaker of Hebrew and Yiddish, languages he utilised to communicate with his Jewish friends, but also with his victims, she concludes that any other character would have acted the same way if one had been in his stead.

Through the banality of the described man, subsequently catalogued by psychiatrists as "a man obsessed with the desire to kill", "a perverted, sadist personality", the author also emphasizes a certain banality characterising his acts, which doesn't have the genocidal evil at its foundation. In conclusion, the evil is that done onto the other. Why banal? The intentionality of the author is not minimising an atrocity and defining it through a rigid concept, but underlining the fact that the greatest criminals are "awfully normal", that evil means an activation of inhuman, instinctive potencies that exist inside every individual. In the case of totalitarian systems, this evil is extended onto an entire community, and the executioners are those who have the power over the weak, they do not know or do not feel they provoked the evil onto the others. Like Eichmann, who in front of the judge strongly maintains his innocence:

> I had nothing to do with killing the Jews […]. I never gave the order for a Jew or a non-Jew to be killed, I simply did not. It happened… that it was never necessary that I do it. (Arendt, 1997: 30)

As a consequence, the executioners, themselves victims of a same system, were subjected to a process of destruction and annulment of their moral personalities. In this context, the notions of good and evil lose any reference to reality, they are not opposite any longer, but even become equivalent. In fact, the subtlety of any totalitarian project consists in initially distinguishing the victims from the executioners who, in the end, will homogenise, after the dehumanisation process exercised onto them.

"The exile from five years of age", writes Manea in the first pages of *The Hooligan's Return*, "because of a dictator and his ideology, was perfected at fifty years, because of another dictator and an apparently opposite ideology", *Addresses to the past (I)*.

Dehumanised and deprived of liberty, food and affection, the writer's characters acquire automated, mechanical and repetitive gestures. The authority or handler, hidden behind a screen or a hood is not the author, as we might expect, but a leading instance under which we may guess the

paternal figure, that of Ceausescu the dictator, a primal unsatisfied need and, by extrapolation, the political system and destiny.

In the novel *The Passport*, 1992, HM approaches the subject of emigration through gradual transformation, intermediated by an increasingly pronounced moral and individual degradation of miller Windisch's family members into dehumanised, completely isolated beings, driven (and handled) only by the desire of obtaining their emigration documents. Here, the emigration dream is held back by the hostile state apparatus. The family finds itself in a dire situation, having to choose between maintaining dignity and integrity, and leaving the country, respectively. In the end, the parents choose to offer their daughter, Amalie, to the policeman who could influence their obtaining of necessary papers. The young woman is thus illustrated as a marionette lacking a proper personality or individuality, driven by her parents' hand, themselves driven by the obsession for the documents.

Upon more careful analysis, we can identify a multiplication process of these human relations. Like the relation between children and parents, there is at any level a figure of authority and other, weaker ones, which submit. For example, the entire community obeys the policeman who intermediates departures abroad. As the dying village is abandoned by more and more people, the isolation and dehumanisation in front of implacable destiny become obvious.

Enclosed in a labyrinth of muteness, Muller's characters do not interact, communication is if not absent, then at least inarticulate, and the language is hermetic. In the novel *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*[10], not even Clara and Adina, friends initially revealed at an age of innocence, manage to communicate. Like the other characters, in the novel every marionette is lonely, it represents its interior drama, although submission is towards a singular authority: the totalitarian regime. Gathered together – and here illustrative is a family scene in the novel – the characters enter conflict, their inter-relations are abnormal.

> (The woman) says in a low and determined voice, go already, take your belongings and go to hell. The man pulls her hair, his hand hits her face. Then the woman stands and weeps next to a child and the child stays mum looking out the window. (*The Passport*, 22-23)

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[10] Herta Müller, *Încă de pe atunci, vulpea era vânătorul (Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter)*. Translation by Nora Iuga, Foreword and bibliographic note by Gerhardt Csejka, Editura Univers, Bucharest, 1995.

In *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*, 1995, the camera catches disparate sequences from Adina's childhood, in all obviousness a narrative projection of the author in the text. Intending to be a film script, the book keeps many of the artifices specific to cinematography.

Adina is described through automatisms and repetitive actions: she accompanies her mother to the tailor's, she goes to the barber every week, she talks to her friend Clara, she often receives fruits from the tinsmith, she wears the same dress every summer. In addition, she demonstrates a sadism which she only develops as time passes: from making the ant necklace to measuring with the fabric scraps.

> Strings of ants had invaded the cracks. Adina poured sugar-water into the narrow and transparent tube of a circular knitting needle. She put the needle in the stone's crack. The ants slipped inside one after the other, here a head, there a belly. Adina glued the ends of the tube with the flame of a match and placed the necklace around her neck. She went to the mirror and saw that living necklace, although the ants had died glued in sugar in the very place they had suffocated, 18.

Adina's figure is exponential as a personality for the children in *Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*. As an adult, she interacts as a teacher with lonely students, who do not know what playing means and who do not distinguish themselves among peers in any way. In the world configured by the author, the environment is not a secure one, but one full of threats: the kittens in the factory's yard are eaten by their mother, the female workers' children are left to wait unsupervised near the porter's hut, smutty with rust. All, without exception, have the same childhood.

> I never saw their children with each other, I only saw them one after the other. Small or big, thin or fat, dark-haired or blond. Girls and boys. When they sit together it is visible that they're all brothers to each other (*Even Back Then, the Fox Was the Hunter*, 75)

Moreover, the characters in the novel, despite being at a young age, are full of vices, they have an uncivilised or bizarre behaviour: Adina wants a fox fur for Christmas and is fascinated by the image of the shot animal, Pavel's girl her spoon against the plate and makes moustaches from pieces of meat, the gypsy child slurps beer remainders from the glass, a stray child steals a gold ring from the hanged tinsmith's neck, the children of the women at the factory exchange the hooks stolen by their mothers for socks, cigarettes or soap, a girl keeps a frog in her pocket despite knowing it will die.

Taken with a truck to a tomato plantation, the children reveal their barbaric, uneducated behaviours, squishing the fruit in their garments. Even when they try to do something specific to childhood, the little ones fail.

The only sequence where the author's intentionality to create an image of childhood can be guessed is when throwing the baby teeth in the grass. After suckling on grass blades, the children throw their fallen teeth over their shoulders, while saying a playful incantation: "Mouse, little mouse, please give me a tooth anew, and I'll give my old one to you", but the image is not one of candour, as the toothless children have dirty hands, covered in rows of warts, and the new teeth are late to appear.

Reaching adulthood, Adina is haunted by insignificant episodes of her childhood. When she takes the train, she notices a child biting on an apple and remembers the frozen apples her father brought her during childhood. These are the memories of a girl who does not have the notion of good or evil, being allowed to do what she wanted, even if she risked her health.

> (The apples) were so cold, that their skins were misty in the room like glass lenses. Adina would immediately eat an apple. The first bite hurt, it was so cold, that she felt it in the temples before swallowing. And upon the second bite, she felt the cold in her entire head. The bite didn't hurt anymore because the brain itself had frozen, 136.

In *The Hunger Angel* (2010), the overarching theme of hunger is an ample one. A primary need according to Maslow's need pyramid, hunger gains control over the being in the camp, it controls and subdues all prisoners. The political and social aspects of life in the camp are transcended, in the minds and bodies of those inside, by that of hunger, the master-puppeteer of the concentrationary space.

> In the trap of wanting to be strong at the morning meal, in the trap of the bread exchange at the evening meal, in the trap of the night spent with the saved bread under your head. […] The hunger angel tells you every morning: Think that the evening will come. (Müller, 2010: 117)

The hunger angel, not the soldiers or the soviet regime, is the one controlling the lives of those incarcerated through a presence so frightening, that Leo Auberg, the central figure of the novel, eventually almost worships it like a deity. Ahead of it, people become lifeless bodies, mechanical entities 'lacking gender', neither men nor women, 'almost like objects', so that the hunger angels couples with all. Its presence and control are so

overwhelming, that Leo Auberg still keeps count, more than 50 years after the release from the camp, of each mouthful.

The other characters are either the soviet authorities – de-individualised and dehumanised figures, predictable (and stereotypical) illustrations of the control-obsessed mechanisms of the soviet totalitarian regime, from the Russian camp commander who always shouts his orders to the officer who commands without having any concrete role beyond this –, or the starving prisoners used as slaves.

If the first represent the automatons of a dubious, formal authority, components of a state control apparatus who have lost their human aspect, the latter are victims and marionettes of hunger at the same time. The originality of the author lies not in exposing impact scenes typical of concentrationary literature (predictable themes include soldier brutality, inhumane working conditions, the physical and psychological degradation to which the prisoners are subjected), but in the way each aspect of life in the camp is viewed through the prism of the omnipresent hunger angel.

By synthesising the observations in the case of each writer, we can affirm that Herta Muller's marionettes are lacking any weight, being deformed, with an interiority marked by fractures, subdued to terror and expectation. It is interesting that the enunciated typology is not minor in the ensemble of her integral work, as all of the author's characters can be perceived as marionettes. To this extent, they are nothing more but string puppets submissive to several handlers: to the paternal figure, then to the one having the authority within a certain space and, last but not least, to the political system which they cannot escape in any way. Not as resigned, however, are the Augusts and clowns of Manea – who interchange, overturn and parody absurd hierarchies.

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Rezumat: Cercetarea pe care o propun, *Clovnii lui Norman Manea versus marionetele Hertei Müller e*ste una generoasă şi poate fi problematizată în funcţie de eroare, înţeleasă în acest caz ca o greşeală istorică, în ideea în care totalitarismul reprezintă unul dintre exemplele extremismului secolului al XX-lea. În acest context, doi scriitori de export ai culturii române încearcă să păcălească cenzura (Norman Manea) sau să exprime o realitate absurdă, folosind anume o tipologie de personaje atipice: clovni şi marionete. Întrebarea de la care am pornit demersul este una previzibilă: de ce autorii menţionate anterior apelează direct sau indirect la aceste figuri prototipice? Incompatibile cu mediul lor de viaţă în care sunt forţate să trăiască - România comunistă - , ele devin mesagerii unei lumi originale, instituind prin jocul lor un set de noi norme, prin ridiculizarea celui dat. De asemenea, ele reprezintă măştile generice ale naratorilor, pe baza cărora se realizează discursiv dihotomia identitate – ascundere identitară. Totodată, prin intermediul lor, este reconstruită o pagină de istorie a ţării noastre.

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Error and Errorists in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

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Abstract: At the turn of the 19th century the English lived under the grip of an uncompromising code of behaviour which sanctioned every action deviating from the "correct" social standard. In her *Pride and Prejudice*, now regarded as a novel of manners, Jane Austen used "error" as a social oscillograph for measuring to what extent people were inclined to observe or neglect the norms of genteel behaviour.

The paper tries to explore the pressure that 'error terror' put on the characters and their different responses to it. From this perspective, Mr. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth is considered to be the turning point of the novel. From that moment on some characters expiate their mistakes, others do not, either because they literally cannot, or because they continue to err in better ways.

Keywords: *error, letter-moment, prejudice, irony, redemption*

1. Introduction to error

Error does not need an introduction, it has been so widely practised in the world and people err so naturally that all ontological assumptions and metaphysical definitions appear superfluous. I do not imply that man is prone to error in a religious sense, I simply state a fundamental truth about the less than perfect human nature and about one of its baffling psychological idiosyncrasies: man finds it easier to err than not to.

Jane Austen, whose works, correspondence and personal life have been the object of much scrutiny, revaluation and worship in the 20th and 21st centuries, seeded her novels with stories of love, courtship and marriage, patriarchal values versus financial insecurity of women, defiance versus strict observance of social codes. Accordingly, her novels have been in turns labelled as moral fables, novels of manners, comedies, fantasies or even realistic novels.

But there is one aspect of the early 19th century socio-cultural context that Jane Austen repeatedly emphasized in her novels: the prominent place *error* held in people's lives, and, on a larger scale, in the British multilayered and multifunctional body politic. Her subtle handling of *error* with all its ethical, economic and social implications challenged such institutions as marriage, family, rank, and developed in her hands into a yardstick for assessing moral integrity and adherence to the codes of conduct on the one hand, and into an apt tool for creating humour on the other.

Out of Austen's six finished novels, *Pride and Prejudice* is, perhaps, the one that best captures the spirit of *error*, not because it literally teems with mistakes and faults, but because, as I will try to demonstrate in this paper, Austen purposely composed it to be a celebration of *error* with all its comic and harmless connotations, with all its positive and negative outcomes. A comedy of errors at its best against the 19th century backdrop!

2. First impressions of pride and prejudice

Jane Austen worked on *First Impressions* between October 1796 and August 1797, a period of great emotional intensity for her, as she was in love with Tom Lefroy whom she (supposedly) expected to marry after he finished his legal studies. Therefore, the first draft of the novel coincided with a felicitous period in her life (Spence; 2007: 104), a thing visible, we can only conjecture, in the optimistic cheerfulness the novel retains from its initial draft.

As has often been the case with literary landmarks, the novel was not accepted by the first publisher Austen's father approached, so she put it aside. Between 1811 and 1812 she rewrote much of it, changed its title into *Pride and Prejudice* and rejoiced in its being finally accepted for publication in 1813 and its immediate success.

Both the initial and the final title have a bearing on the issue of *error,* as can be easily noticed. First impressions are, of necessity, linked to the idea that appearances can be deceptive and, because the first manuscript is no longer available, we can surmise that the initial plot dealt with the love-hate game that Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy engage in starting from false assumptions of each other.

When she returns to the manuscript almost fifteen years later, Austen is a different person altogether. She has regained her spirits after her sentimental disappointment but also changed her perspective on life and human relationships. We can conjecture again that the sagacious portrayal of human nature, the social criticism and careful intertwining of the different subplots of the novel as foils to one another were given new polish during this phase of the writing process.

The new title, though borrowed from another contemporary author[1], confirms Austen's maturity as a novelist. She chooses now a metaphorical title which epitomizes the two individual faults that underlie the whole plot of the novel. She claims that "pride", a sin, and "prejudice", a flaw in character, are *errors* that can ruin lives if not wisely and properly educated.

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[1] Fanny Burney's novel *Cecilia* published in 1782

The happy ending of the novel, which consists in Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth's wedding, reveals that they have both reformed, individually and as a couple.

Ironically, pride and prejudice thrive on each other. At a symbolic level, this translates into the fact that the two characters are apparently bound to be together. Additionally, both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy are complex characters, each being the embodiment of one major flaw but also displaying the other: Mr. Darcy is the symbol of British haughtiness but he is also prejudiced in his perception of Elizabeth, based on her poor standard relatives, her blunder-ridden mother in particular; Elizabeth, on the other hand, mistakes appearance for essence and rushes to judge people according to their amiability. Being of a proud nature, she is continuously terrorized by her relatives' *faux-pas* and expects Mr. Darcy to despise and renounce her after her sister's scandalous behaviour.

The change in the title discloses the fact that Austen has enlarged the scope of her satire but also that the whole narrative has gained more depth and is psychologically better articulated. The transition from mere "first impressions", superficial, instinctive, therefore copiously groundless and false, to the metonymic identification of the protagonists by their major faults, suggests the author has gone through an ample process of literary skills refinement.

Furthermore, one has the impression that Austen has grown more comfortable with the treatment of *error* and she can now toy with it *ad libitum*, tuning it to her comical purposes. As I will try to demonstrate, she even creates two characters totally immune to the consequences of their *errors*, just to prove her point that moral conventions and norms are social artefacts that can be mocked at!

Apparently, *error* looms large in the novel, like an all governing agency to which almost all characters fall victim, irrespective of their (other) vices or virtues. Austen uses it as an oscillograph that can tell to what extent people adjust to the "correct" social norms, are interested in being amiable and civil to their fellow-characters, feel free to voice their options and, inevitably, err.

3. "Colonel Fitzwilliam was no longer an object."

The task of drawing an anthology of the errors / mistakes / misjudgments / prejudices / blunders / faults / fallacies that Jane Austen subjects her characters to in *Pride and Prejudice* is of a considerably complicated nature. First, they are too many, too varied, too human, some extremely subtle, all exceedingly comic though painful for the respective

characters, some redeemed, others hopelessly permanent. Second, no character (except for the Gardiners, perhaps) is exempt from imperfection and foolishness. The novel is inhabited by a whole gallery of errorists whose misunderstandings, willed errors, pompousness or evil deeds objectify the concept of *error*. But they are deliberately approached in a light-hearted manner, as Austen herself observed in one of her letters to her sister: "The whole work is rather too light, & bright, & sparkling; it wants shade" (Emsley, 2005:86). She continues by ironically complaining that her book does not rely on useless digressions ("an Essay on Writing") or boring didactic insertions ("a critique of Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte") like those written by her contemporary fellow-writers, further emphasizing the liveliness ("playfulness") of her text.

Our study will, therefore, try to avoid the error of attempting to be exhaustive, nor does its author feel so vain as to believe she can examine in depth the *errors* of judgment and action, be they moral or social, that Austen has laid so generously at the disposal of her novel analysts.

Pride and Prejudice is conspicuously built around faulty acts and the way the characters perceive the essence and motives of their and other people's mistakes. It also deals both in an oblique and a straightforward way with the context of those errors and their subsequent consequences. In Lady Catherine de Bourgh's own words a *mistake* consists in disregarding "honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest" (Austen, 2003:305). This is to say that a mistake (not an error) is an act of outrageous defiance against exterior, societal pressure but, also, of unwitting rebellion against the individual's personal gains and advantages.

The tenderness of Austen's approach, though she was accused of "regulated hatred" of her "society's vulgarities" (Harding in Emsley, 2005: 87) softens her satire and critique of her contemporaries to the point that her early supporters (feminist critics) now claim that she has lost her appeal (Emsley, 2005: 84). I believe that Austen was a highly humorous, tongue-in-cheek type of person (her letters prove it) and that her nature influenced her writings, which, of course, amounts to a truism, but is worth mentioning. Her vivacious dialogues and the sarcastic comments embedded in the free indirect discourse of the novel do not bear the mark of embittered criticism, on the contrary, they reveal her zest for living, experiencing, observing people and her benign bias for exposing their foibles. As a consequence, her error-ridden characters are better delineated than the error-free ones: Mrs. Bennet is more vivid and memorable than Mrs. Gardiner, for example, and Lydia is more palpable than sweet but placid Jane.

In my opinion *Mr. Darcy's letter to Elizabeth* is the turning point of the novel, as great an event as any that could bring vital changes in the characters' destiny. The letter-moment literally fractures the plot sequence and time frame into before-the-letter events and after-the-letter events. And, as if to endorse my statement, Elizabeth starts reading the letter on page 169 while the novel ends on page 334! (2003 edition) The heart of the matter lies at the middle of the book! (all editions)

The before-the-letter period abounds in *errors* as if the characters were jostling one another to come first in a preposterous *error*-race. Except for Lydia, whose after-the-letter elopement with Wickham surpasses *in quality* all her previous mistakes, almost every other character is in some form of *error* in the first part of the book and reforms in the second, or never, like Mrs. and Mr. Bennet. Lydia is the only one who crassly errs after-the-letter but, in accordance with the pattern of comedies, without reforming and, as a far-reaching consequence of the letter-moment, she will find herself in the most envied position of a married woman, with a husband holding some rank in the army, much to her mother's delight. I would ironically comment that Austen wasted an *error* on her, she never learnt anything!

The difficult process of writing the letter and the excruciating patience of reading it compel Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth, respectively, to identify and face their own *errors*. At the same time, the letter offers them the possibility to show openness to each other and prepares them for pondering over their attitudes in all honesty. The letter-moment encapsulates their first act of genuine communication and mutual availability. And the immediate consequence is that "Colonel Fitzwilliam was no longer an object" of Elizabeth's attention, "She could only think of her letter" (Austen, 2003: 180), which actually reads: she could only think of the other man.

Carefully reading and re-reading Mr. Darcy's confession, Elizabeth is confronted with a dramatic and incredible reality that she utterly ignored before. Mr. Darcy explains his part in Mr. Bingley's estrangement from her sister based on what he considered to be Jane's indifference to her suitor (Elizabeth remembers Jane's reserved attitude, in keeping with the code of conduct), then minutely and painfully details Wickham's infamy and exposes his ignoble ways of ingratiating himself with young ladies. The letter literally shakes Elizabeth, who has so far revelled in her reasoning ability. Ashamed of her blindness, she exclaims: "How despicably have I acted! [...] I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I who have valued myself on my abilities! [...] Had I been in love, I could not have

been more wretchedly blind! But vanity, not love, was my folly". (Austen, 2003: 178-179)

Every word in the letter proves how shallow she was in her appreciation of Wickham based on *first impressions* alone: "[…] there was truth in his looks." (Austen, 2003: 74); "His countenance, voice and manner, had established him at once in the possession of every virtue" (Austen, 2003: 176-177). She realizes she is not better than Lydia, whom she has continuously criticized for her lack of insight and common sense. To entirely mistake appearance for essence is a crass mistake which discloses how gullible and immature Elizabeth is, after all. And her error is double, because not only did she believe Wickham's yarn, but she demonized Mr. Darcy on totally false grounds.

Psychologically speaking, Wickham's deceiving revelations about the part Mr. Darcy played in his own misfortunes fuelled Elizabeth's initial dislike of Mr. Darcy. She judged the latter by his haughtiness and was unable to go beyond that. *Par conséquent*, she was more than ready to lend an ear to what his most cunning enemy told her (lies to cover his own offences). When invited by Mr. Darcy to dance at a ball she confides in Charlotte Lucas: "*That* would be the greatest misfortune of all! – To find a man agreeable whom one is determined to hate. – Do not wish me such an evil" (Austen, 2003: 78). Her words speak volumes of her determination to hate Mr. Darcy based entirely on superficial estimates and wrong conjectures.

Unable to identify her own faults, she deems prejudice and resentment serious *errors* in others: "Implacable resentment *is* a shade in character", (Austen, 2003: 49) she cries when Mr. Darcy claims he is very strict on other people's mistakes. She will later comment "And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody" (Austen, 2003: 49). She gets an answer whose meaning she will understand later: " 'And yours', he replied with a smile, 'is wilfully to misunderstand them.' " (Austen, 2003: 49)

Socially speaking, Mr. Darcy is superior to all the people he mingles with at Netherfield, and, financially, even to his younger friend, Mr. Bingley. His haughtiness, he explains, is the outcome of an *error* in his education: "I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit.[…] my parents […] taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond our family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world […]" (Austen, 2003: 317). Accordingly, his prejudice against Elizabeth's relatives who are professionals not highly regarded at the time (one uncle is a lawyer, the other a tradesman), prompt him to react violently when he realizes his younger friend can be caught in a *mésalliance* with

ominous results. He convinces Mr. Bingley that his feelings are not reciprocated and tries to keep him away from Jane. Paradoxically, though, he lets himself be overwhelmed by his own passion for Elizabeth and would willingly forget about social rank and his high standards, as he reveals in his deplorable proposal to Elizabeth. Austen humorously implies that passion can conquer all adversity and even proud Mr. Darcy can become inconsistent in his *errors* when in love!

Before-the-letter Mr. Darcy is not only arrogant but also gratuitously impolite. When Sir Lucas asks him to join the group of dancers at a ball as he thinks dancing is "one of the first refinements of a polite society", Mr. Darcy retorts that "Every savage can dance" (Austen, 2003: 20) leaving little room for further conversation.

But, though snobbish and, occasionally, uncivil, Mr. Darcy has fine qualities, too. Underneath his reserve he is an honourable, intelligent, deeply caring and refined man. And, though they are worlds apart, he is capable of falling in love with Elizabeth precisely because he has the intelligence to appreciate her brisk mind, good looks and free spirit. When he proposes to her in a totally unacceptable manner, he is still a before-the-letter man … but promises much. He has made the first step on the road to redemption!

The letter has a cathartic effect on him, as well. In writing it, he actually begins the process of self introspection and transformation. His perspective on others changes, too, and he starts to see quality and human warmth where he formerly spotted only folly and superficiality. In his letter he apologizes several times for hurting Elizabeth's feelings, but the more he apologizes, the more sincere he gets and the clearer he can see things from her stance.

In the after-the-letter section, both he and Elizabeth have to cover the difficult stages towards personal improvement, each trying to understand and reasonably get rid of their faults. After visiting Pemberley, Elizabeth also realizes that refusing him so abruptly was another mistake that she has to mend, hence her very firm stand when confronted by Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

4. "What will become of me. I shall go distracted."

The novel is replete with errorists, as I said, a small group of whom can be met from the onset of the novel. They are the *socially inept* people with two brilliant representatives, Mrs. Bennet and Mr. Collins. Both are egocentric people, they lack empathy, common-sense and proper social skills, and, ultimately, prove to be experts in blunders. They are from

beginning to end ridden by the same *errors*, they do not improve, are not affected by the letter, they do not even know about it.

Mrs. Bennet is characterized by the narrator as "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (Austen, 2003: 3). Her tactless comments in public embarrass Elizabeth and raise eyebrows whenever she makes them. Though not totally ignorant of the conduct books requirements (she is very vocal when spurring Mr. Bennet to visit their new neighbour so as to create the proper context for the ladies to contact him), her preferential love for Lydia turns her blind to her daughter's folly, which leads to the latter's serious mistake. Moreover, when the crisis of Lydia's elopement is over, she is more concerned with "trifling" appearances (wedding gowns) than with "serious" appearances (Lydia's reputation).

Mrs. Bennet may be crassly provincial, selfish, hysterical and not very intuitive, but one thing she does not possess, namely "mean understanding". On the contrary, her understanding is as generous and encompassing as any of a mother with five grown-up daughters in the early 19th century! From this point of view she is more realistic and pragmatic than any person in her family. Her urgent, immediate and unmitigated aim, psychologically comprehensible and economically justified, is to secure her daughters' future by way of convenient marriages. To fulfil this end she is, like all mothers, an inexhaustible source of resolution and energy, the sky's the limit to her imagination, and if a mistake can ensure the success of her enterprise, she is ready to plan one. Jane is invited to have dinner with Bingley's sisters at Netherfield and she asks for the carriage to take her there:

> "Can I have the carriage?"
> "No, my dear, you had better go on horseback, because it is likely to rain and then you must stay all night."
> […] her mother attended her to the door with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day. (Austen, 2003: 25)

Jane will spend not only the night at Netherfield but several days of confinement to her room due to the cold she catches as part of her mother's marriage scheme. Irresponsible and foolish as Mrs. Bennet's *willed mistake* is, it will prove highly productive: it will grant her a second son-in-law, of whom she does not even dream at the moment: Elizabeth will go to Netherfield to take care of her sister and Mr. Darcy will be thus in a position to appreciate her looks and vivacious mind and start being interested in her.

But not all of Mrs. Bennet's mistakes are as glorious as this one. While attending a ball she cannot help boasting of all the benefits Jane

would get from marrying Mr. Bingley and is overheard by Mr. Darcy. This corroborates what Sir William Lucas has hinted at earlier and Mr. Darcy will, accordingly, quite abruptly interfere and extract young Mr. Bingley from the claws of the Bennets. Unfortunately, this is a mistake with a lasting reverberation and it is only Mr. Darcy's letter that will repair its devastating effects.

At the end of the novel, after being so diversely and expertly an errorist, Mrs. Bennet is finally rewarded: "Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me. I shall go distracted" (Austen, 2003: 326). Her final sentence betrays her fear that she might lose her intrinsic quality, her foolishness, a rhetoric fear, as it were, for she continues to be "occasionally nervous and invariably silly." (Austen, 2003: 331)

The other, almost Dickensian, character, who is an authority in making a fool of himself, is Mr. Collins, the Bennets' cousin, a clergyman who capitalizes on being "distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh." (Austen, 2003: 53)

Mr. Collins is described by the same narrator as being "not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society" (Austen, 2003: 59) with the result that he is "a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility." (Austen, 2003: 60)

Mr. Collins introduces himself through a letter he sends Mr. Bennet asking for permission to visit them for a week. His pompous style and vain relish in the protection of a high personage "promise well" to cynical Mr. Bennet, who is eager for some entertainment, but sounds ridiculously dangerous to his elder daughters, who fear he will try to find a bride among them. Which he will, actually: the first evening he would marry beautiful Jane, the next morning, hearing from her mother she is as good as engaged, he changes heart in the interval Mrs. Bennet is stirring the fire, and bestows his hopes on Elizabeth. He takes her firm refusal to be a frivolous game of encouragement and cannot for a second believe she speaks the truth. "But we are all liable to error" (Austen, 2003: 100) he consoles his hurt pride, foretelling poor Elizabeth will die a spinster. In only three days' time he turns his attention to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's friend, "who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishmen" (Austen, 2003: 106).

Practical minded Charlotte did not think much of marriage but knew very well it was "the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune" (Austen, 2003: 107). She stands for a whole generation of young women who were forced to make the same mistake: marry only to release their families from the burden of their existence.

Though educated and coming from decent families, their choice of employment was reduced and the only other acceptable position was that of a wife. Society was less inclined to weigh the gains and losses of a loveless match as long as public codes of conduct were observed and appearances saved. Austen is not unsympathetic with her, in a way she is a weaker Elizabeth, who yields to her parents' pressure and the system's inflexible laws.

Mr. Collins continues his series of blunders with his first encounter with Mr. Darcy, a humorous proof of his foolish conceit and wrong way of observing class distinction, though he parades perfect manners in the domain. He takes the liberty of addressing his superior in rank directly, without a proper formal introduction, as Elizabeth wisely advises him. Though his long speeches are met with surprise and contempt by Mr. Darcy, he cannot correctly decode the latter's attitude and later recounts his interlocutor's reaction to Elizabeth as full of civility. Moreover, he is so inflated with pride that he ends his story with a condescending conclusion: "Upon the whole, I am much pleased with him." (Austen, 2003: 85)

5. The more you err, the more you err

In the 18th century, when the rates of literacy soared and the position of the middle class was consolidated both financially and socially, women, in particular, became recipients of "polite" education. Conduct books were written to teach them how important "context" was and to provide them with examples of decent behavior for every occasion. They were thus guided how to conduct themselves "during their courtship and marriage" (Todd 2007: 298), how to cultivate their conversation and the arts besides "benevolence, modesty, self-examination and integrity", (Idem) the true virtues a woman was supposed to excel at.

Jane Austen relied on the complex mechanism that the civil conduct of women implied when constructing her characters and plots. Elizabeth, though of a non-conformist nature, is socially sensitive to the bathos her mother creates when she insists on details such as cooking their favorite dishes for the young gentlemen she will soon call her sons-in-law. On the other hand, Elizabeth will speak her mind and be very firm when she wants to teach Mr. Darcy a lesson. At the end of the novel, she jokingly asks him if it was her "impertinence" that he first admired in her. He gentlemanly replies it was "the liveliness of your mind", admitting thus he fully deserved her abrupt retorts.

When society falls under the grip of too strict norms of behavior, individuals may consider social errors as possible paths to evade imposed

limits, as forms of denial that reinstate their power of self-assertion. Jane Austen did not go that far in her treatment of *error* in *Pride and Prejudice*, at least, and though she was contemporary to great literary rebels such as the Romantic poets, she did not take their example in standing against social pressure. Apart from Elizabeth, who is determined to assert her personality, but is still captive in the social meshes, there are no heroic characters that oppose the rules of the community in a truly rebellious way. They may make mistakes but no big hole is torn in the steel network of social conventions.

But Austen's genius is here at work again. She found other, more insidious strategies to undermine the system and its conduct books: she introduces the group of *the socially irresponsible* people that counts foolish Lydia and evil Wickham. They are the satirical weapons she chooses to make her social point. They err to no moral avail. They win a battle they do not fight and though they are on the brink of social dissolution in terms of reputation, they end up well, content and … unredeemed. Lydia continues to believe that a trip to Brighton would get one a husband, and Wickham nourishes his secret hope that, eventually, Mr. Darcy will contribute more substantially to his financial position. And on top of that, they do not even know about the letter!

Actually, the consequences of the social errors that an individual was liable to commit were enormous and the whole family could be affected in more ways than one. As Mary Waldron remarked "The disgrace of a family was one of the few things which justified the breaking even of an official engagement at the time" (Waldron, 2003: 58). It is in this context that Lydia's elopement with Wickham must be considered. Her reckless behavior does jeopardize not only her possibilities to marry decently (another man) but drastically diminishes her better sisters, Jane's and Elizabeth's, chances of finding good matches.

Lydia is described as having "high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers […] had increased into assurance." (Austen, 2003: 38) She was her mother's favourite and, though the youngest, her mother decided she could 'be out' along with her elder sisters. She falls victim to her family's willed neglect and to Wickham's egotistic indifference. When Elizabeth gets the news of her elopement, she realizes the dimension of her sister's disastrous circumstance and tells Mr. Darcy that "she has no money, no connections, nothing that can tempt him to – she is lost forever" (Austen, 2003: 235), voicing her fears that Wickham has nothing to benefit from such a marriage and will not even try to. And she regrets having kept Wickham's behaviour secret from her family, vainly thinking they could have prevented Lydia

from her debasement. But she knows her family very little. After all the three marriages are settled (Lydia's even performed), Mr. Bennet makes a startling remark: "I admire all my three sons-in-law highly. Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite" (Austen, 2003: 326). They may have had more than silly wives in common!

Wickham is the embodiment of the unscrupulous upstart who tries to benefit from his good looks and polished manners to reach a financially secure position. He tries all possible ways, including the deception and ruin of other people's reputation and life. He is by no means redeemable and both Elizabeth and Jane are perplexed at his ease of manner when the newly-wed couple first visits them. He is by nature prone to error but, alas, he is no rebellious Lucifer! He can only be a scheming and deplorable Satan who will relish his victory on a lower level.

It is not by accident that Austen has Wickham's position secured by the very man he has previously attempted to dishonour. Mockingly, Austen makes Wickham morally triumph in his tacit confrontation with Mr. Darcy, perhaps because she wanted to push her satire of moral constraints to its ultimate limits. His presumed, not assumed, repentance looms large over the happiness of the couple. Lydia annoyingly reiterates that she wishes her sisters to have her luck in choosing husbands, which is another caustic take on the morality that characterized the whole business of marriage at the time. Lydia has not realized that one *error* triggers another and the deeper you are in faulty judgment, the more liable you are to continue so. How could she, if her string of *errors* proved to be heavenly beneficial and brought her felicity and a position! As a consequence, her silly urges to her unmarried sisters to go to Brighton to get husbands is not as unrealistic and groundless as it may first sound. Morality appears meaningless to her as long as life teaches her otherwise.

As to her *errors*, Lydia's before-the-letter mistakes seem to have a gradual cumulative effect culminating in her crass *error* of eloping with Wickham. She is encouraged in her frivolous turns by her parents' tacit approval, though Mr. Bennet, (apparently) the more sensible of the two, has been warned by Elizabeth that Lydia's behaviour is on the verge of indecency. She is the only one to err seriously after-the-letter and Austen does not even allow her the time to understand her *error* and improve. She lets her be happy, loose and unredeemed, implying that the system and its code are indubitably flawed!

Wickham, on the other hand, has had a fair lot of *errors* in his charge both before- and after-the-letter. He is shrewd enough to hide his unprincipled past relations with the Darcys and concoct stories to further

manipulate people. Ironically, his elopement with Lydia is a far cry from his scheme with Georgiana Darcy. Though this is a humble victory both Lydia and himself enjoy the fruits of the circumstances and do not regret their disreputable behaviour. Austen may mockingly suggest their marriage *is* their punishment and a remarkable way to redemption!

6. "To Pemberly, therefore, they were to go" for a conclusion

The novel is suffused with *errors*, premeditated or naive, serious or only humorous. Nobody is spared, not even the cleverest or most moral persons and, to crown it all, the system has its drawbacks, as well. By examining the subtle sublimation of individual *mistakes* into superior ethical attitudes the novel ultimately constructs a discourse of *error* (in its large sense) that is both engaging and enlightening as to what is inherently human in each character. In many ways *error* determines the dimension of personal change, in fiction as in life. Its presence is so palpable throughout *Pride and Prejudice* that one might say *error* becomes the source of the quest for experience, self-revealing and gratifying to all parties involved.

On the other hand, *error* provided Jane Austen with the perfect excuse to approach her novel in an oblique and satirical manner. It actually created ironic distance and offered her plenty of space for derision. *Error* also grew into a versatile vehicle for what was faulty in society and in human nature. Austen could not have found a more suggestive way of subverting morals and clichés, of ridiculing traditionalists and progressives alike.

From an *error* perspective, the key moment of the novel's plot and time frame is the letter-moment, the first instance when truth is spoken and Austen renders both Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy completely serious and committed not to make any more mistakes. The letter-moment sets things right and divides the events into before-the-letter and after-the-letter occurrences. From that moment on some characters expiate their mistakes, others do not, either because they literally cannot, or because they continue to err in better ways.

At the end of the novel, when (almost) all the single men with some "good fortune" or, at least, fair prospects of one, are married, one returns to the first sentence of the novel: "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (Austen, 2003: 1). It definitely makes the reader smile but how true it sounds and how well things evolved for the single men in the novel! Mésdames Bennet were right!

The sentence quoted above is the best known first sentence in the whole English literature and has elicited numberless comments, most critics deeming it to be an ironic statement, because experience has shown that not all rich single persons are in quests of wives, unless they inhabit the imagination of mothers of daughters. The very first sentence, then, is the perfectly syntaxed expression of a deliberate *error of judgment*. The ending of the book, though, challenges this view and shows how mistaken this approach is! The first sentence is but a *false* false statement, actually, which brings back the issue of the novel being written as the glorification of *error*!

Jon Spence finds *Pride and Prejudice* to be "an irrepressible happy novel" (Spence; 207, 104) and believes it was written "as a love gift to Tom Lefroy" (Idem). Austen may have written the first draft in praise of her love but the novel we now delight in is her cry fifteen years later: "It was an ERROR!"

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Rezumat: La începutul secolului al XIX-lea englezii trăiau sub presiunea unui cod de conduită ce nu admitea compromisuri şi sancţiona orice acţiune ce devia de la standardul social considerat 'corect'. Pe scurt, 'greşeala' genera de multe ori 'teroarea de a nu greşi'. În romanul *Mândrie şi prejudecată*, clasificat acum ca roman de moravuri, Jane Austen a folosit 'greşeala' drept oscilograf social pentru a evalua în ce măsură personajele ei erau înclinate să respecte sau nu normele de comportament ale clasei considerate respectabile.

Lucrarea îşi propune să analizeze presiunea pe care 'teroarea de a nu greşi' o pune asupra personajelor şi diferitele lor reacţii. Din această perspectivă, scrisoarea domnului Darcy către Elizabeth poate fi considerată placa turnantă a romanului. Începând cu acel moment, unele personaje îşi ispăşesc greşelile, altele nu, fie pentru că nu pot, literalmente, fie că preferă să-şi continue greşelile într-o manieră îmbunătăţită.

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Assuming Contextual Error in Ernest Hemingway's
The Old Man and the Sea

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Abstract: The notion of error presents the readers with an insight into the fatal attraction towards the prone to error human nature. Hemingway's predilection for machist individualism and existential egocentrism has propelled his characters into a constant fighting with absurdity and religiousness. Santiago, the fisherman from *The Old Man and The Sea* raises heroic individualism to the status of tragic *hubris* under the prejudice of a *salao*. Assuming an error implies the craving for perfection and progress in the context of great misery: 'I could not fail myself and die on a fish like this.' (Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and The Sea*)

Keywords: *assumed error, futility of existence, hubris, monstruosity of times.*

The term *error* bends the literary boundaries of hermeneutics through the existentialist polemics of the late twentieth century, an age of modernist fiction. The research in human transgression and defective behaviour begins with the contextualization of Ernest Hemingway's famous novella *The Old Man and the Sea*. To err does not necessarily suggest an unconsciously performed act like the pardonable mistake, since it comprises a loose degree of vicious intentionality. An error involves a certain assumed premeditation of the actions the individual enterprises, a speculation, though passing as a blameless contemplation of fault at first: "All things truly wicked start from innocence." (Hemingway, 1964: 32)

In order to contextualize the errors presented in the Nobel Prized novella, a brief portrayal of the post-traumatic effects of warfare in the 1950's is needed. The socio-economical inconstancy, the futility of existence, the oppressive governmental policies, hunger, fear, violence and indifference describe an appocalyptical context of existentialism. The egocentric individuality, mediatic manipulation, the lack of social credibility and the agnostic standing of daily absurdity tend to enunciate the predispositional slips of modern man.

The novella *The Old Man and the Sea*, originally known under the name of *The Sea Book,* is part of a trilogy produced in 1952, ten years after the great success of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The book is a *parable* of art and the artist that reinforces Ernest Hemingway's position as one of the grand pylons of the existentialist movement. The *nada philosphy*, the

iceberg method and the image of the *macho hero* are among the original innovations the writer brought to the literary spectre.

The protagonist, a fisherman known under the name of Santiago, is struggling to survive the adventure of a lifetime under the former prejudice of *salao* (Portuguese slang translated as *unlucky*), his story embodying the *Fisher King* myth. Society tends to erroneously condemn its heroes failing to understand the fact that to vanquish is to try and even if the protagonist does not win, at least he endeavours to overcome his prone to error nature. A game of chance played during four hot days in September does not describe Santiago as he does not believe in hazard or any other fishing artifices; his determination and obstinacy grow into self-sufficiency: "To hell with luck, I'll bring the luck with me." (Hemingway, 1952: 26)

The recurrent dreams with the lions Santiago has before and after the grand catch reveal his clinging onto hope, the last resort the old man holds on when he sets sail into the unknown. The lions' fearless nature remind him of his adulthood when he had the strength to beat down any rival and his body was like a temple for his soul. Dreaming involves the release of the tension accumulated in the days of helplessness, the resolution to start over and a strong desire to change his luck.

The *salao* nickname projects the old man's existential fears, the dread of becoming a useless being, his body has become like a cage with old age. Santiago's anxiety is related to the future prospect of being on the verge of starvation, at the mercy of Manolin and the fishing community.

The old fisherman passes as a victim of the social context, of the indolence and superficiality of the Cuban community, he embodies the image of an outsider, the typical uprooted Spaniard who lives on charity. The old man is tranformed into a misfit for the society's needs, he is seen as a pariah, a no name (Santiago's surname is never mentioned in the novella, reinforcing the idea of alienation). He is only the shadow of the *macho* he used to be due to his nullified success before the epic catch of the gigantic marlin.

Instead of revolting himself against the offences of his fellow brothers and to lament his mischance, the veteran fisherman admits to his old age and to the deadly risks of fishing alone gladly to give a final representation of vanity and bravery in anticipation of his doom: "You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought". "You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman" (Hemingway, 1952: 116). Santiago's moral duty lies above all malicious comments of the Cuban fishing community.

Santiago is the typical Sisyphean hero who attempts a machist sacrifice in measuring forces with the savage in man in a dangerous aquatic encounter, his act representing more an inner strive for public recognition. He actually does not wish to go against the philosophical naturalism represented by his beloved *la mar*, the mother sea, his lifelong companion. The protagonist is sympathetic with the ecosystem, but the favourable reputation of a veteran fisherman requires the immolation of the gigantic marlin and the harming of the 'sons of the sea'. Therefore in the context of the old man's error, his betrayal of *la mar* is included in order to secure his nourishment and the future legacy of a devoted fisherman of the Cuban village.

The forces tend to be unbalanced at the beginning of the epic struggle, as the fish has the advantage of being in his own element, with the aim of driving the boat aimlessly for three days whereas the old fisherman's body is weakened by his venerable age and the constant striving for finding a good prey. Therefore the pair has an inconclusive conflict during their voyage, conflict that most certainly will end with the death of one the opponents, in this case the fish cedes first, but the victory of Santiago is short lived.

The old man cannot ellude the fatal attraction towards the innate beastly instinctual nature of the individual, although man and fish are united by the line that transforms the pair in blood brothers. Man and beast coexist in a three-day ordeal when Santiago becomes one with the great marlin: "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went out too far. I ruined us both" (Hemingway, 1952: 15). The fisherman assumes the error against his alter ego, the fish, the killing of a beloved 'brother', because it is more the assumption of the fighter code in the deadly game of the strong than a betrayal of Mother Nature: "I killed him in self-defence. And I killed him well." (Hemingway, 1952: 117), "everything kills everything else in some way. Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive." (Hemingway, 1952: 106)

Sylvester Bickford states the fisherman's position concerning the faults of his egoistic attitude: "Now the guilt for which Santiago apologizes cannot be that of individualism if individualism is the only mode of behaviour sympathetically portrayed" (Bickford, 1966: 131). Santiago's struggle to outdo and regain his self esteem involves a selfish behaviour towards the persons who love and admire him because in general, emotional detachment ensures the context of social triumph. The grand catch weakens the body, but not the mind and Santiago preserves his objectivism to ensure a successful expedition. Alienation and egocentrism become crucial in the

process of public rehabilitation as the old fisherman has a lifetime reputation to defend.

Harold Bloom insists on breaking the pattern in point of assuming the error in a psychological and philosophical context: error is distinct from mistake, he recreates a new dimension after stating that strong poets do the error on purpose, as to modify the linguistic expression and the approach of a literary stance. Futhermore, a writer completes his precursor, through heroism of endurance, as the strongest poets were at first weak, the descendants perfecting their work.

The writer decomposes to recompose the narrative discourse, in order to bring originality to the traditionalist perceptional concept, theory inspired from kabbala, Greek and Latin culture: "The poet confronting his Greek Original must find the fault that is not there" (Bloom, 1997: 31). According to an acient Jewish primordial custom, the act of creation is recreated under a sort of parricide. Killing the old to let the new bloom and removing the inveterate welcomes the Hemingway's *lost generation* of the twentieth century: "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh: but the [sea] abideth forever." (Ecclesiastes, 1.6) (Bloom, 2008: 65)

The fisherman represents an alter ego of Ernest Hemingway as the marlin depicts an alter ego of Santiago, the old man is the protoype of the universal self-reflective artist, a strict autodidact, a sort of "Narcissus observing himself in the mirror of the sea" (Bloom, 1997: 29). The novelist introduced autobiographical elements and personal details in order to make the story more veridical and more attractive to the public: "I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things." (Baker, 1969: 16)

Santiago defends enthusiastically the art which nearly brought him on the verge of suicide, fishing and the naturalistic background of the village of Cojímar: "The fisherman is the artist, fishing is art, and the fish the art object" (Bloom, 1997: 50-51). Santiago is rather acculturate, he has not studied, but his cosmic faith and mother wit yield the old man a relationship of interdependence with the fish. The fisherman sometimes sides with the creature in a perfect union with the environmental background and in a very sentimental manner: "It is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers" (Hemingway, 1952: 103). The fisherman sails everyday as he has no other source of income, he loves and respects the creatures of the sea, as well as any being that surrounds him.

For Santiago an error is never a failure in the context of never accepting fault as such, slaying a 'son of the sea' may become a lamentable error, but he preserves his intransigence despite his charitable essence: "I could not fail myself and die on a fish like this" (Hemingway, 1952: 87), "Although it is unjust, he thought. But I will show [the fish] what a man can do and what a man endures." (Hemingway, 1952: 91)

The old man is obstinate and determined revealing thus a superhuman power to withstand all misforunes as he claims to love courage facing adversity, pain ennobling the individual: "A man may be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemingway, 1952: 58). The protagonist represents the passionate "great artist in the act of actually writing about the struggle. Nothing is more important than his craft, and it is beloved; but because it must be struggled with and mastered, it is also a foe, enemy to all self indulgence, to all looseness of feeling." (Bloom, 1997: 31)

The victorious defeat marks the beginning of a new era for Santiago and his so-called *child of the sea*, Manolin, as the old man sees in the young fisherman the death of his way of life. The parricide Harold Bloom has mentioned coincides with the birth of the modern generation. In an assumed realization of his craftsmanship act, the old fisherman has to give in to his error of 'going too far'. Following the natural cycle of life and the immanent order imposed by death provides Manolin with his heritage in the fishing trade. Santiago assumes that his errors belong to the past, a past where his *child of the sea* was absent, thus he is absolved of all sin.

The old fisherman embodies the failed Christ figure. In a religious contextualization of the error, Santiago is the Father, Manolin (his real name is Emmanuel, in Biblical denomination translated as the *Redeemer*) is the Son and the fish the Holy Spirit, forming the unitary trio of Christianity, a perfect portrayal of pious behaviour if Santiago were not an atheist. Santiago sails 'too far', captures a monstrous fish, sacrifices it (killing for pride is considered a sin), feels remorse and then is punished for his *hubris* (extreme pride, overestimation). The punishment consists in having the flesh stripped off his prize, the hands pierced by the thread and the forehead stung by the straw from his hat, reference to Jesus Christ's torturing. An aching body and a tired spirit raise the fish to the status of a worthy foe, a fearsome opponent, capable of victory. The beast's victory is unattainable because of Santiago's experience and supremacy.

The old fisherman commits *hubris* under the tragic irony of human existence, an act of presumption and arrogance. He chooses to go beyond others as to achieve more, thereby establish oneself as a better individual, a better self. The linking of Manolin with Greek heroes like Achilles and

Oedipus, who killed their older generations to ensure the preservation of the new descent, becomes synonymous with Santiago's evanescence (Bloom 1997). Santiago does not fear death because he leaves a great legacy to his predecessors, his heroic deeds being now appreciated by any inhabitant of Cojímar.

The father-son bond transforms Santiago in a guru for Manolin, he teaches him useful tricks to survive the fishing traps. He passes on the anthropocentric preservation instinct the phronesis which is the practical wisdom a fisherman must have: "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him" (Hemingway, 1952: 10). Santiago encourages the boy to have a genuine communion with nature, instils in him mature masculine grace, by providing great "hope and confidence" (Hemingway, 1952: 13). At the same time, Manolin has a healing power over the old man's daily misery, a caring nature that softens little by little the rigid temper of Santiago: "The boy keeps me alive… I must not deceive myself too much" (Hemingway, 1952: 107). The man fears to confide the boy with all his sapience because Manolin is still young and easily manipulable by his domestic context.

Nevertheless in the engaging teacher-student relationship, Santiago showers on the young fisherman a passive-aggressive influence nurtured by ethnic alienation. This fact hints to a demotivating futuristic perspective upon modern existentialism in a pathematic contextualization: "If I cannot fish with you, I would like to serve you in some way." (Hemingway, 1952: 12)

The old man's behaviour comes from the parental frustration of being childless, he ultimately passes as the spiritual father, the fishing guru. Manolin is adopted to be his child at a very young age (only five years old), but he is not his flesh and blood as Santiago saddened admits: "If you were my boy I'd take you out and gamble…But you are your father's and your mother's and you are in a lucky boat" (Hemingway, 1952: 13). The bondage of the two is strictly affective and the old man cannot impose on Manolin the filial responsibilities of a true son.

Manolin at his young age is an uncorrupted young man, but gets to be emotionally manipulated by the old fisherman who breaks his spirit through the mastering nature of his mentoring. The breed of masculinity pertains to the Spanish ethnical superiority confronted with the Cuban ignorant cultural consciousness. The two are linked by a strong bondage: "I missed you" (Hemingway, 1952: 123). Harold Bloom and a group of modern critics find the book "sentimental", as relying mostly on 'emotion in excess of its object', the tone of the narrative becoming too soapy for the

taste of a generation of *machos* (Bloom, 1997: 3). Santiago's error consists in perpetuating the ancestral encoding of the fishing asperity.

The passive-aggressive influence is definitely related with the ethnic otherness of Santiago; his Spanish name is the first clue that emphasizes the foreignness of a Spaniard when faced with the impossibility of returning home. This cross-cultural permanent displacement questions the fisherman's national identity as long as he continues living on the north coast of Cuba with the community looking down on him. The journey the fisherman attempts when catching the marlin looks more like a self-exile, an act of bravado and stoicism sprinkled with internal monologue and self-preservation techniques.

The social context that best depicts the two locations is the one of the colonizer versus the colonist. Spain embodies the palpable socio-economical cultivation of morality and democracy, whereas the 1950s' Cuba records the perfect depiction of a regressive nationalist country under the socialist regime of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

Santiago represents the *homo viator*, the picture of a travelling man overcoming ethnic and cultural boundaries in search of heroic devotion, assuming and adopting the violent Cuban conduct of his adoptive country. The religious delimitations in an atheist's dwelling are imperceptible because the old man cherishes the Virgin of Cobre, the saint patroness of Cuba. Nevertheless, he also preserves in the modesty of his cottage a Spanish sanctuary inviolable by the traditionalist Cuban allegiance.

He is characterized by isolationism and the refusal of feminine interrelation (Santiago denies any memory of the deceased wife): "Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it" (Hemingway, 1952: 16). His real wife is the sea, thus gendering the sea as the feminine counterpart leads to the theorized myth of *men without women* Ernest Hemingway often included in his writing.

The old fisherman's misogyny comes to the point of actually gendering the fish by its behaviour: "He took the bait like a male, and he pulls like a male, and his fight has no panic in it" (Hemingway, 1952: 49). Sexism is an erroneous context for Manolin to develop sane principles concerning the human hierarchies because he only receives machist outlooks on women and feminine company.

In the novella *The Old Man and The Sea*, Santiago's faulty legacy is influenced by a multitude of socio-economical, political, psychological, philosophical, religious and emotional factors. His behaving in the Cuban community shows an assumption of the errors of an old fisherman. Santiago

is aware of the flaws that are to be expiated by the genesis of the new generation, a better version of himself, "the child of the sea", Manolin.

Santiago's error consists in having gone so far and have nothing to show off in the end, he fails to preserve his endless influence in the fishing community. His error in the context of embracing a new social order consists in rejecting the wind of change that comes along with the passing of time. This voyage becomes Santiago's last journey in his life as a fisherman for the scythe of time is unkind to the old fisherman who is about to end his mission and assume his defeat after three days of struggle, even if he brings the skeleton of the fish to the shore.

The old man can only hope to resurrect like Jesus Christ, but the photographic realism of an atheist makes the old man incompatible with any other form of existence. The errors Santiago commits are also the product of the national context. His *hubris* exceedes the subjective perspective of the Cojímar fishing community and consolidates Santiago's legacy as a legitimate 'Cuban' hero.

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Rezumat: Noţiunea de eroare introduce cititorii în cunoaşterea mistică a fascinaţiei pentru partea întunecată a naturii umane. Predilecţia lui Hemingway pentru individualismul *machist* şi egocentrismul existenţial lansează personajele într-o dispută continuă cu absurdul şi religia. Santiago, pescarul din *Bătrânul şi marea* ridică eroismul individual la statut de *hubris* (mândrie exacerbată) sub prejudiciul de *salao* (ghinionist). Asumarea unei erori implică setea de perfecţiune şi progres în contextul unei mari nenorociri : 'Nu aş fi putut să-mi înşel aşteptările şi să mor la un asemenea peşte.' (Ernest Hemingway, Bătrânul şi marea)

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Destruction and Reconstruction in Utopia and Science Fiction. The Chance of a New Beginning?

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Abstract: The patterns of utopian and dystopian narratives have long dominated scholarly discussions of concepts of societal structures in fiction. Over time such visions have become increasingly pessimistic. Many classic 20th century examples have provided frightening visions of future human societies in which man is subjected to ideological stringencies that involve a fundamental departure from mankind's historic values and experiences. Science fiction narratives go much further by showing the complete deconstruction of human society and outlining the first steps in the reconstruction process. This paper gives an overview of this development and shows what this "renewal" implies in terms of the portrayal of (new?) social patterns.

Keywords: *utopia, anti-utopia, science fiction, alternative worlds, world catastrophe, fight for survival*

Shakespeare and Thomas More

O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, that has such people in't!

Shakespeare, The Tempest, V, 1, 182 -184[2]

This is Miranda's perception of the island state which she grew up in under the guiding hands of Prospero, her father and the island's governor and spiritual head. Thanks to the books he has been able to bring along when put on a raft and left to the ill-fortunes expected from the elements of wind and water by his usurping brother Antonio and the conspiring Alonso, King of Naples, Prospero wields power and magic in this miniature state of which Shakespeare's play reveals but some basic essentials. The setting of the play as an isolated territory, reachable only by water, the dichotomies of good and evil and of harmony and disturbance, the elements as a wild storm washes a ship's party ashore, an occurrence which partly mirrors Prospero's account of his deposition as Duke of Milan and the arrival on this island of

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[1] The paper was presented at the International Conference 'Reality: An Open Window to Doubt' organized by the University of Craiova in 2013.
[2] Kermode, Frank (Ed.). *William Shakespeare. The Tempest*. London: Methuen 1958.

his opponent's party are antithetically opposed to the backdrop of the near pastoral environment of the island; the static as expressed by the raucous behaviour of some members of the shipwrecked party in contrast to Ferdinand's transition to the gentle and harmonic atmosphere at Prospero's island court; Prospero's wisdom, knowledge and magic power set against the coarseness of behaviour of characters such as Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano; the reality of the co-existence of two worlds represented by Prospero on the one hand and by Antonio on the other – all of these similar seemingly opposing features can equally be found in utopian and anti-utopian literature. We note also the existence of two parallel worlds. All the temporary inhabitants of and visitors to the island state, of which Caliban is the original and ultimate ruler, are displaced persons, because none of them came to the island of their own accord. After the events on the islands, meaning after the restoration of the established order, the majority of the characters return to the real world.

The plot of the play thus develops in typical Shakespearean fashion from the deconstruction of a generally recognised order via a series of harmonious and disharmonious encounters at several levels of the social stratum towards a state of total harmony. While the upheaval occurred before the beginning of the action of the play, the audience witness the restoration of this order which culminates in the reinstatement of the deposed ruler. Thus, a return to a *status quo ante* can be observed with the hierarchical and social status of the protagonists remaining unaltered, although challenged before and while the plot unfolds. The resolution of the conflicts at several levels of society evolves in the physical reality of an island that seemingly does not exist in the real world – a nowhere without a name and of undistinct geographical location.

Thus, we can say that Shakespeare's Tempest *inter alia* provides a paradigm for a certain kind of fantasy literature.

Thomas More's *Utopia* – the full title also makes reference to the best state of a republic and the fact that Utopia is a new island[3] - is seen by many critics as the key text to what referentially is called utopian literature, although conceptualisations of alternative societies can be found in many earlier texts. Thus, the fundamentals of many religions rely on the dichotomy of a world as experienced by man with all its shortcomings and

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[3] The Latin title is: *De optimo rei publicaestatudeque nova insula Utopia, libellusvere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festius* (On the best state of a republic and of the new island Utopia; a truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining). Cf. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*. Ed. Edward Surtz, S.J. & J. H. Hexter. Vol. 4: *Utopia*. New Haven: Yale University Press 1965.

the failures inherent in the human being on the one side and on an idealised notion of life after man's physical existence in what is perceived as a parallel ethereal world on the other. There is a considerable degree of affinity to Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *De re publica*.[4] Both treatises deal with forms of society in which the rulers govern with a sense of justice and reason, the common denominator being that the texts take the form of fictitious discussions between philosophers, mainly Socrates, some Athenians and some foreigners in the *Republic* and Scipio Aemilianus Africanus and some Roman politicians in *De re publica*. The dramatic dialogue centres on the issues of justice and governance in a city state. The advantages and disadvantages of some regimes of government are discussed in some detail with both authors showing sympathy with forms of autocratic government provided, however, the rulers meet considerable requirements of justness, knowledge and wisdom.

Thomas More's *Utopia* departs from the concept of an idealised city state as a contrasting mirror of the contemporary state of affairs.[5] The intellectual play with quasi-imaginary settings gives way to a depiction of a real-life location in an as yet unexplored territory. More retains the dialogue as the main feature of the discourse about the alternative world. But he replaces the exchange of ideas about a rather theoretical alternative reality, that has become reality only in the minds of Plato's and Cicero's protagonists, with an exchange of questions and observations between a travelling visitor, i.e. Raphael Hythlodaeus, to an unknown island that coexists in time, and a knowledgeable high-ranking inhabitant of that island. This setting of part of the narrative in a real world location, albeit unknown to the reader, may be seen as a concession to the contemporary readership in a period of history where, due to the discoveries mainly of the Americas, the geographical maps had to be redrawn to account for the new territories, many of them Caribbean islands. In addition to the benefits derived from the

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[4] The direct influence of Cicero's text can be discarded here as the original text was only discovered early in the 19th cent. Even so, the similarity of content, structure and narrative technique should be noted.

[5] Thomas More's *Utopia* falls into two parts. In a lengthy introduction with an exchange of letters between More and some contemporaries on the Continent the reader is familiarised with the island Utopia, its alphabet and More's subsequent discourse partner, Raphael Hythlodaeus (in a letter of Peter Giles of Antwerp to Jerome Busleyden). Reference is also made to Hythlodaeus' participation in Amerigo Vespucci's voyages to the Americas, before he set out on his own – a combination of fiction and fact to lend credence to his narrative. Vespucci's voyages to South America took place in a time span of 6 years from 1497 to 1503. In part I, More engages in a discussion with Raphael Hythlodaeus about the role of counsels to princes. Part II is devoted to the dialogue about life in Utopia.

novelty effect that such locations provide, whether real or imaginary, the island motif allows More to preserve the familiarity that a small-size city state had offered in earlier conceptualisations of an ideal state. The structure of the island society, the government system, the provisions for education and the relations with the outside world need not be overly complex. In addition, the surrounding sea acts as a barrier both to entry and to exit; the relative isolation from external influences allows the island state to protect its political and societal structures.

The political organisation of Utopia is characterised by very clearly defined boundaries between towns, most of them with the same layout, and the countryside and an equally rigid hierarchy of government. In sharp contrast to his predecessors, More opts for a system of representation by election starting with the smallest unit, the family (where, however, the head will always be followed by one of the sons), and right through to the top level of the prince. All of these, once elected, hold office for life. The rulers are selected at an early stage of education and undergo a rather specific learning process to prepare them for high office. In this we can see a degree of deviation from and at the same time confirmation of contemporary practices. The compulsory work rule for everybody guarantees the plentiful supply of goods to cover the daily needs. More envisages many different forms of communism in the sense of shared meals, work rules involving fixed minimum working hours, the alternation of life and work in towns and in the country every two years, the availability of goods in markets only (there is no private ownership), the equality of men and women, simple and egalitarian forms of dress, the disregard for material wealth and privacy. Goods in state ownership are used for trade with other countries and to finance wars, although warriors are trained to avoid armed conflicts rather than get engaged in them.

Apart from these rather unconventional aspects of life in Utopia to which may be added the function and provenance of slaves (offenders are assigned to this group rather than being administered corporeal punishment), the Utopians have embraced many of the existing conventions, i.e.the respect for (life-long) marriage (after a pre-marital inspection in the nude) and for religion, the position of the head of household, the role of women in the house. Thus, More's *Utopia* is modernist and egalitarian with quasi-communist tendencies and at the same time traditionalist in a positive sense. The progression of Raphael Hythlodaeus from a discourse partner in Part I to a narrator and interlocutor in Part II shows a shift in the point of view which corresponds

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to the shift in location where More, the erstwhile author and discourse partner, does not have any creditable role to play anymore.

Francis Bacon

In Francis Bacon's text, *New Atlantis*[6], the isolated island motif is used again to lend credence to a story about an imaginary ideal world which, in the same way as in Thomas More's *Utopia* or indeed in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, is shown to coexist in real time – a thoroughly convincing narrative technique given the fact that accounts of sea adventures and travels to unknown islands were plentiful in the 16th and early 17th centuries.[7] The geographical location of More's island state of *Utopia* is by no means clear, as the text references to the longitude and latitude are deliberately cryptic. Shakespeare's island is clearly set in the Mediterranean Sea, a seemingly real world as a backdrop of a somewhat mysterious story. Bacon interestingly moves the location of *New Atlantis* to somewhere in the Pacific Ocean (i.e. the South Sea) west of Peru in the direction of China and Japan. Similar to the examples discussed before, the place of action is situated in uncharted territory. Equally, Bacon sticks to the set narrative techniques used in earlier texts about ideal states, and that means reducing the intricate structures of state and society in the real world to a seemingly well-balanced and highly organised political and social network in the state of Bensalem. He portrays the life of man in harmony with their fellow men and with nature and focuses on an unquestioned hierarchical organisation of society with some degree of selectivity. He stresses the importance of the island state's isolation from the rest of the

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[6] The name of the island portrayed in this text may be traced back to Plato's Timaeus and Kritias dialogues where reference is made to the mythical island world Atlantis that is supposed to have existed some 9,000 years ago. Plato describes the living conditions and the forms of government as well before moving on to the conflict between the island state and Athens.

[7] The idea of a possible link between the two texts seems somewhat speculative. It should be noted, however, that Shakespeare's play was supposedly written in about 1609/10 (first performed in 1611) and may have been inspired by the wreck near Bermuda of the Virginia Company flagship, the subsequent stay of the crew on the island and the later continuation of the journey (cf. Frank Kermode in his introduction to *Shakespeare, The Tempest*. London: Methuen 1962. p. XXVI ff.). Bacon on the other hand, who as Solicitor General (1607), Attorney General (1613), later Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England (1617) and as Lord Chancellor (1618) held top government offices during the reign of James I, was closely connected with the foundation of the Virginia Company (1609) and therefore well aware of its activities. He may well have been inspired by the Bermuda incident, although there were also plentiful accounts of such shipwrecks at the time.

world and emphasises the relevance of education and its role for social and political cohesion in dialogues with several interlocutors to set forth the characteristic features of life in this island state. As in More's *Utopia*, the visitor's interlocutors are of very high rank (the governor of the House of Strangers and the head of Salomon's House).[8] And like the Utopians, the Atlantiansdisdain private property; and precious metals are held in contempt. While the Utopians lead a religious and austere life and practise tolerance, the Atlantians very pointedly refer to the principles of Christianity that govern their society, which they trace back to the mysterious arrival on the island of the Old and New Testament together with a letter of the Apostle Bartholomew. The narrative focuses on the pursuit of knowledge, the substantiation of discoveries through experiments and the regulations in place for venturing abroad to expand this knowledge for the benefit of society as a whole. The detailed description of the set-up of Salomon's House has been seen by critics as the basis for the foundation of an ideal scientific research institution. The quest for knowledge is also the primordial reason for Atlantians to have organised and time-limited contacts with the outside world.

Thus, the geographical isolation which allows the idealised island states to thrive economically in near self-sufficiency, socially in near harmony with one another and politically in the fairness, justness and wisdom of the ruling powers protects the states of Utopia and Bensalem from the evil influences of the narrators' real world. And the degree of perfection that the largely expository accounts of the functioning of the islands' institutions convey is such that even a partial transfer seems utterly impossible even to the benevolent reader. However, the juxtaposition of the perceived reality in the parallel worlds and the actual experience of the authors' contemporaries highlights the deficiencies of the worlds that More and Bacon playfully expose by converting them into the opposite. At the same time, the narratives remain firmly anchored in the respective times of drafting insofar as the reversal is restricted to selected aspects of public and private affairs only. Further, both More and Bacon cast their protagonists in the roles of interested albeit somewhat passively listening observers thereby

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[8] This reference to the biblical King of Israel, Salomo, is quite intentional. Salomo's name was associated with the modernisation of the administration of the Kingdom, the building of towns and the enlargement of Jerusalem; his openness towards other cultures and religions and also his wisdom and balanced judgement made him an outstanding ruler.

taking away some of the immediacy of the statements made by their hosts none of whom incidentally is mentioned by name.[9]

Swift: Gulliver's Travels

In his fantastic allegory *Gulliver's Travels* Jonathan Swift exploits the potentials of the island motif and the travel narrative even further. Sea travel accounts arranged in four books allow for the description of voyages to island states such as Lilliput (Book I), Brobdingnag (Book II), Laputa including Balnibarbi, Luggnagg and Glubbdubdrib (Book III) and finally the County of the Houyhnhnms (Book IV). Similar to More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* the exact locations of these islands remain unclear, although there are many inter-referential geographical indicators that purport to create a sense of real-time existence of these parallel worlds. This impression of authenticity is enhanced as the travel reports refer very concretely to storms, nautical details, England as the location of departure and arrival, ships' names, shipwrecks, mutinies etc. On the other hand the antithetical structure, which sees Gulliver experience the country of the dwarfs, Lilliput, from the perspective of a giant and, the other way round, the country of the giants, Brobdingnag, from the perspective of a dwarf, the imbecility of the research projects undertaken by human-kind scientists on Laputa and the high level of intelligence of the Houyhnhnms in contrast to the humanoid yahoos, provides for a fantastic diversity in the satirical reflections on society in Swifts time.

Swift retains the functions attributed to the men in power in Utopia and Bensalem (*New Atlantis*) and also arranges for the informational dialogues to be held between the visitor and a high-ranking representative of the state in question. Among the topics discussed in the course of Gulliver's successive visits are those that were of primordial importance in the accounts of *Utopia* and *New Atlantis*, above all the process of education, the acquisition of knowledge and the role of scientists and, finally, the functioning of government. Interestingly, however, Swift departs from the largely mono-directional approach of both More and Bacon of casting the agents of their narratives in the roles of providers and recipients of factual information. Instead, he has the protagonist experience life both among

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[9] In More's *Utopia*, Hythlodaeus is a partner in the discussion with Thomas More and Father Aegid in Book I about aspects of life in England at the beginning of the 16th century. Bacon's key protagonist remains nameless, as the account uses the "I"- and "we"-perspective in his travel report. Interestingly, both More and Bacon refrain from giving the high representatives of their island states any names.

ordinary inhabitants of the islands visited and also at the courts of the respective rulers. Thus, Gulliver becomes actively involved, an ordinary visitor living among ordinary inhabitants and, in part also, among the ruling class, and much less the passive listener. Apart from the extraordinary physical features of the inhabitants of the Swiftian island worlds, the actual conditions of daily life seem to closely reflect those in Swift's times. The dichotomy of the court and the commoners, sometimes despicable such as the Yahoos, prevails in all four accounts. Swift's socio-critical comments on the conditions prevailing in England in the early 18th century are cleverly disguised behind the predominance of the fantasy world created against a backdrop of seeming reality.

19th Century Visions

By the second half of the 19th century the island motif has largely disappeared. Instead the stories remain earthbound, but still rely on some form of physical transition into a parallel world in real or some future time. The novels *The Coming Race* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, first published in 1871, and *Erewhon* (anagram for Nowhere)[10] by Samuel Butler, published only a year later, are often classed as utopian or, at times, dystopian literature, when in fact they make use of related narrative techniques mainly to create incomplete societal structures which serve to satirise aspects of Victorian society. Bulwer-Lytton's antagonistic setting of the upper world of humans and the underworld of the Vril-ya will be taken up again in H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* only a good two decades later.

The anonymity of the nameless narrator and protagonist,[11] who is introduced as being born into a well-off and distinguished American family, is juxtaposed to the seeming concrete-ness of the time and place of action (more than a generation after the American War of Independence, the action starts in a mine near the "old-country" town of Liverpool) and also the narrator's counterparts all of whom are clearly identified by name. The historical development of Vril-ya society from periods of strife above ground to total harmony in their present underground existence emerges in a series of discussions with the members of the narrator's high-ranking host family.

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[10] This title refers back to Thomas More's account *Utopia*.The Greek [εu] or [oú], meaning "good" or"not" respectively and [τοπος] meaning "place". The latinised reading could therefore stand for "good-place-land" or "no-place-land" = nowhere.

[11] The first-person perspective lends credence to the account of the fantastic occurrences in the underworld though.

Much of the factual information about the political and societal setup of the subterranean state, the underlying ethical and moral principles, the harnessing of will-power through the application of the fluid Vril as one of the key characteristics of the underground state, is outlined in long strings of descriptive observations made by the narrator-protagonist. This static existence and idyllic way of life in a quasi-paradisical situation is threatened by the Koom-Posh, a fast-growing parallel race of primitive savages. Thus, the ideal world of the Vril-ya is juxtaposed to an as yet immeasurable threat of annihilation and, at the same time, to the upper-world reality not only of the mid-Victorian era but also of America in the aftermath of a civil war.

In many ways other than the antithetical visions of the terranean and subterranean realities of the good and savage societies does Bulwer-Lytton visualise Vril-ya as a rather disturbing reflection of his contemporary world. The portrayal of aspects of female equality and physical superiority, the disregard for high office, the conception of crime as a form of illness, the disdain for money, the rigidity of solving overpopulation issues purely by administrative means, Darwinism as the key selective principle for the development of the Vril-ya species, the lack of competition, of self-interest or of any form of motivation – all of these contribute to turning the seemingly harmonious Vril-ya model society into a horror scenario. Bulwer-Lytton cleverly makes the reader realise that the underground world – in traditional thinking of humankind the underground has always carried negative connotations – is nothing but an idealised reflection of the failings of 19th century society. In spite of the superficial attractiveness of its way of life, this world, and potentially also the narrator's world, is doomed to failure if and when the population explosion of the underground society of the savages gains ground and comes to the surface. The protagonist's return to the real world and thence to his home country without Zee, his host's daughter, to whom he has become emotionally attached notwithstanding her strange physical features, puts a definite end to this fantasy and leaves no room for any reconciliation of the diverse views and practices of the real and the fantastic world.

For plausibility Butler also uses a first person narrator in his novel *Erewhon*. Higgs, who has left England to reach a British colony, presumably New Zealand, and to work on a sheep farm sets out on a walk across the range of mountains together with his guide, with the Maori name of Chowbok. In the uncharted land of *Nowhere* Butler is at liberty to discuss to problems of his time by paradoxically reverting cause and effect. Thus, soon after birth children become party to a legal document dissolving parents from any responsibility for mishaps that might befall them and

apologising for any inconvenience that their coming into the world might cause them. Birth is deemed a risk to the child and, eventually, to society as a whole; and the relations between parents and their children are characterised by parental disaffection. Similarly, the traditions and views in human society are turned upside down: in daily life the use of meat or vegetables for food is considered sinful by the Erewhonians, and the rights of animals or plants are taken seriously. Such reversals become evident in a number of chapter headings, such as "The Colleges of Unreason", "The World of the Unborn" as well. They are also a means by which to highlight some of the failings of Victorian society; there are many direct references to England throughout the book.

In his novel, Butler preserves the disparity between the rich and the poor indicating on various occasions the advantages that pecuniary wealth can bring. He reflects on a variety of social, economic and philosophical issues, on science, education and family life rather than political issues. Machines or the urban infrastructure are likened to living bodies whose parts communicate with each other in performing the functions for which they were originally designed. From here there is only a short step towards the development of an artificial intelligence which might eventually lead to the machines taking over. This imminent fate has led to the systematic abandonment of any kind of technological progress and, in fact, a reversal. Thus, Butler addresses his contemporaries' fear of the machine age. The love relationship with Arowhena who accompanies Higgs back to his home country is indicative of the fact that Erewhon is not to be seen as an ideal world. As with Bulwer-Lytton, a sense of realism prevails in the narrative, as the protagonists are able to experience the strangers, as it were, in their home environment. However, in contrast to many earlier texts the role of the quasi-omniscient counterpart to the protagonist is done away with. What the reader learns about *Erewhon* comes from the protagonist's own observations and their interpretations occasionally substantiated by statements and comments of prominent, but anonymous Erewhonians. These are always assessed critically and seen against the protagonist's own experience of his real world.

Similar to earlier accounts of model societies Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward* relies on a combination of extraordinary circumstances to cause his readers to suspend their disbelief of the account that will unfold (the protagonist's sleeping disorder, the specially protected and equipped underground sleeping chamber, the fire incident, non-ageing qualities during his 113 years of uninterrupted sleep) in the year 2000, thus transferring the contemporary reader from the year 1887 – the year of

publication – to the time of action of the major part of the story. Bellamy sets the American society of his time, characterised by a competitive, profit-oriented, exploitative and often wasteful production system which is controlled by a privileged minority of moneyed entrepreneurs with a strong inclination towards consumerism and a deep class divide against an utterly egalitarian concept in which the means of production are owned by the state and the notion of money as a reward for work is replaced by an egalitarian credit card system. This allows the inhabitants to buy, as it were, the required goods and services from their generous yearly allocation and to return any excess allocation to the state. With work being compulsory and the quasi-monetary compensation being the same for everyone the motivation lies in the individual's degree of contribution to the common good for which there is a system of non-pecuniary rewards.

The wastefulness inherent in the chaotic organisation of production in the capitalist American economy of the second half of the 19th century has gradually been replaced by a well-functioning cooperative system of a meticulously planned economy and state ownershi Technological progress and economies of scale in highly organised production processes have had material abundance in their wake. Based on the assumption that everyone contributes to the best of their ability to the production of goods and services, everyone is compensated in the same way and to the same amount. And similar to More and Bacon, Bellamy also takes an optimistic view with regard to the possibility of crime gradually disappearing. The equal distribution of materialistic goods and the guaranteed access to services obviate the need or urge for unlawful actions. There is no need therefore for a complex law enforcement infrastructure.

This wildly idealistic and, in parts, overly romantic narrative about a perfect socialist national economy again relies on a near-omniscient interlocutor, the retired physician Dr Lette, who, as a member of the professions, enjoys the privileges of a special reward system and is in a position to provide a more comprehensive overview of the history of and an insight into the rules governing America at the turn of the third millennium. The reasons for this transition from the strongly individualistic and capitalist system in which egotism prevails to the perfect socialist system in which individual happiness comes second to the welfare of the commonweal remain unaccounted for in Bellamy's vision of an ideal society.

Towards the end of the 19th century numerous accounts involving tales of the future begin to appear. The title of William Morris successful novel *News from Nowhere* refers back to More's *Utopia* not only in terms of its title but also of the portrayal of society in the protagonist's dreamworld

as a truly socialist community. With England, and especially London, the dreamland has a distinct physical reality; and the time of action is equally clearly that of the third millennium. The transition to and return from it are made in a state of slumber. Morris sees the future as a reversal of his perception of the country's ills which are highlighted by the regression to much less complex forms of production and patterns of human interaction. The harshness of the machine-dominated production processes in big conurbations has given way to an idyllic life in the country. Farming activities have replaced industrial production, and most of the work is done by hand or with the help of simple technical equipment rather than by complex and noisy machines. Man is seen in harmony with nature and enjoying work in a natural environment and, therefore, does not require any coercion to make his contribution to the well-being of society.

It is in line with this disposition that formalised education has been supplanted by the principle of "learning by doing" on an entirely voluntary basis and by playing out of doors and observing the working of nature. Equally, the emphasis on handicraft and pride in good workmanship helps to overcome the rift between the arts and everyday life. "Life [is] founded on equality and communism" (Morris, 1912: 128). There is shared ownership of property, and democratic forms of decision-making are in place to control industrial processes whenever necessary. Courts and prisons are no longer needed, as human relationships are governed by love and fellowshi Morris speaks out in favour of the equality of men and women, yet retains the traditional role of women as being responsible for running the joint household. The institution of marriage is kept intact, but with the contractual stringencies removed. Thus, there is no provision for divorce proceedings, and the partners are free to choose another love-mate. As in More, Bacon, Swift and others, the narrative relies on an authoritative figure, in this case Hammond, to provide an account of the "historical" development and a description of the principles on which life in the parallel society is based. Constant references to the problems in the past that have been overcome in this idyllic society together with the contemporary readers' knowledge of the conditions in their world create the highly critical dimension of the narrative.

H.G. Wells

In his novella *The Time Machine* (written in 1895), H. G. Wells uses time travel in a man-made machine to catapult the traveller a few hundred thousand years into a distant future of the planet Earth. He builds on the

concept of contrasting two antithetical strands of society within the narrative that both Swift and Bulwer-Lytton had already employed in their texts in order to hinge his social criticism on. He retains Bulwer-Lytton's distinction between an upper and a subterranean world to highlight a dichotomous evolutionary trend that has its roots in the class divide of the outgoing 19th century in England. But while the idealistically beautiful, seemingly paradisiac upper world may be appealing at first encounter, the lack of purpose and reason for the existence of the frugivorous Eloi is most disturbing. Their uncommunicative nature, their lack of intellectual curiosity and self-motivation have made them utterly degenerate, just good enough to be food for the society of carnivorous, machine-minding and equally degenerate Morlocks who live almost slave-like in the darkness of the underground machine world for the sole purpose of keeping the world going. The ruling class and the proletariat are both depicted in an advanced stage of degeneration in a two-level world which shows every sign of extreme regression and human degeneration.

Time and again Wells returns to this topic of class divide in his early writing career and makes references to Plato, More and Bellamy. Warfare and world rule as well as some effects of technical and scientific progress are an integral part of his fictional accounts. *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899) is a socio-political story set in a time of 203 years into the future. It describes a conflict of power with the protagonist Graham who is cast in the role of benevolent observer and do-gooder in a world beset by political strife and worker revolt. Again London as the place of action brings home to the contemporary readership the misery of the working class.

The text *A Modern Utopia* (1905) may well be termed a combination of philosophical discussion between the narrator and his protagonist about the utopian concept and their observations on the utopian world state. Wells evokes the relevant books of many earlier writers of ideal utopian states, which he considers "static", whereas he postulates a "kinetic" (Wells, 1925: 7) utopian society stating in the final pages of his text: "There will be many Utopias. Each generation will have its own version of Utopia." (Wells, 1925: 328)

The new 20th century utopia, and here Wells consciously deviates from his precursors of the genre, is a world state with a single language spoken world-wide. The features discussed and the solutions finally presented for this model society are rather traditionalist in the sense that they hardly go beyond what Thomas More had conceived 400 years earlier: an oligarchic form of society, but with very distinct social features, an elitist role of the ruling scientists, equality of the sexes, but with a special role

assigned to women, procreation according to set rules and financial protection during motherhood, public ownership of the means of production. However, different from More or Bacon and certainly also Morris, Wells refrains from presenting the reader with an escapist vision of a new world that is ideal in every respect. While earlier accounts of ideal states often referred to the beauty of buildings, the landscape, the general harmony in social intercourse, the Wellsian vision acknowledges the failings of human nature by admitting crime, drunkenness, discontent and unhappiness etc. as a few signs of realism in an otherwise seemingly ideal world.

In *New Worlds for Old* (1908) Wells reconsiders issues of a socialist society and of individual parental rights and concludes that socialism is a moral and intellectual movement. He returns to the motif of science and warfare in *The World Set Free* (1914) to discuss the threat of nuclear weapons which might lead to a regression to man's agricultural past or have more long-term effects or engender in forward-thinking leaders attempts to establish longer-lasting peace between the nations. Thus, futuristic utopian and dystopian narratives of the latter half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries use time travel and parallel worlds to create a realistic geographical scenario for their socio-critical visions of future worlds. Aspects of contemporary political, social and scientific realities are developed beyond what has been experienced by man. The resulting distortions, both negative and positive, are designed to shock and maybe, apart from the delight that the "what would happen if ...?"-approach invariably leads to, a reassess-ment process.

Anti-utopian paradigms: Huxley, Orwell, Bradbury

In much the same way did Aldous Huxley and, barely two decades later, George Orwell turn to well-trodden narrative paths to develop their irritatingly cynical scenarios of possible future societies. Set at some time in the future and presupposing times of devastating wars (the cataclysmic Nine Years' war in *Brave New World* and a global atomic war in *1984*), the plots develop in worlds that have undergone radical changes in terms of political, social and industrial development. Nation states have been replaced by world or inter-continental governments. In *Brave New World* there is ever-lasting peace, whereas in *1984* the three world powers are constantly at war with each other. Any individualism is suppressed by conditioning and brainwashing. Strong and strictly hierarchic class systems prevail with each class being assigned its distinct function in society and in the economy. In

both narratives harsh selection criteria for the members of the ruling classes, predetermination, genetic engineering, behavioural conditioning, indoctrination, free sex and government-controlled entertainment are supposed to guarantee amongst others the smooth functioning of the system. Totalitarian governments control every aspect of life by force (Big Brother and also the constant need to work to eke out a scanty living) or gentle persuasion (the soma drug). The political leaders remain quasi-anonymous.

In both novels the main place of action is London, a clever ploy to bring home to the readers the dramatic changes in a location that they are so very familiar with.[12] The unknown or uncharted islands and other territories of earlier texts, often the locations of the ideal world, have been turned into places for the outcasts of societies, to become re-education camps, places of exile or worlds of savages. Even non-urban England has lost some of its pastoral qualities, as Winston Smith and Julia learn to their dismay, because Big Brother is omnipresent albeit in different guises.

In a shift of focus from earlier accounts of utopian or anti-utopian societies the protagonists are no longer cast in the role of genuinely curious observers keen to learn about the rules and customs of the new worlds. Instead, they now have become actively involved in the life of their respective totalitarian world. It is their tacit rebellion that brings to light the utter despicableness of the conditions of life; and that focuses on the seeming happiness and indoctrination of the masses with total disregard for the individual. The protagonists' quest for privacy and the search for their respective identities constitute cardinal offences against the established rules of Huxley's and Orwell's societies. Interestingly though, some of the leaders (O'Brian in *1984* and Mustapha Mond in *Brave New World*) have themselves offended in various ways. They are endowed with superior knowledge and can explain to the rebels the history and some of the workings of the totalitarian states. Thus, the motif of the omniscient narrator recurs with Mond being the understanding benevolent representative of state power and O'Brian, the seeming adherent of counter-revolution, turning out to be the representative of the thought police and Winston Smith's unrelenting torturer. The re-education process ends in the total subjugation of the protagonists Julia and Winston and their readmission to Oceania society. The fate of John, the Savage, seems doomed right from the start. Having come from afar-away island his return there is impossible now that he is endowed with the intimate knowledge of the history and functioning of the world state. His suicide is a compelling and at the same time cynical

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[12]Cf. also William Morris, *News from Nowhere.*

solution, as it is unthinkable without an overdose of Soma, the drug meant to act as a tranquiliser.

As in so many visions of future worlds, there is no woman in a key function in these two texts, nor is the role of women as fellow workers alongside their male colleagues discussed in any depth. Further, there is no mention of any family relationship except for that between John, the Savage and his mother Linda. Inter-gender relationships are short-lived and not meant to lead to any emotional involvement. Both Huxley and Orwell, in their texts, clearly discard the traditional concepts of women's roles in society as mothers and partners even when living in communes as envisaged by More, Bacon and Bellamy without, however, assigning them a different place in their future societies.

Ray Bradbury's narrative *Fahrenheit 451* is possibly one of the last major fictional accounts of a fully functioning future society whose continued existence comes under threat in the final stages of the story. It hinges on the untold development of human society as being entirely dependent on television programmes for the entertainment of the masses, and so much so that books have become outlawed. As they are considered to lead to rational thinking and enlightenment about the evolutionary processes in the history of mankind, books are taken to be the worst enemies of existing society. Possessing books is treated as a crime against the state. The burning of books, in addition to wilfully destroying mankind's printed heritage and, thus, severing all ties to the past, similar to the rewriting of history in *1984*, is a way for the state authorities of securing their rule. The image of the purifying effect that fire has in some civilisations is thus perverted. Fire serves to destroy the ills of society, the books, and partly also the people that keep them. Not only are traditional concepts of the function of books, i.e. those of providing pleasure, communicating ideas and imparting knowledge, turned upside down, but ironically also they are replaced by constantly available superficial forms of visual entertainment. Such playing to the masses promotes the uncritical acceptance of the situation as is; critical awareness and enlightened thinking are ruthlessly eradicated. Such people just disappear without many questions being asked.

Bradbury preserves the traditional features of human society: the seemingly intact family in which Clarisse grows up and develops an independent and critical mind is set in contrast to Montag's somewhat problem-ridden relationship with his wife Mildred – the initially conformist fireman turned thinker versus the entertainment-consuming partner who relies on sleeping pills to be able to shut herself out from the perception of reality. Equally, the characters of Faber, the former professor of literature,

and the elderly book-preserving woman who commits suicide in the face of the firemen who threaten to burn her books, are stock characters which highlight the decadence of the new political regime. The urban society is set off against the pastoral group of "refugees" out in the country who learn books by heart in the hope of preserving the heritage of mankind. But different from Huxley and Orwell, Bradbury takes the reader to a point zero where the old regime is annihilated. The return of this group to the city after a nuclear attack and the image of Phoenix rising from the ashes mark the primitive beginnings of a new era. In the same way as Huxley and Orwell, Bradbury focuses on the plight of the protagonist, uses the fire chief as a key representative of the system to provide the historical background and has the main character proceed through a cleansing process after which his place in society is redefined.

Fahrenheit 451 marks the transition from using a fully functioning national or world society as a quasi-static protagonist in the narrative in which individuals go through a process of finding their real identity, a process that sees them move further away from the existing mainstream to becoming an outcast. The cleansing period of being given the historical background of the ruling political regime ends with either the main protagonist's full dissociation as in the case of Huxley's John, the Savage, or his complete reintegration, as with Winston Smith in *1984*. In both novels the continued existence of the super-state is assured. This utterly pessimistic prospect must also be interpreted with regard to the historical, political, social and scientific reality in the first half of the 20th century. The impact of the experience of two world wars, the disappearance of long-established political and social systems in the aftermath of World War I in Russia, in the Austrian-Hungarian empire and to some extent in Germany too, the rise of communist and national-socialist dictatorships, the effects of the automation of production processes, the use of the media for mass indoctrination have found an outlet in anti-utopian fiction.

Pessimistic visions after World War II

Numerous authors of mid-20th century science fiction accounts share the pessimistic views of Wells, Huxley and Orwell and their contemporaries, especially when they turn to world catastrophe as a motif in their texts. The causes of the sudden or gradual disappearance of political and social structures are manifold. They are linked to catastrophes arising from man's tinkering in the fields of science and technology, to the issue of population explosion, to global warfare, to alien invasions of the planet

Earth, to intergalactic wars or to unexplainable natural disasters. And the stories are no longer set in the distant future after a decisive event that has swept away the old regime and allowed the authors in a "tabula rasa"-situation to develop totalitarian world states. The instant or gradual deconstruction of living conditions, of the set patterns of social and political life as we know them certainly allows for the critical reflection of the ephemeral character of the systems that govern our societies. Such texts channel and alleviate the generally perceived fears of the future resulting from developments in politics, the sciences and technology that vast sections of the populations could no longer understand. In addition, the authors might have perceived the craving of their readers for societal forms that assign the individual a well-defined place in a small group with which they can identify and which they can consider as a kind of home and retreat, an environment where they feel secure in a situation where the fight against the external enemy provides an awesome life-endangering threat every day. Authors such as Ballard (*The Wind from Nowhere*, *The Drought*), Wyndham (*The Day of the Triffids*, *The Kraken Wakes)*, A. C. Clarke (*Childhood's End*), Hoyle (*The Black Cloud*, *October the First is Too Late*) depict the catastrophe in progress and see man fighting the threat. However, they do not envisage the total annihilation of mankind.

Many stories describe the stages of the gradual decay of the physical world and, alongside it, the disintegration of society to a point where only a few individuals survive and, by accident, find others in a similar plight. What emerges very often are small groups of survivors that develop patterns of a multi-generation family in which the sexes are set in very traditionalist roles of domestic care and child-rearing on the one hand and defender against the outside threat and also breadwinner on the other. Interestingly, and possibly realistically, internecine warfare is a motif that frequently recurs. Thus, man is thrown back to the very early stages of civilisation with little sign that the lessons of mankind's history have been learned. Wyndham is one of the few authors to return to earlier treatments of the role of women in post-catastrophe societies, when, in *The Day of the Triffids*, the role of women for procreation has to be redefined due to an imbalance in the numbers of male and female survivors. It is striking is that the facets of the large family and, occasionally, small groups reveal harmony in near-pastoral, i.e. rural surroundings, a vision that Bradbury also evokes. These nuclei of future societies in their fight for survival are pitted against an outside threat that has caused the destruction of the urbanised world.

But there are also texts that realistically turn to the "homo homini lupus" – theme to indicate that the survivors also have to contend with

human aggression in an emergency situation, a conflict that is familiar from Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. After World War II and in the times of the Cold War of the 1950s and 60s and considering the perceived threats posed by the advances in science and technology, the return to the traditional form of a large family as a safe haven in somewhat idyllic surroundings may have seemed comforting to the readershi And indeed, some of the end-of-the-world narratives of the early post-war period have been highly successful – an easy read so to speak for SF enthusiasts and others, who wanted to come to terms with the immediate past and also future developments in science and society and at the same time find themselves in the cosy atmosphere that life in a small group in a non-urban environment can bring. The label chosen by Brian W. Aldiss for this kind of fiction, namely, "cosy catastrophe"[13], seems fully justified. In this kind of science fiction, reconstruction implies a return to what was. The changes wrought by deconstruction are of a material nature; there is little or no hope for an improvement of the inter-relations in human societies. But whether such visions of the world and the role of the individual in society have a future is debatable.

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[13] Cf. Brian W. Aldiss: *Billion Year Spree. The History of Science Fiction.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1973. P. 293 ff.

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Rezumat: Narațiunile de tipul utopiilor și distopiilor au dominat multă vreme discuțiile avizate asupra conceptului de structuri societale în ficțiune. Cu timpul, asemenea viziuni au devenit din ce în ce mai pesimiste. Multe exemple clasice din literatura secolului al XX-lea au avansat reprezentări înspăimântătoare ale societății umane, în care omul e supus unor constrângeri ideologice care implică o îndepărtare fundamentală de valorile și experiențele istorice ale omenirii. Literatura științifico-fantastică merge chiar mai departe, înfățișând o distrugere totală a societății umane precum și primii pași în procesul de reconstruire. Prezenta lucrare face o trecere în revistă a acestei evoluții și arată în ce constă această „reînnoire" și în ce mod ea definește tiparele sociale (noi).

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