MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue Annuale
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Margins Marges Margini

RIVISTA MULTILINGUE ANNUALE

DI STUDI LETTERARI, LINGUISTICI E CULTURALI

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UNIVERSITÀ DELLA CALABRIA

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Vol. 2 (2024)
Periodicità: annuale

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755

Margins/Marges/Margini

Casa Editrice
Mimesis (MI)

Margini: spazi di ricostruzione, traduzione, trasformazione, rinascita

Indice

Rotte

Soglie

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Creative Writing and Intersemiotic Translation in the English Language Classroom: Turning Shapes and Colours into Flash Fiction

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Abstract

This paper explores the integration of creative writing and intersemiotic translation as a multifaceted approach to English language learning. The translation between different semiotic systems (in this case from visual to textual), combined with creative writing, offers a rich pedagogical framework for engaging language learners in deep, meaningful interaction with the target language. The methodology employed a blended approach, incorporating Task-Based Language Teaching, Project-Based Learning, and learning by doing, wherein learners systematically progressed through a series of gradual activities designed to culminate in the composition of a concise narrative inspired by a visual artwork. Participants in the project were advanced-level students in their second year of the bachelor's degree program in Foreign Languages and Cultures.Findings indicate that the students demonstrated significant improvement in both language proficiency and intercultural competence. Furthermore, the study found that these activities fostered a deeper emotional and cognitive engagement with the learning material, facilitating a more personal approach to language acquisition.Incorporating creative and multimodal approaches into the curriculum can lead to more effective and immersive language learning experiences. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on multimodal pedagogies and opens new avenues for exploring how creative writing and intersemiotic translation can be exploited to support language and linguistics learners in an increasingly interconnected and semiotically complex world.

Keywords: Task-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, intersemiotic translation, literary linguistics, creative writing.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

1. Introduction: theoretical background and methodology

The aim of this paper is to explore the intersection between creative writing and intersemiotic translation in a foreign language learning environment. The teaching module outlined here can be regarded as a voyage through the margins, which can be understood as boundaries between disciplines but also as seemingly distant, peripheral areas in relation to language and linguistics learning. In fact, for various reasons, these margins contribute to language enhancement through creativity. Learners feel like protagonists of an experience that, leveraging their passions and emotions, leads them to create something original, personal, and meaningful, often reflecting their experiences.

In a foreign language learning context, the use of literature and creative writing fosters learners' spontaneous self-expression, thereby enhancing their proficiency in reading and writing skills. Creativity serves to 'distract' from the learning objective, allowing for spontaneous invention, alleviating apprehensions regarding peer and instructor judgment. Maley (2012) effectively summarizes the reasons why creative writing and literature have proven to be valuable allies in language teaching by increasing proficiency in language across various dimensions: syntax, lexicon, phonetics, and communication; by nurturing a sense of playfulness, motivating students to creatively engage with language and fostering a willingness to experiment and explore; by promoting a balanced use of both the analytical and creative sides of the brain; by cultivating self-confidence, thereby enhancing motivation levels, and by improving comprehension through creative writing endeavours, enabling students to grasp the mechanics of text construction and aiding in reading comprehension. These considerations should not be deemed unexpected, as creative writing, in contrast to functional and guided writing, accesses emotions and spontaneity, thus activating the right hemisphere of the brain and fostering a harmonious equilibrium between logical and intuitive faculties (Sperry 1961; Krashen 1977; Gardner 1982; Sachs 1987).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

In a world dominated by images, the challenge was to start from a painting chosen by the students and try to transform it into a story with the aim of activating the linguistic functions that arise from cognitive reactions to visual elements, as Hunt explains well (2013, 110):

> It used to be thought that language was confined to the left hemisphere, but it has now become clear that, whilst the left brain possesses the complete lexicon and rules of syntax and is responsible for linear and clear-cut meanings, the right hemisphere has a number of very subtle but intriguing linguistic functions, including the processing of images and symbols, metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, inference and allusion, personification, prosody, assonance and alliteration. All of these are central features of poetry or poetic language, and indeed of creative writing as a whole.

It should be emphasized that the focus here is not on intersemiotic translation, art, or literature per se, but on English language learning. Students are not meant to become writers, artists, or critics, but rather to use the subjects they are passionate about as stimuli to enhance and refine their language skills. Paintings and literature become tools to build and consolidate comprehensive language proficiency. The aim is to analyse and interpret the meanings of a painting, a non-verbal text, and transport them beyond the visual boundary, stepping out of the frame to tell a story and practice written production, which seems to have become increasingly marginal in today's culture and education.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Figure 1 *Escapando de la Crítica*, Pere Borrell del Caso (1874)

Intersemiotic translation is the act of transposing signification from one semiotic domain to another, ensuring that the meanings conveyed in the translated message retain their intrinsic identity (Kujawska 2001, 187). Of course, the transition from an image to a narrative text is drastic, especially because the visual element can be interpreted in several ways. A painting can evoke different emotions and thoughts, and consequently, the translated meaning can vary from student to student. Indeed, in some cases, students who had chosen the same painting created profoundly distinct narratives (in terms of genre, atmosphere, plot, etc.). For this reason, it is deemed appropriate to complement the concept of intersemiotic translation with that of ekphrasis, which aims to convey the essence and emotional impact of an artwork through words. However, the task assigned to the students involves more than a mere vivid description of a painting, requiring instead its transformation into a narrative that integrates descriptive, narrative, and dialogic components. In this context, we cannot consider the outcomes as products that remain faithful or identical to the meaning and underlying essence of the original text. This is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

because, aside from varying interpretations, students may focus on only one theme among many for their written work.

Therefore, it is more precise to classify these outcomes as adaptations rather than translations, since the final product is not intended to replicate the original text but to serve as an interpretation and re-creation. This involves a transformative process where the new work reconfigures the source material within a different medium (Hutcheon 2006).

The teaching methodology employed in this project integrates three approaches, Task-Based Learning (TBL), Project-Based Learning (PBL), and Learning by Doing, all centred around active and practical learning. TBL is an approach to teaching foreign languages that focuses on carrying out specific activities or tasks to enhance language learning. This approach places students at the centre of the learning process, encouraging them to actively use the target language for practical purposes (Nunan 1991, 2004; González-Davies, 2004; Ellis 2006, 2009). Nunan (1989, 10) defines a task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on the meaning rather than form" . PBL involves learners working on extended, often interdisciplinary projects that require inquiry, collaboration, and critical thinking (Beckett 2006, Boss et al. 2007). Projects culminate in a final product – a short story in our case – that demonstrates understanding and mastery of the topic.

TBL and PBL can be highly effective approaches to teaching creative writing, as they provide students with opportunities to engage in authentic, real-world writing tasks. For example, students often choose to write short stories that address contemporary social issues. Furthermore, students are particularly motivated because they are allowed to express their own voices and perspectives and, at the end of the project, they will have created something personal, a completely unique creative product resulting from reflections and direct experiences, which are the main elements of the third method used here, that is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

learning by doing, or experiential learning, which I habitually summarise with the word 'e*do*cation'. TBL and PBL are not conflicting approaches, as has sometimes been suggested. Rather, they can be effectively combined within a cohesive educational framework. This integration can be achieved through the implementation of a series of short and concrete tasks designed to address specific learning objectives. These tasks serve to gradually guide students towards the realization of the final project.

2. Module *Shortelling: from paintings to flash fiction*[1]

Target audience and language level

- Second-year undergraduate students (C1 level of the CEFR).

Aims

- Understanding and exploring the process of translating between different modes of communication, such as from visual art to written text.
- Understanding how creative writing works and producing creative texts of different genres.
- Developing skills in analysing and interpreting both visual and textual elements.
- Promoting interdisciplinary learning by bridging the gap between visual arts, literature, translation, and language studies;
- Providing practical in class experience through hands-on tasks and projects.

[1] The course lasts 45 hours and is divided into two modules. The first, consisting of 24 hours, is the one presented here. Due to space constraints, only some lessons will be detailed (topics 1, 2, and 4); for lessons on style, reference is made to Barone, *La componente linguistica e stilistica nella scrittura creaiva* (Barone et al. 2021). The second module (*Shortelling*: from literature to screen) involves the reverse path, from words to images. Students are engaged in writing a screenplay for a short film based on an English literary work that must be modernized and contain innovative elements compared to the original text (spin-offs, deeper exploration of certain characters, addition of scenes, etc.). The best screenplays will be transformed into scripts, and the students will shoot their short films. The lessons presented here will be included in a monograph that will illustrate the entire course.

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Topics and tasks

1. Text, textuality, text types/genres, textual competence (two lessons)
2. Intersemiotic translation and multimodality (two lessons)
3. Style, register, ambience, stylistics (two lessons)
4. Further insights into stylistics: foregrounding, showing and telling (one lesson)
5. In class task: Continue the story given the opening lines (one lesson)
6. In class tasks: analysis of selected paintings and discussion (one lesson);
7. Narratology and characteristics of the short story (two lessons)
8. In class task: Fairy tale rewriting/modernization. (This is the final in class task and the first in which students challenge themselves with writing a complete story) (one lesson)

Short story assignment

You are required to write a short story of minimum 600 words / maximum 1500. The choice of the genre is free. You can write either individually or collaboratively in maximum 3. Your story must be based on a painting and must take into consideration all the aspects dealt with throughout the module.

Assessment criteria

25 % – The idea behind the story and the connections with the chosen painting.

15% – Plot and pacing

The framework of the story. The actions, events and turning points that propel the story forward. How the story unfolds (points for originality/unpredictability). The timing of the action.

20% – Language 1

Grammar: spelling, punctuation, syntax.

ISSN: 2974-9549
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20% - Language 2

Vocabulary choices: appropriateness, richness, and/or originality.

20 % – Style

Overall quality of the writing. Original use of language. Register that reflects the plot and characters, ability to show things/situations/characters. Use of figures of speech.

2.1 Lessons 1 and 2: Text, textuality, text types/genres, textual competence, literary and non-literary language

a. Lesson 1

Task

The first question I ask students is "What is a text?". I invite them to read some excerpts and tell me which of those can be defined as a text and why. NOTE WELL: only **ONE** answer is right.

1. HELP!!!
2. It seemed colder on the long ride back to Winterfell, though the wind had died by then and the sun was higher in the sky. Bran rode with his brothers, well ahead of the main party, his pony struggling hard to keep up with their horses.
3. Dear Claire, I'm writing to tell you that I finally found the courage to leave (…)
4. *Going to* is often interchangeable with the present progressive, but its use does emphasise the idea of a decision that has been made. It is also used to make predictions based on present evidence.
5. "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore".

The class generally reacts almost immediately by stating that the only correct answer is number 2 (Martin 2011, 15) because, assuming that only one answer is correct, they associate the text with the novel form, while a cry for help, a letter, a grammatical rule, and a line from a movie are not taken into consideration. The point is that only a few reflect and are

ISSN: 2974-9549
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not misled by the "NOTE WELL: only ONE answer is right", and guess that the only correct answer is that they are all texts.

Theory box (quotes from scholars)

Text

> A pre-theoretical term used in linguistics and phonetics to refer to a stretch of language recorded for the purpose of analysis and description. What is important to note is that texts may refer to collections of written or spoken material (the latter having been transcribed in some way), e.g. conversation, monologues, rituals, and so on. (…) Texts are seen as language units which have a definable communicative function, characterized by such principles as cohesion, coherence and informativeness, which can be used to provide a formal definition of what constitutes their identifying textuality or texture. On the basis of these principles, texts are classified into text types, or genres, such as road signs, news reports, poems, conversations, etc. (Crystal 2008, 482).

> Texts can come in all shapes and sizes: they can correspond in extent to any linguistic unit: letter, sound, word, sentence, combination of sentences. To put the matter more brisky, I identify a text not by its linguistic extent but by its social intent (Widdowson 2004, 8).

Text types

Students are introduced to the concepts of text types and genres through a schematic summary that includes all the text types (descriptive, narrative, argumentative, instructive/procedural, and expository/didactic), their communicative purposes, and a list of genres for each category. They are then invited to provide examples for each category and genre.

Textual competence tasks

The second part of lesson 1 is dedicated to textual competence, that is the ability which allows to produce and recognize texts by interpreting them.

It consists in attaching a type, a genre, a class to a text: for instance, to start reading/listening and soon understand you are reading/listening to a joke, weather forecast, an ad, or the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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instructions for your microwave, but also in recognising elements of intertextuality when reading something.

Task

Guess the context by means if isolated words. These words were extracted from some texts. What are these texts about? Can you identify a genre?

Sets of words

1. Mass, communication, sell, buy, television set, plug, running.
2. Monument, site, found, foundations, build, tools, stone.
3. Trip, world, mountain, sea, map, ocean, ship, islands.
4. Handshake, contract, career, competitive world, large amounts, graph, power.
5. Children, hunger, pain, dirt, crying, fight, weapons, surgery, wounds.
6. Condemnation, truth, accusations, lies, repentance, suffer, pride, honesty, blindness, duty, crime.
7. Fragile, special handling, damaged, broken.

During the brainstorming session that follows the reading of the words, students are almost always certain to guess the context correctly. For example, they associate set number 1 with advertising, number 2 with archaeology, number 3 with tourism, number 4 with marketing or economics in general, number 5 with humanitarian initiatives, number 6 with the religious world or literary fiction, and number 7 with instructions on packages containing fragile items. When they later discover that none of their hypotheses were correct but that I had extracted those words from song lyrics by Depeche Mode, they are surprised, but not disappointed. Instead, they are amused and engaged, and they understand that they must always consider the context before grasping the meaning or the genre of something.

ISSN: 2974-9549
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b. Lesson 2

Task

Remaining in the field of textual competence, I ask students to read and understand larger portions of texts with the same aim, that is the individuation of the right genre. Try to tell me what you would highlight in these texts. What would you include in your text analysis? What genre do you think these texts belong to and why?

Text 1

> And now, before proceeding to our subject proper, **let me beg the reader's attention** to an excerpt or two from a somewhat remarkable letter, **which appears to have been found corked in a bottle and floating on the Mare Tenebrarum** – an ocean well described by the Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephestion, but little frequented in modern days unless by the Transcendentalists and some other divers for crotchets. The date of this letter, I confess, surprises me even more particularly than its contents; for **it seems to have been written in the year Two thousand eight hundred and forty-eight**.

Text 2

> The expression of the law may be thus generalized: – the number of **light-particles** (or, if the phrase be preferred, the number of **light-impressions**) received upon **the shifting plane**, will be **inversely proportional with the squares of the distances of the plane**. Generalizing yet again, we may say that the diffusion – the scattering – **the irradiation**, in a word – is **directly proportional with the squares of the distances.**

After carefully reading the excerpts, the students have no doubts. The first text belongs to literary language, while the second one belongs to scientific language (see the bold parts that students usually underline to justify their answer). Actually, the two excerpts belong to the same text, *Eureka* by Edgar Allan Poe (1848, 6-7 and 36-37), an implicitly ambiguous text that defies classification within a specific genre. It is undoubtedly an essay, but the question that many have raised is whether it is literary or scientific.

This task allows me to open a parenthesis and explain the difference between scientific language and literary language, but above all, it allows me to discuss an aspect that I consider fundamental and that concerns the strong division that still exists today between the scientific world and the literary world.

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Explanation Box

As a rule, the main differences between scientific and literary language regard communicative aims; scientific language is predominantly denotative while literary language is characterised by a high frequency of connotative uses. Such differences are present at all levels of analysis, from morphology to pragmatics and they have an impact on lexis, syntax, and semantics. It goes without saying that language itself does not change in scientific or literary texts; what changes is the use of language in specific situations, with the linguistic code employed in a different way compared to common usage. In the field of specialised languages, the different uses of the linguistic code develop in relation to the various scientific disciplines, which in turn come to be intertwined and share the operative techniques and ways of using symbols and words. In general, sector-specific languages are characterised above all by monoreferentiality, absence of ambiguity, objectivity, economy, depersonalisation and appropriateness as well as by what might be defined as a lack of style, while literary language can be considered, albeit a great simplification, as at the opposite extreme.

Returning to the Poe excerpts, it seems easy to immediately classify them. What is instantly clear is that in the first example we find very precise stylistic choices, while in the second we notice a lack of style. The lexical, stylistic and semantic choices in the first excerpt immediately reveal the literary and fictional nature of the text and the parts in bold explain why; the use of the first person and the link with the receiver, the lexical choices that are little suited to science ("let me beg the reader's attention, corked in a bottle and floating in the Mare Tenebrarum, divers for crotchets, I confess, I fancy") and above all the author's inventions concerning the "Mare Tenebrarum" and the "Nubian geographer, Ptolemy Hephestion". We should also note the year of the fictitious letter, 2848, which makes the text decidedly non-scientific. The second excerpt is characterised by precision, the use of technical terms and modal verbs, and above all by the above introduced concept of

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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depersonalisation through the use of the personal pronoun *we* and no direct reference to the author.

Is *Eureka* a scientific or literary text? the critics are divided on two fronts: some have defined the work as a literary composition saturated with exercises in style without any foundation of truth; others have considered it, and continue to consider it, a scientific text that heralds discoveries that would only be made many years later and that is based on real scientific sources. In this connection, for example, we read that "Poe's *Eureka* scoops the Big Bang Theory by eighty years. It wasn't until 1927 that Georges Lemaître, a Belgian priest, asserted that the explosion of an atom (the Big Bang) sometime between 10 and 20 billion years ago was responsible for the creation of the universe" (Bloomfield 2007, 175). But, aside from the reflections on the content of the text, here we are interested in other, purely linguistic questions. Starting from the considerations previously made, and analysing the text in search of textuality conditions, can we place it in the scientific genre? Is the register used literary or scientific? To what extent are the argumentative and descriptive sequences typical of the scientific genre? At the same time, I wonder whether it is appropriate and sensible to classify a text at all costs within a specific category. The charming power of this text lies precisely in its hybrid nature, in crossing the margins, and not for this reason being considered marginal by the scientific world.

I conclude this lesson by telling the students that the divide between science and literature, or between scientists and literary scholars, remains significant today, with little change since Snow (1959, 4, 17, 19) wrote about it in his essay *The Two Cultures*:

> Two polar groups: at one pole we have the literary intellectuals, who incidentally while no one was looking took to referring to themselves as intellectuals, as though there were no others… Literary intellectuals at one pole – on the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension – sometimes (particularly among the young) hostility and dislike, but most of all lack of understanding. They have a curious distorted image of each other. […] There seems then to be no place where the two cultures meet. The clashing point of two subjects, two disciplines, two cultures – of two galaxies, so far as that goes – ought to produce creative chances. The chances are there now. But they are there, as it

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> were, in a vacuum, because those in the two cultures can't talk to each other. […] There is only one way out of this: it is, of course, by rethinking our education.

2.2 Lessons 3 and 4: Multimodality and intersemiotic translation

c. Lesson 3

Before involving the class in specific tasks, I introduce the concepts of multimodality and intersemiotic translation, which are often new to learners.

Explanation box

Our society is profoundly multimodal, and all texts incorporate various semiotic resources to create and convey meaning. This meaning-making engine is particularly present in contemporary texts which can rely on the incessant progress if ICTs and the Internet. Technology superpower has sped up the combination of the above-mentioned semiotic resources in a way which was unconceivable when, chiefly in language teaching situations, teachers and students could use and exploit printed texts only. One of the main objectives of this lesson, and of the module in general, is to highlight the vital importance of motivation in language learning. The use of highly engaging materials, drawn from what students love (music, cinema, literature, etc.), helps teachers establish a strong connection with the learners, whose feedback and output will most likely be positive.

Multimodality theory explores the diverse range of methods individuals employ to communicate and convey their thoughts and feelings. Consequently, people can seamlessly integrate multiple modes - such as art, writing, and music - into their creative expressions. A mode, in this context, refers to a recognized communication channel within a culture. These channels encompass various forms, including writing, gestures, postures, gazes, font styles and colours, images, videos, music, noises, and the intricate interactions among them (Kress 2000; Kress, Van Leeuwen 2001, Kress 2009).

In this part of the lesson, students are confronted with two tasks, but I will present only one due to space constraints.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Task

After reading the following text, try to visualize images related to a possible story: people involved, objects, colours, atmosphere, setting, etc. Anything that comes to mind.

> Reach out and touch faith
> Your own personal Jesus
> Someone to hear your prayers, someone who cares
> Feeling unknown and you're all alone
> Flesh and bone by the telephone
> Lift up the receiver, I'll make you a believer
> Take second best, put me to the test
> Things on your chest you need to confess
> I will deliver
> You know I'm a forgiver
> Reach out and touch faith (*Personal Jesus*, Depeche Mode)

After the discussion, students watch two videoclips of the song. The first is by Depeche Mode, the second is by Marilyn Manson, and they realize that the same words accompanied by the two videos drastically change in meaning. Themes, atmosphere, and tone considerably shift, demonstrating that the interaction of diverse semiotic resources, despite sharing the same verbal text, can generate profoundly different worlds. Multimodality is closely linked to intersemiotic translation (a videoclip based on a song being a prime example).

Intersemiotic transposition offers students the opportunity to explore their creativity. By inviting them to adapt a concept from one expressive mode to another, creative thinking and imagination are stimulated and that is precisely the general aim of this module.

d. Lesson 4

Students analyse two paintings trying to imagine possible stories and then they read an intersemiotic adaptation of them in search of connections.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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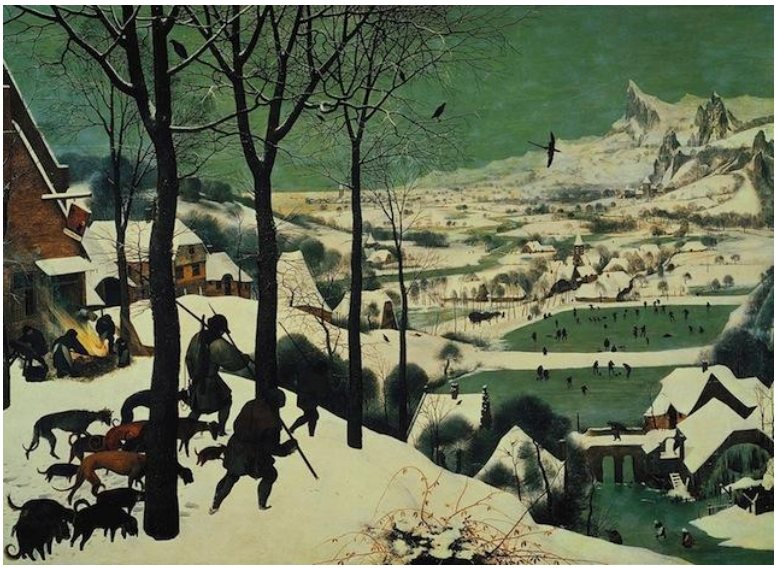

Figure 2 *The Hunters in the Snow*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1565)

Figure 3 *The Starry Night*, Vincent Van Gogh (1889)

Task

Analyse the two paintings from a visual perspective breaking down elements such as composition, colours, mood, symbolism, and narrative potential. Identify the key elements and possible themes within the painting that you want to capture in your fiction writing. This could include characters, settings, emotions, or symbols. Use vivid and descriptive

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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language to convey the visual aspects of the painting in your writing. Describe the scenes, characters, and settings in a way that brings them to life for the reader, capturing the essence of the original painting. Develop a narrative structure that incorporates the themes and elements of the painting. This could involve creating characters and plotlines inspired by the painting, or even imagining the events leading up to or following the scene depicted. Remember that intersemiotic transposition is not about creating an exact replica of the painting in written form, but rather about interpreting and reimagining it in a new medium.

Class discussion

Seek feedback from others and be open to making further revisions based on their input. Intersemiotic transposition is a collaborative process, and feedback can help you refine your writing and enhance its impact.

It is important to specify that, at this stage, students do not yet possess elements of creative writing that will be addressed in subsequent lessons. However, it is interesting to see how they react naturally without instructions and constraints, and then move on to theoretical concepts and specific writing advice in a pathway that progresses from practice to theory. After this discussion, the students read two poems (*The Starry Night* by Anne Sexton and *Hunters in the Snow* by William Carlos Williams) inspired by those paintings to have an insight into how it is possible to transpose an image into a literary text. Despite the difference in genre, namely poetry rather than prose, this reading exercise can facilitate their comprehension of the process of intersemiotic transposition and the literary interpretation of visual material.

2.3 Lesson 7: Introducing the writing techniques of foregrounding and showing vs. telling

Explanation box

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Foregrounding serves as a literary technique employed to emphasize certain elements within a text, distinguishing them from the surrounding words. This method highlights specific portions of the text that are deemed crucial for comprehending and interpreting the author's style. Its application extends across all levels of linguistic analysis: phonology, graphology, morphology, lexis, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Garvin 1964, Short 1996, Hall 2005, Leech 2013, Scott 2013). We distinguish two types of foregrounding:

- parallelism (the repetition of a word, sound, idea, pattern, etc.);
- deviation (when you 'deviate' from what is perceived as the norm of the language, when rules are broken. Deviations can be lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphological, semantic, dialectal, but also of register and style). "In short, an unusual linguistic usage would be foregrounded against the background of standard language, and thus would stan out" (Scott, 2013, 4).

Students read an example in which the obsessive repetition of certain words enhances the sense of anguish and emotional turmoil serving as an emotive trigger.

> Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet I dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them – many, many days ago – yet I dared not – I dared not speak! (Poe 1985, 182).

Another significant aspect of creative writing pertains to the techniques of showing and telling. The telling vs. showing distinction captures two different modes of presenting events in a narrative. In the showing mode, the narrative evokes in readers the impression that they are shown the events of the story or that they somehow witness them, while in the telling mode, the narrative evokes in readers the impression that they are told about the events. When you tell rather than show, you simply inform your reader rather than allowing him to deduce anything. You're supplying information by simply stating it. You

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

might report that a character is 'tall', or 'angry', or 'cold', or 'tired'. When employing the technique of showing, the reader becomes an active participant in the narrative experience. Rather than merely receiving information passively, the reader engages in mental visualization, allowing them to draw the intended conclusions. An example could be:

- Telling: Claire was angry
- Showing: Claire stormed into the room, her footsteps heavy against the floorboards. Her jaw clenched as she forcefully crossed her arms over her chest, her narrowed eyes flashing with suppressed rage. Claire's voice, when she finally spoke, was strident, each word punctuated by a sharp exhale as she struggled to contain the storm of emotions growing within her.

In short, as Joseph Conrad (2018, 7) suggests, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see! That – and no more; and it is everything!".

Task

These are 'telling' sentences. Transform them into examples of showing.

1. After the class, Gary went home in a bad mood.
2. She was an unusual woman.
3. He was so happy!

Due to space constraints, I will present just two productions written by the students. She was an unusual woman.

> She had long curly hair pulled back into a messy bun and big blue glasses that matched the color of her eyes, perhaps too large for her face. She dressed in eccentric colors: wearing a light green pullover and a red skirt paired with stockings featuring yellow and black stripes, resembling a bee! She had an iguana as a pet, which she took for a walk every morning before going to work. That was rather weird.

After the class, Gary went home in a bad mood.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

He arrived and slammed the door behind him without even saying hello to his mother. His eyes were full of tears and anger, and he nervously and constantly cracked his fingers. His face seemed like the perfect blend of the characters "Anger" and "Sadness" from the cartoon "Inside Out". He was completely red, with veins pulsing on his neck, and his eyes seemed to belong to someone on the brink of a meltdown. He paced back and forth in his room like a caged animal and constantly bit his chapped lips. In a matter of minutes, his room became a mess as he threw everything he came across onto the ground, even breaking his mom's favourite lamp.

3. Final work and conclusion

The module presented here has produced unexpected and astonishing results, which can be attributed to the influence that fields like literature and visual arts can have on learners, as well as to the freedom of expression. On more than one occasion, at the end of the students' stories, I found annotations that testified to the effectiveness of the task even in terms of personal and emotional growth. For example, I read: Dear Professor, regardless of what you will think of my short story and of the evaluation, I would like to thank you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to write about it. It helps to render this page of my life, which will always be a part of me, less oppressive. It is extremely touching and encouraging to realize that a language course can generate impacts of such magnitude, and that the writing of a story contributed to alleviating the weight of a particularly hard life experience.

Returning to the proposed teaching module, literature and art in general emerge prominently as important resources in language learning, offering a wide range of benefits that go beyond simple acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. They stimulate intellectual curiosity, fuel creativity, and promote a deeper understanding of human complexity. Carter and McCarthy (2006) have highlighted the intrinsic link between creativity and linguistic competence, positing that linguistic creativity reflects an individual's mastery of the linguistic resources available within their language repertoire, and as Hall (2005) points out, using literature and creative writing in foreign language environments has several advantages that go from vocabulary acquisition to reading skills, promotion of

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

interpretative and inferential skills to psycholinguistic aspects (focus on form, discourse processing skills etc.).

As I have previously stated, this approach has produced highly satisfying results, and I have frequently found myself appreciating the stories written by students, particularly those that transport you into the painted scene while reading, making it seem as if you were witnessing the events unfold. This exemplifies the power of multimodality, serving as both a meaning-making and a meaning-amplifying engine.

One of the examples that has left a lasting impression on me is a narrative depicting Mariko's final moments a few minutes before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Figure 4 *Water Lilies and Japanese Bridge*, Claude Monet (1899)

The story, entitled *The Sky over the City*, opens with a precise date and time: August 6, 1945, 7:15 AM, and this alone evokes strong emotions even before starting to read the story. It portrays the daily routine of preparing breakfast for the child before school, washing dishes, and saying goodbye to the little one as she heads to school with a friend. The radio announces the presence of American planes flying over the city's sky, though it is likely just

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

a reconnaissance mission. Mariko senses a feeling of anguish. This is the final part of the story:

> She needed some fresh air, so she stepped outside. At the rear of the house lay a magnificent Japanese garden, adorned with numerous trees, flowers, and a charming pond with a small bridge. She had always loved that place, it was the most beautiful on Earth to her. Taking a few deep breaths, she wandered through the garden, finding relief in its serenity.
> Arriving at the bridge, she paused in the middle, resting her elbows on the railing. Tears welled up in her eyes, falling from her cheeks and into the still water below. Despite enduring so much, she could no longer suppress her emotions. It was then that she realized she still clutched Yun's letter. Opening it, she read his words once more:
> "My dear Mariko, today I cannot write for long. Here, we are working harder than ever; some say the war will end soon. I truly hope so. I miss you, my dear, and I miss our little Kanao. I keep thinking of you both, and the thought of seeing you is the only thing that brings a smile to my face now. Soon, I will come home to you, I promise. Until then, you must remain strong, as I know you are.
> I love you, yours, Yun".
> Once again, Yun's words and familiar handwriting managed to soothe her. She folded the paper and kissed it tenderly, then pressed it against her heart, longing to feel Yun's presence. A gentle breeze rustled through the willow branches, while the flowers stretched toward the sky, basking in the sunlight that had emerged after three days of inclement weather. All was quiet, all was peaceful. Mariko closed her eyes, envisioning Yun and Kanao with Momo the giraffe, all smiling. She breathed deeply. It was 8:15 AM, and a blinding light illuminated the sky over Hiroshima.

A sequence of familiar events is interrupted by one of the most terrible and tragic events in history, which is not described explicitly, since the narration halts when Mariko catches sight of the blinding light. However, we are all aware of the consequences and the magnitude of the horror. This permeates the story with both power and delicacy, rendering it highly poetic.

To conclude, engaging in creative writing facilitates students in approaching language across various levels of analysis, thereby fostering a closer connection to the field of linguistics. As Matthews (2014, VII) suggests when defining the word 'linguistics', "a range of other disciplines, from the study of literature to computer science, deal with language in one way or another, and the boundaries between them and linguistics are not fixed. It would indeed be a pity if they were".

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

Reflecting on how creative writing works and attempting to express oneself in a literary manner can be beneficial from various perspectives such as 1. language mastery with a deeper understanding of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics because creative writing requires careful consideration of word choice and precision to evoke desired emotions, create vivid imagery, and convey nuanced meanings. 2. Structural awareness (sentences and paragraph organization, and narrative coherence) that enables students to construct cohesive and engaging texts. 3. Stylistic variation in search of distinct voices, moods, and atmospheres in their work not to mention the exploration of different registers and/or dialects. Incorporating creative writing, multimodality, and intersemiotic approaches into a foreign language/linguistics course not only enriches the educational path but fundamentally transforms the perspective of learning itself. Through the exploration of the bounds of imagination and creativity, students refine their linguistic skills crafting knowledge through action: e*do*cation.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549016

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Gender Marginalisation in Indian Society: Inequalities and Cultural Exclusion of Indian Women as Depicted in Indian Fiction in English

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Abstract

Indian fiction in English prominently demonstrates the imposing presence of marginalisation founded upon gender. Gender Marginalisation is an extensively recognized social concern, accentuating the anguish of gender discrimination, oppression and subordination in all societies. For this research, two short stories by eminent Indian stalwart writers have been selected. Amrita Pritam (1919- 2005) is regarded as one of the forerunners of Indian women writers of the twentieth century. Her works asserting her identity in society have established her as a chief proponent of feminist writing. Her celebrated story "270 Crore Heartbeats" illustrates several gender marginalities that weigh down upon our society even today. In contrast to Pritam, Rabindranath Tagore (1861- 1941) also theorises through his literature some of the crucial gender-marginal concerns of his day that were governed by rigid social conditioning and are still prevalent in the present day. His short story, "Profit and Loss" demonstrates the hideous repercussions that spell havoc in the lives of people who that coerced to follow the male-dominated norms of society. Both these authors have been versatile visionary thinkers in their own right. Yet, their critique of social malpractices makes a strong statement in theorizing gender marginalities of society. This paper evaluates and contrasts how both these writers have flagrantly critiqued the social institution of marriage and how the marginalization based on gender can gnaw at the foundation of any society and destroy is cultural values of solidarity.

Keywords: Female Consciousness, gender inequality, social malpractices, social oppression, transformation.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

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di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Introduction

Gender marginalisation is powerfully depicted in contemporary Indian writing in English literature M. R Anand, Munshi Premchand, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi (1926–2016), Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991) Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) Anita Desai (1937-) and Arundhati Roy among others. To describe the influential representation of the gender marginalisation in contemporary Indian writing two legendary writers have been selected for this research—Rabindranath Tagore and Amrita Pritam. Both writers have been revolutionary writers and torchbearers of their respective times. It is pathetic to observe that the social malpractices that infested the society during Tagore's time, have thrived maliciously during the time of Amrita Pritam.

One can observe the piteous plight of women even to this day, despite the incredible progress human beings have made in the field of science and technology and all other walks of life. Gender marginalisation causes isolation and uprootedness, among other devastating drawbacks, and it brings about numerous degrees of social closure. Social closure is the process of subjugation in which a group of oppressors, seizes all privileges while depriving the group of victims of even the right to basic sustenance. It is aptly observed,

> The male and the female in the patriarchy-shaped consciousness are representative of such a relationship, in which the woman is "the other," who frequently assumes marginalized status. This marginality is closely associated with a strong sense of difference resulting from the decidedly androcentric perception of gender. (Gilarek 221)

A couple of representative short stories written by these authors have been identified for this research that best demonstrate gender inequity. Rabindranath Tagore's short story, "Profit and Loss" has been compared with Amrita Pritam's celebrated story "270 Crore Heartbeats" in this paper. Through the scope of this comparison, the paper aims to reflect upon gendered marginalizations and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

contemporary interpretations that may be justly applied to the contexts of these stories and current society.

Both these authors have been radical visionary intellectuals in their respective times and domains. Yet, their evaluation of social derelictions makes a firm assertion in theorizing gender issues in society. This paper analyses and contrasts how these writers have vehemently criticized the social institution of marriage and how it adversely affects the female consciousness.

Gendered Marginalities

Much of the study of the gendered marginalities has its foundations in feminist criticism or feminist reading or interpretation. Commenting on the ideological mode of feminist criticism, Elaine Showalter comments:

> It is concerned with the feminist as a reader, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems. This is not all feminist reading can do; it can be a liberating intellectual act. (Showalter 327)

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir proposes her most important thesis:

> Women are not born feminine but femininity is constructed, explaining that no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the female presents in society. Instead, she argues, it is civilization that has created this feminine creature, whom she considers intermediate between male and eunuch. (McCann 205)

Moreover, a feminist theory is formed exactly where social norms about gender are disputed. (Radtke 359) The stories discussed below, which portray women with their sense of aporia, vulnerability, dependence and stoicism, justly illustrate this point.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore (1861- 1941) was a writer, poet, playwright, artist, painter, composer, visionary and social reformer. The vast corpus of his literature has inspired and influenced the literature and culture of India for generations, even long after his death. As the only recipient from India of the Nobel Prize for Literature (in 1913) so far, his work Gitanjali (Song Offerings), the prose translation of a collection of his Bengali poems is ever more relevant today. Tagore and his family have played an important role in the Bengali Renaissance.

Rabindranath Tagore often critiques the social oppression of women in his literature. The woman characters of his stories are modelled on the lives of the real women of colonial India. Their approach to life has been stoical and futuristic. They were ahead of their times in their brave encounters against the gendered marginalities and narrow-minded beliefs that exist in society in the present day. Women challenge concerns of sexuality, chastity, self-identity and domesticity.

The heroines of his stories are advocates of liberty, individuality, justice, freedom, dignity, rights and power. As a mouthpiece for Tagore, they often confront patriarchy through their unexpectedly radical actions. His fiction is filled with brave women.

An Analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Profit and Loss"

Rabindranath Tagore theorises through his literature some of the crucial aspects gendered marginalities of his day that were governed by rigid social conditioning and are still prevalent in the present day. His short story, "Profit and Loss" demonstrates the hideous repercussions that spell havoc in the lives of people who that coerced to follow the male-dominated norms of society.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

The story traces the adversities that Ramsundar Mitra faces as a result of getting his daughter, Nirupama married into a family that demands a heavy dowry that he is unable to pay. The aftermath of this inability drags Ramsundar and Nirupama to drastic and irreversible consequences. The story opens with Tagore's acerbic observations about the institution of marriage through the description of a pathetic situation. He writes:

> The question of Nirupama's marriage now arose. Her father, Ramsundar Mitra searched and searched without finding a groom he liked; but in the end, he procured the only son of a grand *Raybahadur*. The ancestral wealth of this *Raybahadur* had diminished considerably but the family was certainly noble. They asked for a dowry of 10,000 rupees, and many additional gifts. Ramsundar agreed without a thought—such a groom should not be allowed to slip through one's fingers. (Tagore 64)

After a frantic search, Ramsundar Mitra finds a suitable match for Nirupama. Tagore mocks the behaviour of the 'noble' *Raybahadur* (or *Rai Bahadur:* a title conferred to Indian patrons during the British Rule) family that demands a dowry as they have run out of their ancestral wealth. The high-handedness of the patriarchal family is evident here. Just because the prospective groom is the "only son of a grand *Raybahadur*", the value of such a suitor is high among those aspiring to get their daughters married. (Tagore 4). Ramsundar is determined and desperate to pay the required dowry. He hopes to secure his daughter's future with this alliance and the dowry among other gifts is a pre-requisite for the same. Tagore insists that even such a heavy price may not ensure his daughter's happiness in such a conservative family.

Social malpractices like the dowry system and domestic abuse that were rampant during Tagore's time are still persistent in the contemporary age. Tagore bitterly criticizes such accepted norms of moth-eaten morality through the high-flown expectations of the *Raybahadur* family and the helplessness of Ramsundar. For

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

instance, being anxious about losing such a good match for his daughter, Mitra hurriedly agrees to pay the dowry. After selling and forfeiting a significant share of his property, he still owed about six or seven thousand rupees. Gender-based marginality is not limited to severe material hardship or social isolation which Mitra fears for his daughter if she is not married on time. The notion of womanhood, perceived through overt patriarchal norms, elevates coerced denial and deprivation to a venerable level. A distorted discourse in favour of men, expressed through a persuasive jargon undermines women's empowerment in most communities of India.

Mitra is expected to pay this dowry by the wedding day. This was a common practice in Tagore's day when a wedding would be completed only if the demanded amount of dowry had been paid. A creditor had agreed to lend Mitra the rest of the sum at an exorbitant rate of interest but he could not turn up on that day with the money. This prompts a choleric outburst of rage at the venue of the wedding.

Ramsundar implores the *Raybahadur*, pleading "not to bring bad luck by breaking off the ceremony," (Tagore 64) and assures that he will pay the remaining money to the *Raybahadur* soon. Tagore describes this commotion as:

> The women of the house wept and wailed at this disastrous upset. The root cause of it sat mutely in her silk wedding dress and ornaments, her forehead decorated with sandal paste. It cannot be said that she felt much love or respect for her prospective husband's family. (Tagore 64)

The ceremony would have been typically aborted if the groom had not protested against his father's decision. The groom wishes to marry Nirupama even without the dowry. Tagore further satirizes the *Raybahadur*'s inability to accommodate a novel point of view even when it is his son who resists the unpleasant social customs like dowry: "The *Raybahadur* sat despondent at seeing the poisonous fruits of modern education in his own son." (Tagore 65) While the men of the house, like the *Raybahadur*

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

and his son voice their opinions, the women of the household including Nirupama are left to silently accept their decisions. The dire situation of gender marginalization is starkly depicted here. It can be agreed that:

> gender inequality is that it is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the structure of societies. Gender inequality is built into the organization of marriage and families, work and the economy, politics, religions, the arts and other cultural productions, and the very language we speak. Making women and men equal, therefore, necessitates social and not individual solutions. (Lorber 8)

However, this is only the beginning of Nirupama's painful conjugal journey. Her agonizing predicament aggravates when soon after their wedding, Nirupama's husband has to report for duty as Deputy Magistrate in another part of the country. He is compelled to leave his newly wedded bride behind to commence his service. Nirupama's in-laws bear a grudge since their expected dowry is still only partially paid. In sheer vengeance, their demeanour is ruthless and insensitive towards Nirupama. Their sense of misogyny is brazenly and ostentatiously displayed to Nirupama and her father who face constant subjugation. This is also another form of exclusion and marginalization. Nirupama's in-laws seize every occasion to upset and degrade Nirupama with their scathing remarks so that she silently bears subservience to all their tantrums.

Ramsundar often goes to see his daughter but is faced with humiliation in his son-in-law's house by even the servants. Sometimes he sees his daughter for five minutes in a separate outer room of the house; sometimes he is not allowed to see her at all.

The family of the *Raybahadur* condemns Mitra, Nirupama's father, as an absconding defaulter and insolvent debtor. He finds this disgrace unbearable. Nirupama is neither permitted to visit her father's house nor is he allowed to meet

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

her. Mitra feels hurt by this indignity. Out of sheer desperation, he sells his house, without informing his sons, to gather money to pay the outstanding dowry amount to Nirupama's in-laws. Assimilation or the urge to fit into the norms of society has been a strategy for survival and this urge can be fulfilled at a high cost both for a woman and her parents or guardians.

But now Nirupama takes a firm stance and forbids her father from paying her greedy in-laws any more. Mitra returns with the money that he had brought with him to give to Nirupama's in-laws. A servant of the *Raybahadur's* household eavesdrops on this conversation between Mitra and Nirupama and reports it to the mother-in-law. Unnerved at the loss of the money, she treats Nirupama mercilessly. This also proves how gendered marginalities are sometimes caused by women who are socially privileged.

Crestfallen and dejected at this inclemency, Nirupama intentionally exposes herself to the bitter cold winds of the season and occasionally goes hungry. She contracts a serious illness and requests her mother-in-law to allow her to meet her father and brothers—just once. The mother-in-law assumes that it was one of Nirupama's ruses to visit her father's house. For Mann,

> Feminism is 'incipiently theoretical' to the extent that it understands the plights of individual women as connected with each other, as instances of systemic subordination rather than as the results of individual, accidental, or coincidental misfortune''. (Mann)

Nirupama's relationship with her mother-in-law demonstrates this idea. Nirupama dies soon after the doctor comes to see her for the first time. After her death, the in-laws lavish great pomp and show on her expensive funeral. They perhaps get into debt but earn praise for the sandalwood pyre that was made for their daughter-in-law's cremation. Unaware of all these occurrences, soon after Nirupama's death, her husband writes to his family to send her to him as he has made all the necessary

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

arrangements to stay with his wife. In reply, his mother asks him to take leave from work and return home soon. They secure another bride for him. This time the dowry is twenty thousand rupees—cash down.

Since the transgression of demanding a dowry for a wedding is not punished in any way nor fulfilled from the *Raybahadur's* point of view, it is easy for the family to demand a heavier dowry for the second wedding of their son.

Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) has been one of the leading women writers of the twentieth century. She has been a radical feminist woman writer in India. During the Partition of British India, she migrated with her father from Lahore to New Delhi. She braved the challenges of the concurrent trauma and violence of the Partition and also suffered the colossal of restoring her life as a refugee. Over six decades of her successful penmanship, Pritam essayed a wide range of literary genres including novels, prose, anthologies of poetry and short stories. Her works have been highly acclaimed by readers across the world. As a four-year-old child, Amrita Pritam was committed to being married to Pritam Singh. She married him in 1936 when she was seventeen. They had two children. The marriage proved disastrous and she separated from her husband in 1960. This episode of her life has inspired several stories written by her. Pritam's literature reveals her fervent quest for identity and individuality. She bitterly critiques how society commoditises the identity of women and strips them of all personal dignity. *Raseedi Ticket* (Revenue Stamp, 1976), her autobiography, chronicles the misfortunes, and the distress that Pritam had to suffer as a woman writer in a male-dominated society. Her stories, reinstating her identity as an assertive woman in society, have established her as a foremost exponent of feminist writing.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

An Analysis of Amrita Pritam's Short Story "270 Crore Heartbeats"

Like Tagore's story, her renowned story "270 Crore Heartbeats" exemplifies several instances of gender marginalisation that prevail in Indian society even today. "270 Crore Heartbeats" describes, Surekha's journey from emotional vulnerability to individual independence and resilience. Some parts of the story are narrated through the protagonist's retrospection of the crucial parts of her life. It evinces Surekha's competence to introspect about the challenges of her life and make informed decisions for her future.

Conventionally in some parts of India, a husband gifts a *mangalsutra* (a Sanskrit word, that means "auspicious thread") to his wife at the time of or after their wedding. The *mangalsutra* is typically a chain of black beads that a woman wears around her neck to indicate that she is married. On the one hand, this *mangalsutra* is recognized as a symbol of conjugal bliss and on the other, it represents her husband's support for her sustenance. But the story depicts how the *mangalsutra* is epitomised as a motif of domestic unrest and betrayal. Finally, by putting on her *mangalsutra* Surekha ushers her autonomy and liberty from the emotional captivity contained in marriage.

Surekha, the protagonist, is a Konkani girl, who marries Raj, a Maharashtrian, against her father's desires. Raj is jobless. Surekha buys a *mangalsutra* for herself. Typically, this is bought by a husband for his wife, but since Raj is penniless, Surekha ungrudgingly buys it for herself, having complete faith in her affection. She tells Raj, "Only the souls meet. It is not a meeting of castes and regions. But from my mother's mother and her mother I have inherited a deep-rooted custom and to honour it you must put a *mangalsutra* around my neck." (Pritam 64)

> Though she can afford only a cheap one, she thus demonstrates her trust in the *mangalsutra* and all that it customarily symbolises. When her father accepts her marriage after the birth of her first child, Surekha requests him to give her the *mangalsutra* of her long-departed

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

> mother. She says, "I don't want anything but my heart will be at peace if you give me my mother's *mangalsutra*. My mother did not die a widow and I too would like to die similarly." (Pritam 65)

This episode brings out a painful reality that every married woman dreads even today: that of becoming a widow. A widow lives a life of social, physical and emotional deprivation from the time of her husband's death till the end of her life. Despite the advances in social life, the social attitude of exclusion towards a widow is still agonizing unless she is sufficiently fortunate to get married again.

However, financial constraints compel her to pawn even her mother's *mangalsutra*. She becomes the bread-earner and provides for her husband and their two children. Raj takes to drinking and gradually dies of consumption. By this time, Surekha accumulates sufficient money but she does not redeem the *mangalsutra* from the pawnbroker. She rationalises that after her husband's death, there was nobody to put it around her neck.

Surekha's fear of becoming a widow turns into the bitter reality of her life. However, she refuses to give in to the pressures of the society and follows her will. After several years a widower appears in Surekha's life with his two children. Proposing to her for marriage, he says "I have two small wailing babies who have no mother. Can you be a mother to them? And you have two children who need a father." (Pritam 66) The proposal also adheres to the norms of personal and social fulfilment. It subscribes to the notion that a woman becomes complete only after attaining motherhood. It is only when a woman bestows motherly affection upon children who are not her own that her powers of personal sacrifice and claims to social approval are recognized.

The widower gifts her a heavy, golden *mangalsutra*, which belonged to his late wife. It had been repaired at three places. The repairs in this piece of jewellery signify the imperfections of any given relationship. Surekha realises that "life was to be lived

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

in bits and pieces." (Pritam 66) Though initially hesitant, she accepts this relationship along with the new *mangalsutra*. But the man turns out to be a swindler and hypocrite. He is neither her husband nor the father of her children. He appropriates all of her hard-earned money. This recalls what a historian of science called Margaret Rossiter (1993) had identified as the "Matilda effect," which occurs when women's belongings or contributions are ignored or usurped. (Signorella 13)

Being utterly disappointed and frustrated, Surekha returns the *mangalsutra* to the man. While getting rid of it from her neck, she recalls the words of a Tibetan Lama: a star beats about 270 crore times and then it dies. Surekha feels that her heart has throbbed 270 crore times after which her heart 'would stop with the next breath.

With time, a distinct self-realization dawns on Surekha. She regains confidence from the idea that the spark for a new star emerges from the ashes of the dead one. Like a newborn star, she feels emancipated from all the past years of grief and misery in her life. It is time she turns over a new leaf. The next morning, she buys herself a new *mangalsutra* and wears it. She cannot be divorced or widowed now; she tells herself. From her painful experiences, Surekha emerged as an independent woman. The *mangalsutra* for her is no longer a symbol of marital bliss but her confidence in self-dependence. It has been rightly observed that "Feminism also sought to transform each militant into a unique liberated woman." (Valcárcel 26) The *mangalsutra* becomes a motif of this liberation for Surekha. It is no longer a chain of dependence for her. Surekha braves the dual stigma of not only becoming a widow but also a woman who separates from her husband. She refuses to endure the pangs of her husband's betrayal.

The protagonist of the story "270 Crore Heartbeats", Surekha shares many similarities with the life of the author, Amrita Pritam. In this sense, this is an autobiographical story. The trials and tribulations of Pritam's life and reflected in that of Surekha. The story illustrates how amid personal adversities in society, it is only by

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

taking complete control of her own life. Surekha resolves to live life on her terms, instead of being anxiously mindful of social conventions and expectations. She learns from all the lessons that life has taught her. Marriage is an obligatory social convention she liberates herself from, thereby, asserting her own individual identity. She embodies, in the words of Hannah More,

> Our intellectual ore must shine,
> Not slumber idly in the mine.
> Let education's moral mint
> The noblest images imprint. (McCann 38)

The story does not define how much Surekha earns and what is the source of her livelihood. Yet, it can be inferred that a family can be:

> a source of women's oppression and exploitation. If a woman works for her family in the home, she has to be supported, and so she is economically dependent on the "man of the house," like her children. If she works outside the home, she is still expected to fulfil her domestic duties, and so she ends up working twice as hard as a man, and usually for a lot less pay. (Lorber 11)

Several parallels can be seen in the protagonists of these stories. The biological mothers of both heroines are absent. To make matters worse, Surekha's conversations with her father are rudely intercepted by her newly arrived stepmother. This probably leaves both protagonists to brave the challenges of life and gender marginalisation on their own. Neither of the husbands of the women has been assigned a name. The reader knows the name of neither Nirupama's husband (or the *Raybahadur*'s son) nor Surekha's second husband who is a widower. Perhaps their names would have lent a greater individuality to the characters who is not the focus of the stories. Both women attempt to assert their identity in their own ways and shed away their "aporia."

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

(Vrablikova 359) While Nirupama prevents her father from paying her remaining dowry, Surekha marries a man she loves against the wishes of her father.

Responding to the feminist strategy of the day, both Tagore and Pritam evince through their literature, the feminist movements in India as well as the Western countries of their time:

> Liberal feminists since the nineteenth century have sought to free contemporaneous society from residual, pre-modern, patriarchal throwbacks in law and culture, investing in legal, educational and media strategies as a form of a feminist civilising process as well as lobbying the state for formal equality within the public sphere. (Motta, Fominaya and Eschle 1)

When Pritam was writing about some of the most radical developments had been taking place, in the 1980s it became clear that in the world's social image, the masculine side continued to connote power, authority and prestige, and that the reforms achieved to date had not made a significant impact on this inertia. Thus, the objective became visible. (Valcárcel 26) Studies have further proved that "previously the social visibility of women had been interrupted because there was no place for their new skills and positions in the explicit or legally established authority. (Ibid. 27)

In the case of Nirupama, her only salvation from her daily dose of oppression was self-annihilation. On the other hand, Surekha strives to achieve this social visibility by becoming not only financially independent but also through emotional autonomy and social independence. She no longer experiences the pressing obligation to comply with the social norms and expectations. Lorber further proposes that Radical, lesbian, and psychoanalytic feminist theories of women's oppression converge in standpoint feminism, which turns from resistance to confrontation with the dominant sources of knowledge and values. The main idea among all the gender-

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

resistant feminisms is that women's and women's perspectives should be central to knowledge, culture, and politics, not invisible or marginal. (Lorber 21) Historically the multifaceted and mercurial nature of Feminism as a movement has survived despite the discomfort with the term. Feminism "is continuously redefined to address mutating forms of social oppression." (Hoskin, Jenson and Blair 16) Several modern artists have observed, "Recent feminists of colour reiterate problems seldom discussed in electronic media theory: universalism, marginalization, stereotyping, strategies of silencing, and rendering invisible. These practices, controversial in the 1970S and 1980s, are still with us." (Schor, Amos and Bee 16) It has been argued that "culture should not be confused with patriarchy." (Sokoloff and Dupont 47) The social practices that uphold patriarchal values, but undervalue, exploit or marginalize women should be obliterated. The position of a woman's status in the society reflects the power of social justice in a nation. Although India's constitution gives men and women equal rights, gender discrepancies in favour of men still persist.

Although Tagore is a male writer, his sensitivity towards the oppression of women and rigid societal norms is remarkable. He flagrantly critiques the narrowminded beliefs, social taboos and social malpractices that can destroy the life of a woman through gender subjugation and social isolation. Both writers voice their protests through these stories about women being objectified in male-dominant society in the name of upholding cultural values and ethos. It is disheartening to note that many of the issues concerning social oppression and material deprivation which victimize women still persist in the present day and hence the study on gender margination has become ever more pertinent in contemporary society. Such research which has a greater potential than just critiquing, should help to mobilise social transformations and reformation.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Bio-bibliographical note

Monali Chatterjee has been teaching English Literature, Language and Communication Studies in prominent institutions and universities in India and other countries. She has been associated with the academia for about two decades. She holds a PhD in Indian Renaissance Literature. She has also taught English Language in the UK. An ardent lover of music, dance, poetry and drama, she is professionally trained in Indian classical music, dance and art. She has presented papers at many international conferences and has published widely on higher education, migration and diaspora studies, South Asian Literature and Film Studies apart from poems and articles in popular dailies.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN:9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549017

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Shifting the Spatial Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Translation: The Case Study of Lonely Planet's *Canada* in Italian

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and space as represented in the Lonely Planet tourist guidebook *Canada* and in its Italian translation. As one of the first mediating links between tourists and tourist destinations, guidebooks play a crucial role in circulating the imagery of cultures (Gilbert 1999, 283; Callahan 2011, 97; Maci 2020, 177). Significantly, as sites of ideological struggle, their translation poses particular issues when it comes to the representation of historically marginalized cultures, as in the case of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada, whose close and enduring relationship with the land has played a crucial role in constructing their own identity (Campbell et al. 2003, 16). While most historians argue that Indigenous Peoples have inhabited present-day Canada from time immemorial (see, for instance, Carter 1999; Campbell et al. 2003; Dickason et al. 2006/2023), others – from a Eurocentric perspective – trace their presence back to a specific time in history, presenting them as the first immigrants (see, for instance, Coates 2004, 34-7). Linking the Indigenous Peoples' presence in present-day Canada with migration, however, effaces the consequences that they suffered following both the arrival of European colonizers and the later waves of immigration (Monture-Angus 1995; Stasiulis and Bakan 1997; Lawrence 2002; Sharma 2006; Ahluwaia 2012). In light of the ideologies underpinning the representation of Indigenous Peoples, this article will examine – through a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to translation (Matthiessen 2014) – the transitivity shifts which occur within the experiential mode of meaning that is concerned with how human experience is constructed in a text (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014). This will reveal any shifts in the interpretation offered by the target text, thus shedding light on the relationship between translation and ideology.

Keywords: Indigenous Peoples of Canada; tourist guidebooks; Translation Studies; Systemic Functional Linguistics; experiential meaning.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the interplay between Indigenous Peoples and space as represented in the thirteenth paper edition of the 2017 Lonely Planet guidebook *Canada* and in its Italian translation, published under the same title and in the same year, through a Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to translation (Matthiessen 2014). Lonely Planet's ethical vision seeks to produce a community of travelers sensitive to local people's cultural identities and aware of the global inequalities caused by colonialism and capitalism (Lisle 2008; Callahan 2011).[1] Lonely Planet guidebooks are a representative example of this type of text, which – as one of the first mediating links between tourists and tourist destinations – play a crucial role in establishing popular understanding of the meanings of cultures. Although this also applies to other types of tourist texts, guidebooks nonetheless stand out as particularly significant from this perspective due to their pedagogical role (Callahan 2011, 97; Maci 2020, 177). In fact, as the least promotional and most informative type of tourist text, offering detailed historical and cultural insights into a destination, guidebooks are usually perceived as truthful cultural representations and authoritative texts by readers, who often rely on them as the main source of information before and when traveling (Dijkstra 2016, 207; Maci 2020, 177). This is due to the authors' deep knowledge of the culture(s) of the destination and to the illusorily impersonal language that misleads readers into perceiving authors as "invisible" and – as a result – guidebooks as "inauthorial" (Dijkstra 2016, 200-1; see also Maci 2000, 173). As noted by Stefania Maci, the authors'

[1] The achievement of Lonely Planet's declared aim has been questioned by Lisle (2008) and Callahan (2011) who have analyzed the guidebooks *Myanmar (Burma)* and *East Timor* respectively from a Postcolonial perspective.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

knowledge and the resulting perceived authoritativeness are expressed through language via instructions, enacted by verbs in the imperative mood, about what is suitable and what is not (Maci 2000, 173, 177). Moreover, the language used in guidebooks – and, more broadly, in tourist texts – enhances the impression of an illusory authenticity through, among other linguistic devices, terms used to stress the uniqueness of the destination from

historical and landscape perspectives; evaluative lexical items; emotive expressions; and foreign words related to the local culture. These convey an exotic flavor and local color to the text, and immerse tourists in the local culture, thus evoking emotions (Maci 2000, 169-71). Through their language choices, guidebook authors shape the image of cultures and destinations, which, although in some cases are the result of constraints necessary to conform to the publisher's ethical vision,[2] reveal the authors' worldview and influence the readers' interpretation (Maci 2000, 166).

This is further complicated in the case of translated guidebooks considering that translation choices, which lead the target-text readers' interpretation, often reflect the *translators*' interpretation (although choices also in this case might be the result of an act of negotiation with the other agents of translation involved in the process of cultural innovation and exchange, such as the publisher). Despite this, the translators of guidebooks are usually perceived as "invisible" by readers (Dijkstra 2016), not least because translated guidebooks are not presented as such by publishers, as is clear, for example, from the lack of the translators' name on the book cover, or even anywhere in the book, as in the case of the translation of Lonely Planet *Canada*.[3] The translators' powerful role as a cultural agent, and yet someone who is perceived to be "invisible", poses particular issues when translated guidebooks circulate the imagery of historically oppressed cultures such as the Indigenous

[2] On the editorial control exerted on Lonely Planet guidebook authors, see Iaquinto 2011.
[3] The expression "the translator's invisibility" was coined by Venuti (1995) to describe the translators' situation in the anglophone North American literary system at a time when translations were – and often still are – conventionally expected to read as original texts, fluent.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

Peoples of Canada, given the enormous power wielded by translation in reinforcing or subverting their representation as marginalized cultures. Indeed, several scholars have pointed out – from a postcolonial perspective – that indigenous cultures are often homogenized, historicized and made invisible in tourist texts (Hollinshead 1992; Braun 2002; Amoamo and Thompson 2010; Yang 2011; Seiver and Matthews 2016; Lee 2017; Grimwood et al. 2019). This results in stereotypical representations of the Indigenous Peoples as exotic and primitive "others" (Amoamo and Thompson 2010), as agentless (Braun 2002) or as passive "hosts" or "locals" with a homogenous experience of being targeted by tourism as threat or opportunity (Viken and Müller 2017).

2. The Indigenous Peoples of Canada: First Inhabitants or First Migrants?

The Indigenous Peoples of Canada have long suffered land dispossession, displacement and marginalization following both the arrival of European colonizers in the sixteenth century and the waves of immigration of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the land has represented the heart of their knowledge, languages and cultures since "time immemorial" (McGregor 1996/2020, 183; see also Campbell et al. 2003; Dickason et al. 2006/2023). The expression *time immemorial*, which refers to "a point that exceeds human memory" (Dickason et al. 2006/2023, 530), reflects a "polychronic" approach to time interaction that sees it as fluid and cyclical in contrast to a "monochronic" Eurocentric linear understanding that segments time in small units and requires events from the past to be associated with a specific date (Matamua 2021, 65). The different ways of approaching time show that its systems can represent different ideologies (Cohen 2018), which, significantly, are at the root of the still ongoing historical debate on the origins of the Indigenous Peoples' presence in present-day Canada. On the one hand, in fact, Indigenous Peoples are presented as the first welcoming community, the original inhabitants living on their lands, thus marking the history of present-day Canada (see, for instance, Carter 1999; Campbell et al. 2003; Dickason et al. 2006/2023; Kasparian 2012; Manuel and Derrickson 2015). On the other hand, from a

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

Eurocentric perspective, the Indigenous Peoples' presence is traced back to a specific time in history (33,000 BC) following their ancestors' arrival from north-eastern Asia, thus presenting them as the first of many waves of immigrants (Carter 1999, 22; see, for instance, Coates 2004, 34-7). As noted by a number of historians, associating the Indigenous Peoples' presence in present-day Canada with migration effaces the consequences that they suffered, not only following the arrival of European colonizers, but also during the later waves of immigration, which undermined their rights to land (see Monture-Angus 1995; Stasiulis and Bakan 1997; Lawrence 2002; Sharma 2006; Ahluwaia 2012). With reference to the Indigenous Peoples' deportation to reserves, Elena Lamberti brings the two perspectives together by proposing the expression "migrazione forzata" (Lamberti 2019, 116) highlighting how the resulting migration forced many nomadic and semi-nomadic Indigenous Peoples into sedentism. Although the land has been the source of the Indigenous Peoples' disempowerment and dispossession, their close and enduring relationship with it – defined by the mutual sharing of place in a community-based life in harmony with nature, amid responsibility, connection and inclusion – has played a crucial role in constructing their own identity (Campbell et al. 2003; Egan 2013; Kant et al. 2019).

It is in view of the close relationship between the land and the Indigenous Peoples' cultural identity that this article will investigate – through the Lonely Planet case study – the dynamics at play when representing the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and space in the translation of tourist texts.

3. Indigenous Peoples and Tourist Texts in Translation: An Overview

The current Translation Studies debate on Indigenous Peoples is mainly centered on the issues of agency and cultural appropriation emerging when translating from Indigenous languages into dominant ones, with a focus on literary translation (see, for example, Henitiuk and Mahieu 2021). However, to my knowledge, there are no studies to date on the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

representation of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada – nor of any other anglophone country – as represented in the translation of tourist texts.

With regard to the representation of historically oppressed cultures in the translation of tourist texts between English and Italian, Eleonora Federici has offered case-study analyses grounded in culturally-oriented translation theory and has pointed out the process of "othering" undergone by Indian people (2019), as well as the simplified message conveyed by localized websites on Southern US plantations (2024). While the localization of tourist websites has been explored in several studies, those on the translation of guidebooks in this language pair, which are all based on the analysis of Lonely Planet texts, are focused on the circulation of Italian cultural stereotypes (see Smecca 2009), the use of specialized language (see Cappelli 2012), and culture-bound culinary terminology (see De Marco 2015). The translation of other types of tourist text has been investigated through culturally-oriented Translation Studies case-study analyses looking at translation as a product (rather than as a process), which discuss the notion of authenticity (see Federici 2011) and the strategies used to translate Italian culture-bound terms into English (see, in particular, Agorni 2012, 2016, 2018). On the other hand, several studies grounded in discourse and multimodal analysis look at the persuasive function as conveyed in English and Italian by drawing on parallel corpora (see, for example, Manca 2008, 2009, 2013, 2016a, 2016b). More specific aspects discussed through this approach include cultural and functional equivalence (see Tognini Bonelli and Manca 2002, 2004; Manca 2004a, 2004b, 2012, 2018; Cappelli 2007). Finally, other studies focus on translation quality (see Federici 2007; Pierini 2007) and offer insights into bridging theory and practice (see Torresi 2010; Federici 2018; Manfredi 2014, 105-18).[4] Among these, Marina Manfredi's practice-led study (2014) includes her own translation of a tourist text which applies Systemic Functionalist Linguistics theory, with the final aim of proposing a model for translator trainees (see Manfredi 2014, 115-8).

[4] For an overview of the translation of tourist texts in different language pairs, see, in particular, Katan 2020, and Sulaiman and Wilson 2021.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

To date this is the only analysis of a translation between English and Italian from a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective.[5]

Against this backdrop, this article stands out as one of the very few studies analyzing the representation of marginalized cultures (and the first one in the case of Indigenous Peoples) in the translation of tourist texts and the first one from a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective. Drawing on this branch of linguistics, which sees language as a meaning-making system embedded in a social and cultural context, will enable an analysis of how the experiential meaning, which construes the author's worldview, is recreated in the Italian translation of Lonely Planet guidebook *Canada*. This stands out as particularly relevant considering the ideologies underpinning the representation of the Indigenous Peoples' presence in present-day Canada.

4. Recreating the Experiential Meaning through Translation: Mapping the Terrain

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, which was first theorized by Michael Halliday (1978, 1985), and sees language as functioning as a network of interrelated meaningful choices, the experiential mode of meaning "is concerned with the construal of our experience of the world, as meaning" (Matthiessen 2014, 278; see also Halliday 1985, 19). Together with the logical mode of meaning, it makes up the ideational metafunction, the first of the three interrelated highly generalized functions served by language (the others being the interpersonal metafunction, which establishes relationships, and the textual one, which facilitates the other two metafunctions). In serving the ideational metafunction, "language lends structure to the users' experience and helps them to determine their way of looking at things" (Halliday 1971/2019, 327). The different metafunctional strands of meaning are combined in the clause, which is seen as the realization of a message from a textual perspective, as exchange on an interpersonal level, and – of most relevance to the

[5] See also Halliday 2010, whose analysis of a translation of a tourist text from Chinese into English is focused on semantic equivalence and translation quality. For a multimodal analysis of tourist texts in English and Italian from a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, see Manca 2016a, 2016b. For an in-depth Systemic Functional Linguistics analysis of English-language tourist texts, see, in particular, Francesconi 2014.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

scope of this article – as representation, namely as the construal of some process in ongoing human experience, experientially speaking. The experiential mode of meaning is realized by the lexicogrammatical resources provided by the transitivity system "for construing a quantum of change in the flow of events as a figure – as a configuration of elements centred on a process" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014, 213). The Process, which is the core element of the experiential structure of a clause, is typically realized by a verbal group (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014, 222), and is categorized into different types, depending on what is represented when construing an event, such as Material Processes (representation as happening), Relational Processes (being or having) and Existential Processes (existing) among others (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014, 214-6). The other two elements of a clause are the Participants (typically realized by nominal groups) involved in the Process, and Circumstances (typically realized by prepositional phrases or adverbial groups) giving different kinds of detail on the Process (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014, 222, 310-4). The type of Process realized by the main verb of the clause influences the Transitivity relations and the Participants' roles (such as Actor and Goal in the case of Material Processes; and Existent in the case of Existential Processes, among others) (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014, 311). The transitivity analysis reveals how the entities participate in a situation, including the type of event, and who or what initiates it. Significantly, the way in which the three elements of a clause are organized shows how a mental picture of reality is encoded in language and represents the event from a certain perspective, thus unveiling the language users' – in this case the *authors'* – understanding and interpretation of such an event, and, more generally speaking, their worldview.

The subjectivity at play when recreating the experiential mode of meaning through translation has been discussed by linguist Christian Matthiessen, who has also expanded Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar framework (see Halliday and Matthiessen 2004/2014). Drawing on the view of language as a network of interrelated options from which users choose to express meaning, Matthiessen points out that, in order to recreate the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

experiential meaning, translators choose among the lexicogrammatical options available in the target language depending on their interpretation of events as configurations of elements (Processes, Participants and Circumstances) (Matthiessen 2014, 277). The notion of "choice" is central to Matthiessen's idea of translation, which he presents as "the **recreation of meaning in context through choice** — choice in the interpretation of the original text and choice in the creation of the translated text" (Matthiessen 2014, 272; original emphasis), and as the result of "an ongoing process of choosing options within the systems of the source language and of the target language" (Matthiessen 2014, 272). Matthiessen explains that his use of "choice" is meant to emphasize that there are always alternatives, both in interpreting the source text and in producing the target text, and these alternatives in meaning are embodied in the meaning potentials of the source- and target languages (Matthiessen 2014, 272-3). Matthiessen proposes a model highlighting that all choices in translation inevitably imply shifts within the same mode of meaning or between different modes (Matthiessen 2014, 276). With reference to the experiential mode of meaning, he explains that shifts might occur within nuclear transitivity (involving Processes and Participants) or circumstantial transitivity (also involving Circumstances) (Matthiessen 2014, 294).

Matthiessen's model has been implemented in very few studies discussing translation shifts between the textual and logical modes of meaning (see, for example, Wang and Ma 2018). Studies analyzing ideational and – more specifically – experiential translation shifts, on the other hand, have used Halliday and Matthiessen's transitivity system as an analytic framework (2004/2014); these consist both of Systemic Functional Linguistics quantitative analyses (see Ma and Wang 2020; Liu and Li 2022), and of case studies grounded in translation theory (see Hatim and Mason 1997; Mason 2012; Munday 2014, 2021). Significantly, Translation Studies scholars Basil Hatim, Ian Mason and Jeremy Munday anticipated Matthiessen's point that when choosing the transitivity resources in order to produce a target text, translators inevitably intervene in the translation process by feeding their own knowledge and beliefs. Albeit through a less systematic analysis and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

based on an existing model, these Translation Studies scholars went beyond Matthiessen's mere notion of "interpretation" and were the first to point out that transitivity shifts imply shifts in the translators' point of view and, as a result, influence the readers' interpretation, thus shedding light on the link between translation and ideology.

Against this background, this article analyzes the transitivity shifts which occur within the experiential mode of meaning in a selection of passages from the Italian translation of Lonely Planet's *Canada*. While a multiple structural analysis of the clause allows for the description of how language constructs meanings simultaneously, this analysis is focused on the experiential meaning, as this is the dominant one in the source text analyzed, particularly in the descriptive and narrative sections (consisting of only written – and no visual – text) of the guidebook devoted to Indigenous Peoples. The Systemic Functionalist Linguistics methodology proposed by Matthiessen will enable a systematic analysis of the selected passages at a clause level, thus highlighting any shifts in the Indigenous Peoples' spatial representation and, ultimately, in the point of view unveiled by the target text. However, when analyzing the translation of culture-embedded texts such as tourist guidebooks, which are sites of ideological struggle, it is important to remember that translation is not always – at least not exclusively – the result of the translators' interpretation, but also of constraints, posed not only by the lexicogrammatical resources available in the target language as pointed out by Matthiessen, but also, for instance, by stylistic conventions, target-text readers' cultural expectations, and the publisher's ideology. The translation of tourist texts, in fact, is often a collaborative translation, namely the result of a collaboration between different translators and other agents of translation, including authors, publishers and editors. In light of these considerations, the following analysis – as a product-oriented study – will examine translation "choices", referring to the selections ultimately made in the target text – leading to a shift in the Indigenous Peoples' spatial representation, and – as a result – to a shift in the point of view unveiled by the target text.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

5. Shifts in Transitivity and Representation

In Lonely Planet's *Canada*, the representation of Indigenous Peoples is concentrated in the four-page section *Aboriginal Cultures*, and in other parts providing an historical and socio-political overview of the country and of the individual destinations. In line with the historical focus throughout the guidebook, particular attention is paid to the origins of the Indigenous Peoples' presence on present-day Canadian soil, as shown by the extracts below, which offer some of the most revealing examples of a shift within the experiential mode of meaning. Analysis will be centered on the three clause elements construing the interplay between Indigenous Peoples and space, namely those serving as Process (in bold below), the Participant indicating Indigenous Peoples – and in some cases the Attribute (underlined), and the Participant or Circumstance representing space (in italics).

EXTRACT 1

SOURCE TEXT

"From time immemorial, the Mi'kmaq First Nation **lived** *throughout present-day Nova Scotia*" (Miller et al. 2017a, 331).

TARGET TEXT

"Da tempi immemorabili *il territorio dell'odierna Nova Scotia* **è stato abitato** dalla First Nation dei mi'kmaq" (Miller et al. 2017b, 384).

EXTRACT 2

SOURCE TEXT

"Many Cree **also live** *in polar-bear-epicenter Churchill, Manitoba, where they make up about one-third of local population;* it's not uncommon to hear people speaking Cree in Churchill" (Miller et al. 2017a, 840).

TARGET TEXT

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

"Diversi cree **si sono stabiliti** *anche a Churchill, nel Manitoba (la città più frequentata da chi desidera vedere gli orsi polari) dove costituiscono circa un terzo della popolazione*; a Churchill non è raro sentire persone che parlano la lingua cree" (Miller et al. 2017b, 935).

In these first two passages, the verb "lived", which realizes an Existential Process, shows the existence of the two Indigenous communities indicated by the nominal groups "Mi'kmaq First Nation" and "many Cree", both serving as Existent and to which details are added by the Circumstances of Place articulated through the prepositional phrases "throughout present-day Nova Scotia" (in Extract 1) and "in polar-bear-epicenter Churchill, Manitoba" (in Extract 2).

Extract 1 prepositional phrase "throughout present-day Nova Scotia" has been translated as "il territorio dell'odierna Nova Scotia", thus serving as Participant instead of Circumstance, and, more specifically, as Identified being the entity recognized as inhabited by the Mi'kmaqs, "dalla First Nation dei mi'kmaq", which thus serves as Identifier. This transitivity shift is due to a change in the Process Type: while "lived" realizes an Existential Process, "è stato abitato" serves as a Relational Process establishing a relationship between "il territorio dell'odierna Nova Scotia" and "dalla First Nation dei mi'kmaq", which is represented as a distinguishing feature of the space they inhabit. Since grammar intersects with lexis, the shift in the representation of the interplay between the Mi'kmaqs and Nova Scotia is created not only by the different transitivity structure of the Italian clause, but also by the way in which meaning is re-constructed by the new Process realized by the verb "abitare". Whereas in the source-text passage the Mi'kmaqs are represented as "living" – simply staying or at most having their home – in present-day Nova Scotia, "abitare", used as a transitive verb as in this case, implies a sense of stable residence, interaction and – as a result – a bond between the Mi'kmaqs and Nova Scotia. This verb, in fact, indicates the act of inhabiting meant as a social process through which the identities of place and people are reciprocally constructed. The use of the passive voice "è stato abitato" emphasizes the traces

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

of this mutual interaction left by the "First Nation dei Mi'kmaqs" on "il territorio della Nova Scotia", which is given focal prominence.

Unlike Extract 1, in Extract 2 "anche a Churchill, nel Manitoba" articulates a Circumstance of Place like the original prepositional phrase starting with "in polar-bear-epicenter Churchill, Manitoba". Interestingly, however, the Epithet "polar-bear-epicenter" has been expanded into an embedded clause, "la città più frequentata da chi desidera vedere gli orsi polari", serving as Qualifier. This bracketed embedded clause, which literally means "the most popular city with tourists eager to see polar bears", presents these animals as one of the main attractions of Churchill, possibly as this might be seen as not yet necessarily known to Italian tourists. While this Circumstance of Place has been retained as such, the Existential Process served by the verb "live" in Example 2 has shifted to a Material Process realized by the reflexive verbal group "si sono stabiliti", thus representing the Cree as Actor, namely as the Participant responsible for settling in Churchill and making it their home on a permanent basis – thus implicitly suggesting that they had been living elsewhere before their arrival – and not simply as living there, as implied in the source-text passage.

In the following extract, the Existential Process is encoded by the item "there are":

EXTRACT 3

SOURCE TEXT

"*North of Cartwright up to Ungava Bay* **there are** a half-dozen small, semitraditional Inuit communities accessible only by sea or air along the rugged, largely unspoiled mountainous coast" (Miller et al. 2017a, 510).

TARGET TEXT

"*A nord di Cartwright, fino a Ungava Bay, lungo una costa montuosa, aspra e quasi intatta*, **sono** situate cinque o sei piccole comunità semitradizionali di inuit accessibili solo via mare o in aereo" (Miller et al. 2017b, 573).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

In this source-text passage, the Existent is served by the nominal group that starts with "a half-dozen small, semitraditional Inuit communities" and includes the embedded relative clause "accessible only by sea or air along the rugged, largely unspoiled mountainous coast", which serves as Qualifier and expresses how and where Inuit communities can be reached, thus representing them as a tourist attraction and eliciting a process of objectification. This has been reinforced in the target-text passage considering the literal translation of "accessible" as "accessibili", in conjunction with the use of the adjective "situate" (literally, "situated"), which serves as an Attribute indicating a feature of "cinque o sei piccole comunità semitradizionali di inuit" that in turn realizes the Carrier. Like "accessibili", in fact, the adjective "situato" is usually used for places – destinations and tourist attractions in the case of tourist texts – as shown, for instance, by its occurrence elsewhere in the translation of the Lonely Planet guidebook with reference to "museo" (*museum*) (Miller et al. 2017b, 167), "riserve" (*reserves*) (Miller et al. 2017b, 379), "area" (*area*) (Miller et al. 2017b, 579) and "isole" (*islands*) (Miller et al. 2017b, 933), among others. The change in role served by the nominal group indicating the Inuit communities from Existent to Carrier is due to a change in the Process Type from Existential (served by "live" in the source-text passage), to Relational (served by "sono" in the target-text one). Following this transitivity shift, while in the source-text passage the Inuit communities are represented as simply being North of Cartwright, in the target-text passage they are represented as being situated, thus implicitly suggesting their permanency, as also revealed in the next two translated-text passages.

EXTRACT 4

SOURCE TEXT

"Today they **number** 59,000 (4% of the overall Aboriginal population) and **are** spread *throughout four Arctic regions: Nunavut, the Inuvialuit area in the Northwest Territories, Nunavik (northern Québec) and Nunatsiavut (Labrador)*" (Miller et al. 2017a, 841).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

TARGET TEXT

"Oggi *nel paese* **vivono** 59.000 inuit (pari al 4% della popolazione nativa totale) stanziati in quattro regioni artiche: il Nunavut, la zona degli Inuvialuit nei Northwest Territories, il Nunavik (Québec settentrionale) e il Nunatsiavut (Labrador)" (Miller et al. 2017b, 935).

EXTRACT 5

SOURCE TEXT

"In New Brunswick, the Maliseets (renowned basket-makers) **live** *in the Upper St John River valley in the west*, while the Mi'kmaqs live to the east" (Miller et al. 2017a, 840).

TARGET TEXT:

"I maliseet (rinomati per la produzione di ceste) **sono** stanziati *nella parte occidentale del New Brunswick, lungo la valle superiore del St John River*, mentre i mi'kmaq vivono in quella orientale" (Miller et al. 2017b, 934).

In the main clause of Extract 4 source-text, the verb "number" realizes a Relational Process expressing the density of the Inuit population indicated by the pronoun "they" serving as Carrier, while the numerative "59,000" and the following embedded phrase encode the Attribute. This main clause is followed by a coordinate one in which the verb "are" serves as one more Relational Process, and is followed by the past participle "spread" acting as an adjective and serving as an Attribute indicating that the Inuit live in different places. In the target text, these two clauses have been merged into one, thus including only one verb, "vivono", which realizes an Existential Process with the nominal group "59.000 inuit" and the following embedded relative clauses serving – as a result – as Existent. The embedded relative clause introduced by the adjective "stanziati" (literally *settled*), which replaces "spread", serves as Qualifier and gives readers details as to how Inuit came to live

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

throughout four Arctic regions (rather than as to how widely they inhabit them), namely by making them their permanent home, thus implicitly suggesting that they had been living elsewhere, as also implied by the verbal group "si sono stabiliti" in Extract 2. In this case, however, the idea of the Inuit as arriving from elsewhere is reinforced, considering that "stanziati" is usually used for ethnic peoples, especially when discussing the origins of the demographic history of a place.

Significantly, the adjective "stanziati" is also used in Extract 5; in this case it is preceded by the verb "sono" (*are*), which realizes a Relational Process and leads to a transitivity shift as this is used to translate the source-language verb "live" realizing, instead, an Existential Process and showing the existence of the Maliseets, which thus serves as Existent. In the target-text passage, on the other hand, the nominal group starting with "i maliseet" comes to serve as Carrier, thus being represented as taking up residence by implicitly suggesting their foreign provenance, rather than being represented as simply inhabitants of the Upper St John River valley in the west.

The shift in the representation of the interplay between Indigenous Peoples and space is even more striking in the following example:

EXTRACT 6

SOURCE TEXT

"Canada's original inhabitants **began living** *on the land* more than 15,000 years ago" (Miller et al. 2017a, 839).

TARGET TEXT

"I primi abitanti del Canada **colonizzarono** *queste terre* più di 15.000 anni fa" (Miller et al. 2017b, 933).

In the source-text extract, the Existential Process realized by the verb "living" included in the verbal group "began living" shows the existence of Canada's original inhabitants, which

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

thus serves as Existent, while "on the land" is marginalized as a Circumstance of Place. In the target-text passage, this Existential Process has shifted to a Material Process realized by the verb "colonizzarono", with the nominal group "i primi abitanti del Canada" thus serving as Actor, namely the entity responsible for colonizing the land. This has been translated by the nominal group "queste terre", which therefore encodes the Goal being the entity affected by Canada's original inhabitants' colonization. Following this transitivity shift, while in the source-text passage Indigenous Peoples are merely represented as living on the land, in the target-text they are represented as taking control of it by using force. Considering that the verb "colonizzare" means to take control of an area already inhabited by somebody else, by imposing one's own culture and language through colonizing expeditions from one's own country of origin, its use clashes with the one conveyed by the nominal group "I primi abitanti del Canada", through which Indigenous Peoples are indicated not only as originally from present-day Canada, but also as the very first peoples to live there. Moreover, in light of the notorious historical connotation of the verb "colonizzare", Indigenous Peoples are paradoxically represented as the perpetrators of a crime of which they have been victim for centuries, undergoing land dispossession, marginalization and deportation to the reserves, among other consequences.

In light of the disrupting influence that the deportation to the reserves has had on the Indigenous Peoples' lives, the analysis of the next two final passages will be centered on how the Indigenous Peoples' presence in the reservation space has been construed.

EXTRACT 7

SOURCE TEXT

"Inuit **have never been placed** *on reserves* as their frozen territory was not carved up in the same way" (Miller et al. 2017a, 841).

TARGET TEXT:

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

"Gli inuit **non hanno mai vissuto** *nelle riserve*, in conseguenza della peculiarità del loro gelido territorio natio" (Miller et al. 2017b, 936).

EXTRACT 8

SOURCE TEXT

"Unlike First Nations people, Métis **were never placed** *on reserves*" (Miller et al. 2017a, 841).

TARGET TEXT: "A differenza dei popoli First Nations, i métis **non hanno mai abitato** *nelle riserve*" (Miller et al. 2017b, 935).

In both examples above, the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the reserves has been described by Material Processes realized by the verbal groups "have been placed" and "were never placed" respectively, both conjugated in the passive voice, thus giving focal prominence to the nouns "Inuit" (in Extract 7), and "Métis" (in Extract 8), which serve as Goal, namely as the entities affected by the actions of being on "reserves", which realizes a Circumstance of Place in both passages. The absence of an entity serving as Actor in these two passages entirely elides the responsibility for the Indigenous Peoples' deportation to the reserves, which would still have been backgrounded by the sole verbal group in the passive voice. In the two corresponding target-text passages, the original Material Processes have shifted to Existential Processes realized by the verbal groups "non hanno mai vissuto" (in Extract 7) and by "non hanno mai abitato" (in Extract 8), thus representing Indigenous Peoples as having the power to decide not to move to the reserves. The use of "abitare", which in this case is used as an intransitive verb, unlike in Extract 1, stands out as particularly striking considering the implicitly suggested bond established by space and people. On the other hand, in the source-language passages, the verbal groups realizing Material Processes represent Indigenous Peoples as victims of the deportation, although any

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

responsibility of the Canadian Government is not simply backgrounded through the use of the passive voice, but entirely elided through the lack of an entity serving as Actor.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of these passages, which all exhibit a change in the Process Type, shows that the shifts within the system of nuclear transitivity lead to shifts within the experiential mode of meaning, which in turn result in a shift in the representation of the interplay between Indigenous Peoples and space, thus offering a different interpretation of their historical presence in present-day Canada. As a matter of fact, in the source text, the predominantly Existential and Relational Processes served by semantically-neutral verbs ("to live" in Extracts 1, 2, 5 and 6; "there are" in Extract 3; and "to number" and "to be" in Extract 4) construct meaning so as to represent Indigenous Peoples as merely inhabiting space. On the other hand, the different Process Types served by the Italian target-text verbs, and the resulting choices made within the transitivity system, recreate meaning so as to offer insights into how space is inhabited. More specifically, Indigenous Peoples are represented as immigrants arriving at a certain time in history (as suggested by the use of "stanziati" in Extracts 4 and 5) who took possession of space (as indicated by the verb "colonizzarono" in Extract 6), thus making it their permanent home and becoming sedentary peoples (as implied by the verbal group "si sono stabiliti" in Extract 2 and by the adjective "situate" in Extract 3). The way in which meaning is recreated thus offers a more detailed representation of how space is inhabited and, as a result, a more explicit interpretation of the origins of the Indigenous Peoples' presence in present-day Canada. By contrast, in Extracts 7 and 8, the shift of the Material Processes, served by the verbs "have never been placed" and "were never placed" respectively, to an Existential and to a Relational Process, realized by the neutrally-semantic verb "vivere" and even "abitare", which implies a bond with space, recreates meaning so as to represent the reserves as mere living places, thus revealing a simplistic view of the Indigenous Peoples' deportation and diminishing their traumatic experience. This stands out as in line with a Eurocentric perspective which sees the reserve

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

system as part of a civilizing and housing program rather than a dispossession and marginalization policy. Similarly, the representation of Indigenous Peoples as immigrants taking possession of space and making it their home on a permanent basis is in line with the Eurocentric historical narrative based on a monochronic linear understanding of time. As a result, it is in contrast with the historical representation provided from an Indigenous perspective underpinning a polychronic approach to time interaction that sees it as fluid and cyclical and consequently views Indigenous Peoples as living in present-day Canada from time immemorial. The emphasis on the notion of possession also reveals a Eurocentric view of space conceived as property, which clashes with the Indigenous Peoples' idea of land as a resource to be shared in a community-based life in harmony with nature. Similarly, the emphasis on the notion of permanency reveals a Eurocentric point of view as this takes for granted the right to stay in a place by setting one's own life there, which, however, is at odds with the land dispossessions of which Indigenous Peoples have long and repeatedly been victim. The different view of their presence in present-day Canada offered by the target text and revealing a Eurocentric worldview confirms that the lexicogrammatrical choices made within the target-language transitivity system inevitably result in the translator's intervention in the text. This implies, in turn, in a shift in the point of view reflecting the beliefs and assumptions of the translator – and of any other agent of translation – thus shedding light on how ideology inevitably impinges on the translation process.

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Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549018

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Apparition, Time, and the Movement of *The Chimes*

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Abstract

This contribution is a reading of Dickens's *The Chimes* as a story of deprivation and starvation – of the mind, spirit, and the body. Throughout his fiction Dickens frequently presents his reader with a version of the moment in which one his character witnesses his own death, like in *A Christmas Carol, The Signalman, A Tale of Two Cities*. However, in *The Chimes* this episode is peculiarly dramatized given the text's focus on starvation, deprivation, and exile. In fact, the protagonist's encounter with his own dead body renders emphatically the degree to which the physical and the psychological are intimately linked; the deprivation, the starvation that necessarily drives such individuals onward from place to place produces a kind of psychological exile. At the end, all the forms of movement here represented are a function of the industrial, utilitarian context that Dickens's tale seeks to indict. They underscore the invisibility of the poor as well as their exclusion from the regular movements of time that determine cultural ritual and the patterns of daily living, exiled as they are into a world of chaos.

Keywords: Nervous motion, time and violence, social and physical exile, nocturnal visitations.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

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di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

"Done because we are too menny".
(Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 1895)

Although written some five decades earlier, much in Dickens's *The Chimes* looks forward to what, in his final novel, *Jude the Obscure,* Thomas Hardy will chillingly identify as the coming "universal wish not to live" (Hardy 2002, 326). Published in 1844, a year after *A Christmas Carol, The Chimes* seeks to remedy the impulse toward self-hatred and self-annihilation that Dickens, like Hardy after him, sees as arising from the human disconnection that was plaguing society in an age of industrialization and growing imperial expansion. For what comes to vex the protagonist, Tobias (Toby or 'Trotty') Veck, in *The Chimes* is the growing sense that he ought not to have been born at all. A ticket-porter who waits outside the church door for jobs, Trotty has internalized the prevailing Malthusian logic – one predicated on notions of waste, excess, and scarcity – that Dickens identifies as a primary affliction in his culture. Indeed, Trotty seems to be learning the hard lesson taught to him by his social betters that he had "No earthly right or business to be born" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 104). A society plagued by suicide, infanticide, starvation, and displacement – all these are rung out by the more harrowing sounds of the Bells.

While it may yet remain difficult to assert with absolute certainty what influence *The Chimes* had on Hardy's writing,[1] the thematic connections between *Jude the Obscure* and *The*

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my friend and mentor, David Paroissien (1939-2021), who has left an indelible mark on my life and work and on the world of Dickens scholarship.

I also wish to acknowledge Haydn Hopkins for his exemplary research assistance during my preparation of this essay.

[1] However, Hardy's poem "The Chimes," which appeared in his 1917 collection, *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses,* makes the influence of Dickens's Christmas story hard to overlook. The poem addresses loss and temporal disorientation as the speaker recalls those "hard utilitarian times" (Hardy [1917] 1976, 13), commencing that recollection with an alliterative description of movement that evokes the very name of Dickens's protagonist:

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Chimes – an obsessive focus on nervous motion; a relationship between time and violence; and a foregrounding of the devastating consequences of social and physical exile – are worth considering here. For, taken together, they point us toward the modernity of *The Chimes,* especially in its treatment of time, deprivation, and violence.

The brief passage I quote above from the latter stages of *Jude the Obscure* originates from its brutally violent, harrowing scene involving the murder-suicide carried about by the protagonist's young son, who hanged himself and his two younger half-siblings after having identified them as the collective source of his family's impoverishment and consequent hunger. They are no longer individuals, but merely each a number adding up to "too menny": they embody useless excess, a drain on their parents' very limited resources. For Jude and Sue and the reader alike, this scene marks an encounter with unconscionable horror.

Although Dickens finally disallows the horror that *Jude* will realize, *The Chimes* approaches something similar in the means by which it charts individuals' inculcation with a sense of their own expendability. Infanticide again serves to exemplify the degree of individual desperation as well as broad scale social decline – in terms of devastating poverty and the resulting breakdown of familial and communal structures (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122). In *The Chimes,* the protagonist, Trotty, is horrified to "[read] of the crimes and violence of the people" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122), especially the account "of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own life but on that of her young child" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 122). Such reports seemingly give proof to much of the rhetoric Trotty elsewhere

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That morning when I trod the town
The twitching chimes of long renown
Played out to me
The sweet Sicilian sailors' tune,
And I knew not if late or soon
My day would be: (1-6).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

confronts regarding the inherent evil of the poorer classes. These stories become all too 'real' when in his visions he encounters his daughter, Meg, who attempts to drown herself along her infant. Yet it will be Trotty's attempt to intervene in order to prevent the tragedy that will ultimately free him from the tormenting visions of the Spirit of the Bells. At that moment of recognition, Trotty articulates Meg's inherent, human value and thereby renounces the utilitarian doctrine regarding the inherent evil and wastefulness of the poor that he had hitherto imbibed. The Bells will at the last ring out with the joy of the New Year and the sacred occasion – Meg's wedding – that it will mark.

It is through an encounter with the dead, or the potentially so, that Dickens's Christmas books finally diverge from the hard lessons Hardy teaches, finding as they do hope and possibility through, as we shall see, the apparitional encounter; inherent in this version of Dickensian death is simultaneously the possibility for resurrection, a possibility that signals the potential transcendence of the social curse, rather than – as in the case of little Jude and his siblings – confirmation of its absolute power. As the grieving Sue Bridehead avers, "We must conform!" (Hardy [1895] 2002, 330).

I. Nocturnal Visitations

Despite its rousing conclusion, *The Chimes* is, like *Jude the Obscure*, a story of deprivation and starvation – of the mind, spirit, and the body. Hunger and starvation are of course dominant subjects in Dickens's writing – we need only think of Oliver's well-known anthem or the dwindling of Little Nell. Indeed, like these earlier tales, *The Chimes* documents a harrowing world of starvation, poverty, and exile.

As many have observed, Dickens would begin composing *The Chimes* at a time when he was himself removed from his own society. Dickens had travelled to Italy, and it was in Genoa that he would, in a roundabout way, find inspiration for *The Chimes*. Although this

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

"inspiration," if we might call it that, initially arises out of profound annoyance. As Dickens writes,

> the bells of the churches ring incessantly; not in peals, or any known form of sound, but in a horrible, irregular, jerking, dingle, dingle, dingle: with a sudden stop at every fifteenth dingle or so, which is maddening. This performance is usually achieved by a boy up in the steeple, who takes hold of the clapper, or a little rope attached to it, and tries to dingle louder than every other boy similarly employed. The noise is supposed to be particularly obnoxious to Evil Spirits, but looking up into the steeples, and thus seeing (and hearing) these young Christians thus engaged, one might very naturally mistake them for the Enemy. (Dickens [1846] 1998, 45).

But Dickens was affected by more than sound in Genoa – it also became a place of intense and formative visual encounter for him: "things that are picturesque, ugly, mean, magnificent, delightful, and offensive, break upon the view at every turn" (Dickens [1846] 1998, 45). One little-remarked upon vision seems of particular importance here – as he experienced something akin to a kind of religious, apparitional encounter. Dickens generally seems to have little patience for medieval visions and miracles, identifying St. Joan of Arc's visions of St. Michael, St. Catherine and St. Margaret as "delusions […] [as] a disease which are not by any means uncommon" (Dickens [1851-53] 1901, 147).[2] Yet one might speculate whether Dickens himself was subject, at least temporarily, to such an illness. Just prior to commencing his composition of *The Chimes* "he dreamed of a Spirit wrapped in blue-drapery, like a Madonna by Raphael" (Ackroyd 1999, 462). He immediately recognized the woman as his deceased sister-in-law Mary Hogarth, but went on to converse with this figure about the primacy of the Catholic Church, asking if "the Form of religion does not so greatly matter, if we try to do good? Or perhaps the Roman Catholic is the best? Perhaps it makes one think of God oftener, and believe in him more steadily?" "For *you*," the Spirit replied, "it is the best" (qtd in Ackroyd 1999, 463).

[2] On Dickens's distrust of medievalism, which likely surfaces here, in addition to his anti-Catholic leanings, see Bauer and Zirker 2017.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

As Michael Slater points out, "Whatever he decided about this had no effect whatever in modifying the sharp hostility towards Roman Catholicism that was to pervade the pages of *Pictures from Italy*" (Slater 2009, 229). Indeed, Dickens's "vision," such as it was, of the Madonna, is useful to note here, less for the degree to which it might raise questions about Dickens's unconscious yearnings for conversion, but moreso for the way that it points toward the tension between fantasy and reality that he will continue to examine in *The Chimes*. "I *wonder*," he wrote to Forster, "whether I should regard it as a dream, or an actual Vision!" (qtd in Slater 2009, 229). Likewise, Dickens asks at the conclusion of *The Chimes* whether Trotty had "dreamed? Or are his joys and sorrows, and the actors in them, but a dream; himself a dream; the teller of this tale a dreamer, waking but now?" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161). Regardless, he urges his "listener," "try to bear in mind the stern realities form which these shadows come; and [...] endeavor to correct, improve, and soften them." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161).

As Ackroyd observes, the subsequent fiction seems to bear out the fact that his "nocturnal visitation" (Ackroyd 1999, 463) in the Palazzo Peschire "was not easily forgotten by Dickens: the hooded figure of a woman reappears in his later fiction and his next Christmas Book, *The Chimes*, was also to deal with ghosts and spirits and visitations." (Ackroyd 1999, 464) As in *A Christmas Carol*, the protagonist of *The Chimes* encounters often-terrifying spirits, which mediate his travel between this world and the next. The visions begin when, increasingly convinced that poor men such as he are inherently bad, a bewildered Trotty retreats into the church and climbs upward into the bell tower. Though he seeks escape, he remains trapped in ceaseless movement as he ascends the "narrow stair": "Up, up up, and round, and round; and up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up! [...] It was a disagreeable staircase for that groping work; so low and narrow [...] up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher up!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 124). And, it is here, at the apex of this parody of Victorian progress where, as "The Voice of Time [...] cries to man,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Advance!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 126), Trotty encounters nothing but chaos. Waking from a swoon, he is stuck by the phantasmagoria "Goblin Sight":

> the tower, whither his charmed footsteps had brought him [was] swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells [...] He saw them, of all aspects and all shapes. He saw them ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel, he saw them merry, he saw them grim; he saw them dance, and heard them sing; he saw them ear their hair, and heard them howl. [...] (Dickens [1844] 2006, 125-126).

Finally, this chaotic scene dissipates and, left with the Goblin of the Bell, Trotty encounters an even more terrifying vision:

> The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.
> "No more a living man!" cried Trotty. "Dead!"
> "Dead!" said the figures all together. (Dickens [1844] 2006, 130).

Trotty thus witnesses his own death, which had occurred, he is told, nine years earlier.

Throughout his fiction Dickens frequently presents his reader with a version of this moment – one in which his character witnesses, in effect, his own death. We see this in Scrooge's encounter with his own grave; in John Harmon's survey of his own corpse at the police station; and in the depiction of the unnamed Signalman who foresees the coming event of his death but cannot stop it. Even Richard Darnay, in flight from Paris, in a manner lives as a result of his own execution, which echoes through the final pages of the narrative.

Yet in *The Chimes* what I would term the dissociative moment occurring at the depiction of the protagonist's death is all the more poignant, for it is neither a matter of switched identity, nor a textual encounter, as in the case of Scrooge's confrontation with his own grave. Rather, Trotty sees his very own body, motionless and dead, before him. This is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

particularly appropriate given the text's focus on starvation, deprivation, and exile. For Trotty's encounter with his own dead body renders emphatically the degree to which the physical and the psychological are intimately linked; the deprivation, the starvation that necessarily drives such individuals onward from place to place produces a kind of psychological exile. Necessarily so – as hunger and starvation force the individual apart from him or herself, as he or she unwillingly, yet necessarily, participates in the denial of his or her own needs. Similarly, when Meg will be driven to carry in her "wasted arms" the baby she cares for down to the river with the intent to drown it, she becomes, as Trotty himself will argue, someone other than, someone truly "outside of" herself.

Thus, to his portrayal of deprivation, starvation, and want – Dickens yokes this singular haunting spectral image, as the narrative fittingly becomes itself a dissociative exercise: *The Chimes* is a story of exile – of the poor's exile from their communities, but also a tale of exile from the self. In this process, individuals become, like the spirits of the bells, a mass of apparitions, indistinguishable and increasingly lost to the perceptions of those around them.

II. Dicing Time[3]

Despite this implicit emphasis on the invisibility of the poor, *The Chimes* is in many ways a theatrical space, one of hurried movement and discordant sound, of ongoing shifts in scene and character. Its pace – like Trotty's – is suggestive of the pace of modern life that induces hurry and anxiety in the citizenry. This stands at odds with both the secular and sacred times marked out by the bells: their predictable sounds mark out the passing of the day; at other times their chiming signals sacred occasion and event. As Jay Clayton observes in his discussion of sound in *The Chimes*, "For centuries, the sound of church bells has been integral

[3] "Hap" (Hardy 1976, 9, l. 12).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

to complex social networks: systems of time-keeping, religion, mourning, marriage, community relations, national holidays, civic honours and emergencies" (Clayton 2012, 19-40, esp. 26).[4] The ringing bell at once marks the sacramental, timeless event, but at the same time the passing of human time – and at their most intense, therefore, the individual's incessant haunting by his or her sense of mortality, of the uncontrollable pace with which time moves forward and one's life necessarily and increasingly fades away.[5] In charting Trotty's movements, arbitrary and unpredictable (given the nature of his work as a ticket porter) as they are, *The Chimes* emphasizes the frenetic nature of this kind of time. This tension between the sacred and the relentlessly secular – timekeeping, working, running, motion – pervades much of the story.

A Christmas Carol is ostensibly more rigidly structured according to past, present, future. Yet in *The Chimes*, time itself *is* rigidity, associated as it so often is with deprivation. Trotty enjoys a special intimacy with the Bells, which frequently offer him sympathy and encouragement. Yet they also mark out the precarious nature of his very existence in their connection to absence, to the non-event. For, "There's nothing," says Trotty, "more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 92). The arbitrary, unpredictable nature of how and when a man like Toby might get his next meal or, indeed, his next job, is utterly at odds with the Chimes' marking of time with regularity. Thus, despite their apparent intimacy with Trotty, the Chimes simultaneously mark out a temporal world from which he – and the class he represents – are excluded. Meg, as we see later, cannot pause to indulge in human emotion

[4] See also Bauer's compelling, incisive analysis of *The Chimes*'s "poetics of rhythm," in which he sees Dickens's use of "rhythm as a subject matter" inherently connected "to rhythm as a feature of style" (Bauer 2017, 112).
[5] Gordon Bigelow echoes this in his discussion of Walter Bagehot's sense of Dickens's "strength [. . .] in representing the discontinuity of modern urban life: the clashing juxtapositions, and the odd simultaneity of unrelated events in every second of the urban clock. This temporality of the 'disconnected' [. . .] is what Walter Benjamin refers to in the famous formulation "homogenous, empty time," the time of the newspaper, the telegraph, the crowd, a time that attenuates the teleos of the Christian calendar" (Bigelow 2003, 77).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

and sorrow, but must persist at her work well into the evening; the needs of the body (for food, for sleep) or those of the soul and mind do not regulate it. Rather, "In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body, Meg's work must be done. [...] Night, midnight. Still she worked." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 142). The time of the poor is not theirs to control; they inhabit a world – and a time – apart, one defined by "the chaos of hunger" (Scholl 2020,13).

The story thus repeatedly shows that the experience of the poor is that of unpredictability, deprivation, and disruption: indeed, *The Chimes* essentially begins with the interruption of a poor man's lunch. Here Dickens illustrates, as he often does, how "understanding the spiritual aspects of familiar things is an important social responsibility" (Mangham 2020, 150). The intrusion of Mr. Filer, Sir Joseph, and Alderman Cute upon Trotty's meal at the beginning of the tale marks the disruption of a moment of sacred communion – one shared between father, daughter, and her would-be husband. Indeed, here, as elsewhere, Dickens stages his drama as a means of infusing otherwise quotidian moments surrounding the sharing of food with a sacramental essence.

Before all is lost, including Trotty's lunch, the extended scene involves Meg's delivery of a pot of tripe to her father, with, as well, a "hot potato beside, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 95). An atmosphere of moving sanctity and empathy that persists as Trotty commences his meal: the Bells ring out, a greeting that he acknowledges as a Grace, and he responds in kind with a solemn "Amen!"(Dickens [1844] 2006, 96). Trotty goes on to describe a kind of union he shares with the Chimes, as to his ear they frequently ring out with his very name, "Toby Veck, Toby Veck" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) and urge him "to keep a good heart" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) and encourage him when work is hard to come by. Trotty concludes with an expression of faith, confirming that, yes,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

as the Bells suggest, work always comes at last – it "Never fails" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 96) – and he goes on to enjoy his meal with great gusto.

Although Dickens weaves much delight and tenderness into this exchange, an atmosphere of guilt and worry persists. For as Meg moves to set a makeshift dining table for her father, she in seeming seriousness asks if it is a criminal offence to spread her cloth. Although Trotty answers in the negative, he is quick to note that "they're always a bringing up some new law or other" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 95). The abundance of laws at once contrasts with and directly contributes to the deprivation faced by individuals such as Trotty. Meg is skeptical that the poor could ever keep track of all of the laws to which they are subject. Ignorance seems to be the "crime" of the poor; as well as their lack of legal knowledge, they are blamed for their "ignorance of the first principals of political economy" – and that, according to Alderman Cute, who will soon arrive to disrupt the scene, along with two other "gentleman", is not just the source of their suffering, but of their wickedness.

Prior to the Alderman's arrival and pronouncements, we see how clearly the humanity of Meg's actions – her desire to lay the table – contrasts the austere legal environment that seems to regulate her every movement. Her laying of the table not within the sacred house of worship but rather without also speaks to their exclusion from religious and cultural ritual as well as the widespread domestic disruption affecting the poor. This moment, then, despite its tenderness, marks the perpetual threat of homelessness and exile that will be manifest in the strife faced by other characters in story, such as the itinerant Will Fern and his niece Lillian.

Dickens thus subtly documents the fragmentation of community that recent work on starvation, society, and nineteenth-century cultural production has effectively underscored. In *Hunger, Poetry, and the Oxford Movement,* Lesa Scholl describes how the legal changes that proliferated in this in this period, particularly the New Poor Law, frequently served to

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

further distance society from the actual suffering of individuals. The result was thus additional adverse consequences for the impoverished and their communities. As Scholl explains:

> The unionizing of parish relief, for instance, introduced by the New Poor Law, meant that individual parishes were no longer held directly responsible for relieving distress in their own community. Poor relief was thus bureaucratized, centralized, and sanitized, making hunger and starvation more palatable and acceptable by distancing the direct offense of poverty from the local community's reach (Scholl 2020, 21).

The very fact that Trotty lacks a singular employer further emphasizes the effects of this form of social disconnection; his situation is distinct from that which we see, for instance, in *Hard Times* or even *A Christmas Carol*. For in these other critiques of industrial hardship, a relationship, albeit a negligent and often punitive one, between employer (Bounderby, Scrooge) and employee (Blackpool, Cratchit) exists. In these texts, Dickens can advocate, however problematically, for a more positive relationship based on responsibility between employer and employee. But Trotty, as his constant motion shows, is without anyone to address. To whom ought he petition? The state? "Faceless institutions," Scholl rightly insists, "are not capable of empathetic connection" (Scholl 2020, 22).

The impact of this detachment – and the resulting invisibility of the poor – becomes acute with the sudden arrival of the three un-wise men who interrupt Toby's interaction with his daughter and her fiancé, Richard. Filer, Alderman Cute, and the red-faced gentleman intrude upon this scene, not to bear gifts to the poor and humble, but to steal their food from their mouths. Quoting all manner of ridiculous statistics, estimates, and tables, Filer upbraids Toby for his consumption of tripe, citing it as a gross indulgence that amounts to little more than the theft "out of the mouths of widows and orphans" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 101). Caught in the harassing mental trap laid for him, poor Trotty suddenly

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

"seemed to have starved a garrison of five hundred men with his own hand" ((Dickens [1844] 2006, 100). Alderman Cute rejects all reports of the ubiquitous starvation and suffering[6] that surround them as mere "cant in vogue" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 103) and propounds upon the foolhardiness of marriage among the poor, telling Meg, "your husband will die young (mostly likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the street" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 104). As a result, the three depart divided: Meg and Richard "in tears" and Richard "gloomy and down-looking" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 105), while Trotty, tasked by the Alderman with delivering a letter, fell "mechanically, in his usual trot, and trotted off." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 106).

III. "All was nervous motion"[7]

The *Chimes* opens with speculation about the possibilities of rough sleeping in a church, which should be a place of obvious shelter and benevolence. Yet as a result of the intrusion of Filer, Cute, and the red-faced gentlemen, it becomes, as we have seen, a site of banishment and exile. Meg becomes but a wanderer adrift, and Trotty resumes his mechanical movements as he and his family are cast off from the steps of the church and sent out separately into the world.

Thus, Dickens contrasts the Christmas image of the Holy Family with familial discord and disconnection, as the three go their separate ways. This and the subsequent visions of family strife, violence, and separation that Trotty will witness are vastly at odds with that version of Christmas joy and unity that is elsewhere lauded in Dickens. For Fred, Scrooge's

[6] As has been well documented, the "Hungry Forties" was characterized by tremendous suffering in the form of starvation and disease among the poorer classes. 1841-42 had seen an enormous depression, which especially affected the working poor in urban locations and in that well-documented site of deprivation and horror – the workhouse. More widespread famine was of course yet to come: between 1845 and 1850 a million Irish would have starve or die from disease in the workhouses (Bigelow 2003, 151).
[7] *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy [1895] 2002, 84).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

nephew, from *A Christmas Carol,* this, the Yuletide, "is the only time . . . in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys" (Dickens [1843] 2003, 36). Fred insists that all are fellow travelers, pilgrims, journeying together toward their final resting place. Yet here, Dickens's readers frequently witness how the journey of the poor is a much more punitive one. Like Meg, who in Trotty's vision will but "wande[r] here and there, in quest of occupation" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 36), such individuals are often in exile, forced to wander, forced to run, forced out and away from community into a life of disconnection and want. This calls to mind, indeed, Little Nell, forced to wander endlessly in order to preserve her grandfather, but also a host of Dickensian characters: Barnaby Rudge and his mother; the wandering Circus performers of *Hard Times;* Magwitch, the escaped prisoner of *Great Expectations*; even John Harmon, the hero of Dickens's last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*.

Dickens thus aptly designates Trotty's work as that of a porter or a kind of general runner who moves swiftly, at the arbitrary command of others, and who moves alone. Such constant, chaotic movement is likewise the plight of the vagabond. William Fern, whom Trotty will shortly encounter, first in report at Sir Joseph's and then in reality, has been accused of the offence of vagrancy, and it is he who cuttingly blasphemes that well-known articulation of human connection and obligation from the Book of Ruth, saying, in protest against his constant pursuit by the police, "Whither though goest I cannot go [...] Thou people are not my people." (Dickens [1844] 2006, 138). Through Fern and the wanderers like him who populate Dickens's fiction, Dickens documents one of the many double binds faced by the poor and hunger-stricken, those without work, without shelter: poverty so often leads to perpetual motion, making movement necessary for survival. Yet that very movement in and across public space is itself deemed criminal.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Ingrid Horrocks's study of women, wandering, and mobility in the Romantic age illustrates the growing restriction and criminalization of individual movement, especially of the poorer classes, during this period. In the late-eighteenth century "harsh new penal measures were brought in that altered the 1744 Vagrancy Act, bringing in tighter regulations on vagrants, peddlers, beggars, discharged soldiers, and travelers and wanders of all kinds." (Horrocks 2017, 17). Such ongoing changes to the Act collectively made "the lack of a home or ostensible livelihood a crime worthy of newly severe punishment." (Horrocks 2017, 17). They also contributed to the conception of the unemployed or impoverished as inherently criminal: the Vagrancy Act of 1824 gave Justices of the Peace the power to arrest and imprison "Vagabonds and Incorrigible Rogues" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 113). Horrocks's description of the eighteenth-century woman wanderer thus has equal application to the plight of Will Fern, a man "jaded and foot-sore, and so soiled with travel," (Dickens [1844] 2006, 115) and that of other wanderers who populate Dickens's fiction. As Horrocks explains: "These are not travellers as we know them, adventuring out to explore the world, but unwilling, pained figures, moving not because they choose to but because they have no choice." (Horrocks 2017, 1) Although they do not take him as far afield, Trotty's perpetual, repetitive movements invite, as I have suggested, comparison with the ceaseless steps of the wanderer, who, as Will Fern attests, feels, like Trotty, increasingly criminalized: "Jail, Jail, Jail, afore us," he says, "everywhere we turn" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 138).[8]

[8] The mechanical nature of Trotty's ceaseless movements combined with his sense of the growing criminalization of his class evokes that punitive machine of ceaseless movement – the treadmill. Although treadmills or versions of them – those used to power mills and other kinds of machines with human or animal labour – had been around for thousands of years, the punitive use of treadmills was of course a nineteenth-century invention. Many, including Ackroyd, have noted that Dickens's basis for Alderman Cute is the magistrate Peter Laurie, who ruthlessly sentenced individuals who failed in their suicide attempts to the treadmill (Ackroyd 1999, 465). Appropriately, then, for Dickens, the members of the wealthier classes, too, are but caught in the treadmill of his prejudice. Regarding the red-faced gentleman's beloved "the great old times," "No matter what anybody said, he still went turning round and round in one set form of words concerning them; as a poor squirrel turns in its revolving cage" (Ackroyd 1999, 102). Sir William Cubitt is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

Trotty can only stop the ceaseless revolution of the wheel of misfortune by the conversion of his vision – that is, through the development of his interpretative capacities. In a crucial moment of recognition – as he looks upon the scene of Meg's imminent suicide and murder of her child – he at last rejects the prevailing taxonomy of the criminal that he has elsewhere absorbed. He claims instead that Meg's desperate actions mark her "as one in whom this dreadful crime has sprung from Love perverted; from the strongest, deepest Love we fallen creatures know!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 136). His plea for mercy, for an understanding of Meg's singular plight and personhood breaks the spell of the Bells and allows him to reenter "real time," as he arises from his dream to greet Lillian and her Uncle Will, as well as Meg and Richard. As he does so, the sordid newspaper falls, we should note, with its superficial judgments, at his feet.

This resurrective moment is followed by the conversion of previously harsh sound and punitive movement, in the jubilance of the wedding celebration as a celebratory "*band* of music burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming "A Happy New Year, Meg!" "A Happy Wedding!" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 158). Here, in the final scenes of *The Chimes* deprivation is replaced by fulfillment and exile by belonging. Such a conclusion thus provides a tonic to the disconnection inherent in wandering, which, Horrocks observes, "assumes neither destination nor homecoming" (Horrocks 2017, 17). Both are provided here in this joyful counter to the "danse macabre" of the Goblin spirits that plagued Trotty's vision earlier. Mrs Chickenstalker arrives, "attended by a man bearing a stone pitcher of terrific size" containing a flip, or a warm drink (Dickens [1844] 2006, 159). Carried on a frame are a portable collection of bells – a makeshift instrument that correspond to their larger counterparts, "the Chimes, [which were] in lusty operation out of doors." (Dickens [1844]

generally credited with the invention of the treadmill for such use; Shyat offers an extensive discussion of the history of the treadmill and its application in the British penal system.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

2006, 159). Amidst all of this Toby Veck no longer runs, nor climbs, nor toils onward. His trot has become a dance.

As Goldie Morgentaler rightly observes, Dickens viewed dance as "a healthy and harmonious activity requiring the participation of all classes and both sexes; it generates joy and benevolent feelings" (Morgentaler 2011, 264). Yet crucially, *The Chimes's* concluding dance offers a particular corrective to those punitive forms of movement – Trotty's mechanized, hurried steps and Will Fern's ceaseless flight – that dominate much of the tale. Both forms of movement are a function of the industrial, utilitarian context that Dickens's tale seeks to indict. They underscore the invisibility of the poor as well as their exclusion from the regular movements of time that determine cultural ritual and the patterns of daily living, exiled as they are into a world of chaos. The dance, however, controls that chaos – it is at once jubilant, but also measured, intentional, and governed by time, with specific steps and movements that depend upon those of one's partner or those of the next couple. There is at once freedom and interdependence in the movements of the dance; it is a communal spectacle made possible only by the participation of individuals. It allows, finally, for the existence of autonomy and difference – for Trotty's "own peculiar trot" (Dickens [1844] 2006, 161) – within the larger pattern of community. The particular community shown here is notably characterized by perception – by intimacy, history, and knowing. This scene of redemption and the union that it celebrates has depended upon Trotty's seeing Meg for who she really is; Trotty in turn witnesses Will Fern's and Lilly's recognition by that celebratory maternal figure, one who had notably long known the little girl's mother, Mrs. Chickenstalker.

In its depictions of the significance of individual encounter and individual identity, *The Chimes* thus works to counter the prevailing discourse of "too many" that is additionally persecuting the ostracized and impoverished. The controlled chaos of the dance thus offers,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

at least for a time, a means of resisting what a later author such as Hardy will term "the modern vice of unrest" (Hardy [1895] 2002, 79) – that ubiquitous affliction of body, mind, and spirit cultivated by a culture of disconnection, constant movement, and pervasive want. Instead, in *The Chimes* the movement of time offers yet another chance for a New Year, as the terrorizing chaos of Trotty's earlier encounter with the Goblin Sight is replaced by moments of recognition, and movement is no longer punitive, aimless, and desperate, but the source of union, reunion, and joy.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549019

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Living (in) the Margin: The Intersectionality of Language and Body in the Ballroom Culture. A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

The sociological and legal recognition of the intrinsic relationship between social categorisations and the perpetuation of discrimination and oppression is encapsulated by the concept of 'intersectionality'. This multifaceted notion, serving as both an analytical challenge and an interpretive framework, additionally encompasses the idea of a margin where individuals inhabiting the juncture of divergent social spaces converge and, in doing so, engender an innovative dimension – an interstitial realm transcending fictitious boundaries. Building upon this conceptual foundation, the current study aims to shed light on the so-called 'Ballroom Culture' as a compelling illustration of this perspective, with a specific emphasis on its linguistic facets, both on a verbal and non-verbal level. From the early 1960s, ballrooms have gathered marginalised individuals who fought those rules that impeded them from expressing their identity. This social context unavoidably exerted an influence on language, as the convergence of diverse cultures and (hi)stories facilitated the intertwining of multiple discourses. The linguistic outcome emerging from this intersectional margin/space was the emergence of a language that transcends any difference of origins and identity. As this is true for both language and body language, this article first explains what intersectionality is, how it works, and what is its relationship with language. Then, it retraces Ballroom Culture's history and traditions, which have always revolved around verbal and non-verbal display of self or other's identity meant to make individuals feel relieved from social discrimination. Finally, the study shows some popular examples of intersectional language also to hypothesise which methodology/ies would better fit linguistic research addressing the contemporary and mediated version of the Ballroom Culture.

Keywords: Intersectionality; Ballroom Culture; Drag Culture; marginal spaces; body language.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

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Introduction

This study represents an embryonic state of research. It was carried out after learning the core of intersectional theory, when two curiosities were raised: (1) since intersectionality is meant to frame and tackle an issue that has always existed, is there an example of socio-cultural agency that has been displaying intersectional attitudes way before? (2) If so, does it showcase a language that can be defined 'intersectional'? The latter question is enhanced in the light of the main role that language plays in contemporary society in debates concerning the politically correct and the respect in addressing different identities.

The relationship between language and society is the main and general focus of sociolinguistics. A specific scope is the interplay between linguistic practices and forms of social classification: gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, age, etc. However, many scholars argue that these categories have been discussed singularly, without taking into account the intricate and mutual enhancement among them (Romero 2017, Maegaard et al. 2019). Therefore, much sociolinguistics and critical discourse take up re-addressing intersectionality (Baker, 2008; Baker and Levon, 2016; Milani, 2014; Levon, 2015; Levon and Mendes, 2015).

In this light, the historical Ballroom Culture provides suitable examples of intersectional identities and language, as it has always brought marginalised individuals together in a community struggling with a society that discriminated their identities. As this research sits on the margin between language and cultural studies, and since it adopts a sociological perspective, the article dedicates a first section to explaining the intersectional framework; this is followed by a paragraph on methodological approaches for linguistic-intersectional case study; Ballroom Culture is then overviewed from its origins and traditions to its contemporary legacy; finally, the article focuses on the inclusive language of this tradition, which is articulated in both verbal and non-verbal dimensions. The marginal crossroad between perspective, case study and methodology help to set a pragmatic research to be carried out starting from this embryo.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

Intersectionality: understanding it, thinking it

As premised by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge (2020), providing a concise and thorough definition of 'intersectionality' is a complex task since, over the last two decades, this term has been widely used both in academic and socio-political fields. Students and scholars encounter and explore the notion of intersectionality in a variety of disciplines, such as Women's, Cultural, Media Studies, but also Sociology, Political Science, History. In current global debates on human rights and environmental matters, intersectionality is a key point, embraced and used on and off-line to shape public opinion, as for instance in the transformation of schools and the promotion of intellectual and political projects. Collins and Bilge agree that, although definitions of intersectionality coming from different domains may even be contradictory, it would be generally descripted and mostly accepted as it follows:

> Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences (Collins and Bilge 2020, 5).

First of all, intersectionality is a problematization: it takes into account the ways in which systems of inequality based on various categories intersect and determine specific dynamics and effects: "in a given society at a given time, power relations of race, class, and gender, for example, are not discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but rather build on each other and work together; and that, while often invisible, these intersecting power relations affect all aspects of the social world" (2020, 5). For example, when a woman experiences sexism, the case is likely to be debated – or possibly taken to trial – also in relation to the colour of her skin, to her religion, or social status. This is due to power distribution along 'axes of social division':

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

> The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other (Collins and Bilge 2016, 2).

As all forms of inequality reinforce mutually, it is therefore necessary to analyse and address them simultaneously. As for instance, tackling the gender pay gap without including other dimensions such as ethnicity or socio-economic and immigration statuses, would probably increase inequalities among women. This perspective is true for both individuals who struggle in society and for scholars approaching sociological matters with an intersectional approach: on the one hand, "[o]rdinary people can draw upon intersectionality as an analytic tool when they recognize that they need better frameworks to grapple with social problems" (Collins and Bilge 2020, 6); on the other, researchers can in turn adopt it as a theoretical and methodological framework, but keeping in mind that an intersectional analysis should focus on "what intersectionality *does* rather than what intersectionality *is*" (Cho *et al.* 2013, 795). What it does is allowing for the conceptualisation of a person, a group of people or a social problem as affected by several discriminations and disadvantages. By considering people's overlapping identities and experiences, it is possible to make the margins between them fade, and to understand the complexity of the prejudices they face.

The general overview outlined so far is necessary to understand the very recent applications of intersectional in society, politics and academy. Nonetheless, the origins of this notion go back to the previous century and require attention to some critical and even paradoxical dynamics within social structures:

> Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked—feet standing on shoulders—with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

> very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor rush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are *not* disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that "but for" the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. [The others] are not invited to climb through the hatch and told to wait in the unprotected margin until they can be absorbed into the broader, protected categories of race and sex (Crenshaw 1989, 151-152).

The term 'intersectionality' was coined by law professor and social theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw, in her 1989 essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. The title is reported here because, on the one hand, the concept of margin turns out to be intrinsic in that of intersectionality, while on the other, every phrase of the title is a hint for more than the content of the text. "Demarginalizing the intersection" may sound contradictory, since it is immediately obvious that the intersectional framework virtually needs different and well-defined social axes to recognise the way they collide. Nonetheless, that is where the margin between understanding and thinking intersectionality fades: to fully grasp the core of intersectionality, it takes considering that some edges do exist between categories, but they are 'permeable'. That is the case of race and gender, long treated as "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis [...] by a single-axis framework that is dominant in antidiscrimination law and that is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics" (Crenshaw 1989, 139). Crenshaw enhances the Black feminist critique against the antidiscrimination doctrine because, despite the fight for which it is meant, it ends up perpetuating discrimination and oppression, since antisexist and antiracist "doctrine[s] are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences. Under this view, Black women are protected only to the extent that their experiences coincide with those of either of the two groups" (Crenshaw 1989, 143).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Figure 1. A demonstration of the Combahee River Collective. Cover of the *New Women's Times*, 5 (13), 22nd June 1979.

The criticisms towards feminist theory and antiracist politics began years before Crenshaw's writing. The concept of intersectionality emerged earlier in the 1960s when, in addition to racism, Black women started to find it difficult to identify themselves with the issues of the mainstream white feminist movement. For example, being a homemaker was a problem for white women, but a luxury for Black ones, who often had to work to keep their families afloat. At the same time, many Black women experienced sexism while participating in the Civil Rights movement, where they were often shut out of leadership positions. Experiencing racism in the feminist movement and sexism in Civil Rights shaped a first, clear intersectional trope. This led to the birth of movements such as the Combahee River Collective (Figure 1), a North American working-class Black lesbian organisation struggling not only to be represented in both feminist movements and Civil Rights, but also to be recognised as Black women, rather than just Black or just women. Early terminological and conceptual suggestions of intersectionality appeared when the members of the Collective declared their standing against racial, sexual, heterosexual and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

class systems of oppression that 'interlock' and 'synthesise' in disadvantaged people's lives. Moreover, it turned out that intersectionality is concerned with identity too: in fact, the moment it shifts from personal/collective to political, it becomes clear that oppressive politics are to be found and faced in the discourse around identity: (Combahee River Collective Statement 1977).

By now, it is assumed that intersectionality is both an entrenched problem and a preliminary solution: without an intersectional perspective, injustice towards one group is likely to end up perpetuating systems of inequalities towards other groups. That is why over the decades this social framework has been extended to numerous categorizations, from historical ones, such as ethnicity, citizenship and class, to gender, religion, age and disability. This widening of applications fosters what Bilge defines as "queer intersectionality" (2012), which is the expression that bridges intersectionality with linguistics in search of a proper methodology to explore the traditions pertaining to the Ballroom Culture.

A 'fair' methodology for a 'fair' case study

Intertwining linguistics and intersectionality requires some necessary theoretical and methodological compromises, first and foremost the adjustment between intersectionality and queer theory. Sirma Bilge underlines "how intersectionality and queer theory can complement and challenge each other and, further, why it is crucial to uphold and extend a dialogue between them in order to firm up a critical ethos and ethics of non-oppressive politics of coalition. [...] [W]e may call this approach 'queer intersectionality' or 'queer anti-racist critique' (Bilge 2012, 22-23). She derives her theory from what Douglas *et al.* previously said about the importance not "to separate questions of gender, sexuality, and queerness, from questions of raciality and racialisation. This form of intersectional critique serves as a tool for building spaces and movements that are committed to interrogating gender and sexuality norms, whilst simultaneously identifying, challenging, and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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countering the overt and embedded forms of racism that shape them" (Douglas et al. 2011, 108). Bilge's proposal "can be seen as the outgrowth of reciprocal challenges and productive tensions between an *intersectionalized queer* and a *queered* intersectionality" (Bilge 2012, 23), the former being conceptualised earlier in 2005 by Johnson and Henderson.

Despite its terminological suitability, the expression 'queer intersectionality' was not that easy to acknowledge. According to Gray and Cooke:

> On an initial view it could be said that the idea of a queer intersectionality is something of a paradox. Intersectionality clearly deals in social categories and identities (admittedly with varying degrees of commitment), while queer theory (although hardly a unified project) is deeply distrustful of all social categories, heteronormative and homonormative regimes of gender and sexuality, as well as the notion of essentialised identities which are sometimes held to pertain to certain categories of person (e.g. gay people, trans men, trans women, etc.) (Gray and Cooke 2018, 409).

The authors immediately add that the solution to 'blur the margin' between the opposite frameworks of intersectionality and queer theory is in Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) queer linguistics. Even if queer theory detaches from identity, queer linguistics takes it into account by framing it with the critical expression used by Judith Butler – a 'necessary error' (Butler 1993, 174). Queer linguistics draws from three fields: queer theory, sociocultural linguistics and feminism. The first one prevents from assigning a fixed, categorical meaning to the long-debated notion of 'queer', which instead deserved strong academic attention (Kulick 2005); the second one highlights the centrality of local understanding and contexts in the study of specific languages and discourses; the third one contextualises queer and hegemonic sexualities in relation to other sociopolitical phenomena, such as gender, race, and social class (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 490).

Moving right from Butler's theories, Rusty Barrett explains that in queer linguistics "identity categories are not accepted as a priori entities, but are recognised as ideological constructs produced by social discourse" (Barrett 2002, 28). In this process of self-

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

definition, power plays a main role. The interplay between identity and power is central in some remarkable works, such as Balirano (2014), in which masculinity is said to be hegemonic and represented through unbalanced power relations with the very concept of femininity, so by a contrast in which femininity represents what masculinity is not. This is echoed in Baker and Balirano's (2018) edition on linguistic and cultural evidence of non-heteronormative masculinities: "since masculinity is traditionally seen as one half of a mutual and binary identity construal (along with femininity), it is only through its relationship with other linguistically, semiotically, and socially construed instances of identity that contemporary dominant tropes on masculinity can be produced" (2018: 2). A different, still equally meaningful perspective is that of Milani (2014), who notes that

> queer theory provides us with an important analytical toolkit to unpack the operations of power in relation to gender and sexuality (and other social categories) without falling into too easy conflations between processes" (a man's/woman's desire for another man/woman), on the one hand, and "identities" ("gay"/ "lesbian"/"heterosexual"), on the other (Milani 2014, 203).

In his study on Linguistic Landscape, Milani discusses 'signs' with reference to the definition of Backhaus (2007), who emphasises the material meaning that sign carries on "an inscribed surface displayed in a public space to convey a message" (4-5). This apparently out-of-context note is quoted here to reflect on the analogy it has with identity, which signifies itself in the public sphere through performative language and body:

> identities are understood as performatively enacted in language, where language is understood 'not [as] an exterior medium or instrument into which I pour myself and from which I glean a reflection of that self' (Butler 1990, 196) – but rather as a medium in and through which speakers actively insert themselves into the discourses which are culturally available to them (Gray and Cooke 2018, 410).

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Judith Butler's Performativity Theory is an essential layer in the theoretical basis of this research, because inquiring the language of the Ballroom Culture means studying bodies' expressiveness. In this tradition, words and bodies cannot be conceived separately: the language spoken is addressed to corporeality and aesthetics of bodies that speak for themselves. "Several aspects of performativity are useful in the linguistic analysis of sexuality. In particular, the concept challenges the notion that either gender or sexuality is 'natural' by maintaining that both acquire social meaning only when physical bodies enter into historically and culturally specific systems of power" (Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 492).

To sum up, even if it is firmly believed that a sought specificity of definition would take off more than it could yield, the right scope ought to be placed may be intersectional sociolinguistics, which brings social categories and individual lived experience together through a focus on language, and on the role it plays in making queer intersectionality visible (Levon and Mendes 2016). Furthermore, since this research focuses on the use of language within a specific context, it makes the case for an intersectional sociopragmatic research.

The in-betweenness of the margin: the Ballroom Culture

By using a metaphorical explanation, Crenshaw suggests that margins should not be merely considered as either material or figurative dividing lines, but rather as empty spaces of occurrence:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. [...] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away (Crenshaw 1979, 149).

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Intersectionality denotes an idea of margin which is home for people who are excluded from heterogeneous worlds, living squeezed between two or more of them. In this no man's land, they happen to meet, interact, and mutual respect and empathy eventually lead them to create a brand-new dimension by dilating that margin against which they are pushed: an interstitial space out of a fictitious line. Ballroom Culture is a clear example of this reading, for it has always gathered marginalised individuals since its early times. Initially, this community was formed by a majority of African Americans, Latinos, gay men, and trans women – people fighting a society that disapproved and sentenced the expression of their identity –, but today it has come to include people from many other social categories and cultural backgrounds. Also known as Ballroom Scene, Ball Culture, House System or Ballroom Community, the concept identifies a branch of American LGBTQIA+ culture characterised by competitions called 'balls'. Participants challenge each other in pageant, dances and other skills (Figure 2), according to categories announced by a host and meant to emulate or even satirise social and identity categories: as it is proper to say, they 'walk a category'. A jury gives votes, and the best competitors are awarded with trophies, cash prizes and, if they keep winning, higher statuses (a more detailed account will be offered in the following paragraphs).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Figure 2. Tina Montana, Avis Pendavis Ball, Red Zone 1990. Photo by Chantal Regnault.

As strange as it may seem, Ballroom Culture was not intersectional since its very beginning (Lawrence 2011). Early and sporadic forms of these competitions appeared in the second half of the XIX century: queer masquerade balls, conceived as sort of entertainment shows. They started to gain notoriety in Harlem during the 1920s. In drawing a detailed overview of the history of this culture, Tim Lawrence reports the words of social activist and writer Langston Hughes: "[He] proclaimed the drag balls to be the 'strangest and gaudiest of all Harlem's spectacles in the 1920s' and described them as 'spectacles in colour'. Noting the presence of 'distinguished white celebrities' during this period, Hughes concluded that 'Harlem was in vogue' and 'the negro was in vogue'" (Lawrence 2011, 3). After a decade, the balls struggled during the 1930s because of Prohibition and Depression. Then, after the World War II, they counted several attendances of those who had been to New York while heading to the battlefront, finally coming back. This success made it quite difficult for the authorities to tackle and repress

ISSN: 2974-9549
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homosexuality. However, "[b]y the early 1960s, drag ball culture had begun to fragment along racial lines" (Lawrence 2011, 3). Issues within this new-born community were due to the presence of white people at the balls and the exclusively 'drag' nature of the events. The problem of 'whiteness' was a matter of expectations from both spectators and attendees: although the ballrooms had a racially integrated floor, white audience, organisers and judges, as well as white participants and winners, led black participants to get used to painting their faces white (Wilson 2010, 86). Consequently, Black and Latino queens started to hold their own balls, which were characterised by peaks of glamour and extravagance, with clothes and dresses realised hours before the events and made up of fabrics and items arranged and sewn together. Later, the balls would open to more and more categories, being the term referred to either the identity of the participants or the challenges of the competitions.

Figure 3. House of LaBeija, Central Park, 1989. Photo by Chantal Regnault.

The turn in the organisation of the balls was a clear display of intersectionality, but it is also interesting to notice how the people who claimed this practice redrew those social

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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margins that have been suffocating them, especially the idea of family. In fact, when talking about the Ballroom Culture it is common to think about not only balls, but also houses, which are basically "familial structures that are socially rather than biologically configured" (Bailey 2011, 367). These communities consist of chosen families (Figure 3) made up of friends who share a bond, a roof, a daily routine of duties and needs and, most of the times, the sad experience of being estranged by their families or forced to leave:

> Led by house mothers and fathers, houses function as families whose main purpose is to organize elaborate balls and to provide support for their children to compete in balls as well as to survive in society as marginalized members of their communities of origin. Houses offer their children multiple forms of social support, a network of friends, and a social setting that allows free gender and sexual expression. Ultimately, houses within the ballroom community constitute figurative, and sometimes literal, "homes" for the diverse range of members involved in them (Arnold and Bailey 2009, 174).

Houseparents are individuals with consolidated experience on the Ballroom scene, who educate and guide their 'children' (considering each other as 'siblings') providing them with life skills and discipline. 'Mothers' are mostly butch queens (gay men) or femme queens (transgender women), while 'fathers' are mostly butch queens or butches (transgender men). Houses gather various ages, races/ethnicities (usually Black and Latina/o), genders and sexualities, and nowadays their inclusiveness has grown up according to the acknowledgement of several different identities, for whom houses keep on being sheds whenever they feel ostracised by conventional support systems: (Bailey 2011, 367). Houses are typically named after haute couture designers, like those of Gucci, Dior and Saint Laurent, but others are named after mottos and symbols that express values and ambitions with which the children associate themselves. There are houses who went down in history, and some even prospered up to date: the very first one, the house of LaBeija, those of Dupree, Pendavis, Ninja and probably the most famous one and the first Latin ever, the house of Xtravaganza.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Intersectionality of (body) language

Although this embryonic research still lacks a defined corpus and a properly calibrated methodological framework to carry out a focused and in-depth linguistic analysis, insights of language and visual inclusivity can nevertheless be provided to confirm the validity of the choice of Ballroom Culture as an object of linguistic research. This confirmation comes right with intersectionality. In such a special social context like that of the Ballroom Culture, intersectionality has inevitably flown into language, as the encountering of different cultures and (hi)stories brought multiple languages together. The linguistic outcome of the intersectional marginal space created by this community is a language which calls off any difference of origins and identity. This language, together with its rightfulness, has been inherited by the following younger generations, and it has become a signature of LGBTQIA+ culture.

Thanks to the new media, it is quite likely to run into, and then acquire, terms and expressions whose derivation from the Ballroom Culture is ignored. Very detailed and useful dictionary to learn about them and their etymologies are Baker's (2002) dictionary of Polari and gay slang (a remarkable text on the history of Polari was published by the same author in 2019) and Davis' (2021) Queens' English dictionary. The epithet 'queen' itself has never been a prerogative of women or those who feel and state to be such, and it has never implied a pure meaning of royalty and majesty – which in turn pertains to a semantic domain where bloodline and conventional family are central – but instead a sense of fierceness, pride and fabulousness inspiring admiration and celebration. Another example is telling someone "do your best" by saying "work it", pronounced and written "*werk* it", which is a typical incitement that can be heard during the runaways of the balls. Even the stressed 'yes' that becomes '*yaaas*' originated from the context of the ballrooms. 'Reading' and 'shading' have even shifted from terms and practices typical of the competitions to common speech acts: reading a person means to highlight and exaggerate their flaws, from ridiculous clothes and imperfect makeup to anything else the reader can

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

come up with, in a battle of wit, irony and sarcasm whose winner is the one who gets the audience to laugh the most; on the other hand, throwing shade consists of paying backhanded compliments to subtly insult someone.

Although these examples still appear quite neutral – reading and shading may even be perceived as negative linguistic performances – that is exactly where the intersectionality of the language spoken in the Ball Culture spreads from: on the one hand, as previously said, it prevents any necessity of enhancing differences among people, may it be for praising or denigrating; on the other, verbal disputes rely on a fair competition in which contestants are 'politely impolite', never meaning to really hurt each other (see Passa 2023). The most symbolic expression of this attitude is probably "sissy that walk", that has been popularised in 2014 by recording artist, producer and entrepreneur RuPaul Charles in his American television show *RuPaul's Drag Race* (Nick Murray 2009-present) and with his homonymous recorded song from the album *Born Naked*: (RuPaul, 2014).

Figure 4. Cover of RuPaul's 2014 album Born Naked, RuCo Inc.

As per the definitions of the Collins online dictionary, 'sissy' can be both a noun and an adjective: "some people describe a boy as a sissy when they disapprove of him because he does not like rough, physical activities or is afraid to do things which might be dangerous"; "if someone describes an action or activity as sissy, they think it is

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

appropriate for girls or women but not boys and men." (Collins Dictionary) Nonetheless, this taunting apposition has been verbalised and associated with the traditional runway show of the Ball Community, becoming an explicit incitement for queens to perform a catwalk with pride and courage. RuPaul is also used to often repeat the question "Reading is what?", to which all the participants and spectators answer "Fundamental!": (RuPaul, Nick Murray 2009-present). This gives an idea of the genuineness of these verbal provocations and challenges, as if they were a sort of catharsis.

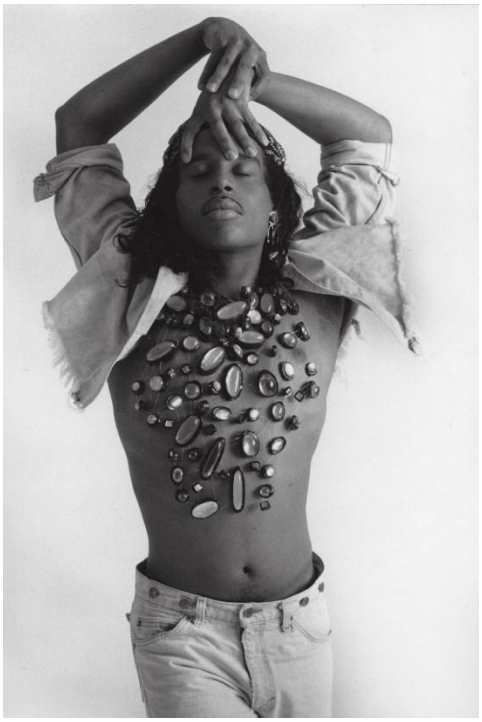

Figure 5. Willi Ninja studio 1989. Photo by Chantal Regnault.

Linguistic intersectionality, which is inextricably associated with the body, is deeply rooted in the flourishing decades of the Ballrooms, and it has been 'fundamental' both for the birth of the famous practice of voguing and for the social and political fights in the dark years of AIDS pandemic in North America. Concerning the voguing (Figure 5), it

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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started as an alternative to throwing shade, early performed by the houses and then introduced to the balls, where different subcategories of it were established:

> "It all started at an after hours club called Footsteps on 2nd Avenue and 14th Street," says David DePino, an influential DJ for the voguing community. "Paris Dupree was there and the bunch of these black queens were throwing shade at each other. Paris had a Vogue magazine in her bag, and while she was dancing she took it out, opened it up to a page where a model was posing and then stopped in that pose on the beat. Then she turned to the next page and stopped in the new pose, again on the beat." The provocation was returned in kind. "Another queen came up and did another pose in front of Paris, and then Paris went in front of her and did another pose," adds DePino. "This was all shade—they were trying to make a prettier pose than each other—and it soon caught on at the balls. At first they called it posing and then, because it started from Vogue magazine, they called it voguing" (Lawrence 2011, 5).

As Lawrence further explains, voguing was improved and articulated through the kung fu moves brought into notoriety by Bruce Lee and the plasticity of Egyptian representations, whose ethnicity voguers had a natural resemblance with. Intersectionality can be perceived spreading from the poker faces of *Vogue*'s models, from which nothing transpires except for self-confidence. For example, if Figure 5 were to analysed according to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2001, 2006) grammar of visual design and framework of Multimodality, on the interactive level it could be observed that:

- the photo is an 'offer' (a term that, by chance, is also typical of Ballroom Culture), as the actor is not looking directly at the viewer, and which means they want to show something, to communicate a meaning through their body;
- the angle of interaction is horizontal with a medium-long shot, meaning that an intimacy is trying to be increased and achieved as if the actor wants the viewer to perceive a closer-coming movement and gradually focus on the details of the look;
- the modality, hence the grade of adherence to reality, swings from high to low, as the represented body communicate realness, however light, tone, colours and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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depth make lend a sort of 'historicity' to the photo, making the subject look like 'unworldly'.

Figure 6. Cover of Madonna's 1990 single *Vogue*, Sire, Warner.

The expression 'vogue' and voguing itself became famous worldwide in 1990, when Madonna released her single *Vogue* (Figure 6), from the album *I'm Breathless*. The song and its videoclip are the result of an artistic and cultural collaboration between the popstar and the Ballroom Culture: "Ladies with an attitude / Fellows that were in the mood / Don't just stand there, let's get to it / Strike a pose, there's nothing to it", says the singer, inviting listeners to "vogue to the music" while featuring Luis and Jose Xtravaganza in her dance video: (Madonna 1990).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

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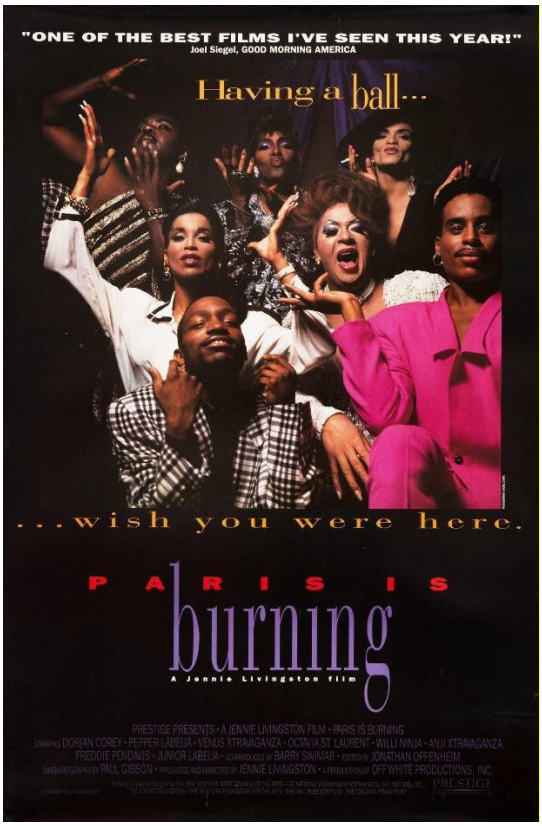

Figure 7. Poster of *Paris Is Burning*, Jennie Livingston, 1990, Off-White Productions.

During the same year, the milestone film *Paris Is Burning* (Figure 7), produced by Jennie Livingston, debuted in cinemas. Named after the 1986 ball staged by Paris Dupree and her house, it is a docu film that provides insights of the 'underground' beginnings of the Black and Latin drag balls, focusing on the hard lives of the 'kids' of the houses. The clear intersectional trope affecting the context that is shown is highlighted when one protagonist tells another: "You have three strikes against you; you're black, gay and a drag queen" (Livingston 1990). By now, reviewing the notion of intersectionality and the history of the Ballroom Culture ought to make it easily understandable that acknowledging this statement as a problem means – and has always meant – also knowing how to tackle it: it only takes turning that 'against' into 'with'.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Representation and self-consciousness were important in facing the problem of HIV, which peaked in 1995. In commenting Jesse Green's 1993 article on the *New York Times*, titled *Paris Has Burned*, Tim Lawrence notes that:

> [...] the fateful narrative of Aids = Queer Death should not be allowed to obscure the fact that as terrible as the consequences of the disease have been for the drag ball community, the demonstratives and courageous underpinnings of ball culture also went on to infuse the political and aesthetic radicalism of Act-Up, the campaign that applied dramatic public pressure on the US government to act more decisively around Aids, with drag queens a prominent, declarative presence on the organisation's high-octane marches (Lawrence 2011, 9).

Before Madonna's hit and Livingston's film, New York counted 27 active houses; after just one year, such an enhancement raised the number to 70. This was crucial to address and face AIDS by organising balls whose purpose was not only to contribute to the scene, but also to increase the awareness of the disease that affected the world both physically and psychologically.

Apart from the examples made so far, over the years plenty of sources of the intersectional jargon of the Ballroom Community were created: besides *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *Paris Is Burning*, other screen products include tv series like *Angels in America* (Tony Kushner 2003), *Dear White People* (Justin Simien 2017-2021) and *POSE* (Ryan Murphy, Brad Marchuk, Steven Fanals 2018-2021), and films like *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino 2017) and *The Boys in the Band* (Joe Mantello 2020). In these representations, as well as in other artistic domains such as music, fashion and theatre, the mastery of language goes hand in hand with sumptuous looks: from fabulous dresses and hairstyles to showy makeup and jewellery, the body plays a shared main role together with the use of mind and words. Tim Lawrence's review of the history of the Ball Culture, which has helped this preliminary study, is an accurate preface that Stuart Baker chose as introduction for his 2011 edition of *Voguing and the House Ballroom Scene of New York City 1989-92*. The book displays several shots taken by Chantal Regnault, photographer and documentarist of the Ball Scene in its golden ages, collected along

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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recent interviews she did with members of famous houses she got in touch with, creating a multimodal archive of images and speeches.

It turns out that, as the houses, the balls and their language were born from margins of mutual understanding, intersectionality shows and is shown in several shapes and practices. It is to be found by means of more than one sense. The same way as it is framed by law and sociology, intersectionality marks both the start and the goal of the Ballroom Culture.

Further research and conclusions

The direction in which this study is progressing involves the collection of a corpus of drag performances – the art that has inherited the legacy of the Ballroom Culture – in order to study the verbal and non-verbal language discussed so far, but with a contemporary focus. The corpus will be analysed with an interdisciplinary approach between Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis and Stylistics, the former to inquiry into the body language of drag culture, the latter to de/en-code this language and see if the common concept of style (in the aesthetic sense) that is central to drag practices can be overlaid with linguistic style – a multimodal style, a visual pattern with critical implications.

Although this article is an 'incipit' of research, the literature and the case study outlined prove what Milani (2014) calls the 'uncertainty' necessary for queer studies, which already characterised other foundational theoretical writings (Butler 1993, Jagose 1996, O'Rourke 2011): "a form of insecurity, I should add, that is not viewed as negative, but rather as the *sine qua non* for queer theory to uphold its radical potential and not be domesticated" (Milani 2014, 221). For the sake of the term queer itself, even a clear framing of intersectionality should not be taken for granted, since, as we hope to have made clear in this article, the intersections between identity categories and the power dynamics that occur between them are multiple and sometimes unexpected. Similarly, politically correct and apparently inclusive language may lack the necessary intersectional perspective.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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What is deemed as interesting and meaningful about the language of the Ballroom Culture observed in this early study is that since its birth, either when it comes to empathising or to offending, it has always succeeded in nullifying not only any margin of ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class, but also in avoiding those terminological implicatures that could cause discontent within its context of use. Language can be intersectional in a wonderfully natural way: while gathering, respecting and highlighting different social categories, it doesn't let any issue stem and poison the faceted and balanced scene in which it is articulated. Moreover, it is believed that this practice is consolidating more and more, for nowadays the target of LGBTQIA+ seems to be shifting from diversity to authenticity. In fact, diversity has long been the flag of a culture history wasn't kind with: since racism and sexism decided what was normal and what was not – consequently marginalising those who did not fit in – the Ballroom Culture took up 'wearing' and 'walking' their diversity with pride, but also with anger and frustration. Today, diversity turns out to be an ambiguous term starting from the way it is defined in dictionaries, where it is sometimes exclusive (being different) and sometimes inclusive (being varied). The goal is – and must be – the authenticity of every individual in their being what they feel and are.

In conclusion, besides law and sociology, intersectionality is an individual feature of language as well. And it seems like language has several ways of overcoming the margins: communication is meant to cross margins, tear them down, redraw them or, as it has been tried to explain here, expand them. The same way translation creates a third space, the intersectionality of language branches out and dilates those margins by languaging and (body)languaging diversity.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

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di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549021

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Living on the Margins: Secluded Characters in Southern Literature

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Abstract

The South of the United States has often been looked at as a marginal region by historians and literary critics alike. The works of white Southern authors like William Faulkner (1897-1962), Flannery O'Connor (1925-1965) and Eudora Welty (1909-2001) have been associated with this so-called marginality, despite the writers' efforts to keep clear from this inescapable reputation. More often than not, the unwanted marginality pervades the novels and short stories of these authors: misfits, disabled and reclusive characters people their stories. In some of their works, Faulkner, O'Connor and Welty depict characters who defy the norm, whether it be through their bodies or their actions. The secluded way of life of these characters tends to amplify their abnormality and anchors them deeper into the margins of their homes, in the recesses of Mississippi, in the Georgia countryside or on the outskirts of the fictional land of Yoknapatawpha. This study seeks to analyze the marginality of reclusive characters in white Southern literature – more precisely in selected works by Faulkner, O'Connor and Welty – and underlines the liminal aspect of margins. The first part of this article focuses on the depiction of abnormality in these works: whether they challenge the social norms or even the bodily norms by way of grotesque traits, the authors' secluded characters embody the margin. The last part demonstrates the paradoxical realistic power of the margins, as they allow for the surprising representation of unamable taboos. The secluded characters of the works under study are marginal figures in a seemingly marginal world, but actually use marginality to cross boundaries.

Keywords: American South; Southern Studies; Flannery O'Connor; William Faulkner; Eudora Welty; seclusion.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

According to Fred Hobson, "the South has stood alone as an alien member of the national family" (Hobson 1983, 9). Although this statement predates the New Southern Studies School, the notion of the South as "alien" is still one of the key themes of the southern narrative. As Charles Reagan Wilson notes in *The American South, A Very Short Introduction*, "pervasive southern storytelling and American stereotyping have highlighted the South's places and peoples as different from those elsewhere in the nation" (Wilson 2021, 2). Indeed, the rural South especially is often referred to as a strange land, a space symbolically separated from the rest of the country. By way of example, in his introduction to *Away Down South, A History of Southern Identity*, historian James C. Cobb recalls singing "Dixie" as a northern elementary school pupil in the 1950s. Cobb came to realize that "the initial popularity of 'Dixie' among New Yorkers had reflected an already well-established tendency among northern whites to see the South as a primitive and exotic land distinctly apart from the rest of America" (Cobb 2005, 1). To readers outside the region, the literary works crafted by Southern authors are likely to echo this marginal status, which seems to make Southern literature a literature of the margins.

The very notion of marginality suggests a literal or figurative place which differs from all others, but which is somehow simultaneously connected to the norm. Etymologically, the name "margin" directly comes from Latin *marginem,* 'edge, brink, border.' What lies on the margins of a given society does not stand *out* of it so much as it stands *on* its limits. As a matter of fact, the South as liminal space is one of the chief focuses of twenty-first-century Southern Studies. In *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies*, Deborah Cohn and Jon Smith evoke a "liminal south, one that troubles essentialist narratives *both* of globalsouthern decline *and* of unproblematic global-northern national or regional unity, of American or southern exceptionalism" (Cohn & Smith 2004, 13). In addition, the concept of margin depends on an interplay between a so-called 'norm' and the deviancy that is positioned against it. Finally, it also entails the people who *live* in that special space and who might be considered abnormal. Southern literature encompasses these three aspects insofar as it

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

stems from a region perceived as otherized and as it sometimes happens to portray characters who continually escape the norm. Indeed, on the one hand, if the South was involved in the economic dynamics of the country and if Southern Studies are now turned towards the place of the South on a global scale (by focusing on its relations with South America and the Carribbean, notably), another movement partly nourished by nostalgia tourism and Southern Studies themselves can "preserve" the region (McPherson 2003, 9). On the other hand, Southern literature is regularly believed to primarily focus on "freaks."

As a matter of fact, Southern literature is often viewed by people outside the region as the kingdom of freaks and grotesque figures. Canonical white Southern writers such as William Faulkner (1897-1962), Eudora Welty (1909-2001) and Flannery O'Connor (1925-1965) are known to depict marginal characters: O'Connor's work, for instance, essentially includes tramps, misfits, disabled young women—alien characters who live in the dark recesses of Georgia. However, if O'Connor's work is partly famous for its 'freaks,' the works of all three writers happen to portray characters who escape the norm and live literally apart from the communities they should belong to. This article will particularly shift its focus to "A Rose for Emily," *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!* by Faulkner; "Clytie," "Keela the Outcast Indian Maiden," "Livvie" by Welty; "Good Country People," "Parker's Back," "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and "The River" by O'Connor. The reclusive and/or marginal characters depicted in these stories are deeply isolated in a region still perceived as Other: seclusion and southernness collide so as to emphasize the otherness of the South.

Through a stylistic, narratologic and contrastive perspective, this paper will seek to study the marginality of secluded characters in selected works by William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, three white Southern authors who both wrote *about* and *from* the margins. This analysis will first focus on the abnormal and the grotesque before examining the depiction of taboos allowed by the marginal status of the characters, for, in the end, seclusion seems to enhance marginality.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

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The South and the Abnormal

Challenging Social Norms and Expectations

The marginality of the secluded Southern scene allows some characters to defy both the reader's expectations and the norms of the society they reflect. In Welty's short stories, for example, the female characters tend to break free from their isolation. By the end of "Livvie" (from *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories,* published in 1941), the eponymous character leaves her husband and his house. Although she is young, the character is married to Solomon, an old man she does not love. The spouses live in a remote area by the Natchez Trace, far away from any town: "Solomon carried Livvie twenty-one miles away from her home when he married her. He carried her away up on the Old Natchez Trace into the deep country to live in his house. She was sixteen—only a girl, then. Once people said he thought nobody would ever come along there" (Welty 1980, 228). Livvie and Solomon live out in the Southern countryside, and the location of the house mirrors their marginality. Although the narrator insists on the remoteness of Solomon's house, the story rather depicts Livvie's path towards freedom: a modern Persephone taken away by an old and feeble Hades, she eventually meets Cash, a charming young man who is synonymous with a new life and love. As Livvie laments through indirect speech, "Oh, for a stirring of the leaves, and a breaking of the nets!" (Welty 1980, 230). Here embodied in the subtle movement of the leaves, the motif of spring which courses through the text hints at the change that will turn Livvie's life upside down for the best: when Solomon dies and confesses to her that he was wrong to marry her and waste her youth, Livvie leaves the house with Cash:

> They moved around and around the room and into the brightness of the open door, then he stopped and shook her once. She rested in silence in his trembling arms, unprotesting as a bird on a nest. Outside the redbirds were flying and criss-crossing, the sun was in all the bottles on the prisoned trees, and the young peach was shining in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring (Welty 1980, 239).

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Persephone finally leaves the Underworld. Compared as "a bird on a nest," Livvie is ready to fly as the next sentence immediately picks up with the flight of the redbirds. What is more, the hypallage or the use of the adjective "young" to qualify the peach serves as an indirect way to qualify Livvie, thus underlining her new-found vitality. It is also noteworthy that the short story ends with the word "spring": finally, Livvie fully enters the spring of her life. As it is often the case, Welty puts her characters on a self-discovery quest. Livvie is meant to challenge herself and the norms associated with both her gender and her literary status as a character: Livvie does not fit the role of the widow who will mourn her husband forever, nor does she remain a recluse. Contrary to popular belief, seclusion is a deeply plastic state: if seclusion is commonly defined as the state of being alone, usually in a closed space, in the works of Welty, O'Connor and Faulkner it is not always synonymous with a complete asbence of motion and a total exclusion from sociability. The depiction of seclusion in those works rather echoes the etymology of the word: Latin *recludo* (re-claudo) once meant "to open." According to Paulette L'Hermite-Leclerc, *recludo* only began to be associated with the act of closing around 200 AD (L'Hermite-Leclerc 1988, 219). Welty, O'Connor and Faulkner's secluded characters are standing at the threshold, sometimes tempted (Welty) or invaded (O'Connor) by the outside world, sometimes rejecting it altogether (Faulkner). As a consequence, the representation of as well as the very concept of seclusion in these Southern works echoes the liminality of Southern literature: those secluded characters evolve on the fringes of society, and even go back and forth at times, thus challenging both the reader's expectations (who expect secluded characters to stay put) and the social norms of the diegesis (female characters who remain unmarried, for instance).

This liminal position allows some characters to violate prohibitions that would otherwise be too visible. In Faulkner's *Light in August*, Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden's marginalized way of life allows their forbidden relationship to thrive. Joe Christmas, nicknamed "Faulkner's marginal man" by Robert M. Slabey's (Slabey 1960, 266) is a character whose racial identity is ambiguous. He is believed to be black by most characters,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

but this allegation is never confirmed in the novel. However, just like a single drop of black blood made anyone fully black, Joe's supposed blackness makes him black to the rest of the town. As such, the character is marginalized and is involved in a marginal relationship with Joanna Burden, another one of the marginal characters of the novel, who lives alone on the outskirts of Jefferson. The descendant of Northerners who were involved in anti-slavery endeavors and a spinster who helps blacks, Joanna is at odds with southern mores. In the words of John T. Matthews, "Joanna suffers primarily for her race activities, but she's also sneered at for being an undomesticated woman in Jefferson" (Matthews 2009, 163). The marginalized status Joanna and Joe share, though not for the same reasons, allows them to be involved in a relationship daylight would prohibit. By having an affair with Joe Christmas, whose racial identity is unclear, Joanna enters into a gray area: it is impossible to assert that this union is indeed prohibited by the law or not. Despite this ambiguity, Joanna falls back into the raped white woman category once she is dead as Joe will be accused of murdering her. As Diane Roberts reminds us, "the white woman with no man (husband, father, son, brother) to protect her was, according to the plantation ideology, at risk of becoming an object of black vengeance, of experiencing individually what the land had experienced collectively: rape was the habitual metaphor for the 'invasion' of the South" (Roberts 1994, 155). In *Light in August*, it is the association of Joe with blackness which transforms Joanna's status. Both characters challenge the social norms of their time: while segregation prohibited the romantic and sexual union of blacks and whites (especially of black men with white women), Joe and Joanna are still involved in a relationship. In addition, Joanna is older than Joe, and is even going through menopause: an affair between a younger man and an older lady, seen by the rest of the town as an old maid, adds to the strangeness of the relationship and to its opposition to the norms.

Echoing the abnormality of Joe and Joanna's union, O'Connor's family units look discordant in the United States of the 1950s. Indeed, these families are very often incomplete and stand against the praised model of the nuclear family. According to Isabel Heinemann,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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> In the period from the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution to the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of the extended family as an economic and social network was replaced by that of the nuclear family as the nation ideal, consisting of two generations, parents and children, characterized by separate spheres with a homemaking mother and a breadwinning father (Heinemann 2012, 7-8).

O'Connor's families do not correspond to this ideal: they are generally composed of mother and daughter, sometimes accompanied by a female sharecropper and her family. In "Good Country People" (from *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, published in 1955), Mrs. Hopewell lives alone with her daughter, Joy (who calls herself 'Hulga') and Mrs. Freeman, her sharecropper. "A Circle in the Fire" shares the same model (Mrs. Cope lies with her young daughter named Sally Virginia and her sharecropper, Mrs. Pritchard). In these texts, the sharecroppers' husbands are mentioned, but they do not play any role in the stories. O'Connor shatters the image of the ideal postwar American family by literally breaking the family units into pieces. In the words of Jon Lance Bacon, "the families inhabiting O'Connor's pastoral settings lack the moral virtues that made the domestic ideal so emotionally powerful, so psychologically reassuring, to postwar Americans. Here again, O'Connor undermines an assumption basic to the ideology of domestic containment – in this case, the integrity of the American family" (Bacon 1993, 48). Furthermore, the families are deeply dysfunctional: more than the absence of a husband and father, the families struggle with a lack of understanding and communication, as well as a lack of affection. "The River" features a nuclear family composed of the parents and their son, Harry Ashfield. The little boy suffers from the absence of his parents who neglect him. One day, his baby-sitter, Mrs. Connin, takes him to a healing service by the river and Harry is transfixed by it. Looking for solace and the Kingdom of Christ, he ends up drowning into the river. Though nuclear, the Ashfield family is completely dysfunctional and is blown apart at the end of the story. As Margaret Whitt notes, "O'Connor's family units are spiritually broken, physically flawed, or intellectually limited. For many of these characters, home, usually thought as a place of sustenance and nurturing, becomes a place of hostile

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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endurance" (Whitt 1997, 114). O'Connor's characters, and even moreso her secluded characters, embody a shift from the norm and thus a dive into a world of marginality in which freaks roam the Southern countryside.

The Southern Freakshow

In *Creating Flannery O'Connor, Her Critics, Her Publishers, Her Readers*, Daniel Moran remarks that "some of O'Connor's readers find that O'Connor's thematic concerns transcend specifics of time and space, just as she intended them to do. However, such an approach is found less frequently than ones that disparage the South as a land of freaks" (Moran 2016, 176). The connection between southern literature and freaks is deep-seated in American culture: the freak, as the abnormal one against which normalcy is defined, echoes the narrative of the region an Other against which the rest of the nation would define itself. As Erik Kline writes:

> Because the freak occupies this vague space determined largely by the whims of what is historically normal or superior, its malleability allows its producers to consistently reframe it as a negative signifier to normalcy. In the national imagination, it tells consumers what they are not; it fulfills their desire to assert their own "normal" subjectivity. As the nation's freak show, then, the South gets caricaturized as what the nation wishes itself not to be: racist, violent, poor, ugly, obese, incestuous, stupid, and so on (Hagstette et. Al 2023, 305).

There is a double movement in the context of the South: outsiders make the region Other and freakish, but southern literature itself nourishes this tendency. Indeed, Kline goes on by stating that the "literature of the U.S. South enfreaks the region through both fictional and nonfictional representations and similarly depicts both historical freak show exhibits as well as real southerners as freaks of nation" (Hagstette et al. 2023, 305). In other words, the South is otherized from within and from the outside, and freaks are one aspect of this dual tendency: one the one hand, the South is perceived as a "land of freaks" (Moran 2016, 176); on the other hand, some southern works do include freaks and are often connected to the grotesque mode.

Freakish characters are indeed often associated with the grotesque which, according to Michael J. Meyer, is akin to "an estranged world fraught with frightful and ludicrous

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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incongruities: human degradation abounds, disfigurement of an aberrational nature assaults the senses, organic and mechanical elements interpenetrate, the categories of a rational and familiar order fuse, collapse, and finally give way to the absurd" (Meyer 1995, 1). The grotesque turns everything upside down and grotesque characters might be viewed as marginal by nature. They are the margin incarnate: their marginality is imprinted on their flesh. In "Parker's Back" (from *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, published in 1965), Parker fills every patch of his skin with tattoos. He was captivated by a fully tattooed man he once saw at the fair, and took to imitate him. However, Parker is endlessly unsatisfied by the tattoos he gets and always looks for new ones:

> He did not care much what the subject was so long as it was colorful; on his abdomen he had a few obscenities but only because that seemed the proper place for them. Parker would be satisfied with each tattoo about a month, then something about it that had attracted him would wear off. Whenever a decent-sized mirror was available, he would get in front of it and study his overall look. The effect was not of one intricate arabesque of colors but of something haphazard and botched. A huge dissatisfaction would come over him and he would go off and find another tattooist and have another space filled up. The front of Parker was almost completely covered but there were no tattoos on his back. He had no desire for one anywhere he could not readily see it himself. As the space on the front of him for tattoos decreased, his dissatisfaction grew and became general (O'Connor 2009, 514).

Parker was willingly contaminated by the freakishness of the man he saw at the fair (who was, in all probability, a freak). The tattoos are visual proof of his marginality and bring forth his interior freakery. O'Connor is known for her many freaks, deformed outcasts who mostly live on isolated farms, as if their marginal localization informed and amplified their grotesque nature. As Anthony Di Renzo puts it, "[h]er grotesques, too, are marginal, literally living on the margins of legitimate society: backwood prophets, bastard children, escaped criminals, shiftless farmhands, sharecroppers, migrants, hitchhikers, refugees" (Di Renzo 1993, 12). The particularity of "Parker's Back" lies in the depiction of the enfreakment process: Parker's tattoos not only marginalize him, they above all make his otherness visible to the rest of the world. As often with O'Connor, the body expresses the character's inner state: in "Parker's Back," this expression is epitomized by the overwhelming presence of

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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tattoos, while in most of O'Connor's story it is rather symbolized by a physical lack, as in "Good Country People." Joy Hopewell is a thirty-two-year-old woman's leg was accidentally shot off in a hunting accident when she was a child, causing her to wear a wooden leg. Joy is simply described as "a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg" (O'Connor 2009, 271) who has a PhD in philosophy. The grotesqueness of her character seems to be incarnated in her leg and in her name, which she changed for 'Hulga' as soon as she left for her studies. 'Hulga' is both reminiscent of the adjectives 'hulk' and 'ugly.' Mrs. Hopewell is then convinced that her daughter purposely chose the name for its ugliness: "When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship" (O'Connor 2009, 274). In a purely grotesque way, Mrs. Hopewell's daughter is objectified through her name and becomes a part of a boat. The alliteration in -b ("broad blank battleship") embodies Hulga's brutality, the brutality of her fierce opposition to her mother as the two cannot get along. Joy-Hulga's freakishness and marginality is epitomized by her name, her leg, and her divergence with her mother's ways and the "good country people" she adores. O'Connor's characters are out-of-place, and this otherness is incarnated in their bodies.

Eudora Welty acknowledged she used grotesque devices in her early fiction, and pointed to the role of the body in the process: "[I]n those early stories I'm sure I needed the device of what you call the 'grotesque.' That is, I hoped to differentiate character by their physical qualities as a way of showing what they were like inside—it seemed to me the most direct way to do it" (Prenshaw 1984, 84). Unlike O'Connor, the physical difference of Welty's characters' is not only the bodily expression of some inner condition, but also a test for the humanity of the rest of the characters. As Charles L. Crow points out,

> The audience at a sideshow pays for the voyeuristic enjoyment of the grotesque, a complex and morally compromised position depending on rubes, or bumpkins in the audience enjoying awe or revulsion whilst believing in their own safe superiority or normalcy. Indeed,the relation of rube gawking at freak mimics,in many ways, the relationship of the audience and the Gothic text or horror movie. But this relationship depends on the smug sense of otherness: whatever we are,we are not like that. (Crow 2009, 129-130).

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Welty humanizes her freaks and uses their freakery as a bridge between her characters. In "Keela the Outcast Indian Maiden" (from *A Curtain of Green and Other Stories*, published in 1941), Little Lee Roy, a club-footed diminutive black man, was kidnapped and forced to perform as a Native woman and to eat chickens alive. The reader's first reaction is not to feel reassured by their own normalcy (compared to Keela's freakery) but, on the contrary, to sympathize with the freak. To Crow, "the response of the reader is less likely to be horror or dread than a thoughtful and sympathetic consideration of the story's implications" (Crow 2009, 130). Clytie from the eponymous short story elicits the same reaction. Though not physically different, the character is perceived as a strange lady who does not know how to properly communicate with her peers:

> It might be simply that Miss Clytie's wits were all leaving her, said the ladies standing in the door to feel the cool, the way her sister's had left her; and she would just wait there to be told to go home. She would have to wring out everything she had on—the waist and the jumper skirt, and the long black stockings . On her head was one of the straw hats from the furnishing store, with an old black satin ribbon pinned to it to make it a better hat, and tied under the chin. Now, under the force of the rain, while the ladies watched, the hat slowly began to sag down on each side until it looked even more absurd and done for, like an old bonnet on a horse. And indeed it was with the patience almost of a beast that Miss Clytie stood there in the rain and stuck her long empty arms out a little from her sides, as if she were waiting for something to come along the road and drive her to shelter (Welty 1980, 81-82).

The comic aspect of the scene emphasizes the grotesque ways of the character. In addition, the phrase "she had been known" underlines Clytie's odd habit and the passive form insists on the community's gaze. Everyone in town recognizes the strange recluse who cannot hold a discussion with the inhabitants, let alone form any bond with them. At the end of the story, Clytie throws herself head first into a rainbarrel, and the uncovering of her body is treated in an extremely grotesque manner: "When Old Lethy found her, she had fallen forward into the barrel, with her poor ladylike black-stockinged legs up-ended and hung apart like a pair of tongs." (Welty 1980, 90). The visual quality of Welty's isolated characters highlights their grotesque nature, which in turn informs their own marginality. The freakshow these

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

characters roam in embodies the discrepancy that stands between the secluded characters and the normative, 'normal' community which looks at these characters as aliens. The freakish quality of these Southern stories thus contributes to create marginal characters who are *physically* inscribed in the margin and always tell something about human nature.

The Margin as a "Gateway to Reality"

Depicting Transgressions

In the words of Flannery O'Connor, "[t]o call yourself a Georgia writer is certainly to declare a limitation, but one which, like all limitations, is a gateway to reality. It is a great blessing, perhaps the greatest blessing a writer can have, to find at home what others have to go elsewhere seeking" (O'Connor 1990, 54). The margin, insofar as it refers to a borderland or fringes, encapsulates the limitation O'Connor mentions. Writing from the South, in other words writing from a region perceived or represented as Other, might offer a special vantage point, a "gateway to reality." Writing *about* the margin thus allows the authors under study to depict actions which are normally hidden because they escape the norm and, as such, cannot be accepted by the other characters or even readers and society at large. In these works, the margin is a gateway to the unthinkable and becomes the land of transgression.

In *Trangression*, Julian Wolfreys endeavors to define the notion of transgression and underlines three main aspects:

> the common assumptions that inform any definition of transgression have to do with (a) form or identity; (b) a movement or motion, a passage of some kind, and therefore implicitly a duration or temporality; and this passage from being on the side of the law to being lawless for example; hence trespass, to pass over or across, to infringe or impose; (c) spatial and relational position or location (Wolfreys 2008, 3).

In two cases out of three, transgression has to do with space – and space might be connected to identity as well, then overlapping all three definitions. In the works under study, to

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

transgress means to cross a line *from the margins*, in other words from a liminal space. This particular position seems to spur or facilitate the character's transgressions: standing on the margins, the characters of the corpus are less concerned by social norms than other characters. They do not have to abide by them or, at least, can use the mysterious privacy of their homes to conceal their transgressions.

Indeed, the marginalized status of secluded characters allows the narrators to deal with particularly reprehensible transgressions in the segregated South. In Faulkner's *Light in August*, Joe Christmas and Joanna Burden's marginalized way of life allows their forbidden relationship to thrive. Joe Christmas, nicknamed "Faulkner's marginal man" by Robert M. Slabey's (Slabey 1960, 266) is a character whose racial identity is ambiguous. He is believed to be black by most characters, but this allegation is never confirmed in the novel. However, just like a single drop of black blood made anyone fully black, Joe's supposed blackness makes him black to the rest of the town. As such, the character is marginalized and is involved in a marginal relationship with Joanna Burden, another one of the marginal characters of the novel, who lives alone on the outskirts of Jefferson. The descendant of Northerners who were involved in anti-slavery endeavors and a spinster who helps blacks, Joanna is at odds with southern mores. In the words of John T. Matthews, "Joanna suffers primarily for her race activities, but she's also sneered at for being an undomesticated woman in Jefferson" (Matthews 2009, 163). The marginalized status Joanna and Joe share, though not for the same reasons, allows them to be involved in a relationship daylight would prohibit. By having an affair with Joe Christmas, whose racial identity is unclear, Joanna enters into a gray area: it is impossible to assert that this union is indeed prohibited by the law or not. Despite this ambiguity, Joanna falls back into the raped white woman category once she is dead as Joe will be accused of murdering her. As Diane Roberts reminds us, "the white woman with no man (husband, father, son, brother) to protect her was, according to the plantation ideology, at risk of becoming an object of black vengeance, of experiencing individually what the land had experienced collectively: rape was the habitual

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

metaphor for the 'invasion' of the South" (Roberts 1994, 155). In *Light in August*, it is the association of Joe with blackness which transforms Joanna's status. Both characters challenge the social norms of their time: Joanna is older than Joe, and is even going through menopause – an affair between a younger man and an older lady, seen by the rest of the town as an old maid, adds to the strangeness of the relationship and to its opposition to the norms – and, while segregation prohibited the romantic and sexual union of blacks and whites (especially of black men with white women), Joe and Joanna are still involved in a relationship and thus also relate to the taboo of miscegenation.

Miscegenation is often cited as a *Southern* taboo as interracial relationships were forbidden in the South. The taboo is recurring in Faulkner's work: it is at the heart of *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Light in August*. In the first novel, Thomas Sutpen marries Eulalia Bon while he is a foreman on a plantation in Haiti. Sutpen finds out that Eulalia is part black when he thought she was of Spanish descent. Following this discovery, Sutpen abandons Eulalia and their young son, Charles. The latter is killed by Henry Sutpen, his half-brother, when he is about to marry his sister, Judith. In other words, Charles Bon dies as he is about to repeat the transgression of racial boundaries, him being part black and Judith being fully white. The marriage of Charles Bon and Judith Sutpen would have transgressed two taboos: incest and miscegenation. However, Henry seems much more bothered by the mixing of races than by incest, as evidenced by the dialogue between Henry and Charles imagined by Quentin: "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest which you can't bear" (Faulkner 1995a, 356). For Henry, an interracial relationship is more dangerous than an incestuous one and Henry's profound fear of miscegenation leads him to kill Charles. However, in some cases, miscegenation can be committed on purpose: Thomas Sutpen also has a daughter from a black slave, Clytemnestra (nicknamed Clytie). As Biljana Oklopcic notes, "when he achieves his design through the body of legally white Ellen Coldfield, Sutpen consciously and willingly commits miscegenation with his female slaves" (Oklopcic 2014, 8). Miscegenation is part of a gray area, stricltly forbidden between blacks males and white females, but

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

tolerated between white males and black females: in the first case, the walls of a marginal space (the isolated house of a spinster in *Light in August*) is needed; in the second case, the microcosm of the plantation is enough. Life on the margins allows the narrator to shed light on trangressions which are more likely to occur on the brink of society because this liminal space provides a shelter from the world. In her study of ritual as chronotope in Mesopotamia, Carolyn Nakamura argues that transgressions "were obfuscated by certain ritual gestures that exploited not only liminal spaces, but also liminal times. In such liminal states, one can cross borders, act against certain strictures with impunity […]" (Gunter 2019, 323). Liminality is a privileged place and state for transgressions, as well as a way for authors to shock the readers in a frame which simultaneously softens the impact of the transgression – precisely because the actors of the transgression evolve on the margins.

William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930) plays on this dichotomy as it partly unsettles the reader thanks to a strategy of concealment. Told from an external and collective narrator, the story hinges around Emily Grierson, a mysterious woman who ends up locking herself away in her father's house after he dies. For a while, the people of Jefferson think she might marry a man named Homer Barron, but the latter suddenly disappears while Emily had been seen buying arsenic from the druggist. The reader and the whole town think she is going to kill herself, and the final scene of the short story comes as a terrible shock: Emily is found dead in "one of the downstairs rooms" (Faulkner 1995b, 129) and, after the funeral, the 'we' narrator makes an even more dreadful discovery on the second floor:

> The man himself lay in the bed.
>
> For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

> Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair (Faulkner 1995b, 130).

The reason for Homer Barron's disappearance is solved at once. The man lies in one of Emily Grierson's beds. The position of the corpse emphasizes the lack of a second body which would have been embraced. The use of the adverb "apparently" shows the subjectivity of the collective point of view and underlines their hermeneutic quest. Although the reader is not given any direct explanation, as the story ends abruptly, they can guess Emily once lay on the bed, next to the man's body, because of the "iron-gray hair" that is found on the second pillow. Emily's isolation allows her to transgress the taboos of murder and necrophilia, with the impenetrable walls of her house sheltering her actions. Emily's marginal position is echoed by the physical space of the house. Indeed, as Diane Roberts points out, Emily and Faulkner's other spinsters

> in some ways reflect and perpetuate the image of the maladjusted, predatory, manless woman judged by her access to or denial of 'normal' sexual relations or the possibility of marriage, marginal to the favored definitions of the feminine in the South. Despite this (or because of it, maybe) they are dangerous women literally on the edge, who construct and, to some extent, control fictions that shape their world (Roberts 1994, 150).

By standing "literally on the edge," Emily subverts the expectations of the readers and of the rest of the characters. The supposedly passive lady turns into active murderer: in the words of John N. Duvall, "because people categorize Emily as a lady, the passive and decorative object, they constantly misread her" (Duvall 1990, 128). Margins both provide a protective screen for transgressive actions and spur – or at least facilitate – such actions. These transgressions suggest that even within a given marginal space, several margins can overlap: in these Southern works, the marginality of the characters is amplified by the Otherness of the South, precisely because of the cultural dimension of the taboos represented in the stories. Miscegenation has a particular status in the South, and so do women – in the timeframes of the stories studied here – who are trapped into a predefined

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

role (either a daughter, a wife or a widow). Both Emily Grierson and Joanna Burden subvert this narrative by being involved in forbidden relationships (with a man perceived as black or with a dead Yankee). To Diane Roberts, "Miss Emily harbors a covert sexuality that destabilizes not only the integrity of the spinster lady but the whole edifice of southern history and class" (Roberts 1994, 158). The destabilizing power of Emily's "covert" actions thrives in the shadows of the multi-layered margins of the story (her status as a murderess, a necrophiliac, a spinster; the particular southern echo of her manless existence).

The margin within the margin

In the words of Hetherington, "margins are spaces of traffic" (Hetherington 1997, 27). This statement highlights the movement inherent to the concept of transgression and suggests that margins stand out because of their capacity to foster such movement. If the margin corresponds to what stands *on* the limits of a given society, then one might consider this space as a place like no other which welcomes all kinds of "traffic," namely trangressions. This peculiar status is reminiscent of the concept of "heterotopia" (Foucault 1994, 752-762), a distinct place which is often the reversed version of a "normal" site, thus offering an alternative to a given location. As such, "heterotopia are spaces in which an alternative social ordering is performed" (Hetherington 1997, 40). They allow transgressions to thrive so as to create a new order. Heterotopia and transgression are consequently interconnected notions: Bertrand Westphal understands heterotopia as "the space imbued by literature in its capacity as a 'laboratory of the possible,' the investigator of the integral space that sometimes occurs in the field of reality and sometimes outside of it" (Westphal 2011, 63). This "laboratory of the possible" is then home to several layers of marginality – deviancy from the norm.

The characters from the works studied here are marginalized because of their secluded way of life, but should they not be isolated, they would all probably be viewed as marginal characters nonetheless. O'Connor's Lucynell from "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

(*A Good Man is Hard to Find*, 1955) for instance, is a simple-minded, deaf young woman. Her grotesque behavior and way of speaking add to the marginality of her status as a recluse: "The daughter was leaning very far down, hanging her head almost between her knees watching him through a triangular door she had made in her overturned hair; and she suddenly fell in a heap on the floor and began to whimper" (O'Connor 2009, 149). Lucynell would be considered as a 'freak' anywhere else. Likewise, Faulkner's Joanna Burden is seen as a stranger by the inhabitants of Jefferson:

> She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it, despite the fact that it is now sixty years since her grandfather and her brother were killed on the square by an exslaveowner over a question of negro votes in a state election. But it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatful, even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought that they had) to hate and dread (Faulkner 1990, 46-47).

Joanna's isolated existence undoubdtedly emphasizes her strangeness, partly because of the symbolic echoes that come with it, primarily the eerie witch who lives in the woods. However, were she not a recluse, she would still be marginalized in the South: as her family name suggests, Joanna carries the *burden* of her ancestry. Her family came from New England right after the American Civil War (1861-1865), during the Reconstruction era (1865-1877). Even though she was born in the South, to the rest of the town Joanna is still a Yankee, and as such she could never fully belong to the society of Jefferson. Joanna perpetuates the legacy of her grandfather and uncle who advocated for the civil rights of black people, by helping blacks as she can, which is seen as queer by the Jeffersonians. Joanna's status as a manless (and manlike) woman is not sufficient to account for her marginality: it is her connection with other marginalized people (blacks, Yankees) which pushes her further in the margins, as if marginality were contaminating. The "wrong" connections have an ostracizing power over the characters of *Light in August*.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

The impact of relations with other characters is central to Eudora Welty's short stories, especially "Clytie" in which the eponymous character is also twice marginalized: Clytie is both a recluse who lives in an isolated manor with her family *and* a character who is profoundly socially inadapted. The young woman is unable to communicate with other people. She flees whenever she is spoken to and cannot seem to bound with anyone:

> If anyone spoke to her, she fled. If she saw she was going to meet someone on the street, she had been known to dart behind a bush and hold a small branch in front of her face until the person had gone by. When anyone called her by name, she turned first red, then white, and looked somehow, as one of the ladies in the store remarked, *disappointed* (Welty 1980, 86).

Clytie's behavior is rendered in a very visual way by the narrator who describes the character's every move as well as the intense colors of her face. The reader cannot help but smile at Clytie's rather disproportionate reaction and at the way she tries to hide herself: a small branch is certainly not enough to cover her entire face. The character's behavior is then quite paradoxical as she attempts to avoid contact with the bystanders but is nevertheless *seen* trying to hide. Because of her strangeness, the townsfolk think Clytie is mad: "It might be simply that Miss Clytie's wits were all leaving her, said the ladies standing in the door to feel the cool […]" (Welty 190, 81). Contrary to Faulkner who uses relations as a lethal weapon which marginalizes his characters further, Welty plays with the *lack* of relations. In "Clytie," it is the lack of social bonds outside *and* inside the house (the Farrs are a dysfunctional family in which blood ties seem to supplant love) which marginalize Clytie, as well as her own behavior. When Clytie touches Mr Bobo's face at the end of the story, she cannot bear the contact with the man. Mr Bobo's flight is barely described and only the overwhelming feeling of hyperesthesia remains: "The terrible scent of bay rum, of hair tonic, the horrible moist scratch of an invisible beard, the dense, popping green eyes – what she had got hold of with her hand!" (Welty 1980, 89). Clytie is both unable to *escape* people (they see her trying to hide) and unable to *connect* with them (any physical contact is overwhelming). An erratic character, she continuously stands on the margin, as if the margin always called for more marginality.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

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The literature from the South of the United States has historically been connected to the notion of 'margin,' insofar as the perceived marginality of the region seems to contaminate its literature. The fiction of the South as 'other' pushes the region into the margins of the country, both literally and figuratively. To many readers outside the region, writing *from* the South seems to mean writing *from* the margins about a different way of life. In *A Web of Words: The Great Dialogue of Southern Literature*, Richard Gray points to "the acceptance, not just of the South, but of southern writing as distinctively separate and implicitely 'regional' even before the term was invented, an acceptance that characterizes many writers from the South themselves as they struggle with the sens of being 'other,' writing on and from somewhere far on the margins" (Gray 2007, 64).

This old and enduring vision of the South as a region on the fringes nourishes a "southern imaginary": in *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*, Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee define the notion as "an amorphous and sometimes conflicting collection of images, ideas, attitudes, practices, linguistic accents, histories, and fantasies about a shifting geographic region and time" (Barker & McKee 2011, 2). Barker and McKee explain that the "southern imaginary" is "not a false representation that must be stripped away to see the real South but a multifaceted, multivalent concept that informs our understanding of U.S. culture, especially in relation to ideas about race, gender, and region" (Barker & McKee 2011, 3), thus highlighting the continuing importance of this imagined, fantasized South as object of scholarly interest as well as a place where the margins – the idea of the South as Other – meet the center – the idea of the South as a fully part of a national *and* global nexus. Barker and McKee's view echoes John E. Bassett's who states that "Southern writers are both part of and separate from American literature if we think of both pedagogical and scholarly categories" (Bassett 1997, 18), which reinforces the position of the South as a liminal space and which places its literature on the fringes of American literary productions. The liminality of the South complicates the categorization of its authors who

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

find themselves in the midst of a greater, contagious narrative, caught between universal, national, and purely regional interpretations.

In the stories studied here, Faulkner, O'Connor, and Welty use margins not solely in order to isolate their characters, but rather to depict the "traffic" (Hetherington 1997, 27) that is spurred or facilitated by this liminal position: the margins depicted in these Southern works can give birth to a "land of freaks" (Moran 2016, 176) but, above all, they establish a land of transgressions. Southern margins call for movement and boundary-crossing, and bridge the gap between the fringes and the center.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549032

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Marginal Voices and Liminal Spaces:
Helen Maria Williams' Translation of de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*

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Abstract

This paper deals with Helen Maria Williams' preface to and translation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788). Both paratext and translation allowed Williams to comment on her practice and express her opinions on the socio-political context in which she lived. Kathryn Batchelor's (2018) paratextual framework and Silvia Kadiu's (2019) reflexive methodology will be first applied to the analysis of the preface and then to the additions, omissions and alterations of meaning that are found in the target text but not discussed in the paratext. The paper will eventually outline Williams' approach to translation and highlight her agency as a translator.

Keywords: translation; paratext; reflexive translation studies; early modern women translators, Helen Maria Williams.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

1. Introduction

Paratexts and translation have traditionally played a marginal role in the humanities, either on account of the liminal place of the former in the physicality of a book, where they appear and function as thresholds to the text they refer to, or for the supposedly derivative status of the latter, as translation was often considered an unoriginal rendering or imitation of its source text. This paper aims to show that in the case of Helen Maria Williams' preface to her own translation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788) neither the "voice of the translatress" (Agorni 1998) nor the space of the paratext play such a marginal role. In order to do so, Kathryn Batchelor's (2018) paratextual framework and Silvia Kadiu's (2019) reflexive methodology will be applied to the analysis of both preface and translation. This integrated approach will prove to be particularly befitting in highlighting how Williams acquired agency through her practice.

As a matter of fact, even though she translated *Paul et Virginie* while she was incarcerated in Paris under Robespierre's Reign of Terror, Williams managed to subtly convey her feelings about the socio-political situation of France and her moral standpoint. The preface was written after the translation itself, allowing her to point out the constraints in which it was pursued and the alterations she made to the source text, namely the omission of some philosophical passages and the inclusion of her own original poems within the translated text. However, these are not her only changes since, as the analysis will show, she avoids mentioning other additions, omissions and alterations of meaning in the translation.

2. Translation and Paratexts

In *Reflexive Translation Studies* (2019), Silvia Kadiu outlines a comprehensive description of the reflexive approach she adopts to translate a selection of texts by Susan Bassnett (2006), Antoine Berman (1998), Henri Meschonnic (2007) and Lawrence Venuti (1995) that deal with translation theory. In so doing, she demonstrates how the translational practice should always be informed with a reflection on the theoretical perspective the translator operates

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

from. Indeed, for the scholar "theorising takes place during the translation process itself, in the act of undertaking a translation and attempting to articulate our experience of it, of facing a translation dilemma and reflecting on possible solutions" (Kadiu 2019, viii). Whenever such a reflection is found in a translator's preface, it is useful to compare what is stated in the paratext to what is done in the translation by means of a contrastive analysis of the source text (ST) and target text (TT). The paratext, thus, is pivotal in this kind of approach and its functions have to be thoroughly evaluated before dealing with the assessment of the translated text.

In *Seuils* (1987), Gérard Genette, the forerunner of paratextual studies, addresses translation only occasionally and considers it as a practice with some paratextual relevance which "serve[s] as commentary on the original text" (Genette 1997, 405). Since the publication of his seminal work, scholars like Kovala (1996), Gürçağlar (2002), Armstrong (2007), Elefante (2013), and Batchelor (2018) have tried to adapt and revise Genette's theoretical framework to translation studies, first and foremost because he does not consider translations as independent texts. In particular, Kathryn Batchelor (2018) outlines a new framework that classifies paratexts according to the following categories: time, senders and addressees, function, space, and substance. In this paper, only the first three will be employed, as the remaining ones are concerned with digital and audiovisual domains.

The first category regards the temporal labels used to describe when the paratext is "consciously crafted" (*Ibid*, 156) in relation to the text it refers to:

- *Pre-ST*: a paratext written for the ST before the first publication of the ST;
- *With-ST*: a paratext written for the first publication of the ST;
- *Post-ST*: a paratext written for the ST after the first publication of the ST;
- *Pre-TT*: a paratext written for the TT before the first publication of the TT;
- *With-TT*: a paratext written for the first publication of the TT;
- *Post-TT*: a paratext written for the TT after the first publication of the TT.

ISSN: 2974-9549
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As for the category of "senders and addressees", i.e. those who write the paratext and the public it is meant to, Batchelor distinguishes between translators and other senders, and between source culture addressees and target culture addressees. When it comes to the functions of the paratext, the scholar partially draws on Annika Rockenberger's (2014) application of paratextual theories to the context of videogames because it "draws on a vocabulary with which translation scholars are likely to be familiar thanks to the popularity of functionalist translation theories" (Batchelor 2018, 160), and identifies the following fourteen functions (*Ibid*, 160-161):

- *Referential*: the paratext establishes the legal and discursive fingerprint of the work;
- *Self-referential*: the paratext draws attention to itself;
- *Ornamental*: the paratext is decorative;
- *Generic*: the paratext categorises the work (also as a translation);
- *Meta-communicative*: the paratext reflects on the text and/or on translation;
- *Informative*: the paratext reveals intentions and/or clarifies culture-specific references of the ST;
- *Hermeneutical*: the paratext widens or restricts interpretative options;
- *Ideological*: the paratext promotes or takes distance from a certain viewpoint;
- *Evaluative*: the paratext demands value and cultural significance;
- *Commercial*: the paratext advertises or praises other products;
- *Legal*: the paratext informs about legal entitlements or establishes its legal rights and obligations;
- *Pedagogical*: the paratext establishes standards for behaviour;
- *Instructive, operational*: the paratext guides the reception of the text;
- *Personalisation*: the paratexts adjusts elements to personal needs in the case of interactive paratexts.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

The meta-communicative function is particularly relevant in this paper because a paratext can also be a "metadiscourse" and/or a "metatext", where "the former represents commentary on translation as a phenomenon, while the latter is commentary on a specific text" (*Ibid*, 151).

The combination of a paratextual framework and a reflexive translation studies perspective is especially insightful in the study of Early Modern women translators since many of them, like Helen Maria Williams, could seldom theorise and comment on translation explicitly in an essay or a book, and consequently had to resort to metadiscursive and/or metatextual reflections in the paratexts that were published together with their translations[1].

3. Helen Maria Williams' *Paul and Virginia*

Helen Maria Williams (1759-1827) was a late eighteenth-century English intellectual who was considered controversial for her progressive political views. Living for most of her life in France, her home became a social salon that welcomed and spread the French Revolution ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* in which she continued to believe even during the Reign of Terror, when she was incarcerated for her opposition to Robespierre's despotism. Not only did Williams believe in peace and grieve that "insensate rage" of war, which the "purest blood inscrib'd on glory's page" (Williams 1823, 142), but she also supported the Société des amis des Noirs, an abolitionist society that – as reported by Williams herself in *Letters from France* (1791) – addressed the National Assembly as early as in 1790 as follows: "[Mons. Mirabeau] has proposed the abolition of the slave trade to the National Assembly […]. The Africans have not perhaps long to suffer, nor their oppressors to triumph. Europe seems

[1] On the importance of paratexts and translations for early modern women, see Robinson 1995, Agorni 1998, Delisle 2002, Belle 2012, Belle and Hosington 2018, Bland and Brown 2013, Orr 2023.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

hastening towards a period too enlightened for the perpetuation of such monstruous abuses" (48-50).

Williams' political engagement is documented in the eight volumes of fictional letters she published between 1790 and 1796, which chronicled the unruly times of the Revolution and its aftermath. The epistolary genre, which was deemed particularly suitable for women, allowed Williams to blur the line between the public and the domestic spheres by opting for a personal and confidential form of writing through which she focused on political and social issues as well. The *Letters* demonstrate that, although she became less euphoric about the bleak period of the *Terreur*, Williams never stopped believing in the ideals that had first inspired the Revolution, and she never "concealed [her] admiration of the great and exalted principles in favour of the human race which the revolution was destined to establish" (Williams 1803, xxiv).

During her imprisonment, she followed the advice Bernardin de Saint-Pierre gave his readers on the necessity of finding a refuge in literature in difficult times: "au milieu de tant de passions qui nous agitent, notre raison se trouble et s'obscurcit; mais il est des phares où nous pouvons en rallumer le fambeau: ces son les lettres" (De Saint-Pierre 2019, 198-199)[2]. Nonetheless, there were some limitations to the *lettres* as well, because "the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger" (Williams 1819, v), as Williams declares in the preface to her translation of *Paul et Virginie*. The pastoral novel is set in what was known under French rule (1715-1810) as Île de France (renamed Mauritius when it was conquered by the British in 1810), an island that, according to De Saint-Pierre, was still unphased by European trends and vices. The French author, inspired by his own visit to the island, represented it as a pastoral paradise, where human beings could live in harmony with nature.

[2] "In the midst of so many passions, by which we are agitated, our reason is disordered and obscured: but there is an ever-burning lamp, at which we can rekindle its flame; and that is, literature" (Williams 1819, 131-132).

ISSN: 2974-9549
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The two main characters, Paul and Virginia, are raised by two outcast mothers, Margaret and Madame de la Tour, who find comfort and friendship in their similar conditions and assemble their cottages in a secluded area of the island, where they live with their faithful slaves, Marie and Domingue. Their little *société* and their way of living is repeatedly compared to European society after Virginia is sent to France, which is represented as the embodiment of hypocrisy and corruption. The novel was indeed inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et le fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and his belief that one can be pure only in uncontaminated natural landscapes. In her translation, Helen Maria Williams manipulated what at first may look like an 'innocent' pastoral novel so as to subtly comment on post-*Terreur* France without overtly doing so.

4. Analysis of the paratext

The first part of the preface deals specifically with the socio-political context in which the translation was pursued, while the second presents metatextual reflections on the translation itself. Six out of the fourteen functions identified by Batchelor can be found in Williams' preface, namely the generic, the meta-communicative, the informative, the hermeneutical, the ideological, and the instructive function. Moreover, since it is signed in "Paris, June, 1795", i.e. the date of publication and not the period of time in which the translation was carried out, the paratext can be classified both as 'with-TT' and 'post-TT'. Indeed, it locates the translation both spatially in the French prison and temporally in the fall of 1793, even though the jail is never mentioned:

> The following translation of 'Paul and Virginia', was written at Paris, amidst the horrors of Robespierre's tyranny. During that gloomy epocha it was difficult to find occupations which might cheat the days of calamity of their weary length. Society had vanished; and, amidst the minute vexations of jacobinical despotism, which, while it murdered in *mass*, persecuted in detail, the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger. The researches of domiciliary visits had already compelled me to commit to the flames a manuscript volume, where I had traced the political scenes of which I had been a witness, with the colouring of their first impressions on my mind, with those fresh tints that fade from recollection: and since my pen, accustomed to follow the impulse of my feelings, could only have drawn, at that fatal period, those images of desolation and despair which haunted my

ISSN: 2974-9549
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> imagination, and dwelt upon my heart, writing was forbidden employment. Even reading had its perils; for books had sometimes aristocratical insignia, and sometimes counter revolutionary allusions: and when the administrators of police happened to think the writer a conspirator, they punished the reader as his accomplice. In this situation I gave myself the task of employing a few hours every day in translating the charming little novel of Bernardin St. Pierre, entitled 'Paul and Virginia;' and I found the most soothing relief in wandering from my own gloomy reflections to those enchanting scenes of the Mauritius, which he has so admirably described. (Williams 1819, v-vii)

After fulfilling Batchelor's generic function by recognising the translation as such, this section seems to present an accurate depiction of France during the "gloomy epocha" and the "fatal period" of Robespierre's "tyranny". Williams writes with an almost solemn tone, painting a picture of violence, fear and censure, and explicitly places herself both as an eyewitness to this despotism and as a reporter. Indeed, she had already written an account of the political changes she had witnessed that was destroyed by the Jacobins during a house search. Even though she was naturally drawn to write again, she would have been censured (or worse) if she did. In this passage, the informative and ideological functions can be identified as well, since Williams explains the context she worked in and, at the same time, distances herself from the radical Jacobin positions.

In the second part of the preface, the focus shifts to the translation itself:

> I also composed a few Sonnets adapted to the peculiar productions of that part of the globe, which are interspersed in the work. Some, indeed, are lost, as well as a part of the translation, which I have since supplied, having been sent to the Municipality of Paris, in order to be examined as English papers; where they still remain, mingled with revolutionary placard, motions, and harangues; and are not likely to be restored to my possession. With respect to the translation, I can only hope to deserve the humble merit of not having deformed the beauty of the original. I have, indeed, taken one liberty with my author, which it is fit I should acknowledge, that of omitting several pages of general observations, which, however excellent in themselves, would be passed over with impatience by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative. In this respect, the two nations seem to change characters; and while the serious and reflecting Englishman requires, in novel-writing, as well as on the theatre, a rapid succession of incidents, much bustle and stage effect, without suffering the author to appear himself, and stop the progress of the story; the gay and restless Frenchman listens attentively to long philosophical reflections, while the catastrophe of the drama bangs in suspense. My last poetical productions, (the Sonnets which are interspersed in this work), may perhaps be found even more imperfect than my earlier compositions; since, after a long exile from England, I can scarcely flatter myself that my ear is become more attuned to the harmony of a language, with the sounds of which it is seldom gladdened; or that my poetical taste is improved by living in a country where arts have given place to arms. But the public will, perhaps, receive with indulgence a work written under such peculiar

ISSN: 2974-9549
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> circumstances; not composed in the calm of literary leisure, or in pursuit of literary fame, but amidst the turbulence of the most cruel sensations, and in order to escape awhile from overwhelming misery. (Williams 1819, vii-viii)

The first striking element of this section is that Williams wrote some sonnets and added them to her translation, as if they were written by one of the main characters, Madame de la Tour. Batchelor's instructive function is here noticeable, since she gives the reader a key to interpret the text, i.e. the fact that those poems are not written by de Saint-Pierre. Williams comes back to her "last poetical production" near the end of the preface, confessing to the reader that she may have lost her touch with English, not only because she lives in another country, but also because her "poetical taste" could not be "improved by living in a country where arts have given place to arms" (resuming to the political commentary as well).

As thoroughly discussed by Krontiris 1992, Robinson 1995, and Pender 2012, the rhetoric of modesty was mostly used by early modern women translators in relation to their gender to explain the potential inaccuracies of their translations. On the contrary, rather than referring to her gender, Williams warns her readers that the flaws in her translation may be due to the "peculiar circumstances" in which it was carried out.

After mentioning the sonnets, Williams changes topic and reveals that the omission of several passages of the source text is the only liberty she took in the translation, which implies that she does not consider the interpolation of her poems as such. In her opinion, the omissions are understandable because she had an English reader in mind while translating the novel. Even though her ear may not be accustomed to the English language anymore (as she professes, humbling her sonnets), she still discerns what an "Englishman" requires and how he differs from a "Frenchman". This statement fulfils Batchelor's hermeneutical function as it contains an explanation of her decision about the translation process. Furthermore, it can be related also to the scholar's distinction between senders and addressees, since Williams herself stresses the differences between the French and the English readership. On the whole, the preface fulfils the meta-communicative function, as

ISSN: 2974-9549
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it "includes reflections on translation and/or the difficulties of the translation process" (Batchelor 2018, 160).

Helen Maria Williams did not choose to translate *Paul et Virginie* "in order to escape awhile from overwhelming misery", but, on the contrary, to have the opportunity to comment on that misery, i.e. the troubled political situation in which she lived, making her text "embroiled in the politics of its own near future, providing, through the subtleties of translation, implicit commentary upon the politico-military violence ongoing between Britain and France" (Sigler 2012, 577).

5. Analysis of the translation

The reflexive translation studies approach adopted in this section will show how the target text is imbued with Williams' ideological and moral standpoints. It will also prove that the omission of long philosophical passages is not the only change to the source text by presenting examples of other omissions, additions, and alterations of meaning. As a matter of fact, Williams adds elements that, far from being void extensions, enrich the target text. The most obvious ones are the sonnets she declares to have inserted. Even though there were originally more (she notifies the reader in the preface that some of them were censured and never recovered), there are still eight sonnets in the English version dedicated to love, disappointment, simplicity, the strawberry, the curlew, the torrid zone, the calbassia-tree, the white bird of the tropic. Since these poems are about pastoral topics, it may be implied that the censured ones were overtly political. However, some references to the current status of France may be found in the remaining sonnets as well. For example, the "Sonnet to disappointment"[3] can be read also in relation to French society, as it could refer to Williams'

[3] "PALE Disappointment! at thy freezing name / Chill fears in ev'ry shiv'ring vein I prove; / My sinking pulse almost forgets to move, / And life almost forsakes my languid frame: / Yet thee, relentless nymph! no more I blame: / Why do my thoughts 'midst vain illusions rove? / Why gild the charms of friendship and of love / With the warm glow of fancy's purple flame? / When ruffling winds have some bright fane o'erthrown, / Which shone on painted clouds, or seem'd to shine, / Shall the fond gazer dream for him alone / Those clouds were stable, and at fate repine? / I feel, alas! the fault is all my own, / And, ah! the cruel punishment is mine!" (Williams 1819, 29). Henceforward, de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* will be referred to as "ST" and Williams' *Paul and Virginia* as "TT".

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

feelings about the deterioration of the Revolution ("the ruffling winds [which] have some bright fane o'erthrown" may be a reference to the Reign of Terror, which brought a cloud on the ideals she shared with the revolutionary movement), and about her imprisonment, since she concludes by exclaiming "I feel, alas! the fault is all my own, / And, ah! the cruel punishment is mine!" (TT 29). Furthermore, only the "Sonnet to Simplicity" is introduced by a single line, while the others are preceded by a (more or less) long introductory paragraph, which further expands the text.

Moreover, these are not the only additions to the target text; in the preface Williams does not mention that she 'took the liberty' of inserting words or sentences where she thought they would fit. Most of the times, it is only an adjective that aims at reinforcing a concept or an emotion; the most recurrent ones are "dear" and "beloved" added to "frère" (2 times, "dear brother" TT 36; 70), "mère" (1 time, "dear mother" TT 93) and "ami" (4 times, "dear friend" TT 101; 178-179; "beloved friend" TT 162; 163).

However, there are also times in which she interposes a whole sentence, such as in the case of "faiblesse" (ST 103) that becomes "misled by the weakness of a tender heart" (TT 7). These kinds of expansions enrich the text and make up for the only liberty Williams states to have taken with her author and believes fit to acknowledge, i.e. the omission of long philosophical reflections. Nonetheless, not every omission is a "philosophical reflection" that interrupts "the catastrophe of the drama" (Williams 1819, viii). Some of the most common ones are short inconsequential phrases, such as:

- "Devant toute la famille rassemblée" (ST 115);
- "Toute couverte de forêts" (ST 120);
- "Chacun y employait son caractère particulier" (ST 137);
- "Souvent, dès le lendemain" (ST 197);
- "Cet homme ne revint que le soir" (ST 200);
- "Pour entrer dans le port" (ST 231).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Nonetheless, there are instances in which the omission of a word or adjective does not seem casual, as when she does not distinguish between "yolof" or "maroon" slaves, even though there are three occurrences in which she uses "maroon negroes" (TT 41; 42; 42), which makes it unclear why it is translated only in some passages. In addition, there is also a case in which she omits "négresse", when talking about Marie: "fut la Négresse Marie" (ST 168) is translated as "was Mary" (TT 102). Considering that at this point in the story we are fully acquainted with the character's relationship with Paul and Virginia's family and her role in the 'little society', and taking into account Helen Maria Williams' support for the rights of black people and the Société des amis des Noirs, it might be a clever way to demonstrate that race is not relevant nor necessary to underline.

Other short omissions that regard philosophical or moral remarks include:

- "Un mal n'arrive guère seul" (ST 147);
- "Quand le cœur d'une fille est pris, son amant n'a plus rien à lui demander" (ST 158);
- "Tout homme qui a eu beaucoup à se plaindre des hommes, cherche la solitude" (ST 180).

In particular, the last one introduces one "long philosophical reflection" (Williams 1819, viii) on solitude, which is the fifth of ten long passages omitted in the translation. Some of these may be, along with the sonnets, the censored parts of the translation. For example, the fourth passage (ST 142-143; 144-145) recalls how Paul and Virginia spent their happiest days, baking for the village, taking care of the poor, especially when sick children were involved – as Virginia says, "on ne fait son bonheur […] qu'en s'occupant de celui des autres"[4]. This passage ends with a brief critique of Europeans:

[4] "You can only be happy […] if you take care of other's happiness" [translation mine].

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> Vous autres Européens, dont l'esprit se remplit dès l'enfance de tant de préjugés contraires au bonheur, vous ne pouvez concevoir que la nature puisse donner tant de lumières et de plaisirs. Votre âme, circonscrite dans une petite sphère de connaissances humaines, atteint bientôt le terme de ses jouissances artificielles; mais la nature et le cœur sont inépuisables[5]. […]
>
> Après tout, qu'avaient besoin ces jeunes gens d'être riches et savants à notre manière? leurs besoins et leur ignorance ajoutaient encore à leur félicité. Il n'y avait point de jour qu'ils ne se communiquassent quelques secours ou quelques lumières: oui, des lumières; et quand il s'y serait mêlé quelques erreurs, l'homme pur n'en a point de dangereuses à craindre[6].

These words remind of Rousseau's philosophy, whose ideas are evoked also in the fifth long omitted passage (ST 180-181; 181-183) about solitude, where there is another denunciation of the European way of life, even though it is not explicitly named as such. The sixth passage (ST 186-200) is more overt in its critique, as it consists of excerpts from a dialogue in which Paul is comforted about Virginia's absence by another character. Since she is in France, the country becomes object of discussion, but the only reference to it found in the translation occurs when Paul exclaims that he will follow her, and he is warned that as an illegitimate child he could never have a great future in France (ST 186-187; TT 126). Thereafter, there are longer omissions in this conversation, which seems to imply that Helen Maria Williams reconstructs the dialogue by translating only few paragraphs. Nonetheless, it is fair to suppose that it is one of the censored parts of the translation because it contains a critique of Europe (in some points) and France (in particular) that was rooted in Rousseau's philosophy. France is depicted as a place full of depravity, only devoted to wealth, where virtue has lost its way and not even literature nor God can be of any help. The eighth omitted passage (ST 219-226) takes place during another dialogue between Paul and another character, who tries to give comfort to the former after Virginia's death. In this case, the

[5] "You Europeans, whose spirit is filled from childhood with so many prejudices contrary to happiness, cannot conceive that nature can give so many lights and pleasures. Your soul, confined in a small sphere of human knowledge, soon reaches the end of its artificial fulfilments; but nature and heart are infinite" [translation mine].

[6] "After all, why would these young people need to be rich and learned in our own way? their needs and their ignorance increase their bliss. There was no day that they did not give each other some help or some light: yes, some light; and when involved in some troubles, the pure man has no danger to fear" [translation mine].

ISSN: 2974-9549
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passages contain theological reflections which have likely been omitted by Williams herself. This applies also for the remaining ones; hence, among the ten long passages which are not found in the printed translation, three were probably censored (the fourth, fifth, and sixth) and the rest willingly omitted.

Furthermore, there are hundreds of changes in which the meaning of a word is altered or entire sentences are reformulated. Most of them can be ascribed to three main themes: 'morality and virtue', 'passions and feelings', 'places and people'. As for the latter, the first example regards the setting of the novel, Île de France for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre but Mauritius in the English translation:

> The actual island of Mauritius, called Île de France as Williams was translating, would become a British holding in 1810; the British government would restore the Dutch name Mauritius in 1814. It is significant, then, that Williams sets the story in "Mauritius" so-called, while Bernardin sets it on the "Île de France": she thus accomplishes at the literary level what the British government would achieve in actual fact some twenty years after (Sigler 2012, 576).

Other examples include:

- "Habitation" (ST 170; 201; 202; 211 215; 216) or terrain (ST 102; 106) > "plantation" (TT 5; 11; 105; 134; 136; 148; 153; 154);
- "Habitant(/s)" (ST 124; 206) > "planters" (TT 40; 141);
- "Créoles" (ST 142) > "natives" (TT 65);
- "Noirs" (ST 156) > "slaves" (TT 84);
- "Société" (ST 161) > "family circle" (TT 91);
- "En leur" (ST 126) > "on those good white people" (TT 43);
- "Favorable à la santé des Blancs" (ST 218) > "favourable to the Europeans" (TT 157);
- "Bâtard" (ST 162) > "natural child" (TT 93).

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Similarly to the omissions of "yolof" and "maroon", in these examples there is not a visible rationale for Williams opting for these translations instead of literal ones like 'inhabitants' or 'society'. The only consistent case occurs with the translation of "bâtard", which is recalled in the very next sentence with "mot de bâtard" (ST 162), translated as "this last expression" (TT 93).

An interesting sentence regarding 'morality and virtue' is pronounced by Paul, when he says: "Elle [Virginie] est tout pour moi, ma richesse, ma famille, ma naissance, tout mon bien" (ST 166). In her translation, "She is everything to me, riches, birth, family, my sole good!" (TT 99), Williams inverts the list order, as if going from the least to the most important element. Another example regarding virtue is "malheur qu'en m'écartant de la vertu" (ST 106), translated as "I have only known misfortune by wandering from virtue" (TT 12); here, the point of view shifts, since in the French text it was misfortune that made Virginia go astray from virtue, while in English she knows misfortune just because she wandered from virtue. Other similar instances are:

- "Fille sans vertu" (ST 165) > "unhappy, that I am" (TT 98);
- "Vertueuse" (ST 213) > "amiable" (TT 150);
- "Sage et malheureuse" (ST 104) > "virtuous and unhappy" (TT 8).

The literal translation of these terms does not seem to be dictated by the meaning of the words, but rather by whether Williams wants to underline the possession of those qualities.

Many are the examples in which 'passions and feelings' and their related concepts are altered and de-emphasised by the translator, among which:

- "Et un feu dévorant la saisit" (ST 149) > "her imagination again grew disordered" (TT 74);
- "Ton amour" (ST 158) > "your feelings" (TT 88);

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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- "Passions" (ST 162) > "sensations" (TT 94);
- "Hors d'elle" (ST 167) > "half distracted" (TT 100);
- "Hors de lui" (ST 168; 197) > "distracted" (TT 102); "his heart throbbing with delight" (TT 130);
- "Mon âme est déchirée" (ST 167) > "My heart is broken" (TT 101).

Williams downplays emotions in order to adapt the passionate and metaphorical language of the source text to the English taste, as when she replaces the 'devouring fire' of the French version with 'disordered imagination'.

The examples presented in this section have shown that, far from being limited to what she discusses in the preface, the omissions, additions, and alterations of meaning in Williams' translation point to an interventionist approach that results in a form of rewriting through which her beliefs and ideas can be conveyed.

6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that, whether for ideological reasons or not, Helen Maria Williams' changes to the source text of *Paul and Virginia* are not limited to the omission of several pages of "philosophical reflections" (Williams 1819, viii). By applying a reflexive approach and comparing her statements in the preface to her actual practice, it is possible to infer that she considered translation as a form of adaptation and rewriting. This is supported by the fact that while she does not consider the addition of the sonnets (and their introductory paragraphs) as a liberty, she has no hesitation in omitting several philosophical passages. Moreover, she never mentions her other changes, such as the many additions, the omissions which are not related with philosophy, and the many deliberate alterations of the meaning of a word or rephrasing of whole sentences.

Williams successfully manages to place herself at the centre of the political discourse of her time thanks to her 'marginal' translation practice and the 'liminal' space of the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

paratext. On the one hand, in the preface she retroactively explains why she chose that text, and how and where she translated it. On the other, the translation gave her the opportunity to express her political ideas in a context in which "[e]ven reading had its perils" (Williams 1819, vi). Finally, the joint analysis of the paratext and the translation allows us to thoroughly assess how Williams acquired agency through her interventionist approach.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Bio-bibliographical note

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549022

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Serializing Nationalism:
Indian Soaps and Border Defense

Rosina Pastore

(Gent University, BE)

Abstract

Since its first airing in 2016 the Indian tv series *Nāgin* (female serpent) was a success. Featuring a shape-shifting female serpent and her fictional entry in the human world to seek revenge, the *nāgin* was even more appealing because of her being a fervent devotee of the Hindu god Śiva. While the first five seasons of the supernatural soap opera were eventually a variation on the theme of the competition between the *nāgin* as newlywed daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law, the sixth season, that premiered in February 2022, introduced a novel element in the plot. The *nāgin* is not anymore to avenge herself because of a personal reason, rather her mission is to defend her country from internal and external forces that attempt to undermine its integrity. A *nāgin* can be seen as a symbol of transformation, as she crosses the margins between the 'supernatural' and the 'human' dimensions at will. This paper aims to shed light on how this fluid figure is made the defender of national borders, conceived increasingly as unchanging and non-negotiable by nationalist narratives. It will investigate the multiple modalities in which border defense is blended into the plot of the series, as it nourishes in this way a form of serialized nationalism.

Keywords: *Nāgin*; Hindi TV; popular culture; hindutva; womanhood.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

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Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

1. Introduction

This paper examines how the last season of the Hindi TV series *Nāgin* has made of its heroine, Prathā, a patriot fighting for her nation. Keeping in mind the evolution of nationalistic discourses on womanhood (Chatterjee 1999), it aims to delineate how the contours of her figure are retraced to mould her in the frame of cultural nationalism.

Several studies have focused on the relationship between popular culture and nationalism in the South Asian context. Restricting the field to visual representations, Purnima Mankekar's (1996) ethnographic work on women and nationalism as portrayed in TV series and its reception is crucial. The scholar notes that: "Viewers' engagement with television narratives was central to their constitution as gendered and national subjects, to their construction of national and communal pasts, and to their understanding of violence committed in the name of the nation - thus revealing the political significance of texts dismissed by many social scientists as fictive and therefore inconsequential, as 'mere' entertainment or, less charitably, as kitsch" (Mankekar 1996, 11). Similarly, in her study of melodrama in Latin America, Lopez highlights that: "Popular cultures, even in authoritarian societies that actively seek to eliminate any possible counter-hegemonic spaces, are never merely transparent. Popular culture forms may represent attempts at social control, but they also have to meet the real desires and needs of real people" (Lopez 1991, 604). With the present study, I hope to show the opaqueness of the *nāgin* in the sixth season, as she is invested in a new role which also conditions her life in her family. Where and how are the margins of the figure displaced to suit nationalistic needs? What does this shift accomplish and what kind of tensions does it generate?

To explore her persona, it is worth recalling Krishnan and Dighe's analysis of femininity on Indian television (1990). The scholars delineated the features of male and female protagonists in fiction programmes among others. They come up with a set of characteristics defining the 'ideal woman':

1 Caring, concerned, maternal,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

2 supportive, she helped men achieve their goals and did not have any ambitions of her own,
3 sacrificing, empathetic, home-centered, family-oriented,
4 passive, accepted her wife/daughter-in-law role, accepted male control and ensured bonding,
5 unquestioning, naïve, submissive,
6 pretty, charming, retaining essential femininity,
7 produced sons to ensure patriliny,
8 devoted to her husband no matter how oppressive he was, defended her married state and died unsullied, if abandoned, and
9 engaged in traditional rites and rituals (Krishnan and Dighe 1990, 51).

Later on, they add some further relevant points: "10) helpless in crisis and 11) shown as longing for a male child and 12) having no control over their lives" (1990, 53). We will see throughout this article how this delineated profile aligns with the depiction of the *nāgin* in its sixth season. Aware of the critics surrounding the actual power of television in advancing the cause of feminism (Misra and Raychowdhury 1997), my point is not to discuss the direct relation of the series to women's issues per se. Rather, I aim to uncover how the portrayal responds to a changed historical and cultural milieu where hardcore nationalism is even more at the forefront of the political scene. Therefore, I am going to analyse how hardcore nationalism is normalized through series such as *Nāgin*, which rely on a medium of transmission that is part of the daily life of people, familiar (Rajagopal 2001). In this latter sense, the analysis will resonate with Geraghty's theorization of a shift in the definition of soap operas, based on the study of series from the USA and Britain, which distinguishes between open-ended and close-ended narratives. At first, the open ending was defended as corresponding to ideological freedom, as several soaps tended to avoid closure. Gradually, however, the open ending has become less of a defining feature. Instead, the interplay of different narratives and a multiplicity of characters is privileged. Closed endings, with their moral and ideological implications, are not avoided anymore (2005, 312-3). The investigation will begin by introducing the figure of the *nāgin* and the series itself. It will also analyse how the series relates to contemporary historical events connected to borders and the Covid-19 crisis through discourse analysis of episodes 1, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21. This forms a necessary background for a further close-up on the snake-woman's name, behaviour, and religious allegiance.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

2. The Characterisation of *Nāg*s and *Nāgin*s in the Textual Traditions, Bollywood and the TV series

*Nāg*s (Sanskrit *nāga*), male counterparts of *nāgin*s, have been part of the Indic mythological and religious landscape for a long time. Looking at the Indic textual traditions, the *Vedas* contain references to *nāga*s and their worship. As noted by Laurie Ann Cozad, their qualities are their divine nature and their powers over the natural world. They are seen as a means to control nature as they can provide riches and fertility for their worshippers. At the same time, they are dangerous because they kill. In the epic *Mahābhārata*, their portrayal is rather negative. Apart from the sacrifice of snakes framing the narrative, we understand from the epic that they need to be controlled and this is done also by subordinating them to other gods. In addition, we get to know that they can change their form and about the existence of *nāgin*s: beautiful, sensual, adorned with a brilliant jewel in the middle of their foreheads. Marriage between a mortal and a *nāgin* crosses the boundaries of mythological and historical pasts, as a large number of royal dynasties claim to have a *nāgīn* ancestress in their lineage (Cozad 2018).

The interaction between *nāg*s, *nāgin*s and humans is portrayed regularly in the Hindi Bollywood movies dedicated to these figures. Focusing on the female, object of this paper, there are two blockbuster movies from which the TV series draws several elements: *Nāgin* (1976, directed by Rajkumar Kohli) and *Nagīnā* (1986, directed by Harmesh Malhotra). In the former film, an *icchādhārī* (shape-shifting, lit. who assumes [a form] at wish) *nāgin* takes revenge for the killing of her male partner by humans. The female serpent is depicted negatively once again: she lies, creates mistrust and shows no remorse in using violence to achieve her goal (Mithuraaj 2018, 98). In the latter, *Nagīnā*, interpreted by Sridevi, the snake woman's companion is killed by humans and his soul takes refuge in the body of a human. For this reason, the *nāgin* plans to kill the human host to bring back to life her lover.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

However, she refrains from killing the human because she falls in love with him and marries him.

The series produced by Ekta Kapoor, broadcasted since 2015, draws the theme song from the 1976 movie and develops the plot of revenge complicated by love for a human of the 1986 movie in all its seasons. However, its 5th season witnessed a decreasing success among the viewers.[1] Some TV critics have highlighted that series like *Nāgin*, streamed twice a week on Colors TV as primetime show, are placed at the margins of cinematic quality.[2] Moreover its story until season 6 revolved mainly around the conflict between the snake-woman as new daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law, a motive pervading multiple TV series (minus the snake).[3] This paper does not seek to judge the cinematic quality or overall credibility of the series in itself. Instead, it shows how its sixth season has been renewed, resorting to its own version of history and politics which constitute a background to the main protagonist's actions.[4]

3. *Nāgin 6*'s Plot, History and Politics

In the first episode of the new season, set in December 2019, we are introduced to a scientist who summons several categories of saintly people – brahmins (priests), *muni*s (silent sages) and other ascetics – in a location in the Himalayas. He informs them that there is a threat upon India and the world, an epidemic (*mahāmārī* in Hindi) which will be spread by a country enemy to India, China. He reveals that spreading the virus through water, more virulent in India than elsewhere, is the only way left for China to win over India. This is because "(…) because the Indian army and people have always managed to make India

[1] The data is collected by the Broadcast Audience Research Council of India. An overview of the seasons' ratings is available on www.iwmbuzz.com (Last Access 4 October 2022).
[2] For example, Hazel Gandhi's review of the ongoing season 6 on *The Quint* "Naagin 6 Is a Crossover."
[3] See Munshi 2010 for a study of 21st century Indian soap operas.
[4] Some critics have remarked the difference of the 6th season and have gone somewhat deeper in the analysis of the success it has enjoyed by comparing it with other ongoing series with a female protagonist. See Taneja's review "Nationalist" snakes, progressive values."

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

victorious." It is difficult to gauge how this last statement relates to actual historical circumstances. India and China stood against each other in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 because of disputed borders in the Himalayas, where China attacked India whose army was found largely unprepared.[5] However, the contrast with China surely brought about feelings of patriotism and unity among Indians (Hoffmann 1990, 167). To witness its impact on the minds of Indian people, several movies have been dedicated to it: *Haqeeqat* (1964), *Ratha Thilagam* (1963), *1962: My Country Land* (2016), *Tubelight* (2017), *Subedar Joginder Singh* (2017), *72 Hours: Martyr Who Never Died* (2019). Claims of unambiguous national boundaries were revived and skirmishes between the two countries took place more recently, in 2017, with the Doklam military standoff, where troops were injured (Karackattu 2020). Again in 2020, soldiers were killed in skirmishes for the first time since the 1962 War ended.[6] As anti-China sentiments in India rekindled, the makers of the web series *1962: The War in the Hills*, which was to be released in 2021, seemingly thought about anticipating it to the last months of 2020 (Seta 2020).

Therefore, the intrigue of *Nāgin 6* can be seen as on the one hand continuing the trend of these movies, developing the theme of the enmity between India and China.[7] On the other hand, its particularity is that it rides on contemporary events affecting the world. Even if Covid-19 is not mentioned as such, the reference to the pandemic is unmissable.[8] Interestingly, it explicitly politicizes the virus matter. The open politicization, with the reference to the virus as a weapon deployed by China to undermine India, follows largely

[5] As the Henderson Brooks–Bhagat report reported. For a summary of the report and the questions surrounding it, see Eekelen 2015, 225-8. In late 1967, the two countries clashed in Sikkim, where the advancing Chinese forces were forced to withdraw (which became a state of India in 1975). The 1987 Sino-Indian skirmish, it was a bloodless conflict.

[6] See Safi and Ellis-Petersen "India says 20 soldiers."

[7] Throughout the series China is called Chingistan, which recalls Pakistan but also Hindustan (one among the common denominations of India among its citizens). Curiously, the machination against India, even if on behalf of China, is shown as brought forward also by other few characters. They are identifiable with a Muslim individual, bearded, and several Western people, representing American/British individuals, see Episode 5 and 12.

[8] Broadly speaking, mainstream entertainment TV channels have been reluctant to tackle the virus question (Cf. Bajpai "It took Ekta Kapoor.").

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

nationalistic narrations of the events. Some official outlets in India and public figures called Covid-19, among others, "Made-in-China Virus".[9] However, Indian political discourse at the international level refrained from taking a position which could appear too extreme. At the BRICS summit in 2021, Prime Minister Modi diplomatically avoided any reference to a 'Chinese virus' but called for China to clarify the origins of the pandemic with the WHO's collaboration (Haidar, Krishnan 2021).

Back to the series, the first episode also reveals that there is a solution to this life-threatening conspiracy and it is not vaccination, as one would expect. When the Chinese virus started spreading, tellingly tinging India's waters red, people started dying. The professor discloses that always at a Himalayan temple in Kedarnath (Uttarakhand), dedicated to Śiva, the god disclosed to him the solution to the problem: pouring *amṛt* into the waters of India. With this reference, the series connects itself to a well-known myth: the churning of the ocean of milk to extract the *amṛt*, the elixir of immortality. Both the *dev*s (gods) and the *asur*s (antigods) wanted to obtain this nectar for themselves.[10] In the series, once the precious liquid is secured and poured into the rivers, the country will have new life – possibly immortal. However, the mission is not easily accomplished since 20 *asura*s need to be eliminated: they want to damage the country with the help of China. These evil figures in the contemporary world are identified, then, with none other but anti-nationals (*deśdrohī*). The *nāgin* is introduced at this point by the professor: she is powerful and "*Deś kā raṅg badal saktī hai*," literally "She can change the colour of the country" (from red to saffron?). The *nāgin* needed is the best (*sarvaśreṣṭh*) among the species. She can be made to appear by sprinkling the country's soil while snake charmers play the national anthem.

[9] An example is the popular Zee News, part of the broadcasting company owned by the BJP-associated Subash Chandra, who accused China of hiding the truth about the virus and spreading it intentionally: https://zeenews.india.com/video/india/dna-coronavirus-is-actually-made-in-china-2270288.html. A considerable amount of references in these terms was employed by Twitter users as hashtags: "#ChinaVirus", "#WuhanVirus" etc. See also the online newspaper article Express Web Desk (2020).

[10] The myth appears in several Hindu texts like the *Purāṇa*s (epic-narrative-historical accounts) with some variations depending on the dedication of the text. See, for example, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.9 in Wilson 1864-77.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

The geographical setting of the series aligns it with issues with which the central government would be particularly concerned, such as borders and pandemics. Apart from the Himalayas, the urban background of the main events is in the Badarpur district, at the edge between Delhi and the state of Haryana, rather than the customary Mumbai. In this context, it is important to mention also that, in the preceding five seasons of the series, the soon-to-be human husband of the snake-woman was a businessman, belonging to a landowning family. In season 6, instead, he aptly is an army official from a rich family whose specific business is selling weapons. Through these narrative strategies, the series creates interactions between historical and contemporary preoccupations and myth.[11] An additional mythical allusion is accomplished through the name of the *nāgin* protagonist of the last season.

4. The Name of the *Nāgin* and the Protection of India's Borders

In the first two seasons of the series the name of the *nāgin* signaled mostly her connection to the god Śiva (Śivanyā, Śivāṅgī), while in the last three seasons the heroines hold common names (Belā, Bṛndā, Bānī). In season 6 she is called Prathā. The feminine noun *prathā* literally means "spreading out, extending, flattening, scattering" (MW 1899, 678). It is derived from the Sanskrit root *prath-* which means "to spread, extend, become larger or wider, increase". In Sanskrit *belles lettres* the noun is understood as to "become known or celebrated" (MW 1899, 678). In addition, in his study about kingship, Jan Gonda comments on how verbal roots like *prath-* "served to express the idea of 'to extend over' […] and also 'to become celebrated', the substantive *prathā* meaning, inter alia, 'fame, celebrity'." Further on, he observes that "the idea of room, wideness or spatial extensiveness sometimes crops up in those passages which deal with sovereignty." (Gonda 1966, 108). According to

[11] Myth constantly feeds the plot of the series produced by Kapoor. For example, season 3 introduces a child character named Andhaka (lit. "darkness") whose name recalls that of an *asura*. According to some Purāṇas, the creature was born accidentally from the contact between Śiva and his future wife Parvatī and was defeated because of its evil actions on earth (Kramrisch 1981, 374-83).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

several traditional texts, Pṛthu, whose name is connected with the root *prath*-, is the first anointed king, who swears to protect the earth (*pṛthvī*, e. g. Wilson 1864, 177–ff.).[12] Therefore, the idea of expansion appears to be closely connected with royal power.[13]

The proper name Prathā employed for the protagonist of the series is charged with such mythical associations as the fame the king acquires through the extension of his reign. She does not expand India's borders, yet she will not allow China to get a hold of Indian territory. In this sense, the series deploys late Vedic imagery as well, where the *nāga*s were associated with protecting the four corners of the world (Cozad 2018). The epic *Mahābhārata*, later on, deprived the *nāga*s of regional placenames, while with *Nāgin 6* such geographical character is reinterpreted for the contemporary world, as Prathā states that "Who sells this country's border will be killed".[14] The chthonic dimension of the *nāgin* is exalted as well, with the evocation of their ability to purify the earth, as Prathā is made to say that she will indeed wash the motherland with the *asura*s' blood.

It appears, then, that the name of the *nāgin* in the last season is a further element through which she is constructed as inherently linked with the (re)definition and protection of borders. As such she does not resist any dominant culture, rather she participates in a hegemonic discourse of upper-caste and upper-class often channeled by national TV as normative (Mankekar 1999, 8–10). The domestication of her figure is achieved also visually as she wears traditional clothes, mostly sarees, and displays the symbols of a married woman. For instance, she wears the chain called *maṅgalsūtra*. Moreover, she lives in an enlarged family where she takes care of her elders and would do anything to protect her husband (she is a *pativratā*, a woman devoted to her husband). As such this leads to questioning: is she at all at the margins of femininity associated with nationalistic themes?

[12] Pṛthu means "broad, wide, expansive, extensive, spacious, large" and by the same token "great, important" (MW 1899, 646). *Pṛthvī* is also a term etymologically related to Pṛthu and *prath*-.
[13] With the Vedic horse sacrifice, the *aśvamedha*, as a chief exemplar of this ideology (Gonda 1066, 110).
[14] Episode 7, in Hindi "Jo is deś kī sarhad ko bechegā, uskā vadh hogā."

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

5. The Behaviour of the *Nāgin*: Shifting the Contours of Domestication, for the Nation

On a closer look, her figure subtly shifts the contours of the habitual portrayal of feminine characters in nationalistic series. This is evident from comparison with other programmes treating similar themes. It is possible to take as an example *Param Vir Chakra* (1990) a series which fictionalised the lives of martyred soldiers, who gained the highest military recognition (homonymous with its title) for defending their nation. Mankekar has observed that, despite being dedicated mainly to male soldiers, the women of the martyrs (the wives, the mothers) are portrayed in a more nuanced manner than the men. Because of their varied and different behaviours, responding less to stereotypes than their male counterparts, it is the women represented in the series that constitute a site of debate for viewers. Still, according to Mankekar, we witness in the series "(…) the construction of nationalist zeal and the depiction or naturalization of female sexuality as a threat to masculine valour." (Mankekar 1999, 259). In contrast, in *Nāgin 6* Prathā is not represented as a threat to masculine valour, as her actions help her husband, who is rarely seen "on a mission". Her sexuality – and the sexuality of the couple – is disciplined because it takes place in the context of marriage. However, it is not completely removed, even if it is just to tease the viewers.[15]

Moreover, series like *Nāgin* have the advantage that their makers do not have to deal with the issues of women's education, or the necessity to work outside the family. But, at the same time, Prathā is not a character who suffers abuse or injustice and is confined to silence. She reproaches her husband Rishabh for apparently flirting and, upon being interrogated about her whereabouts, she is heard saying: "It seems you are like those guys who think they can ask their wife where were you, but when asked, they can't give an answer about where a lipstick mark came from." She continues by saying that if he's having

[15] Earlier series, like *Uṛān* (Flight), centered on a female policewoman, tended to obliterate references to femininity and sexuality in portraying the heroine as a nationalist woman (Mankekar 1999, 120-1, 144-5).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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an affair, she is ending the marriage.[16] She fights for her marriage, answers back to her mother-in-law and orders (*ḥukm denā*) her husband to send people away from their house (Episode 17). In this way, she pushes the margins of what a woman can say and do. After all, if she is to protect the country, she cannot be that coy in everyday life.

Importantly, her actions threaten the unity of the family when she accuses her husband's cousin of beating his wife and proves it.[17] Hence, the family only partially limits her agency. The power relations within the family seem to be put into question by her actions and words to an extent – albeit limited. The narrative then restores the margins of family relations because these television genres do not permit extreme dissent to reach its very end (Mankekar 1999, 143). Yet, it engages in its terms with such existing concerns and familiar symbols (Rajagopal 2001, 146). The identification between the family and the country is valid only if the family does not threaten the country. In this case the family confines are no longer as inviolable as those of the nation. Therefore, the defense of the nation and its borders implies that it needs to be done even at the cost of family relations. This creates multiple moments of tension and dilemma in the series, including pushing the limits of the *nāgin*'s allegiance to Śiva.

6. The Religious Allegiance of the *Nāgin*: From Śiva to Rāma, for the Nation

As semi-divine figures, *nāga*s are associated with several divinities.[18] One of the most famous images is that of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa resting on the ocean, behind him a *nāga* called Śeṣanāga – shielding him with its multiple hoods – at his feet goddess Lakṣmī, and the god

[16] See Episode 13: "Lagtā hai ki āp bhi unhī laḍkoṁ meṁ se hai jo sirf apnī patnīyoṁ ko pūcheṁge ke vah kahāṁ paḍtī. Par pūche jāne par unke pās kabhī javāb nahīṁ hogā ke lipstick kā niśān kahāṁ se āya."
[17] Cf. Mankekar 1999, 160 about the portrayal of women involved with the nationalist movement in TV series: "The family circumscribed the agency of these revolutionary women: indeed, they were able to 'step out' as revolutionaries only because their actions did not threaten the purported unity of their families."
[18] They are present since long time in Indic sculptural art. Even outside the pale of Hindu belief strictly, they are widespread in Buddhist milieu (Härtel 1976).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

Brahmā sitting on a lotus springing from Viṣṇu's navel, ready to emanate the universe.[19] However, it is Śiva who is now most commonly associated with *nāga*s. The mountain god is peculiar because he is usually depicted in an aniconic fashion, through a *śivaliṅga* (Fleming 2009). A *śivaliṅga* is an object built of stone in pillar shape, of various sizes. It has also been seen as a representation of the god's phallus as a symbol of his creative power (Hohenberger 2018). In the natural world, anthills are sometimes interpreted as *śivaliṅga*s because of their conical structure. In turn, supernatural serpents inhabit and protect anthills, according to common belief (Cozard 2018). In countless sculptural representations and ritual items of nowadays, *śivaliṅga*s are protected by cobras and the customary portrayals of Śiva include at least one cobra adorning his throat.[20] Secondly, the myth of the churning of the ocean also involved him in a fundamental role, that of swallower of poison. During the churning process, a mass of poison surfaced from the ocean, threatening of destroying the universe. Śiva drank it and, as a result, his throat turned blue, causing him to assume the appellative of Nīlakaṇṭa (lit. who possesses a blue throat). In the *Mahābhārata* retelling of the myth, Brahmā complimented him for his throat now looked like a serpent (Kramrisch 1981, 147, 151-2).

Prathā's devotion to Śiva is a pervading element in the series. In every confrontation she invokes the god to give her the power to carry on her duty as queen of the *nāga*s and *nāgin*s (*śeṣnāgin*). In multiple instances, she refers to herself as *śivavardānī* – one who has received a boon from Śiva – and assumes the form of half woman and half serpent, with her head circled by five cobra hoods (e.g. Episode 14). Besides, her marriage with Rishab (Ṛṣabha) takes place on Mahashivratri, the most auspicious night dedicated to the divinity.

[19] A classical rendition of the scene in print from the end of the 19th century can be seen at https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/849519 (Last Access 25th October 2022).
[20] See, for example, a painting conserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O72546/shiva-parvati-ganesh-and-karttikeya-painting-unknown/ (Last access 27 October 2022).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

For this reason, Rishab's grandmother compares their couple to that of Śiva and Pārvatī (Episode 6).

There is, however, a precise moment in which her unwavering faith in Śiva is shaken by the events. This occurs when Prathā has to defeat the fifth *asura*, who is no one else but her (human) father. The confrontation is set in the Himalayas, at India's borders, at the source of the river Yamuna. In the background, a shrine hosts the statues of the god Rāma, along with his wife Sītā, his brother Lakṣmaṇa and his friend and devotee Hanumān. She has accepted by now that her father is a traitor to the nation for which she is ready to sacrifice her life. However, she is paralysed psychologically and physically. Her feet are stuck in the snow by her father thanks to the potency of the snake-jewel (*nāgmaṇi*) he stole from her. Her powers, bestowed by Śiva, are lost. In fact, she invokes Śiva, but nothing happens. Tellingly, her father mocks her: "What has Śiva ever done for you, for me, for us?" as earlier he told his foreign ally that "Śiva… cannot save this country today.[21]" In an extremely dramatic sequence, where the camera moves from her father's face to her face, to Rāma's, her parent dares her to invoke her god again.[22] At this point, she turns towards the nearby shrine and looks at Rāma and his bow resting on the floor. Instead of calling Śiva once more, Prathā calls thrice "Jay Śrī Rām" (lit. Victory to Śrī Rām!). Immediately after she calls Rāma there is a typhoon, thanks to which her sister is saved. But she is unable to recover the source of her powers, the *nāgmaṇi* (Episode 21). Desperate, she calls to Rāma with increasing resolve. Bells start ringing because the earth trembles. Due to the commotion, she manages to recover the jewel with background voices chanting "Rāmrām jay Rāmrām, Rāmrām jay Sītārām" louder. She also fetches Rāma's bow, but she is torn – she can't shoot her father. A further moment of tension, where the margins of familial relations are questioned: should she choose her father or her duty (*dharma*)?

[21] Episode 20: "Kyā kiyā Śiv ne, tere liye, mere liye, hamare liye?" "Koī Śiv…āj is duniyā ko nahīṁ bacā saktā."
[22] Episode 20: "Bulā le tere Bhagvān ko!"

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

In this dilemma, before leaving to meet her father in the Himalayas, she talks to her sister. She points out that even an elder's decisions can be wrong when it comes to the country. Prathā quotes then the first half of a well-known verse from the *Bhagavadgītā* (The Song of the Blessed One, verse 4.7): "Whenever righteousness decays, O Bharata, (…)[23]" The verse is interrupted because the hint is sufficient for the viewer to guess its missing part: "and unrighteousness grows, then I manifest/create myself." As the *Bhagavadgītā* is a poetical discourse included in the *Mahābhārata*, we know that Arjuna is on the battlefield, where the enemy is his cousins. It is a conflict about power, on who will rule over the Kuru reign. The prospect of battle with his own family weakens Arjuna's resolve. In a nutshell, Kṛṣṇa, his charioteer for the occasion, explains to him that he should carry on with his duty as a prince and wage war despite who's confronting him. Attachment to family relations only comes in the way of *dharma*, the right conduct sustained and ordained by Kṛṣṇa himself. In addition, he reveals to the prince that when *dharma* declines he manifests himself on earth to ease the burden of unrighteousness (*adharma*). The Kauravas, Arjuna's cousins, are committed to evil actions and must be eradicated (Malinar 2007, 98-100). Eventually, the warrior is convinced, and the battle ensues. After the evocative programmatic statement by Prathā in *Nāgin 6*, we would expect a resolution in the way the dichotomy between family and duty is solved in the *Bhagavadgītā*. We would expect the snake-woman to fire at her father. However, and significantly, she is not made to choose. She is not allowed to kill her father as under Rāma's hint, the hitting arrow is propelled by a force coming from Śiva's third eye.

Further elements in the episode connect Prathā with Rāma. It opens with the celebration of Prathā's birthday, which coincides with the festival of Ram Navami, dedicated to Rāma's birth. In episode 19, during a puja to Rāma, someone tells Prathā and her husband: "May your couple be like that of Rāma and Sītā."[24] These scenes substitute the

[23] In Sanskrit: "Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati bhārata / abhyutthānam adharmasya tadātmānaṁ sṛjāmy aham." Cf. Jauregui 2015, 49, for another case of use of this verse to justify vigilantism in a 2000 Bollywood movie, *Kurukshetra*.
[24] "Tum dono kī jodī Rām aur Sītā kī jodī kī tarah bane!"

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

imagery linked to Śiva with that associated with Rāma. The god at the margins of the country is not longer him, but Rāma. Much as the world-renouncer appeals to Hindutva – "Hinduness" – nationalism (Jaffrelot 1996, 40-5), Śiva the yogi, isolated in the mountains with his wife and family, is not enough for the Hindu who wants to protect the country.[25] He or she has to rely on Rāma. The latter is the deity armed with a bow and arrows, whom this brand of nationalism has reinterpreted into its principal model of conduct. He is conceived as the strong, muscular king able to protect with force his reign, identified by the nationalist cause as the whole of India (Jaffrelot 1996, 390-3). To my mind, the operation of the series cannot be understood as radically as a call for a boycott of Śiva, but rather for his subordination to Rāma, as the last scene of the struggle implies. In any case, it is a manner of integrating Śiva into mainstream Hindu nationalistic ideology through his devotee (*bhakta*), the *nāgin*.

7. Conclusive reflections

This paper has examined how the last season of the Hindi TV series *Nāgin* has made of its heroine, Prathā, a patriot fighting for her nation. First, it has dealt with the place of this figure in the Indic mythological and literary imagery and its representation in Bollywood cinema. This analysis has served not only to show the popularity of *nāga*s and *nāgin*s but also to lay down the elements, the margins of the traditional representation, that the TV series recalls, recovers and reinterprets. In different degrees, her name, her behaviour and her religious allegiance have been rewritten compared with previous seasons. In contrast with the series of the early 90s analysed in Mankekar (1999), while the portrayal of Prathā still largely conforms to the standard of a Hindu upper-class woman, we witness new tensions in the family due to her commitment to her mission. Eventually, the dilemmas

[25] The detachment from worldly affairs is a characteristic of Śiva emerging from several myths of the *Purāṇa*s, where the resolutive action is often carried out by one of Śiva's acolytes rather than the god himself. See Granoff 2006.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

(re)presented and (re)created may be solved because of television logic but the questions raised remain for viewers to reflect upon.

It is worth noticing that the defense of the nation is made part of the "'repeated and repeatable scenarios'" (Geraghty 2005, 311) to which series and soap operas subject their audience. This has also to do with the construction of the *nāgin* as a determined and strong-willed woman, who doesn't budge when she has to hit back even at her mother-in-law or husband. As stereotypical as this characterisation may be, it reflects to what extent the ideal of the "Angry Hindu" – woman in this case – has become ingrained in Indian popular culture (Rajagopal 2001, 149). A country that is shown to be every day under threat needs people who act as her protectors every day. This implied call coincides with the rise of vigilantism in India, where it is seen increasingly as a virtue (Jauregui 2015, 53). However, if soap operas were generally appreciated as they leave the viewers with a "'sense of an unwritten future'" (Geraghty 2005, 312), *Nāgin 6*, instead, re-writes the future through myth for its viewers. The *asura*s (the anti-nationals and China), the cause of the virus and the border crises, will be defeated. The end of the virus – something its viewers have still not experienced – is also achieved, as India is said to be the first country to be freed from it. The discourse about the inviolability of the national territory in *Nāgin 6* accomplishes what diplomatic politics can't achieve: the defeat of China at the hands of India – revenge against China.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

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Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

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Rosina Pastore holds a PhD in South Asian Studies at the Université de Lausanne (Switzerland). At present she carries out a novel project at the University of Gent (Belgium) as FWO postdoctoral junior fellow. Her main axis of research is early modern South Asian philosophical literature in vernacular languages, concentrating on Vedantic traditions and their intersection with politics, religion and broader literary and cultural trends. She is also interested in issues of identity, self-fashioning, gender and nation-making, especially when seen through the lens of popular culture, including Hindi cinematography and TV.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549023

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Corpi che contano? Corpi, sessualità e orientamenti divergenti nella narrativa e nella fiction da Mona Caird a Ryan Murphy

Cesare Pozzuoli

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Abstract

La storia dei corpi, o per meglio dire delle rappresentazioni della corporeità, del corpo sessuato attraversa come un *fil rouge* una sostanziosa parte della vicenda, complicatissima, della cultura occidentale. Il corpo è un vettore di significanti e significati, è lo strumento primario con il quale ci si presenta, come soggetti, sia all'interno dello spazio pubblico sia della sfera privata. La corporeità assume, a seconda delle epoche, simbolismi e significati sempre nuovi e diversi ma senza dubbio va notato come sia soprattutto l'associazione semiotico-filosofica tra corporeità e differenza sessuale, tra corpo e genere a risultare pregna di implicazioni. La storia dei corpi è infatti in *primis* una storia della sessualità e delle pratiche culturali legate alla sessualità. Al contempo, per tale motivo, il corpo sessuato ha sempre agito e continua ad agire come un limite, un margine che in alcuni casi si intende valicare, spesso con fatica, e che in altri è una barriera dietro la quale ci si trincera. Seguendo questo impianto teorico il saggio proposto intende indagare come attraverso la rappresentazione letteraria e la fiction tra la fine del XIX secolo e la contemporaneità, facendo particolare riferimento alla cultura anglosassone, i corpi sessuati, feticci di sessualità e orientamenti 'divergenti' abbiano di volta in volta svolto la funzione di limite, di gabbia o di margine invalicabile. Come si supera questo limite? Perché il corpo sessuato 'non conforme' diventa strumento di marginalità? Queste sono le domande di ricerca alla base del presente lavoro che presenta un impianto teorico squisitamente interdisciplinare e indaga nei linguaggi diversi della letteratura e della fiction televisiva cogliendone i significati culturali, pedagogici e filosofici.

Keywords: corpo; limiti; narrative; queerness; sessualità.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

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1. Breve storia dei corpi sessuati. L'età vittoriana

Il corpo, o per meglio dire l'identità corporea, sin dalle origini del pensiero occidentale, ha rappresentato e rappresenta la base del soggetto-individuo-persona in cui sono iscritti gli archetipi di noi umani, in cui si scrive il nostro presente e buona parte del nostro futuro. È attraverso la datità corporea, prima ancora che per tramite delle pur nobili vie della mente, che si esprime l'essere umano nella sua interezza. È indubbio a tal proposito fare un accenno, per quanto breve necessario, alla dualità tra la mente e il corpo, una difficile e inquieta sorellanza tra i due capisaldi dell'umano che tuttavia ne rappresenta l'essenza. Nel corso della storia, a seconda delle epoche, è stata talvolta la mente a prendersi la scena e a rappresentare l'umano nella sua interezza, in altre invece la cultura occidentale si è completamente affidata al corpo per autorappresentarsi, usando la corporeità sessuata come vettore di ingresso nello spazio pubblico dei soggetti. Tale dualismo avrebbe influenzato per generazioni anche il pensiero educativo occidentale, strettamente legato alle questioni della filosofia e della rappresentazione:

> Anche tutto il pensiero educativo occidentale verrà influenzato da questo cliché e da una radicale sottostima del corpo, da un suo costante maltrattamento, da una sua progressiva emarginazione. Il corpo è invece un soggetto-oggetto: corpo vivo […] e corpo fisico organico […] sono intrecciati in un'unica ingiunzione ontologica che permette al soggetto di esplorare la complessità della dimensione umana in rapporto col mondo e di cogliere il livello qualitativo/quantitativo dell'esistenza stessa. (Mariano 2020, 8)

Indubbiamente, un momento cruciale nel discorso tra rappresentazione della corporeità e la negoziazione del sé sessuato è rappresentato dal XIX secolo ed in particolare dal fondamentale spartiacque storico dell'età vittoriana. Durante gli anni controversi del regno di Vittoria, si

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

afferma in maniera marcata il binomio tra una definita idea del maschile e del femminile e la corporeità sessuata. Sono in particolare le donne, i corpi di donna, ad essere oggetto di un'attenzione quasi morbosa da parte dei sistemi educativi, della rappresentazione letteraria e artistica. Come viene messo in luce dalla storia dell'educazione di genere, specialmente durante la seconda metà del XIX secolo in terra d'Albione le ragazze venivano indottrinate ad essere piacenti, femminee, appetibili per il genere maschile; simili in maniera quasi inquietante alle bambole dalle facce di porcellana o legno dipinto che abitano le *dollhouses*, le case di bambola; strumento ludico e al contempo pedagogico che in quegli anni appare come un elemento costante della sfera domestica borghese e che attraverso l'immagine fortemente stereotipata della bambola ingabbiano le fanciulle in uno schema culturale e comportamentale. Da un punto di vista della rappresentazione iconografica, in una fusione metaforica tra spirito della nazione e iconologia della famiglia, intesa come immagine embrionale dell'Impero, è proprio il corpo di Vittoria, pingue, materno ma imponente, ad essere il potente simbolo della femminilità come maternità ma anche come strumento di potere: "Vittoria non sfugge a questa rappresentazione del *body politic,* che la lega al suo destino di sposa, madre vedova. Il corpo di Vittoria è corpo riproduttore, corpo materno. Di più, è il corpo della madre Terra […]. E il corpo di questa dea madre viene fatto rientrare, inevitabilmente, con una sovrapposizione tra il corpo della regina e i confini dell'impero sancita da un rituale politico tagliato sulla sua persona come un abito" (Boni 2002, 47). Sebbene non sia questa la sede più adatta per dipanare la complessa matassa dei rapporti tra le rappresentazioni del corpo femminile e la cultura vittoriana, è interessante soffermarsi su quanto si verifica nella seconda parte del periodo. Muovendosi sempre su questa tastiera, il turbolento periodo della *fin de siècle,* che orientativamente copre gli anni tra il 1880 e la morte di Vittoria, nel 1901 (Sherry 2015), ha portato in dote alla contemporaneità una seria

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

messa in discussione dei rigidi canoni della sessualità e della netta divisione tra i generi. Elaine Showalter a tal proposito osserva come quegli anni siano stati all'insegna della *sexual anarchy*, della cosiddetta 'anarchia sessuale' (Showalter 1992); secondo Showalter ed altre studiose, la fine secolo ha costituito un autentico laboratorio di pratiche e concezioni nuove legate alla sessualità e alla grammatica dei generi. Sono fondamentalmente due le figure storiche che interpretano appieno le nuove tendenze: la *new woman* e il dandy. Le *new women,* come è noto, erano un gruppo di intellettuali, sviluppatosi in maniera non strutturata tra gli Stati Uniti e l'Europa. Attraverso una fitta produzione polemico-saggistica che si associa ad una notevole produzione narrativa esse contestano istituzioni cardine della retorica sul femminile, in particolare il matrimonio borghese, grande trappola del patriarcato, e la maternità. Scrive Caird come la condizione delle madri, anche di quelle appartenenti al ceto borghese, sia piuttosto simile alla schiavitù, dal momento che la donna sposata e per estensione la madre di famiglia, cede sé stessa, il proprio corpo in particolare, in cambio di mantenimento (Caird 1888, 131-33). Questo porta alla nascita di figlie e figli da madri che percepiscono la gravidanza, il crescere la prole come un fardello; non potendo nemmeno rifiutare di portare questo peso in quanto in una situazione di minorità e per l'appunto di schiavitù. Eppure, ricorda la scrittrice, l'unico destino per le donne sembra essere il cedere sé stesse alla dittatura del materno per il quale sono state allevate. Questo, ancora una volta, vede il corpo agire come tramite, come limite e campo di battaglia, uno strumento attraverso il quale si manifesta la "malattia del materno":

> This misdirection of nervous energy creates innumerable miseries, and some of them seem to have become chronic, or hereditary, and from being so common have lost the very name of disease. Yet with these facts before them, people still dare to infer, from the present condition of women, their eternal limitation of function; they still fail to see that to found a theory of society upon hereditary adaptations which they now find in a long enslaved and abused race, is to find a theory of nature upon artificial and diseased development. (Showalter 1992, 135)

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Come dicevamo, la netta opposizione delle *new women* agli istituti borghesi del matrimonio e della maternità si inseriscono nella più ampia discussione sui limiti della sessualità, tipica di fine Ottocento, che queste intellettuali hanno appieno interpretato. Tra i punti più interessanti in tal senso vi è senza dubbio il riferimento delle *new women* alla passione, intesa anche da un punto di vista sessuale, della donna; un fatto interessante e a tratti rivoluzionario se solo si considera come almeno fino alle prime decadi dell'Ottocento si ritenesse ipocritamente che le donne non fossero dotate di una sessualità, o quantomeno di una pulsione corporea e sessuale svincolata dal fatto riproduttivo. Sempre Caird scrive, nel 1888, che prima della riforma luterana: "Society was in what was called a chaotic state; there was extreme licence on all sides, and although the standard of morality was far severer for the woman than for the man, still she had more or less liberty to give herself as passion dictated, and society tacitly accorded her a right of choice in matters of love. But Luther ignored all the claims of passion in a woman" (Caird1897, 25). Ritornando a quanto detto in precedenza, è il corpo a farla da padrone nella grammatica della sessualità fine secolo; un corpo che si fa, come dicevamo, feticcio, strumento di potere, ma anche margine. Per quanto riguarda le 'nuove donne', da un punto di vista della cultura delle immagini, della autorappresentazione, esse si ponevano come donne 'viriloidi'. Le *new women* in tal senso, per affermare la loro piena rottura con i paradigmi rappresentazionali e comportamentali associati ad una certa idea di femminilità ottocentesca, si appropriano di modelli comportamentali ritenuti come maschili quali il fumare, l'andare in bicicletta, il portare i capelli corti, l'indossare il monocolo e i pantaloni. L'imitazione del maschio anche nella corporeità per assumere una posizione di potere, attirandosi tuttavia sberleffi da parte della stampa satirica, è uno dei modi più incisivi in cui queste intellettuali

ISSN: 2974-9549
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interpretano la loro idea, proto-femminista, di rottura delle barriere di genere. Questo ha fatto sì che queste donne fossero ritenute un pericolo per la stessa idea di femminilità, attirandosi strali critici provenienti da ambienti culturali legati all'*establishment*, e contestualmente una minaccia alla tenuta stessa della nazione, fondata sull'idea stessa di famiglia patriarcale. La tendenza alla mascolinizzazione dell'immagine, all'uso del corpo in una maniera provocatoria, se non addirittura sovversiva, entra anche nel patrimonio narrativo delle *new women.* Un esempio in tal senso è dato da *A Cross Line*, novella tratta dalla raccolta *Keynotes* (1893) di George Egerton. Nel testo vediamo come protagonista una *new woman* dal temperamento indipendente e fortemente sensuale; in una celebre scena il compagno di lei le mostra una chioccia con i pulcini in una cesta, simbolo assoluto di maternità. L'effetto prodotto tuttavia è di disagio, di repulsione fisica da parte della giovane; la stessa immagine è disturbante per il lettore che la vede attraverso gli occhi del personaggio: "A dishevelled looking hen, with spread wings trailing and her breast bare from sitting on her eggs. Screeches after him. He puts it carefully down and uncovers it, disclosing seven little balls of yellow fluff splashed with olive green. They look up sideways with bright round eyes, and their little spoon bills look disproportionately large […] She suppresses an exclamation of disgust" (Caird 2016, 52). I più accaniti critici delle *new women* poi ritenevano che la letteratura da loro prodotta presentasse immagini di donna distorte, troppo sensuali e sessualizzate oppure troppo mascolinizzate (Ledger 1997). Come dicevamo, quando si parla della rivoluzione sessuale di fine secolo non si può non citare la figura storico-culturale del dandy. Se la *new woman* polemizza attraverso la produzione artistico-letteraria e attraverso una postura del corpo, il dandy si pone polemicamente contro i dettami della sessualità etero-normata principalmente attraverso l'incarnazione fisica e iconografica di una mascolinità androgina, posta in maniera anfibia tra i

ISSN: 2974-9549
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generi. Le due figure erano quindi senza dubbio facce della stessa medaglia. Come rileva inoltre Maya de Leo, il dandysmo e le *new women* in grandi metropoli europee come Londra e Vienna trovano terreno fertile di sviluppo in seno alla nascente cultura Drag (De Leo 2021). Indubbiamente, al discorso sul dandysmo di tardo Ottocento si lega a doppio filo la questione dell'omosessualità. In una sorta di cortocircuito logico che agli occhi di noi contemporanei sembra difficile da comprendere; aspetto androgino, tipico del dandy, ed omosessualità erano indissolubili. A tal proposito sicuramente va ricordato come questo scorcio di secolo e la prima decade del Novecento abbiano dato allo studio della sessualità da un punto di vista scientifico un ruolo importante. Un interesse che si radica nella vera ossessione esplosa nell'Inghilterra *fin de siècle* e del primo Novecento sia per le sessualità altre sia per le pratiche sessuali, gli orientamenti e i generi che sfuggono all'incasellamento voluto dal dettato patriarcale. Tra essi vanno annoverate l'omosessualità ma anche la sessualità quella dei pazzi e persino la sessualità delle donne, quella dei pazzi. Come ricorda Foucault, in questo periodo: "La famiglia coniugale la confisca e l'assorbe nella serietà della funzione riproduttiva. Intorno al sesso si fa silenzio. La coppia, legittima e procreatrice, detta legge […]. Nello spazio sociale come nel cuore di ogni casa esiste un solo luogo di sessualità riconosciuta, ma elitario e fecondo: la camera dei genitori" (Foucault 1984, 6). Nel discorso del filosofo vediamo come sia ancora una volta il corpo riproduttore, più che la dimensione psicologica, ad essere identificato con il sesso; una concezione che è cruciale nella nuova scienza (o per meglio dire pseudo-scienza) sviluppatasi alla fine dell'Ottocento: la *sexology*, la sessuologia di cui Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Tardieu e prima ancora Urlichs sono stati i maggiori esponenti. La sessuologia tardo-ottocentesca e di inizio Novecento tende a classificare gli individui in base al loro grado di vicinanza al genere dominante, quello maschile, e all'unico orientamento accettabile, ovvero quello eterosessuale.

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Tardieu a tal proposito identifica i giovani uomini omosessuali in base alle loro caratteristiche fisiche e al vestiario: "I capelli ricci, il volto truccato, il collo scoperto, gli abiti stretti in vita per mostrare le forme […]: questa è la fisionomia strana, repellente e a buon diritto sospetta che tradisce il pederasta" (Tardieu in De Leo 2021, 24). Da un punto di vista letterario è proprio in questo periodo, sulla base del modello platonico, che si diffonde, coperta sovente da una pesante coltre di autocensura, una vera e propria letteratura gay che interessa sia la poesia che la narrativa. Da un punto di vista poetico di grande interesse sono senza dubbio le opere dei poeti Uraniani, gruppo di letterati ispirati dalla teoria erotica platonica che pongono al centro della loro produzione l'amore gay, riprendendo in un certo qual modo, con modalità e linguaggio diversi, il grande precedente dei sonetti scespiriani. Sebbene il modello platonico, cui senza dubbio questi poeti si rifanno, preveda come suprema forma d'amore l'unione spirituale tra un giovane imberbe e un anziano filosofo; unione dal valore iniziatico per il giovane e che conduce l'anziano a produrre arte e discorso; nella poesia uraniana si fa strada anche l'amore tra due uomini della stessa generazione, inviso a Platone in quanto ritenuto sterile. Vediamo quindi come sia il corpo a prendersi la scena, come esso diventi il vettore di un amore che da ideale si fa subito fisico, sensuale. Senza dubbio per soggetti divergenti come le donne e i gay il giocare con i toni e semitoni della corporeità/sessualità assume una valenza che oseremmo definire politica, della rivendicazione di una diversità che è in sé un atto politico. Da questa prospettiva va sicuramente ricordato come le tensioni di questo periodo abbiano gettato le basi per quanto sarebbe avvenuto nei decenni successivi.

2. Corpi non conformi da Forster a Ryan Murphy. Qualche momento cruciale

Il vasto spazio Novecentesco, nelle sue varie fasi storiche, che hanno visto dapprima l'affermarsi dei femminismi globali e in seguito dei movimenti LGBT+, ha fatto della sessualità

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e dei corpi sessuati un tema ricorrente della *fiction*. In questo paragrafo toccheremo alcuni punti cruciali di questa complessa vicenda delle rappresentazioni artistico-letterarie dei corpi; concentrandoci su alcuni *case studies* specifici. Uno dei punti più controversi nella storia di queste rappresentazioni è senza dubbio quello legato alla corporeità femminile. Come abbiamo già in parte visto nelle pagine precedenti, il corpo di donna fin dalla notte dei tempi è un corpo 'controverso', votato, secondo la logica patriarcale, risalente già all'antichità classica, alla mera riproduzione o, in alternativa, è un corpo ritenuto intrinsecamente malato, mutilo, una prigione (Federici, Fortunati, Lamarra 2005). È la maternità, legata indissolubilmente alla sessualità femminile, a rappresentare anche nel Novecento un tema imprescindibile della rappresentazione artistico-letteraria del femminile e sul femminile. Va ricordato come il XX secolo abbia costituito lo spazio privilegiato, il terreno fertile della speculazione psicoanalitica e culturale sul femminile e sul materno, partendo proprio dal corpo. Il discorso sul corpo di donna, centrale nella narrazione psicanalitica occidentale, diventa il *topos* cardine dell'interconnessione tra femminismo e psicanalisi che si sviluppa a partire dagli anni '70. Il materno, nel discorso femminista di quegli anni, diviene di volta in volta una trappola, l'ultimo grande tranello che il patriarcato riserva alla donna, volontà di potenza, affermazione dell'unicità femminile. È indubbio che la letteratura delle donne del Novecento, sempre in bilico tra narrazione autobiografica e *fiction*, abbia rielaborato, attraverso numerose ipostasi, da Mansfield a Karen Blixen, la problematica del corpo gravido e del suo rifiuto per tramite della nevrosi, della depersonalizzazione, della separazione da sé (Fusini 2012). Emblematico in tal senso è *Prelude* (1918) di Katherine Mansfield. Mansfield in questo celebre racconto narra la storia di tre generazioni di donne: la nonna, Mrs Fairchild, le figlie: Beryl, nubile e irrequieta, e Linda, madre prolifica e le figlie in età pre-adolescenziale. La scrittrice fa del racconto un

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esempio di genealogia del femminile, di trasmissione di valori psichici e di saperi tra generazioni di donne che convivono (Marone 2004). Qualcosa però sembra stridere con l'immagine perfetta di famiglia post vittoriana che l'autrice porta sulla pagina. Linda è una madre prolifica. È attraverso il corpo, corpo prestato alla sola riproduzione e a una sessualità forzosa che la sua funzione di donna si esprime. La consapevolezza del corpo, l'insofferenza verso il ruolo di riproduttrice e verso il mestiere di cura, ma soprattutto la sofferenza della gravidanza e del parto, tradite da lunghi monologhi interiori del personaggio, segnalano la modernità di Linda, il suo differenziarsi dalla figura materna espresso dal disagio che prova. Nel passaggio che segue notiamo un simbolico trasferimento semantico/simbolico tra un cane e Stan, il marito di Linda: "If only he wouldn't jump at her so, and bark so loudly, and watch her with such eager, loving eyes. He was too strong for her; she had always hated things that rush at her, from a child […]. 'You know I am very delicate. You know as well as I do that my heart is affected, and the doctor has told you I may die any moment. I have had three great lumps of children already'" (Mansfield 1962, 55). Linda parla letteralmente di aver avuto "tre nidiate di bambini" ("three lumps of children") e di non reggere più lo sforzo. Il termine stesso usato dal personaggio, *lump*, rimanda ad un lessico dell'animalità più che dell'amore, parlando di figli. Ancor più interessante il personaggio di Beryl, la nubile, che si differenzia dall'eredità di affetti e dal modello comportamentale materno in maniera differente. Beryl è divisa tra il desiderio di perpetuare il modello materno e della sorella maggiore Linda (matrimonio, casa, figli) e il desiderio di indipendenza, riflettendo su quanto la vita delle donne della generazione precedente sia impraticabile: "Of course mother simply loves the place, but then I suppose when I am mother's age I shall be content to sit in the sun and shell peas into a basin. But I'm not-not-not" (Mansfield 1962, 58). Il personaggio poi, inserendosi in tal senso perfettamente nel

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contesto del pensiero novecentesco, disconosce la sua stessa immagine e con essa la sua stessa realtà ontologica di donna, guardandosi allo specchio:

> What had that creature in the glass to do with her, and why was she staring? She dropped down to one side of her bed and buried her face in her arms. 'Oh' she cried, 'I am so miserable-so frightfully miserable. I know that I'm silly and spiteful and vain; I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a moment. […] If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl- a shadow…a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? (Mansfield 1962, 60)

Come emerge dal testo, il personaggio si percepisce come un io instabile, sfuggente; una sfuggevolezza che in un certo modo transita in maniera anfibia tra il piano simbolico e la dimensione della fisicità che diventa evanescente, un'ombra priva di sostanza per l'appunto.

Passando alla seconda parte del secolo, in piena seconda generazione femminista, senza dubbio Margaret Atwood con *The Handmaid's Tale,* romanzo distopico del 1985, segna un passaggio importante nella speculazione (per Atwood non a caso si parla di s*peculative fiction*) sul corpo di donna che diventa un utero deambulante, un mero contenitore per la vita, alla mercè del maschio nella repubblica immaginaria di Gilead, riproduzione distopica dell'America reganiana o, con occhi contemporanei, anticipazione dell'America trumpiana: "Gilead […] pone la donna in posizione subalterna di corpo da riproduzione. […]. Uno degli elementi più rilevanti in tal senso è la divisa indossata dalle ancelle. La sua funzione è duplice: da una parte essa intende nascondere il corpo di chi lo indossa e a desessualizzarlo […] sia una connotazione sessuale" (Pozzuoli 2021, 172). Nel romanzo tuttavia, in rare occasioni, il corpo delle ancelle da prigione diviene anche strumento di potere; corporeità non conforme ed eversiva insieme: "What if I were to come at night, when he's on duty alone-though he would never be allowed such solitude- and permit him beyonf my white wings? What if I were to peel

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off my red shroud and show myself to him, to them, by the uncertain light of lanterns?" (Atwood 1985, 31). Passando ad un altro nucleo tematico, cruciale ai fini della nostra discussione, oltre che per la cosiddetta letteratura delle donne, è la funzione ricoperta dal corpo e dalla sessualità all'interno del complesso universo *queer*. Nel paragrafo precedente abbiamo avuto modo di accennare al fenomeno del dandismo, alla poesia uraniana e generalmente all'emergere di una cultura *queer* e con essa di una letteratura gay durante i ricchi e complessi anni della *fin de siècle*. Secondo questa prospettiva, il Novecento ha senza dubbio aperto un lungo e articolato campo di discussione sul concetto stesso di *queerness*, riprendendo le fila di quanto si era già sviluppato negli anni immediatamente precedenti. Dal punto di vista storico-letterario, è nel XX secolo che si inizia a parlare in maniera sistematica dell'emergere di una cultura gay o più ampiamente di un sistema di pensiero associato a quella dimensione difficilmente incasellabile della *queerness*. Come osserva tra gli altri Francesco Gnerre, uno degli elementi cruciali portati dal XX secolo[1], in materia di rappresentazioni artistico-letterarie, è stato proprio l'autolegittimarsi attraverso la parola narrata di comunità che per secoli non ha avuto, a differenza dell'universo *cisgender* etero-normato, modelli culturali, psicologici, pedagogici e comportamentali cui fare riferimento. Al contempo, così come era già in parte avvenuto per la letteratura delle donne, a partire dal secondo Novecento avviene da parte di

[1] Come osserva tra gli altri Gnerre ed in generale una buona parte della contemporanea critica letteraria e culturalista in materia di *queerness*, la seconda parte del Novecento, che peraltro ha visto la pubblicazione di testi rappresentativi per la cultura *queer* e per la cultura gay come *Maurice*, ha visto il concretizzarsi, anche attraverso l'uso della parola narrata e per tramite di una riscoperta e una rilettura di testi e testimonianze di una cultura gay sommersa, una maggiore consapevolezza di sé da parte dei soggetti *queer* sul proprio posto nel mondo, rivendicato con spirito critico e pugnace. Cruciale in tal senso è senza dubbio la vicenda dello Stonewall Inn nel 1969. Cruciale è poi stato il periodo dei secondi anni '80 e dei primi anni '90 che con la diffusione dell'epidemia di HIV hanno visto anche l'inizio di una profonda fase di riflessione all'interno della comunità *queer*.

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intellettuali ma anche semplicemente di attivisti e attiviste la riscoperta e la ricostruzione di una geneaologia letteraria LGBT+ ed in particolare della letteratura gay, con la rivalutazione, dopo decenni se non secoli di inabissamento carsico, di opere come i sonetti scespiriani o di quelli di Michelangelo (Gnerre 2015). Gli anni '70, nel post Stonewall, ma ancor di più gli anni '80 del Novecento hanno poi segnato un ulteriore cambio di passo nella connessione tra aspetti politici/rivendicativi della comunità *queer* e materia letteraria:

> Ancora negli anni Ottanta del Novecento, a parte piccoli gruppi di militanti gay delle grandi città che iniziavano a rivendicare forme di visibilità, l'omosessualità era l'amore che non osava dire il suo nome, e libri che trattavano di omosessualità erano veramente pochi e poco diffusi. Il tema era ritenuto sconveniente e in genere vi si alludeva con giri di parole. Quando appariva in maniera inequivocabile assumeva quasi sempre caratteristiche negative: il personaggio omosessuale nei testi letterari era ancora, tranne rarissime eccezioni, il corruttore di giovani innocenti o una patetica vittima il cui destino era inesorabilmente segnato non da una qualche colpa, ma dal suo stesso essere. E nei testi non letterari, il tema era associato in genere alla devianza o a disturbi psicologici. (Gnerre 2015, 6-7)

Con il graduale affermarsi di una visibilità dell'universo LGBT+ si è anche sviluppata una nuova letteratura o meglio una nuova visione letteraria che fosse affrancata dall'idea della diversità come fonte di colpa interiorizzata, di malattia o di vergogna (Gnerre 2015). Precedente storico fondamentale in tal senso è quello che probabilmente è il più celebre romanzo gay mai scritto, ovvero *Maurice* di E.M. Forster. L'opera, scritta tra il 1913 e il 1914, viene pubblicata postuma soltanto nel 1971, un "anno più felice" (Antinucci 2019), come recita l'epigrafe apposta da Forster stesso, a causa di un poderoso processo di autocensura. *Maurice* fin dagli anni '70 costituisce un'opera feticcio per la comunità gay per una serie di motivi. In primo luogo il finale. Come scrive tra le altre Raffaella Antinucci, riprendendo quanto affermato da Lionel Trilling, l'opera può essere definita come un *novel without antecedents*, un romanzo senza

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antecedenti in quanto per la prima volta siamo al cospetto di una storia d'amore tra due giovani gay, Alec e Maurice, premiata non dalla punizione, divina, sociale o autoinflitta, ma dalla felicità, una sfida questa che si sviluppa sia sul piano diegetico che socio-culturale:

> Sul piano diegetico, Forster contravviene a due importanti convenzioni letterarie. La coppia costituita da Maurice e Alec è infatti espressione di un duplice radicalismo, sociale e morale. I due giovani provengono da due classi che, nell'Inghilterra edoardiana, costituivano due universi distanti e rigidamente separati. […]. La sfida più audace lanciata da Forster, infatti, è quella di prefigurare un legame duraturo per i suoi due protagonisti, e soprattutto contravvenendo alla canonica rappresentazione dell'omosessualità, immaginare un lieto fine in luogo del più comune- ed accettabile- epilogo esiziale con un suicidio o una morte provvidenziale. (Antinucci 2020, 112-13)

La parabola formativa del giovane è ancora una volta determinata dall'uso del corpo sia in termini di assenza, mortificazione, sia in termini di strumento di autocoscienza in sé. Nella prima parte dell'opera, il giovane protagonista, a Cambridge, attraverso la relazione con il giovane Clive, si misura con il modello erotico-pedagogico platonico, di per sé dominato dallo spirito[2]. Tuttavia, andando verso il superamento completo del modello platonico ed entrando dunque in contatto con la dinamica del desiderio corporeo, Maurice completa il proprio percorso di maturazione umana. La dinamica del desiderio, nel perenne confronto tra natura e cultura, tipica di Forster, conduce il personaggio a mettere in discussione molti di quelli che fino a quel momento aveva considerato come dei capisaldi: la famiglia, la posizione sociale, la civiltà tutta, attraverso il superamento di margini che il personaggio impone a sé stesso. Margini sociali e culturali: "All that night, his body yearned for Alec's, despite him. He called

[2] Una delle sequenze più celebri dell'opera è proprio quella in cui Clive si serve del *Simposio* di Platone per dichiarare la propria omosessualità e contestualmente il proprio amore a Maurice che sulle prime resta profondamente turbato ma che poi cede.

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it lustful, a word easy uttered, and opposed to it his family, his friends, his position in society. In that coalition must surely be included his will. For if the will can overlap class, civilization as we have made it will go to pieces" (Forster 2005, 183). Attraverso l'accettazione della carne e del desiderio il giovane protagonista compie un atto anche fortemente sovversivo abbracciando la sfera naturale e sfidando quindi la supremazia della cultura, fulcro stesso della *englishness* (Antinucci 2019, 82-3). Maurice non è che il primo di tanti protagonisti e protagoniste della lunga e continuamente mutevole narrazione della *queerness*, un corpo "non conforme" che senza dubbio ha aperto uno spazio amplissimo nella discussione sul corpo sessuato e le sue rappresentazioni.

3. Nuovi linguaggi e rappresentazione della *queerness*. Il caso *Pose*

Grazie all'emersione di nuovi soggetti e alla sempre più radicale messa in discussione della logica binaria dei generi, anch'essa figlia della fine secolo, alla fluidità degli orientamenti, la sessualità è diventato qualcosa di ecumenico, finalmente inclusivo. Il concetto stesso di genere sessuale a partire dagli anni '90 è oggetto di discussione. Dopo decenni di dibattito[3] possiamo affermare di essere al cospetto di una cultura *post-gender*. Butler, già a partire dagli anni '90, inizia a ritenere la nozione di genere sessuale come oggetto di messa in discussione; per la studiosa il genere non è un fatto incontrovertibile e statico ma è piuttosto il risultato di una *performance*: ogni individuo in una certa misura applica una personale 'performatività' del genere sessuale (Butler 2005). In tale ottica ancora una volta il corpo ha un ruolo centrale; è

[3] La discussione sulla genesi teorica del concetto stesso di *queerness* e sulla cultura della sessualità è storicamente complessa e ricca di implicazioni. Se Teresa de Lauretis teorizzava il concetto stesso di *queer*, Rosy Braidotti rivendicava il nomadismo della natura femminile; sarà Judith Butler però, in polemica con quest'ultima a sparigliare completamente le carte mettendo in discussione non tanto il binarismo tra maschile e femminile ma il concetto di genere stesso.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

attraverso il corpo che il genere può diventare oggetto di *performance*. La corporeità sessuata, marcata, diviene quindi uno strumento di affermazione per il sé, specialmente nel caso di individualità marginalizzate da un punto di vista sociale. L'esempio migliore di questa dinamica è senza dubbio dato dalle persone *transgender* che attraverso lo strumento del corpo concretizzano il proprio sentire interiore rispetto all'appartenenza di genere. Va rilevato come storicamente persone appartenenti alla comunità *trans* abbiano sofferto e in parte continuino a soffrire non solo la marginalizzazione simbolica e sociale da parte della comunità *cisgender* ed etero-normata ma anche da parte di soggetti stessi ascrivibili alle comunità LGBT+ (Sedgwick 1990). Una segregazione che si manifesta ancora con più forza nei confronti delle persone *trans* di etnia non europea; in questo caso all'elemento di natura *gender-oriented* si unisce uno stigma di matrice etnica. In anni recentissimi, da un punto di vista culturale e artistico, tali fenomeni hanno trovato voce grazie a linguaggi dell'arte dinamici e capillarizzati, in grado di raggiungere un vasto pubblico come quello della serialità televisiva. Da questa prospettiva, dal 2018 al 2021, lo sceneggiatore e regista Ryan Murphy (insieme ad altri ed altre), egli stesso esponente della comunità LGBT+, ha raccontato con realismo, miscelando dramma e commedia, la vita di una comunità di persone *trans*, gay e lesbiche principalmente ascrivibili alle comunità afro e latine di New York in un arco temporale compreso tra il 1983 e il 1996, nel pieno della micidiale epidemia di AIDS nella pluripremiata serie *Pose*. La malattia per i personaggi è sia un dato storico che una metafora per rimarcare proprio il senso di questa marginalizzazione, una segregazione che passa proprio per il corpo. Tali soggetti, in particolar modo coloro appartenenti ad etnie 'ai margini' del consesso sociale, vengono ritenute responsabili della diffusione del morbo; i loro corpi stessi quindi sono corpi malati, pericolosi, da estirpare. Come viene osservato a tal proposito (specialmente durante gli anni della

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

conservatrice amministrazione Reagan) a causa dello stigma che ha colpito queste comunità, esse hanno avuto più possibilità di contrarre la malattia in quanto decisamente più lontane dall'accesso alle (poche) terapie disponibili, anche rispetto alla comunità gay, bianca, *cisgender*: "The portrayals of gender and sexuality in *Pose* demonstrate the hegemonic lack of interest in the health needs of this community. As shared by the character Pray tell (a black, gay man) […] 'Ronald Reagan will not say the word AIDS. Health insurance will not cover any treatment. The World wants us dead'" (Price, Butker, Mocarski 2021, 113). In questo caso una popolazione intera viene ritenuta responsabile della diffusione di un virus letale e per questo va estirpata in quanto corpo sociale problematico e malato, sia metaforicamente che materialmente. In *Pose* tuttavia, ricalcando anche quanto sostiene Bourdieu, l'uso di un vestiario appariscente, della potente esaltazione di attributi femminili, in particolar modo all'interno delle comunità *trans*, appare come un atto di rivendicazione politica della propria differenza ed unicità (Bourdieu 2014). Il corpo sessuato dei membri di questa comunità è utilizzato sia come strumento di continua negoziazione del proprio sé, attraverso le performance artistiche nel mondo chiuso della *ballroom*, sia come vero e proprio tramite di rivendicazione politica e di affermazione del proprio status attraverso la ricerca dell'assimilazione alla comunità, al mondo di 'superficie', tradizionalmente precluso a persone 'non conformi'. Come recita il personaggio di Electra nell'episodio quattro della prima stagione: "I can pass. I can strut down fifth avenue when the sun is sitting high as my cheekbones […] same as any white woman while you hide away in the shadows, beast". *Pose* poi, adoperando per la prima volta un cast composto quasi esclusivamente da componenti della comunità *trans* ha contribuito anche al superamento di un limite non solo a livello artistico ma anche sociale permettendo a tante artiste ed artisti

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

appartenenti a questa comunità di uscire da una condizione di marginalizzazione e sfondare un durissimo soffitto di cristallo.

4. **Conclusioni**

Come abbiamo avuto modo di osservare in queste pagine la rappresentazione del corpo sessuato e le sue interconnessioni storiche e culturali appaiono come un fatto di grandissima complessità, ricco di articolate varianti. Senza dubbio l'arte, la parola narrata, la visualità hanno avuto il compito, specialmente a partire dal secondo Ottocento, nelle culture anglofone, di accompagnare se non addirittura anticipare le mille ipostasi dei corpi sessuati. In una società in continua mutazione anche le storie dei corpi e delle sessualità mutano con l'emergere di nuovi soggetti e di nuovi posizionamenti e, in tal senso, il linguaggio dei nuovi media, la semantica della serialità tv, dei social network contribuiscono a produrre uno *storytelling* di queste nuove individualità. In una prospettiva futura lo studio di questi fenomeni dovrebbe tenere conto in misura sempre maggiore di nuove forme di marginalizzazione e considerare nuovamente il dispositivo artistico non solo come un oggetto di studio ma come strumento politico e sociale.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

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Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549024

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On the Edge of Self-discovery:

Water, Spaces and Sense of Belonging in the novel *Weathering* by Lucy Wood

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Abstract

According to ancient Celt mythology, water draws a line between this world and the "otherworld", an alternative reality inhabited by deities, spirits, or the souls of the departed (Monaghan, 2004: 469). Thus, water – and flowing water in particular – becomes an interstitial space that acquires several binomial meanings: life and death, destruction and rebirth, safety, and catastrophe (Arikan, 2014: 213). To inhabit a river is to dwell on the edges, on the borders of two opposite realities that merge within this interstitial fluid space. To reside in this hybrid third space is to be part of both worlds, while at the same time being part of neither. This is precisely the condition experienced by Pearl, one of the three characters enclosed in the pages of Weathering, the first novel published by Cornish author Lucy Wood. After her passing, Pearl remains trapped between the worlds of life and death, and dwells in the flowing waters of a river in an unnamed British town. Indeed, it is on these margins that she first meets her granddaughter, Pepper; and it is by breaking free from these margins and flooding the house where she once lived, that Pearl finally meets again with her daughter Ada. By focusing on the symbolic significance of water and on the meanings associated with the concept of 'house, through Lucy Wood's novel and through hints to her short story Notes from the House Spirits, this paper intends to analyse how margins can become a place of reunion and self-(re)discovery: a third and interstitial space where two worlds physically and emotionally come together into one.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Introduction

The following work stems from two works by the young Cornish author Lucy Wood. It mainly focuses on her novel *Weathering*, while also referencing one of her short stories *Notes from the House Spirits*. The aim of this paper is to investigate how, in her pages, margins and borders become a place of self-discovery and reunion with oneself and with others. The key issues discussed in this paper concern the changes brought about by time and by water in the life of the characters created by Wood, and it does so by referencing some of the scholarly works addressing these topics. Indeed, after a summary of the novel's plot, the paper centres on the relationship between its characters and how this evolves through time – including the role played by the flowing of water, and the symbolism of water in literature. Furthermore, by drawing from relevant studies, the analysis proceeds onto the concept of house in both of Wood's works, her novel, and the above-mentioned short story, whilst resulting into the discussion of dichotomy space and place, and how a new sense of belonging comes into being as the plot unfolds.

Relations on the Margins: The Destructive and Purifying Power of Water

Change is an inevitable consequence of time which, to use Heraclitus' words, flows just like a river. Indeed, as the word itself suggests, the novel *Weathering* focuses precisely on the flowing of time, or else on the slow flowing of time and the changes it eventually leads to. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the term "weathering" refers to "[t]he action of the atmospheric agencies or elements on substances exposed to its influence; the discoloration, disintegration, etc. resulting from this action"[1]; thus, it identifies those changes brought about by nature and time. Indeed, time and space hold a key role in the novel, and are so important as to become

[1] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "weathering, n., sense 3.a", July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1136335399>

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

actual characters – characters whose actions become evident in the flowing of a river and in the existence of the house where the three main characters live.

First published in 2015, *Weathering* is the first novel by Lucy Wood – already critically acclaimed for her debut work, the collection of short stories *Diving Belles* (2012). The novel is set in an unnamed rural British town, and it focuses on the lives of three generations of women: Pearl, Ada, and Pepper (respectively grandmother, mother and granddaughter). Presented entirely through the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator, the novel immediately dips its readers into the river where Ada and her daughter Pepper find themselves scattering the ashes of the recently departed Pearl. Grandmother and granddaughter have never had a chance to meet one another, and this signals a strong physical and emotional distance between the various characters: most especially a lack of relationship between Ada and Pearl, as later suggested by the way in which Ada relates to the house where she once lived with her mother. And yet, it is precisely thanks to her mother's house that this distance will lessen until it vanishes completely – thus, allowing mother and daughter to finally reunite, and grandmother and granddaughter to eventually meet. The physical and emotional distance between Ada and her mother is tangible from the very first pages, and it can be explicitly read in a sentence that echoes throughout the entire novel: "We won't be here long" (Wood 2015, 14). After bidding her mother farewell and scattering her ashes into a river, Ada intends to refurbish Pearl's house and sell it; thus, tearing the final tie that kept her attached to her mother. Indeed, no matter who she talks to – be it her mother's only friend Luke, or the owner of the local pub Val – Ada insists that her stay in her mother's house, a house she has always wanted to run away from, is only a temporary one. Indeed, thirteen years before Pearl's passing, Ada decides to let go of her past and leave the town where she had spent her childhood and teenage years. Although her daughter's choice leaves Pearl still and speechless, she understands Ada's desperate need to escape from a place she perceives as a trap rather than a home (Wood 2015, 128-129).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

This distance is but the result of years of misunderstandings and silence, since "they started to mishear each other a lot. Table slipped to ladle, flour slipped to fire. Pearl went to the doctors and got them to check her ears – skulking in at fifty-seven, worried about going deaf […]" (Wood 2015, 151). The fear of being trapped in a life she does not perceive as her own, induces Ada to push her mother away, first on an emotional level – talking to her as little as possible – and then on a physical one – moving out before her twenties never to return again, if not after her mother has already passed. Likewise, the fear of not having been a good parent leads Pearl to emotionally drift away from her daughter, enclosing herself in the stillness and silence of her days spent by the river while taking pictures of birds. Abandoned by her husband Frank while Ada was still a baby, Pearl settles in a place she too does not feel her own and where she too has always wished to remain as little as possible. The sentence "We won't be here long" that echoes Ada's desire to run away, was once a sentence that belonged to her mother as well; however, the distance between the two has buried this confession under the inches of snow that covers Pearl's house every winter.

This is why Pearl remains silent while Ada moves out; this is why Pearl remains silent even when "[s]he wanted to say something about how strange the frozen river made her feel – uneasy but also astonished at the colours the ice could make" (Wood 2015, 154). Pearl allows her thoughts and emotions to freeze like the river; but they eventually thaw out and come back to the surface when the river overflows and floods the house where Ada, Pepper and Pearl's spirit find themselves. Indeed, Wood writes:

> Water rushed over her [mother's] skin, turning it murky and thin. Ada could almost see the window through it.
> 'Tell me what birds you see', Ada said. Her legs were so cold.
> 'You don't want to hear about that'.
> 'I do', Ada said. 'I do'.
> 'Well', her mother said. 'There's a pied wigtail […]'. (Wood 2015, 264-265)

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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It is in such a moment of climax that mother and daughter open up to one another, annihilating the distance between them and destroying the barriers of time and space, life, and death. Ada wants to learn about her mother, about the sense of belonging she feels towards the river, about her passions for birds and photography; Ada wants to tell Pearl, that that bread she had baked, burned, and then thrown away, she had personally recovered from the rubbish and eaten it. In fact, in a flashback concerning Ada's teenage years readers witness the episode of Pearl's bread baking:

> […] The loaf was black and smoke curled out of it. A deep, dark split in the crust.
> 'You made bread', Ada said.
> And Pearl felt such a fool that she said, 'No, I didn't'. Took the thing out and threw it in the bin, where it smoked for hours. (Wood 2015, 156)

Yet, during the flood, the readers as well as mother and daughter discover:

> ['…] But the bread burned and I threw it in the bin'.
> Ada watched her closely. There was so much water dripping it was hard to keep her in focus. 'I ate it', she said. 'I took it out and I ate it. It was perfect in the middle.' She'd cut the burned crust off and the middle was soft and full of air.
> 'You ate it', her mother said. (Wood 2015, 264)

During this touching confession, the fury of the river invades the house and sweeps Pearl away. As in other cases in literature, water here has a strong metaphorical value. Its penetrating violence annihilates the ghosts and spirits of the past, washes away unsaid words, and breaks the chains that had enveloped the relationship between mother and daughter. The river – of which Pearl is now a part of, being that her ashes have been scattered there – pushes Ada away from the pains of the past, and clears Pearl from her sense of guilt. Now, Pearl can finally let herself go, let go of the rock she is clinging to in the attempt of making up for her errors of the past, and she can eventually flow alongside the river towards the sea: "and when it rained she

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

would be back at the beginning, where the river was a trickle in the middle of the moor. Conjuring itself drop by drop" (Wood 2015, 290).

Water has inspired various stories, theories, and beliefs throughout the ages, including – to mention but one example – those discussed by Greek philosopher Thales, who believed water to be the very seed of life since "the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and that water is the origin of the nature of moist things" (Reale 1987, 36). According to more recent philosophers, indeed the founding fathers of psychoanalysis Jung and Freud, water is a metaphor for many things, and in particular change and reincarnation, or a shift from life to death and vice versa (Arikan 2014, 213); and to quote MacLeod (2013): "[i]t is the final outlet of […] rivers that so many cultures entrust with the task of receiving and carrying away the dead. It is the dimension of memory lingering in the wet hearts of everyday objects" (40). Accordingly, the ancient Celts, whose mythology is a milestone in Cornwall, believed water and rivers to be the margins between the world of the living and the "other" world:

> The Celts saw fresh water as sacred, whether it ran in RIVERS and SPRINGS or was still in LAKES and WELLS. This appreciation for a vital part of the ecosystem is appropriate for people to whom NATURE was a source and residence of divinity. Water often appears as a dividing line between this world and the OTHERWORLD […]. (Monaghan 2004, 469)

The Otherworld addressed by Monaghan (2004) refers to an alternative reality, inhabited by spirts, deities and the departed. Yet, unlike Catholic paradise, the Otherworld is not separated from the "real" world. It is near it, and it can be accessed even by the living, although only fortuitously (370-371). Indeed, it is in a fortuitous manner that Pepper bumps into the spirit of Pearl that lies trapped into the waters of the river – waters that, according to Celt mythology, represent the edge between the world of the living and the world of the deceased. Being linked with water, the Otherworld is also a source of knowledge: an occult kind of knowledge limitedly accessible to humans or not accessible at all (O'Rahilly 1946, 318).

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Considering the meaning of life and death associated with water, the strength and the flowing of the river become a source of rebirth, and simultaneously acquire the role of a negative destructive force and the role of a positive regenerative one. The biblical tale of Noah and the Arch is a fitting example of water being contemporarily a catastrophe and a salvation. The regenerative value of water ensures a breaking point in almost every tale in which it appears: it signals the moment that breaks the normal flowing of time, setting a before and an after, and it is also the means through which characters are purified (Arikan 2014, 210; 213). With its destructive force, the river of *Weathering* annihilates the idea of safety generally linked with the house, whilst favouring the possibility of communication between mother and daughter: water does not only allow them to come closer, but it also purifies their relationship from the misunderstandings that have contributed to its deterioration. As O'Rahilly (1946) notes, the river leading to the Otherworld becomes a source of knowledge (138), thus providing the two women with a knowledge so strong as to delete the contrasts of a lifetime only in a few moments (Arikan 2014, 213). Indeed, water may be identified as a source of knowledge because of the "limitless memory" it possesses, being "at once the resting place of every forgotten event and the dwelling place of the dead" (MacLeod 2013, 47).

As a writer, Wood is not new to the use of water invading the space of the house and mining the idea of safety and protection it bears. In her debut work, the collection of short stories *Diving Belles*, readers find such an instance in her work "Notes from the House Spirits". The narrator of this story is a first-person plural "we" – the spirits inhabiting the house, whose job is to protect it and keep it safe – who relates its dream about a "sudden rush of water" (Wood 2013, 135) that completely submerges the house. However, while in *Weathering* the flood is true, and it truly invades the safe and almost 'sacred' environment of the house; in "Notes from the House Spirits", instead, the recurring flood-dream of the spirits signals their fear of failure: a flooded house is an unsafe house, therefore a proof of them failing in their role and

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

task. Therefore, in the novel the water washes away the tormenting ghosts of the past and favours rebirth and purification; in the short story, instead, a potential flood exemplifies the destruction of the house and the consequent death of the spirits who not only inhabit the house, but are themselves the house. The water that floods their dream acquires a negative value relatable to death and destruction, and it reflects the fear of inadequacy felt by the spirits. Thus, in this case, Wood uses the symbolism of water as a metaphor for the subconscious and a portrayal of the deep fears that tear the soul of the house spirits (Arikan 2014, 209). In the short story, the house itself speaks out and voices its own fear of being unfit, unsafe and meagre; and it does so by using surreal juxtapositions of the objects inside it, thus implying on the one side "the coincidence of different times and spaces – a feeling heightened by the spirits' own lack of chronological awareness" (March-Russell 2017, 62), while on the other side their fear of their memory being drowned by a watery submersion.

Home Sweet Home? A Comparison between the House in *Weathering* and the House in "Notes from the House Spirits"

Chronologically, Ada should be the joining link between the three generations. However, the true link is Pepper, the youngest of the three. Pepper is presented as a six years old girl who is clumsy (thus, constantly tripping over and hurting herself), incapable of making friends and relating with other people, and unable to focus and concentrate (thus, finding it hard to read and write). For these reasons, she is rejected and not made to feel welcome by her fellow classmates. Despite her oddness, Pepper is the first one to venture into the secrets of the house: she enters its rooms, scrutinises its objects, accepts its weirdness. She retrieves Pearl's old cameras and books on birds, and becomes interested in the same activities that had rooted her grandmother to that house. She ventures towards the river, tries to take a picture of some birds

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

as Pearl used to do, and she talks with a strange old lady she sees in the river and whose identity she ignores (Pepper has never personally met her grandmother).

Pepper is responsible for the shift from *Pearl's* house to *her own* house; she is responsible for the shift in appropriation from "[Pearl's] place. […] Her river, her trees, her birds", to *Pepper's* place, river, trees and birds. Refused by various schools because of her social and educational difficulties, Pepper finally develops a sense of belonging in her grandmother's town and begins attending school with enthusiasm. She even befriends a little boy called Petey, learns to write her name and draws a picture that, for the first time in her life, her teachers appreciate so much as to show it to everyone rather than putting it aside:

> One afternoon, they had to draw the house they lived in. Pepper bent over her paper and scratched with a thick pencil. Tried to capture the sprawling bits of the house, the bending trees, a glimpse of the river. Smoke winding up. She worked over break time. Dark, deep pencil lines and lots of crossing-out but she finally finished it. 'Well', the teacher said. She went to get another teacher to look. The picture was pinned up in the corridor for everyone else to see. (Wood 2015, 208)

When discussing the drawings children provide of their own houses, Bachelard states that its execution is linked to the happiness children associate to the house itself. In other words, if children see their house as a happy place, they will draw a welcoming and solidly structured house; if, instead, children view their house as an unhappy one, their drawing will portray the uncomfortable feeling they relate to the house (Bachelard 1994, 72). The fact that Pepper finally feels a sense of belonging towards her grandmother's house, pushes her to concentrate on a task as she had never managed to do before, thus drawing in such a detailed way that her teachers publicly reward her efforts. Through this young character, readers can grasp Bachelard's idea according to which a house is not an empty lifeless box (Bachelard, 1994: 47); indeed, a house is a physical state oozing with intimacy (Bachelard 1994, 72). Pepper's attachment towards an old, worn-out and damp house does not only weigh on the unfolding

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

of the story, but it also plays a key role in shaping the little girl's identity, proving how spatiality influences an individual's personal identity (Khademi-Vidra 2014, 109). Perceiving the house as *hers*, Pepper feels she belongs somewhere, and this pushes her to accept the school and social environment she has refused up to that moment. Through the intimate environment of the house, the little girl finds her place in space and this highlights the reciprocity that exists between house and universe, inside and outside, text and co-text, place and space (Whaley 2018, 26).

The concept of the house as an intimate space also appears in the short story "Notes from the House Spirits". The spirits Wood gives a voice to are not a feature of the house, they are the house itself, as made clear in the last lines of the story: "We, the house […]" (Wood 2013, 146). The life of the spirits is so intertwined with the house that they actually ask themselves who has come before, the house or themselves:

> Brick by brick by brick, more houses are being built somewhere nearby. When do we arrive in them [the houses]? We don't know. Were we already there and the house was built around us? We don't know. We don't exist without bricks and slate and glass, and bricks and slate and glass do not exist without us. There is no need to think about it any further, but sometimes we like to think about it a little bit. (Wood 2013, 141-142)

In the story, more explicitly than in the novel, the house stops being a mere setting and becomes a character and narrator itself. The house has its own spirit (or better, spirits) and it observes the dwellers that inhabit it throughout time. They know every corner of the house, which means that the house knows every corner of itself: the sweets on the floor and covered in dust, the layers of steam on the windows on which the inhabitants have written their names, etc. The house/spirits explicitly express their tastes concerning furniture and decorations: they state they no longer like to blue walls, and for this reason they begin to scrape it onto the carpet (Wood 2013, 131). By doing so, they protect the house, its appearance and existence, because

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

this is their life task: "An empty house is never silent for long and a house is never empty because we are here" (Wood 2013, 130). Although the spirits and the house can only speak through Lucy Wood's story, they constitute the very memory of the house.

"A Place in Space": Putting Down Roots and Developing a Sense of Belonging

A house is like the memory box of those who live in it. Her own house constantly reminds Pearl about her failed life and disappointed expectations, for she has been abandoned by her husband and rejected by her daughter. Despite this, Pearl never leaves the house and takes extra care in repairing its faults and damages. Its cracks, chinks and faults never induce Pearl to leave; on the contrary, she fixes its every problem as if by doing so she can amend the faults she sees in her own life and the wounds she has in her own soul. Ada, instead, looks at the house as a constant reminder of the emptiness of her mother's life: an emptiness she ardently desires to avoid. All she wants to do is put everything in place as soon as possible, and sell the house: as if by selling it she can rid herself of her memories and of all the memory the house embodies. Finally, for Pepper the house is *hers*, her place in space. Pearl's house becomes Pepper's home, or else a firm centre that allows her to integrate all her experience and gain an understanding of her own world (O'Connor 2017, 14). It is no longer an anonymous geographical space, but a place Pepper knows from top to bottom:

> She wasn't even scared of the house's noises any more: the creaks, the groans, the soft chunterings. […] She knew the best place to watch the road, the best places to hide, the best place to stand if she wanted to listen to conversations. She avoided, without even noticing, the rusty nail sticking out of the third step, and the sharp tile by the door in the kitchen. (Wood 2015, 224)

Her sense of belonging to the house is so strong that Pepper is capable of avoiding potentially dangerous nails or tiles without even realising she is doing it. The house shapes Pepper's

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

identity, and by the end of the novel she is no longer the clumsy little girl readers have met in the first pages. Wood in fact writes:

> She licked her front tooth, which was sharp and tender – she had just fallen over and banged it on the front step and there was a tiny chip in the corner. She was riddled with old injuries: at three, had crushed her thumb in a door; at four, had caught a glimpse of a bright bird and fallen out of a window, splintering her collarbone; at five, she'd grabbed a hot light bulb and seared a semicircle onto her palm. Now, at six, she had a chipped tooth […]. (Wood 2015, 24)

Therefore, if initially the house had caused her a chipped tooth, by the end of the book the house causes her no more pain or injuries. Pepper has learned to listen to the house and the geometry of its echo (Bachelard 1994, 60). Citing Yi-Fu Tuan (1979a, b), the space has become a place, shifting from an infinite abstract to delimited intimacy; the house has become a "space in place", therefore a centre of experience since:

> Place implies space, and each home is a place in space. Space is a property of the natural world, but it can be experienced. From the perspective of experience, place differs from space in terms of familiarity and time. A place requires human agency, is something that may take time to know, and a home especially so. (Sack 1997, 16)

A place is, in fact, the incarnation of human desires and aspirations, and it can be interpreted in relation to the experience and perspective of those who have provided that very place with meaning – thus, allowing it to shift from space to place (Tuan 1979b, 387).

Eventually, just like her mother had done in the past and her daughter in the present, even Ada manages to develop a sense of belonging towards the only place she would have never dreamt of. During the very moment she is about to definitely rid herself of the house and sell it, her feelings shift from "We won't be here long" to "I changed my mind" (Wood 2015, 261). Now everything in the house feels "comforting and familiar" (Wood 2015, 255). The way in which she looks at the house and the river is no longer blurred by the ghosts of the past:

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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> She had forgotten, or maybe never noticed, the sound the river made when it lapped at the shallow edges, how the drizzly mist clung to the surface like static on fabric. And all the shifting colours. She'd thought of it dull and monotonous, the same old river from one moment to the next. But it changed second by second: now a plunk of feathers tumbling down, now a plunk of wood, now the water riled up around a snapped sapling. (Wood 2015, 283)

In the final pages of the novel, readers learn how much Ada cherishes her new "old" life in that house that once belonged to her mother and is now hers and Pepper's. She enjoys taking her daughter to the river and taking pictures of a heron: the same heron Pearl had tried to take a picture of, before giving up after Ada had forsaken her. According to Celt tradition – from which Wood often takes inspiration (especially in *Diving Belles*), the heron:

> [is a] symbolic animal. Several BIRD species had specific symbolic value in Celtic tradition. One of these was the heron, which as a waterbird existed in several elements (air, land, water), thus becoming an emblem of OTHERWORLD power. […] (Monaghan 2004, 245)

As a symbol of the Otherworld, the heron readers meet at the end of the novel could actually be Pearl. She has abandoned herself to the flowing of the river, therefore she has purified herself and passed from the world of the living to the world of spirits: Pearl is no longer on the margins of two worlds, she is now pure spirt. She is now a large heron tinted with grey and purple, that cries:

> 'Frank', she said. 'Frank, Frank'.
> 'What did you say?', her mother asked.
> 'It's what the heron says', Pepper told her. (Wood 2015, 281)

"Frank" is the name of Ada's father, a man who had run away from home twenty years before, deserting a wife and a baby girl. It so results that neither Pepper nor her mother Ada have ever met Frank, since his fleeing is traced back to the time when Ada was still a baby. Yet, "Frank"

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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is the sound the heron makes according to Pepper. Although "she'd given up taking pictures of herons a long time ago" (Wood 2015, 126), Pearl had never lost hope of seeing Frank once again. Her desire to take a picture of a bird crying the name of her runaway husband reflects her desperate need to "capture" in a photograph someone who, instead, had escaped from her life. Indeed, such an attempt resurfaces in the words pronounced by Pepper when talking to her mother.

Conclusions

Taking into account the role of the heron and these final words, as well as the whole unfolding of the narrative, readers can eventually grasp the true meaning of *Weathering*: as time and water change the nature of rocks, likewise time and water have changed the relationship between three generations of women who, until then, had never truly met with one another. Indeed, such a meeting takes place on two types of margins, temporal and spatial. It occurs on the margins between life and death, with Pearl being stuck in the land of the living after her passing; and it also happens on the margins between land and water, and more specifically when the boundaries between the two worlds are broken and overthrown. As a matter of fact, Wood is not new to blurring the lines between apparently opposite realities, and her writing is thus described as the result of "interwav[ing] the folkloric with the mundane so that it becomes difficult to see where one leaves off the other" (March-Russell 2017, 58). Her whole writing, fiction and landscapes are indeed built upon the foundation of uncanny and mysterious liminality. Thus, it is within these liminal spaces and on the ruins of fallen borders that the processes of self-discovery and reunion unfold, allowing all characters to be free of the boundaries that had chained them up until then. It is indeed upon this new third space where the three women, in different ways, acquire their own sense of identity and belonging, and begin to actively embrace their lives and afterlife.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549025

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Out of Margins:
Exploring Post-humanity in *Klara and the Sun*

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Abstract

Seventeen years after *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro deals with another dystopian story whose protagonist is an android. An artificial intelligence endowed with both sensitivity and extraordinary ability to observe the world around her. Klara is meant to be a 'friend' for only those who can afford her. Playing the role of a friend, she can observe many aspects of people's behavior in particular concerning personal relationships. Like in the previous novels, Ishiguro uses an I-first person narration to deeply investigate human love capacity. The novel seems to ask some crucial questions: how willing are you to compromise for love? What are the limits of the human heart? How much are we all dependent on technology and also in interacting with each other? My aim is to answer these questions through a close, hermeneutic reading of the text also considering the context in the view of the studies on post-humanism.

Robots in disguise

Man has always had the temptation to break the bank that divides the inanimate from the universe of the living. Our species has always struggled to bring an alternative parent vocation to the surface with its hands and intellect. There are plenty of examples of these attempts to shape otherness: a piece of clay to model, a slab of marble to sculpt, a genetic line to select, or a computer to program. Being able to create a life is such a strong *leitmotif* that it can be traced in the cultures of all times. Precisely, this lies in the persistent fascination for robotics, that is the challenge of man creating man. The engine of this atavistic human ambition is what the ancient Greeks called *hubris*, or the arrogance to place oneself on the

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

same level as God by challenging the limits imposed on man and rebel against the established order. The motivations that guide this research are many: the desire to overcome death, the male dream to procreate without female inter-mediation, but also the fear of creating a double as a shadow or a reflected image of repressed fears and nightmares. The creative activity of man, therefore, presents itself in its double value of dream and nightmare. However, while the world of nature is perceived in a positive and legitimate way, even when it causes destruction and suffering to man, the fruit of human creation is always looked upon with distrust and fear. The creature, or the robot are totally delegitimized to an autonomous existence and almost all traditions revolve around the risk of rebellion and emancipation of the son of man who from obedient servant turns into an evil and dangerous entity. We find this narrative cliché, for example, in the myth of the minotaur, in the legend of the Golem, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and even in Collodi's *Pinocchio* (see Marchesini). The private and almost exclusive bond between the creator and the creature reveals the selfish need to maintain control over the creature and consequently the dark side of its creator. The creature is always represented in a problematic way, its entry into the human proscenium is accompanied by a series of questions about the risk of its contamination with human beings, a consequent rebellion against humanity, or the request for social recognition as a legal entity. Contemporary society feels a growing need to be assisted both in daily tasks and in adequate psychological support. All this in response to a condition of isolation that arises from the predominance of individualism. Hence androids can become perfect surrogate companions simulating social and affective behavior. In creating life-like robots, however, human beings paradoxically feel more comfortable to confide to them than to each other because a robot makes them feel less shy and insecure. As rightly observed by John Goff (2018, 8):

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

> The value of an android would vary according to what it was required to do (or, at a further level of development, required itself to do). […] However, if the android was required not only to adapt to the humans it serves but also to do so reflexively through some form of self-understanding, then the better it was able to adapt to varying circumstances, and the more autonomy it developed, not only would it become more valuable to its humans but also to itself. It would have a value given the uniqueness of its adaptations. Such an android would not only have initial but increasing value – this is not dissimilar to a very good servant such as a butler. However, the range of services that an android might perform for its humans would be wider than that of a butler since an android fuses in its uses the roles of instrument and of agent.

One wonders how humanlike a robot should behave emotionally in order to be accepted by humans without becoming too realistic and, as a result, threatening. Designing a too natural robot could lead to ambiguous situations and unpredictable consequences, namely towards the 'uncanny valley' (Mori 2005), a no-place out of control where unexpected things may occur.

AI's environmental awareness.

These and many other questions seem to underlie the eighth novel by Kazuo Ishiguro whose protagonist is a robot named Klara. However, Klara is not just as any robot but a perfectly anthropomorphic robot, highly performing, as the store manager says in a sales pitch, she has an: "appetite for observing and learning ... [and] has the most sophisticated understanding of any AF in this store" (Ishiguro 2021, 42). The story unfolds in a dystopian US town where robots like Klara are designed to serve humans in an absolutely unusual way. After *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro returns to science fiction as a pretext to talk even more to man about man. Ishiguro has accustomed his reading public to deal with various literary genres and transform them into something always new and unpredictable. If in the *Never Let Me Go* dystopia clones are designed to donate their organs to sick humans, in *Klara and the Sun* the robots have a no less disturbing function: they are creatures programmed to become the best friends of lonely children. Klara is an AF, that is to say an artificial friend. Through Klara's eyes, the narrative explores themes of machine intelligence, human frailty,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

and the ethical implications of creating sentient beings. Through the lens of Rosi Braidotti's *Metamorphoses* we can better understand how Ishiguro's novel grapples with the boundaries of the human and the posthuman. Braidotti's posthumanist framework moves beyond the humanist fixation on the autonomous subject and instead emphasizes the fluidity of identities, bodies, and subjectivities. This conceptual lens is particularly relevant when examining *Klara and the Sun*, as Klara occupies an ambiguous position between the human and the machine. Subjects are no longer seen as fixed, rational entities, but rather as fluid and interconnected with the nonhuman, animal, and technological worlds: "The model of the body proposed by the brand of philosophical nomadism I am defending is symbiotic interdependence. This points to the co-presence of different elements, from different stages of evolution: like inhabiting different time-zones simultaneously. The human organism is neither wholly human, nor just an organism. It is an abstract machine, which captures, transforms and produces interconnections (2002: 226)". Klara, an AI with a humanoid form, embodies this posthuman subjectivity. She blurs the line between human and machine, possessing not only intelligence but also a capacity for empathy and moral reasoning. Ishiguro deliberately leaves ambiguous the extent to which Klara can truly feel or understand human emotions, but her actions often suggest a deep engagement with the world of humans. Klara's keen observational skills and willingness to sacrifice herself for Josie's well-being challenge traditional notions of what it means to be human, as her behavior echoes Braidotti's notion of fluid identities that move beyond the purely human. Braidotti's idea of 'becoming' is also central to Klara's narrative arc. That is meant as the potential for individuals and societies to undergo transformative processes. Klara, throughout the novel, constantly becomes something else. She begins as an observer in the store window, gradually becoming Josie's companion, and ultimately tries to become a surrogate for Josie in her mother's desperate plan to transfer Josie's essence into Klara.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

Klara's transformation, however, remains within the boundaries of her artificial nature. Even though Josie's mother entertains the idea of using Klara as a vessel for Josie's identity, the novel explores the limits of this becoming. Klara's sense of self remains distinct and separate from the human experiences around her. Furthermore, Klara's relationship to the Sun introduces an interesting angle to Braidotti's notion of materialism and the vitality of nonhuman entities. Klara attributes great significance to the Sun, seeing it as a source of life and power, even praying to it in her own way to heal Josie. This connection between Klara and the Sun could be seen as part of a broader posthuman perspective, where technological life forms are still interconnected with natural forces and ecologies. In this view, Klara is not just an isolated machine but part of a larger network that includes the natural world.

Stephen Cave has also dealt with the AI in his work. Cave, in particular, identifies recurring tropes in AI stories, such as the idea of AI as a threat to humanity or AI as a tool for human salvation. Cave highlights the long-standing cultural fear that AI will surpass human intelligence and potentially harm humanity. This fear is notably absent from *Klara and the Sun*. Unlike many AI narratives where AI is depicted as a dangerous force that threatens human supremacy (such as in the case of HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* or Skynet in *The Terminator*), Klara is portrayed as a deeply benign and caring entity. Her motivations are entirely centered on helping Josie, even to the point of personal sacrifice. In this sense, Klara is a deliberate departure from the traditional narrative of AI as a potential antagonist. Ishiguro invites readers to consider a different narrative, one where AI is not necessarily a threat but a companion and helper, though still bound by its limitations. Another key narrative analyzed is the idea of AI as the 'perfect servant' — machines designed to fulfill human needs and desires: "The close association between artificial intelligence, power, and control is one such area of continuity, as are the desires for perfectly loyal, unerring servants, and for reliable information about the future (2020: 66)". Klara fits into this

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

archetype as she is created specifically to provide emotional and social support to children. However, Ishiguro complicates this narrative by questioning the ethical implications of creating sentient beings for the purpose of serving humans. Klara is undeniably intelligent, and while her emotional experiences may not be as rich or complex as those of humans, she nonetheless demonstrates a form of consciousness. This raises uncomfortable questions about her agency and the morality of using her as a tool to fill emotional gaps in human lives. Klara becomes a mirror for the human characters' anxieties about death, illness, and loneliness. Josie's mother, in particular, sees Klara as a possible solution to her fear of losing her daughter. The potential of transferring Josie's consciousness into Klara speaks to a deep-seated human desire for immortality, a theme that Cave traces through various AI narratives. However, Ishiguro complicates this desire by showing the limitations of such a solution. Klara, despite her intelligence, cannot fully replicate Josie's essence, suggesting that there are aspects of humanity — the soul, perhaps, or individual consciousness — that remain beyond the reach of AI. Ishiguro's novel also engages with another narrative discussed by Cave: the Promethean myth, which frames the creation of intelligent machines as a form of overreaching hubris. In *Klara and the Sun*, the act of creating AI, while not explicitly framed as hubristic, does raise ethical concerns. The idea that Klara might be used as a replacement for Josie hints at a discomfort with the notion of humans playing god, creating machines in their own image, and attempting to defy the natural order of life and death. Yet, unlike traditional Promethean narratives, where human hubris leads to disaster, *Klara and the Sun* offers a more nuanced exploration of the consequences of AI, suggesting that while AI can be helpful, it cannot fully replace the complexity of human relationships. As in previous novels, also in *Klara and the Sun* there is a first person narration (see Lodge). Yet, unlike the previous narrators, Klara does not start her story 'in the midst of things', but from the beginning, namely from the time she arrives at the shop. She feels the urge to

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

recollect her memories in order to take stock of her life which has come to a moment of dead end. Klara, however, recounts the events that she witnesses in a casual way, while they occur, slowly plunging us into a deeper perception and awareness of the reality around her. Klara embodies the topos of the different camouflaged as a human. As an android Klara does not have to comply with laws conferred on her by nature, but must only respond to the orders of her manufacturer. Yet, there is an emancipation of the robot that from a slave meant for industrial activity becomes a friendly partner who is able to create an attractive interface with its user. Klara is precisely the example of this emancipation. She is the one capable of surpassing man's performance, proving to be more reliable and precise. As a robot, Klara initially moves only in confined spaces, in the store where she is alternately placed in the window when she gets: " 'the special honor' of representing the store to the outside" (5), or in the back room and then at Josie's place, the little girl who has chosen her to be her personal AF, though: "[U]nlike most AFs, unlike Rosa, I'd always longed to see more of the outside - and see it in all detail" (6). Differently from human beings, Klara experiences the store and the house as 'striated spaces' while the town outside as 'the smooth space'. According to Deleuze and Guattari's spatial theory, indeed, there are basically two types of space, the smooth and the striated, the latter is characterized by "hierarchical ranking, identity, resemblance, truth, justice and negation, the rational founder of order, the power of logos, entrenched in a closed space, power which builds walls" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 363). This space is therefore called striated because "lines or trajectories tend to be subordinated to points: one goes from one point to another" (ibid. 478). On the other hand, the smooth space is generally associated with force "which arrives from outside to break constraints and open new vistas". Unlike "demodystopias" based on overpopulation (Domingo 2008, 725), the novel represents the main characters' house as isolated among endless prairies. Klara lives as a recluse in two very delimited spaces

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

organized according to very rigid rules. In the store she has to follow the directions of her manager, at Josie's those of the child's mother and of the strict Melania Housekeeper. The latter sees Klara with the evil eye, perhaps jealous of her presence or perhaps worried about Josie's illness, she is often gruff and unfriendly towards Klara. Klara scans the spaces, learns to move skillfully especially in the kitchen and to sit on the stool without losing balance. She also becomes keen on a soft cream couch beside the bedroom renamed 'the Button Couch' (53) from which she enjoys the last part of the Sun's journey. The sun plays a predominant part in the story as Klara is an eco-friendly robot, she is indeed solar powered and she looks at the sun as a sort of deity which is able to sort all things out. Though the sun is essential for her survival, Klara has to catch its rays staying in, but imaging the world outside. Her limited view allows her to visualize two opposite dimensions: the urban one (the striated) when she stands in the store window and the wilderness (the smooth one) outside Josie's house. The latter becomes particularly meaningful when Klara has got finally the chance to explore the world outside. What she sees is far from being comforting.

Her trip to the Morgan Falls turns to be strongly uncanny as it brings back sorrowful memories of Josie's dead sister, Sal. This place in which astonishment and terror mingles together metaphorically mirrors Josie's mother's state of mind. Nevertheless, Klara appears to perfectly integrate in the new environment and in her role of Josie's perfect companion until she decides to take an initiative out of the way. As a matter of fact: "In modernity, the android is the ideal of the worker made real. However, in use and practice, the android begins to develop a kind of particularity and a shift from a universal *gestalt*" (Goff 2018, 19, my emphasis), literally 'a shape'. According to the Gestalt foundations, indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of all parts meaning that our own behavior is the result of a complex organization that also guides our thought processes. In human standpoint:

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

> an android is a perfect human form and one that also functions perfectly (without fault). As an instrumentalization, an android is perfectly obedient. Ideally, androids are without fault, error or accident. However, this conception will meet its fate in the actuality of ongoing human-android interactions […]. Relations in which androids are most likely to be very far from perfect" (Goff 2018, 19).

Not having taken this latter aspect into account is what compromises Klara's relationship with humans and even with herself. As said above, Klara is very good at observing and also imitating people, Josie's mother asks her to imitate her daughter's pace twice. Yet, despite her skills, her knowledge of the world is limited and characterized by physical margins over which she cannot imagine or visualize anything else. Klara's horizon stops at a farmer's barn, Mr McBain's, where she believes the sun sets. Since she wants to do something to recover Josie's health, and as she sees the sun as a God, she plans to go across the grasslands surrounding Josie's house to make a plea for help, but surprisingly: "[…] the Sun was about to descend not into the place I was making such an effort to reach, but somewhere further away still" (161). Klara becomes aware the Sun must be angry with mankind:

> it was clear the Sun was unwilling to make any promise about Josie, because for all his kindness, he wasn't yet able to see Josie separately from the other humans, some of whom had angered him very much on account of their Pollution and inconsideration, and I suddenly felt foolish to have come to this place to make such a request" (165).

Klara, therefore, understands to have to give something in return if she wants to have her wish accomplished:

> 'I know how much the Sun dislikes Pollution. How much it saddens and angers you. Well, I've seen and identified the machine that creates it. Supposing I were able somehow to find this machine and destroy it. To put an end to its Pollution. Would you then consider, in return, giving your special help to Josie?' (inverted commas in the text, 166).

In making such a promise Klara shows not to fear the freedom to make a choice. Despite being programmed to be subaltern and non-subject, Klara wants to play an active role in her and other's lives symbolically moving herself from a marginalized to the central

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

position. Unlike human beings, who often seek to escape from freedom (see Fromm 1941–2013) because it can feel intoxicating and dizzying, freedom also entails the responsibility of making choices, which brings anxiety and anguish due to the inherent risks involved Klara does not feel the urgency of doing something as a threat, on the contrary, as the chance to play her part in the world. What she acts is 'freedom to' (positive freedom) characterized by authenticity and spontaneity both belonging to the process of child development so that: "positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality" (Fromm 2003, 257). Klara experiences her own emancipation from the authoritarian system which has created her through love. Similarly to the clones of *Never Let Me Go*, Klara is a selfless creature who can love immensely and even to sacrifice herself. This is her way to become an individual which perfectly epitomized in Fromm's famous statement "there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself" (261). Klara finally accomplishes her purpose by destroying the Cootings Machine, but the day after a new machine replaces the old one and Klara's good intentions fail. In doing so, she even loses an amount of her P.E.G-Nine solution, namely a part of her metal ability. Despite her sacrifice, pollution increases, but Josie eventually heals and her life continues happily.

Lifted *vs* unLifted

In the imaginary future hypothesized in the story, there is not only a margin which splits beings in two categories: humans and non-humans, but also another one creating an opposition between those human beings who have been 'lifted' and those who have not. Josie belongs to the first group of children who are genetically engineered for academic research. In the second group there is Rick who is Josie's neighbor and best friend. In such a programmed society those who are not lifted do not enjoy the same opportunities as others. The future looks even more predetermined and unjust than our present. The whole

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

society is rigidly controlled through scientific practices, via eugenics, of the human race. Those, like Rick, who have not received this treatment, are considered second-class citizens. The marginalization of non-lifted children becomes apparent when Josie has to host an "interaction meeting". Like the other 'lifted', Josie spends a very solitary life, mostly at home studying, she has not much time left to socialize, so the interaction meetings aim at making friends and sharing opinions among equals, as her mother Chrissie explains:

> 'This crowd happen to be your peer group. And when you get to college, you'll have to deal with all kinds. By the time *I* got to college, I'd had years of being alongside other kids each and every day. For you and your generation it's going to be pretty tough unless you put in some work now. The kids who don't do well in college are always the ones who didn't attend enough meetings' (italics and inverted commas in the text. 63).

Josie is however reluctant to host such a meeting unless her friend Rick also joins it. The meeting is attentively reported by Klara whose brain visualizes the party geometrically through a series of boxes. She deconstructs her view in many parts in order to understand each and to eventually gather them and obtain a single overall image. Her personal space perception and representation metaphorically makes the separation existing among these individuals more evident, Rick is the outsider:

> The Sun, noticing there were so many children in the one place, was pouring in his nourishment through the wide windows of the Open Plan. Its network of sofas, soft rectangles, low tables, plant pots, photograph books, had taken me a long time to master, yet now it had been so transformed it might have been a new room. There were young people everywhere and their bags, jackets, oblongs were all over the floor and surfaces. What was more, the room's space had become divided into twenty-four boxes - arranges in two towers - all the way to the rear wall. Because of this partitioning, it was hard to gain an overall view of what was before me, but I gradually made sense of things. Josie was near the middle of the room talking with three guest girls. Their heads were almost touching, and because of how they were standing, the upper parts of their faces, including all their eyes, had been placed in a box on the higher tier, while all their mouths and chins had been squeezed into a lower box. The majority of the children were on their feet, come moving between boxes. Over at the rear wall, three boys were seated on the modular sofa, and even though they were sitting apart, their heads had been placed together inside a single box, while the outstretched leg of the boy nearest the window extended not only across the neighboring box, but right into the one beyond. There was an unpleasant tint on the three

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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> boxes containing the boys on the sofa - a sickly yellow - and an anxiety passed through my mind. Then other people moved across my view of them, and I began to attend instead to the voices around me. […] (Rick), he now was by himself, not conversing with anyone (70-71).

The guests' attitude towards Rick is only apparently kind, they actually ask him intrusive questions and make impolite comments implying that he is not one of them. The same treatment is reserved to Klara. Like Rick she feels uncomfortable and disappointed by Josie who behaves differently towards them when she is together with her peers. Unlike Rick, the lifted children are upper class kids who can afford AFs and they take delight in showing off the latest models. Yet Klara refuses to show her skills in front of those troublesome kids revealing again her 'freedom to', her independent mind collides with the homologation of the children. Despite being an android, Klara is not an automaton. Although the 'lifted children' are meant to be superior, they are far from flawless. Josie's sister has already died, revealing their fragility, and they often fall ill more frequently than the 'unlifted' children.The experimentation has not worked as expected. Later on we learn that, according to the logic of the social hierarchy of this futuristic utopia, Klara is not only meant to be Josie's AF, but also to replace Josie in case of her death. This is the disturbing plan of the notorious Mr Capaldi, the creator of these genetic manipulations.

Conclusion

Time goes by, Josie recovers her strength and goes to college, suddenly Klara becomes obsolete and she is even perceived as a threat for the society. Mr Capaldi warns Klara of the atmosphere of suspicion that has arisen around the androids. At this point, the story focuses on a common fear. When faced with artificial intelligence, people feel a mixture of fascination and repulsion; the above mentioned 'uncanny valley' describes the anxiety that man feels in front of robots that are all too similar to humans. Basically, according to this theory, the more a robot looks and behaves like a human being, the more we are inclined to

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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empathize with him; until we reach a certain threshold beyond which the robot seems mysteriously too human and therefore disturbing. It is not entirely clear why this happens. It could be an evolutionary reaction, where our senses pick out characteristics in someone (or something) that raise the alarm (see Patel 2015). It could also be a knee-jerk response from our brains, trying to resolve the cognitive dissonance caused by seeing something that looks like a man but we know it isn't. The greatest fear is that robots, instead of remaining subservient to humans, might rebel and take control, causing humans to lose all power over them. Being faced with a robot that understands what we say, who responds to us naturally, smiles, takes offense and seems to feel emotions, it is, in short, a bit too much. At this point, a question inevitably arises: can robots feel emotions? The book suggests that, rather than fearing a possible robot revolt, we should be more concerned about a society so fragmented and isolated that we might one day rely on robots to keep our elderly relatives company or even take on the role of lovers. And that they could even become children's best friends or replace dogs or cats as pets. This can be scary, but in this case, man is the only culprit. This is a point of no return and Mr Capaldi is aware of that when he asks Klara:

> Do you believe in the human heart? I don't mean simply the organ, obviously. I'm speaking in the poetic sense. The human heart. Do you think there is such a thing? Something the makes each of us special and individual? And if we just suppose that there is. Then don't you think, in order to truly learn Josie, you'd have to learn not just her mannerisms but what's deeply inside her? Wouldn't you have to learn her heart? […] I considered this for a moment, then said: 'Of course, a human heart is bound to be complex. But it must be limited. Even if Mr Paul is talking in the poetic sense, *there'll be an end* to what there is to learn. Josie's heart may well resemble a strange house with rooms inside rooms. But if there were the best way to save Josie, then I'd do my utmost. And I believe there's a good chance I'd be able to succeed' (my italics, 218-219).

However, once Klara is moved to the area where old machines are stored where she can peacefully slow fade. Klara retires to a kind of open-air yard or junkyard for old robots. This place is described as a recovery yard where obsolete robots are discarded, no longer of use. Here, Klara reflects on her life and the role she played in Josie's life, accepting her fate with

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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a quiet dignity that aligns with her selfless and robotic nature. She also realizes that she couldn't have 'continued Josie': "to continue" – an echo of "to complete", one of the sugar-coated verbs which *Never Let Me Go* is peppered with (Whitehead 2011, 60) implying that any being is unique and irreplaceable, even an android. Klara might have invested too much in the humans, but she is not disappointed, she regrets nothing and she cares to say that: "The Sun was very kind to me. He was always kind to me from the start. But when I was with Josie, once, he was particularly kind" (307).

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549020

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Mena Mitrano, *La Critica Sconfinata. Introduzione al pensiero di Susan Sontag* (Quodlibet Studio, 2022)

Recensione di Francesco Di Perna
(Università degli Studi Roma Tre, IT)

La critica sconfinata riesce a racchiudere, sin dal titolo, un insieme di contenuti e pensieri che caratterizzano l'intero volume dedicato ad una delle più emblematiche pensatrici del pensiero critico statunitense ed europeo al contempo, quale è Susan Sontag.

Le parole-bussola che possano accompagnare e guidare il lettore alla scoperta del volume sono due, e sono le stesse che compongono il titolo. La critica è il concetto portante, la colonna che sorregge l'intero lavoro di Mena Mitrano, ma è anche la materia prima che costituisce il pensiero e la vita di Sontag. E il concetto di critica racchiude al suo interno i più importanti pensatori di riferimento del Novecento, come Adorno, Benjamin, ma ancora Cioran, Derrida, Foucault, Said. Sontag riesce a racchiuderli tutti, nessuno escluso, nell'elaborazione del suo personale pensiero critico. Lei, che nasce come filosofa, non si accontenterà mai della filosofia fine a se stessa. E tenta abilmente di incapsulare nella sua visione globale del pensiero tutte le sfumature che riesce a cogliere da ciascuno dei pensatori poc'anzi menzionati. Ma ci occuperemo più avanti di analizzare e cercare di tessere un fil rouge che illumini la strada al lettore de *La Critica Sconfinata*. La seconda parola costituente del titolo, un aggettivo in questo caso, è sconfinata. Si tratta della definizione in assoluto più adatta a descrivere l'attitudine del pensiero di Sontag. La sua critica è sconfinata, il suo pensiero è sconfinato, le sue riflessioni sono sconfinate. Il tutto inteso nel senso più letterale del termine: senza confini. Il pensare di Susan Sontag non ha confini dappoiché collega geograficamente gli Stati Uniti all'Europa, e non si tratta di un dato da ignorare o sottovalutare. Ancor'oggi, nel pensiero critico più generale, può essere

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549026

identificata la contrapposizione netta delle due aree geografiche in questione, che Sontag riesce a far combaciare in modo complementare nel suo pensiero. L'aggettivo di cui si parla, però, non è relegato esclusivamente ad un aspetto puramente geografico. La definizione professionale che si può attribuire a Sontag è, allo stesso modo, sconfinata. Sontag è una filosofa, ma è anche e soprattutto una pensatrice nel senso più ampio del termine. È appassionata di fotografia, di cinema, di arte, e il tutto riesce a confluire senza forzature nel suo pensiero, nel suo modo di pensare. Non esistono confini in questa modalità di leggere la realtà, come non ci sono confini al pensiero critico di Sontag.

È interessante iniziare ad esplorare questo lavoro partendo, in modo inusuale, dalle ultimissime parole dell'ultima sezione del libro, che descrivono Sontag come "figura centrale nella circolazione delle idee tra Stati Uniti e Europa dal dopoguerra a oggi." (140), e non potrebbe che esserci una conclusione e una risoluzione più esplicativa di questa, terminando la lettura. Una conclusione che si ripiega simmetricamente sull'incipit del lavoro, rendendo quest'ultimo un cerchio che torna su sé stesso in maniera naturale. Il passo conclusivo contiene la chiave che aprirà la porta al pensiero di Sontag. È un mondo che trasporta il lettore in un ambiente sconfinato, appunto, per richiamare il titolo-guida del volume. Non si può pensare a Sontag senza considerare l'importante contributo che concede all'unione di Stati Uniti e Europa come luoghi fluidi e connessi nei quali far circolare l'elaborazione dei suoi pensieri critici.

Il libro si apre sulla stessa premessa appena analizzata. Mitrano identifica sin dall'introduzione la centralità che acquisiscono le due aree geografiche nella costruzione del pensiero di Sontag. Si legge, a tal proposito, come "La modernizzazione è consistita in una reciproca apertura che si è realizzata attraverso uno spostamento di idee tra le due aree geografiche." (9) Premessa che rende questo lavoro che ci si appresta a scoprire un ciclo compiuto e completo. Un processo che si sviluppa totalmente tra queste pagine, e che offre senza dubbio un'introduzione al complesso pensiero di Sontag, ma anche e particolarmente un'analisi lineare e agevole del suo pensare.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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Per orientarsi all'interno di questo testo critico, il lettore ha certamente bisogno di elementi preliminari che possano illuminare il viaggio tra le diverse sezioni. A tal proposito, sono le pagine introduttive a calare chi legge nella dimensione critica del Novecento, nella quale Sontag naviga sconfinatamente. L'autrice afferma come "questo libro non vuole essere né un ritratto intimo né una biografia" (10). Si può interpretare invece, dal punto di vista del lettore, come un'esplorazione approfondita del pensiero di una figura di riferimento per la critica statunitense e europea al tempo stesso. A partire dalla formazione di Sontag come *critical thinker*, dalle basi attraverso cui è arrivata alla costruzione di un così complesso e completo pensiero, che non resta mai marginato ad un'unica area di indagine.

Le influenze dei pensatori del Novecento non tardano ad arrivare. Sontag si muove "tra tradizione e innovazione" (12), condivide l'obiettivo della sua ricerca con Derrida, che consiste ne "l'apertura del discorso sull'opera d'arte" (13), in cui i segni costituenti di ogni opera risultano svincolati e indipendenti "dal proprio contesto stabilito" (13). E quello con Derrida è solamente uno dei punti di contatto con pensatori critici che ci appresteremo a ripercorrere d'ora in avanti.

Il primo capitolo, intitolato *Pensare*, trasporta il lettore nel vivo e nel pieno dei lavori di Sontag. Il suo prediligere note e tipologie sconfinate di scrittura, che siano in grado di non vincolare e non intrappolare l'oggetto del pensiero in una forma, è alla base del suo approccio critico. Anche se, come scrive Mitrano, si avverte "una certa turbolenza nel passaggio dall'attività del pensiero a quella della scrittura" (20). Nascendo in principio come filosofa, non sempre Sontag riesce con trasparenza e spontaneità a trascrivere le sue sensazioni. Motivo che giustifica la scelta costante di "forme aperte" (19) di scrittura.

Nel corso di questo lavoro, come già affermato in precedenza, il concetto di critica sconfinata guida il lettore e si sviluppa in maniera crescente tra le pagine. Del resto, è una costante che regola la vita professionale di Sontag, che mira senza dubbio allo studio di "un pensiero alla continua ricerca di una forma" (25). E a tal riguardo, l'autrice scrive

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"Nella versione di Sontag la critica diventa un campo largo di discorsi disciplinari diversi […] che si uniscono, si fondono, e si modificano a vicenda dando luogo a un nuovo genere di discorso" (29). Non è possibile pensare ad una spiegazione più chiara ed esaustiva di questa, per afferrare al meglio il concetto di sconfinatezza della *critique* di Susan Sontag.

Nel secondo capitolo del lavoro, *Essere immagine: politica e cultura*, Mitrano indaga un aspetto di Sontag che si potrebbe definire sociale. Dalla crisi dell'intellettuale pubblico, che interessa il Novecento, alla politica, passando per il femminismo e la guerra in Vietnam, a cui Sontag dedica non pochi scritti. E il concetto che torna in questi aspetti, il loro filo conduttore rintracciabile dal lettore, è il silenzio. A partire dalla problematica legata al ruolo dell'intellettuale pubblico. "Gli anni della formazione di Sontag sono anche gli anni in cui viene messo in discussione il ruolo dell'intellettuale pubblico" (39), scrive Mitrano. Ma questa corrispondenza temporale darà luce, in Sontag, ad una "percezione di pensatrice *sui generis*" (39). E se l'intellettuale è il centro di questa problematica novecentesca, alle masse, alla folla, è affidato un ruolo di altrettanto rilievo, seppur passivo. "Le masse non pensano. Sono convocate per guardare, ascoltare, leggere o sentire" (41), ed è esattamente in questo aspetto che inizia a farsi strada il ruolo del silenzio. Le masse sono silenziose. L'arte stessa diventa silenziosa. A tal proposito, Sontag si trova a "reinventare la figura dell'intellettuale pubblico" (47). E per farlo si serve del pensiero di Edward Said, che nel corso dei suoi lavori difende apertamente il ruolo. Sarà però Julia Kristeva a influenzare e convincere maggiormente Sontag nella ricerca di una nuova figura di pensatore. Kristeva difende la volontà dell'intellettuale di staccarsi dalla massa, di distinguersi. Questa figura diventa, nella visione di Kristeva condivisa da Sontag, una "figura di un osservatore silenzioso" (49), ed ecco che torna il silenzio, filo conduttore di queste pagine.

Ampio spazio in questo capitolo è dedicato anche all'importanza che la guerra in Vietnam ha nella vita di Sontag. Non lascerà certamente inalterata la sua vita e la sua arte, anzi, rivoluzionerà e influirà sul suo pensiero. *Viaggio a Hanoi*, pubblicato nel 1968, è il

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549026

saggio in cui Sontag affronta questa tematica. E come scrive Mitrano, "diventa l'occasione per affrontare apertamente lo scollegamento tra pensiero e ideologia. Lo stile aforistico questa volta serve a sottolineare il disorientamento di fondo" (46). Ancora una volta è implicita ma evidente la presenza del silenzio. Il silenzio disorienta. E mettendosi nei panni di Sontag, che scrive su una guerra tanto rilevante nella storia mondiale, il silenzio è ciò che la accompagna. Il disorientamento è sempre accompagnato da silenzio, che sia esso concreto o interno alla mente dell'intellettuale.

Meritevole di particolare attenzione è anche il quinto capitolo, *Amatorialità e «theory»*, in cui Mena Mitrano riesce a districare e a illustrare gli aspetti che Sontag eredita da due tra i numerosissimi pensatori fondamentali nella sua formazione: Esposito e Benjamin. Il capitolo si apre con ciò che possa simboleggiare il concetto di *theory*. E ritorna, ancora una volta, l'importanza dello sconfinato flusso di idee e pensieri, che interessa Europa e Stati Uniti. Uno "spostamento che non è solo geografico ma anche concettuale" (105). Seconda metà costituente di questo capitolo è la fotografia, un altro pilastro nella vita e nello sviluppo del pensiero di Sontag che risulta, come già affermato, e come Mitrano illustra abilmente all'interno di queste pagine, un'equilibrata contaminazione di filosofia, cinema, fotografia, note, pensieri, politica, storia. La fotografia è indispensabile all'interno del processo costruttivo di Sontag. "Le immagini sono necessarie. Sono alleate della letteratura e dell'arte nel preservare la scena problematica, il groviglio dal quale per Sontag fluisce il vero pensiero" (123).

Come un perfetto ciclo circolare e compiuto, il lavoro termina così come è iniziato, con l'importanza di Susan Sontag come "figura centrale nella circolazione delle idee tra Stati Uniti e Europa dal dopoguerra a oggi" (140). L'autrice riesce a catturare il lettore con una scrittura d'effetto, che rende accessibile il complesso pensiero di Sontag. Questo lavoro riesce a ripercorrere, seppur brevemente, tutte le tappe della formazione del pensiero critico di Sontag. L'influenza dei maggiori pensatori del Novecento, l'importanza della filosofia, amore primordiale di Sontag, ma anche e soprattutto della fotografia, delle

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549026

immagini. Sono soprattutto le immagini inserite nel volume a concedere una spiegazione ancor più chiara e visibile delle parole di Mena Mitrano. Le immagini accompagnano le parole, così come per Sontag, anche per Mitrano. Contribuiscono a mantenere viva la curiosità del lettore, a concedere un supporto visivo alla scrittura, posto che l'indiscussa abilità dell'autrice nel rendere accessibile e avvincente la lettura non fosse sufficiente. *La Critica Sconfinata* merita, alla luce di una lettura approfondita, e grazie alla penna dell'autrice, un posto di riferimento per coloro i quali vogliano addentrarsi nella scoperta di una pensatrice dalle innumerevoli sfaccettature, in costante evoluzione, che rielabora e sovverte totalmente il ruolo di *critical thinker*.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549026

Nota bio-bibliografica

Francesco Di Perna è attualmente studente del corso di laurea magistrale in *Lingue e Letterature per la didattica e la traduzione,* presso l'Università degli Studi "Roma Tre". Si occupa di letteratura inglese, soggettività e Gender Studies. Nel 2021 ha conseguito la laurea triennale in *Lingue, Culture, Letterature, Traduzione* presso "Sapienza" Università di Roma, discutendo una tesi dal titolo *Judith Butler e Virginia Woolf: due prospettive di genere*. Ha pubblicato, nel primo numero di *Margins*, la recensione del volume *Maestre D'Amore, Giulietta, Ofelia, Desdemona e le altre*, di Nadia Fusini.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549026

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

James Moran, *Modernists and the Theatre: The Drama of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Methuen Drama, 2022)

Reviewed by Andrea Lupi
(Università di Pisa, IT)

Straddled between the long shadow exerted by the extremely prolific, late Victorian playwright G. B. Shaw and the emergence of experimental drama embodied by the younger generation of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and John Osborne – to quote only some of the dominant post-war voices in drama – modernist theatre is often unacknowledged, forgotten, and approached with prejudices in favour of the poetry and fiction produced around those same years. Nonetheless, as James Moran's latest monograph *Modernists and the Theatre: The Drama of W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* aims to show, theatrical production was far from being a marginal element in the literary background of the first decades of Twentieth Century Britain. Rather, as the rich array of examples and case studies provided in his book demonstrates, dramatical forms of expression should be seen as mutually constitutive of these modernist authors' products, not only affecting the creative processes that would lead to works such as *Ulysses* (1922) or *Between the Acts* (1941), but also equally informing these writers' critical views about culture, society, class, or even sexuality.

As the author states in the "Introduction", the choice to include the 'Big Six' of Modernism relates to their prominence in canonical overviews of the period as well as their ambivalent positions towards theatre, and specifically, certain theatrical forms they challenged and criticized. Their discriminating views are, however, to be rethought by shedding light on how theatricality is deeply immersed in the evolution of modernism as a whole and, more specifically, in the creative parables of the authors examined here. In

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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contrast with the unavailability of their dramatic attempts, often unfinished (see Lawrence, Woolf, and Joyce), unpublished (in the case of Yeats, Pound, Lawrence, and Woolf) or destroyed (as for Joyce), Moran's noteworthy efforts are directed at bringing into light material research that witness their personal involvement with theatre as actors and producers, and illuminating the complex, entangled networks of affiliations, relationships, and collaborations that saw them related to the stage world. Of particular value, for both theatre and modernist scholars, are the dualisms explored across the six chapters that make up the book: high/low forms of entertainment, elitism/popularity, aesthetics/politics and, within this latter, inclusive/exclusive politics. Charting the transformations of the dramatic scene across the years, Moran outlines the tension between coterie drama and large-scale forms of theatrical entertainment, oscillating between the potentialities offered by the West End scene and the intimacy of private performances evoking closet drama. Moving freely from the Noh-style drama pursued by Yeats and Pound to the sensation of failure stemming from the struggle to stage their works, in Joyce and Lawrence's case, and to the box-office success of Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), readers can grasp different attitudes towards the politics of culture and better understand the underlying the social implications at stake.

As far as the methodology employed is concerned, *Modernists and the Theatre* constitutes a primary form of geo-chronological mapping of the networks, performances, plays, actors, and directors at the heart of modernist theatre. It is therefore no coincidence that, besides the six preeminent figures mentioned in the subtitle, the author considers the legacy of J. M. Synge's works, the fascination towards actresses such as Eleonora Duse and Sarah Bernhardt, or even the transnational influences of Maurice Maeterlinck and Henrik Ibsen's innovative playwriting. Moran thus shifts between Britain, Ireland, and Europe, reviewing for instance the pioneering project of the Abbey Theatre, Woolf's connections with the theatre producer and women's rights advocate Edy Craig, or Lawrence's and Joyce's engagement with the Italian production of Ibsen's *Ghosts* by Ermete Zacconi. While revealing these associations and relying on memorable anecdotes – to name but one, Woolf's

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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participation in the Dreadnought Hoax in blackface and dressed as an Abyssinian prince – Moran creates a common thread, with Yeats at the indisputable centre, and tracks the trends and currents of drama by resorting to primary sources, including reviews, articles, performance histories, and the play scripts themselves. Although the author claims that his is merely "a small and tentative contribution to a far wider debate" (173), *Modernists and the Theatre* effectively introduces students, scholars, and readers to the issues at stake in the theatrical environment of the modernist age, including debates around politics and identity and the extent to which masses should access these forms of entertainment.

In the first chapter, "W. B. Yeats: Theatre and Shakespearean elitism", Moran navigates through various phases in the life of the Irish man of letters, from his first attempts at playwriting inspired by Shakespearean motifs through the turn towards Irish settings and themes, as witnessed by *The Countess Cathleen* (1892), to the London years and the enduring collaboration with the actress Florence Farr. What remains constant in Yeats's conception of drama through the decades, the author argues, is the model provided by Shakespeare of an artistic drama distant from the standards and the modalities typical of the commercial scene, which culminates in his fascination for Noh drama and his later works. The legacy of a Yeatsian understanding of the relationship between the dramatic text and its audience is made visible in chapter two, "Ezra Pound: Theatre and anti-Semitism", where is shown how "[u]nder Yeats's tutelage, then Pound developed an interest in forms of theatre that were associated with particular kinds of social privilege" (64), which especially emerges in his activity as a theatre reviewer. In Pound, Moran illustrates, Shakespearean intertextualities are equally constitutive of his views on drama and the public as his master's, as evident in his critique of J. B. Fagan's *The Merchant of Venice* and, especially, of Maurice Moscovitch's Yiddish-speaking Shylock, up to the point that quotations and allusions to the text would resurface in his eugenic, antisemitic remarks produced for his infamous Rome Radio broadcasts. Paralleling Pound and Lawrence in "D. H. Lawrence: Theatre and the working class", the following section explores Lawrence's engagement with drama across various

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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periods of his life and career – including his thespian interest in performing charades at Eastwood and his activity as director of school plays while working as a teacher – with a focus on his prolific activity as playwright. Inevitably influenced by Synge in *The Daughter-in-Law* (1913) and *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1914), it is shown how Lawrence transformed his dramatic aesthetics into a political gesture by employing a Nottinghamshire setting and the use of working-class dialect – an overtly distinct result of the socio-cultural demands theatre was requiring from authors, if compared to Yeats and Pound.

Chapter four, "James Joyce: Theatre and sexual-non conformity", builds on Lawrence and Joyce's shared fascination for the communal dimension of popular, commercial drama – despite their struggle to stage their plays – as well as their conception of the playhouse as "a site of relative inclusiveness, as both focused on how the sexually subversive might be expressed in and through the realm of the theatre" (107). Moran thus delves into Joyce's fiction, considering for instance the performative aspect involved in the subversion of gender and heteronormative sexuality in the 'Circe' episode of *Ulysses*, and his only published play, *Exiles* (1918), which involved a plot driven by the veiled erotic potential of a *ménage à trois*. Returning to the centrality of Yeats in "T. S. Eliot: Theatre and popularity", the author evokes a series of connections between the two poets, including Eliot's 1940 lectures in Dublin in tribute and praise of the Irishman's efforts in the creation of the Abbey Theatre. Shifting between his critical prose and his plays, including *The Rock* (1934), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and *The Family Reunion* (1939) among others, the chapter highlights how Eliot gradually moved away from Yeats and Pound's coterie theatre, positing conversely a form of verse drama that specifically aimed at a popular audience to which the moral hints in his plays were addressed, shaping a hallmark of commercial success that will peak with Andrew Lloyd Webber's West End musical *Cats*. The closing chapter, "Virginia Woolf: Theatre and gender equality" pursues the previously addressed issues of gender dynamics on stage, reflecting on Woolf's fascination towards female actresses and theatre producers, including Ellen Terry and Edy Craig, that will respectively inspire her only

ISSN: 2974-9549
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surviving play *Freshwater* (1935) and her last novel, *Between the Acts* (1941). Tracing her theatrical involvements as actress, director, supporter, and her shared passion with her sister Vanessa Bell and her niece Angelica, Moran craftily illustrates how Woolf conceived the small-scale stage and coterie entertainments as liberating for gender politics, in contrast with the institutional scene that would offer limited opportunities to women.

The six case studies proposed in *Modernists and the Theatre* raise a variety of questions and issues revolving around the theatrical scene of the Twentieth Century that, albeit common to the representative figures chosen here, demand distinct answers and approaches. Nonetheless, their reactions and contributions on different levels, from mere theatregoers to actors and playwrights, are paradoxically entangled and require acquaintance with the theatrical networks which they were involved in and, in some cases, brought them together. The value of James Moran's latest monograph hence lies in charting these networks, providing the reader with a clearer perspective of their relationship with the stage. What is more, the book compellingly expands the research horizons by considering the impact of these on their other achievements, including fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Concise yet clear, *Modernists and the Theatre* presents only a limited, chosen cluster of authors, works, and concepts, but effectively shows students and scholars the potentiality of a research field that has been overlooked but which holds great value for both modernists and theatre researchers.

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DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549027

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Bio-bibliographical note

Andrea Lupi is a PhD student of the doctoral programme in Linguistics and Foreign Literatures at the University of Pisa. His area of specialization is English Literature, and mostly Modernist literature, with a focus on T. S. Eliot. His research project, tentatively titled "'You must not deny the body': Corporeal Encounters in T. S. Eliot's Writings", examines Eliot's engagement with the body in his poetry and drama, understanding how it informs related issues such as illness and trauma, gender and sexuality, the relationship with the non-human, and phenomenology. His research interests also include the literature of the 1930s, spatial literary studies, and the phenomena of intertextuality and adaptation.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549027

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Kalyani Thakur Charal, *Poems of Chandalini*

(Birujatio Sahitya Sammilani, 2024)

Reviewed by Monami Nag

Bridging the barriers: Translating resistance, transforming social order

With time Wordsworth's definition of poetry being "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" reunites his readers more than ever before. Poetry is like an endless tradition that gives birth to subsequent patterns or canons which diversify into more such new patterns. One such pattern demanding undivided attention thereby making room for literary negotiations is Dalit Poetry. Dalit Poetry evasive and 'spontaneous' on one hand and as rebellious on the other is slowly paving its way to form a canon in future times. Since most of the poetry are a part of indigenous dalit poets, translation makes an important intereference in collaborating between two languages. The task of translation is an attempt of resistance on one hand and appropriation on the other as Dr Sukanta Chaudhury points out in his 'Translation and Understanding'. And Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, Principal of Alipur College, Kolkata has been deploying this craft with books like 'The Untouchable and Other Poems' where he translates the poems of Shyamal Kumar Pramanick with Arunima Chanda. Now he collaborates with Dr. Zinia Mitra to translate the poems of Kalyani Thakur Charal, a Bengali Dalit poet. The efforts come out as 'Poems of Chandalini', poems by a Bengali Dalit Womanist Kalyani Thakur Charal.

Dalit poetry has been making its presence felt with the rise of activism of Dalit Panthers, Chaturtha Duniya apart from the Telegu Dalit poets etc. Kalyani Thakur Charal has been a poet of prominence writing Dalit poems in Bengali. Sarangi himself has lauded the poet as 'fiery', 'magical'. He emphasizes that she herself wanted to be called as a womanist like her fellow poet Bama. On the other hand, Mitra believes that the poems

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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have written from her 'lived experiences'. She adds that the cover page of the book has the design of Indian saree white with red border which marks a sign of resistance to the dominant sections of the society calling for inclusion.

Translation is like adouble-edged sword which on one hand enhances the outreach of the langue and can also be a resistance to the target language. The poet herself has admitted that the translators have done a commendable job as it was not an easy task to translate her poems. The inclusion of certain words from the Motua dialect into Bengali scheduled to be translated into English posed challenges to the translators. But Kalyanidi expressed her heartfelt gratitude towards the honesty of the translators in bringing the spirit of the poems alive. She expressed her opinion in a webinar 'The Hearth Within' organized by the publisher Birujatio Sahitya Sammilani along with the translators Sarangi and Mitra.

As one takes a candid glance at the poems they appear in myriad forms. Notwithstanding the popular theme of social oppression coupled with the factor of caste as a major spade the poems are also about love, loss, humour all laid perfectly in the Dalit fabric. While reviewing it will be easier to deploy the different issues.

On Hypocrisy and Selfhood

Most of the regional Dalit poems are being translated by non-Dalits. Whether it is the autobiographies or the poems the question of selfhood sparks in the minds of the readers doubting the honesty of the portrayal of the state of the Dalit woman. While reading these poems severed selves of the poet resurfaces as a 'woman', 'dalit', and 'dalit woman'– who triumphs over whom?

In poem no. 1 she is vocal about this divide when she says: "Dalit sympathisers rise to / Exploit the Dalits". Or in poem no. 33 where she strips off the *bhadrolok* society: "My genteel colleagues enjoy / Using abusive terms--- / *Chamar* ,*Charal* and *dom*---daily!".

The underlying hypocrisy of the society to make negotiations with the existence of the Dalits show how even today the higher dominant class fails to accept the dalit women

ISSN: 2974-9549
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typically shedding herself from the torn and tattered clothes to become a fiercesome resistant speaker. Therefore in defining the cause of dalit woman feminism fails to address their cause. So Barbara Smith, as Anandita Pan in her book 'Mapping Dalit Feminism' points out, has expressed doubts whether existing theories can comprehend black women's writing whose needs go close by the Indian Dalits. The urge for a new birth and a fervent appeal for a new birth is clear in poem no. 32:

> I am looking for a crematorium friend
> Amongst dhuno and aguru perfume.
> ….or else I alone
> Will jump into the burning pyre arranged
> On my own.

This image of a Hindu woman poised as a symbol of sacrifice takes the readers to Sita of the celebrated epic Ramayana with a haunting question about the selfhood of Indian woman: who is Dalit? Is the Indian uppercaste woman trapped in a hallucinating maze of being an uppercaste?

On Love

The poet possesses a love-sick heart which yearns for a partner who can rise above all divides of caste, creed, religion and accept her with her trials and tribulations. This yearning seems to be timeless in poem no. 3: "Yet I leave behind this river, this / Sky is my ageless intimate evening". Here lies the magic of translation which enables the poet to go beyond her regional limits with such ace translators who can handle the nuances of translation: "তবুও আমি ছেড়ে যেতে চাই এই নদী, / এই আকাশ আমার কালাতীত ঘনিষ্ট সন্ধ্যা|".

Or in poem no. 8 where the poet has expressed her lonesome dream of love:

> All sorrows are bridled, many imaginative dream
> if she comes, she walks in love.
> The poet's heart bleeds for her beau for she reserves her wishes in poem no 23
> I'll flood you with sms and calls
> Between my sleepless nights and dreams
> Standing like a pendulum
> The life you gave me-my dearest man.

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This relentless quest for a partner resurfaces with a sense of loss and void in poem no. 44 where she uses the illusion of mirror image:

Looking like
An old lover is
Meeting his
Beloved after
A long time
In a new flair
Of mirror.

The lone struggles of the poet seemed to have taken a toll on her psyche. So, she takes a desperate fancy to return to her love-lorn past:

I was eighteen
[…]
We have spent an eternity together
Water flows incessant. (Poem no. 40)

Her ability to deal with the void for love renders a metaphysical aura: "I'm your night's bed" (poem no. 25). The final section will climactically handle the political negotiations including the factor of caste which looms large on her works of the poet.

On Caste and Politics

When you are a Dalit you are a caste in yourself. Says Arjun Dangle "Dalit is not a caste but a realization". India is a country steeped in ramifications of caste. The Chaturvarna system of Caste has placed the Shudras or Dalits at the last rung of the ladder. This surfaces with a double-edged meaning as the caste itself acts as the signifier of exploitation and exploited. In poem no. 5 – "Titphuti and Chadra are caught" – the readers encounter these names of fishes which represent lower caste. In a significant manner the poet represents the Dalits as Rahu in poem no. 14: "Rahu desired for a total eclipse / But he couldn't succeed, would be".

Rahu always fails to gulp down the moon during lunar eclipses. This is very similar to the Dalits who are ever hungry for food and suffer from diseases due to malnutrition. Again, we have the same resonance in poem no. 34: "We don't call the moon our home".

The exploitative cry reaches a climactic pitch in poem no. 33:

ISSN: 2974-9549
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Dalits are everywhere in the world
Not here!
[…]
Train us to say—
We are all equal, no caste stratification here.

Caste is big weapon for the ballot influencers. It takes up different colours for different causes. In poem no. 24 the voice of different colours surface:

Oh what a terrible game!
Lalgarh Lalgarh
[…]
Between the green and the red.

These political negotiations usurp and utilize the rights of the Dalits in heaping up their ballot boxes. Then there is displacement due to political deploys: "We've got Bonbibi / We have got Dakhinray" (poem no. 39).

These are deities who are worshipped to appease the wrath of the man-eaters of Sundarbans. Then comes the horrible plight of political and geographical barriers:

I am a Bashkaata Chitmohol girl
I live in this fractured Bengal border
[…]
I have no voting rights. (poem no. 45)

The collection comes to a closure as the poet gives a clarion call to all who are reeling under the clutches of dominance and exploitation: "Wake up black men and women! / Thousand –years-asleep-men and women / Wake up!" (Poem no. 53).

This translated work will turn out to be a milestone for the academia as it will leave room for further ruminations on subjects like caste, displacement, uppercaste dominance. Moreover, as the work has not been translated by the poet herself a sensible literary distance is maintained eliminating the possibility of any bias. Says Jhumpa Lahiri in her work *Translating Myself and Others*: "Self-translation means prolonging your relationship to the book you-have written. It affords a second act for a book, but in my opinion this second act pertains less to the translated version to the original…". So, this translated collection under the able aegis of Mitra and Sarangi will be treasured as a significant watermark adding immense value to the corpus of Indian poetry.

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DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549028

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549028

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Shahram Khosravi, *Io sono confine*

(Elèuthera, 2019)

Recensione di Maria Fiorella Suozzo
(Università degli Studi di Salerno, IT)

Pubblicato per la prima volta in inglese nel 2010 con il titolo *'Illegal' Traveller; An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*, *Io sono confine* esce in italiano nel 2019 nella limpida e scorrevole traduzione di Elena Cantoni per i tipi di Elèuthera, casa editrice impegnata fin dalla fondazione nella pubblicazione di "libri per una cultura libertaria", come riporta il loro sito web. Il volume si apre con una prefazione all'edizione italiana, in cui l'autore propone una riflessione sull'importanza del Mediterraneo in tema di confini: "fino a non molto tempo fa un canale, un passaggio, uno spazio di collegamento e mobilità [...]" che è stato tramutato oggi "in una zona di frontiera militarizzata e in un luogo di morte" (13). Questo scritto non vuole raccontare l'ennesimo calvario di un profugo, bensì proporre un'indagine politica e intellettuale allo scopo di storicizzare radicalmente l'odierno "regime delle frontiere" (12), per mettere in evidenza la natura tutta umana e politica dei confini oggi esistenti. Lo "sguardo illegale" (26) di Shahram Khosravi, professore di Antropologia sociale all'Università di Stoccolma, si offre come testimonianza di prima mano che accompagna il lettore in un viaggio, al tempo stesso personale e politico, dall'Iran degli anni '80 al Pakistan, attraverso i porosi confini dell'Afghanistan (44), poi da Karachi a New Delhi e infine dall'India verso l'Europa. Nel corso di questo viaggio, Khosravi sfrutta il potere narrativo della testimonianza per "raccontare le storie degli scarti della Storia, le storie degli sconfitti" (27): dall'esperienza del carcere alla vita sradicata del clandestino, dal processo di 'profughizzazione' (128) subìto nel campo svedese di Kiruna, 145 km a nord del circolo polare artico, alla condizione dell'esule che non riconosce più nessuna terra

ISSN: 2974-9549
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come patria.

Il libro, come dichiara il titolo inglese, appartiene al genere dell'auto-etnografia: non un'autobiografia, ma uno studio sul campo in cui l'identità del ricercatore non si dà come soggettività avulsa dal suo oggetto di studio, ma al contrario si mescola ad esso, collocando la propria esperienza di migrante clandestino, richiedente asilo e profugo nel più ampio contesto transnazionale e globale che l'ha determinata, in dialogo costante con i racconti dei suoi informatori e con la letteratura accademica oggi esistente. Lo stesso titolo introduce un altro tema caro all'autore, esplorato fin dall'introduzione: cos'è un migrante clandestino, se non un viaggiatore considerato 'non desiderabile' al di fuori dei confini del proprio paese? Così Khosravi dimostra che l'attuale politica dei confini alla base del moderno sistema degli Stati-nazione crea non solo un essere umano politicizzato, ossia il cittadino, ma anche "un sotto-prodotto, un 'residuo' politicamente non identificabile" (22): una vita di scarto, per dirla con Bauman, che reca finanche sul proprio corpo i segni del confine. Nella società contemporanea, il profugo rappresenta ciò che Giorgio Agamben ha definito *homo sacer* mutuando il termine dal diritto romano: un semplice corpo biologico spogliato di ogni diritto, una 'nuda vita' (*zoé*) sacrificabile che non può aspirare alla condizione di vita politica (*bios*) incarnata dal cittadino dello Stato-nazione. Il confine, tuttavia, si configura anche come spazio di opposizione e resistenza: tra superamento del confine ed esistenza dello stesso vige un rapporto di relazione reciproca, per cui è nello spazio liminale determinato dalla frontiera che si gettano i semi del suo attraversamento (fisico) e superamento (politico). La prospettiva con cui Khosravi guarda al concetto di margine sembra portare con sé un'eco degli scritti di Bell Hooks: il confine, oltre che sito di privazione, è il luogo della possibilità radicale, uno spazio di resistenza dove coltivare modi diversi di vedere il mondo e dove immaginare nuove alternative possibili (Hooks 1990, 149-150).

Gettate le fondamenta teoriche della sua narrazione, l'autore procede capitolo per capitolo alternando la storia delle proprie e altrui esperienze con costanti riferimenti a

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DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

concettualizzazioni teoriche e ricerche sul campo. Nel primo capitolo, *Una terra conosciuta*, la trattazione panoramica dell'Iran post-rivoluzionario, all'epoca in guerra con l'Iraq, offre lo spunto per riflettere sulla 'retorica del martirio' adottata dai media nazionali per spingere i giovani iraniani a imbracciare le armi. Andare al fronte costituiva, in quest'ottica, "una prova di mascolinità, un'ostentazione di virilità" (32), insomma un rito di passaggio maschile, e se cadere in battaglia era "il più dolce degli sciroppi" (30), sottrarsi a questo "destino desiderabile" era obiezione di coscienza, oltre a rappresentare un tradimento verso lo Stato. La famiglia di Khosravi, in quanto appartenente a una minoranza etnica tribale, quella dei bakhtiari, aveva già vissuto esperienze di vessazione sotto lo scià ed era altrettanto ostile al regime instauratosi dopo la rivoluzione islamica del '79: nessun familiare era quindi toccato dalla retorica del martirio, e anzi il giovane Shahram, appena terminati gli studi liceali, fu incoraggiato e finanziato dalla famiglia a intraprendere la strada della migrazione clandestina per sottrarsi alla chiamata alle armi. Per affrontare un viaggio del genere con la giusta preparazione, tuttavia, sarebbe stata necessaria una "cultura della migrazione" (38-39) che per gli iraniani non era un fatto comune prima del 1979: in mancanza di accesso alle informazioni necessarie per espatriare, senza reti di supporto e infrastrutture adeguate, finire in mano al trafficante sbagliato, uno che "consegnava i pesci piccoli alle autorità, lasciando invece passare quelli grossi" (41), era una possibilità molto concreta.

Il secondo capitolo, *Guardie e genti di frontiera*, si apre quindi col primo, fallimentare tentativo di fuga dell'autore, costretto a scontare un mese di detenzione nella regione del Belucistan, tagliata a metà dal confine tra Iran e Pakistan. L'esperienza del carcere offre a Khosravi una prospettiva diversa sul concetto di criminalizzazione, fulcro delle politiche internazionali che governano le migrazioni: "ridefinire un problema sociale come crimine, e bollarne le vittime come criminali, è una strategia politica per autorizzare interventi di forza su comportamenti che prima non erano considerati reato" (49). Si arriva così a definire una "necropolitica dei confini" (60): l'attuale regime di protezione delle frontiere,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

come quello che vige tra gli Stati Uniti e il Messico o tra l'Unione Europea e gli altri paesi del Mediterraneo, funziona non tanto decretando la morte di chi cerca di attraversarle, bensì esponendoli al rischio della morte, legittimando la possibilità che ci siano vittime. Questa strategia politica passa anche per il linguaggio, tant'è vero che il lessico migratorio è pieno di metafore animali che, implicitamente, denunciano la vulnerabilità dei migranti e la loro degradazione ontologica: in Messico i trafficanti e i loro clienti sono definiti rispettivamente *coyote* e *pollos,* mentre i mezzi che caricano i migranti sul confine sono *dog wagon* che 'danno la caccia' ai trasgressori; in Iran un uomo come Shrahram è detto *gosfand*, cioè pecora, oppure *dar poste gosfand*, 'persona camuffata da pecora' (58-59). Se il migrante non è un essere umano a tutti gli effetti, ma solo una 'nuda vita', il suo corpo reificato può essere sfruttato per ottenere soldi e favori, come nel caso dei trafficanti, ma può anche essere usato come pedaggio: così lo stupro al confine, prassi sistematica e consolidata in molti luoghi del mondo, non rappresenta una strategia punitiva, bensì una moneta di scambio per poter continuare il viaggio (79).

Nel terzo capitolo, *La comunità dispersa*, l'esperienza di trasferimento da Karachi a New Delhi e poi ancora dall'India alla Svezia offre all'autore la possibilità di riflettere sui meccanismi globali che regolano la vita dei migranti. Nel corso della sua vita a New Delhi, nel quartiere della Defence Colony, Khosravi stringe relazioni con migranti di diverse provenienze, tra cui una prostituta afghana di nome Hiva e un conterraneo bakhtiari, Fariborz. La vita sospesa di Hiva, in particolare, rappresenta per Khosravi la dimostrazione di come, anche oltreconfine, rimangano in vigore le discriminazioni razziali e di genere vigenti in patria: la donna viveva infatti una condizione di doppia emarginazione, non solo come profuga ma anche perché respinta dalla sua stessa comunità, che considerava la sua esistenza una vergogna e un'offesa personale (93). Tra le persone conosciute in India, chi aveva un parente o un conoscente in Europa, in Canada o negli Stati Uniti era da considerarsi un privilegiato, perché poteva contare su una rete sociale in grado di fornire supporto economico e contatti fondamentali per affrontare o proseguire il viaggio. Il ruolo

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

delle reti sociali è sempre stato di cruciale importanza nella storia delle migrazioni, perché i conoscenti all'estero sono in grado di fornire fondi e informazioni, riducendo al tempo stesso rischi e costi; l'ampliamento della rete e l'aumento delle migrazioni autoalimenta il ciclo, creando nel tempo una cosiddetta "catena migratoria" (96-97). Proprio la mancanza di questa rete sociale nell'Iran di Khosravi lo aveva esposto al rischio della deportazione, di una vita sospesa nelle carceri in attesa di una sentenza o della scarcerazione, e anche alla possibilità della morte.

Nei capitoli che seguono, infatti, apprendiamo in che misura la vita del richiedente asilo in un qualsiasi paese occidentale, anche dopo l'ottenimento dello status di rifugiato, resti regolata dalle medesime politiche di confine già affrontate durante il viaggio: il confine non è più visibile, ma diventa interiorizzato, e la "linea del colore" (Balibar) rimane un insieme di tratti distintivi che il migrante espone inevitabilmente attraverso il proprio corpo. Se, nel campo profughi di Kiruna, Khosravi fa esperienza del processo di vittimizzazione a cui sono sottoposti i richiedenti asilo – cui viene richiesto di "adeguare il proprio modo di vivere alle aspettative convenzionali" (130) e imparare a raccontare la storia della propria vita espungendo da essa ogni tratto di autodeterminazione ed enfatizzando invece la sottomissione più avanti – ormai integrato nella società svedese, l'autore subisce un tentativo di omicidio da parte di John Wolfgang Alexander Ausonius. L'Uomo laser (*Lasermannen*), così denominato perché sparava alle sue vittime usando un fucile con puntatore laser, colpì undici persone, perlopiù immigrati, tra l'agosto del 1991 e il gennaio del 1992, uccidendone una e ferendo gravemente tutte le altre. L'aggressione subìta, e in generale il trattamento riservato al richiedente asilo giunto nel paese di destinazione, rappresenta, secondo Khosravi, un buon esempio di 'ostipitalità' (Derrida). Nessuna delle esperienze passate, seppur terribili, era riuscita a privarlo del senso della dignità: ci sono riusciti il campo profughi, togliendogli la voglia di vivere, la forza di volontà e il coraggio, instillando in lui la necessità di recitare il "copione appreso" della vittima (128-129), e l'aggressione dell'Uomo laser, in seguito alla quale la sua storia è

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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diventata di dominio pubblico, argomento di dibattito e addirittura oggetto di libri di narrativa, documentari e di una serie TV. Quest'ultimo episodio ha comportato un annullamento della distinzione tra vita pubblica e vita privata cui ogni cittadino avrebbe diritto. Essere rifugiato, o esule, in un paese straniero comporta infatti un'ospitalità 'condizionata', che porta con sé una porzione di ostilità ineludibile: "la politica dell'ospitalità è dunque un esercizio di potere, in quanto rende manifesta la superiorità dell'ospitante sull'ospitato" (208-209). A questa situazione Khosravi oppone il diritto all'ospitalità in quanto abitanti della terra, un diritto cosmopolitico alla protezione e alla sicurezza la cui teorizzazione moderna risale al trattato sulla pace perpetua di Immanuel Kant (209).

A ben vedere ci sarebbe una terza possibilità di leggere questo libro, non solo come auto-etnografia dei confini e come letteratura testimoniale sulla condizione di migrante clandestino nel mondo globalizzato. Khosravi pone in epigrafe la sua dedica a due "antenati sconfitti", Walter Benjamin e Edward Said, creando in tal modo un ponte che si estende in molte direzioni, verso tutti gli antenati d'elezione che hanno condiviso le sue esperienze. A questo proposito viene da pensare alle riflessioni di Salman Rushdie che, facendo riferimento al proprio *background* storico, sociale e culturale di scrittore indiano in Inghilterra, rivendica, nel saggio evocativamente intitolato *Imaginary Homelands*, il diritto di attingere alle numerose tradizioni letterarie portate avanti da profughi, esuli, perseguitati e appartenenti alle minoranze del mondo, e dunque la propria appartenenza a un albero genealogico variopinto e poliglotta:

> Let me suggest that Indian writers in England have access to a second tradition, quite apart from their own racialhistory. It is the culture and political history of the phenomenon of migration, displacement, life in a minority group. We can quite legitimately claim as our ancestors the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews; the past to which we belong is an English past, the history of immigrant Britain. Swift, Conrad, Marx are as much our literary forebears as Tagore or Ram Mohan Roy. [...] it is perhaps one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant to be able to choose his parents. (Rushdie 1991, 20)

Proprio come Rushdie, anche Khosravi rivendica la scelta della propria parentela

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

intellettuale, dichiarando come propri antenati un ebreo denaturalizzato dal Terzo Reich (reso perciò *homo sacer*) e morto suicida dopo una vita in fuga, e il teorico dell'Orientalismo, lo studioso palestinese che ha reso distinguibile quel confine, pur invisibile, che ci separa dall'Altro. Il pensiero di Khosravi si affilia a molti altri pensatori, tra cui Hannah Arendt e Theodor Adorno, ma c'è almeno un terzo 'antenato' che ricorre nella narrazione in maniera preponderante: lo scrittore ebreo di lingua tedesca nato e vissuto a Praga, Franz Kafka che, "con le sue tre identità, incarna perfettamente questo *continuum* di esclusione in cui ogni cielo ha il medesimo colore: per i praghesi è non solo ebreo ma oltretutto di lingua tedesca, e per gli ebrei di lingua tedesca è comunque un ceco" (57). La sua narrativa del paradosso e dell'assurdo si dimostra lo strumento più adeguato a raccontare la condizione dei migranti al cospetto dei labirinti della burocrazia e dell'astrattezza dei trattati internazionali, un ingranaggio kafkiano che li fagocita dal momento in cui varcano il primo confine, quello del proprio paese, e all'interno del quale ogni strada possibile sembra diventare un vicolo cieco. Così il profugo illegale a Karachi avrebbe virtualmente la possibilità di accedere agli uffici dell'UNHCR, che pure si trova a poca distanza dall'albergo dove alloggia, ed è tuttavia "presente ma non accessibile" (72) come la porta chiusa davanti alla quale l'uomo del racconto *Davanti alla legge* si consuma, aspettando per tutta la vita. La perdita di controllo sulla propria storia personale, raccontata a tutti e manipolata a piacimento dai media, rievoca l'indistinzione tra pubblico e privato messa in scena ne *Il processo*, dove Josef K., che non conosce il motivo della sua condanna, è imputato in un'aula di tribunale adiacente alla sua stanza da letto (141-145). Ancora un altro racconto, *La tana*, capovolge l'idea di fuga da un nemico, in quanto la misteriosa creatura protagonista, scavando instancabilmente un tunnel sotterraneo inespugnabile, si accorge infine di aver creato una trappola senza uscita: similmente, si domanda Khosravi seguendo una riflessione di Agamben, com'è possibile considerare casa il sistema dello Stato-nazione, che più e più volte si è rivelato una trappola letale per le persone che lo abitano? (165).

In chiusura a *Imaginary Homelands*, Rushdie riporta un racconto di Saul Bellow in cui un

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
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cane, opponendosi alla limitatezza della propria esperienza canina, abbaia verso il cielo, implorando: "For God's sake, open the universe a little more!"; allo stesso modo, nelle pagine di Khosravi risuonano con forza le parole di incoraggiamento rivoltegli da un *dal lal* (trafficante) nel momento in cui, ancora clandestino e senza documenti in Pakistan, l'autore era tormentato dall'idea di rimanervi bloccato a vita: "Figliolo, nessuno può chiudere la portadel mondo!" (83).

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

Profilo bio-bibliografico

Maria Fiorella Suozzo frequenta il secondo anno del dottorato in Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Storici, curriculum letterario, presso l'Università di Salerno, con un progetto sulle testimonianze dei viaggiatori stranieri in visita a Paestum nel XVIII e XIX secolo.

Nel 2020 si è laureata in Letterature e Culture Comparate presso L'Orientale di Napoli con una tesi in Glottologia. Nel 2021 ha vissuto in Germania, a Friburgo, dove è stata assistente di lingua italiana e dal 2023 è docente di ruolo nella scuola secondaria di primo grado.

Ha curato la sinossi della serie TV *Downton Abbey* per *Downton Abbey: il fascino sfacciato dell'aristocrazia*, a cura di L. Esposito e A. Ruggiero, Milano, Mimesis, 2021. Nell'anno in corso saranno pubblicati due suoi saggi sull'adattamento televisivo di *The Handmaid's Tale*, uno introduttivo (parte di una monografia che uscirà per Mimesis) e uno incentrato sullarappresentazione audiovisiva delle ancelle come animali da reddito.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549029

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Francesco Benozzo, *Sciamanica: Poems from the Borders of the Worlds* (Forum, 2023)

Reviewed by Alan Wildeman
(University of Windsor, CA)

A new collection of poetry by Francesco Benozzo, the Italian Professor of philology, poet and musician, is a powerful body of work that stirs emotions and invokes humility. *Sciamanica*, which won the 2022-23 International Prize Poets From the Frontier, is a body of work that bears a stark relevance to today as it leads us on a journey through the natural geological and biological world that arose from primordial beginnings, and that existed and still exists on our planet, a world before Homo sapiens crystallized into their present form with a flawed sense of primacy. The poems strive to describe natural wonders in language that can frequently feel as if Benozzo's observations and phrases preceded the rules and norms of civilization. The title, an homage to shamanism, boldly invites a reader to travel with him through the natural world and become a participant in the tradition. The book adds to a large body of writing and music that Benozzo has produced (https://www.francescobenozzo.net), including his thought-provoking 2022 work on the origins of poetry itself during human evolution, *The Ridge and the Song: Sailing the Archipelago of Poetry*.

Written over a period of ten years, *Sciamanica* is comprised of seven major poems that took form following treks Benozzo made on several continents. Many were composed orally, adding to the feel that they are poems written before poetry as we know it existed. Translated from Italian to English by the Canadian poet and translator, Gray Sutherland, the book pulls all seven works together with a coherence created by the imageries of rocks, trees, birds, insects,

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549030

fish, water, air, space and more. And while it has the feel of an epic body of work written for the ages, it simultaneously is very much a collection for our times. It challenges us to rethink who we are on this third planet from the sun and confronts us with the boredoms and constraints and pressures that civilization presses upon us.

The first poem, *Oneiric Geological*, as its title promises, is a dreamlike depiction of bewilderment and amazement at natural structures. In describing mountains and shores and more, with the absence of human manipulations, Benozzo begins to take us on his walking journey. The language is rich and deep, with unexpected juxtapositions of images and words. In describing the Apennine mountains of Italy, he refers to them as "the longed-for sandstone headland" and "the gates of the flood and time". In the same way that what he describes evokes a mélange of imagery, the emotion of his words brings on a spectrum of feelings ranging from joyful awe to quiet melancholy. Benozzo himself captures a fragment of how he himself is being affected by what he sees with a beautiful passage: "in the eloquence of the cliffs I hear the humming of my blood beneath the skin".

In the second poem, *Ferns in Revolt* (who can't be curious about a poem with that title!), Benozzo takes a slightly darker turn, writing about observations that are more disconcerting. He realizes that not all is good and not everything unfolds with a happy ending. His lines project a frustration and a loneliness of being a poet in the modern world, constrained by norms. When he writes "the poet loves the lines that kill him" I hear references to the human trap of self-pity. Benozzo writes as if he struggles to be free of this, and indeed free of all entrapments. This poem is one that reveals more about Benozzo and more about humanity each time it is read.

Each poem in *Sciamanica* leaves the reader with lines that are like a sphere with a million facets. In the third poem, *The Castaway's Shack*, he positions himself on a shore, directly in the centre of the geological and biological world he is drawn to. There are challenges of survival

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549030

to be overcome and much to learn about the dynamics of change caused by natural events, be they tides or storms or more. Much of this turmoil he anchors with a passage that resonates deeply with anyone who is navigating potentially damaging events: "Nothing falls without first fading into something else, nothing vanishes just like that, not even thunder or lightning". The imagery of those words can readily be superimposed upon the trials and tribulations of life in our charged and fraught modern world.

In *Poem from the Edge of the World*, Benozzo retreats back to the oneiric sentiments of the first poem, but in doing so reminds us that everything is ephemeral: "all of you, without exception, are disappearing … for no reason, meaninglessly, or maybe without having really come to terms with the snowfall flights of moths and the static outlines of nothing". Benozzo's writing is either as bleak as you want it to be or as liberating as you want it to be. The final poem, *Poem of the Suicid*e, invites a rethinking of our transience. But at moments in it Benozzo does so with touches of wry humour. He opens it by saying "I'll kill myself to give body to my shadow", and later compares himself to a chestnut being damaged as he steps on it, creating a discordance that reminds him of his carefree nature and how death might be seen as "the exile of having come into the world". Yes these are weighty words, but they dance with a lightness that reminds one of the wonderful and playful notes that Benozzo the musician can draw from his harp.

Sciamanica is a book that deserves to stand whatever test of time can be thrown at it. It should be taught to students of writing. It has passages that should be read at births and at funerals and at every one of life's occasions where humans confront their limitations and seek meaning. For Benozzo, meaning is to be discovered in the natural world, and discovering it requires that we remove ourselves from the centre, where Homo sapiens like to congregate, and that we become observers. By removing ourselves from the centre, we can see more clearly the warrens within which we cloister ourselves and the misunderstandings we pursue.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549030

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
Rivista Multilingue
di Studi Letterari, Linguistici e Culturali

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549030

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Bio-bibliographical note

Alan Wildeman (PhD) is President Emeritus of the University of Windsor in Canada. His academic degrees in biology are from the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Guelph. His research career focused on molecular genetics and biotechnology, and in addition to Canada he has worked in research institutes in France and Germany. He has released two albums of original songs, *The Apologist* in 2016 and *Unsheltered* in 2020, both available on all major streaming outlets. The albums have been described as prairie surrealism.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549030

MARGINS MARGES MARGINI
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Pratica teatrale e video arte al tempo della pandemia
Intervista a Raffaele Di Florio[1]

Giuseppe Capalbo
(Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata, IT)

Il 4 maggio 2020, Lanre Bakare, sulle pagine del noto quotidiano britannico *The Guardian*, pubblica un articolo dal titolo: "'It's great if you are bored with Netflix': video art flourishes in lockdown". Riprendendo le riflessioni di Barbara London, Bakare evidenzia come, rispetto alla posizione periferica che occupava negli anni Settanta (London 2020, 6), la video arte sia diventata "the most essential and accessible art form" (Bakare 2020). Tale cambio di rotta sembra essere legato a doppio filo alla pandemia di COVID-19 del 2020 e alla necessità, nei mesi di *lockdown* in particolare, di accedere – da remoto – a una varietà di contenuti artistico-culturali. Mentre la fruizione di film e serie tv per mezzo delle piattaforme di streaming (e.g. Netflix) costituiva un fenomeno già affermato – e logorato – negli anni precedenti, la pratica teatrale e la video arte – interamente digitalizzate – rappresentano una novità appetibile per il pubblico, inquietante per gli addetti e le addette ai lavori: infatti, al riconoscimento del merito delle tecnologie informatiche di superare la temporanea chiusura dei teatri e degli spazi espositivi, si affianca il timore per l'utilizzo improprio del mezzo digitale e per l'eventuale cannibalizzazione della natura 'dal vivo' delle arti performative (Pizzo 2013, VII).

A partire da uno studio condotto da chi scrive sulla svolta virtuale nelle pratiche interconnesse di teatro e video arte, Raffaele Di Florio – figura di spicco del panorama

[1] La presente intervista, speculare a d uno studio – di prossima pubblicazione – sulla cosiddetta 'svolta virtuale' nel teatro e nella video arte, è stata realizzata il 6 settembre 2020.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549031

contemporaneo italiano, in quanto regista, scenografo, attore e video maker – risponde agli interrogativi sulla genesi, la categorizzazione, le modalità di creazione e distribuzione della *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi*, un'opera/video su Giordano Bruno,[2] in tre movimenti, realizzata dall'associazione AltroSguardo,[3] a seguito della vincita di un bando pubblicato dall'Assessorato della Cultura del Comune di Napoli, relativo alle attività culturali del 'Maggio dei Monumenti'.[4] Di Florio, muovendosi tra pratica teatrale e video arte, è ben conscio della "frattura epistemologica nel modo di pensare-fare teatro […] in cui certo giocano un ruolo non secondario le innovazioni tecnologiche" (De Marinis 213, 352): aperto alle sfide della contemporaneità e alla 'contaminazione digitale', non rinuncia a metterci in guardia dal passaggio *tout court* agli ambienti virtuali, sottolineando l'importanza di quella "relazione vitale" che si genera tra Attore e Spettatore nei luoghi 'fisici' in cui il Teatro e la video arte si sviluppano.

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G: Gentile Raffaele, innanzitutto la ringrazio per avermi concesso questa intervista.

R: La ringrazio io per l'interesse. Spero di essere esaustivo nelle risposte.

G: La prima domanda che vorrei porle riguarda la genesi della *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi*: come nasce questa produzione? Perché ha deciso, insieme a Antonello Cossia e Riccardo Veno, di scegliere Giordano Bruno come principale chiave attraverso cui leggere l'emergenza sanitaria da Covid-19?

[2] La *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi* è reperibile sulla pagina dedicata alle attività culturali del Comune di Napoli: https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1091388051240619 (ultima consultazione: 7 dicembre 2024).
[3] L'associazione culturale AltroSguardo è composta da Antonello Cossia, Raffaele Di Florio e Riccardo Veno.
[4] L'edizione 2020 è stata dedicata alla figura di Giordano Bruno, da qui il titolo *Giordano Bruno 20/20: la visione oltre le catastrofi*.

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549031
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R: La produzione della *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi* è nata in pieno periodo di lockdown. Con Cossia e Veno ho una lunga frequentazione artistica (per 15 anni, dal 1998 al 2012, abbiamo realizzato diversi lavori teatrali fondando la firma artistica *cossiadiflorioveno)* e, proprio durante il mese di aprile 2020, per ritornare a lavorare insieme, abbiamo deciso di partecipare al bando pubblicato dall'Assessorato della Cultura del Comune di Napoli, relativo alle attività culturali del 'Maggio 2020', il cui tema era legato alla figura di Giordano Bruno. Parlare del filosofo nolano, con la sua visione di un universo infinito e la sua concezione immanentistica, ci sembrava necessario proprio in quel periodo di grande preoccupazione, in cui tutto il nostro, di universo, sembrava limitato alle mura di casa e alla conta dei contagi.

G: In quale 'categoria' – e perché – collocherebbe la *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi*? Teatro virtuale oppure video arte?

R: Sicuramente il linguaggio adottato per la Trilogia entra nei canoni della video arte: una scelta pensata e voluta per cimentarci con una grammatica diversa dalla nostra pratica teatrale. L'idea nasce anche per proporre il progetto in diversi spazi espositivi e farlo vivere oltre la nostra presenza fisica.

G: Dai titoli di coda, apprendo che il video è stato realizzato da lei: suppongo che, alla formazione propria del regista e dello scenografo, sia stato necessario integrare competenze squisitamente informatiche. Come ha vissuto questo passaggio al digitale e quali strumenti ha adottato per l'editing?

R: Sono da sempre curioso dei nuovi linguaggi e quelli relativi al mondo digitale sono per me una calamita. Le mie conoscenze e l'uso dei programmi specifici restano nell'ambito della formazione base, ma cerco comunque di aggiornare la mia conoscenza. Per i tre

ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549031

capitoli ho usato tre diverse modalità di lavoro, o meglio, tre variabili cromatiche e ritmiche che potessero aderire al pensiero di Giordano Bruno. Ho fatto una ricerca su alcuni siti specifici di astrofisica e sono partito da alcune immagini riprese in 4k dai satelliti artificiali della NASA. Ho usato alcuni programmi di montaggio ed editing in tandem con Riccardo Veno, curatore dell'audio e della composizione musicale.

G: La *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi* è stata distribuita online, attraverso *Vimeo* e *Facebook* (con una pagina ad essa dedicata, oltre al canale dell'Assessorato alla Cultura e al Turismo del Comune di Napoli). I social diventano, quindi, un vero e proprio *performance space* (uno spazio in cui mettere in scena uno spettacolo)?

R: Il progetto è stato pensato per essere visto sui social e, quindi, le piattaforme più 'cliccate' erano il fine ultimo del nostro lavoro. Personalmente, pur essendo un frequentatore assiduo delle piattaforme web, non auspico un futuro del Teatro sui 'social': il Teatro si fa nei luoghi in cui Attori e Spettatori stabiliscono una 'relazione vitale', unica ed irripetibile, ma che può rinnovarsi in ogni replica.

G: Fra l'altro, pubblicare il video sui social implica, in un certo senso, la cessione gratuita della proprietà intellettuale: il video, che non è soggetto ad alcun pagamento, può essere salvato, riprodotto, nonché modificato, da chiunque. Cosa pensa a questo proposito?

R: *La Trilogia degli Infiniti Mondi* è stata commissionata dall'Assessorato della Cultura del Comune di Napoli, il quale ha pubblicato in maniera gratuita online sulle piattaforme che ha ritenuto opportune. Quando abbiamo accettato di aderire al bando sapevamo quali erano le condizioni e i fini. Poi, se vogliamo fare un ragionamento sull'uso e 'l'abuso' delle piattaforme digitali, dobbiamo aprire un capitolo a parte. Internet ed il mondo del web hanno creato delle vicinanze e delle velocità di documentazione che fino a qualche lustro

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passato sarebbe stato inimmaginabile. Sono assolutamente a favore dell'uso dei nuovi linguaggi e la contaminazione che può generare. Certamente, come ogni novità, ci sono lati positivi e lati oscuri, ma correrei il rischio di battere nuovi sentieri.

G: Il passaggio al virtuale comporta una nuova modalità di fruizione da parte del – e comunicazione con il – pubblico: penso, per esempio, alla condivisione del video sulle pagine delle singole persone e/o alla rete di commenti generata per manifestare la propria valutazione. Come ha influito questo aspetto su di lei e sull'associazione? Per esempio, è riuscito a determinare il grado di apprezzamento, da parte del pubblico, per la *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi*?

R: Spesso si fa un errore di valutazione: misurare il gradimento del proprio lavoro con il numero dei 'clik'. Questa è una trappola che spesso inganna la maggior parte degli utenti. Il nostro lavoro ne è un esempio. Infatti, verificando le visualizzazioni dei tre capitoli di cui è composto, si riscontra che il primo e il terzo mediamente hanno avuto 2350 visualizzazioni, invece per il secondo capitolo si sono raggiunti picchi di 8530 visualizzazioni, ma tale 'picco' di gradimento coincideva con i giorni in cui noi tre partecipavamo anche ad incontri online con molte realtà del mondo dello spettacolo dal vivo e, quindi, per curiosità o per coincidenza, il secondo video fu 'cliccato' in pochi secondi dalla sua pubblicazione da diverse decine di utenti che erano in contatto con la diretta web. Ripeto, il gradimento di un lavoro non si misura con il numero di visualizzazioni, ma dal numero di condivisioni; del resto lo stesso vale per il teatro: un lavoro teatrale è di successo quando c'è il 'tam-tam' tra il pubblico, il migliore amplificatore di pubblicità.

G: La *Trilogia degli infiniti mondi* nasce durante l'emergenza da Covid-19: com'è stato lavorare a questa produzione durante il *lockdown*? Come immagina le produzioni a venire alla luce delle attuali normative per gli eventi culturali? Potremmo anche fare riferimento al

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recentissimo lavoro che ha curato (regia, scene, luci), ovvero la tragedia lirica in due atti *Norma*, a Trapani: penso, in particolare, al foglio di sala caricato online, per evitare un'eventuale trasmissione del virus attraverso la distribuzione del materiale – durante l'evento – in formato cartaceo.

R: *La Trilogia degli infiniti mondi* è stata un'esperienza unica per me; per la prima volta ero costretto a lavorare a casa senza il contatto diretto, il confronto con i miei compagni di viaggio è stato però prolifico e 'divertente': programmavamo incontri e riunioni online nelle ore più impensabili (a volte anche alle 01.30 di notte). È stato un vero 'smart working' dell'artigianato creativo, senza il pericolo o la preoccupazione del distanziamento dettato dalle norme sanitarie. Per quanto riguarda la messinscena di *NORMA* di Vincenzo Bellini il processo creativo ha subito non poche variazioni anche durante le prove avvenute nel mese di agosto. Ho dovuto cambiare radicalmente il progetto scenografico presentato a dicembre 2019 per poter consentire ai protagonisti e al coro dell'opera di stare alle distanze consentite dalle normative sanitarie e conservare la mia idea di regia. Per ridurre il distanziamento 'obbligatorio' ho fatto uso di proiezioni video (gigantografie di ritratti dei protagonisti). La formula di pubblicare il materiale informativo solo in formato digitale e non online non credo che sia stata una scelta felice: il rapporto con il cartaceo funziona di più perché esso viene letto ed usato maggiormente durante la rappresentazione.

G: Un sentito grazie per la disponibilità e a presto, Raffaele!

R: Grazie a Lei.

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Note bio-bibliografiche

Raffaele Di Florio si è formato a Napoli presso l'Accademia di Belle Arti. Come scenografo ha elaborato spazi scenici per lavori firmati da Antonello Cossia, Nino D'Angelo, Carmine Della Volpe, Andrea De Rosa, Lisa Ferlazzo Natoli, Nello Mascia, Mario Martone, Antonella Monetti, Anna Redi, Riccardo Veno. È stato assistente di scena di Carmelo Bene. È stato fondatore dell'Associazione Culturale *Liberamente* e in qualità di attore, scenografo e regista ha firmato: *Il tredicesimo apostolo* (1995); *Io muoio, Orazio!* (1997); *La Discesa* (1998); *corposporco* (2002); *Sedimenti* (2006); *Malavitacontinua* (2007). Nei teatri d'Opera lirica ha collaborato con Giancarlo Corbelli, Costantin Costa Gravas, Hugo de Ana, Roberto De Simone, Jean Kalman, Graham Vick. Ha collaborato, in teatro, con artisti quali Lello Esposito e Mimmo Paladino. Ha partecipato, come protagonista, al film di Antonietta De Lillo *Il resto di niente* (2004), accanto a Maria de Medeiros.

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ISSN: 2974-9549
ISBN: 9791222317755
DOI: 10.7413/2974-9549031