ANGLICA

LITERATURE AND CULTURE IN CONTEXT

Edited by

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1. Putting God into words and mimetic tradition in the secular age

There is a widespread tendency, especially prevalent in English literature since the 19th century till the present times, to think of the novel in mimetic terms: as representing man, the world, history and society. The novel seems to be a particularly suitable medium to mirror the conditions of life, socio-cultural changes, impenetrable depths of the human mind and the intricacies of collective and individual memory. Its primary task and its greatest challenge lie in reflecting everything that is visible and observable, all that can be measured, tested or at least guessed by means of subtle instruments of psychological examination and analysis. The medium of the novel has been researched, stretched, revised and reshaped to serve that purpose which can be most naturally achieved through the realistic mode. The same mimetic goal is also inscribed into two literary tendencies predominant in the 20th century: modernism and postmodernism. Modernism, with its preoccupation with epistemological experience of mental reality, and postmodernism, with its quest for some kind of ontological principles on the perceivable surface of life, both contribute to generating narrative fiction which acts as a mirror, reflecting what human beings and their social structures reveal as well as what human consciousness hides.

Material realism, always subjugated to the rule of subjectivity and relativity, greatly contributed to the process of secularisation of the novel, and in consequence pushed God out of its range of interest and caused a detachment of imaginative writing from preoccupation with the Transcendent and the Sacred where, according to Eliade, things truly acquire their reality: “the sacred is equivalent to a power, and, in the last analysis, to reality” (1957: 12). T.S. Eliot deplores that process in his essay significantly entitled
“Religion and Literature”: “What I wish to affirm is that the whole of modern literature is corrupted by what I call Secularism, that it is simply unaware of, simply cannot understand the meaning of, the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life” (1935: 40). Eliot is deeply convinced that the value of literature cannot be determined solely by aesthetic criteria. Therefore, he postulates what looks like a marriage of imaginative accomplishment with literary merit and religious sense, claiming that “literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint” (31).

Graham Greene voices a similar opinion when in his essay on François Mauriac he bemoans the loss of religious sense in the novel and mentions in that context Virginia Woolf who seems to be a particularly suitable example for she may be regarded as one of the main exponents of the secular ideology of Modernism (1969: 91). Virginia Woolf takes the attitude of indifference or even hostility to religion when in a letter to her sister Vanessa Bell bitterly complains about the conversion of T.S. Eliot: “I have had a most shameful and distressing interview with poor dear Tom Eliot, who may be called dead to us all from this day forward. He has become an Anglo-Catholic, believes in God and immortality, and goes to church. I was really shocked. A corpse seem to me more credible than he is. I mean there is something obscene in a living person sitting by the fire and believing in God” (Nicholson – Trautmann 1977: 457–8).

Despite all the tendencies of secular modernity aiming at pushing God out of literary interests, the novel, nevertheless, demonstrates a persisting urge to free itself from the bonds of secularism. Accordingly, it leaves behind what might appear as its prime domain rooted in material and psychological realism and endeavours to reach out towards the metaphysical and transcendent. In doing so it comes closer to poetry, and relies more heavily on the poetic strategies of metaphor, symbol, myth or ambiguity, finding in them a proper means to incorporate the Sacred into its fabric, and to express the inexpressible Divine through its multifarious prose forms. In order to render the paradigms of the transcendent the novel also manoeuvres the narrative into the area of irony and paradox, for they both underlie the formula of life, where the human clashes with the Divine, the temporal coexists with the eternal, and the worldly intertwines with the spiritual. Thus the novel, originally powered by the mimetic impulse, gets involved in the dialogue between the secular and the holy. It becomes an important agent in the dialectic of the opposites as it attempts to do justice to the full scope of the world where, as Mircea Eliade notices, the Sacred, as a wholly valid mode of being, is contiguous with the profane.

Most of the time, however, with the exception of the so-called sacred texts, such as the narratives of the Bible, the realm of God has been traditionally reserved for poetry which, even in its narrative form, is more reflective in character and shows more intimate affiliation with the ineffable and the sublime. But the 20th century (and after) manifests a great impetus to blur otherwise recognised boundaries, and to do away with formal distinctions between genres. The tactics and territories of narrative prose often combine with poetry in an urge to render the unutterable. Not surprisingly, when the novel is dedicated to the task of rendering the Sacred, and at the same time dissatisfied with its proper means of expression, it enters into the province of poetry. Moreover, when among secular tendencies of the times it searches for God’s presence in the world of human affairs and listens to the reverberations of the Divine in the midst of worldly profane sounds, paradoxically, it becomes a peculiar sacred text for the ungodly present centuries.

The following discussion proposes to look closer at three examples of the 20th century English fiction in order to analyse the way how it tries to come to grips with the exceedingly difficult task of embedding God into imaginative narrative or, in other words, inscribing the Sacred into the body, i.e. form and content, of the novel. The three case studies of novels which will be taken under scrutiny are: G.K. Chesterton’s The Man Who Was Thursday (1908), Muriel Spark’s The Comforters (1957) and C.S. Lewis’s Till We Have Faces (1956). The order in which they are presented is not intended to be strictly chronological, but rather to reflect a certain direction, or shape, in the English literary history of the 20th century. Gilbert Keith Chesterton and Muriel Spark embody the opposite poles in twentieth-century English literature: the non-modern or, considering Chesterton’s hostility to modernism, even anti-modern tendency of the first decades of the century, on the one hand, and the post-modern, but rooted in and nourished by modernism, inclination of the second half of the century, on the other hand. Clive Staples Lewis, in turn, represents what may be regarded as ideologically neutral position of story-telling and adhering to the archetype of narrative as such, which falls back upon inexhaustible resources and potential of myth. The three novelists in question were all gifted with what might be described as a religious sense, and a religious dimension played an important role in their lives as all of them were converts: G.K. Chesterton and Muriel Spark to Roman Catholicism, and C.S. Lewis to Anglo-Catholicism.

2. Religious issues and rendition of the Sacred in the novel

At the beginning, it is necessary to make an important distinction: writing God into narrative texts of imaginative literature and writing what is
sometimes labelled as Catholic, or more broadly, Christian novel, are two
different things. Sometimes these concepts may overlap, but by no means
should be treated as homogenous or identical.

Graham Greene, for example, in some of his novels, unambiguously termed
as Catholic and classified under the category which may be provisionally
called 'religion in imaginative literature', addresses some of crucial issues of
Christian religion, especially Roman Catholicism, such as God's real
presence or the reality and active power of sacraments, as well as some
essential moral questions, such as sin, crime, lie, adultery and sacrilege. The
whisky priest in the Power and the Glory, in spite of all his mediocrity,
deficiency and despisable behaviour, is a dignified bearer and defender of
priesthood. Scobie, in The Heart of the Matter, in spite of the heavy weight
of his mortal sin of the sacrilegious communion and premeditated suicide
entailing eternal damnation, is still a faithful Christian loving God and man.

Though such novels bring the awareness of God into the art of fiction and
not directly concerned with issues of doctrine or morality, but it nevertheless
narrates the presence of the Divine, and represents sacred time and space in
the profane world which has fallen victim of impoverishing processes of
secularisation.

3. God in the distorting mirror of the grotesque

The novel which writes the sense of God into the narrative addressing
mysterium tremendum of the God Who Is the essence of all Being, and does it
without any overt framing of religious allegiance, is Chesterton's The Man
Who Was Thursday. Although it seems unlikely from a casual glance at its
plot, the novel was inspired by a strong autobiographical impulse. It is
noteworthy that Chesterton wrote The Man Who Was Thursday, subtitled
A Nightmare, as a reaction to a personal crisis which, in his own words, was
connected with all the maladies of modernity, involving different forms of
agnosticism, scepticism, nihilism and solipsism. It is also worth stressing that
the novel was written in keeping with Chesterton's strongest conviction that
literary art creates a miniature or a working model of the universe: “Art
means diminution. [...] Art exists solely in order to create a miniature
universe, a working model of the universe, a toy universe which we can play
with as a child plays with a toy theatre” (1953: 148). Chesterton's toy universe
of fiction reflects and intimates the universe where the existential drama of
the human and the Divine is taking place. The novelist as a maker of such
miniature universe presupposes the existence of a sacred space which is
invested with the presence of God, and accordingly he attempts to render it
by means of literary art. In The Man Who Was Thursday Chesterton ventures
to do precisely that which in his essay “The Middleman in Poetry” he sums up
as the essence of artistic creativity and the main function of literature:

The poet, like the priest, should bear the ancient title of the builder of the bridge.
His claim is exactly that he can really cross the chasm between the world of the
unspoken and seemingly unspeakable truths to the world of spoken words. His

In The Man Who Was Thursday such bridge is provided by a dream
convention used as a framing device. The novel, which professes to follow the
pattern of a nightmare, can be also read as an elaborate grotesque, and on
the imaginative plane it functions in the same way, similar to medieval
gargoyles, which magnify the ugliness and highlight the deformity of the
profane in order to point and lead to the invisible and the Sacred. The
subtitle of the novel captures the nightmarish ambience of the world at the
beginning of the 20th century, where nothing is what it seems or pretends to be; chaos and confusion define the nature of existence, and nowhere can one find clear and objective points of reference. The world portrayed lives in the shadow of some undefined but dangerous conspiracy that presents a serious threat to civilization as it intends to install the rule of anarchy and to abolish “all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery,” and eventually it means “[to abolish God]” (23). The mood and the setting of the novel provide a perfect description of what Eliade perceives as the profane, and which points to all those compartments of life space, where everything is meaningless because it is detached from the transcendent Sacred that contains all reality and houses all meaning.

That meaning, as the narrative gradually discloses, gets compressed into the character of Sunday, the President of the Central Anarchist Council and the chief officer of the Secret Police Service in one person, who, in the midst of general unknowing, is postulated as the only one to provide explanation. But at the same time, paradoxically, Sunday is also the greatest enigma and one of the most puzzling actors in the evolving dream, in whom converge all the opposites and contradictions which the novel presents. However, in keeping with the general character of nightmare, that convergence does not produce elucidation, but on the contrary, it increases mystification.

The plot of the novel mostly consists of a chase, running away and a number of surrealistic adventures of seven members of the Central Anarchist Council who, for reasons of security, are called by the names of the days of the week. In the end all the anarchists turn out to be detectives, under secret command of Sunday, the chief police officer. The entire narrative is underpinned by what Chesterton calls “the sacramental principle” (1953: 69) that underscores the spiritual significance of all visible reality, which not only represents the supernatural, but, more importantly, contains it in the same way as the sign of the sacrament contains the reality which it signifies. Such belief in the sacramental nature of being links The Man Who Was Thursday with Chesterton’s juvenile short story “A Picture of Tuesday,” a literary exercise of the budding writer who moves an ordinary experience of successive weekdays onto a transcendent plane, and proposes to look upon the seven days of the week as “the colossal epic of creation.”

The tendency started in the youthful work is continued in Chesterton’s mature fiction, and so the adventures of the conspirators/detectives become an epic of human quest for the meaning of everything, which in effect is the quest for the Sacred that contains all meaning. The Man Who Was Thursday through dream convention and with the instruments of the grotesque probes into the very heart of Being which includes the Divine. The novel portrays existence, where the Sacred and the profane lie side by side, or even overlap. It is not accidental that the most insightful detective, Syme, or the eponymous Thursday, who next to the enigmatic Sunday is the main character in the novel, is a poet. It is a suggestive hint about literary art which is closest to grasping and representing the sense of the transcendent in obscure and complicated paradigms of worldly affairs.

Even when the confused identities are finally revealed and most of the tangled threads of the plot get disentangled, still the question about meaning remains unresolved because at the heart of it lies the mystery of Sunday.

But above all these matters of detail which could be explained rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been up to? (151).

And so if the narrative, or the whole series of most fantastic and uncanny adventures, generate or imply any meaning, it becomes obvious that the meaning of everything is dependent upon the meaning of Sunday, just as the biblical consecutive days of Creation can be put in the proper perspective only when they are related to the seventh day of rest. The sense of the profound dependence of all meaning upon the meaning of Sunday is reflected in the conversation of the detectives going to a meeting with the enigmatic President:

‘This is more cheerful,’ said Dr Bull: ‘we are six men going to ask one man what he means.’ ‘I think it is a bit queerer than that,’ said Syme. ‘I think it is six men going to ask one man what they mean’ (153).

The question about meaning is intertwined in the plot of the novel and highlights the entire pursuit of Sunday. When the Secretary of the Anarchist Council spells it out, it resounds with existential overtones of the mankind’s perennial query seeking understanding of human plight spanned between the absurd and the holy.

We have come to know what all this means. Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are? Are you a half-witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you (154).

The farcical adventures reach their climax in the dancing masquerade in Sunday’s garden, where all common objects and living creatures reveal their true nature which is most intimately connected with their spiritual reality. So paradoxically, in the fancy dress ball the costume and disguise do not conceal, but rather expose and best express the true selves: “If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realized that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else” (176). The masquerade, however, does not
disclose the true character of Sunday, and it does not show his true face. What is more, in the nightmarish patterning of the novel Sunday is presented as if he were faceless, for it is his "broad back" (25) that is continually put in the foreground of the narrative. The first impression of Sunday which Syme gets when he goes to breakfast with the secret council of anarchists is a glimpse of Sunday's back:

As Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of man! When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone [...] His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. [...] He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish (55).

The philosophical and conceptual gloss to the artistic rendition of the character of Sunday can be found in Chesterton's book on a Victorian symbolist painter and sculptor, George Frederick Watts, where Chesterton speaks of the back as "the most awful and mysterious thing in the universe: [something that] touches the oldest nerve of awe," and he further alludes to "the dark scriptures of a nomad people" that describe Moses' encounter with "the immense Creator of all things" who shows his back to the prophet, but forbids to look at his face (see Chesterton 1904: 136–9). The heightened poetic sensitivity of Syme helps him to see the world in terms of a curious interplay of the back side of things hiding their true face.

'Listen to me,' cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. 'Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have known only the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front —' (170).

Sunday is always seen in semidarkness, "I am the man in the dark room" (155), and his appearance is difficult to describe because he is full of mutually contradictory characteristics:

[...] he was so fat and so light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but he could have danced against a sylph. [...] Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength in levity. It was like the old speculation — what would happen if an elephant could leap up in the sky like a grasshopper? (165).

The detectives' perception of Sunday is blurred to the effect that the inscrutable President is portrayed as having no particular features, as if the particular were removed to make room for something that transcends all specific distinctions:

Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to — the universe itself. [...] I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world (168).

There is something terrifying, but at the same time something likeable about Sunday, as one of the chasers puts it:

I can't help liking old Sunday. No, it's not admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There's a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, "Why leap ye, ye high hills?" The hills do leap — at least, they try to [...] Why do I like Sunday? [...] how can I tell you? [...] because he's such a bounder (165).

There is no clear one-to-one allegorical correspondence between Sunday and God. However, there are too many analogies and similarities between the sense of the Divine, especially arising from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the character of the enigmatic President of the Anarchists and chief Police Officer simultaneously, to be ignored, or even completely discarded. Sunday definitely possesses some of the divine attributes like omniscience and omnipotence. The power and the capital he holds make the detectives speak of "Sunday's universe" (125). He reads through Syme who, before the eyes of the President is "as if he were made of glass" (62). Similarly, in the presence of the President the six detectives feel "as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred eyes" (153). When Sunday takes the central seat at the fancy dress ball, the faces of the dancers change as if "heaven had opened behind his head" (178). Sometimes Sunday speaks with the playfulness of a jester and plays tricks on confounded detectives, as when he drops for them apparently silly and nonsensical messages. At other times the President adopts the solemnity of biblical diction: "who am I to quarrel with the wild fruits upon the Tree of Life?" (154). All that is perfectly consistent with the grotesque convention which intentionally deforms and mixes the preposterous with the sublime. And when eventually Sunday speaks out to answer all questions and doubts, he sounds like the Old Testament God from the Book of Job, condescending to explain to the innocent sufferer something that is beyond cognitive faculties of a human being, and at the same time joking good-heartedly about man's ignorance and limitations.
"What am I?" roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break. "You want to know what I am, do you? Ball you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the topmost cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophers. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now" (154–5).

Although Sunday is not an allegorical image of God, he implies Being in which God is present. And into the world of chaos, doubt and destructive pessimism, he brings joy and hope. He enacts the sacramental nature of existence saturated with a religious sense, where the commonplace is very close to the luminous, and where the profane is redeemed by the Sacred. The juxtaposition of the Sacred and the profane in the novel is reflected in the oxymoronic imagery which underlies its artistic design. Already at the beginning Syme is invited to a poorly looking "obscure public house" (19), where he is royally treated to lobster and champagne. Later he is shown into a room "the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light" (48).

The dream vision culminates in what seems to be the merging of the back with the face. The climax reinforces earlier biblical overtones, and it points to a warped connection between Sunday and the Deity, deformed by the mode of the grotesque:

the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger that the colossal mask of Merman, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?" (183).

When Syme wakes up, his mental state contradicts the usual after-effects of a nightmare. On the contrary, it approximates the radically different state of mystical elation.

Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality (184).

Thus Sunday, viewed from a vantage point of Syme’s "nightmare" becomes a literary grotesque approximation of God who speaks from the Bible, and whose baffling presence is continually felt in the world, and experienced in the life of the individual.

4. God in the authorial perspective constructing human narratives

The intimation of God’s presence in the narrative of human life as well as its literary portrayal figure out conspicuously in Muriel Spark’s first novel, *The Comforters* (1957). Like in the case of Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday*, a strong autobiographical impulse also lies behind *The Comforters*. It seems that in its theme and general artistic design the novel reflects and, in a sense, also accounts for two important biographical facts in Muriel Spark’s life. Firstly, it marks her debut as a novelist, in spite of an earlier reserve, and even distrust of the genre of the novel. It is remarkable that for quite a long time the novel was not Muriel Spark’s most esteemed genre. In an interview given to Philip Toynbee she speaks of the superiority of poetry as the "best way of saying things" (1971: 73–4). Spark retains that special feeling for poetry all throughout her life, and in effect she remains a poet in her novelistic art, admitting in her autobiography that “the novel as an art form [is] essentially a variation of a poem” (1992: 206). Secondly, the writing of *The Comforters* coincided with Spark’s conversion to Roman Catholicism; an important step she took, no less for introducing a religious dimension into personal life than in view of finding her proper identity as an artist. In a short autobiographical piece, published five years after her conversion, she explicitly acknowledges the profound link between her acceptance of the religious viewpoint and her writing fiction: “I think there is a connection between my writing and my conversion, but I don’t want to be too dogmatic about it. Certainly all my best work has come since then [...] I find I speak far more with my own voice as a Catholic and I think I could prove it with my stuff” (see Spark 1961: 58–63).

The religious sense, or in other words the awareness of the Sacred, is usually contiguous, if not always analogous, with the perception of God in the experienced reality and in the observable world. For Muriel Spark, even before her embracing Faith in the form of Roman Catholicism, such perception assumes the shape of a quest and desire for truth, as opposed to all kinds of distortion, falsity and illusion. Consequently Muriel Spark looks upon fiction as a path that leads to truth. Already at the beginning of her writing career she professes her interest in absolute truth and declares, accordingly, that lies in fiction can be used as a means of reaching truth.
extension of the truth” (see Kermode 1963: 61–82). Such views form her creed, and will remain one of the buttresses of her artistic activity as a fully-fledged novelist. Muriel Spark cogently stresses both her search for truth and her being a Catholic. Therefore it is consistent with her ideological stance that God, as the absolute repository of all values, including truth, cannot be left out of her fictitious world, but must be put into words and incorporated into the body of the novel.

The protagonist of The Comforters, Caroline Rose, bears a close resemblance to Muriel Spark herself. Like the author of the novel, Caroline is a young woman writer who is writing a book on twentieth-century literature, significantly entitled “Form in the Modern Novel”. She is also a recent Roman Catholic convert who has been suffering from a mild nervous disorder. While working on her book Caroline begins to hear strange and inexplicable sounds of a typewriter and gradually realises that another author is simultaneously typing the story of her own life. The entire plot of The Comforters is organised around that central dialectic between the human agent, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the transcendent presence of the mysterious typist who is relentlessly writing the script of the human writer’s life: “as if a writer on another plane of existence was writing a story about us” (63). Such dialectic gives rise to many tensions, so the whole array of emotional attitudes, ranging from anxiety to open revolt, is evoked in the narrative: they are not unlike those found in the Bible when a human being is confronted with the overpowering and puzzling presence of God.

Those emotions are lodged in the figure of the woman writer who has a double function in the novel: she lives her own ‘real’ life within the portrayed world of Sparkian fiction, and at the same time, she is a character written into somebody else’s script and, in consequence, is overwhelmed with “this fabulous idea of themselves and their friends being used as characters in a novel” (95). Observing her own life as it runs according to what looks like a premeditated design of the disturbing typing voice, Caroline never ceases to assert her own personal integrity and freedom for she does not want to be part of the mysterious typist’s scenario.

I refuse to have my thoughts and actions controlled by some unknown, possibly sinister being. I intend to subject him to reason. I happen to be a Christian. [...] I won’t be involved in this fictional plot if I can help it. In fact, I’d like to spoil it. If I had my way I’d hold up the action of the novel. [...] I intend to stand aside and see if the novel has any real form apart from this artificial plot. I happen to be a Christian (105).

It is worthwhile to note how many times in the relatively short passage Caroline refers to her being a Christian, as if the supposed rationality of belief were a safeguard against the incomprehensible and inscrutable transcendent that impinges upon the profane act of living one’s life or writing a book. It is also significant to see how many Catholics in Muriel Spark’s fictitious world do not possess the slightest religious sense: Georgina Hogg, “that [obnoxious] gargoyle” (156) may serve as an example.

In Muriel Spark’s novels it is usually difficult to number and clearly define a specific range of themes, which proves the richness and enormous potential of her novelistic art, and The Comforters well demonstrate that quality of Sparkian fiction. The Comforters have been often read as a self-reflexive novel about writing fiction. Its metafictional inclination has encouraged readers and critics to speculate about God-like position of the omniscient and omnipotent author with regard to the created world of text, and contemplate the freedom of fictitious character that may either contest or succumb to the authorial control. However, it may be also read as a novel which from the vantage point of postmodernism addresses a religious question of God and divine presence in people’s lives.

Furthermore The Comforters, as the novel both about writing a novel and about the disembodied typing voice which accompanies?/reflects/controls?/directs? the life of the main character, in a provocative way addresses one of the main issues of postmodernism, namely its refusal to accept something outside or beyond the text, and its rejection of any external referents to the string of words on page. If postmodernism eliminates the transcendent dimension from the realm of experience and, in consequence, from the domain of fiction, the mysterious typing voice in The Comforters forcefully challenges such assumption. Caroline is perfectly sane and lucid, yet she keeps hearing the disturbing sound of the typewriter and engages in a dialogue of internal strife with the mysterious writer who operates on “another plane of existence” (63).

Like Chesterton’s Sunday, the disembodied typing voice in Spark’s novel possesses divine attributes and God-like prerogatives, such as omniscience, or being simultaneously involved in and detached from human life. That is why Caroline’s attempts to oppose the alien script’s intrusion upon the course of events are futile and doomed to failure. Moreover the mysterious plotter seems to mock Caroline, so when she desperately tries to exert full control over her life and ignore the typist’s scenario, she falls victim of her own efforts to uphold her freedom and independence. Before the car crash, which later causes much of mental and physical pain: “being written into a novel was painful” (181), Caroline decides to go by train in order to outwit the phantom author in whose narrative she goes by car. However, eventually she acts according to the unsettling typescript, and chooses to go by car with her fiancé Laurence. Interestingly, the reason for her choice is her religious duty as a Catholic to attend a Mass on a holiday of obligation.
It was very well for Caroline to hold out what she wanted and what she didn't want in the way of a plot. All very well for her to resolve upon holding up the action. Easy enough for her to criticise, Laurence speeded up and touched seventy before they skidded and crashed (106).

The Comforters through the metafictional implications and by means of various artistic strategies, such as e.g. irony, convey a recognition of the interplay between different planes of being: in Eliade's terminology they would be called the profane and the Sacred; in the philosophical idiom – the material and metaphysical; in the language of religion – human and Divine. Similarly to The Man Who Was Thursday in Muriel Spark's novel things are not what they appear, or they represent more than catches the eye. Laurence's grandmother, Louisa Jepp, is not merely an elderly pensioner, but also a powerful leader of a gang of diamond robbers. Her guests and friends alike hide their true identities and occupations under misleading guises.

Mr Webster with his white hair, white moustache and dark nautical jacket is not easy to identify with his early-morning appearance – the tradesman in a sandy-brown overall who calls with the bread (18).

The double status of things, which often assumes the form of a discrepancy between reality and appearance, is introduced already in the title of the novel and is sustained in the narrative with a slight tinge of irony. The "comforters" evoke the biblical friends and well-wishers from the Book of Job who do everything but bring comfort. Undoubtedly the Book of Job had a great appeal for Muriel Spark, as demonstrated by The Only Problem (1984), the novel explicitly designed upon the paradigm of Job's predicament. The allusion to the Book of Job also has a deeper significance, for it points to Job's discourse with God, and his anxious endeavour to understand the unfathomable decrees of the Deity. And the Divine, as also suggested by the speeches of Chesterton's Sunday, can only be hinted at, but by no means can be contained within the closures of narrow realism and rigidity of human reasoning.

Chesterton resorts to surrealistic dream convention to present a larger concept of reality that would encompass God. Muriel Spark does a similar thing making use of various implications of metafiction and turning to the supernatural to demonstrate her scorn for "stark" realism which in her fiction often gets subjected to the process of artistic subversion. In a 1987 interview Spark rejects the popular idea of realism on the grounds that it does not mean 'the real'. When asked about the type of novels she writes, Spark answers: "It's certainly not realistic, you would never say that they were realistic novels, although I do try to get an accurate background. Realism has come to mean something rather stark, anyway it's a category of literature that doesn't really mean 'the real'" (Frankel 1987: 443–57). Hence most of her novels abound in unrealistic characters and supernatural events. For instance, Mrs Georgina Hogg keeps disappearing in an inexplicable way, be it from the back seat of Lady Manders's car or from her own room.

Muriel Spark conceives of reality as something richer and more complex than mere surface and façade of phenomena. Her conception of truth is similar in that it involves different planes of cognition and does not offer simple solutions. Therefore, in The Comforters the mysterious presence of the disembodied author and his role in Caroline's life remain an unresolved puzzle. Nevertheless the novel gets closer to absolute truth because it postulates a broader notion of truth, comprising more than that which is strictly verifiable. It seems that for Spark, at least in her early novels, truth lies somewhere in the region of the Sacred, and it can be approached only if intellectual faculties are accompanied by faith which presupposes the existence of God.

5. God revealed through myth as the archetypal narrative

The detectives in Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday desperately try to find out "what all this means" (154), and come across the enigma of Sunday. Caroline in The Comforters is intrigued by the disembodied author who is typing the script of her life, and gradually comes to accept the fact that the typing voice is not a delusion but belongs to "another plane of existence" (63), and manifests God-like attributes. The heroine of C.S. Lewis's novel defies the gods as she seeks understanding of the ways in which the Divine deals with the human.

C.S. Lewis's Till We Have Faces was rather underestimated by many of his critics, though it occupied a very special position for Lewis himself. Peter Schakel calls it Lewis's "fictional autobiography" because it "lived in the author's mind" since his undergraduate years, and in a sense Lewis "worked at it most of his life" (see Schakel 1984: 160). The novel is subtitled "A Myth Retold", for it represents a 20th century re-working of the ancient story of Cupid and Psyche, derived from Metamorphoses by a late Latin writer, Apuleius. At this point it should be emphasized that for Lewis, like for Chesterton, myth offers all that which Muriel Spark finds in the lies of fiction, i.e. the surest and most comprehensive way to grasp the truth about reality. Accordingly, he perceives myths as special kind of stories, anchored in absolute truth and ultimately pointing to the transcendent. Lewis sees in them "a real, though unfocused gleam of divine truth falling on human
imagination” (1947: 161), and therefore a foretaste of the Sacred which is positioned next to the profane.

What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always about something, but reality is that about which truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which becomes truths down here in the valley; in hac valle abstractionis (Lewis 1971: 42).

In his reworking of the ancient myth, however, Lewis introduces some very important alterations to the old story. First of all, in the foreground of his narrative, instead of Psyche, he puts her ugly and elder sister Orual, who is eventually made the Queen of Glome. Orual as a character in the story, or a figure in the myth, is given great depth and complexity. She is presented as an ugly woman capable of intense feeling, passionately dedicated to her sister, a loyal follower of her Greek teacher, the slave nicknamed Fox, and his perfect disciple whose intellectual abilities very soon equal those of her mentor. She is also a daring rebel against Ungit, the faceless goddess of the land and the embodiment of all the enigmas of the Divine and the supernatural. In *Till We Have Faces* Orual becomes the narrator not only of the story of Psyche, but also of her own difficult relationship with her younger sister, where adoring love mixes with egoism, and her readiness to sacrifice everything for the sake of Psyche goes hand in hand with destructive possessiveness and emotional tyranny.

Secondly, in Lewis’s retelling of the myth Orual, apart from being the protagonist and the focalizer of the story, is also significantly represented as the author of a book. The writing of the book underlies the entire narrative providing a conceptual foundation for the novel, and the book itself functions metonymically in the sense of literary art. Additionally, the closing paragraph hints at Orual’s book as a sacred text, which the High Priest of Glome consigns to a trustworthy traveller to be taken to Greece. Orual begins to write her book already as an old woman who has much achieved and experienced in life. She is by then free from the fear of the anger of gods and, therefore, her crucial motive for writing the book is to state her case against the gods, which she does boldly and openly: “The case against them should be written” (254).

Orual’s book is meant as an audacious complaint against the divine unfairness. She accuses the gods of depriving her of everything she cherished, and giving nothing instead, not even a small sign to guide her amidst confusion. She blames the gods for staying in darkness, talking to mortals only in riddles and refusing to give clear answers to their existential doubts and queries. There is a certain burning urgency in Orual’s determination to put her case in words and present it as a book of accusation and protest against the offensive silence and utter obscurity of the Divine. It becomes obvious that she cannot find peace until she has written her charge against the gods: “I was with book, as a woman is with child” (256). This simile constitutes one of the most significant symbolic figures organizing the discourse of the novel. Another is to be found at the end of the narrative, when Orual enters the world of visions where she is called before the judge on the supernatural plane, or what Caroline Rose, Muriel Spark’s *alter ego*, names “another plane of existence” (63), and there she is made to read her charge. But before she begins, she has been stripped of all her clothes and the veil she has been wearing for all her mature life has been torn off her face. So she stands there, before the divine authority, completely naked, holding only her written scroll: “No thread to cover me, no bowl in my hand to hold the water of death; only my book” (300). The last phrase: “only my book,” deserves special emphasis.

The book mostly concerns putting into words her case against the gods. Orual, however, does not lose from sight the reader and witness of her spelled out grievance, and so she pleads desperately: “And now, you who read, give judgement” (142), “You, who read my book, judge” (182). Furthermore she identifies the reader of her profound confession and her bold address to the gods as the Greek: “You, the Greek for whom I write” (228). Therefore the Greek becomes another significant metonymy in the novel. The target “Greek” corresponds to all the world of learning, philosophy, rationality; it represents the reliance on logic and universal laws, which can be studied, as well as natural causes, which can be explained. The Fox, Orual’s mentor and foster father, is Greek by origin and personifies the Greek dimension in Orual’s life.

But Orual is torn between two conflicting worlds. One world comprises the lucid, transparent and well ordered metaphorical Greeklands. It is there that the Fox nourishes her with knowledge, feeds her on words, teaches her how to make trim sentences and speaks of the lies of poets. The other world is her native kingdom of Glome, the land which comes under the reign of Ungit, the mysterious and powerful goddess without a face that embodies not only primitive belief, but also the supernatural dimension in human life which evades rational qualifications. It stands for all those secret layers which cannot be accommodated within the plain paradigm of natural, verifiable and quantifiable phenomena. And so Orual struggles on the boundary of the two adjacent but at the same time interlocking realms: the transparent profane of the Greek, and the opaque Sacred of Glome.

When she writes her book Orual wants to be honest: “in this book I must hide none of my shames and follies” (189). Consequently, she reveals in writing things which she hides even from her closest friends. For example, she...
records in her book what she withholds from Bardia, her faithful servant who leads and accompanies her to the Tree, where Psyche was tied up and left as the Great Offering, namely that she actually got some glimpses of Psyche’s invisible palace, in other words that she got some inklings of the truth Psyche was telling. Without doubt Orual is to some extent honest in her narrative. But her scope of vision and her scope of knowledge, also self-knowledge, are limited, and while she wants to be absolutely sincere in her writing, she cannot be completely truthful because she does not see the whole truth, both about the world in which she lives and about herself.

However, the very process of writing begins to work a change in Orual: it opens up her eyes and broadens her understanding. Neither the Fox, with his logic, rationality and Greek learning, nor Bardia, with his crude belief in Ungit and unconditioned acceptance of the obscure realm of the gods of Glome, can assist her in the attainment of understanding; Orual is aware that “[w]hat began the change was the very writing itself” (263). So writing itself, generating the book, mediates between the two worlds which are difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to reconcile. But, Orual soon realises that the change, which the writing of the book has triggered off, is only the beginning of a much profounder and more fundamental process. She sees it in terms of a preparation for “the gods’ surgery” (263). Through her book Orual becomes like Psyche, when the latter was tied to the Tree of the Great Offering and entered into the strange intercourse with her lower-god: “And now those divine Surgeons had me tied down and were at work” (276). “They used my own pen to probe my wound” (263).

The divine “surgery” of which Orual speaks is reflected in the structure of the novel that consists of two parts of strikingly unequal length. The first part being much longer than the second represents what Orual intends to be her entire book of complaint against the gods. Significantly, it ends on the note of contemptuous resignation when Orual utters what seems to be a rhetorical question: “they have no answer?” (259). However, Orual is pressed to add a kind of postscript to her book, which she does in the second part, where she continues the motif of the gods’ answer. The appendix is different not only in length, but also in character. The border line between evanescent vision and stark reality gets blurred, and Orual frequently “sinks” into deep thought (284) or “walks” into visions (294): “I walked into the vision with my bodily eyes wide open” (296). In the postscript to her book she cannot easily tell waking life from a dream; neither can she say with any certainty which is more revealing. Nevertheless she already knows that “things that are shown only to one may be spears and waterspouts of truth from the very depth of truth” (288–9).

Orual’s visions do more than all the sacred stories she has heard. They show things before which the Fox’s erudite eloquence appears only as a mere “prattle of maxims” (306). When Orual, holding her book, confronts the judge and reads her complaint, the convergence of the author with the reader takes place. At the end Orual hears the question: “Are you answered?” to which she responds in the unswerving affirmative “Yes” (304). Subsequently, the last section of the postscript opens with Orual’s clarification: “The complaint was the answer” (305). In the postscript Orual’s thirst for understanding is satisfied. She gets nearer not only to the ultimate closing of her book, which corresponds with her approaching death, but also to grasping truth and reality which she has been seeking all her life. She finishes her book at the moment when she is dying, and her final words represent an epiphany that communicates the fullness of being and the finding of the Divine:

I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words. Long did I hate you, long did I fear you. I might (320).

In the closing sentence of her book Orual, at once the author and the reader, no longer speaks of “the gods,” but changes her idiom and refers to “Lord”, a term much more personal and evocative of Judeo-Christian connotations. In the epiphany experienced in the process of writing, Orual not only regains her true naked face, but above all sees another face: the face of the god of the mountain whose Psyche found much earlier. The dash which winds up Orual’s book represents the silence where all meaning gets compressed. It is the silence which conceals Orual’s encounter with the Divine that cannot be easily accommodated in the domain of words, nevertheless can be approached through the medium of the book which epitomises literary narrative art.

The characters from G.K. Chesterton’s, Muriel Spark’s and C.S. Lewis’s novels have much in common: Syne is a poet, Caroline Rose is a novel writer, Orual is the author of the autobiography spelling out human complaint against the gods. All the three of them grope for meaning and seek understanding. In the course of that process they have to come to grips with the transcendent and as the result get some glimpses of the Divine. The ending of Till We Have Faces, where Orual’s writing gets cut in the middle of a sentence, is representative of the artistic design of The Man Who Was Thursday and The Comforters. None of them cannot be rounded off with an elucidating phrase closed by a full stop because they are like an open bridge that takes the author and the reader to the Sacred space inhabited by the Divine that sustains all the profane spaces of human life.
NOTES

1 When David Lodge, giving a diagnosis of the state of the English novel, envisages the novel at the "crossroads," thus suggesting a potential of different courses which its development may take, in reality he only confirms the general view that English fiction is heavily inclined to material and psychological realism (Lodge 1971).

2 See Mircea Eliade (1957: 14–15): "The reader will very soon realize that sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of history. These modes of being in the world are not of concern only to the history of religions or to sociology; they are not the object only of historical, sociological, or ethnological study. In the last analysis, the sacred and profane modes of being depend upon the different positions that man has conquered in the cosmos; hence they are of concern both to the philosopher and to anyone seeking to discover the possible dimensions of human existence."

3 E.g., C.S. Lewis's Perelandra (one of the novels composing the so-called cosmic or interplanetary trilogy) can be treated as a reworking of Milton's Paradise Lost. Thematically it is a reversal of Milton's epic poem as it represents a poetised prose narrative of the Fall which on the planet Perelandra, unlike on Earth, gets averted.

4 Among the latter we may mention such critical works as: Garry Wills's Catholic Faith and Fiction (1972), Thomas Woodman's Faithful Fictions. The Catholic Novel in British Literature (1991), or Andrew Greeley's The Catholic Imagination (2000).


6 Such analogies which the novel undoubtedly posits should be taken under critical scrutiny even though G.K. Chesterton in an article published in the Illustrated London News (13 June 1896), denies the claim of some critics that Sunday was meant as a serious description of the Deity.

7 Muriel Spark was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1954. She acknowledges her conversion to the influence of the writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman.

8 For more, see David Lodge's "The Uses and Abuses of Omniscience" (1970), Patricia Stubb's Muriel Spark (1973), and Ruth Whittaker's The Faith and Fiction of Muriel Spark (1982).

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Though from their inception Shakespeare's works have been re-written, restructured and re-created in various adaptations, his poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* have rarely been included in this practice. Even a cursory survey of the worldwide various appropriations of his artistic achievements indicates that for various reasons – prominence, cultural and political relevance, controversy, historical taste, circumstances – they are mainly Shakespeare's plays, which generate "the desire", as Jacques Derrida calls this phenomenon in a different context, "to launch" the already written texts in as many different forms as possible (1985: 157-158). In other words, his non-dramatic works somehow escape the interest of writers, who capitalize on the concept of Shakespeare as the greatest potential of variability, indecisibility and plurality, which triggers their desire to respond, and frequently "perfect" him in an adaptative process.

Since in the Elizabethan times the popularity of *The Rape of Lucrece* greatly contributed to Shakespeare's reputation and fame, its current marginal status is disconcerting. Published in 1594, the poem went through eight editions before 1640 (Halliday 1964: 402). As presenting the enthusiastic response of its first readers, Patrick Cheney convincingly advocates *The Rape of Lucrece* must have significantly help Shakespeare forge his identity as a publishing author and poet. After its publication, all of a sudden, "Shakespeare" did indeed become a "national poet-playwright," whose name sold books (Cheney 2005: 142).

Since the number of critical and interpretative works devoted *The Rape of Lucrece*, which appeared in the 1600s, was commensurate with its readers' admiration of his talent, its popularity helped contemporize its text for various cultural and political reasons. Countless creative responses to the poem entered into a dialogue with Shakespeare's original, altering, and even
implicitly correcting, his reflective and rhetorical treatment of the story. It is enough to compare Thomas Middleton’s poem _The Ghost of Lucrece_ (1600), Thomas Heywood’s play _The Rape of Lucrece_ (printed 1608), John Fletcher’s _Valentinian_ (1610–1614). As it is nowadays, their adaptations/analogues revealed more about their own culture and values, both social and literary, than about Shakespearean text (Baines 2003: esp. 101–234).

Commenting on the reputation of _The Rape of Lucrece_ in the seventeenth century, especially before the Civil War, when it became one of Shakespeare’s most fashionable works, Sasha Roberts states:

_Lucrece_ was deployed in a wide range of volumes from analytical tracts to the leaves of readers’ manuscript miscellanies; indeed the poem lent itself to sententious and aphoristic reading, providing a fund of sage maxims and pithy sayings on a wide range of topics.

Evidencing her claim with examples taken from various sources (pamphlets, poems, plays, translations, creative appropriations, and others), Roberts proves that _The Rape of Lucrece_ was put to diverse uses: it commented such topic as time, opportunity, melancholy, desire, suicide, monarchy, republicanism, as well as alluring descriptions of female beauty (2003: 103–142).

The popularity of the poem lasted until the end of the Stuart dynasty: _The Rape of Lucrece_ was extensively read, while the story of Lucrece served as an exemplary behaviour for resisting various kinds of tyranny. Though “for the Renaissance as well as for its original Roman audience,” Katherine Maus propounds:

the story of Tarquin and Lucrece displayed vividly the inextricability of domestic and civic order, of public and private realms, of sexual and political violence, as a political fable, it suggested circumstances in which subjects were permitted, even obliged, to challenge the authority of their sovereign.

And she adds that Tarquin’s transgression was treated not only as “an act of brutal violence against Lucrece,” but also as a defilement of “Collatinus’s exclusive claim on his wife’s body, imagined as the husband’s property.” In other words, Shakespeare’s poem was used as an illustration of “a ruler’s reckless disregard for the rights of his male subjects” (2005: 663). The same attitude to Lucrece’s story prevailed in many Western European countries, especially in France, where, as Donaldson demonstrates, it became creatively transformed into new texts. When the adaptations centered on the story of the rape, Lucrece was the main character, when they focused on the overthrow of the tyrant, Lucius Janus Brutus dominated the plot (Donaldson 1982: 103–107).

In the next century _The Rape of Lucrece_, like Shakespeare’s other non-dramatic works, lost its political/national significance. In his conclusion to _Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays_ William Hazlitt stated:

The two poems of Venus and Adonis and of Tarquin and Lucrece appear to us like a couple of ice-houses. They are about as hard, as glittering, and as cold. The author seems all the time to be thinking of his verses, not of his subject [...] The whole is laboured, up-hill work.

He did not approve of the poem’s allegories, and criticized Shakespeare’s “strange attempt to substitute the language of painting for that of poetry” (1817: 291–292). Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s (Eliot 1934: 298–299) and John Keats’s appreciative readings (Spurgeon 1928: esp. 38–43; Bush 1976: 71–89) did not change the situation: the poem was slighted and/or incisively criticized by many critics in the nineteenth century.

No wonder that Hyder Edward Rollin, the author of the monumental _Variorum Edition of Shakespeare’s Poems_, drew attention to the difficulties he encountered while trying to find significantly positive comments on _The Rape of Lucrece_ written at that time. The general consensus had it that Shakespeare’s poems were inferior to his plays, which some critics justified by the fact that when he wrote them “his genius was not [...] mature” (qtd. Rollin 1938: 468). There is no doubt that the nineteenth century was the time of Shakespeare’s vigorous entrance onto the international arena, his non-dramatic works did not, however, contribute to the worldwide propugation of his name.

Yet, it was in the nineteenth century that one of the most famous adaptations of _The Rape of Lucrece_ appeared. In a note attached to his work _Count Nuin_ written in 1825 (published in 1828), Alexander Pushkin’s explained that while rereading _The Rape of Lucrece_, the poem which he regarded as “fairly weak,” he became fascinated by its personal and political implications:

what if it had occurred to Lucrece to give Tarquin a slap? Perhaps this would have cooled his venture and he would have been forced to retreat in shame. Lucrece would not have stabbed herself, Publicola would not have become enraged, Brutus would not have cast out the kings [barer], and the world history would have been different.

Tongue-in-cheek, the poet concluded that “we owe the republic, the consuls, the dictators, the Catons and Cæsar to a seductive occurrence.” Prompted by a similar event, which had apparently happened in his neighborhood, he revealed that his aim was to write a parody of “both history and Shakespeare” (qtd. O’Neill 2003: 139).
Pushkin’s version of *The Rape of Lucrece* revealed his politicized understanding of the Russian cultural milieu. His characters are simplified, presented through new events, and the original ending is changed. The story starts with the introduction of Lucrece impersonated by Natalya Pavlovna, a Russian country lady fascinated with French sentimental novels and manners. During her husband’s absence (he is away from home hunting) she feels unhappy and bored. Fortunately, she is visited by Count Nulin, her new neighbor, who has just had an accident with his carriage nearby her house. The Count, a young dandy, dressed in the latest French fashion, is also a zealous admirer of French culture. Derived from *nul* ("zero"), Nulin’s name was used by Pushkin as a keyword to his character’s morality and spirituality.

They spent an evening together, criticizing Russian customs, glorifying French literature, and shopping in Paris. When at the end of the evening the Count is leaving to retire, Natalya gently presses his hand, which makes him believe, as Tarquin does, that she apparently wants to encourage his advances. At night Nulin, as stealthily as Tarquin in Shakespeare’s poem, decides to go to her bedroom. Here the similarity with the original abruptly ends, since Natalya, awakened, slaps his face. The Count is utterly confounded by her un-Lucretian behavior: he runs away, especially that Natalya’s dog, a shaggy Pomeranian starts barking, and her maid wakes up.

Next morning his embarrassment increases as he must face her husband, who returns from hunting, and oblivious of the previous night’s incident, invites Nulin not only to breakfast but also to dinner. When after his departure, Natalya’s husband learns about Nulin’s “exploit,” he becomes extremely upset and promises to take his revenge. In the conclusion of the poem, the readers are informed that when the incident becomes widely known, one of the neighboring landlords laughs heartily, since for some time has been secretly enjoying Natalya’s favors.

The publication of *Count Nulin* was a literary failure and its author was accused of “bawdiness” and “indecency,” while the poem’s “shocking theme” classified it unsuitable for young girls (O’Neill 2003: 140). Though the moral standards have radically changed since Pushkin’s times, nowadays *Count Nulin* may also evoke severe condemnation, especially by the practitioners of gender studies criticism: presenting the presumably insatiable sexual needs of married women, the poem can be treated as an example of literary misogyny. Whatever approach the critics assume while analyzing and interpreting *Count Nulin*, Pushkin embraced in his adaptation the two main themes of Shakespeare’s original: sexuality (rape and Lucrece’s violation) and politics (the overthrow of despotic rulers and the change of the political system). He admitted in his diary, as O’Neill rightly notices, that while reading Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* Pushkin was also interested in the expulsion of political tyrants (the poet evocatively uses the word “tsars”) and the establishment of a republic (2003: 139).

These themes, unfortunately, very seldom draw the attention of playwrights, who seemed to share George Wyndham’s opinion:

Excepting in the last speech and in the death of Lucrece, the Poem is nowhere dramatic. It tells a story, but at each situation the Poet pauses to survey and to illustrate the romantic and emotional values of the relation between his characters, or to analyze the moral passions and the mental debates in any one of them, or even the physiological perturbations responding to these storms and temors of the mind and soul (1898: xvi).

Compartmentalized as lacking dramaturgical qualities, the poem is usually regarded as a terse and clear-cut tale, which presents a series of suggestions for a full-scale exercise only in lyrical and descriptive dilation.

This opinion was, however, successfully undermined by André Obey (1892–1975), who working closely with Jacques Copeau (1879–1949) and his theatrical Compagnie des Quize (est. 1929) wrote a dramatic adaptation of Shakespeare’s poem. In the preface to the play Obey stated:

I had long had the idea of making something of the long and splendid poem by Shakespeare called *The Rape of Lucrece*. From childhood on I had loved Roman history and had a passion for Shakespeare. This *Rape of Lucrece* seemed expressing my respect both for the Roman matron and the English poet while at the same time playing my craft as a man of the theater for the benefit of my actor friends in Burgundy [the place, where Campagnie des Quize was located].

Though he did not give a longer explication of his creative transformation of the narrative text into drama, in his remarks on *Noë*, his first play based on mythical material, Obey revealed that he was never interested in “thesis, symbol or message.” The only thing he was worried about was “staging”: the performative quality of his text (qtd. Smith 2000: 123–124).

Obey’s most significant innovation was the introduction of two Narrators (Recitants), one of them female (Recitante), and the other male (Recitante), who fulfill the role of commentators and explicators of Tarquin’s and Lucrece’s psychological states. Instead of moving, as Shakespeare does, from Tarquin’s inner turmoil to that of Lucrece, they describe their emotions respectively. Obey explained his dramaturgical decision:

The poetry of Shakespeare, this old lumber produced by a genius, lyricism and rhetoric cloaking with marvelous dust so many golden, fiery jewels that sparkle with miraculous life, all this Shakespearean “Boutique fantasque,” was to be handed over to my two strange antique sellers who would display their wares in
abundance at the very threshold of the stage while within the set, in a strange half-darkness and separated from the public by the invisible curtain that is being woven all the time by the Reciters, the characters would speak and act only rarely, removed from us by a sort of the distance created by slowness and silence.

The function of his two Narrators was similar to “the leaders of the Chorus [in Greek tragedy],” yet Obey envisioned them “freer, more active, actually taking part in the drama, to support certain characters and even substitute[d] for them” (qtd. Cohn 1976: 126 and 42-43). The play consists of four acts. In Act 1, Scene 1, soldiers describe the competitive boasts of the Roman generals about the fidelity of their wives, with Lucrece easily winning. In Scene 2 the Recitante describes faithful Lucrece at home, and the Recitant describes Tarquin’s approach to her home. The act ends when Lucrece welcomes Tarquin to the home of her husband, Collatin. In Act 2, the two Narrators describe Tarquin’s guilty approach to the bed of Lucrece, which is a condensed modernization of Shakespeare’s account. When Tarquin reaches her bed, the two Recitants speak simultaneously, and the act closes upon Tarquin’s threat to malign Lucrece, if she does not accede to his lust. In Act 3, Lucrece makes up her mind to commit suicide and then sends for her husband. In Act 4, she confesses the rape to Collatin, who behaves like a typical bourgeois husband, thinking chiefly about his own honor. After her confession, Lucrece dies, without a hint of the dagger present in Shakespeare’s poem. And Collatin’s fellow-warrior Brutus converts her into a symbol: “There is a woman like this one, noble and pure like this one, whom Tarquin violates every day! And she is the mother of us all! She is Rome” (Wildr 1933: 193). When all the characters leave the stage on vengeance bound, the two Narrators close the drama with phrases of pity for Lucrece.

In 1946 Obey’s play was used by Roland Duncan, who wrote the libretto for Benjamin Britten’s The Rape of Lucretia. In his libretto Duncan introduced some significant changes. He removed, for example, the lines in which Tarquin threatens to dishonour Lucretia, by killing a slave, entwining it with Lucretia’s dead body, and later claiming that he killed them both out to remove any implication that she cooperated with Tarquin. In the libretto of Britten’s opera, she is raped only through violent force with Tarquin’s sword held against her.

Though the two Narrators, who assumed the role of choruses, are the principal singers in Britten’s opera, their musical role was initially challenged as “intrusive” by critics. They disapproved of Lucrece’s passivity for in Duncan’s text she unhesitatingly accepts her own complicity in her shame. In addition, her recurring appeals to Christian forgiveness, which unexpectedly and self-consciously break the representation of pre-Christian events and oddly evokes a Salvationist doctrine in a modernist opera is even nowadays questioned. The critics express their astonishment that the chorus figures call for the audience to see the events “through eyes that once have wept with Christ’s own tears” (Duncan 1946: 7). The opera ends with the female chorus left in despair over the moral emptiness of the story, while the male chorus tells her that all pain is given meaning, and the sins redeemed in the suffering of Christ. Later they all unite in a prayer.

The music of the opera is usually praised for its compact intensity. It is performed by only eight singers and twelve instrumentalists. Commenting on its musical value Whittall says that Britten’s opera contains moments of “an almost maniac blend of outrage and compassion” (Whittall 1990: 100).

Though he seems outraged at the violation at the centre of the story, he approves of the structure of violence compacted into a modernist form of music.

The next full-fledged dramaturgical version of the poem was written by Callie Kimball, a contemporary American playwright and actor. The play, first staged under the title Shakespeare’s Rape of Lucrece was a commissioned last minute replacement for a cancelled production of King Lear by the Washington Shakespeare Company, Washington, D.C., which participated in the 2007 annual Shakespeare Festival. In her “Note from the Playwright,” Kimball explains that her primary interest in Shakespeare’s work was prompted by the fact that in his poem Shakespeare “did not place the rape in much of a historical, social, or political context – he limited the action to Lucrece’s rape and suicide (Kimball 2007).” She also expressed her interest in gender problematics of Lucrece’s story:

Great social and political change often demands violence, and violence requires victims. Lucrece could have kept living if she’d kept quiet. She chose to speak and to act for reasons that are slippery and elusive. Apparently, to her the worst sort of violence would have been silence.

In Kimball creative adaptation of the poem a significant function is performed by two narrators, called Janus 1 (“God of Fate and Beginnings. The more aggressive of the two [...] More yang than yinny, Representative of the corrupt, selfish monarchy [...]”). Played by a male”) and Janus 2 (“God of Doorways and Endings. Slightly softer take on things. [...] A kinder, gentler Janus representing the New Republic”). In the production of the Washington Shakespeare Company, Janus 2 was played by a woman. Besides Lucreta, the cast of the play includes five additional female parts: Augusta and Maia, Lurectia’s maids, Sabina, who is a ghostly representative of Sabine woman and Sylvia, personifying the “spirit of Rhea Silvia, raped and murdered mother of Romulus and Remus.” In accordance with Kimball’s wishes,
Augusta, Sabina and Janus 1 were played by the same man, while Maia, Silvia and Janus 2 were performed by the same woman (Kimball).

The critics appreciated Kimball and the Washington Shakespeare Company for their project, stressing the difficulty with adapting Shakespeare’s lesser-read narrative text into a dramatic venture. In addition, the playwright was praised for her ingenious appropriation of the most stirring lines from Shakespeare’s poem, redistributing them among the characters, and “turning narration to speech and vice versa” (The Washington Post February 15, 2007). Though both the text and the production was not “flawless,” the general consensus had it that it was a “bold and provocative enterprise” (The Washington Post, February 14, 2007).

Despite these three attempts at the dramatization of The Rape of Lucrece, the poem has very seldom been turned into a play. Responding to this situation, Robert Koehler noted:

One would think that of Shakespeare’s two epic poems The Rape of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis - Lucrece would be the better suited to the stage. More than Venus, it has conflict and an intriguing central idea: a sick symbiosis between victim and criminal that hand-wringing can’t ignore but that a higher moral ground could address (1991: 16).

Since Shakespeare’s name, as a powerful global icon, has achieved its cultural status mainly through theatrical, and nowadays cinematic, presentations of his plays, the fact that very few dramatic adaptations of the poem have appeared in modern times, contributes to its cultural peripheralization. Even a cursory survey of the number of Lucrece’s renditions in a dramatic form, demonstrates that the poem less frequently that Venus and Adonis has ever entered the theatre. If it does, the poem’s theatrical renditions are usually limited to dramatic readings of Shakespeare’s text.

Though since 1990s international attention has frequently focused on the use of rape as an element of political upheavals, which brought the change of political system, none of the poem’s interpreters or critics have so far referred to these events in their works on The Rape of Lucrece. The United Nations commission and various human rights groups revealed, for example, that ethnic Serb paramilitary groups had systematically tolerated or encouraged the raping of Bosnian Muslim women. Rape was also employed by Hutu troops against Tutsi women in the genocide campaign Hutu leaders conducted in Rwanda in 1994. In 1998 women who identified with secular culture in Algeria accused desperate rebels fighting in the name of the Islamic revolution of kidnapping them and making them sex slaves. In Indonesia, reports were surfacing that suggested that members of the security forces might have been among the men who raped ethnic Chinese

women during rioting in May 1998 (New York Times, June 14, 1998). In Poland the rape charges contributed to the dissolution of the political coalition at power in 2007. The party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] dissolved its political alliance with the party Samoobrona [Self-defence], whose leader became accused of rape. Consequently, an earlier parliamentary election took place, and the Polish political scene was radically changed.

Revealing these sexual atrocities against women, most of the world narratives of violence tend to assume the dimension of logic and power present in Shakespeare’s poem. For example, both The Rape of Lucrece and modern narratives of rape create or forestall the possibility of a certain kind of political response; they demonstrate that the sexualization of violence can create a bond among some men. The treatment of the rape victims by the society, their fears and behaviour have not changed over centuries, and, as in Shakespeare’s poem, it is almost always a woman’s body that seems to ignite political action, though its materiality is neglected and forgotten. In the case of Shakespeare’s other works, especially his plays, we deal with texts which provide a universal structure for study, for many disparate cultures come together presenting their contemporaneity, this process does not cover The Rape of Lucrece. Since the poem is unpopular and unfamiliar, its panoply of critical, and theatrical, interpretations do not make any use of the capitalization of Shakespeare’s universality and The Rape of Lucrece is not used as an “excuse” to present our local concerns.

NOTES

1 I use the word “adaptation” here to designate all kinds of cultural appropriations which Ruby Cohn so succinctly listed alphabetically, e.g., “abridgement,” “appropriation,” “amendment,” “collaboration,” “redaction,” “spolinoff,” “transformation” (1976: 3–4).

2 Ian Donaldson says that the Elizabethan interest in Shakespeare’s poem was intensified by the popularity of Lucrece’s story/myth, recorded originally by Titus Livy in Ab Urbe Condita (Chap. LVII-LX) and by Ovid in Fasti (11, 721–852). In the story/myth, which had been centuries disseminated in various versions all over Europe, Lucretia was also called Lucetta (1982: 19).

3 Some of these epigrammatic dicta are even today quoted in more sophisticated articles, reviews and political speeches, which appear in various American, Canadian and British dailies (e.g. Austin American Statesman, August 20, 1989; The Guardian, November 7, 1993; Newday, March 12, 1995; Toronto Star, May 10, 2002; The Guardian, January 20, 1993).

4 It was Britten’s first work to which he applied his term “chamber opera,” the genre fashionable at the times Henry Purcell (1659–95). In the austerity of post-war England, the genre seemed perfect because it was less demanding to produce, and flexible enough to go on tour. The two-act opera was composed especially for Kathelin Fertier (contralto), who performed the title role in its world premiere in Glyndebourne (Great Britain), a small country
house venue, on July 12. It later toured the north of England, but did not achieve much popular
success.
It was a citywide, six-month Shakespeare in Washington Festival, which also celebrated
the 75th anniversary of the Folger Shakespeare Library Foundation and Shakespeare’s 443rd
birthday. As it is indicated in the “Production History” of an unpublished text of the play, the
work was commissioned on January 12, while its world premiere took place on February 9, 2007.
I would like to thank here Ms Callie Kimball, who generously answered my questions
concerning her work on the play, and helped me receive CD recording of the production.
For a detailed analysis of Kimball’s play and its staging by the Washington Shakespeare
Company, see my review “Callie Kimball’s Rape of Lucrece (2007): A Woman’s Creative
Response to Shakespeare’s Poem” (forthcoming 2011).
In 1991 Matthew Jones’s Taking of Choice, a dramaturgical adaptation of the poem was
staged by the Spiral Candle Theatre Company at the Link Theatre in London. The text of the
play reached me too late (November 2010) to include its analysis in this work.
Though after its first translation in 1922 by Jan Kasprowicz, some other Polish versions of
The Rape of Lucrece appeared, neither their authors nor critics or interpreters have located
the poem in the context of politics. See also the first Polish work devoted to Lucrece (Dyboski
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1. Dickens and Shakespeare

In his seminal book *Victorian Conventions* John Reed states that “in order to read the literature of the Victorian period accurately and rewarding, it is necessary to acknowledge and recover the forms of stylisation and convention with which Victorian authors and audiences were familiar,” encouraging the potential reader to try and restore the 19th literature to the world view out of which it was written (1975: 3). Though it is never possible to read the past from its own perspective, yet even a mere attempt may lead to thought-provoking conclusions. Victorians frequently stylised their scenes and characters on Shakespeare. Considering a large bulk of 19th literature, one may boldly observe that the Victorians were haunted by Shakespeare. According to several researchers of Victorian literature, Shakespeare is woven into Victorian art through echoes, ubiquitous allusions and plot patterns. Likewise Dickens appropriated Shakespeare as a treasury of types and moral and aesthetic designs that could fulfill (in the language of typology) his characters and plots and cast his narratives into a larger moral and aesthetic context. “He brought within the magic circle of his genius, traditions peculiarly adapted for his purpose, and turned familiar things into constellations which should enlighten the world for ages,” thus one of
Dickensian characters, Nicholas Nickleby defends Shakespeare’s contemporaneity, viewing him both as the shaper of literary tradition and as the major figure in the tradition Nicholas himself inherits (1978: 727).²

In her Companion to The Mystery of Edwin Drood Wendy Jacobson enumerates Macbeth as one of the major works of influence on Dickens’s last novel which contains numerous echoes of phrasing and allusions from the play, a striking similarity of plot design and an ambiguous character at the centre (1986: 1–2). Jasper seems to be stylised as a Macbeth-type character re-enacting the eternal pattern as exemplified in Shakespearean tragedy. “This lifelong hold of Macbeth upon his imagination and its fertilizing influence upon his creative energy, was like that of Robinson Crusoe and the Arabian Nights. [...] Macbeth was one of the seed plots of his childhood’s fancy,” observed Howard Duffield in his article “Macbeth Motif in Edwin Drood”, providing numerous examples of references to the play in such Dickens’s novels as Sketches by Boz, Dombey and Son, David Copperfield and The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1934: 263). According to the critic, “the kinship in mood and in structure between Macbeth and The Mystery of Edwin Drood is too circumstantial to be wholly accidental, and too complete not to be accorded careful consideration when seeking to unravel the riddle which Dickens left as his final bequest to the world of letters” (1934: 270). Duffield’s article contains very detailed biographical information concerning the history of Dickens’s fascination with Shakespeare’s plays since his childhood, and Macbeth in particular. The critic also speculates how the play could have influenced the possible ending of the unfinished novel. For instance, Duffield refers to Dickens’s collection of literary sketches and reminiscences The Uncommercial Traveller where the novelist recalls the first performance of Macbeth that gripped him as a boy. It was apparently played by such a meagre company of actors that several of the players were induced to double their roles. Due to this predicament it seemed to the excited Dickens boy that “the good king Duncan couldn’t rest in his grave, but was constantly coming out of it and calling himself somebody else” (1934: 271). Such a testimony of the novelist may undoubtedly fuel further speculation concerning the image of a murdered man coming back, and seeming to be a different person. Wendy Jacobson and David Paroissin (the editor of the 2002 Penguin edition of the novel) limit themselves to careful enumeration of all allusions and quotations from the play in The Mystery of Edwin Drood.³

The purpose of the paper is to contribute to the scarce criticism on the subject: first, to describe in detail Dickens’s references to the play in his last unfinished novel and, second, to speculate how they may influence our interpretation of the text.

2. References to Macbeth in The Mystery of Edwin Drood

Dickens compels the reader to recall and think incessantly about Macbeth from the first pages of the novel. For the play exists in Edwin Drood not merely in open textual citations or paraphrases without quotation marks which are at least fourteen in number (see notes to Paroissin’s edition of the novel or Jacobson’s thorough notes to its every chapter). The most apparent are, for instance, the title of Chapter XIV: “When shall these three meet again?”, or in Chapter X the Reverend Crisparkle is “as confident in the sweetening powers of Cloisterham Weir [...], as Lady Macbeth was hopeless of those of all the seas that roll” (MED 101).⁴ According to Duffield, “not one of these quotations is flung casually into the flow of the narrative, but each is linked with a nerve centre of the novel” (1934: 264). It would be difficult to disagree with the critic that the Christmas Eve dinner after which Edwin mysteriously disappeared is the pivot of the plot or that the good Canon in Chapter X is about to “set in motion a train of circumstances which will ultimately and irresistibly carry him to Cloisterham Weir where the air seemed burdened with weird whisperings of murder” (265).

In an opium delirium Lascar in Chapter I “starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms and draws a phantom knife” (MED 10). Valerie L. Gager thus comments on the Dickensian reference to the play: “Whether in this instance a murder has actually been committed or whether Jasper-Macbeth has only ‘draw[n] a phantom knife’ in a parallel of the hallucinatory dagger scene remains a mystery” (1996: 173). Neville Landless, falsely accused of Edwin’s murder, describes his unbearable situation as being “so tied to a stake” since his flight could be tantamount to a confession of guilt (MED 195). These are the words of besieged Macbeth in Act V explaining his hopeless position: “They have tied me to a stake: I cannot fly, / But, bear-like, I must fight the course” (V.7.1–2).

3. The plot and the witch woman of the opium den

The motto for the present paper could be as well used as the summary of the main theme in The Mystery of Edwin Drood. The solid reasons against Duncan’s murder and the atrocity of the deed parallel those of John Jasper, a choirmaster in the Cloisterham Cathedral, against the murder of Edwin Drood. Jasper is Edwin’s uncle and a legal guardian appointed by his dead father to guard and protect him, “not bear the knife [him]self” (1.7.16). Furthermore, Edwin is visiting him for Christmas, thus, just like Duncan, he is Jasper’s guest. Similarly to the Scottish nobleman, Jasper is “troubled with some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessmess, dissatisfaction,” though
his object is Edwin's fiancée, a beautiful young Rosa Bud and perhaps her ample dowry which he could gain by marriage (MED 20). Likewise in both texts from the beginning the great emphasis is laid on the disparity between the person's public appearance and pleasing words and the reality of his wicked thoughts. Macbeth's words to Duncan suggest a model of the loyal subject, it is enough to observe the stress on "service", "loyalty", "owe", "Your highness", "duties", "state", "safe", "love", "honour" in a few lines (I.4.22–27). Jasper goes to any lengths to show the Cloisterham public his infinite doing on his nephew. Edwin's first visit in the novel is a picture of familial love, trust and constant care; there is "a kind of fascination attendant on his strong interest in the youthful spirit that he loves so well" (MED 22).

Yet the opening scenes in both works reveal a completely different nature of Jasper and his Shakespearean predecessor, and establish the mood which will pervade the main action of the play and the novel; the mood suggesting a confusion of the usual human order, a reversal of human values, a world of darkness and futility, a sinister challenge to ordinary goodness. For the scene is set in a place far removed from the usual social rules – the witch's den. "Akin to the Weird Sisterhood of Macbeth, the Witch Wife of the Opium Den radiates evil energy, and is the herald of destiny," Duffield comments on her role in the novel, "Four times she appears, and each time she erects a milestone on the road to the dénouement" (1934: 266).

Jasper's encounter with "instruments of darkness" (I.3.124) is in a London opium den, "the meanest and closest of small rooms," "a dark stifling room" which is the whereabouts of the old haggard opium addict, clearly described in a similar vein to the three weird sisters as sinister, prophetic and fateful (MED 256):

"... the woman is of a haggard appearance, and ... her veined chin is resting on her hands, and ... her eyes are staring – with an unwinking, blank sort of steadfastness – before her (MED 160).
As ugly and withered as one of the fantastic carvings on the under brackets of the stall seats, as malignant as the Evil One, as hard as the big brass eagle holding the sacred books upon his wings (and, according to the sculptor's presentation of his ferocious attributes, not at all converted by them) (MED 271).

She lights the candle "as if she were loading some ill-favoured and unseemly weapon of witchcraft" (MED 263). Just as the witches carry out a chanting ceremony to enhance the strength of their prophecies for Macbeth, the opium woman begins to "bubble and blow at the faint spark" of her opium pipe to kindle it, saying that only she possesses "the true secret of mixing it" (MED 258, 8). In the play Banquo notes the ambiguous appearance of the weird sisters: "... you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (I.3.45–7). Jasper's fateful hostess is presented in a similar manner: "He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple and his color, are repeated in her" (MED 8). Like Macbeth, Jasper is intrigued, puzzled and repelled by her and her two other opium-smoked eerie customers. Upon seeing the weird sisters, Macbeth's companion Banquo wonders if they have not "eaten on the insane root, that takes the reason prisoner" (I.3.84–85). "The insane root" – opium is accountable for the eerie, violent and unreal atmosphere of the room and for Jasper's hallucinations full of violence and expectations of an atrocious murder – "writhing figure [...] on the grim spike" (MED 7). His predecessor, Macbeth, too, has "horrible imaginings" after the encounter with the witches:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man,
That function is sooner'd in surprise,
And nothing is, but what is not (I.3.138–142).

The potency of "insane root" is ever-present throughout the novel as "a curious film" in Jasper's and the opium hag's eyes, as the reason for Neville's violent assault on Edwin and for Durdles's sudden doze in the Cathedral crypt (MED 18). It seems probable that the role of the opium witch is of great importance regarding the unravelling of the mystery of Edwin's sudden disappearance. Jasper's return to her den halfway through the novel to recapture the relief he derives from the spectres induced by opium parallels Macbeth's return to the coven in order to seek reassurance of his power. Similarly to her Shakespearean prototypes, the old crone builds up Jasper's confidence that she could not have comprehended his incoherent opium mumbling, only to plunge him to his ruin. Chapter I of the novel ends with Jasper returning to Cloisterham for an afternoon service in the Cathedral and singing the evening prayer: "When the wicked man [...]" with the choir. He, like Macbeth, has something to conceal at the end of Act I: "False face must hide what the false heart doth know" (I.7.83).

The idea that human wickedness is reflected in the natural world is common to Shakespearean tragedies. Thus in Macbeth the extraordinary confusion in the natural world reflects the unnatural human acts of the night:

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard t' th' air; strange screams of death,
And, prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion, and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to th' woeful time ... (II.3.55–60)
Edwin disappears shortly after twelve o'clock at night, in the play Duncan is murdered just after midnight. Likewise during the night of Edwin's disappearance the elements seem to be at their greatest fury and violence:

No such power of wind has blown for many a winter night. Chimneys topple in the streets, and people hold to posts and corners, and to one another, to keep themselves upon their feet (MED 165).

Durdles confesses to Jasper his terrible sensation during last Christmas Eve in a similar manner to these “lamentings”, “screams of death”, and “prophesying” in nature:

And what woke me? The ghost of a cry. The ghost of one terrific shriek, which shriek was followed by the ghost of the howl of a dog – a long dismal woeful howl, such as a dog gives when a person’s dead. That was my last Christmas Eve (MED 136).

Both works share the identical bird imagery traditionally used to indicate doom and death: ravens. The planned crime is so appalling in the words of Lady Macbeth that even the ominous bird of ill omen is terrified into hoarseness:

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements (I.5.38-40)

Likewise Dickens chooses a hoarse-voiced bird of the raven tribe to reinforce the pervading evil and the eerie atmosphere of the city where rooks are ubiquitous. There are at least twelve references to those hoarse black birds, for instance: “[...] a city of another and a bygone time is Cloisterham, with its hoarse Cathedral-bell, its hoarse rooks hovering about the Cathedral tower, its hoarser and less distinct rooks in the stalls far beneath” (MED 23). It seems important to mention one more point of resemblance between the play and the novel – the figure of the drunken Porter at the Inverness castle who imagines himself to be the “Porter of Hell Gate” (II.3.1–22). In the novel Durdles is also a frequently drunk gatekeeper of the Cathedral crypt whose pastime is discovering new “old uns”, that is old graves. According to Valerie L. Gager, “our sensitivity to the word ‘Gate’ may derive partly from the growing network of references to Macbeth within the novel” (1996: 173).

4. The hero

The most striking parallel between the two texts can be found in the ambiguous character at the centre. Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s shortest tragedies with an uncluttered plot that highlights the eponymous hero. In Dickens’s novel Edwin Drood disappears early in the plot and it is John Jasper that rivets the reader’s attention due to his supposed guilt and the shadow of Macbeth lurking in all his actions. Barbara Hardy thus describes the genealogy of Dickens’s characters: “Their ancestors are Falstaff, Macbeth, Iago, and Hamlet; like them, they speak with the force and simplicity of moral abstractions but are imagined as individuals with appropriate voice and form” (1983: 7). Dickens’s daughter, Katey Dickens Collins, offers very convincing evidence that the character of Jasper had a strong hold on the novelist’s imagination and that the choirmaster’s careful portrayal was crucial to the novel:

It was not [...] for the intricate working of his plot alone, that my father cared to write this story. [...] he was quite as deeply fascinated and absorbed in the study of the criminal Jasper, as in the dark and sinister crime that has given the book its title [...] but it was through his wonderful observation of character, and his strange insight into the tragic secrets of the human heart, that he desired his greatest triumph to be achieved (Perugini 1906: 646).

Macbeth, after the murder of Duncan, and Jasper, after the disappearance of Edwin Drood, follow an identical course of action: exaggerated shock after the news, theatrically artificial display of grief, increasing loneliness and isolation from society and the obsessive sense of insecurity and distrust of others. “How now, my Lord? why do you keep alone, / Of sorriest fancies your companions making.” Lady Macbeth complains of her husband’s increasing distance even from herself (III.2.8–9). In a similar vein we are given the picture of Jasper after the fatal Christmas. “Impassive, moody, solitary, resolute, so concentrated on one idea, and on its attendant fixed purpose, that he would share it with no fellow creature, he lived apart from human life” (MED 255). After the deed Macbeth is led from crime to crime to achieve security. Correspondingly, Jasper secretly sneaks to London to spy on Neville since he considers him a rival for Miss Bud’s hand and threatens her that Neville’s life is in danger. The exaggerated theatricality of Macbeth’s grief could be a reminder of his acting skills and that, in fact, it is an actor who speaks the lines. Jasper’s outstanding acting talent is best visible during the love confession scene, where Rosa is startled between “the violence of his look and delivery, and the composure of his assumed attitude” which he could preserve for unsuspecting onlookers (MED 214).
In fact, there is some evidence in Dickens's novel to suggest that it is also indebted to the 19th theatrical adaptations of the play. "This interweaving of the play with the very fibre of his imagination was mightily fostered by his friendship with Macready, the leading actor of the time, famous for his interpretation of Macbeth," Duffield comments on Dickens's life (1934: 264). For instance, in the Chapter "A Picture and a Ring" Dickens recalls W. C. Macready's renowned performance as Macbeth at the moment in which he stealthily crosses the stage to Duncan's chamber. This happens during the incident which is crucial to the unravelling of the mystery, that is, placing the ancestral engagement ring in Edwin's hands by Mr. Grewgious.

According to Blackwood's Magazine of 1841, "for Londoners high or low, rich or poor, theatre was their supreme delight [...] The upper, middle and lower classes" of the nation's capital could take their pick of "theatres for the east, and theatres for the west; theatres for this side of the river, and theatres for that" (Schoch 2006: 1–2). Shakespeare's history plays and Macbeth were performed with the astounding accuracy of scenery and rich mediaeval costume, thus in Schoch's opinion Shakespeare became "a would-be Victorian medievalist" (19). Interestingly, the main plot in The Mystery of Edwin Drood unfolds in the shadow of a huge medieval cathedral with the crypt "abounding in vestiges of monastic graves," which gives the novel a strong Gothic flavour and seems to be responsible not only for Jasper's murky soul. It is described as being "incorporated into many of its citizens' minds" (MED 23). Moreover, the character of Jasper may owe a lot to the reinterpretation or, rather, the misinterpretation of Shakespeare in the 19th century. Robert Langbaum thus summarises the Victorian reading of Shakespeare:

> They read him not as drama in the traditional Aristotelian sense, not in other words, as a literature of external action in which the events derive meaning from their relation to a publicly acknowledged morality, but as literature of experience, in which the events have meaning inasmuch as they provide the central character with an occasion for experience - for self-expression and self-discovery (1957: 160).

Such a psychological interpretation of Shakespeare is best summed up in A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy which treats Shakespearean characters as if they were complete and coherent psychological creations. In his penetrative analysis of Shakespearean tragic heroes Bradley seeks to study how the consciousness of each is displayed to an audience in performance and strives to show the reader that Shakespeare has concentrated attention on the obscurer regions of man's being, on phenomena which make it seem that he is in the power of secret forces lurking below, and independent of his consciousness and will (1985: xvii).

Victorians admired Shakespeare's psychological insight into the human mind so much that new mental scientists wrote essays on his characters in Manual of Psychological Medicine, Journal of Mental Science or American Journal of Insanity (Faas 1988: 105–120). Dickensian scholars observe that compared with the novelist's earlier villains, such as Jonas Chuzzlewit, Fagin or even Bradley Headstone, John Jasper appears to be a character of far more complex interiority. For instance, Lauriat Lane claims that analysing Jasper in terms of the archetypal motifs of the double would be an oversimplification of the complexity and psychological insight Dickens depicted in the choirmaster's personality. "Torn between his active desire for Rosa Bud, and an excessive love for his nephew, John Jasper represents a far subtler psychological problem than Dickens had ever before hinted at," Lane argues (1959: 47). Duffield, too, discerns a new psychological complexity of the Dickensian protagonist:

> The spinning of the third thread in the web of destiny both by the witches in the play and by the witch Wife in the story, occurs when with their black art they second the criminal in his desperate endeavour to discover the real nature and consequences of his guilt. [...] This psychology of guilt is an elemental factor in both the play and the story (1934: 268).

Thus thanks to creating his protagonist as a type of Macbeth, Dickens endowed Jasper with greater psychological depth. Without Shakespeare in the background, Jasper could appear to be more like a stereotypical black-hearted villain of the 19th melodrama for which Victorian audiences had a colossal appetite. But John Jasper is not a villain of the deepest and darkest dye since Macbeth bestowed on him his own moral frame and a status of a tragic hero with all its psychological implications. For Macbeth is a story of a noble and valiant man who becomes a villain, presented in such a way as to arouse pity and terror. In the words of Kenneth Muir: "Macbeth is a noble and gifted man who falls into treachery and crime, not deluded into believing that he has any justification for his deeds, but knowing them precisely for what they are" (Shakespeare 1957: li). Jasper, too, is haunted by the horror of the deed and impresses that horror on the reader, like his Shakespearian type he is beset by qualms of conscience since he did not predict that it would also be the deed against his own nature. In Chapter I the choirmaster warns his nephew against himself and his "some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction," in Chapter XV where after hearing about the secretly broken engagement of his nephew Jasper becomes "nothing but a heap of torn and miry clothes on the floor" (MED 20, 176). By resorting to a well-known tragic type, Dickens might have wished to give Jasper's life greater significance and to make him part of some
larger generally recognisable universal pattern for he, like Aristotle and Victorian readers, believed in the universality of tragedy. The reader is even literally reminded of the ancient and venerable genre in the novel and invited to ponder its meaning. For instance, in Chapter VI Dickens alludes to Aristotle’s concept of catharsis. Cloisterham’s violent past left at least in Minor Canon Corner “that blessed air of tranquillity, [...] and that serenely romantic state of the mind – productive for the most part of pity and forbearance – which is engendered by a sorrowful story that is all told, or a pathetic play that is played out” (MED 53). Mr Bazzard, Mr Growgious’s clerk is an unfulfilled playwright:

‘He has written a play’, said Mr Growgious, in a solemn whisper. ‘A tragedy. [...] And nobody [...] will hear, on any account whatever, of bringing it out’ (MED 227).

This seems to be yet another sign that the genre with all its implications could be of great importance for the novel.

From the above facts it can be concluded that imaginative transformations of Shakespeare’s words and motifs enrich all aspects of Dickens’s novel, including language, imagery, plot, foreshadowing, atmosphere, theme and characterisation. Thanks to references and allusions to Shakespeare’s tragedy, the tragic plot in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* gains psychological complexity and universality.

NOTES


3 All quotations will be taken from this edition which will be henceforth referred to as MED.

4 Compare with speeches by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: “Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood / Clean from my hand?” (II.2.59–60); and “All the perfumes of Arabia will never sweeten this little hand” (V.1.68). The famous actor thus conveyed Macbeth’s hesitation: “[...] his desire to over-elaborate made him pause, and when his body was actually off stage his left foot and leg remained trembling in sight, it seemed, fully half a minute” (Coleman 1889: 223).

REFERENCES


COMPOSING THE SELF IN ANN RADCLOFFEE'S
AND MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
WRITING

1. Autobiographical writing and the “self”

Autobiographical writing raises questions about “self”, writing and experience. The present article is an attempt to discuss the issue of the gendered self in eighteenth-century women's travel writing, namely, in Ann Radcliffe’s *A journey made in the summer of 1794, through Holland and the western frontier of Germany, with a return down the Rhine; to which are added, observation during a tour to the lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland* and in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* written in 1795.

The etymology of the word “autobiography” and its everyday usage suggest, per Elspeth Graham, that it can be “defined as a life of the self who is writing” (Graham et al. 1989: 16). However, though autobiography takes its form from the articulation of the self, definitions of autobiography are very hard to draw up. The questions of “truth”, and the concepts of “self” and “life” present difficulties. Does a fully constructed “self” pre-exist the autobiography or is that self created in the process of writing? What is the relation of a “self” to life and truth? As Domna C. Stanton puts it, to insist simply that autobiography is the narration of a life is to fall into the dangers of “that notion's facile presumption of preferentiality” (1987: vii). When discussing ficitiveness and non-fiction, Philip Dodd implies that all constructions of a “self” are in some sense “fictional” (1987: 5-8). Therefore, many questions concerning how we understand the relation of lives and writing in autobiography depend on a concept of the “self”. The texts discussed not only take the writer herself as subject matter but imply, or directly address the
reader. If the self is to be articulated, one experiences the necessity of an audience. When talking about the psychoanalytical process, Jacques Lacan emphasizes the importance of being understood by someone: “we cannot be considered to be speaking ourselves if we are speaking into a void or meeting incomprehension. We need to construct ourselves in relation to others” (Lacan quoted in Graham et al. 1989: 19). This idea could be applied to autobiography since it is a form that takes its shape from speaking of a self and speaking to others. According to such scholars as Kohut, Hartmann, Modell, and Kernberg, a sense of self depends on the negotiations of self defined against and in relation to others, where the “other” takes the form of an object of various emotions. For many of these scholars, creativity, especially writing, performs the function of restoring or re-creating a sense of self and re-negotiating self-object relations. The idea of writing as re-creation of the self, can be related to autobiographical writing where this is quite explicit.

According to Natalie Sutherland, autobiography is “a historical form, since it specifically attempts to recount the story of a self via its history” (Sutherland 2010). Recent theories of subjectivity stress this concept of the self as a construct of history and culture (and also language and textuality, among other things), rather than as a naturally occurring phenomenon. Sutherland also maintains that “personal history is itself a discourse heavily bound up with notions of personal truth and identity” (ibid). In his book Rewriting the Self, Mark Freeman notes that “a life history, rather than being a natural way of accounting for the self, is one that is thoroughly enmeshed within a specific and unique form of discourse and understanding. As such, it is but one among numerous possible modes of conceiving of and accounting for the self” (1993: 28). Laura Marcus discusses the concept of autobiography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a “destabilising form”. According to Marcus, “The perceived instability and hybridity of ‘autobiography’ are inextricably linked to the problems of selfhood and identity, with the boundaries between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, ‘private’ and ‘public’ becoming the sites of the greatest concern” (1994: 15). Marcus also notes that “the eighteenth century novel ‘usurps’ first-person narrative and thus renders uncertain the authenticity of the autobiographical ‘I’, and the distinction between autobiography and fiction” (1994: 13–14). Some theorists, such as Gudofsky, Renzo and Freeman, have done much to assert that truth in autobiography comes from the very act of narrative writing. “Nothing prevents us,” writes Renzo “from exploring the issue of how discrete acts of writing become identifiable as autobiographical to the writing self as he writes” (1980: 273). However, the question about the truth remains unanswered as the truth about life is projected through the lenses of memory. The past, to use Gudofsky’s words, as it is remembered by the writer, then, or as it is recalled, is always different from the past “as it was” or as it appeared when experiencing it:

Autobiography is not a simple repetition of the past as it was, for recollection brings us not the past itself but only the presence in spirit of a world gone forever. Recapitulation of a life lived claims to be valuable for the one who lived it, and yet it reveals no more than a ghostly image of that life, already far distant, and doubtless incomplete, distorted furthermore by the fact that the man who remembers his past has not been for a long time the same being, the child or adolescent, who lived that past (1980: 38).

When focusing on Wollstonecraft’s and Radcliffe’s articulation of the self in their autobiographical travel narratives, it is assumed that the writers do have a gendered identity, to use Kristeva’s term, that precedes the act of writing and is central to their experience. Regardless of the differences in form of writing and personal viewpoint, both writers share a particular female perspective on experience and self-expression.

2. Composing the self

Though contemporaries, both writers present different selves in their autobiographical travel writing. In her Journey, Ann Radcliffe’s self is not clearly revealed as she uses the pronoun “we”, while Mary Wollstonecraft refers to herself by using the pronoun “I”. In their travel accounts, both writers, however, address their audiences, establishing a contact with readers. In the Preface to A Journey, dated May 20, 1795, Ann Radcliffe writes:

The Author begs leave to observe, in explanation of the use made of the plural term in the following pages, that, her journey having been performed in the company of her nearest relative and friend, the account of it has been written so much from their mutual observation, that there would be a deception in permitting the book to appear, without some acknowledgment, which may distinguish it from works entirely her own (1795: v).

As Gephardt notes, “her [Radcliffe’s] choice of the collective pronoun stresses her marital status and the proper division of gender roles in marriage; [...] the collective pronoun also corresponds with the nationalization of taste that allows Radcliffe to accentuate the political division between Britain and the Continent with a pencil of aesthetics” (2010). A Journey expresses Radcliffe’s republican sentiments and her strong anti-Roman Catholic standpoint. For example, Ann Radcliffe or the Radcliffes, observe that many of the inhabitants of Frankfurt “declared to us, that they had a substantial, practical freedom; and we thought a testimony to their actual enjoys
more valuable than any formal acknowledgements of their rights.” Thriving merchants in Rotterdam remind the author that commerce “is the permanent defender of freedom and knowledge against military glory and politics” (1795: 12). Ann Radcliffe’s journey lasted at least three months, she and her husband arrived in the Hague on May 29. The journey, as Rictor Norton notes, “was the fulfillment of a dream nurtured by creating the French, Swiss and Italian scenery in her most famous novel The Mysteries of Udolpho” (1999: 111). It seems relevant to note that Ann Radcliffe in the first place was a traveler interested in the Picturesque and the Beautiful. The delight in the grandeur of nature is also very well seen in Radcliffe’s Journey, Made in the Summer of 1794, when she is travelling in the Lake-District and visiting Patterdale and the mountains of Ullswater. In Alida Wieten’s opinion (1926: 46) its excellence and sincerity come still more to the fore when setting it side by side with an earlier passage in The Romance of the Forest:

The shade of the overhanging precipice was deepened by the gloom of the atmosphere. It was evening when they came within view of the lake, and the storm, so long threatened was now fast approaching; thunder murmured among the Alps; and the vapours that rolled heavily along their sides heightened their dreadful sublimity. The darkening air and the lightnings that now flashed across the horizon terrified Clara. […] A peal of thunder, which seemed to shake the earth to its foundations, and was reverberating in tremendous echoes from the cliffs, burst over their heads (The Romance of the Forest, 268).

When we saw them, the sky accorded well with the scene, being frequently darkened by autumnal clouds, and the equinoctial gale swept of the surface of the lake, marking its blackness with long white lines and beating its waves over the rocks to the foliage of the thicketes above. […] The effect of a stormy evening upon the scenery was solemn. Clouds smoked along the fells, veiling them for a moment, and passing on to other summits; or sometimes they involved the lower steepes, leaving the tops unobscured and resembling islands in a distant ocean. The lake was dark and tempestuous, dashing the rocks with a strong foam. It was a scene worthy of the sublimity of Ossian, and brought to recollection some touches of his gloomy pencil: “When the storms of the mountains come, when the north lifts the waves on high, I sit by the sounding shore” (Journey, 418).

When discussing Ann Radcliffe’s Journey, the questions about the self, truth, and memory remain open.

In contrast to Radcliffe, in the Advertisement to her Letters, Mary Wollstonecraft addresses her readership as follows establishing a personal, even intimate, contact with the audience:

The writing travels, or memoirs, has ever been a pleasant employment; for vanity or sensibility always renders it interesting. In writing these desultory letters, I found I could not avoid being continually the first person – “the little hero of each tale.” I tried to correct this fault, if it be one, for they were designed for publication; but in proportion as I arranged my thoughts, my letter, I found, became stiff and affected: I therefore, determined to let my remarks and recollections flow unrestrained, as I perceived that I could not give a just description of what I saw, but by relating the effect different objects had produced on my mind and feelings, whilst the impression was still fresh. A person has a right, I have sometimes thought, when amused by a witty or interesting egotist, to talk of himself when he can win on our attention by acquiring our affection. Whether I deserve to rank amongst this privileged number, my readers alone can judge – and I give them leave to shut the book, if they do not wish to become better acquainted with me (1796: 46).

“If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book,” William Godwin wrote of Mary Wollstonecraft’s Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1798). As Gordon notes, in her Letters Wollstonecraft’s “heart beats through her pen” such that her “female vulnerability is bound to win readers of both sexes” (2005: 217, 289–90).

This travelogue was written in the form of letters to a lover,unnamed in the text but, clearly, Gilbert Imlay, who sent Wollstonecraft (accompanied by their one-year-old illegitimate daughter and her nanny Marguerite) as his agent on a business trip to Scandinavia in the summer of 1795. In her Letters, Wollstonecraft writes both, a travel book about a sublime northern landscape and, at the same time, “a lovers discourse”, to use Roland Barthes’s term, a discourse that transforms the beloved’s absence into an aesthetic “ordeal of abandonment” (1979: 13). Her epistolary discourse is the double: it is amorous as it is an attempt to elicit the absent lover’s response and it is educational as she writes a travel guide. Thus, to use Karen R. Lawrence’s words, part of the book’s agenda is to evoke a response from both a lover and a public who haven’t been listening (1994: 81). Considering Wollstonecraft’s vulnerable state of mind after the attempted suicide, the Letters serve as a means of composing the self. If we refer to Lacan, relating self to the others brings a healing effect: “The subject begins the analysis by talking about himself without talking to you, or by talking to you without talking about himself. When he can talk to you about himself, the analysis will be over” (Lacan 1975: 21). In the Letters, the writer or the writer’s self is constructed in relation to an absent other. As Roland Barthes puts it,

What is proposed here then is a portrait, but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structured one which offers the reader discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, amorously, confronting the other (the loved
The double nature of Wollstonecraft's text seems to declare, to use Lawrence's words, that "she is here, now, in the place where he/the reader-lover is not" (1994: 81). Wollstonecraft writes: "And here I am again, to talk of anything, but the pangs arising from the discovery of estranged affection, and the lonely sadness of a deserted heart" (1796: 283). Wollstonecraft's use of new beginnings and endings to her letters not only provides convenient stopping places in her travelogue but also renews the contract of writer and reader. The comings and goings of the letters give the traveler/writer the illusion of control over the presence and absence of the lover. Not only is the reader of the text constructed as a lover, but the lover is constructed as a reader as well. She constructs the reader, presumes his interest: "I almost forgot to tell you," "But let me talk of something else. Will you go with me to the cascade?" Thus it is possible to say that in the Letters, Wollstonecraft constructs a female subjectivity for the reader's attention, a self in writing and a reader/lover at the same time.

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YOUNG MAN'S DELUSION: FATALITY IN JOHN KEATS'S TIME'S SEA AND LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

To say that the figure of the femme fatale is a recurrent motif in John Keats's poems is to state the obvious. What is less transparent, however, is Keats's construction of this popular topos. The purpose of this paper is to look at two poems: Time's Sea and La Belle Dame sans Merci in the context of Keats's conviction that an intense love affair must be destructive to the male self and to show how male lovers in these poems actually cast their beloved women as fatal. To do this, first I intend to look at Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne, which I believe help to see his texts in the perspective which is interesting for my purposes, and then to pass on to a close analysis of both poems in question.

The conviction that a close contact with a woman, intensity of both physical and spiritual experience, can be dangerous, as it often leads to the destruction of the self, is visible in Keats's letters to Fanny Brawne. If his words communicate infatuation and adoration, his discourse at the same time evidences fear. In the letter of 13th October 1819 Keats wrote:

This moment I have set myself to copy some verses out fair. I cannot proceed with any degree of content. I must write you a line or two and see if that will assist in dismissing you from my Mind for ever so short a time. Upon my Soul I can think of nothing else — The time is passed when I had power to advise and warn you again[.] the unpromising morning of my Life — My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you — I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again — my Life seems to stop there — I see no further. You have absorb'd me. I have a sensation at the present moment as though I was dissolving [...]. You have ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist: and yet I could resist till I saw you; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often "to reason against the reasons of my Love." I can do that no more — the pain would be too great — My Love is selfish — I cannot breathe without you (Scott 2005: 390).
Additionally, in an earlier letter, the reader encounters similar statement:

It seems to me that a few more moments of thought of you would uncrystallize and dissolve me (Scott 2005: 326).

It seems that Keats's experience of love has reached such unbearable intensity that in truth it borders on self-annihilation. This passage abounds in negative expressions evidencing the lack of will or power to resist – such words as 'cannot', 'no further', 'nothing else', 'no more' suggest that the speaker of these lines has in truth become an object of desire, lost his subjectivity and now only lets things happen to him; furthermore, the infatuation is stilling, possessive, threatening, absorbing, stripping of identity, results in melting and dissolving of the self. Interesting gender question arises at the same moment, as here Fanny acts as a ravisher, while Keats imagines himself as being absorbed and ravished. Traditional male and female roles get reversed. Additionally, his love is clearly an affair of his heart not his mind – despite his rational efforts to control it through logic, it still holds him captive. It is as if he himself had no control whatsoever over his feelings.

Such a relationship, based on exclusion of any stimulus other than those directly related to the love object, as well as possessiveness, unbearable intensity, and – frequently – utter co-dependence which proves fatal for both parties in the long run, can already be detected in Keats's early poem Time's Sea, is very well visible in La Belle Dame sans Merci and comes back with full impact in Lamia. Time's Sea (1818) is a sonnet showing strong Shakespearean influence, whose main theme is longing for an absent woman. Biographical evidence shows that the sonnet celebrates a lady whom Keats saw only for a few moments in Vauxhall, but whose beauty influenced him as much as to write a couple of poems addressed to her (Time's Sea, Fill me a brimming bowl, When I have fears). This fleeting moment of contact seemed long enough to make the speaker of Time's Sea focus on his missing love with such intensity that the rest of his environment is relevant only as far as it connects in his thoughts with the mysterious woman. Thus, he confesses:

I never look on midnight sky,
But I behold thine well-memoried light;
I cannot look upon the roses dye,
But to thy cheek my soul takes flight;

(I. 7–10)

The reality is, and at the same time is not present. It is a springboard for memories which transport the speaker into the fantasy world. Although he does look at the sky, the colours, the flowers, he does not see them at all. In fact, he does not live in the present but muses over his reminiscences forgetting the natural world. The speaker seems to know that this leads nowhere, and he remarks that hearkening after a sound coming from her lover his ear 'doth devour its sweets in a wrong sense' (l. 11–12). The verb 'devour' suggests hunger and even violence; moreover, there is a syntactic ambiguity related to possessive pronoun 'its'. In full, these lines read:

I cannot look on any budding flower,
But my fond ear, in fancy at thy lips,
And hearkening for a love – sound, doth devour
Its sweets in the wrong sense [...]

(l. 9–12)

The reader cannot know whether 'its' relates to the 'budding flower' or 'a love sound.' This ambiguity is meaningful because clearly in the speaker's mind one is an excuse to turn to the other – while the flower is real, the sound is imagined 'in fancy' and thus both are seen and heard in 'the wrong sense' – not as they really are. The beauty of the flower is not felt neither appreciated; a love sound is not real but a product of wishful thinking. As a result, the speaker concludes:

[...] Thou dost eclipse
Every delight with sweet remembering,
And grief unto my darling joys dost bring.

(I. 12–14)

The word 'eclipse' is particularly important, since it emphasizes the speaker's infatuation, bordering on obsession. It also informs us about the nature of his feelings. In the real world, when the sun is eclipsed, this results in darkness and in fear, very often connected with thoughts of impending apocalypse, something unnatural, ominous. The nature of the eclipse in the poem is similar: joy and delight get overshadowed by grief, nevertheless, ambivalently, the remembering is sweet. However, it is not the woman who eclipses the speaker's world, but the memory of her, which he obsessively rehearses and re-lives in his thoughts. The woman, absent as she is, in the speaker's mind evolves into ambiguous figure, bringing pain and pleasure. In the first part of the sonnet he imagines himself as 'tangled in her beauty's web' (l. 3) and 'snared by the ungloving of her hand' (l. 4). All the words with negative connotations – 'snare', 'web', 'tangled' – point out at passivity and lack of will on the speaker's part, while the woman is pictured as the one who actively snares, and in the final line of the sonnet, brings grief unto the speaker's joys. The ambivalence between joy and pain is going to become a trademark of Keats's fatal women. Now, however, it is vital to point out that although the
speaker does all he can to convince himself (and us) that the woman is fatal, what is really fatal and snaring are his memories, which he cherishes and replays over and over again. The woman is not even present, let alone fatal and dangerous.

The theme of femme fatale returns in one of the best known poems by Keats – La Belle Dame sans Merci (1819). While this motif gets enriched and complicated, unequivocal nature of the woman is much more strongly emphasised. As in the previous poem, the speaker again is a man who suffers from his encounter with an ambiguous female – fairy. The narrative probably originated in the legend of Tannhauser, a Christian knight who in his wanderings (crusades) encountered a pagan goddess (Venus) and disappeared for seven years. Keats’s knight, pale and lonely, loiters in the woods, oppressed and sick, which is indicated by the natural surroundings: the sedge had withered in the lake, no birds sing. His sickness is a direct result of his encounter with a beautiful fairy lady, who seduced him, took him to her magical place – elfin grot, fed him on manna and honey-dew, let him kiss her, sang him a lullaby, and withdrew, making him wake up on a cold hill side, feverish and pale, probably like other knights who appeared in his dream, unable to come back to his normal life.

The critics who have analysed the poem differ significantly in their conclusions – from seeing the woman as Circe who deliberately destroys man to blaming the knight for his inability to maintain vision. While I generally agree with the standpoint rejecting straightforward interpretation of the belle dame as a deliberately destructive type, I am convinced that this poem is a milestone in Keats’s view of the feminine potential, which will also disclose itself later in his poems. Thus, the woman, although ultimately causing illness, suffering, fever and alienation, offers something which for the knight is priceless – a glimpse at a reality unattainable for him without her. Therefore, the union of the knight and the lady, their courting and lovemaking – in the poem described as making garlands, feeding on manna-dew and kissing – might be seen as a temporary union with an ideal, which cannot here be sustained. Similarly, the elfin grot to where the knight is taken functions as a magical place, typically liminal, a point in between two different worlds. La Belle Dame herself exemplifies one of the typical femme fatale traits, namely she is unattainable for the knight, and while he is a mortal man, she belongs to a different, half-mythological, half-magical realm: she is characterised as a ‘faery’s child’, she speaks strange language that the knight cannot understand, she sustains herself on roots, manna and honey-dew, the last two suggestive of a paradise-like world. As a fairy, she inhabits a different realm from mortal people, and she can be placed on an intermediary level between the world of Gods (ideal) and the vegetative world. Last but not least, she induces visions and dreams and – finally in the poem – she disappears, causing anguish and illness by her withdrawal. But is it really her who withdraws in the ballad?

The key moment of the whole poem, at the same time also centrally located in stanza 8, is the knight’s entrance to the elfin grot, the mysterious Otherworld. It is a place of promise and fulfilment, but also it is here where the magical transformation of the knight takes place. Only after the withdrawal from the grot does his sickness starts. As Earl Wasserman notices, the narrative movement in the poem can be seen as the knight’s progression to the grot (stanzas 4–7 of the narrative proper), with stanza 8 which admits the knight into the magical place, and then the withdrawal in the stanzas 9–12 (1967: 80). The visit in the grot becomes synonymous with the culmination of the love-affair, as it is where the lady leads the knight, feeds him, and sings to him. The main question that teases the reader is why the knight cannot stay in the grot after the lady takes him there? I would like to suggest that this problem can be explained only in relation to the dream that the knight has after the lady lulls him asleep.

Keats frequently uses the motif of the dream in his poetry and fairly often the dream is linked to imagination and it offers an access to the ideal, permanent realm. In one of his letters he wrote:

Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream: he awoke and found it truth (letter to Bailey, November 22, 1817, Scott 2005: 54).

Whether one awakes from the dream to the higher imaginative reality he dreams of, or to the bitter disillusionment, the dream itself usually serves as a moment of vision or an access to the world of imagination. In La Belle Dame sans Merci, however, the dream that the knight experiences in the elfin grot is not the dream of permanence but of mortality: he reports to have dreamt of other pale knights and princes, with horrid starved lips, trying to warn him (already too late) that the beautiful lady without mercy ‘has him in thrall’ (I, 39–40). As Karla Alwes points out, ‘thrall’ is a favourite word of Keats to express the idea of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, especially with regard to the female (1993: 19). Ironically, the knight wakes to find the dream truth: he has joined the army of pale knights, alone loitering through the woods, surrounded by withering landscape, which obviously corresponds to the condition of spiritual and physical sickness that he experiences.

The dream the knight has seems to be the key for understanding the meaning of the poem in many different interpretations. In recent gender criticism, the declaration of the lady from La Belle Dame sans Merci to be a femme fatale without mercy, cold and cruel, is often linked to it as well. The dream implies that the knight’s suffering is in fact the woman’s fault because
she has him 'in thrall'. Anne Mellor, in her chapter ‘Keats and complexities of gender’ argues that what the knight really gains by perceiving the woman as fatal and destructive is the right to tell the story – male voices silent the female because they feel threatened and in this way themselves commit, in fact, an act of violence:

What does he (and the knights, princes, and warriors of his dream) gain by defining the belle dame as ‘sans merci’, cold, cruel lacking in compassion? The gain is clear: even though the knight is left ‘Alone and palely loitering’ in a wasteland where the ‘edge has withered’ and ‘no birds sing’, even though his harsh dream has become his reality and he remains unloved, unloving, even dying, he gets to tell the story. Male voices and this male story silence and appropriate the female. We never hear la belle dame’s side of the story, what she thought or felt. This poem thus becomes, in Swann’s memorable phrase, a case of ‘harassing the muse,’ a sexual and verbal assault upon a female whose response is neither listened to nor recorded (Mellor 2001: 223).

In addition to this viewpoint it might be concluded that the dream unmasks the knight’s weakness. Although the lady provided him with all accessories he needed to enter, through the dream, the world she is the representative of – the realm of imagination, magic, immortality, permanence, beauty and love – he is not capable of dreaming the imaginative ideal. Being too deeply engrossed in the mortal world he belongs to, he summons this world into his sleep. In this way, his dream is not an ascend, but descend, from the threshold of the grot to the mortal world he knows and belongs to. It also might indicate the knight’s subconscious fear and reluctance towards parting with the place he is familiar with. The knights, pale, mortal and frightened as he is, may as well symbolise his fear of the union with the facry lady – the union which can lead to absorption and annihilation of the self. Thus, the dream in La Belle Dame sans Merci is, in fact, only an abortive attempt at vision.

At this point, to understand fully the significance of the relationship between the lady and the knight, and the consequences of the knight’s withdrawal from the grot, it is useful to introduce the notion which Keats developed rather early in his short writing career – that of ‘the pleasure thermometer.’ It is the concept in which pleasure, in the series of increasing intensities, leads to self-absorption, self-annihilation in a communion with essence – in the sense of truth and beauty, partaking in the ideal, immortal order. In Endymion, Keats introduces this notion:

   Wherin lies happiness? In that which becks
   Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
   A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
   Full alchemized, Behold the clear religion of heaven! Fold

   A rose leaf round thy fingers taperness,
   And soothe thy lips; hist, when the airy stress
   Of music’s kiss impregnates the free winds,
   And with the sympathetic touch unbinds
   Aeolian magic from their lucid wombs [..]

Feel we these things? – that moment have we stepped
Into a sort of oneness, and our state is like a floating spirit’s.

(l. 777–786, 795–797)

Happiness lies in those things which help us ascend higher, to ‘fellowship with essence.’ These lines belong to most widely disputed verses of Endymion, as some critics read them in a Neoplatonic sense, as an idealizing hierarchy. However, what seems troubling here is the fact that this communion with essence is conditioned not by rejection, but rather appreciation of the natural and the sensual world – it starts with the admiration of the beauty of the flower, than it moves through appreciation of music, which is linked to poetic creativity and inspiration (mention of winds and Aeolian magic). Yet, this can be achieved only thorough forgetting of the self, ‘stepping into oneness’ with what surrounds us. Next degree on a pleasure thermometer, after experiencing the beauty of the sensuous world, and even more self-annihilating, are close human relations – friendship and love (Endymion 1. 797–811, 813–815). The experience of love, standing highest, starts with anxiety and fear – but carried further results in a communion with higher essence – here described in Platonic terms as light and radiance, leading to sympathetic melting and blending in the universal spirit of love. Surprisingly, this does not entail self-destruction, but self-nourishment – the idea of being nurtured as a pelican brood (l. 815) denotes pelicans feeding their young with their own flesh and blood. Furthermore, as this experiences ‘sit high, upon the forehead of humanity’ (l. 800) they make us more human, not less.

As Keats further explains the notion of ‘pleasure thermometer’ in his letter to Taylor from 30th January 1819, ascending on the scale set implies ‘stepping of the Imagination towards the Truth’ (Scott 2005: 85). Stepping towards the Truth denotes progress in the direction of the higher, spiritual world, where communion with essence – love, beauty, truth, immortality – is possible. As we have seen, the steps towards it must entail awe and admiration for the natural world, experiencing of music and poetry – arts and, finally, the most intensive human contact – a love relationship. If we remember that particularly the last is, at least apparently, a process of forgetting, and even destroying the self – then the concept of the femme fatale, the woman whose love necessarily requires losing of the sense of separate ‘I’, can be seen in a new perspective. Probably the knight from the ballad, being so deeply engrossed in the material world of time and space,
could not trespass the barrier set by his own self. One should remember that the pale warriors and princes from his dream warn him against the inherent danger—which well might be losing of his self in the passionate relationship with the woman—ideal. Similar idea is suggested by Earl Wasserman, who comments on this problem:

The knight's inherent weakness in being unable to exclude from his visions the self-contained and world-bound mortality dissipates the ideal into which he has entered momentarily [...]. The elfin grot once again becomes the cold hill side which is the physical, mutable world, where the knight has been all the while, but which, by means of his visionary insight, took on the magic splendour of the elfin grot, the mystery within the mutable (1967: 76–77).

Another motif, characteristic for Keatsian treatment of the *femme fatale* topos although present rather covertly in the ballad, is the theme of illusion and susceptibility to the promise it offers. In the poem it functions on two levels. First, it is evasively hinted at already in the structure of the poem. The ballad starts with first three stanzas where the speaker is not a knight, but someone who meets the knight, reports his sickness and withering, and poses the question of the reason of the knight's suffering. The function of the frame narrative is to objectify the encounter with the knight and the relation of his physical condition, and, consequently, to stress subjectivity of the knight's story. It is noteworthy that the 'objective' speaker reports the knight's condition using the discourse of sickness both physical and mental: the knight loiters 'palely,' is 'haggard and woe-begone,' probably feverish—he's cheeks are red, his forehead (brow) is moist. Therefore, such description may put into question reliability of the knight's story. Secondly, after a close reading of the ballad we may get to the conclusion that the knight deludes himself into thinking that his encounter with a beautiful fairy lady was motivated by infatuation on both parts: when the lady enchants the knight, he proves very susceptible to her charm and plays an active part in their courting: makes for her a garland, bracelets and a fragrant girdle, it is him who sets her on his steed and rides away. Moreover, when telling the story he readily shares with his listener/reader his conviction that his fascination was reciprocated. Thus, although he cannot understand her language, he is sure that what she said to him was a love confession, and what is more, she looked at him 'as she did love.' Finally, the knight's readiness to enter the world of illusion and stay there is signalled by the fact that after they have set out for a journey, he reports his inability to see anything apart from his lady, because she bends sidelong and successfully blocks his view. Metaphorically the knight is blinded as to what is happening to him as much as to the consequences. As a blinded Lycius in *Lamia*, he chooses to perceive and believe in illusion.

Thus, the *femme fatale* topos in *Time's Sea* and *La Belle Dame sans Merci* works primarily through ambiguity and ambivalence: the lady is, and at the same time, is not, fatal. The man whom she snares, enchants, seduces and abandons in fact actively and willingly construes his fate. In his later poetry Keats develops the fatal woman concept and ultimately transforms it from tantalising but lethal enchantress to the muse, offering a possibility of insight and vision, necessary for self-development and self-definition. The encounter with such *femme fatale* becomes a rite of passage, where defeat or survival depends on the man and his potential.

NOTES


2 Among critics who read this passage in a Neoplatonic sense are J. Middleton Murry, Colvin and Finney. This argument is summarised in N. F. Ford, "The Meaning of "Fellowship with essence" in *Endymion* in *PMLA* LXIII (1947), pp. 1061–76.

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Ford, Newell F. 1947 The Meaning of "Fellowship with essence" in *Endymion* in *PMLA* LXIII (1947), 1061–76.


Critics usually agree that the basic scheme of The Magus plot relies on the magician-apprentice relation between Conchis and Nicholas. In the course of his education, compared by critics to Euhnorian mysteries (Fleischman 1976: 299–301) or to the Tarot deck (McDaniel 1980–81), also suggested in the novel itself, in the first edition, by the quotation from Rider-Waite Tarot deck, and in the revised edition by June clarifying the source of their names (Fowles 2004: 477), Nicholas is to gain the true knowledge about the world. Critics have also reached consensus with regard to the nature of this knowledge. Fleischman (1976) writes about the godless universe, McDaniel (1980–81) lays stress rather on the discovery that all that is important in life is love, while Nadeau (1980–81) calls attention to the need of acceptance of subjectively conceived reality which allows freedom from the existing scientific, social and cultural structures.

It is also the object of general agreement that this novel should be read in relation to another work by Fowles, The Aristo (1964), as it constitutes a practical application of Fowles’s philosophy presented in the earlier work. Thus, referring to Conchis’s words directed to Nicholas “You are now elect” (Fowles 2004: 531), critics agree that Nicholas’s education has been completed (even if he realised that only after some time) and that he belongs now to the aristos. This intertextuality and strong dependence of the meaning of the book on another text corrupts The Magus and draws attention to the artificiality of the whole world presented in it. On the one hand, the story presented in the novel is now not interpreted as an autonomous whole but as a part of an argument, on the other hand, placing itself in an intertextual continuum, discourse gains precedence over story turning the whole project into an exercise in narcissistic fiction in which the author comments on the narrative strategies of telling and understanding stories.

How does the image of a magician fit into this world? Is he just a code name for a narrative strategy implying intentional and conscious illusoriness
and artificiality of a literary text? The strategy which spreads the concept of "magic of theatre" to "magic of a novel"? Or is he a teacher schooling the apprentice in the spiritual rites as the critics quoted above suggest? How does a magician function in a godless universe? The goal of this paper is to analyse the manner of creation of the magus figure in Fowles's novel and his possible connotations. The basic questions include the relation of Fowles's magus to the traditional magician figures, the possible reasons for introduction and use of the concept of a magician as such, and the manner of re-working of the whole concept. Fowles clarifies his concept of magician in the 1976 introduction to his novel:

If there was some central scheme beneath the (more Irish than Greek) stew of intuitions about the nature of human existence — and of fiction — it lies perhaps in the alternative title, whose rejection I still sometimes regret: The Godgame. I did intend Conchis to exhibit a series of masks representing human notions of God, from the supernatural to the jargon-ridden scientific; that is, a series of human illusions about something that does not exist in fact, absolute knowledge and absolute power (2004: 10).

The above quotation links the concept of God with the concept of a magician making God replaceable with a magus in the title. In the course of the novel Conchis is to assume towards Nicholas subsequent masks identified in the above quotation with God taking in this manner the place of God in Nicholas's world only to reveal himself as a magician and withdraw from it. Contrary to God, the magician does exist as the fairy tale incorporated in the novel seems to illustrate, although at that stage in the manner in which he is to replace God is not clarified. In the tale which Nicholas finds at the end of the events which took place at Pharox, a young prince learns that the whole reality is just an illusion created by a magician and to be a magician means to be able to create one's illusion and to recognise illusions created by others. The full significance of this recognition shall be discussed later.

The figure and powers of the magician are developed gradually in the novel. Conchis is mentioned for the first time by Mitford who tells Nicholas that the only person interesting on the island is a Greek collaborator. Although he doubts that Nicholas will meet him, nevertheless, while leaving he once more gives an ambiguous warning enough to steer Nicholas's interest: "Beware of the waiting-room" (45). With this warning he introduces the idea of mystery, of secret brotherhood, of danger waiting for those who dare to follow their wishes. In fact, with the introduction of this interdiction the similarity of the story to the structure of the folk tale identified by Propp becomes evident and the reader more or less consciously awaits for the interdiction to be violated. The violation of the interdiction and the introduction of Conchis, who now falls into the role of the villain into the story is preceded once more with the cryptic message: "But then the mysteries began" (63) which suggests that the known order of the world is going to be challenged. At the end of the novel, the reader also realises that Mitford giving warning to Nicholas disclosed himself as a failed "apprentice". Leverrier and Nicholas do not reveal any information relating to the events taking place at Pharox.

The actual appearance of Conchis in the novel brings about the change in the person of the narrator and in the mode of narration itself. At the beginning Conchis seems to be just one of the characters in a traditional, first-person Bildungsroman. Nicholas referring to the convention of Victorian fiction gains trust of the reader who momentarily assumes him to be a reliable narrator and the story told by him to be "real". He presents himself as an heir to the tradition of the 19th c. Britain, a standard product of his times. Nicholas is aware of the mask he is wearing and lets it determine his behaviour. He seems almost proud of his ability to adjust to the society based on appearances. He suspects the same shallowness of character as he displays in everybody else. Tired and bored with his life, unsuccessful in his creative effort, he consciously refers to the literary genre he is writing himself into and says: "I needed a new mystery" (19). In the course of the events happening on Pharox Nicholas finds that his narrative is invaded and flooded by thousand of other narrative conventions overiding and confusing his story, giving over the reigns of a story-teller to the hands of Conchis, the man existing through, in and out of thousands of stories, implying and defying them all. Dwight Eddius comments:

What happens is that the player of the godgame manipulates, indirectly, the pawns who are holding the novel in their hands. Faced with his own recurring gullibility the reader is thus forced to admit his tendency to "collect," to seize upon convenient "solutions" that are nothing more than screens hiding the next mystery. [...] The result is the active initiation of the reader into awareness of the provisional nature of his own constructs, and the vagaries of hazard. [...] Art must continually undermine its own artifice if it is to maintain its dialectic with the reality that provides its elements. If it pretends to ontological autonomy, it becomes the enemy of its own vitality and authenticity (1976: 214).

Although he is not developing the subject, Eddius draws attention to the fact that this novel is basically narcissistic, reflecting on its own structure and commenting on it. On the level of story, Nicholas talks about Greece being a mirror in which his true nature is disclosed and reflected. On the level of discourse the reader deals with the mirroring structures and images entangling uncountable number of references and quotations from other
literary texts, culture, history etc. etc. in which the division between story and history becomes impossible or even unnecessary. This is the place where the magician appears in the story. Conchis places himself in the middle of the web of references and meanings and takes over the creation of the world from the first person narrator. He seizes the role of an implied author confusing the narrator with ever new stories incorporated into his world. The method adopted by Conchis reflects the expectations and capabilities of Nicholas. Information the reader gets about other “disciples” like Mitford, Leverrier, John Briggs or Mrs de Seitas allows to assume that for each of them a different scenario was prepared reflecting their personal and intellectual qualities. Nicholas was in search for a mystery, and the mystery was created for him. The events in which he was engaged seem to follow roughly the basic pattern of initiation rites as Nicholas as able to recognise them as such. All critics agree that Conchis holds a central position in the novel and a key to the mystery. Avrom Fleishman identifies him with a high priest holding Orphic rites (1976: 300), McDaniel (1980–81) and Eddius (1976) with a Tarot magician introducing the Fool to the first mysteries, Robert L. Nadeau (1980–81) calls him a psychotherapist and a philosopher, while Martin Kuester (1997) stresses that Conchis is the only one who fully understands the events.

Conchis presents himself as a master story-teller. From the moment he is introduced into a novel, which in itself is an intrasemonic quotation of a wizard’s apprentice motif, quotations from literature, theatre, movies, paintings, myths, songs, scientific texts, reality replace and displace “the real” world, making Nicholas and the reader embark on the interpretative and cognitive quest trying to recognise the source and assign relevance to the introduced quotations. At that stage in the story, Nicholas still differentiates between “the real world” and “the magical world.” The first task he assigns to himself is to disclose illusions created by Conchis displaying the true nature of the latter. He tries to determine the significance of the quotations in relation to the story told by Conchis, and the possible intentions of Conchis in telling the story to him. He feels he is a spectator in a play staged for his sake, but in that he fails to perceive himself as an actor and agent in the story. He still believes to an outsider unthreatened and uninfluenced by the events. It is finally in the judgement scene, when Nicholas is forced first to see a blue movie and then Lily and Jo making love, that he has to accept that there is no distinction between the real and the fictional world.

It should be mentioned here that The Magus exists in two different versions published in 1966 and 1977, respectively. The second version extends the events describing the relation between Julie, June and Nicholas introducing erotic scenes between Julie and Nicholas, commenting on his fascination with the possibility of having sex with twins, making Nicholas more clearly manipulative and unpleasant. In this version Julie and Nicholas are having intercourse before he is seized by Conchis and his men, which makes the lesson in sex and morality more explicit (in the first version Julie does not allow the actual intercourse). The second edition also plays down the significance of the Tarot deck for the interpretation of the novel as it removes the quotation from the Rider-Waite’s Pictorial Key to the Tarot from the beginning of the novel and introduces, instead, just a short reference to such possible significance of Lily and Rose names in the clarification provided by June. The quotation implies the possibility of interpretation of Conchis as a magician from the tarot deck, and, thus, it validated the whole idea of the spiritual development of Nicholas brought about by his teacher. McDaniel following this idea identifies Rose, Lily and their mother as assistant magi to Conchis (1980–81: 252) and re-creates the whole deck spread in the novel. The presence of this additional paratext further stressed the textuality of the world of The Magus. The removal of quotation from Pictorial Key to the Tarot makes the quotations from de Sade placed as epigraphs to the chapters more exposed. With these quotations Folkes not only comments, as it is usually the case, on the content of the chapter they precede presenting, thus, Nicholas as a debauchee, events which take place at Pharoah as a mock-ritual, and promising the triumph of philosophy granting freedom to an individual in conclusion, but also introduces the whole concept of a philosophical work conveying its message of freedom unrestrained by morality, religion or law in the form of a popular story. De Sade is one of the magicians in the story.

Conchis does not invite Nicholas directly to Bournari. Leaving a collection of poems as a snare, he assigns the role of a seeker to Nicholas stimulating the natural curiosity of the latter and making use of the latter’s feeling of alienation. The delicate smell of perfume emitted by the pages of the book alongside the poems urging Nicholas to embark on a quest make him feel like a knight from the Arthurian tales in search for an abducted lady. Conchis creates his first illusion referring to the imagination and knowledge of Nicholas. From that moment on Nicholas is determined to enter the waiting room. His interest is further stimulated by the fact that there are apparently contrasting reports concerning Conchis among the villagers. His colleague, Melli, informs Nicholas that Conchis lives alone and sees nobody. Melli repeats Mitford’s information that Conchis might have been a Nazi collaborator. Melli’s story is challenged by some of the villagers. Nicholas also learns that Conchis is well educated, speaks foreign languages, has a large library. Conchis is presented as a man of resources and power who decided to withdraw from active life.

Conchis confirms this impression during their first meeting. Nicholas decides to appear uninvited on an excuse to get some water or ask direction. To his surprise he finds that he is expected. Conchis waits for him with tea
manifesting his superior knowledge of Nicholas’s plans and intentions. Nicholas describes him as an elderly man, whose age cannot be easily determined, showing certain disregard in his clothing.

He was nearly completely bald, brown as old leather, short and spare, a man whose age was impossible to tell. Perhaps sixty, perhaps seventy; dressed in a navy-blue shirt, knee-length shorts, and a pair of salt-stained gym shoes (79). This description evokes the connotations of timelessness, preservation. The casualty of his dress confirms that nothing foreseeable is to be expected of him. Nicholas attention is drawn to Conchis’s eyes, “The most striking thing about was the intensity of his eyes; very dark brown, staring, with a sinnian penetration emphasized by the remarkably clear whites; eyes that seemed not quite human” (79). Eyes reveal supernatural power resting in Conchis, his power to mesmerize Nicholas, who is unable to resist his host. Recognizing Conchis for intellectually superior, Nicholas from the beginning is filled with the wish to be recognized by Conchis as equal. Conchis, on the other hand, immediately takes control over the events forcing Nicholas to the role of a listener. He silences Nicholas several times giving Maria his last orders concerning tea. The extraordinairiness of Conchis’s character is confirmed at the beginning of their conversation, when Conchis referring to Nicholas’s questioning of his servant Hermes, says: “If you question Hermes, Zeus will know” (80). Joking remark nevertheless likens Conchis to the head of Greek Pantheon assigning, thus, to the speaker such features as power, knowledge and timelessness. It is also a further introduction to game between the two. Conchis widens the possible interpretations of his figure and Nicholas role with the reference to the mystical and magical characters known from myths, literature and tradition. Another example of such a reference is his mentioning of Prospero. Inviting Nicholas to show him round Conchis says: “Prospero will show you his domaine” (83). On the one hand, mentioning Prospero introduces associations with the Renaissance Magus. Taking knowledge from Magical books, Magus believed in the possibility to control and change the world with the help of words of power and incantations. Equipped with Grimoir Prospero could summon demons and create illusions. The conviction that there is language granting control over the world stemmed from the belief that world was created with the help of words. The knowledge of the original creative word allowed for control over this part of the reality, but at the same time it implied strongly the existence of creative God and metaphysical reality. The existence of Renaissance or Tarot magus as well as any other historical magician figure depends on the existence of metaphysical world constituting the source of his power. The Egyptian priest to whom Conchis refers with elaborate gestures he uses and with the Anubis mask he places on Joe’s head, also based their power on the existence of after-life. This significance of the Magus is taken by Fowles and re-interpreted.

Still, at that stage of the novel Conchis like a magician weave a web of language around Nicholas. The introduction of the poetic texts at the beginning, books he leaves in Nicholas’s room, stories from his life, “authentic” materials he provides like the manifesto of his student group, played out mythological scenes, songs etc. etc. all these point out to the textual nature of the world and influence of language and texts of our culture on the perception and understanding of the world making art the source of knowledge. Playing with the subsequent concepts of a magician, Conchis in fact not only questions its validity in the modern world, but also deconstructs the very basis of its construction. His magicians are deprived of any special powers and their skills are disclosed as mystifications.

The lesson taught by Conchis occupies several narrative levels. On the one hand there are numerous complete and incomplete quotations from other literary works, intersemiotic quotations from songs, dramas and paintings and transsemiotic quotations from reality. They are often constituting the sphere of improbable or surreal, seem to break away from the written medium and transgress to the reality as, for example, characters from confession written by Robert Foulkes who appear in front of Nicholas, or a song “Tippery” which he hears in the middle of the night (141, 133). The bone structure for other tales, drama performances, etc. is the story of his life told by Conchis, and this story holds the key to message to be learned by Nicholas. Conchis decides to tell this story to Nicholas in order to clarify to him what he means by the concept “elect”. As a result of his tale, Nicholas is to change into a “magician” or “aristo” himself. At the same time, the stories told show us the modern magus as re-defined by Fowles.

The first part of the story describing his childhood and adolescence stresses the duality of the world and division between intellectual and emotional principle. He associates his English father with reason and understanding, while his Greek mother stands for feelings. In the whole novel Conchis identifies certain psychological features with national characteristics. This is why, at the very beginning he differentiates nations into those with the ability to laugh at themselves (English, Greek and French) and those without it (Roman, German and Spanish). Torn between his wish to comply with the rules of the world of his father while at the same time recognising in himself the preference to the world of his mother, Conchis introduces the reader, on the one hand, to the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian principle in art and in life. He also denies at that stage the moralized notion of duty and virtue. The above ideas introduce the novel not so much to the openly admitted philosophy of Heracleitus but to the philosophy of Nietzsche, where
this influence becomes more visible in the further parts of the story. At present, like early Nietzsche, he finds art the highest task in life and the source of knowledge.

The meeting with de Daukans in Paris constitutes one of the first meetings of Conchis with a magician figure. At that time Conchis professes the power of reason valuing science and empirical truth over myth. De Daukans represents everything which at that time should abhor him. He is a misogynist, on the verge of being a misanthropist, fabulously rich, collector of automates, a black magician and an eccentric scientist. He places himself outside of the society, questioning its right to impose its moral codes on him. He lives a life of a new-hedonist, interested only in the pleasure of the moment. His collection of automata suggests his similarity to one of the magician figures created by E.T.A. Hoffmann, and as such he also constitutes one of the alter egos of Conchis who takes on a similar role towards Nicholas. Conchis comments:

[...] he was a man from a perfect world lost in a very imperfect one. And determined, with a monomania as tragic, if not quite as ludicrous, as Don Quixote's, to maintain his perfection (180).

De Daukans is destroyed by the society as he cannot bear the burning of his house and his collections stored in it. The events illustrate the power of good/evil mode of valuation, the “grudge-laden resentment” of ‘the slaves’, representing herd morality, towards ‘the nobles’.

The meeting with Henrik in Seidevarre is presented by him as a moment in which he realises that there is no reason to assume that everybody shared the same vision of reality, and that our perception of reality is based on the major ideal of value we had so far. The meeting strangely reminds of Nietzsche, and the meeting with the hermit who still did not know that God died. Nietzsche's madman telling us that God is dead makes way for the magician filling in its place. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra the protagonist tells about his meeting with a hermit living in a forest:

‘And what is the saint doing in the forest?’ asked Zarathustra. The saint answered: ‘I make songs and sing them; and when I make songs, I laugh, and hum: thus do I praise God. With singing, crying, laughing, and humming do I praise the god who is my god. But what do you bring us as a gift?’ When Zarathustra had heard these words he bade the saint farewell and said: ‘What could I have to give you? But let me go quickly lest I take something from you!’ And thus they separated, the old one and the man, laughing as two boys laugh. But when Zarathustra was alone he spoke to his heart: ‘Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has no yet heard anything of this, that God is dead!’ (Nietzsche 1969: 41).

This meeting does not only remind of the meeting of Conchis with Hendrik. Placed into the novel as an interverbal, incomplete quotation it introduces both the image of a magician believed by the ancient Greeks to be a magician par excellence (Butler 1979: 21) connecting, thus, the idea of a magician with the idea of the absence of God, and the concept of an Übermensch (overhuman/superman) bearing similarities to the concept to the aristo presented by Fowles himself in his study.

The Second World War is the time of meeting with the dark magician once more. The cruel Colonel Wimmel has not only the power of life and death over the villagers and soldiers, he is also able to influence their perception of the world. Conchis describes the moment of revelation in the following way:

I understood many things. His real self, his real position. And from that came the realization that he was mad, and that he was therefore innocent, as all mad people, even the most cruel are innocent. He was what life could do if it wanted—an extreme possibility made hideously mind and flesh. Perhaps that was why he could impose himself so strongly, like a black divinity. For there was something superhuman in the spell he cast. And therefore the real evil, the real monstrosity in the situation lay in the other Germans, those less-then-mad lieutenants and corporals and privates who stood silently there watching the exchange (433).

Colonel Wimmel represents freedom unchecked by common sense, by reason. It is freedom without smile. Conchis clarifies:

In mine [world] life had no price. It was so valuable that it was literally priceless. In his, only one thing had the quality of pricelessness. It was elutheria: freedom. He was the immaculate, the essence, the beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond civilization, beyond history. He was not God because there is no God we can know. But he was a proof that there is a God that we can never know. He was the final right to deny. To be free to choose. [...] He was every freedom, from the very worst to the very best. [...] He was something that passed beyond morality but sprang out of the very essence of things—that comprehended all, the freedom to do all, and stood against only one thing—the prohibition not to do all (434).

Following the guerrilla and contrary to his choice during the First World War, Conchis decides to choose freedom rather than life. Wimmel and the guerrilla represent will to power, either by power to hurt others or by directing this power against himself and subjecting his life to an ideal of freedom. Anton represents the feeling of powerlessness leading to despair. The guerrilla taking the position of God becomes yet another magician in the story. The white magician on the way to perfection learning that it is just an illusion created by people, that the ascetic ideal has to be replaced with an
ideal of a superman. The black magician on the way to power finding out that the source of evil is in himself. Still, it can be noticed that this story repeats the same pattern reported in the story of Conchis’s childhood, i.e. the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian principle. Colonel Wimmel representing self-control, rules, clarity and order becomes an image of the Apollonian principle. He stands for the world of Conchis’s father and the original Lily, the world of symbolic arrangement and hierarchical structures, “a man’s world” (413) as Conchis calls him, or a world of Romans, Germans and Spaniards, i.e. the nations who cannot smile accepting life wholly. The unnamed guerrilla, on the other hand, stands for chaos, intoxication, instinct, excess and dissolution of boundaries, i.e. for the Dionysian principle. It is the world of Conchis’s mother, female world, in which not structures but relations are important, in which meaning is created not with the help of symbolic but semiotic order of language.

The importance of the above story for the structure of his message is shown by the fact that Conchis insists on telling it, although Nicholas assumes that he has already found the solution to the Conchis’s charade, negating in that way the so far interpretations of events as provided by Nicholas. Nicholas involved just in the question of truthfulness of the stories told about Julie and June, treated other tales presented by Conchis as clues aiding the solution of that issue. Therefore, he rejected subsequent magician masks adopted by Conchis, starting with an Egyptian priest, through Renaissance magus, alchemist, necromancer to mesmerizer treating them as a sign of unreliability of the story-teller. He believes to have overcome Conchis’s protean skills and forced him to assume his real shape, or in terms of the already mentioned Propp’s structure of the magical tale, he believes to have defeated the villain.

“The old man of the sea” is in his opinion beaten by the persistence and courage of a hero who is to receive his reward. At the beginning his assumption seems to be confirmed by the manner in which Conchis tells the story. Conchis states that “for once this is a true story” (413) which apparently confirms the “true-false” basis of the so far game, introducing a new reason for this story.

At that stage Conchis’s behaviour towards Nicholas also changes. He appears openly irritated and tired with Nicholas, as if the latter have failed in his task. He admits that the so far events constituted part of the performance in which Nicholas was involuntarily involved, but stresses that their obvious artificiality was intended:

‘The object of the meta-theatre is precisely that – to allow the participants to see through their first roles in it. But that is only the catastasis. [...] It is what precedes the final act, or catastrophe, in classical tragedy. Or comedy. As the case may be.’

‘The case depending on?’

‘Whether we learn to see through the roles we give ourselves in ordinary life’ (408–409).

Following Nietzsche, Conchis says “All good science is art. All good art is science” (409) urging Nicholas to learn “the innermost secret of life” (146) from a smile immortalized on an Ancient Greek sculpture. This early philosophy of Nietzsche is also reflected in the manner in which Conchis conveys his lesson to Nicholas. A collage of dramas, performances, music, literary texts, forged documents from real world which also acquire the status of stage props, movies creating mirroring theatres within theatres, constitutes the best teaching material. Nicholas rejects the message of the above quotation. He disregards the information that he merely saw through the “first” role assigned to him. To accept that would mean to him to confirm that his achievement in forcing Conchis out of his lies was just part of the plot and the least expected of him. What he wanted was to prove his intellectual superiority. He wanted to win the seeker contest as set at the beginning by Conchis. Therefore, the above clarification provided by Conchis is perceived by him as yet another attempt of the defeated opponent to wriggle out from the defeat by creation of a new illusion. Observing change in Conchis’s behaviour, Nicholas comments:

I felt his energy then, his fierceness, his heartlessness, his impatience with my stupidity, my melancholy, my selfishness. His hatred not only of me, but of all he had decided I stood for: something passive, abdicating, English, in life. He was like a man who wanted to change all; and could not; so burned with his impotence; and had only me, and infinitely small microcosm, to convert or detest (439).

He assigns the apparent impotence and furious powerlessness in Conchis’s behaviour to the failure of the latter to change him. Still, he believes it to be his success being convinced that Conchis simply underestimated his abilities. At the same time Conchis desperation to force him to accept his vision of reality is for Nicholas another confirmation of Conchis’s madness. From the beginning of their acquaintance Nicholas describing Conchis repeatedly states that the latter is “mad”. The perception of this madness changes from “eccentric” as during their first meetings where he constantly oscillates in his reaction and behaviour between interested and irritated, welcoming and bothered, when he asks strange questions, and assumes strange roles making it impossible for Nicholas to form an unanimous opinion on him, through “manipulative” as at the beginning of Julie story, to “dangerously manic” when he looms over the characters like doctor Caligari. “Madness” representing something unaccountable and unpredictable in Conchis’s
behaviour and actions as well as the insistence in imposing his will, his views on others, is a feature Conchis shares with Hendrik, Wimmel and the unnamed guerrilla. The idea of madness is constantly connected in the novel with the idea of god and magician. From Hendrik who talking with his God creates his God for himself, through Wimmel who becomes God to his soldiers, to Conchis who is likened to madman, magician and god by Nicholas who hearing the last part of the story comments: “You honestly do think you’re God, don’t you?” (440). The madman, god, and the magician become one forming a new concept of a superman.

This idea is later on developed in the already mentioned fairy tale Nicholas finds in the Earth. It is also repeated by Madame de Seistas, who during the second meeting with Nicholas, while referring to the events which took place on the island she states: “The godgame is over. [...] The godgame. [...] Because there is no God, and it is not a game” (625). Everything which happened to Nicholas prepares him to change into the aristo/superman.

The identification of Conchis with a Zarathustra figure from Nietzsche’s philosophy allows also for the connection of the moral lesson taught to Nicholas with the concept of aristo. Tales told by Conchis present his rebellion against the “herd morality” in which as a result of resentiment the notion of ‘bad’ is transferred into ‘evil’ and the notions of virtue and duty are moralized. Herd morality is presented in the behaviour and expectations of Conchis’s father, the original Lily, peasants burning down the house of de Daukans or German soldiers in the Second World War. Herd morality makes Nicholas repeat uncritically the patterns of “angel” “whore” dichotomy in the perception of women, i.e. evaluation of their personalities on the basis of a moralized concept of virtue. Still, following Nietzsche, to overcome this concept of morality means to be able to create new values, and for that Nicholas has to overcome his conviction that truth is more important than anything else, i.e. he has to break away from ascetic Platonic/Christian ideal connecting God with ultimate truth. God has to die for Nicholas as well. To achieve that Conchis creates a world in which the distinction between fact and fiction is abolished and in which he takes the position of God.

Lily de Seistas clarifies: “Maurice convinced us – over twenty years ago – that we should banish the normal taboos of sexual behaviour from our lives. Not because we were more immoral than other people. But because we were more moral” (603) and later “Do I look an evil woman? Did my daughters?” and “Are you absolutely sure our actions have been nothing but evil?” (604) with which she refers, first of all, to the concept of morality of ‘the good’ or ‘the noble’ as presented by Nietzsche in which the ideas of goodness with connected with mark of distinction, and second of all, with the idea of ‘unnaturalness’ of morality resisting in its hatred of any all too great freedom, connecting thus the concept of morality with the concept of freedom.

In Nietzsche’s philosophy Zarathustra creates the idea of superman as the alternative to ‘herd morality’. This lesson is voiced in the novel by Madame de Seistas who claiming higher moral awareness for the members of their group clarified that this higher awareness implies responsibility towards other people. She stresses that not everybody is able to reach this status differentiating between the noble and the slave. She attempts to provide Nicholas with tools for evaluation of the events which took place on Pharox:

Nicholas, if one is trying to reproduce, however partially, something of the mysterious purposes that govern existence, then one also has to go beyond some of the conventions man has invented to keep those purposes at bay. That doesn’t mean that in our ordinary lives we think such conventions should be swept away.

Far from it. They are necessary fictions. But in the godgame we start from the premise that in reality all is fiction, yet no single fiction is necessary (627).

Nicholas in his actions followed “herd morality”. Not only his assessment of Julie, June and Alison is important here, but also his conventional behaviour described in the first part of the novel as well as, for example, his behaviour during the “trial” when he realizes that even at that moment his decision was motivated by the approval of the others. He says: “I was aware I wanted to make a right choice; something that would make them all remember me, that would prove them all wrong” (516). His decision follows the generally accepted moral standards. The blue movie he is shown in conclusion not only once more questions his distinction between fiction and fact but also his concept of morality proposing the Dionysian order represented by the white goddess.

In the last message given to Nicholas Conchis says: “Learn to smile, Nicholas. Learn to smile” (531) repeating the lesson of affirmation of life presented by Zarathustra in the concept of eternal recurrence which manages to overcome the devaluation of human life incorporated in the ascetic ideal.

With the title of the novel Fowles places the concept of a magician in the limelight. Still, the magician created by him consequently deconstructs and abolishes existing cultural models of such a figure. His priest, god, Renaissance magus, Tarot’s magician, necromancer, alchemist, prophet, mesmeriser or free mason are just empty masks. Their powers are disclosed as illusions, ineffective and empty in the modern world. They are unable to summon demons, dead, disclose future or carry out the rite introducing a neophyte into the mysteries. In fact they constitute just a distraction, an element of a trap set for Nicholas, a concept to be deconstructed and reinterpreted. Their ineffectiveness and emptiness stems from the fact that they were all based on the system of which proclaimed the existence of metaphysical or true world as opposed to our empirical world. The use of the form ‘Magus’ is one of the
first hints to the connection of his magician with the figure of Zarathustra, as the Old Testament 'Magi' were also believed to be the followers of Zoroastrianism (Butler 1979: 19). Still, Fowles does not refer to the original Zoroaster, but to his counterpart created by Nietzsche. Like Nietzsche, who named his character Zarathustra to negate the original prophet's idea of morality, Fowles uses the character of a magician to profess the world of freedom and acceptance of life. The world of superman who finds the source of morality in himself/herself defying ascetic ideals and metaphysical world. The world in which there is no place for a magician as we know him. The form of the novel itself, on the one hand, presents art as the best medium for presentation of a philosophical lesson, while, on the other, constitutes a comment on the artificiality and textuality of the world created. As it destabilises diegetic levels of storytelling, constituting a kind of an artistic collage, it stresses the fact that it is, first of all, a work of fiction which mirrors itself rather than reality.

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THE ART OF WRITING AS A WAY TO ACHIEVE MORAL REBIRTH
IN IAN McEWAN'S ATONEMENT

In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start
W. H. Auden

Atonement has been so far Ian McEwan's most explicit investigation into the art of writing and into what it means to be a writer. As McEwan himself puts it: "Part of the intention of Atonement was to look at storytelling itself. And to examine the relationship between what is imagined and what is true" (Reynolds & Noakes 2002: 19). Moreover, both the novel's subject matter as well as its unusual – for the author generally associated with traditional, realist forms and techniques – postmodern, self-conscious construction are fully coherent with McEwan's strong belief in moral consequences of novel writing.

The very first page of Atonement opens with a description of a play written by a thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis who is the protagonist and, as it turns out later, in the final twist of the plot, also the narrator and the author of the novel. Thus, as Brian Finney rightly observes, "[w]e meet an instance of Briony's literary imagination before we get to know her as a personality. She is an author first, and a girl on the verge of entering adolescence secondly" (2002). And since she is so obsessed with writing, it is only natural that all that happens around her must affect both Briony the girl and Briony the writer. "In Briony, McEwan presents an image of the child and the writer together [...]" (Childs 2006: 141). In other words, her development as a human being is parallel to, or fused with, her literary development.

It is worth noting here that, firstly, the specific construction of the plot constitutes nothing else than Künstlerroman and, secondly, that this is the first instance of Künstlerroman, in its rather post-modernist version, in McEwan's writing career. The very form is an intertextual element of

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McEwan’s deliberate play with literary traditions and conventions. Other intertextual devices include stylistic influences of modernist writers (e.g. Elisabeth Bowen, Rosamund Lehmann, Virginia Woolf), plot similarities (e.g. Henry James’s What Maisie Knew or L.P. Hartley’s The Go-Between), direct references (e.g. to Virginia Woolf, W.H. Auden, Jane Austen) or allusions (e.g. Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady, Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita). Indeed, “[i]t’s a novel full of other writers” (Reynolds & Noakes 2002: 19). Atonement is thus not only a novel about a novelist as well as the process of writing a novel but, thanks to its rich, many-layered intertextuality, it is also about literature in general, also by the fact that it draws the reader’s attention to its own fictionality; its deeply metafictional character is emphasised throughout the novel. According to Peter Childs, in its formal complexity the novel draws heavily upon a realist tradition with its deep characterisation and social awareness, at the same time showing concern about modernist ideas of consciousness, pre-postmodernist humanist view of morality and post-modernist interest in exposing its status as a literary artefact. It should also be noted that as regards the form, the novel, although unquestionably a Künstlerroman, is also a genre hybrid, a mixture of a country-house tradition in the first section, a war memoir in the second, and a story of reconciliation in the third (2006: 143).

Going back to Briony, to understand fully the process of two-level changes happening in her life, we should first take a brief look at the girl’s peculiar personality. At the beginning of the novel, we get an insight into Briony’s room. The detailed description of her toys, all in perfect order and ranks, clearly suggests the girl’s two distinct traits: love of order and miniaturisation (5). Briony has also a great “passion for secrets” (5) despite, or perhaps because of, her life devoid of any serious reasons to hide anything from others. Finally, one should take into account Briony’s true interest in language itself, especially its most sophisticated words, that makes her determined to spend long hours searching through dictionaries (6). What is interesting, all of these desires together are ingeniously satisfied when the girl discovers a self-made fiction (6, 7). Not without significance for the future events as well as for Briony’s writing aspirations is also the peculiar moment in the girl’s life when we meet her; the fact that she is no longer a child but not yet an adult. This in-between state, the very fact of being suspended between childhood and adulthood brings about Briony’s certain actions and decisions.

Briony first realizes the need and inevitability of change when she compares herself to her older cousin Lola. She clearly feels there is a gap between her and Lola and senses all the nuances of Lola’s behaviour, although she might not be able to understand all of them (13). Lola’s carefully designed, almost woman-like appearance, cannot pass unnoticed by still very child-like Briony who is fascinated with the girl’s aura of adulthood (11). Faced with Lola and her manipulative behaviour, ironic or sarcastic comments and grown-up looks, Briony is less confident than usual and feels both jealousy and embarrassment. Being acutely aware of her own childishness in comparison with the older cousin she thinks for the first time she should pay more attention to the way she looks, even if it seems so troublesome: “She should have changed her dress this morning. She thought how she could take more care of her appearance, like Lola. It was childish not to. But what an effort it was” (35). In another passage Briony considers “starting on her face”, the thing Lola already takes as something natural and necessary (120).

Other people around Briony also realize changes in her. Her sister Cecilia recalls the past with tenderness and seems to regret that Briony is not a child any more (44). Briony’s mother, Emily, shares similar feelings. She wishes that the sweet and peaceful time of Briony’s infancy had not ended and sees that her daughter is changing and getting out of her mother’s control (68, 151). Even Robbie notices there is something special about the period of life Briony passes through: “It was an awkward age in a girl” (94). Although he once admits “[s]he was still a child” (129), at the same time he also claims: “At this stage in her life Briony inhabited an ill-defined transitional space between the nursery and adult worlds which she crossed and recrossed unpredictably” (141).

Briony is an intriguing and untypical young girl whose thoughts, surprisingly, sometimes wander away to metaphysical problems. For instance, there is a passage when Briony wonders about her body and the magical way she is able to move her finger (35, 36), which leads her to more general reflections: “[…] was everyone else really as alive as she was[…] Was being Cecilia just as vivid an affair as being Briony?” (36). And although she assumes this is highly probable that others might also have thoughts and feelings like her, she is far from accepting that probability; after all, if it were not for “the scribble of other minds, other needs” (36), the rehearsals for her play would be perfect, just as perfect it first looked on the paper. Briony honestly regrets she has not come up with the idea to write a story to welcome her brother Loon, a story which is, in comparison with a play, “direct and simple”, with nothing in between reading and understanding, just like with “the crooking of the finger” (37).

And it is there, in the nursery, and then, in the heat of the summer morning that Briony, being in a rather confused and irritated mood, notices Cecilia and Robbie standing by the fountain. Immediately, being an aspiring writer of some literary experience, she starts to interpret that what she sees: “A proposal of marriage. Briony would not have been surprised. She herself had written a tale in which a humble woodcutter saved a princess from
drowning and ended by marrying her. What was presented here fitted well [...] It made perfect sense. Such leaps across boundaries were the stuff of daily romance" (38). Clearly, Briony’s “powerful imagination works to confuse the real with the fictive. Her observation of life around her is conditioned by the fictive world that holds her in its grip” (Finney 2002). The world of her childhood reading and her first naïve literary attempts which imitate that world give her a ready scenario. It is a complete surprise for her when her sister suddenly gets undressed and jumps into the pond. Briony is shocked as at that very instant her scenario does not fit any more, hence she claims that “[t]he sequence was illogical – the drowning scene, followed by a rescue, should have preceded the marriage proposal” (39).

The scene makes a profound impact not only on Briony the girl but also, above all, on Briony the writer. She feels that from now on everything will be different, that she enters the next stage of her writing career, “that for her now it could no longer be fairy-tale castles and princesses, but the strangeness of the here and now, of what passed between people [...], and [very ironically for the future course of events] how easy it was to get everything wrong, completely wrong” (39). She feels a great urge to start writing in this new, adult style of psychological realism (Wells 2006: 124) and knows that what she needs to do is “show separate minds, as alive as her own, struggling with the idea that other minds were equally alive. [...] And only in a story could you enter these different minds and show how they had an equal value. That was the only moral a story need have” (40). Ironically, Briony’s thoughts of “imaginative empathy” (Childs 2006: 135) will soon prove to be very superficial. Briony would like to show empathy at work in her writing but it does not seem possible as, in fact, she lacks empathy in her own life.

Interestingly, the theme of empathy is close to McEwan himself. As an atheist, he claims it is the most significant foundation of secular morality (Nicieza 2005: 242). “Imagine yourself into the minds of other people is [...] a fundamental human act of empathy, which lies at the base of all our moral understanding” (Whitney 2002). According to McEwan, a novel is an excellent form which enables the writer to enter others’ minds and learn something important. “I look on novels as exploratory, forms of investigation, at its broadest and best, into human nature” (Cryer 2002). And if empathy is the most significant element of morality and a novel is a perfect medium of empathy, of going beyond your own limitations in order to imagine and understand what goes on in the minds of others, then novel writing itself becomes a moral act (Nicieza 2005: 242). “Writing novels is a form of investigation into the human condition. Novels have this extraordinary capacity, better than any other art form, to go into other minds. [...] It is that journey out of oneself into what it means to be someone else that lies at the heart of the moral nature of novel writing” (Lawson 2001).

The impact of the scene by the pond on Briony is so great that the girl feels the need to reconsider both her life and her writing. Playwriting in her mind becomes “the shallowness, the wasted time, the messiness of other minds, the hopelessness of pretending” and she decides she will never again be a playwright. As for her life, Briony feels she no longer belongs to the sphere of childhood, no longer needs the “dependency of infancy” and “to show off and be praised” (74). She feels independent now of others’ opinion. What she also feels, and that needs to be taken into account as it will have its grave implications for the further events, is an uneasiness in the real world. Clearly, Briony feels better while daydreaming in the world of her own invention than in the world that invented her (76). The real world disappoints her with its limitations and monotonous predictability: “Was there really all there was in life, indoors or out? Wasn’t there somewhere else for people to go?” (76). Therefore, she decides to “wait until something significant happened to her,” some real, not imagined, events occur that will dispel her insignificance (77).

Briony does not wait long for her “real event”. It comes in the form of a letter that Robbie gives her to deliver to Cecilia; or so it seems to Briony, when in the belief that, being a writer, “it was right, it was essential, for her to know everything,” she opens the letter only to discover a mysterious word with which “something elemental, brutal, perhaps even criminal had been introduced” (113). Although she does not fully understand the letter, nor does she know what really happened by the pond, she imagines the letter throws a new light both on the previous scene and on Robbie. Briony already builds a story in her mind according to which she feels she must defend her sister from Robbie. Above all, however, she feels “the urge to be writing” (115). Yet, the events of the day and her own reactions to them seem a totally new and quite problematic sphere for an aspiring young writer: “[...] how to do justice to the changes that had made her into a real writer at last, and to her chaotic swarm of impressions, and to the disgust and fascination she felt?” (115). Having chaos in her head and heart, Briony knows that first “[o]rder must be imposed” (115). And then she should finish with simple good and evil stories and find “some lofty, god-like place from which all people could be judged alike” (115). And yet, all she can feel for Robbie is disgust, especially after Lola calls him a “maniac” (119). And, of course, the name fits perfectly to Briony’s feelings and the story being built in her head: “Now his condition was named she felt certain consolation [...]” (119).

Another scene that seemingly marks Briony’s transition from childhood into adulthood, when in fact it is her next misinterpretation of the ‘adult event’, occurs the same day later when Briony enters the library. “The young Briony suffers from an inability to disentangle life from the literature that has shaped her life. She imposes the patterns of fiction on the facts of life.” Being
too young and, therefore, totally unprepared for that which she sees, she interprets the event according to her book-bred knowledge and the story, her story she has already in her head. “Briony is a child who becomes involved in an adult sexual relationship that she is ill equipped to understand” (Finney 2002). Thus Robbie and Cecilia’s sex scene in the eyes of the thirteen-year-old girl becomes a violent and brutal act which Briony takes as a confirmation of her being right after all about Robbie:

[...] her immediate understanding was that she had interrupted an attack, a hand-to-hand fight. The scene was so entirely a realisation of her worst fears that she sensed that her over-imaginative imagination had projected the figures onto the packed spines of books. [...] Briony stared past Robbie’s shoulder into the terrified eyes of her sister. [...] His left hand was behind her neck, gripping her hair, and with his right he held her forearm which was raised in protest, or self-defence” (123).

She obviously does not know anything about love-making so that she takes Cecilia’s expression as “terrified” and her forearm seems to be “raised in protest or self-defence.” The thought never crossed her mind that these two might be just shocked and embarrassed by the fact that somebody has caught them in their most intimate and passionate moment. Briony’s only thought is that by interrupting “the attack” she helps her sister. And yet she observes with surprise that “there was no sign in Cecilia of gratitude or relief” (124).

The moment is important for the future events. Not only is Briony sure now that Robbie is a dangerous man, truly a maniac, but she also feels a certain pride for being again included into the world of adults: “[...] to be the object of adult hatred was an initiation into a solemn new world. It was promotion” (157). She once again admits that there have been changes in her life that will have a huge impact on her writing: “Her childhood had ended [...] The fairy stories were behind her, and in the space of a few hours [...] she had become a participant in the drama of life beyond the nursery. All she had to do now was discover the stories, not just the subjects, but a way of unfolding them, that would do justice to her new knowledge” (160).

When the twins run away, Briony, though afraid of darkness in the park at a moonless night, is determined to continue searching with the others precisely “[...] because the day had proved to her that she was not a child, and that she was now a figure in a richer story and had to prove herself worthy of it [...]” (163). It is a challenge for her she has to face for the sake of her newly gained adult identity. Determined to “prove herself worthy” of a “richer story”, when she sees a figure in the dark running away from Lola it is out of formality that she asks her cousin who it was as “[e]verything connected. It was her own discovery. It was her story, the one that was writing itself around her” (166), “the terrible present fulfilled the recent past” (168). And when Briony over and over again defends her statement in front of the police officer and all the other adults she in fact defends her own, real (for her only) story built in the course of the day, in which she is no longer insignificant and in which everything connects, or so it seems to her, as well as her newly gained sense of maturity and “new-found power of adult interpretation” (Wells 2006: 124).

At the same time, however, Briony is aware of the fact that she could not see clearly, and that her accusation is based on something more than just seeing. “[I]t is her novelist’s need for order that clinches it” (Finney 2002). “It was not simply her eyes that told her the truth. [...] Her eyes confirmed the sum of all she knew and had recently experienced. The truth was in the symmetry [...] The truth instructed her eyes” (169). All she experienced during the day has found its vent at the moment of Briony’s testimony. Her new mature self and her ambition to be a serious writer deaden any doubt or sense of guilt. And although “she would have preferred to qualify, or complicate, her use of the word ‘saw’. Less like seeing, more like knowing,” which proves that Briony’s self-confidence is not so strong after all, she continues to “[march] into the labyrinth of her own construction” as if “[h]er doubts could be neutralised only by plunging in deeper” (170).

Briony has finally got what she wanted. She is treated seriously and plays one of the major roles in the events during and after the tragic night. “[...] the way she was listened to, deferred to and gently prompted seemed at one with her new maturity” (173). And yet, there are moments when it seems that there is, after all, a vague sense of guilt in Briony’s thoughts and feelings which now and then comes to the surface stirring the smoothness of her conviction. “She wanted the inspector to embrace her and comfort her and forgive her, however guiltless she was” (174). And then at dawn when Briony finally lies down, her head is full of conflicting thoughts and she is no longer as brave and mature as she claimed herself to be:

In her dizzy state she was not able to say exactly what her success had been; if it was to have gained a new maturity, she could hardly feel it now when she was so helpless, so childish even, through lack of sleep, to the point where she thought she could easily make herself cry (185).

When the crime has been committed and the innocent man has been accused of a terrible thing, Briony looks out of the window, as if nothing has happened, and it is again the scene with Robbie and Cecilia that she misreads. She wrongly interprets the lovers’ behaviour and takes their parting for Cecilia’s accusation of Robbie and her act of merciful forgiveness. She also wrongly and naively assumes that the tragic night will surely bring her
and Cecilia closer (185). Nothing yet does she know of the truly bitter and
tragic course of the future events.

Despite her own feelings and the crime committed, Briony is still a child
in 1934, but five years on when we again meet her, she has all the painful
awareness of what she did and how grave the consequences of her act have
been for the Tallis family and the people concerned with them. The family
has drifted apart with Cecilia cutting herself off from her parents, brother
and sister, and resigning from her university plans. Robbie, after serving his
sentence in prison, has been sent to war and the future of the two lovers is
more then ever uncertain.

Briony is a different person now. The past has left its stamp on her and
she cannot get away from all the memories that torment her. Just like her
sister, she has also resigned from university and decided to enrol on a nurse
training in hospital. We can only imagine what it means for a girl like her,
who not so long ago wanted the events to dispel her insignificance (77), to be
in a place where one is so anonymous, or to an aspiring writer to find herself
in a surrounding which is “a stripping away of identity” (275). Yet this is what
Briony has chosen for herself and there can only be one reason for that. She
wants that harsh, difficult and often humilitating life, that discipline and strict
rules so different from all that she knew in her childhood years because of the
enormous guilt she feels. She wants self-punishment in order to atone
somewhere for her sin from the past. But, still, whatever she does and however
much she tries to expiate, all that is futile in comparison with her crime.

Briony knows that nothing can ever change the past and, moreover, there
seems to be nothing that could absolve her from her sin and kill the pain she
feels inside:

All she wanted to do was work, then bathe and sleep until it was time to work
again. But it was all useless, she knew. Whatever skivvying or humble nursing she
did, and however well or hard she did it [...] she would never undo the damage.

She was unforgivable (285).

Briony’s sense of guilt is so strong that all her thoughts wander continuously
towards the past and also the present of those whom she hurt the most – Robbie and Cecilia. In a rather infantile and melodramatic fashion she
dreams of the day when it would turn out that one of the soldiers she happens
to take care of is Robbie and that he would be grateful for her care and
forgive her (298). Yet, she knows that this hardly possible and that the prospect
of forgiveness, both from Robbie’s and Cecilia’s side is solely a figment of her
imagination, more particularly as she cannot forgive herself.

Through all those years Briony did not forget about writing. It was no
passing fancy of her but a true interest that has remained her greatest passion
and escape, whenever she needed it. It is no different when she does her
nurse training. She keeps a journal which is her only joy in life and, at the
same time, a link with the happy childhood years: “She had never lost that
childhood pleasure in seeing pages covered in her own handwriting” (280).
The journal has a therapeutic meaning:

At the time, the journal preserved her dignity; she might look and behave like
and live the life of a trainee nurse, but she was really an important writer in
disguise. And at a time when she was cut off from everyone she knew – family,
home, friends – writing was the thread of continuity. It was what she had always
done (280).

Above all, however, thanks to the journal, in spite of such unfavourable
conditions, Briony remains herself and is even able to develop as an artist.

But the journal is by no means the only literary form that Briony
practices. We learn that she has also written a story entitled Two figures by a fountain
and even sent it to Horizon magazine in the hope that it would be
published. Moreover, Briony does not resemble all the hesitant girl she
once was, unsure of what genre she should focus on. Now she seems to be an
artist who is confident of what she does. She shares, for instance, with the
reader her views on the modern novel. Deeply influenced by Virginia Woolf,
she claims that “[t]he age of clear answers was over. So was the age of
characters and plots.” Now “[i]t was thought, perception, sensations that
interested her, the conscious mind as a river through time [...]” (281). And
her artistic manifesto is “[t]o enter a mind and show it at work, or being
worked on, and to do this within a symmetrical design [...]” (282). It should be
noted that direct references to Virginia Woolf’s The Waves (which Briony
reads between her shifts) and the fact that Briony’s story is an obvious calque
of Woolf’s style, are all metafictional devices, by which the reader is
constantly reminded of the novel’s fictional status.

Yet, even that sphere of Briony’s life is burdened with her sense of guilt.
When she receives a rejection letter from the editor of Horizon (supposedly
Cyril Connolly) and he tells her she needs “the backbone of a story” (314),
Briony’s bitter reaction is that she does not lack a backbone of a story but
a backbone itself (320). Again, Briony the girl and Briony the writer fuse into
one. She is mercilessly honest with herself and sarcastic while discovering that
literary style “does have ethical implications” (Finney 2002):

Might she come between them in some disastrous fashion? Yes, indeed. And
having done so, might she obscure the fact by concocting a slight, barely clever
fiction and satirize her vanity by sending it off to a magazine? [...] Did she really
think she could hide behind some borrowed notions of modern writing, and
drown her guilt in a stream – three streams of consciousness? (320).
As Brian Finney rightly observes, McEwan, through Briony, "indicates how for him the ideology of modernism (especially its prioritization of stylistic innovation) has hidden moral consequences" (2002).

Briony is well aware of the fact that, despite all her ambitions and aspirations, what art mainly demands from her is honesty. Her story, in order to be worthy of being published, read, admired and believed in by others, does not need a range of technical or stylistic innovations but simply needs to be true. It has to reveal her own intense emotions, her true self instead of presenting only the level of her artistic sophistication. That is why she feels a coward while “hiding behind” modern techniques and “drowning her guilt” in them. Above all, however, she knows that she will never create anything better, she will never become a great writer unless she confronts all that she fears the most and is most deeply ashamed of. Her crime will always be a burden and an obstacle in her life and her career unless she finds the way to face it.

It seems that it is with this very aim that Briony decides to visit her sister. She feels mature enough and finally ready to admit to herself and say to Cecilia that there is nobody else but her to be blamed for the tragedy that happened in the past. She wants somehow to explain herself in front of Cecilia, and to try to make amends to her and Robbie, however impossible it might be, for all that she did. Secretly, perhaps subconsciously, she must also dream of her sister’s forgiveness. Yet very quickly her hopes fade away as the meeting turns out to be devoid of any sisterly warm feelings. Cecilia is surprised by Briony’s visit and the fact that her younger sister has chosen exactly the same path of life, but there is a cold distance, even formality in her attitude towards Briony. Clearly and unmistakably the time of Cecilia’s being close to Briony is over. Also, Cecilia looks different, much changed over all those years which does not help Briony at all (332). And yet she tries to stand bravely by her decision to reveal the whole truth to the rest of the family and withdraw her false evidence in court, which would restore Robbie’s good name. However, when Robbie unexpectedly walks into the room she is no longer sure she can bear it all. His changed appearance intensifies Briony’s sense of guilt: “The shock was how much older he looked, especially round the eyes. Did everything have to be her fault? She wondered stupidly. Couldn’t it also be the war’s?” (339). Robbie cannot hold back his anger when he sees Briony but she is not surprised or shocked, as if prepared for his bitter accusations and contempt, “like a child anticipating a beating” (341). Finally, when Robbie and Cecilia see her to the tube station, Briony plucks up all her courage and apologizes for all she did and for all the terrible distress she caused them (348). But the sentence “I’m very sorry” seems too little, too weak, too pitiful in these circumstances. “It sounded so foolish and inadequate, as though she had knocked over a favourite houseplant, or forgotten a birthday” (348). Still, she had to say it, how else could she express her enormous guilt and sorrow? At least they give her a sort of consolation. When she leaves Robbie and Cecilia at the station, she knows there is nothing else she could have possibly said.

Yet however much the scene satisfies the reader’s curiosity, melodramatic inclinations, feeling of justice, or anything else, the next and last chapter brings the shock that, in fact, the scene never happened. Briony never visited her sister in her rented flat and, even if she had done so, Robbie would have been dead by then and Cecilia would have been killed in a few months after the visit. The whole novel then turns out to be Briony’s creation, her “last version” actually, preceded by “half a dozen different drafts” which ends Briony’s “fifty-nine-year assignment” (369). And it is only in this last version that “[the] lovers end well, standing side by side [...] as [she] walks away” (369–370).

Let us try now to answer two fundamental questions: Why did Briony change the events creating a romantic scene when the facts of life could only deny it? Why did she need this novel with all its preceding drafts for? There are two things we have to remember. First, Briony is a writer and, as such, she has all the power and right to construct her novel the way she wants. She honestly admits once, although it is perhaps early enough for anyone to notice and take into account properly, that “[s]he was under no obligation to the truth, she had promised no one a chronicle. This [her writing] was the only place she could be free” (280). In the last chapter she, in fact, paraphrases herself: “If I really cared so much about facts, I should have written a different kind of book” (360).

Another thing we have to remember is Briony’s enormous sense of guilt and her dearest wish to expiate and find reconciliation (Nicieza 2005: 242). However, life has taught her a bitter lesson that there is nothing she can possibly do to repair the damage she caused. No hard work done by her, no sacrifice made would change anything or relieve the pain. There is no way she could turn back the time, and only that miracle would undo the damage. Because Robbie and Cecilia are dead, and because her crime was caused by her imagination that constructed fiction in her head, she feels that only her imagination and another fictional construction may offer some kind of comfort. Although it may seem bizarre or even devoid of any sense, she feels that only in such a way she can undo her terrible crime: “[... ] she turns to fiction as her only, though hardly satisfactory, resort. Unable to atone for her crimes in real life, she does it in her novel by resurrecting Cecilia and her beloved” (Nicieza 2002: 242). And yet, even in that way atonement seems unachievable as there is nobody, no higher authority, above Briony (Childs 2006: 136) to forgive her: “[...] how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God?” (371).

In that internal conflict Briony resembles another McEwan’s character who has a similar problem. Briony is like Jean Logan, John Logan’s wife, in
Enduring Love, who at first thought her husband had an affair and was with another woman at the time of his tragic death. When she later learns he was just innocently giving a lift to a professor and his young girlfriend when the balloon accident happened, she cannot hide her despair. When the professor asks her whether she can forgive them for not telling her the truth earlier, she says bitterly: “Of course I can [...] But who’s going to forgive me? The only person who can is dead” (230). Both Briony and Jean Logan seek forgiveness from those who they know can no longer forgive them and they have no other option but to live with that awareness of being unforgivable. In Briony’s case “guilt refined the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime” (173).

Yet it seems that for Briony the most important thing is that, above all, she tried to achieve her atonement: “It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all” (371). In the process of creating the whole novel Briony had to learn what she lacked in the past and what caused the tragedy: empathy towards others. She had to enter to the others’ minds and hearts to be able to imagine what they think and feel. That must have been very painful indeed to turn herself into Cecilia or Robbie, knowing they are both dead and will never do or say things imagined by Briony, and it seems that it is exactly what Briony means when she says that “the attempt was all.”

Briony, in fact, has not achieved her atonement, but in the painful process of writing she finally learned that other people have independent, equally important to themselves, existence. The important fact to notice is that even in the fictional version of events, when she could have easily made Cecilia and Robbie forgive her, she chose not to do that. According to Brian Finney, “her refusal to have the lovers forgive her in her fictional account of their survival [...]” is precisely the “[...] proof that in her literary act of atonement Briony has finally learned how to imagine herself into the feelings of others.” Briony explains: “I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-sacrificing as to let them forgive me” (372). Still, she adds: “Not quite, not yet” (371), as if the prospect of achieving their forgiveness was not, all in all, such an impossible idea. Nevertheless, Briony is ill. She has been diagnosed with a condition known as vascular dementia and, consequently, will soon lose all her memory. We must admit that from that perspective “Robbie and Cecilia, still alive, still in love, sitting side by side in the library, smiling at The Trials of Arabella” (371) becomes only a beautiful dream. On the other hand, if Briony’s illness allows her to forget, in time she will also forget about her crime. She will finally be able to stop fingering her rosary of guilt (173) and achieve most desired absolution.

Atonement tells a story of crime and guilt. Briony shows us her tragic life, beginning from her childhood crime, through adolescent’s years of guilt and self-punishment, to adulthood and senility when she finally finds her own way to atone. It is also a Künstlerroman, a story of a writer, her artistic development and choices; her long path to achieve public esteem and fame. But, above all, Atonement is a story of deep internal change; a story of extraordinary moral rebirth through the art of writing. Can there be more literal account or greater praise of the meaning of fiction in human life? McEwan’s novel, through its self-conscious, intertextual construction and numerous literary references, becomes “a work of fiction that is from beginning to end concerned with the making of fiction” (Finney 2002). Both the subject matter of the story and its narration, with focal characters often changing in the first section – the focalization drawing much upon the style of Charles Dickens, while the shifting point of view recalling works by Henry James and Virginia Woolf (Elliam 2009: 40) – fuse into one to achieve the same aim: to show the moral values hidden in the process of novel writing. After all it is thanks to variable focalization that Briony is allowed to present to the reader, and to herself, her ability to feel imaginative empathy and compassion for the others. As Frank Kermode remarks in his review of Atonement, “[...] it could probably be said that no contemporary of [McEwan] has shown such passionate dedication to the art of the novel” (2001: 8).

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CHARLES DICKENS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND BEYOND

He [Dickens] understands the practical side of authorship beyond any author.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

1. The marketing Dickens

These words from one of Dickens's closest friends, and himself a distinguished literary figure, aptly epitomise the author's extraordinary flair for both identifying and taking full advantage of opportunities arising in an era of the rapid development of the novel as a genre. Indeed, Dickens's creative and innovative approach to the style of writing has recently come to great prominence. However, little attention has as yet been devoted to the contextual question of his avant-garde attitude to the Victorian readership as featuring the novelist's ingenious marketing skills or, as Lytton wants it, the "practical side of authorship." The resulting unprecedented rapport with the audience and popularity which followed are partly due to this innovative approach, an intrinsic component of which is Dickens's wish to cater to his readers' needs. To this end, "The Inimitable Box" orchestrated a unique marketing strategy of novel publication by instalments followed by their appearance in volumes, organised public readings and controlled a number of periodicals to which he was also a contributor. This section will particularly focus on exploring Dickens's method of serialisation as a profit-generating strategy, illustrated by his first properly planned novel: Dombey and Son.

It has been frequently pointed out that mass literature is a fundamentally Victorian invention (Mitchell 1996: 233). With the arrival and progress of the middle class and the steadily growing number of the literate in society the demand for popular fiction naturally increased. Add to that new printing
technologies such as the high-speed press and machines for typesetting, the use of cheap materials and the introduction of railways, and it comes as no surprise that expensive three- or four-volume novels by Austen or Scott were soon to be replaced by cheaper, and hence more available, forms of publication. Dickens responded to these needs with his ingenious idea of novel publication by instalments which revolutionised the Victorian readership market and earned him a place among the most influential English literary figures of the day. Indeed, Dickens's flair for money-making is distinguishable through the idea of serialisation itself whereby the price for the whole novel in paperback parts was approximately two-thirds the cost of a three-volume hardback, with the expense divided into weekly or monthly parts (Mitchell 1996: 234). Additional profits were generated by re-editions in volume form, and suffice it to say that the amount of plagiarism to which Dickens's œuvre was subjected testifies to the enormous effectiveness of this marketing strategy. Furthermore, by no means was the question of profitability abandoned in the progress of writing; it can be safely assumed that in the course of publication Dickens watched sales and promptly responded to their fluctuation, a tactic adopted as early as The Pickwick Papers, whose popularity increased with the introduction of Sam Weller, originally conceived as a minor Cockney character adding to the underlying variety principle characteristic of the picaresque. Once Sam proved profit-boosting, Dickens decided to extend his function, which also led to the unification of the novel, both in theme and structure (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 66).

What is interesting, this strategy of developing a popular character stretched beyond the limits of a single novel and reverberated in subsequent fiction. Hence, it can be argued that with regard to attracting sales the replacement of the original Nobody's Fault with Little Dorrit as the title of his 1855 novel was a shrewd move, reminiscent of the most popular of Dickens's characters, Little Nell (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 233), her success also resulting in the creation of little Paul in Dombey and Son. Paul's plot bears a striking resemblance to that of Nell's, and his death repeats the emotional effect which the girl's death exerted on the public; Lord Jeffrey – whose weeping over Little Nell led his friend to believe that he was mourning a real person – wrote to Dickens: "Oh my dear Dickens! What a No. 5 you have given us! I have so cried and sobbed over it last night, and again this morning; and felt my heart purified by those tears..." (Johnson 1953, 2: 611). The popularity of a boy's perspective on his dying undoubtedly prompted the continuation of the idea in his next novel, David Copperfield, in which Dickens explores the possibilities of adopting a child's point of view. In parallel, the success of Mrs Pipchin's establishment and Dr Blimber's academy resulted in the construction of Mr Creake's school, where David suffers humiliation and abuse (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 100).

More importantly, pecuniary considerations not only determined his fiction at the local level but also propelled the creation of the author's literary ventures as such, the most obvious being A Christmas Carol, written to prevent financial catastrophe after the unexpected commercial failure of Martin Chuzzlewit (Johnson 1953, 1: 464). However, it is Dickens's next novel, Dombey and Son, which is of the most relevance to discussing the dialogue between fiction and its commercial context. Around the time of writing this "business" novel Dickens experienced serious financial difficulties, which peaked in his resolution to become one of London's paid magistrates in order to establish financial independence from literature. As he famously wrote to Forster: "I shall be ruined past all mortal redemption" (Smith 2002: vi), and this anxiety was not unsubstantiated – apart from the Martin Chuzzlewit disappointment, he was in debt to Chapman and Hall as the expensive and highly ornamental Christmas book did not return the investment, and his editorship of the Daily News ended after merely seventeen numbers (Johnson 1953, 1: 583). Hence the need for another novel in instalments emerged, and these were the financial circumstances in which the idea for Dombey originated. The popularity of its first number exceeded Dickens's expectations; in a letter to Forster he wrote: "The Dombey sale is BRILLIANT! I had put before me thirty thousand as the limit of the most extreme success, saying that if we could reach that I should be more than satisfied and more than happy; you will judge how happy I am!" (Johnson 1953, 2: 603). Indeed, Dickens now felt so confident with his newest enterprise that he even hesitated about writing the 1847 Christmas book, which he did not feel inclined to do: "[...] On the other hand, I am very loath to lose the money. And still more so to leave any gap at Christmas firesides which I ought to fill" (1953, 2: 620). As Edgar Johnson remarks (1953, 2: 620), "with Dombey he had reached a place in his career beyond which he was never to feel financial uneasiness again. In the previous six months his earnings had been 2,000 pounds more than his expenses, and now, after drawing 100 pounds monthly, he had another 2,200." This financial stability was also due to the fact that the splendid profits of Dombey coincided with his regaining control of half of his copyrights – from this time on Dickens always had several thousand pounds invested or in the bank (1953, 1: 626).

Hence, it is only natural that a novel conceived in such circumstances should revolve around mercantile society as its crucial question is put into little Paul's mouth: "Papa! What's money?" (90). The thematic unity of the novel did not undergo major alteration and was sustained even in the face of Dickens's ultimate disregard for the professed concurrent theme of the firm's dealings, which was sketched somewhat hastily and only in the closing number, outside the novel's time frame. However, the mode of serial
publication necessarily involved a dialogue with a responsive audience who expressed their views during the advancement of the novels not only by writing to the author but also by reducing or increasing their purchases (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 16). This dynamics is clearly discernible in the alternations concerning the novel’s structure and the authorial intentions in character construction, most notably that of Walter Gay, Florence and Edith Dombey. Originally, Walter was destined to ruin and moral downfall; however, it is Forster who dissuaded Dickens from debasing the character, probably for reasons connected to sales (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 98). Similarly, Edith Dombey was predetermined to become a fallen woman and eventually die, with Florence by her repentant deathbed (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 106). Again, Lord Jeffrey voiced his incredulity in Edith’s projected adultery, which triggered Dickens’s milder treatment of the character. To Forster, he wrote: “What do you think of a kind of inverted Maid’s Tragedy, and a tremendous scene of her undeceiving Carker, and giving him to know she never meant that?” (Johnson 1953, 2: 622). Forster agreed, and the design was promptly altered, what testifies to Dickens’s authorial flexibility and lack of reluctance to satisfy his readers’ expectations, even if it involved abandoning a long-lasting resolve – Edith was designed for guilt as far as number XV.

What is more, Dickens’s choice of ultimate villain is also a bow to his audience; as the Victorian admiration for self-made and industrious men precluded Mr Dombey as a potential antagonist this function was reserved for Carker. Mr Dombey may have inspired compassion and pity for his wrongly directed energy and efforts, but he could never be damned as utterly corrupted. The delineation of Florence as a plot-producing character, on the other hand, was determined by the structure of the narrative; to sustain the reader’s attention after little Paul’s death, Dickens intended to transfer all interest to Florence (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 101). However, it quickly proved that the meek and passive character could not provide the dynamism created by a more attractive marriage relationship between Mr Dombey and Edith, which instead became central to the novel (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 103).

The narrative structure, however, depended mostly not on the character function but on the form of serialisation itself. Dickens wrote his serial “numbers”, or parts, with the view of each instalment’s identity and its capacity to be treated as a unit: interest and incident needed to be evenly spread, and each number had to lead to a climax or a point of rest (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 15). As he himself writes in the 1837 Preface to The Pickwick Papers: “[...] it was necessary – or it appeared so to the author – that every number should be, to a certain extent, complete in itself, and yet that the whole twenty numbers, when collected, should form one tolerably harmonious whole, each leading to the other by a gentle and not unnatural progress of adventure” (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 65). Again, Dombey and Son best illustrates the carefulness with which Dickens constructed his monthly parts, and the amount of consideration given to their subject matter, which is discernible in the first number. Dickens intended to postpone the introduction of Walter Gay and the company of the Wooden Midshipman until the second instalment, but Forster persuaded him to keep the scene in the first, claiming that its exclusion would weaken the opening (Johnson 1953, 2: 601). A similar amount of attention was devoted to the structuring of number XV. Originally, the number was supposed to end with the blow of Florence’s flight from home, but that would leave the reader anxious and worried over the Christmas season, as its publication date fell in December. Therefore, Dickens resolved to follow the climactic chapter with a reassuring one in which Florence finds refuge at Captain Cuttle’s home (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 107). The part is an illustration of Dickens’s preference for creating dramatic effect through suspense rather than providing a resting place at the end of his instalment, although both were approximately equal in number throughout the novel, and usually interwoven (with the exception of the closing double instalment, in which plot resolution was the determining factor).

Hence, it is evident that Dickens’s intuitive awareness of his audience resulted in devising an effective means of appealing to its tastes, which in turn automatically translated into profits. It is also apparent in his providing advertisements for his upcoming novels, which, to use the modern marketing jargon, is deemed inherent in any advertising campaign. Dickens inconspicuously attests to the effectiveness of this technique of “teasing” when describing the attraction of the bookshop in Martin Chuzzlewit:

[…] in the window were the spick-span new works from London, with the title-pages, and sometimes even the first page of the first chapter, laid wide open: tempting unwary men to begin to read the book, and then, in the impossibility of turning over, to rush blindly in, and buy it! Here too were the dainty frontispiece and trim vignette, pointing like handposts on the outskirts of great cities, to the rich stock of incident below (72).

Earnings, this tangible evidence of the writer’s quick responsiveness to the reader, are probably best illustrated not only by Dombey and Son’s popularity, but even more so by the great success of Nicholas Nickleby whose massive sales (higher by approximately 10,000 copies than that of Pickwick) are due to the combination of what the audience appreciated most in the two preceding novels: the elements of popular entertainment featured in Pickwick and the recapture of Oliver Twist’s social criticism (Schlicke 1988: 48). This keen sense of his audience and the responsibility towards it is visible in Dickens’s early revisions of the Sketches by Boz; by the autumn of 1837 he was firmly established as a “family” author as well as the editor of a period-
ical, which rendered him more sensitive to allegations of vulgarity (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 57). Original versions of the Sketches were not free from foul language and various other “indelicacies” which were disposed of in the re-editions, an adjustment made with family readings in view.

This acknowledgement of the readership as the ultimate decisive force determining the commercial success or failure of any literary venture indirectly led Dickens to seek contact with the audience at every stage of his career; even the prefaces to the volume editions of his novels were opportunities for dialogue with the reader. Little Dorrit, for instance, opens thus: “In the Preface to Bleak House I remarked that I had never had so many readers. In the Preface to its next successor, Little Dorrit, I have still to repeat the same words, deeply sensible of the affection and confidence that have grown up between us” (2). The life-long sense of connection with the audience culminated in the writer’s decision to give public readings for his own profit. On the occasion of his first paid reading, Dickens said: “I have long held opinion, that in these times whatever brings a public man and his public face to face on terms of mutual confidence and respect, is a good thing” (Fielding 1960: 264). Hence the professed reason behind the venture was that of the closestness to the people who admired his work. Perceived as such, readings represent the crowning jewel of Dickens’s lifetime’s dedication to popular entertainment; however, their marketing value, both promotional and pecuniary, is indisputable. George Dolby, Dickens’s manager, estimated that altogether the readings earned him approximately 45,000 pounds (Schlicke 1988: 227), and the author’s ensuing popularity was only comparable to that of the fan enthusiasm awaiting him in America. As Paul Schlicke jokingly remarks (1988: 232), “the long queues of people waiting to buy tickets to hear him read and the crowds following him about in the streets testify to a degree of adulation similar to that given to pop stars in our own time.” This popularity was also due to the vastly entertaining nature of the performance: apart from translating his skills of an actor into the readings, Dickens’s repertoire consisted of fragments from novels written no later than David Copperfield, hence the grim mood of darker novels was virtually excluded, and the sombre excerpts such as little Paul’s death were chosen for their force of expression rather than psychological depth. The famous scene of Nancy’s murder in Oliver Twist is a good case in point; unsure whether its horror and bloodshed were appropriate for a female audience, Dickens organised a test reading for a select group of friends in order to hear their opinion. This is what William Charles Kent, a journalist and editor, writes in his account of the event:

As for the Author’s embodiment of Sikes […] it was only necessary to hear that infuriated voice, and watch the appalling blows dealt by his imaginary bludgeon in the perpetration of the crime, to realise the force, the power, the passion, informing the creative mind of the Novelist at once in the original conception of the character […]. It was in the portrayal of Nancy, however, that the genius of the Author-Actor found the opportunity, beyond all others, for its most signal manifestation. […] The character was revealed with perfect consistency throughout – from the scene of suppressed emotion upon the steps of London Bridge, when she is scared with the horror of her forebodings, down to her last gasping, shrieking apostrophes, to “Bill, dear Bill,” when she sinks, blinded by blood, under the murderous blows dealt upon her upturned face by her brutal paramount. Then, again, the horror experienced by the assassin afterwards! So far as it went, it was as grand a reprehension of all murderers as hand could well have penned or tongue have uttered. It had about it something of the articulation of an avenging voice not against Sikes only, but against all who ever outraged, or ever dreamt of outraging, the sanctity of human life.

And he goes on to add that “as certainly as the ‘Trial from Pickwick’ was the most laughter-moving of all the Readings, as the ‘Story of Little Dombey’, again, was the most pathetic, ‘Sikes and Nancy’ was in all respects the most powerfully dramatic and, in many ways, the most impressive and remarkable.” It appears clear that even to his contemporaries Dickens seemed capable of rendering the emotional tension of his fiction on stage, due not only to his theatrical skills but also his clever selection of material. To be attractive, Dickens considered it essential for entertainment to appeal directly to its recipients, thus his readings invariably featured the audience’s fears, aspirations or moral values, and the range of characters appearing on stage together with their creator almost invariably consisted of recognisable personas such as Sam Weller, Mrs Gamp or Mr Micawber, all of whom were granted their own distinctive catchphrases (Schlicke 1988: 229–231). Hence, the readings were not only a commercial venture bringing measurable benefits, but also the most directly appealing of Dickens’s various modes of contact with his audience. They also added greatly to the popular image of Boz as a great entertainer rather than a serious artist; George Henry Lewes, for instance, did not consider Dickens’s fiction as engaging the reader of cultivated taste, and this view still persists in the popular imagination. However, Dickens himself dismissed the utilitarian or educational value of his fiction and, instead, called for the perception of entertainment as the pure fulfillment of the essential human need for diversion (Schlicke 1988: 183). He jokingly puts this declaration in the mouth of a Hard Times character: Slear, the circus owner, repeatedly insists that “People must be amuthed” (33) – they must break away from grim reality, if only for a brief moment.
2. The cinematic Dickens

Our discussion so far has shed light on those aspects of Dickens’s *oeuvre* which had an effect on his contemporaries who embraced, for instance, the method of novel serialisation (i.e. Elizabeth Gaskell or Wilkie Collins). Interestingly, Dickens’s innovative formal concepts stretched beyond the nineteenth century and influenced twentieth-century creators of mass media culture; thus the second aim of this paper is to present those features of the Dickensian novel which are – consciously or not – incorporated in film aesthetics. Andrzej Weseliński observes that Dickens is perceived as the most cinematic of all Victorian writers (2009: 434) and that his narrative techniques are successfully translated into the language of cinema.\(^\text{10}\) Indeed, the large number of Dickens’s adaptations confirms this statement, ranging from musicals (the acclaimed *Oliver!* 1968) to television and feature films. The newest productions include the BBC miniseries *Bleak House* (2005) starring Gillian Anderson as Lady Dedlock, and Roman Polański’s *Oliver Twist* (2005) with Ben Kingsley (Fagin).

However, analysing the affinity between any distinctive semiotic systems (such as literature and film) engenders numerous questions. First, what enables a text (or texts) belonging to one semiotic system to be translated into another? It seems that the key to this problem can be found in the relation between different codes operating within the given systems, or, more specifically, the application of the same codes to various semiotic systems. Although some codes (e.g. editing, lighting or mise-en-scène) are categorised as cinematic or extra-cinematic both can be “read” in films, as Andrzej Weseliński contends (1999: 15). Hence the second question: what are Dickens’s codes incorporated in the sphere of cinema? The answer is found in analysing the writer’s narrative techniques. Turning yet again to *Dombey and Son*, for instance, we come across a powerful scene enacted between Mr Dombey and his second wife, which serves as a preparation for the climax of Edith’s departure:

She bent her eyes upon him steadily, and set her trembling lips. He saw her bosom throb, and saw her face flush and turn white. All this he could know, and did: but he could not know that one word was whispering in the deep recesses of her heart, to keep her quiet; and that the word was Florence. Blind idiot, rushing to a precipice! He thought she stood in awe of him! [...] She had had changed her attitude [...] and now sat – still looking at him fixedly – turning a bracelet round and round upon her arm; not winding it about with a light, womanly touch, but pressing and dragging it over the smooth skin, until the white limb showed a bar of red. [...] ‘Wait! For God’s sake! I must speak to you.’

Why did she not, and what was the inward struggle that rendered her incapable of doing so for minutes, while, in the strong constraint she put upon her face, it was as fixed as any statue’s – looking upon him with neither yielding, liking nor hatred, pride nor humility: nothing but a searching gaze? (522–524).

The emphasis in this scene is on detail and gesture; the focus on Edith’s bracelet functions as a subtle reminder of her being “bought” in marriage, her union with Dombey devoid of love. The manner with which she handles the ornament symbolises Edith’s pride and unbent spirit, features absolutely unacceptable to Dombey who did not bargain for an undutiful wife. This hint at Edith’s rebellious character, in turn, prepares the reader for the crisis of her elopement. By means of skillfully directing the reader’s attention and selecting an angle of vision, Dickens achieves here what the camera achieves for film – it establishes the distance between the viewer and the scene and acts as a guide, controlling our perception (Weseliński 1999: 9). But that is not all. The technique of narrative close-up employed by Dickens shows affinity with that introduced to cinematography by “the man who invented Hollywood,” David Wark Griffith, himself a fervent admirer of Dickens’s fiction (Weseliński 1999: 16). The close-up, however, was not Griffith’s only invention which he ascribes to Dickens’s influence. In his famous essay “Dickers, Griffith and the Film Today” (1944) Sergei Eisenstein points to another narrative method found both in Dickens and Griffith, namely parallel montage (Eisenstein 1969: 205), or “imbricated montage”: “the separate but interspersed assemblage of shots back and forth between strands of a story which ultimately get tied together” (Weseliński 1999: 104). On the level of literary narrative, this technique corresponds to Dickens’s parallel plots linked to the main theme, counterpointing the serious story with a comic one. Since in the Victorian period the novel was still perceived as merely a form of entertainment, Dickens strove to include a comic relief in all his monthly parts. The author openly (although half-jokingly) attests to such necessity in the famous “streaky bacon” narratorial comment in *Oliver Twist*, feeling obliged to comply with melodramatic conventions of the stage. Immediately after the crisis of Oliver’s recapture by Fagin and his gang the focus is shifted to Mr Bumble and his mock-heroic pilgrimage to London, which is introduced thus:

It is the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes in as regular alternation as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, well-cured bacon. The hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and misfortunes; and, in the next scene, his faithful but unconscious squire regales the audience with a comic song. We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron, her

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virtue and her life alike in danger, drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost of the other; and, just as our expectations are wrought up to the highest pitch, a whistle is heard, and we are transported to the great hall of the castle, where a grey-headed seneschal sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals, who are free of all sorts of places from church vaults to palaces, and roam about in company, carolling perpetually (106).

Similarly, in *Dombey and Son* large parts of whole chapters are devoted to the purpose of pure diversion, an example of which is the second's close describing the state of Miss Tox's affections, which does not correspond to the predominant theme of little Paul's progress. Generally, these moments of comic relief centre around Captain Cuttle or Mr Toots and the company at the Wooden Midshipman, although Dickens was always careful to avoid placing them in direct succession. This tactic was frequently used by Dickens in the structuring of his monthly parts in which the first two chapters were of equal length and importance, whereas the final chapter was designed as a comparatively light and short appendix (Butt – Tillotson 1982: 154). Needless to say, introducing moments of comic relief was one of the novelist's favourite methods of tension release in the course of an emotionally loaded narrative.

Filmmakers employ parallel montage to render both spatial and temporal simultaneity, and this technique corresponds to fragmentation and non-linear narrative in modernist fiction (Weselisiski 1999: 110); hence it can be argued that Dickens's innovative style has become influential not only in cinematography but also in literature of the twentieth century. Arguably, discontinuity and fragmentation facilitated Dickens's construction of instalments, offering virtually infinite possibilities as to the quantity of plot lines and number of characters introduced; in this respect Dickens's *oeuvre* shows affinity with television aesthetics, or, more specifically, with the genre of soap opera. Thus, television drama, for instance, is invested with a variety of female characters normally excluded from other genres by their age, appearance or status (Geraghty 1991: 17); analogically, the Dickensian novel is peopled with numerous Misses Tox and Havisham, “Good Mrs Brown” and many others. Moreover, new possibilities of stretching the narrative conventions open – the US primetime soaps adopt their own surmise that death without a body is not final (Geraghty 1991: 20), and examples of Dickens's own employment of this idea are manifold: the assumed death of Walter Gay (*Dombey and Son*), Allan Woodcourt (*Bleak House*) and John Harmon (*Our Mutual Friend*) all prove to be based on false premises, not to mention the unresolved fate of Edwin Drood (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*), whom speculators would like to see alive, even against Dickens's strong private assurances to the contrary. However, the closest analogy between the writer's techniques and the television genre lies in their creation of open, flexible text; soap operas are characterised by endless but organised time, and "even series which cease to be produced project themselves into a non-existent future" (Geraghty 1991: 11). As has been mentioned above, Dickens strove to provide his instalments with unity; however, his aptness to create dramatic effect through the build-up of suspense, riddled only by that of soap opera creators themselves, adds to the sense of openness and rejection of an ending assumed or already known. To take one example, the third part of *Dombey and Son* ends with a chapter preparatory to little Paul's death in the next monthly instalment:

> The golden ripple on the wall came back again, and nothing else stirred in the room. The old, old fashion! The fashion that came in with our first garments, and will last unchanged until our race has run its course, and the wide firmament is rolled up like a scroll. The old, old fashion – Death! Oh thank GOD, all who see it, for that older fashion yet, of Immortality! And look upon us, angels of young children, with regards not quite estranged, when the swift river bears us to the ocean! (212).

Charles Dickens's *oeuvre* to this day provides filmmakers with a number of techniques which can be appropriated by the cinema, and only a few are analysed here. This is the cinematic Dickens. What is more, as a symbolic realist and precursor of stream of consciousness and narrative fragmentation he also anticipated modern fiction. This is the creative Dickens. And finally, the ingenious method of novel serialisation followed by volume editions enabled him to doubly capitalise on his writing, and together with the total profits from the readings the value of Dickens's estate on his death amounted to 93,000 pounds (Johnson 1953, 2: 1146), a sum far outstripping the financial assets of any other contemporary writer. This is the marketing Dickens. Together these various facets comprise an image of the significantly innovative Dickens.

NOTES

1 In her essay “The Modern Tone of Charles Dickens” (1961: 169–65) Jean McClure Kelty shrewdly observes that Dickens stylistically foreshadows stream of consciousness in his fiction; Barbara Hardy (2008: 68-9) is even more radical when she argues that this technique is conspicuously employed in the construction of “talkative” characters such as Mr Jingle or Sairey Gamp.

2 Interestingly, his professed disregard for commercial underpinnings in favour of the bond with the audience did not conflict with Dickens's determination to maximise personal profit by striking hard bargains with his publishers or initiating occasional breach of contract cases, as the famous strife with Bentley shows.
Although in actuality a decade earlier, Pierce Egan's Life in London appeared in instalments, it was Dickens who embraced this mode of publication throughout his career, a method which was almost accidentally initiated by his Sketches, as John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson notice (1982: 36).

To take another example Great Expectations which, originally designed as "a little piece", turned into a weekly serial and, subsequently, a full-fledged novel when Charles Lever's A Day's Ride was so unpopular that it jeopardised the profitability of All the Year Round (Hardy 2008: 30).

Whilst it is true that he produced Pictures from Italy, this loose collection of reflections could not substitute for a new novel.

Public readings from his fiction were Dickens's own invention, a unique mode of entertainment, although similar in form to public literary lectures or recitals held at the time (Schilke 1988: 240).

In such cases, however, the reading usually ended on a more optimistic note, as Dickens selected a short and light comic piece to close his performance (Schilke 1988: 230).

Charles Dickens as a Reader (Kent, Charles [1872]), excerpt taken from the Internet page.

Charles Dickens as a Reader (Kent, Charles [1872]), quotation from the Internet page.

For semiotologists, "the language of cinema," although not a natural language, is, nevertheless, a system of communication, and is here discussed as such.

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The criticism of the *Book of the Duchess* traditionally reads the two major figures of the poem, the narrator and the knight in black, in opposition to each other. Well-grounded as this interpretation is, I would like to devote this paper to a less obvious reading, one that brings out their fundamental similarities.

The knight and the dreamer share a number of traits. First of all, they are both characterised as immature, the narrator due to the restrictions conferred on him by his social status, the knight on account of his young age. The narrator’s inferiority is stressed in the encounter with the knight in black, who instantly addresses him “thou” (519, 520, 521), while the dreamer addresses the knight with the deferential “ye” (524). The man in black is, of course, a knight (452), who belongs to the royal company of the Emperor Octavian, whose party he has just strayed away from. There is a parallel between the hounds and the little puppy, on the one hand, and the royal huntsmen and the narrator, on the other. It is the adult dogs that are expected to track down the “hert”, which nevertheless escapes them and hides in the forest, just as the hunting knights would be more appropriate to talk to the man in black about his sorrow. Yet it is the whelp, which “koude no good” (390), that leads the narrator, equally inexperienced in the matters of love and, as a commoner, incapable of heightened sensitivity, to the deep forest where he tries to ease the troubled mind of the aristocrat. The description of the puppy, which “koude no good,” befits the dreamer/narrator, as we see him commit various blunders in the conversation with the knight. The narrator is thus portrayed as slightly deficient due to his social inferiority. The man in black is also depicted as immature; references to his young age recur throughout the dream section. Youth is the circumstance he selects for the beginning of his love story.
And later mentions a few times:

I tok byt [love] of so yong age
(793)

For that tyme Yowthe, my maistresse,
Governed me in ydelnesse;
For byt was in my fyrste yowthe,
And tho ful lytel good y couth.
(797–800)

The last verse echoes the description of the puppy, which helps to associate the quality of tender age with the knight. He further says that he loved White “after my yonge childly wyt” (1095), and when the moment of acceptance comes, youth appears again: “In al my yowthe, in al chaunce, / She took me in hir governaunce” (1285–6). A few years later, when the reader meets him, he is only twenty four years old, and the narrator hastens to add that he has only little hair in his beard, a visible sign of immaturity.

Furthermore, both the knight and the dreamer perform the function of “makers” in the poem: the knight admits to poetic activity in his youth, recites a complaint on his wife’s death and a short love lyric from the days of courtship and then produces a long poetic description of his sorrows followed by a narrative recounting his love-affair and marriage. Everything the reader learns about White comes in fact from the knight’s artefact. The narrator presents himself as the author of the whole poem already in the proem: “I, that made this book” (96); and at the end promises to put the dream we have just read in rhyme (1330–3). He is also the person responsible for recounting the story of Aleyone and Ceyx, and even specifies the circumstantial details of when and why he chose to become acquainted with it. He does not invent the tale, but narrates what he has read. Neither is the knight a creator of the matter of his tale, as he recounts what he has experienced. On the grounds of medieval theories of authorship and literary practice, however, as they both impose their intention on a pre-existing matter and select a mode of treatment, they can be properly called “makers”.

Interestingly, they overtly admit that they engage in poetry for lack of better activities. The narrator cannot sleep and toys with the idea of other forms of entertainment, such as backgammon, but finally settles on a book “To rede and drive the night away” (48–9), while the knight in his youth makes songs to keep idleness at bay: “But for to kepe me fro ydelnesse, / Trewly I dicke my besynty / To make songs, as I best koude (1155–7). Clearly, their engagement in poetry is amateurish and, in the light of their immaturity, far from being perfect.

In fact, the reader is made to understand that their approach to poetry is flawed. The narrator repeatedly shows incomprehension of the figurative language the knight uses, so the comments that he makes acquire unintended senses owing to the context he does not grasp. As a result, the whole conversation is punctuated with the knight’s dictum that his interlocutor does not understand his own words: “Thou wost ful lytel what thou bendest; / I have lost more than thou weneest” (743–4). As for the knight, he is fully aware of his poetic incompetence. He confesses: “I koude not make so wel / Songs, ne kneu the art eal, / As koude Lamekes some Tubal” (1160–2) and reciting a specimen he comments: “And, lo, this was [the] altherferste / I not wher hyt were the werste” (1173–4). Moreover, in the midst of his tale when he was struggling to express his sorrow following his lady’s rejection, he explicitly likens himself to Cassandra. He does it in order to show the intensity of his woe, claiming that his outuld hers, yet, as Gayle Margherita comments on this fragment of the Book, for a medieval audience Cassandra would have been a clear symbol of discursive inefficiency, usually associated with female linguistic incompetence (1994: 97). This comparison definitely casts some doubt over the knight’s verbal performance.

Young or inexperienced, the characters exhibit and demand unconditional empathy in the reception of poetical works. The narrator’s immediate reaction to Aleyone’s and the man in black’s sorrow is deeply emotional, strong and rather overdone. The queen’s anxiety about her husband’s fate causes her sorrow, and this, in turn, profoundly affects the narrator, who indulges in the emotion:

Such sorwe this lady to her tok
That trewly I, that made this book,
Had such pite and such rowthe
To rede hir sorwe that, by my trowthe,
I ferde the worse al at the morwe
Aftir to thaken on hir sorwe.
(95–100)

What is striking in this passage is, first, the extreme form of sympathy the narrator literally suffers, and second, its bad timing. The narrator offers his deepest sorrow not when the queen learns about her husband’s death, which would be justified, but at the point when she is ignorant about his fate and her
greatest suffering is still to come. The narrator must know that this event is about to come, as he has just read in the episode about Ceyx’s death at sea, yet he acts as if the uncertainty the heroine undergoes were the greatest calamity that could happen to her. By the same token, the narrator learns about the knight’s loss of wife from the short complaint he overhears and later he professes his ignorance as to the cause of the knight’s sorrow. The deep compassion the dreamer has for the knight comes across as equally premature and based on outward signs of suffering. The first complaint of the knight is judged as “the moste pitee, the moste rowthe, / That ever I herde” (465–6), and the person “ful pitous pale” (470), close to death because of sorrow (467–9). Moreover, the dreamer identifies with the knight’s suffering upon hearing the metaphorical account of the loss:

And when I herde hym tel thys tale
Thus pitously, as I yow telle,
Unneethe might y longer dwelle,
Hyt dyde myn herte so moche woo.

(710–3)

This feeling appears out of place in the light of the dreamer’s announcement, a few lines later, that he understood the allegory as a loss of a piece in a game of chess. He sympathizes only because the story was so “pitious”, without comprehending what it was really about. It is feeling emotions for emotions’ sake.

The narrator’s rendering of the Ovidian story also stresses lack of certain knowledge and a quick emotional response to a piece of fiction. Alcyone’s request to Juno to be informed about the fate of her husband is granted in the form of a dream. Some critics classify it as a prophetic vision, the reason being that it is sent by a goddess and therefore true. I find, however, a few disquieting passages in Chaucer’s version. First, the technical aspect of making the vision work reveals underlying falsification, as Morpheus creeps into the drowned body of Ceyx, carries it to the queen’s bedside and imitates the dead king’s voice in order to deceive his wife into believing that it is her husband speaking to her. The god impersonates the king and addresses the queen as if he were Ceyx: “my swete wyf” (201). Even if the final message is true, for the king is in fact dead, the way it is presented to Alcyone is doubtful. It is not her husband that appears and talks to her. Chaucer suggests this reading by terminating the vision in an ambiguous way: “With that bir eyen up she casteth / And saw noght” (212–3). Besides simply denoting the end of the dream, the statement influences the reader’s perception of the vision. The queen sees nothing because there was nothing to see, it was just Morpheus, sleep, illusion, fiction. The heroine, however, reads her vision in the same way the narrator reacts to her and the knight’s stories, that is, she accepts its literal pronouncements without asking interpretive questions. Even if she has obtained an answer from Juno, a dream has the power to mislead and should be verified. The queen, instead, unreservedly believes the message and takes it for a fact, which leads to dreadful consequences: she dies of sorrow soon after. The imagery dominant in this episode points to an interpretative negligence. Namely, the slumber during which the vision occurs is called “dode sleepe” (127) and the queen is “as cold as ston” (123). These phrases, apart from literal connotations, bring also an association with the myth of Medusa, who, as Allen Shooab explains in his discussion of the “Franklin’s Tale”, stands for termination of hermeneutical efforts due to unconditional acceptance of the literal level as final and decisive (2001: 72–85). Thus, the empathic reading is defined in the proem as an ungrounded, overemotional response to the surface meaning.

The knight, on the other hand, exacts empathetic reading from others. He agrees to disclose the reason for his pain only if his interlocutor receives it unconditionally “I telle the upon a condicion / That thou shalt hooly, with al thy wyt, / Doo thy sentent to herkenn hit” (750–2). The narrator duly promises that and, curiously, repeats the knight’s phrasing: “I shal ryght blythely, so God me save, / Hooly, with al the wit I have, / Here yow as well as I kan” (755–7). I believe that the recreation of the same words in the mouth of another man cannot be attributed only to the requirements of polite conversation, but, rather, it indicates an aspiration to complete identification. Furthermore, the knight challenges people to sympathize with him without, again, their being cognizant of the exact cause. J.D. Burnley also notices this fact, saying that he “phrases the description of his sorrow in a somewhat curious way. He is heartily lamenting a mysterious sorrow, and he presents his plight in the form of a test of feeling for any chance observer” (1979: 153–4).

But whoso wol assay hymselfe
Whether his hert kan have pitee
Of any sorwe, lat hym see me.

(574–6)

Whoso wiste al, by my trouthe,
My sorwe, but he hadde rowthe
And pitee of my sorwes smerte,
That man hath a feently herte.

(591–4)

The sympathy the knight demands should be granted on the basis of external attributes of sorrow, such as pitiful appearance. Though tonally different, this situation is reminiscent of the opening passage, where the narrator
pathetically depicts his mental state. He almost begs compassion from the reader, yet the same reservation about disclosing its exact cause appears. He stipulates that “who aske this / Leseth his asking trewely” (32–3) and rambles vaguely about his eight year long sickness. Thus, the principles that inform the reading strategies displayed by the narrator and by Alcyone are, in turn, requested by the knight and the narrator from those who interpret signs produced by them.

What is more, the man in black presents himself as an easily impressionable person:

As whit wal or a table,
For hit ys redy to caece and take
Al that men wil theater make,
Whethir so men wil portreye or peynite,
Be the werkes never so queynte

(780–4)

This is a powerful image which highlights both readiness and unquestionable acceptance. The side effect of the relative ease of imprinting new information is, according to medieval psychology, inability to retain it for a long time. This side of the coin is typified by the persona of the narrator, who first bewails his insomnia, melancholy and mysterious sickness and then, with a complete change of mood, ceases to brood over his sorrows and seeks some nightly entertainment to kill time. After that, he suffers a great pain at the sorrow of the ancient queen, short-lived as it is proved when he forgets her predicament instantly upon finishing reading and when the mental anguish gives way to the light-hearted prayer to Morpheus to send him sleep. Thus, sensitivity to stimuli, with its diverse consequences, is shown as a prominent feature of the poetics of empathy.

Despite the fluctuations in mood and tone, the far-reaching results of empathy turn out to have disastrous consequences. The poetics of empathy is situated within the semantic field of sickness/death and nothingness/absence/loss. It is especially so in the ancient tale the narrator recounts and the initial part of his dream, where he introduces the grieving knight. Alcyone actually refuses to eat anything unless she hears of her husband, swoons frequently, and finally dies. The indirect cause of her death, the dream, happens when she is sleeping, as cold as stone, in “dcd slep” (127), with her head down, as if lifeless (122–3). This positioning of the body has lethal connotations in other parts of the poem, too, as the gods of sleep in their hellish cave slumber with their heads down and the knight keeps his head hung down (461) when the dreamer notices him for the first time. He is sitting in a forest that is not penetrated by sunrays, dressed in black, which provides another link with the cave, described as dark as hell (170–1). Moreover, in the wasteland, the falling water makes a “dedly slepynge soun” (162), which is paralleled in the phrase describing the knight’s delivery of the complaint “with a dedly sorful soun” (462). He is also implicitly linked to the drowned king Ceys: “He take up Seys body the kynge, / That lyeth ful pale and nothing rody” (142–3), while the knight is “Ful pitous pale and nothyng red” (470). The description of the narrator’s condition also revolves round the twin concepts of illness and death: “melancolye / And crede I have for to dye” (23–4); “Defaute of steep and hevyynesse / Hath sleyne my spirt of quynkynesse / That I have lost al lustyhede” (26–7). It is contrary to nature: “agnayes kynde / Hyt were to liven in thy wysse” (16–7), which is echoed in the account of the knight’s state: “Hit was gret wonder that Nature / Myght not sever any creatur / To have such sorwe and be not dect” (467–9). “Thogh Pan, that men depeht god of kynde, / Were for his sorwe never so wroth” (512–3). The notion of absence is realized on various planes: first, physical, when the narrator talks about the lack of sleep (5); or when Juno’s messenger visits Morpheus’s cave in a valley deprived of any life forms:

[..] the derke valeye
That stant betweene roches tweye
Ther never yet grew corn ne gras,
Net tre, ne [nothing] that ought was,
Breste, ne man, ne hought elles.

(155–9)

The loss of a spouse is also executed in terms of absence, both in the case of Alcyone: “Anon she sent both eest and west / To seke him, but they founde nought” (88–9) and “With that hir eyen up she casteth / And saw noght” (212–3) as well as the knight’s: “I have lost more than thou weneest” (744). “[..] ye have thus youre blisse loxe” (748) and “I have lost suffisance, / And thereto I have no pleassance” (703–4). Secondly, absence concerns the intellectual and moral planes: empty thoughts (4) and loss of moral discrimination: “Al is ylyche good to me” (9); “I have feyleng in nothing” (11) in the case of the narrator, and, a similar situation and a similar phrasing in the case of the young knight: “Al were to me ylyche good / That I knew thoo” (803–4) and “ful lytel good y cothe, / For al my werkes were flytynge / That tyme, and al my thought vurying” (800–2). To sum up, the three key advocates of empathy in the poem: the narrator, Alcyone and the man in black are characterised in terms of absence, malady and death, with their essential similarity often pointed up by verbal parallelisms.

The empathic attitude to love is based on the same principle of unreserved and unquestioned response. For the sake of love, Alcyone
sacrifices herself totally to Juno: “And I shall make you sacrifice, / And hooyle youres become I shal / With good wille, body, herte, and al” (114–6). The nature of the Knight’s love service is communicated by the same formula: “With good wille, body, herte, and al” (768). Nicolai von Kreisler comments on this phrasing: “The iteration of the elements that here make up man – the will (governor of all behaviour and servant of the heart), the body (agent of both will and heart), and the heart (emblem of the highest and most noble of emotions) – conveys forcefully if indirectly a sense of human totality expressly devoted to a lost mate” (1970: 62). He further identifies it as a reference to the pattern of Mark 12:30, 22:37, which describes due devotion to Christ, which he finds here “rather strikingly applied to the claims of service to the pagan deities Juno and Love” (1970: 63–4). The Biblical allusion, then, foregrounds a sense of impropriety in the utter devotion to a beloved. Even more totalising terms appear in the knight’s description of his infatuation: he becomes Love’s “ thrall” (767), pays tribute to him and does homage. More daring, still, is the idea that the beloved is absolutely everything to the lover and that he becomes wholly hers:

Rytght on thys same, as I have seyd,
Was hooyle al my love leyd;
For certes she was, that swete wif,
My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf.
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my bisesse,
My worlde’s welfare, and my godesse,
And I hooyle hires and everydyl.

(1035-41)

Again, the motif of complete subjection recurs, coupled with the hint of idolatry: not only pagan deities, such as Juno or Love, personifications of natural forces, are worshipped, but the woman herself is treated as a goddess. Thus, total immersion in love leads to an idolisation of the feeling and the beloved, that is, to an elevation of what is worldly to the rank of the divine.

To sum up, the narrator and the knight in black are similar in their being immature persons and amateurish poets. They both typify the empathic approach to love and poetry, which is characterised by quick, uncritical and overemotional response. This attitude is presented as idolatrous and closely connected with absence, malady and death. Propounded by the narrator, it is most prominent in the proem, where it influences the mode of his self-portrait and of the ancient tale. It makes its way, too, into the dream section of the poem, where it is embraced by the man in black. On the whole, the narrator’s and the knight’s underlying notions of love and poetry are shown as ultimately the same.
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ENGENDERING THE NATIONAL HISTORY OF HAITI
IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT’ S KRICK? KRACK!

The concept of the nation and nationalism is the most significant development of Modernity. As Ernest Renan argues in his essay “What is a nation?”, the concept of the nation is quite new in our history, and it was not known in antiquity (1990: 19). Today nationalism defines itself through geographical, ideological and political distinction, it is “a large scale solidarity, constituting by the feeling of the sacrifices that have been made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future [...]” (1990: 19). The ideas of nation and nationalism have been also adopted by different oppressed minority groups (e.g. Afro-Americans) and by many postcolonial countries that reproduce Western knowledge of the nation-state with its institutions (such as: representative democracy, competitive elections, market capitalism, etc.) and its strategies of nationalizing the identity.

The Caribbean countries are no exception to this rule, in the words of Boyce Davies, “nationalism was a ‘trap’ within which the growing independence movements in the Caribbean were interpellated” (1994: 12). In the nationalist period that overlapped with decolonization, Caribbean states struggled to forge national models of public power and define a sense of national and cultural identity. This struggle, as many critics observed, was an uphill battle because in the West Indies, with its multiple peoples and languages and its long history of dissemination of cultures, a homogeneous model of national identity was hard to sustain. Presently, in the post-indigenous era that began in the 1990s, the Caribbean is rather seen as transnational and diasporic place that challenges the definition of the nation and the ideology of nationalism, and, to paraphrase Michael Hanchard, diaspora is a revolt against the nation-state.

The aim of this paper is to explore how the Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, who is a part of the Haitian diaspora in the United States, takes issue with the Haitian versions of Modernity and nationalism.
Danticat's collection of short stories entitled *Krick? Krak!* shows from a feminist perspective how Haitian history of the 20th century was negatively affected by some misguided efforts of Haitian leaders to modernize the country. Edwidge Danticat is one of the most acclaimed female writers from the region, and her writing has been fiercely committed to the recovery of the voices of Haitian women who were particularly marginalized by the ideology of progress and nationalism. Her novels and short stories illustrate Alison Donnell's comment that "[regardless] of what role or status [women] had in their traditional society, inclusion into expanding Western sphere in their countries usually meant loss of status [...]" (2006: 139). I will further argue that "for Caribbean women as historical subjects the struggles of nationalism were always gendered" (Donnell 2006: 147). Nationalism, as Boyce Davies persuasively contends, is "a male formulation" and "a male activity with women distinctly left out or peripheralized in the various national constructs" (1994: 12). Using selected stories from this particular collection, I will demonstrate that Danticat engenders the recent history of Haiti by offering both a feminist and post-nationalist understanding of nation and culture. She exposes Haitian nationalism as exceptionally misogynist, as it not only deprived Haitian women of their status and erased them from Haitian historiography, but also actively persecuted them in the name of the Western ideal of progress.

Danticat engages with the political, social and cultural history of Haiti, the first black republic in the world, a republic which came into being as a consequence of the only successful slave revolt (1791–1804). From its very inception, the black republic of Haiti was seen as an aberration in the eyes of the white world; it was politically and economically isolated and impoverished. The predominantly peasant culture remained faithful to its cultural roots and resisted its own leaders' efforts to westernize the country. The aim of these efforts was to get recognition for Haiti as a legitimate country in order to attract foreign capital and bring the country out of its torpor. Modernizing the country by means of adopting Catholicism as the official religion was one if the strategies to "whiten" the country, and since that moment the state and the Catholic Church combined forces in the effort to eradicate vodou "superstition." Since vodou was associated mostly with rural areas and with women, it was peasant women who were targeted in the so called Anti-superstition Campaigns. The persecution of vodouisants, that is witches in the official nationalist discourse, began right after the victorious slave rebellion, increased after Concordat in 1860 and under the US occupation of Haiti, and it is continued well into the later part of the 20th century. As Chancy puts it:

[vodouisants] were not only politically suppressed but militarily and brutally criminalized under the US Marines occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and later during the Anti-superstition Campaigns of 1940–1941; even Duvalier, who allowed vodou to flourish, but used it as a weapon to incite fear and control the Haitian masses, the religion was not granted full legitimacy (Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* qtd. in Evans Brazile 2005: 74).

Many of Danticat's stories in this collection revolve around these events. In *Krick? Krak!* she creates a female lineage that goes back to a historic figure of the vodouisant Défile-la-folle, Défile Madwoman, whose real name was Débée Basile. Having lost all her sons to the cause of revolution, she followed the troops of one of the leaders of the Haitian revolution Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the first black president of free Haiti. Though she was reputedly insane, she turned out to be a paragon of sanity, when after the assassination of Dessalines, she defied the angry crowd that ripped his body apart, gathered his remains and gave him a proper burial. Danticat uses the figure of Défile-la-folle and her female descendants, who are representatives of Haitian creolized ethnicity, to talk about women's contribution to national struggles.

The stories about Défile-la-folle's progeny are set in the midst of the 1946 Catholic Anti-Vodou campaign, during which Duvalier, Haiti's most oppressive dictator, came to power, and in the time of his regime. Duvalier tried to control the lower classes who were vodou followers by ordaining his own priests (hougan), organizing his own religious meetings and infiltrating other vodou societies presided over mostly by manbo i.e. vodou priestesses. As Chancy points out, he wanted to wipe out these predominantly female societies, which he treated as a rival power (1997: 208). Francis in her article "Silences Too Horrible to Disturb..." confirms Chancy's observation by claiming that

The Duvalierist state (1957–1986), [...] ushered a shift in the reigning paternalistic construction of women as political innocents to women as 'enemies of state.' Under his administration when women voiced opinions in support of women rights or the opposition party, they were defined as 'subversive, unpatriotic, and unnatural' (2005: 78).

Danticat's tales show histories of several imaginary women descended from Défile-la-folle, who are suppressed by the national culture and the misogynist and repressive Haitian regime. One of the most memorable incarnations of Défile-la-folle is her namesake in the story "Nineteen Thirty-Seven." There is an ancestral lineage between the two women that is more than one hundred and fifty years long. The contemporary Défile owns a Madonna statue passed down from the historic Défile, who got it from "a French man who had kept her as a slave" (Danticat 2001: 34). The title of the story refers to the so-called Parsley Massacre, the ethnic cleansing organized that year by the
Dominican regime of El Generalísimo, Dios Trujillo on Haitian cane cutters working in the Dominican Republic. It is deeply ironic and paradoxical that having survived the massacre, Defile is now incurring a slow death from the hands of her own compatriots in the prison of Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti.

Defile is accused of being a lougarou or lougavou from the French word "loup garou" meaning "werewolf." She is believed to be a mythical figure who "[flies] in the middle of the night, [slips] into slumber of innocent children, and [steals] their breath" (2001: 37–38). In the prison there are many other women like her. As Josephine, Defile's daughter, notices

[all] these women were here for the same reason. They were said to have been seen at night rising from the ground like birds on fire. A loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused them of causing a death of a child. A few other people agreeing with these stories was all that was needed to have them arrested. And sometimes even killed (38).

The women slowly starve to death but their emaciated, ghostly figures evoke irrational fear in their male guards who watch them closely for any signs of their nocturnal transmutations: "[the] prison guards thought that the wrinkles on Defile's haggard face resulted from her taking off her skin at night and then putting it back on in a hurry before sunrise." "This is why," claims Josephine, "[her] Maman's sentence was extended to life. And when she died, her remains were to be burnt in the prison yard to prevent her spirit from wandering into any young innocent bodies" (36). From her account, it becomes clear that the guards, who represent the authority of the state, not only genuinely believe in the culpability of the women in their charge but also fear their reputed powers which they associate with their femininity. The guards physically abuse the women and shave their heads not only to mark them as violators of gender roles but also to de-feminize them: "I realized," claims Josephine, "[the guards] wanted to make [the women] look like crows, like men" (39).

Defile's granddaughter, Marie in the story "Between the Pool and Gardenias," suffers a similar fate. The childless Marie has left the village of Rose-Ville where her grandmother and mother used to live, in order to escape from an unhappy marriage. She works as a maid for a rich couple in Port-au-Prince. They enjoy the taste of the countryside that she puts into the food she cooks for them and reap the fruit of her labor:

Monsieur and Madame sat on their terrace and welcomed the coming afternoon by sipping the sweet of my sour sorrel juice. They liked that I went all the way to the market every day before the dawn to get them a taste of the outside country, away from their protected bourgeois life (93).

At the same time, however, they remain deeply distrustful of her and her countryside ways. "She is probably one of those manbos," they say when [Marie's] back is turned. "She's probably one of those stupid people who think that they have a spell to make themselves invisible and hurt other people. Why can't none of them get a spell to make themselves rich? It's that voodoo nonsense that's holding us Haitians back" (95).

Though they need her, they despise and hate her. As members of the middle class, particularly active in the Anti-superstition Campaigns, they disdain voodoo as the illegitimate religion of the poor, illiterate and backward peasants who can nevertheless be potentially harmful. They are bound to the idea of progress which makes the erasure of indigenous traditions imperative and frames the future in terms of material advancement.

The title of the story, "Between the Pool and Gardenias," alludes to the limited space that Marie is allowed to occupy in this new, modernized model of the Haitian nation. She is a prisoner of stereotypes associated with voodoo as well as of the traditional model of Haitian femininity, where the woman's worth is measured by her ability to bear children. These presuppositions make Marie an outcast in all communities in which she tries to find a home for herself. Rose-Ville is "the place that [she] yanked out of [her] head" because her infertility made her feel "like a piece of dirty paper people used to wipe their backs" (96). Her deficiency as a woman is made painfully clear by her wayward husband, who "got ten different babies with ten different women" (96), as she grieved over all her miscarriages.

The alternative home she finds in Port-au-Prince does not even give an illusion of a protective space. While the life in the village circumscribes the protagonist's life with patriarchal notions of wifehood and motherhood, the city delimits her existence with nationalistic prescriptions and assumptions. Marie's migration from the country to the city does not help her to get outside of society's limiting structures or create a sense of possibility. On the contrary, it only deepens her sense of alienation and displacement. The city is an even more constricted and hostile place, marked by the absence of any meaningful human relationships. It is a place of anonymity and sterility, where nobody cares about her: "In the city, even people who come from your own village don't know you or care about you" (95). For most people it is a place of poverty and corruption that forces women to "throw out their babies because they can't afford to feed them" (92). At the same time it is a place of luxury and comfort for few others who, like Monsieur and Madame, own a lavish house with a swimming pool that overlooks the sea with "the holiday ships coming in the distance" (96). Marie, who dreams about domestic happiness and fulfillment in her role as a wife and mother, can only "pretend that it was all [hers]" (96). Thus Monsieur and Madame's house becomes a symbol of middle class entitlement and lower class disempowerment.
The city is first and foremost the place of death, where one has to enter an imaginary world in order to survive. Severed from her family and relatives, Marie imagines a community of dead women, descended from her great-great-grandmother Défile, who watch over her and comfort her in the face of loneliness and misery that engulf her. She is introduced to them in her dream by her own dead mother Josephine (the narrator of the story “Nineteen Thirty-Seven”). As the old women lean over her bed, she can “see faces that [...] knew [her] even before [she] ever came into this world” (97). They are a family of women who worship Erzulie, the protector of women and children, embodied in the statue of Madonna in the story “Nineteen Thirty-Seven.”

It is a sense of despair at being “the last one of [them] left” (94) that prompts Marie to “adopt” a dead baby she finds in a Port-au-Prince sewer. The baby’s name, Rose, which she finds embroidered on the collar brings to her mind Rose Ville, a place where people still hold on to a traditional, more ethical cosmology:

Back in Rose-Ville you cannot even throw out the bloody clumps that shoot out of your body after your child is born. It is a crime, they say, and your whole family considers you wicked if you did it. You have to save every piece of flesh and give it a name and bury it near the roots of a tree so that the world won’t fall apart around you (92-93).

As soon as Marie rejects the idea that the baby is a wanga (an evil spirit sent by her husband’s lovers), she accepts another explanation for the sudden appearance of this lovely baby in her life. Rose becomes an embodiment of all the children she has lost. She thinks of all the names that she wanted to give to her unborn children: “I called out all the names I wanted to give them: Eveline, Josephine, Jacqueline, Hermine, Marie Magdalene, Céline” (92). In the names that she chants, *noms de famille et de guerre* (Evans Braziel 2005: 84), as well as the faces she sees in her dreams, the reader can recognize the characters from other stories from the collection drawn into “one ancestral fabric” (84). Finally, a more plausible explanation for Rose’s appearance is provided. In reality, Rose has been discarded by some rich people: “she was something that was thrown out aside after she became useless to someone cruel” (93), people whom Marie associates with her own employers because the baby smells “like the scented powders in Madame’s cabinet; the mixed scent of gardenias and fish that Madame always had on her when she stepped out of her pool” (94). For a few days Marie’s life oscillates between dream and reality, life and death until the decay of Rose’s body forces her to face the facts and abandon the fantasy world in which seeks compensation for the deprivations of her life. This is when she is betrayed by a Dominican gardener, who condemns her as a *soucouyan* (i.e. vodoun banta) who eats children and calls the gendarmes. As they “wait for the law,” the world of patriarchal and nationalistic dictates closes in on Marie.

Such women as Marie or her grandmother Défile evoke fear because, as they cross the boundaries between rural and urban setting, they appear to deviate from the Western model of normative femininity; they are aligned with witchcraft, with transgressive female power. As Ga thirstier argues in his article “Why Witches?” witches always occupy a transgressive position in society: “If the figure of the witch appears wicked, it is because she poses a real danger to phallicocratic society” (1981: 203). In traditional African religions the position of a witch, or more precisely speaking a “conjure woman,” used to be associated with a positive power. The conjure women were often visionaries, who possessed the gift of seeing with the so-called third eye. As Boyce Davies concludes, a conjure woman “stands between the community and what it is unable to attain” (1994: 75). But in Haiti, whose dominant forms of cultural experience have been wired in the Western ideals of Modernity and a homogenous nation state, the position of the visionary conjure woman has been reduced to that of a witch – an epitome of transgressive female power to be penalized. It is consistently associated with evil by the regressive national realpolitik that contains and represses women to impose uni-centricity on the Haitian cultural cauldron. The witch can be therefore seen as a rebel against the nationalistic order and patriarchal dominance. In the words of Evans Braziel:

Défile, historically resistant to colonial oppression, becomes a revolutionary revenant in Danticat’s diasporic literary narratives. In *Knock! Knock! the figure of Défile is marred by cultural forms of violence that suppress both femme d’Ayiti and Haiti; by rewriting Défile, who is tortured and imprisoned, Danticat resists those national and imperial forms of violence’s that have destroyed alternative historical lines in Haiti. By doing so, Danticat offers feminist resistance to national, neocolonial and feminist violence’s in 20th century Haiti – specifically the US Marine occupation of 1915-34, the Haitian Massacre of 1937 and the Anti-superstition campaigns of 1940-41 (2005: 85).

Danticat’s characters defend cultural sovereignty of Haiti and are posed in opposition to the ideals of nation state. Her narratives of confinement and political persecution expose the Eurocentrism of the political and cultural agenda of nationalism, the construction of nationalist teleology that insists on grounding the nation in one fixed point of origin and on forging one single worldview. The city of Port-au-Prince with its villas for the rich and the prison for the poor becomes a trope for Haitian nationalism that serves to problematize the vision of the modern mono-cultural nation. The nation, on
the basis of the evidence provided by these two stories, continues to be defined by the experiences of colonialism — all the anomalies and perversities wrought on the slave society are a discernible legacy in modern Haiti. The city is associated with betrayal and dispossession, it is a place where mothers abandon their children. With her creative representation of the Femmes d’Ayiti, Danticat seeks to heal this rift, as she builds bridges between mothers and their children, between the historical subject Defilee and her “diasporic daughters” (Evans Braziel 2005: 85). In this way Danticat offers a feminist redress to the history of her homeland, brutalized by the masculinist and Eurocentric concept of the nation state.

As Francis argues, female narratives “were rendered invisible as the state exercised its power to obscure violence against women by dismissing their testimonies as nonsensical and inconsequential to the political life of Haiti” (2004: 79). Danticat challenges through her writing this trope of invisibility and silence of Haitian women. Writing is a way for women like Danticat to speak back to the normative, masculinist ideology of Haitian nation state (1995: 211): “in our world, writers are tortured and killed if they are men or called lying whores, then raped and killed if they are women. In our world, if you write you are a politician,” claims Danticat, who is very critical of the nationalistic ethos of the middle class. Her book can be viewed as a feminist corrective to the project of nation building because in her reckoning of the male-centered history of Haiti, Danticat sidesteps the whole gallery of national heroes, such as: Boukman Dutty, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Toussaint Louverture, Henri Christophe and others. Instead she recovers from obscurity the history of Haitian women who have remained only a token presence in Haitian historiography. Thus, as Danticat narrates the gendered history of Haiti, she puts herself in the role of feminist historiographer and revisionist.

Even though Danticat rarely joins theoretical debates about diaspora, she does seem to endorse in her writing the ethos of maroonage culture (René Despestre’s term). In one of her interviews Danticat stated: “I’m maroonage” (Shea 1997: 49), and the fact that Danticat speaks of herself as a contemporary maroon situates her writing in the long history of black resistance and survival. By presenting herself as a modern maroon, she resists the masculinist and nationalist domination, and male versions of female agency. Danticat clearly sees her role as a diasporic female writer as similar to that of a contemporary conjure woman, a legitimate traveler in the post-indigenous world, who through her art redefines such fixed hegemonic labels as nationality or gender.

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1. Introductory

Like all other human pursuits, music has evolved over time and has always played an important part in the life of many civilizations since antiquity. Fellowes (1948: 11) concludes that "Music is, in fact, as old as the human race, for Song must be classed with Speech and Dance as one of the natural forms of expression of primitive man." The creation of music has taken on a gradual course with a number of smaller revolutionary steps along the way. It seems opportune to differentiate Western music (end product) from its Eastern counterpart (prototype). Thus, music is the youngest of all the arts, although, this statement is true only for the history of musical development in the Western World, which is based on the combination of melodies.

A distinctly British musical style dominated up to the reign of Charles II (1660-85) who introduced a cult of foreign art, especially French music. Pulver (1923: v) concedes that the break in the continuity of the British national music was caused by the intrusion of styles and manners alien to the British character, temperament, and the native genius. To the same argument, Young (1967: 1) quotes Lewis Morris from his A Brief Account of the British, or Cambrian Music (1746): "The ancient Music of the People of Britain hath been so mixed with that of other Nations, who have from time to time made conquests, or otherwise inhabited in this Island, that, as well as in other Arts and Sciences among them, it is, at this day, a very difficult Matter to trace out the true British Music and its Revolution; [...]" The insular character of Britain induced a unique approach to the implementation of new ideas from the Continent. Matters encompassing economy, politics, religion and intellect would reach Britain with a delay, which encouraged the growth of conservatism towards artistic processes taking place in that country.
At the same time, this seclusion from the Continent gave ground to a greater independence, and frequently accelerated civilization. Fellowes states that only few realize that in the first half of the fifteenth century, also England was in the forefront of European music, and thus may be regarded as the cradle of the Art of modern music. It appears likely that English music had a potential to influence Continental music, cf. Fellowes (1948: 29): "[...] it was directly due to English influence that the science of the Belgian school of music received so wonderful an enlargement as to make it seem a new Art." Another piece of evidence for the superiority of English music comes with the round Sumner is y come in (1226) which had no equal on the Continent.

The present paper discusses the development of music in medieval Britain from the four perspectives which may overlap to some extent, i.e. vocal and instrumental music (both encompassing secular music), ecclesiastic music and chronologically, the music of the peoples in Britain before the Norman conquest (Celts, Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings). The division into vocal and instrumental music applied here is based on Hope (1894: 15) who states that music is either vocal or instrumental; the former is the most ancient, and the latter is a matter of cultivation, in which a certain amount of practice is necessary.

2. Vocal music

It has been stated repeatedly by many musicologists that the British have always been inclined to and skilled at singing, cf. Fellowes (1948: 27): "[...] it is important to make it clear that the natural bent of English musical taste is in the direction of vocal rather than instrumental music. This is not only the case in the present day, but a careful examination of the subject will show that it always has been so [...]"

The earliest form of music was homophonic, that is, one single part or melody (Hope 1894: 15). It is also true of Britain where plainsong, i.e. the unison unmeasured chant in use before the measured music was known from the earliest centuries of the Christian era (Pulver 1923: 174). Harrison (1958: xiv) refers to the plainsong as the staple fare of the medieval musician, i.e. the material of his musical education and the rudiments of his professional qualifications.

However, Fellowes (1948: 11–12) states that besides purely melodic music there are two other distinct phases in the history of musical development, namely, the polyphonic and the harmonic. And these are to be found exclusively in the music of the Western World.

Naturally, when discussing vocal music, one must inevitably consider the text to which the music is set. Providing music with lyrics requires both skill and talent and the British artists have been aware of this. Ambros (1893: 81) claims that there is no objection that the purely musical expression of a song becomes modified by the text to which it is set, or would even be unintelligible if the words were extracted because the words that are sung constitute a component part of the music itself.

As for the British music, it gains more expression in the case of ecclesiastical music as the most significant relation between text and music occurs in the mass of the Catholic Church (Ambros 1893: 81), cf. also Edwards (1887: 55) speaking of the British secular music: "Music and words well fitted together seem to me the right and proper thing. I could give many instances from my own experience where certain tunes are associated with sacred words, and cannot be separated from them without causing one to feel that a mistake has been committed."

The only extant music from Anglo-Saxon England that can now be deciphered is music with Latin liturgical texts. Almost all of this liturgical music is plainchant (or plainsong) (Phelpeas and 2003). The secular and sacred music differed in terms of the theory of practice as different standards of pitch were applied for both sacred and secular vocal music (Fellowes 1948: 73).

3. Instrumental music

The beginning of English instrumental music dates back to the times of the olamh, i.e. the ancient Gaelic poet, who, as a highly respected poet, would have a companion play to his poetry reciting (Lipinski 2003: 40).

According to Fellowes (1948: 11), "Instrumental music of an elementary nature made its appearance very soon after Song, and as a necessary sequel to it in the process of the evaluation of this primeval instinct. But, for countless generations, music throughout the world remained absolutely and solely melodic in character." Two exclusively melodic types of music that have survived to the present day and should be rendered without musical accompaniment are Folk-song and Plain-song. This statement suggests that the majority of modern music has evolved in such a manner that instrumental accompaniment appears inextricable.

Obviously, the Church had its own approach to the rendition of music within its premises. The demarcation between vocal and instrumental music has always been of the utmost caution. Edwards (1887: 138) states that all instrumental music, may be classed as sacred, though slow music is preferred. Harrison (1958: xiv) claims that there is no evidence that any other instruments apart from the organ were normally used in church.

The three divisions of instruments are pulsatile, wind, strings, and the three appear to have been adopted in this order. The wind, it is said, has
never been cultivated where the drum, in some form, had not been in previous use, nor the strings where the pipe had not first been adopted (Hope 1894: 15).

According to Lipiński (2003: 40), the Celts were able to make metal wind instruments as early as approximately 700 BC. The most famous instrument of that sort is the so-called trumpet from Derrynane which resembled in shape our modern hunting horn, and which is a great example of the Celtic metallurgy. Another famous Celtic instrument, especially on the territory of Britain, was a harp called the *cruit*. The musician who played the *cruit* was called a *cruitaire* and he would often accompany poets reciting poems. The sound of the *cruit* was very delicate. The Celtic harp differed from the medieval harp which became the symbol of Ireland as the latter had strings made of steel and a different frame. The medieval harp was called *clasach* in Ireland, and *clarasach* in Scotland.

With time, musical instruments managed to outshine the importance of purely vocal performance, cf. Fellowes (1948: 28): “When once instrumental music attained its great importance, the cultivation of secular vocal music, outside the range of Opera, and, to a less extent, of Cantata, no longer continued to hold quite the same position among musicians of any nationality [...]”

4. Sacred music and the role of Church in cultivating British music

Church has done more than any power to foster the development of arts. In his monograph, Hope (1894: 5–6) states that Church encouraged and furthered every advance towards the perfection of music. In addition, each new discovery in music was immediately and eagerly adopted by Church.

Ambros (1893: 81) concludes that it is the Catholic Church that has for many centuries appropriated and relied on art in its solemn and pious ritual, cf. Edwards (1887: 14): “Music is an art. It is in its noblest and purest sphere when used in the praise of Him who is ‘the Giver of every good and perfect gift.’” By the same token, Hope (1894: 4–5) expresses praise for the English Church which has a fine music and a more suitable ritual than the Italian Church.

According to Lovett (2000), the oldest sacred songs in English date back to the mid–12th century, but the sources available indicate that the Church people participated also in secular music. It is in line with Coulton (1915: 31) stating that: “A vast amount of early Church music was adapted, like the Salvation Army hymns, from secular music, St. Francis once took two lines of a popular song for the text of his sermon.”

According to Young, Pope Gregory I sent to England in 596 the Benedictine Abbot Augustine who landed on the Isle of Thanet with his forty religious companions. There, Augustine sang the antiphon *Deprecamur te, Domine* to the English king Ethelbert, which marked the time when “[...] the modern history of British music may be said to have begun” (Young 1967: 6). The speed at which the Roman chant spread over Europe in post-Gregorian times is amazing (Hughes 1967: 99).

In Anglo-Saxon Britain ecclesiastical music generally relied on vocal music, with only the occasional use of musical instruments on feast days (still depending on the local practice). There is a wealth of surviving instruments along with iconographic and literary evidence which prove that instrumental music was vital and well-received in both social and religious gatherings (Lovett 2000).

5. Music of the medieval period in Britain

There were three main sources of cultural impacts on ancient and medieval Britain, and they were inextricably connected with the peoples who inhabited Britain at that time. It is possible to distinguish the three main influences on the origin of the British people and their culture: Celtic, Mediterranean and Saxon. The Celts instigated the first impulse to musical expression, the Romans introduced a sense of uniformity and organization and the Saxons shaped the language which is the primary means of individual musical appreciation (Young 1967: 1).

The links between Britain and the Continent were always strong up to the times of the Carolingian Empire. A separate identity of groups began to emerge when the frontiers of language, encouraging notions of national individuality, were established (Young 1967: 5).

5.1. Celtic music

Celts built a massive cultural empire which was based on language, religion (the institution of the druids), literature and, most of all, the extraordinary political role of the bards. A Celtic bard was a very significant person, much more important than a mere poet or singer (Lipiński 2003: 28, 33).

The ancient Celts prospered both martial and pacific forms of music, which is confirmed by the travelling chroniclers of the first century BC (e.g. Poseidonius, Strabo). The Goidelic Celts are said to have already then used accompanying instruments resembling a lyre.

The first musical instruments to be found in the British Isles come from the time of the Goidelic Celts who inhabited north-west Europe, Britain and especially Ireland during the Bronze Age. Their instruments included wooden or bronze horns, trumpets and rattles (Young 1967: 1).
Education among the Celts was extremely defective. Nuttall (1840: 114) states that they apparently were not “[...] acquainted with the art of writing; but they learned hymns, or triads by art, singing and dancing to music, and their exercises were entirely military. Learning was confined to the Druids.”

The institution of Eisteddfod (the Platonic linkage of music with literature and other sciences) is attributed to Druids. They educated bards and other artists who were under patronage of their superiors, the most reputed Bards in the sixth century were Aneirin and Taliesin, the latter lent his name to the compilation of 14th century poems, “Book of Taliesin” (Young 1967: 3).

It is possible that the Celts initiated what is now called *lay*, i.e. “in general medieval usage, any song or poem of a lyric or narrative character” (Carter 1961: 233). Hughes (1967: 248) states that: “Whether or not the *lai* is Celtic in origin [...] it clearly derives from an old tradition of minstrelsy in which persistent repetition similar to that of the *chasson de geste* is combined with the variety of structure to be found in *puncta* (or contrasted sections) of dance-forms such as the *estampie*.”

5.2. Roman Music

The ‘artistic romanization of Britain’ was a grim story, not because Rome failed to impose its artistic canons, quite the opposite, nor because Britain lacked artistic talents, as there were enough, but because the objectives of the teacher and those of the student were divergent (Collingwood – Myres 1949: 254–255). The Roman settlement in Britain had created one kind of international organization which was later replaced by another created by the Roman Church in the Anglo-Saxon times. The Roman occupation of Britain had little impact on the music of the natives unless by introduction of new musical instruments like the *tibiae*, or *double-reed-pipes* or by introducing imported Christian songs from the new religion. The Romanization of English (or Anglo-Celtic) music is described in some detail by the Venerable Bede (673–735), who was a pupil of Benedict Bishop, Abbot of Wearmouth and a monk of Jarrow, whose *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (completed in 731) is a pillar document in the history of English literature (Young 1967: 4–6).

There were many instruments in vulgar use amongst the Romans, cf. Nuttall (1840: 300): “Certain festivals also, and ceremonies of religion, required particular instruments of music; [...] Music was introduced into the Christian worship, after the example of the Jews, between the years 347 and 356.” The most popular musical instruments used by the Romans are the *crotala*, *tympana*, *sistra*, *lyra* (or lyre), *tabor* (Nuttall 1840: 234, 300, 543).

The Romans had no musical system of their own hence they adopted that of Greece, but misapplied the Greek terms (Hope 1894: 1).

The Romans undoubtedly shaped the sacred music for the centuries to come. It was during the pontificate of St. Gregory the Great (590–604) that the liturgical chant took its final form in the Catholic Church, and was known since then as Gregorian chant. The church music brought from Rome to Britain was studied and spread by learned missionaries and administrators who taught it to others (Young 1967: 7).

The Romans also enjoyed secular music. Nuttall (1840: 292) compares The Saturnalia of the Romans to the Middle Ages *Mummmories* which are described as “[...] certain farcical amusements [...] in which the mummers were disguised in masks, like bears, unicorns, etc. They were the common holiday amusements of young people of both sexes.”

In general, the Roman musical entertainers from the period between St. Gregory to the end of the ninth century, arc cantors, monks, and popes (Hughes 1967: 98).

5.3. Anglo-Saxon Music

The Anglo-Saxon lifestyle was filled with music which was key to the Anglo-Saxon vitality. Many songs were performed in connection with a particular purpose, e.g. war, religious ritual, etc., and they conveyed the mood of the message. The type of music played was said to exert certain physical and emotional responses. In the early Anglo-Saxon times music was an essential part of the four sciences referred to as *quadrivium* and the potential effects of this could be both useful and dangerous. While there is no extant Anglo-Saxon text on music, the two commonly known Latin treatises from the 6th century *De institutione musica* (by Boethius) and *Institutiones* (by Cassiodorus) deal with different abilities of music (Lovett 2000).

According to Young (1967: 4), the Saxons and Angles readily adopted the musical tradition as developed by the Celts and Britons. Their bards, called *scops* and *gleeman* (the former ranking higher in seniority), were in high demand among their masters.

Liporaki (2003: 65) concludes that the Anglo-Saxon poets did not form such a complicated hierarchy as the Celtic ones did. There were two kinds of poets that we know of: a high-rank poet called *scop* and a low-rank poet called *gleeman*. The name *scop* derives from the Old English verb *sceapan* ‘create’ which later evolved into the present day verb ‘shape’. Thus, *scop* was ‘creating or shaping’ poetry, while *gleeman* (OE *gleoman*) was a man ‘causing happiness’, who recited poetry. Scops were performing at courts while gleemen were wandering entertainers. If a vacancy occurred at a court, an ambitious and skilled gleeman could obtain that position, but the competition was high among them.
Another word for a scop was hearpe 'harper', which implies the use of the harp. The Anglo-Saxon bards were artistic ancestors of the commonly known minstrels (Nuttall 1840: 273).

Notated music in Anglo-Saxon England existed as early as the 8th century, which is proved by written music containing neumes in the 'Durham Cassiodorus'. Griffiths (1996: 100) states that because the most extant discussions of Anglo-Saxon secular music were written down by the clergy, the way social events are presented are deliberately biased to chastise sinners. By the same token, sacred music was looked upon more favourably.

Bede illustrates the watershed in Anglo-Saxon musical culture by presenting the career of Caedmon who was a poet-musician singing biblical narratives in his own language thus affecting the minds of those skeptical of Christianity (Young 1967: 7).

With Christianity entering Britain in 597, religious music appeared, first, supposedly in the form of liturgical singing. Although the organ was used as early as the 4th century AD, there is no mention of this instrument throughout the Anglo-Saxon times (Lipoński 2003: 71).

The Anglo-Saxon instruments fall into three categories: stringed, wind and percussion. Furthermore, the division distinguishes 'loud' and 'soft' instruments of which sound qualities would be used in different ensembles (Lovett 2000). As for the stringed instruments, the most popular was the rote (a.l.a. cros, croud, or crut), a quadrangular instrument with a number of gut strings. The rote was later replaced by the harp, the importance of the two instruments being proven by the custom of using them as burial relics. The group of wind instruments consisted of the horn, panpipes, organs, flutes (also referred to as recorders; Lovett 2000).

The most widely known and used musical instruments in the Anglo-Saxon times was the harp (popular in northern Europe), which eventually supplanted the unbowed cruth (chrotta, rote, or crut), which was also popular in Ireland (Young 1967: 5).

5.4. Viking music (the Carolingian Empire)

The Viking rule over Britain during the Anglo-Danish union left a profound cultural legacy, often disregarded by historians. By introducing their culture, however brutally and in a barbaric manner, the Vikings stopped an already existing tendency of the British culture to isolate.

The Danish and Norse invaders introduced their own traditions to the Britons, which led to their assimilation into the Anglo-Saxon community. Also, during the Carolingian Empire the connection between Britain and the Continent grew stronger due to the immigration of artists and scholars, e.g. Alfred the Great (849–901) facilitated the development of ecclesiastical music in Britain by employing Frankish and Breton musicians. At this time Britain, like the whole Carolingian Empire, saw the standardization of the Roman Church music (Young 1967: 10–11).

The Viking professional storytellers were called the skalds. They composed and recited poems in a fairly simple verse form which relied heavily on alliteration and also the use of kennings. Most of the Skaldic poetry was written for particular occasions and often included heroic virtues. Another popular genre of the times was saga which told stories of famous people and well-known heroes (Williamson 1999). The Skalds are mentioned in Ambros (1893: 135): "... accompanied by powerful chords of Skaldic harps, a hymn of victory [...]." According to Nuttall (1840: 52), the Scandinavian Skalds were artistic ancestors of the Norman bards.

Dunstan (c. 924–88), the famous archbishop of Canterbury, further ensured the growth of ecclesiastical music in Britain as a commanding figure of the clergy. As a practising musician, he played the harp (and invented the Aeolian Harp), the psaltery (then referred to as a tymphanum), the cymbals (or chime-bells struck with hammers), and the organ (Young 1967: 12).

As for the musical instruments of the period, by the end of the 10th century there was a reliable piece of evidence that the following instruments were used in Britain and Ireland: the psaltery, shawm, percussion instruments, harp, clarsach, Celtic cruth, tymphanum, single- and double-pipes, cornet, rebec, lyre (which came through Germany from the East) and the organ. The latter appeared first in Western Europe during the 8th century, and the most famous British organ of the Anglo-Saxon period was in Winchester Cathedral. It was ordered by Bishop Elphege (Young 1967: 12–14).

The most conspicuous trace in the present day British culture attributable to the Scandinavian legacy is lexical influence. Language interference was especially strong on the border of the Danelaw and the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy, where bilingualism was flourishing and words from one language would easily enter the other. This process was fuelled by the same Germanic origin of the two languages (Lipoński 2003: 81).

6. General statements

(1) The British natural predilection towards vocal music had a bearing on the late occurrence of music notation, as vocal music had been preserved and spread by Iorc. The pre-Conquest British musicians evolved from Celtic bards, through the Anglo-Saxon gleemen (low rank) and scoops (high rank), the Viking skalds to the Norman minstrels. The first mention of notated English music comes from the 8th century which was sacred music to Latin texts.
(2) The Church in England introduced musical education shortly after 596 and fostered the growth of ecclesiastic music by implementing Gregorian chant. The clergy were responsible for copying and preserving both religious and secular musical treatises and manuscripts in Medieval Britain.

(3) Like in the rest of the West, the development of music in Britain took on the following stages: homophonic, polyphonic and harmonic. Due to population diversity, it was vibrant and reached its climax in the 15th century elevating English music to the Continental level. The England of the 15th century may be regarded as the cradle of modern European music.

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Iain Sinclair’s texts are filled with photographs. His non-fictional work includes collaborations with Marc Atkins and numerous references to the art of photography. This interest also pervades Sinclair’s fictions. In his novels photos are taken, discovered, viewed, discussed and used as plot devices. Then the photographers are invoked: Bill Brandt, Eugène Atget, Robert Frank, John Deak, Man Ray, Markéta Luskačová, Don McCullin and others. This preoccupation with the photographic could be related to Clement Greenberg’s conviction that “photography is closer to literature than it is to the other graphic arts” (1988: 63). However, one may also view it as linked not so much with the literariness of photography as the photographic-ness of Sinclair’s writing. This paper will attempt to trace some of these photographic qualities in the writer’s work and explore how they feature in and perhaps shape his unique vision of London.

Iain Sinclair, hailed as an inspired urban wanderer, acquires his material by walking and observing the city. A writer of a certain space, he operates with images and narratives they entail. Sinclair’s primary concern is that which is about to disappear – the London of the past and the often marginalised authors and artists who preserve and divine the city’s eternal energies. His aim is to salvage traces condemned to obscurity and subsequent erasure. This credo explains Sinclair’s artistic rapport with the city photography of Marc Atkins, who is “[q]uick to notice vulnerable structures. He doesn’t want to photograph anything that will still be there tomorrow” (1999: 66). And it is precisely this focus on the lost, the neglected, that points to the first significant parallel between Sinclair’s writing and the practice of photography.

The photographic is characterised by seeming contradictions, one of which is that it signifies both absence and presence. As Roland Barthes explains in Camera Lucida (2000), the photograph fixes its subject at a certain
instant in time, thus singling it out and preserving, and simultaneously erases it, marking an absence, something that is always already in the past. It is the now, and the then. The here, and the somewhere else. These dichotomies are frequently evoked by Sinclair. In Downriver, photography is recognised as “a kind of death” (Sinclair 2004a: 103); in Liquid City, prints are called “cruel rectangles” imprisoning time-coded light (Atkins – Sinclair 1999: 59). And yet the latter comment is immediately followed by an assertion that “whatever [Atkins] notices shall live” (1999: 59), a notion reinforced in Radon Daughters where it is remarked that “[t]he unphotographed are the forgotten” (Sinclair 1998: 50). It seems then that photography creates what Barthes saw as “a new being, really: a reality one can no longer touch” (2000: 87).

The ontological status of this new reality is problematic, oscillating between truth and fiction. And again the ambiguity corresponds to the complex tension between fact and imagination, evident in Sinclair’s subversive mythology of London. To account for this analogy we may turn to Maurice Blanchot. As John Seurs points out, Blanchot’s The Space of Literature (1955) proposes the notion of writing as erasure, claiming that the text removes its subject and the idea of it, takes its place, and is subsequently mistaken for what it describes (2007: 163). Sinclair extensively explores such a concept of writing, convinced that certain fictional accounts of the capital’s history have the power to replace the material London in our consciousness. We may, therefore, argue that these texts are photographic in that they re-invent London through a narrative which supersedes actuality, hence concurrently preserving and erasing the space of the city.

The question of photography’s ‘realness’ has been answered by semiotician C. S. Peirce, who introduced the concept of the ‘index’, a category of signs which are intrinsically linked with their object, constitute “an imprint or transfer of the real” (Krauss – Ades – Livingston 1985: 31). As a result, “the photograph […] is made by the thing that is photographed transferring itself onto the film” and consequently proves ontologically distinct from other forms of representation (Walker 2002: 10). William Henry Fox Talbot anticipated this, when he wrote of his mansion Lacock Abbey: “this building I believe to be the first that was ever known to have drawn it own picture” (qtd. in Walker 2002: 10). Sinclair makes a similar observation, claiming that London poses for Marc Atkins. Through this statement he reveals another parallel between photography and his own texts, which are informed by the concept that certain sites demand narratives from certain writers: the shamans blessed and cursed with unique vision, making them respond to the city’s call.

However, it would seem that in Sinclairian terms it is the photograph rather than literature that possesses greater potential for deceit and misrepresentation. The medium’s unreliability stems precisely from the fact that its indexicality makes us accept Jean-Luc Godard’s claim that “photography is truth.” Meanwhile, the objectivity of the photographic has long been undermined by a wide variety of practices, with artists seeking to construct new forms and use prints to express their own creativity. In fact, even ‘straight’ photography may be regarded as essentially subjective, since the produced image is selected, ‘composed’ by the photographer. Sinclair points to this issue, quoting Atkins’s assertion that he knows what he wants the end product to be and thus sees the photograph before it is taken. As a consequence, his images are – in Atkins’s own words – “three-dimensional sculptures” (1999: 8). Moreover, Sinclair notes that while the photographer has the capacity to grasp in one shot all that the writer may be incapable of conveying in words, he also falsifies reality. In Liquid City, Atkins is described as hopping, swooping, craning, crawling, hauling himself onto rocks and walls – to find the one spot where he can get the job done. The freakish position from which he can show [the] mock temple up for what it isn’t. His print, sweatied over, reveals Hackney as it should be. More style, less history. A narrative in cryogenic suspension (1999: 59).

This critique may imply a similar sentiment to that of André Bazin, who argued in “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” that “[a]ll the arts are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence” (1980: 241). The regard for photographic objectivity correlates Sinclair’s craft with a particular Surrealist idea of photography, namely Louis Aragon’s notion of Surrealism as the advent of “the realms of the instantaneous, the world of snapshot” (qtd. in Walker 2002: 12). Single out by Peirce as particularly indexical, the instantaneous image attracted the Surrealists through its capacity to capture and reveal the hidden magic of ostensibly banal cityscape. It would seem that it appeals equally to Sinclair, who himself uses instant-print snapshots in his creative process, calling them ‘memory logs.’

Given the writer’s preference for unforced images which most fully represent the ideas of photographic immediacy and authenticity, we may argue that Sinclair shares common ground with another famous walker of another famous city – Eugene Atget. One of the most important photographers of the 20th century Paris, Atget claimed his images to be “simply documents” and instructed Man Ray that they should be used anonymously (Walker 2002: 90). And yet these over 10,000 documents have become viewed as a visionary testimony of vieux Paris. As poet Robert Desnos put it, “[h]is albums […] comprise the most fantastic dossier of marvels that our
eyes can see each day but to which too often they do not pay attention" (qtd. in Walker 2002: 98).

Atget was primarily an observer of the city, a notion reinforced by the fact that his art was popularised by the American photographer Berenice Abbott, a proponent of straight photography and a firm critic of Pictorialism of Henry Peach Robinson and Alfred Stieglitz. Walter Benjamin and Susan Sontag linked Atget with the literary tradition, proclaiming him an urban rag-picker and a Baudelairean flâneur. It is then no surprise that his name recurs in Sinclair’s texts. The praxis of both artists is a response to the imaginative stimulus of their respective cities. Atget may also be related to Sinclair through his appreciation of the Parisian Zone: the derelict strip of land between the capital and its fortifications. By the late 19th century it became the habitat of outcasts, rag-pickers, the so-called ‘zoniers’, and in the years 1910–12 Atget photographed extensively the site and its inhabitants. The very name – ‘Zone’ – primarily brings to mind the space of Strugatsky brothers’ Roadside Picnic (1972) and Tarkovsky’s adaptation of the novella. However, if considered in ideological, rather than topographical terms, Sinclair’s areas of the ‘other’ London bear considerable likeness to the Parisian Zone. Thus, his interest in the discarded, the forgotten spaces of particular resonance, and the writers and artists on the fringes of modern consumer society aligns with Atget whom Waldemar George called in 1930 a photographer of “Paris terre en friches [waste ground], no man’s land” (qtd. in Walker 2002: 119). And like Sinclair’s London, the Zone of Atget’s photographs was lost – about to disappear, erased by post-war city planners.

The point where the Zone and Paris met evolved into another meaningful site: the Ile market, greatly favoured by the Surrealists, and resembling though its chaos of hints and echoes the space of Rodinsky’s room (Lichtenstein – Sinclair 2000: 11). The market served as a prominent subject for Atget as well as for other notable photographers, including André Kertész, Jifi Sefer, Emiel van Moerkerken and Bill Brandt. What attracted both the Surrealists and the photographers was the appeal of André Breton’s objets trouvés – talismans resonant with voices of the past. The mystic charge of such obscure material constitutes a major preoccupation for Sinclair. The obvious example is the already-mentioned Rodinsky’s Room, but the theme resounds in all his texts, especially through the insistence on treating books as objects pervaded with secret energies of lost London.

And yet the connection between Sinclair and Atget, the two urban wanderers, can be traced beyond their shared interest in documenting their lost cities. In appropriating Atget for the Surrealist tradition it is often pointed out that his images are, as Ian Walker puts it, “both factual and dreamlike” (2002: 98). This may be associated with Sinclair’s praxis of imaginative re-vision of the history of London. What happens in the realm of Atget’s photography and Sinclair’s writing is what happened in the investigation of Rodinsky’s disappearance: “[t]he factual and the fabulous met in riotous conjunction” (Lichtenstein – Sinclair 2000: 4).

A further link is provided by Walter Benjamin, who saw the stillness of Atget’s images as evocative of the scene of a crime, a fact which may be further related to the notion of photography as evidence of past events, as well as things to come. Sinclair echoes the Benjaminian sentiment, commenting in Rodinsky’s Room that “[p]hotographs of deserted streets must imply uncatalogued crimes” (Lichtenstein – Sinclair 2000: 7). Desnos also recognised this sense of imminence in Atget’s images, associating his work with Fantomas of Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre. The poet recalled Appolinaire’s belief that the novel provided “the exact description of the Paris of 1910” (qtd. inWalker 2002: 100), and proclaimed Atget’s prints the perfect illustration of those times. This establishes a connection between Atget and Sinclair’s White Chappel Scarlet Tracings, a novel proposing that the myth of Jack the Ripper still determines the aura of Whitechapel, and that the key to the mystery of his crimes lies in literature. The link between crime and photography is further reinforced by Sinclair through the character of Mr Eves. The gentleman boasts a collection of photographic plates taken at all the scenes of Jack the Ripper murders, and has a habit of “viewing his photographs through an ivory-handled magnifying glass, waiting for the first trace of movement somewhere among the grey background detail” (Sinclair 2004b: 27).

Jack the Ripper and Fantomas enjoy a similar status in terms of notoriety and cultural impact. It may be of course pointed out that while the Victorian murderer actually existed, the French master of disguise belongs to the realm of the literary, but this in fact supports Sinclair’s shamanistic theory of the convergence of reality and fiction. According to the writer’s vision, literature and the material world influence and shape each other to a point where the boundary between the two spheres is dissolved. Thus, the two villains meet on a common plane: Jack the Ripper gets there, having been eternally fictionalised, in literature, comic books, films. Paradoxically, Fantomas gets there through the same process – the novels by Allain and Souvestre, together with Louis Feuillade’s serial and a wealth of other film and comic book adaptations, brought the character to life and allowed him to enter the cultural canon of the 20th century. In this way, Fantomas has become a part in the process, which Sinclair describes as follows:


certain fictions, chiefly Conan Doyle, Stevenson, but many others also, laid out a template that was more powerful than any local documentary account – the presences that they created, or “figures” if you prefer it, like Rabbi Loew's
linked with the fact that, as Ian Walker observes, although produced quite differently, the postcard and the snapshot both share the quality of a talisman (2002: 55). Jobbard's postcards indeed prove to have a special resonance, as reading the images seems to give the character mystery over the novel, an authority which is confirmed in the last chapter, where he actually takes over the narration.

But it is the portrait of Edith Cadiz that perhaps most fully illustrates Sinclair's perception of the pull of the photographic image. The photograph of a young woman, noticed by chance in the house of Roland Bowman who used to be the girl's lover, is immediately recognised by the narrator as "the potential mystery" (Sinclair 2004a: 76), "the implied narrative", which compels him "to enter the story [Edith] had already persuaded us to demand from her" (2004a: 77). Consequently, prompted by the print, Sinclair creates a narrative of Edith's life, noting however the image's potential to disrupt his tale. Revisiting the house where the portrait was discovered, the narrator is relieved not to find it on display, explaining "I didn't want to know if the photograph had changed; if it showed some fresh aspect of Edith's disappearance that I would have to act upon. Any minor alteration in the image would mean an alteration in the account I have already written of it" (2004a: 138).

Sinclair's notion of this narrative compulsion inherent in the print may be regarded as an extension of Barthes's concept of the punctum, a detail within the photograph which activates the viewer's imagination, "that accident which pricks [him]" (2000: 27). It is, however, important to observe that for Barthes, the punctum is located not in the image itself, but rather in the process of its cognition by the observer (Nickel 2000: 233). And despite seemingly endowing the portrait of Edith with the potential for transformation, Sinclair appears to concur with Barthes. After all, Jobbard's twelve photographs "could, of course, be reassembled in any order, and read in whatever way suits the current narrator. These dim postcards are as neutral as a Tarot pack" (Sinclair 2004a: 36). Moreover, the story of Edith's photograph concludes on a similar note. The narrator half-expects the image to alter, Dorian Gray-like, through the power of his fiction; and yet upon inspecting the print again he finds that "[It was undoubtedly the same woman" (Sinclair 2004a: 151). In the end, Sinclair's own fiction overwhelms him, as the invented Edith materialises in the narrative in a violent climax, which the narrator feels unable to bring to a conclusion. The writer's struggle with his own creation points to our final photographic equation, namely the pact between the photographed and the photographer.

The question of power relations between those who find themselves on the two ends of the camera counts among the most exciting for contemporary critics of photographic themes in literature. It also interests Sinclair, who seems to recognise in it the essence of the power struggle between writing
and reality. In his observation of Marc Atkins's photographic practice, Sinclair notes how the artist gains control over actuality by removing its fragments and fixing them in his prints. The notion in fact goes quite far: in *Lights Out For the Territory*, when rendering the photographer’s attempts to turn to portraiture, Sinclair recalls Atkins’s assignments to shoot Robin Cook and Eric Mottram, which were swiftly followed by the two men’s death. As a result, “[n]ow writers of a certain age, seeing Atkins arrive on the doorstep with his camera, make their excuses. The energy exchange is too intense. Leaving those marks on photographic paper, drains the live force. It's too risky a collaboration” (Sinclair 2003: 267).

However, while the general discussion tends to focus on the photographer's dominance over his subject, Sinclair is also drawn to the other side of the equation. The choice of the word ‘exchange’ in the rendition of the Cook and Mottram anecdote is quite revealing. As with the mystic bond between certain London sites and certain London writers, photography is interaction, and no one remains unaffected. Thus the photographed too exerts power over the one who holds the camera, a notion most fully and darkly realised in *Radon Daughters*, in the story of Sofya Court and Mordecai Donar. Sofya is a photographer; Mordecai – an aged Jewish hermit who insists on becoming Sofya’s subject. Struggling for power over each other, the two characters form an obsessive relationship which leads to a violent conclusion. Interestingly, this narrative incorporates also other Sinclairian preoccupations, as it is revealed to be the space of encounter between reality and fiction. Its factual basis may be discovered through another text, namely *Rodinsky's Room*. Sinclair invokes there the figure of Sharon Chazan – the real-life equivalent of Sofya – noting the parallels between her risky connection with a man called Moshe Drukash and Rachel Lichtenstein’s obsession with David Rodinsky.

*Radon Daughters* explores the relationship between the photographer with the project “to map the psychosis of London” (Sinclair 1998: 131) and her subject who by laying himself bare gains control over the artist and all her future prints. To free herself, Sofya resorts to a near-shamanistic resolution: she sacrifices herself through the process of becoming an image, which she achieves by turning Mordecai's room into a camera obscura. Curiously, such a notion goes back to the very beginnings of photography and specifically Fox Talbot. Plate VIII of *The Pencil of Nature*, “A Scene in the Library” depicts shelves of books while its caption speculates on the idea of turning an apartment into a camera obscura. Significantly, Talbot’s musings reference the code of the detective novel, as he contemplates an image produced in this fashion as the testimony of the secrets of the darkened chamber (Brunet 2009: 42). Fulfilling Talbot’s fantasy, Sofya reverses her fate by becoming literally a reversed imprint on the wall. And yet it is interesting to note that Sinclair calls Mordecai’s attic a cave. One may link this with Brassaï's romanticism of cave art, which he parallels with graffiti, recognising in both “the same agony [...] the frenzy of the unconscious” (qtd. in Walker 2002: 155). It is Plato’s cave, however, which remains the most obvious association, bringing into question the meaning, as well as meaningfulness, of Sofya’s solution. If what remains on the wall is but an imperfect shadow, how can it have the potential for redemption? And as it turns out, this doubt is not unsubstantiated. After all, we learn from *Rodinsky’s Room* that the story of Sharon Chazan ended quite differently. But perhaps what *Radon Daughters* ultimately suggests is that through becoming an image, the photographer opened herself to fictionalisation, an alternative reading of her portrait and story.

To conclude, there is a meaningful photographic undercurrent in the work of Iain Sinclair and it can be argued that the photographic greatly affects the writer’s literary vision, or re-vision, of London. Susan Sontag, Walter Benjamin, and many others pointed out that photography introduced a new level of perception, taught us to notice the usually overlooked details. As Russian Formalist Ossip Brik put it, “[t]he camera [...] can see in ways that man is not accustomed to – can suggest new points of view and demonstrate how to look at things differently” (2003: 90). Consequently, Sinclair’s frenetic catalogues of impressions may be regarded as evidence that he sees the city photographically and thus recognises the simultaneous presence and absence of his mythical London. As it has been mentioned before, in *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair states that Atkins can do with one image what he is struggling to achieve through prose. Suddenly this comment acquires a much broader meaning. Due to the nature of the medium, a photograph by Marc Atkins indeed captures the essence of Iain Sinclair’s writing: its confluence of reality and fiction, presence and absence, life and death, the present and the past, the banal and the marvellous, subjectivity and objectivity, memory and erasure.

NOTES

1 The term ‘straight’ photography, championed by Group f/64 (comprised of seven San Francisco photographers), refers to the type of photographic practice which strives for objectivity and rejects all manipulation of the image.

2 Popular at the end of the 19th and in the early years of the 20th century, Pictorialism was a photographic movement promoting the idea that photography needed to emulate painting.

3 Although considerably different, both the novella and the film revolve around a mysterious and forbidden area – the Zone – which can only be accessed with the help of ‘Stalkers’, guides with a special understanding of the anomalous space, able to navigate their way through the site.
Chazan was a young photographer working in the Whitechapel area who died at the hands of a man she photographed (Moshe Drukal).