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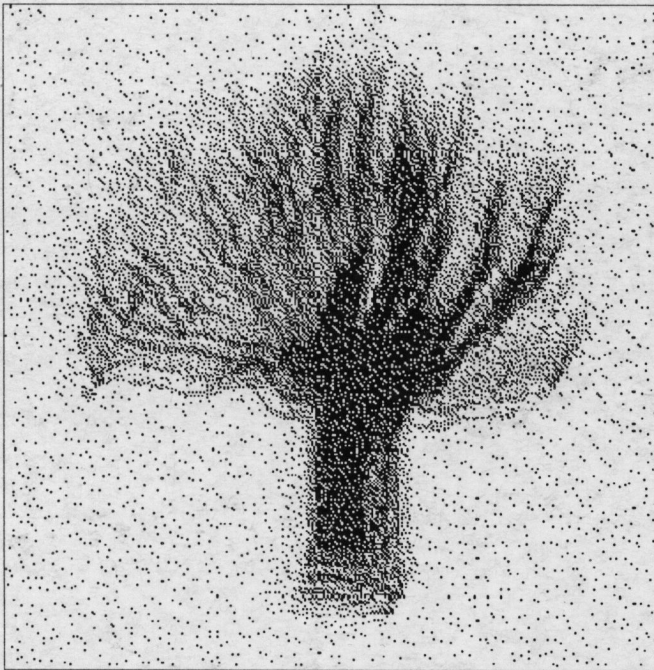
# FOLIO

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A STUDENTS' JOURNAL

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# FOLIO

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A STUDENTS' JOURNAL

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Dear Readers,

We are proud to announce the launching of the new issue of FOLIO. You probably think that there is completely no need to boast about it? Why, it seems just like any other number of FOLIO, doesn't it? Oh, do not judge the book (magazine!) by its covers nor by its ever-changing content, for significant changes *have* occurred! Namely, the Old Crew has disembarked the FOLIO Freight giving room to us - the New Sailors, who would like to thank our senior colleagues for their cooperation and support. At the same time, we promise all we will do everything to keep FOLIO shipshape. We hope the winds of fortune will be kind to us and fill our sails with the best articles imagined, to bring us straight to the shores of your interest.

The Editors.

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Anna Maczkowska

Conformism or Quest for Freedom.  
Portraits of Victorian Age Women  
in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*  
and John Fowles' *The French  
Lieutenant's Woman*\*

Why have women passion, intellect,  
moral activity – and a place in society  
where no one of the three can be exercised?<sup>1</sup>  
Florence Nightingale 'Cassandra'

## Introduction

What was the situation and social status of women in Victorian England? On the one hand, they were deprived of any civil rights; they were condemned to a family life and housework. On the other hand, England was a country in which more talented female writers than anywhere else appeared; it was also a country where the suffragist movement grew strong in the 1890s. So there must have been a lot of women trying to break free from the restraints of their society – and such women have been portrayed in literature. My purpose is to show Victorian women, both 'rebels' and 'conformists', portrayed by authors living in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century – and to compare how different

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\* The paper has been written under the supervision of Ms Marzena Sokolowska, PhD, and submitted as a MISH year paper.

experiences of the writers and different literary conventions can influence the way in which the female protagonists are shown.

This essay describes two different ways in which a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman was depicted in English literature. The first one is a contemporary view of George Eliot; the second one is the modern, 20<sup>th</sup> century outlook of John Fowles. The contrast between their novels results obviously from the fact that both authors lived in completely different environments and had very unlike life experiences. They wrote for different audiences and used different narrative techniques (Eliot – traditional realist convention with omniscient narrator, modified by elements of psychological insight. Fowles uses the Victorian convention with an ironical distance, adding a 20<sup>th</sup> century perspective, contrasting Victorian values to the 20<sup>th</sup> century ones. Moreover, he stresses the freedom of a reader and the characters). Both Fowles and Eliot's ways of creating their protagonists were influenced by different ideologies. Last but not least – there is an obvious difference between Eliot's female and Fowles' male point of view. The influence of all those factors on the Eliot's and Fowles' ways of describing a Victorian woman will be closely examined. The essay focuses on the main heroines of 'The Mill on the Floss' and 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' – Maggie Tulliver and Sarah Woodruff – because they embody the values and the ideas of the writers who have created them, and they are a fictional example of women who were not typical representatives of their society, but who tried to find their own place and looked for independence. Both heroines are placed in a similar position; they feel unsuited for and suppressed by the society they live in, and they crave for freedom and opportunity of self-realisation, which is denied to them. But either of them chooses a totally different solution and either of them finds a totally different end. I will try to answer why and how it happens. I will also give an account of how other female characters (the typical ones, the majority, juxtaposed with Sarah and Maggie) and the society in which they lived were presented by the authors.

## **Historical Background**

A short account of how the Victorian society looked according to historians (focusing on the women's situation at the time), and according to both writers, is necessary here. It is essential as the essay presents both the heroines opposed to the society and to a generally accepted image of a Victorian woman, and those who perfectly suit that image. The background is necessary for better



understanding the motivation of Sarah and Maggie – but also for better understanding of the motivation of the writers (particularly Eliot, living in this society, not being as free as Fowles to criticise it. In her private life she did not obey the Victorian rules of behaviour, but couldn't despise them in her novels – they would have been rejected by the audience then).

The Victorian Age (about 1832 – 1901) was the time of a rise in wealth and living standards, the time of the 'Second Industrial Revolution', the time of political changes – extension of the right to vote and the forming of the labour unions. It was also the time when Britain became a colonial empire, a time of growing imperialism; a time of relative stability and peace (Britain was engaged in only one major war – The Crimean war of 1850s). British society felt confident and proud, content with its richness and willing to bring civilisation to the 'inferior' races in colonies.

What was women's situation at the time? One of feminist critics, Susan Meyer, claims that British imperialism referred also to the women, who were treated like a lesser race (and this attitude reveals itself also in fiction, even in 'The Mill...' where Maggie is constantly compared to a Gypsy and her dark carnation and hair are complained about – so she's like a Black among 'superior' whites). Meyer's metaphor may be a bit exaggerated, but the Victorian society was certainly male-dominated ('Adam's society' as Fowles calls it in his 'The Aristos'). Here are just a few examples: until 1882, a woman had to give up all her pre-marital property to her husband; until 1891, men were allowed by law to beat their wives. Women were to be good wives and mothers, not engaging in any kind of serious intellectual activity, or in any kind of 'male' activity. George Eliot gives some examples (as she is writing in a framework of the Victorian literary convention and for the Victorian audience, she expresses criticism only in the form of narrator's observations and perceptions – she does not give a scientific, sociological account) of men's attitude to women. When Maggie's father praises her intelligence, he adds 'It's a pity but what she'd been the lad'<sup>2</sup>; in another place, the narrator says; 'It was a time (...) when country surgeons never thought of asking their female patients if they were fond of reading, but simply took it for granted that they preferred gossip'<sup>3</sup>. Fowles (who, unlike Eliot, expresses openly his subjective opinions and criticises Victorian society by comparing it with modern times) describes the first Parliamentary vote on giving the women suffrage, what was commonly laughed about (even by women themselves – e.g. Ernestina Freeman) but at the same time he stresses that this date (1867) was the beginning of women's emancipation movement. The Age of a New Woman (as Fowles puts it), was coming (and Sarah may be seen as its forerunner) – the age when women were allowed at universities and when they began to campaign for suffrage.

Another typical feature of Victorian society was its double (for men and for women, accepted in public, and used in private) moral standards and sexual repression (Fowles writes about 'enormous progress and liberation in every other field of human activity; and nothing but tyranny in the most personal and fundamental'<sup>4</sup>; he mentions the 19<sup>th</sup> century cases of female hysteria, describes London's brothels, etc. Eliot of course does not mention a word about it – as Fowles says, there was 'not a single novel (...) that ever goes beyond the sensuality of a kiss'<sup>5</sup>. Sexual repression manifested itself also in banning sex, or any open reference to it, from literature).

Both Eliot and Fowles focus on presenting the provincial environment (of St. Ogg's and Lyme Regis) which considers itself deeply religious, but in fact is semi-pagan (as Eliot claims), neglecting the really Christian principles, interested mainly in gossip, ready to condemn everyone who is different from the majority. In this kind of a community the oppressiveness of the Victorian system of principles is particularly visible.

Victorian society was a society of strict rules (Adam's society – society 'in which (...) male gods exact strict obedience to established institutions and norms of behaviour'<sup>6</sup>- as Fowles defines Victorian society), applying to all spheres of life – rules much harder for women, who were chained to their roles (what Fowles stresses on his novel). Most (who I'll call 'the mainstream') adhered to those rules – some thought of, or even attempted at, breaking them. Firstly I'll take a closer look at the former ones.

## Women – the mainstream

Both Eliot and Fowles show 'mainstream' female characters in a similar way. The difference is that Eliot's protagonists are purely fictional, but very realistic characters depicted in accordance with the rules of realist convention (to which Eliot adds her modification, primarily psychological insight – but this applies mainly to the main heroine). The frames of convention made it impossible for Eliot to show all aspects of her protagonists' personality. In the Fowles' novel the characters are the products of the writer's imagination – but they are realistic and presented us as they really could be (with historic/psychoanalytic /Marxist/existential hindsight) – all aspects of their personality are shown. I will focus on two types of 'mainstream' characters : satirical ones (aunts Glegg & Pullet and Mrs Poulteney) and 'well behaved young lady' (Lucy Deane and Ernestine Freeman). Sarah and Maggie are contrasted with both kinds of protagonists, but in either case the contrast is of a different kind.

Aunt Glegg and Mrs Poulteney bear some resemblance to each other but, more interestingly, they share some features of personality with Maggie and

Sarah: that is, both Mrs Glegg (who complains all the time about Mrs Tulliver being weak) and Mrs Poulteney (who 'acknowledged no bound for her authority'<sup>7</sup>) are women of strong character, energetic and full of determination. But unlike Maggie and Sarah, they are not endowed with imagination or intelligence, and their mental horizons are narrow (Mrs Glegg is concerned with money and economising- her main problem is whether her husband won't leave her poorly off - and with her family being respected. Mrs Poulteney has two obsessions: Dirt and Immorality). That is why these women are capable of realising themselves in a socially acceptable way. They totally approve of the social convention, are satisfied with it, and even find it necessary; they do not possess enough intelligence to have doubts, questions or to imagine the world looking in a different way.

Aunt Glegg and Mrs Poulteney are the satirical portraits of the women of strong characters and narrow horizons. But the satire is aimed not only at the individuals juxtaposed with main heroines, but also at the society which Mrs Glegg and Poulteney represent. However, here the difference between both authors appears. Mrs Glegg presents some typical features of a Victorian, provincial community (respect for the social status, preoccupation with the rules of behaviour, a belief that money is more important than education; her sister, Mrs Pullet, is described in a similarly satirical mode- as a woman preoccupied only with her garments and tidiness of her house, extremely careful about public opinion). Nevertheless aunt Glegg has some positive features (family solidarity) and is not openly, or even indirectly, despised by the narrator (satire is in the framework of convention). On the other hand, Mrs Poulteney is openly criticised by the narrator (apart from his usual irony in characterising the heroes of the novel, he expresses his disgust e.g. saying 'There would have been a place in the Gestapo for the lady'<sup>8</sup> – again an example of the 20<sup>th</sup> c perspective- or describing Mrs Poulteney's fall to hell). Mrs Poulteney is an embodiment of almost all the negative features of the Victorian society: its oppressiveness, double morality (she sees herself as an authority in religious matters but in fact denies the real Christian values), sexual repression (the narrator says that her vision of meetings on Ware Commons were 'the objective correlative of all that went on in her own subconscious'<sup>9</sup>). And Sarah runs away and frees herself from Mrs Poulteney just as she frees herself from the bounds of society (although in some way she needs Mrs Poulteney, uses her to become free – just like she needs and uses the society's disapproval and contempt).

Ernestina Freeman and Lucy Deane are juxtaposed with the main heroines of the novels in a different way. They are both typical, even stereotypical literary heroines of a Victorian novel (Maggie defines them as light-complexioned girls, who 'carry away all the happiness'<sup>10</sup>) and

representatives of Victorian society. I've called them 'well-behaved young ladies' and what Peter Conradi wrote about Ernestine may as well be applied to Lucy: 'a pretty, pert, uninformed, the Kinder Kirche und Kuche heroine, who aptly and unchallengingly compliments (...) conventionalised masculinity'<sup>11</sup>. Both Lucy and Tina are pretty in a way that was valued by the Victorians (Lucy has blonde, curly hair and light complexion, Tina is described as having exactly the right face for her age). They both enjoy the kinds of entertainment considered appropriate for young ladies; embroidery, playing some musical instrument and singing, reading aloud. They are both well-mannered, polite, and blush when it is expected. The only difference is that Lucy is 'a little darling' while Ernestina shows some sort of independence (there was something about her 'that denied (...) her apparent total obeisance to the great god Man'<sup>12</sup>) – but though she finds some social conventions annoying, she never questions them. What separates Lucy and Tina, is the way in which they are presented by the narrators. Fowles turns the Victorian stereotype upside down, using Freudian ideas of sexual repression to show what a Victorian heroine could have really felt, to show the aspect of her personality which was absent in a traditional realist novel (e.g. Tina's telling herself 'I must not' whenever a sexual thought crossed her mind. The same Fowles does with other female characters – apart from Sarah)

There is one more link between Tina and Lucy: they both are a part of a triangle and both of them compete with another woman (although unconsciously): Lucy with Maggie for Stephen Guest, Tina and Sarah for Charles Smithson. Eliot and Fowles (again parodying the Victorian literary convention) introduce here one of the oldest and most common literary motifs – of a man torn between a light and a dark woman (by the way, this is the literary convention which Maggie herself criticises, saying 'Give me some story, now, where the dark woman triumphs'<sup>13</sup>). Charles and Stephen are engaged to women who are a good match (according to Stephen 'a man likes his wife to be accomplished, gentle, affectionate, and not stupid; and Lucy had all these qualifications'<sup>14</sup>) but they feel passion (initially only sensual, sexual passion) for women who are totally different; women who are in conflict with social conventions. Charles though is in a slightly different situation than Stephen: Ernestina is a danger to his freedom, forces him to enter her social class – that is why the opposition between her and Sarah (who stands for freedom), is stronger than between Maggie and Lucy; what is significant, Maggie and Lucy reconcile with each other at the end of a novel.

## In Quest for Freedom

I've written that Maggie Tulliver and Sarah Woodruff are the characters that become opposed to the society. They are different from the majority of contemporary women (and this difference is manifested even in their looks – they are both dark, they don't conform to the Victorian ideal of feminine beauty), as they both are intelligent, passionate, and imaginative, and crave for self-realisation – but in the Victorian society such women had little possibility for satisfactory self-realisation. Both Maggie and Sarah show little respect for the social convention and rules of behaviour, as they both search for freedom. But Sarah decides to break the convention completely – and Maggie, though she feels constrained by the social rules, dreams only about changing and modifying them. Unlike Sarah (who achieves her aim), Maggie finds a tragic end. Feminist critics claim that George Eliot made her heroine reject all possibilities of gaining freedom. But was it possible for a heroine of a Victorian novel to achieve real freedom? And what were the other reasons that made Eliot shape her protagonist's fate that way? I will try to answer these questions in the next paragraph.

### Maggie – the Angel of Renunciation?

Maggie Tulliver is from the very beginning of the novel characterised in terms of being different. Her own mother wishes Maggie was more similar to Lucy Deane and complains that she is naughty; her father appreciates her intelligence, but regrets she is not a boy. She is associated with the images of a drowned witch from Daniel Defoe's book (tragic anticipation of Maggie's fate!) and of a Gypsy queen: colourful but unsuited to society characters (already as a child Maggie tries to find her own way and runs away to the Gypsies in her attempt at escaping the disapproval and criticism expressed by her family). Maggie is endowed with imagination and sensitivity, that her beloved brother lacks; thus they often misunderstand each other. Elaine Showalter claims that Maggie and Tom represent the opposition of 'masculine repression and feminine passion'<sup>15</sup> but Maggie is rather a character that represents both the positive and the negative - e.g. being too emotional and impulsive - woman's features plus some at the time commonly associated with men – e.g. intellectual capacity. Despite Maggie's intelligence and creativity (she, though younger, is better at understanding maths and Latin than her brother) her parents are primarily interested in her brother's education (as according to Victorian standards). She has little opportunity to develop intellectually. From her earliest childhood Maggie has an acute feeling of being restrained by her environment.

For this reason she dreams of running away and so strongly admires her father, who is the only person that appreciates her intelligence.

When her family suffers the 'Downfall' Maggie must leave boarding school and is condemned to boring household chores. In this period she is not only in a usual conflict with the society (that is manifested e.g. in her impulsive attack at her aunts and uncles' behaviour during her father's illness) but an inner conflict, a struggle in Maggie's soul (uncertainty which way to follow, what to choose, that existed since her childhood) becomes stronger. She wants that 'self-command which (...) made Tom manly in the midst of his intellectual boyishness'<sup>16</sup> but she has to suffer loneliness and monotony and cannot understand why it is she who has to bear such a heavy burden. Then comes the moment of her first renunciation. When seeking some explanation and help for her pain Maggie comes across the works of Thomas a Kempis and she decides to look at her life as something insignificant, a part of a divinely guided whole. But the narrator stresses that Maggie's renunciation is artificial, as the girl has not understood that renunciation still means sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was all the time craving for happiness. Philip Wakem shows Maggie that what she did was merely a choice to remain in ignorance and our heroine gives up practising the idea of renunciation (though she remains under its influence). However, later on Maggie goes once again through inner conflict: she must choose between her affection for Stephen and her love for Lucy (and her obligation towards Philip). After an inner struggle she gives in to passion – but then quickly decides to resign from love (and in case of this choice Maggie does not take into consideration conventions and public opinion at all!). When she comes back to St. Ogg's she is subjected to ostracism. Only the small minority remains loyal and tries to help her. But she's so strongly despised of and regarded with suspicion by the St Ogg's community, that she has no alternative but to leave the town. However, she rejects the offer of Stephen and help from Dr Kenn. She comes back to words which carry the idea of renunciation ' "I have received the Cross (...) I will bear it" '<sup>17</sup> – but she cries in despair, wishing that death would come soon. Afterwards comes the flood – that unites Maggie with Tom and drowns our heroine and the town of St. Oggs.

'The angel of renunciation' is the name that feminist critics could have given to Maggie (as they called George Eliot 'The angel of destruction' and claimed that she advocated women's renunciation). Feminist critics heavily criticised Eliot, claiming that Maggie is a passive, self-destructive heroine who tries to give birth to healthier self, but eventually always chooses to punish herself and prefers renunciation to a fight. According to Elaine Showalter such a portrait of a woman results from Eliot's situation of a female writer in a male-dominated society (female writers of early Victorian era faced the problems of

‘obedience’ or ‘resistance’ to commonly accepted gender stereotypes, and were in ‘double bind’ – they didn’t want to be treated scornfully by male critics, but at the same time were afraid of appearing unwomanly).

However, Maggie’s renunciations are not a sign of passivity. The first, the religious one, is, as I have mentioned, not properly understood by Maggie (who actively looks for happiness and self-realisation) and therefore she quite easily gives it up, choosing meetings with Philip, which give her an opportunity of intellectual development and are a kind of education (which Maggie so strongly longs for). Maggie’s second renunciation (i.e. resigning from love) signifies an Eliot’s moral message. Eliot perceives individualism as exerting one’s free will and following one’s interests. But this freedom of will means also taking responsibility for one’s actions and bearing their consequences. An individual’s freedom is limited, as what he does may affect not only his life and happiness, but also the fate of others: we can exert our free will as long as we don’t do harm to others. For this reason Maggie, aware of Lucy’s and Philip’s feelings, abandons Stephen (she says that although she has caused sorrow already – by her initial agreement to run away with Stephen – she has not done it deliberately. She does not want to live with the memory of the sin, and tells Stephen that if they got married, not taking care of the others feelings, ‘it would be a warrant of all treachery and cruelty’<sup>18</sup>). Maggie epitomises Eliot’s ideology, influenced by Comte’s positivism (advocating altruism, i.e. putting the benefit of a whole species, of whole Humanity – understood as all people who ever existed or are to exist – higher than the benefit of an individual).

But did Eliot have to make her protagonist die? Why Maggie could not marry Philip? Marriage seems a solution, but in fact it would not have given Maggie neither happiness (she does not love Philip) nor freedom (and freedom is what Eliot wants to give to her imaginative and passionate heroine – freedom from the provincial society, freedom from the binds of convention, freedom of self-realisation, of not being directed by a man). Moreover, a question of boundaries of individuality, Maggie’s consistency in a promise she gave her brother, appears here.

Eliot could not allow Maggie to be totally free either: a heroine who e.g. is educated, escapes her provincial town and succeeds in world (as did Eliot herself!) would have totally broken the rules of a Victorian realist novel and wouldn’t have been accepted by the contemporary audience. Eliot did as much as she could by modifying the convention (her purpose was not to break it – just as it was not Maggie’s goal to break social rules, but to change them – just as Maggie wanted to change the stereotype of a literary heroine!). Apart from marriage the only possible solution for Maggie is death. But this death is what ends Maggie’s suffering (she is not happy with her decision of the final

renunciation), unites her with Tom, and is also the death of the community which criticised Maggie, the community in which she has always been a stranger. Eliot was unable to show a heroine who is not conventional but both triumphant and happy, without breaking the rules of a Victorian novel. John Fowles, the writer free from any limitations of a traditional novel, solves Eliot's problem – but it is a solution for a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman who is a 20<sup>th</sup> century literary heroine (and not for a 19<sup>th</sup> century literary heroine).

### **Sarah – an Outcast and a Creator**

Sarah Woodruff is in my opinion a sort of a counterpart of Maggie Tulliver in 20<sup>th</sup> century novel – they share the sense of alienation from society and the desire for freedom. But Fowles' heroine chooses a completely different way than the Eliot's one. She has to choose the different way, as she embodies ideas and attitudes different from those advocated by George Eliot.

Nevertheless, the initial situation of Sarah and Maggie is similar. Sarah does not suit her environment even before she consciously chooses to be an outcast. Her education makes her exist as if in between social strata: her father, a farmer, 'forced her out of her own class, but could not raise her to the next'<sup>19</sup> (in this aspect Sarah is similar to Tess Durbeyfield ; that is one of the examples of intertextuality of the Fowles' novel). What is more, she is passionate and imaginative (exactly like Maggie; I think that Fowles deliberately gives his heroine such features to stress an intertextual link with George Eliot's novel). What differentiates Sarah from the rest of women is her awareness of her sexual power and her directness of look, thought, and language (that she reveals during her meetings with Charles – she calls herself 'The French Lieutenant's Whore', while Ernestina, out of shame, replaces the word 'whore' by 'woman'). Sarah's education and profundity of insight are the two 'curses' of her life that make her 'a victim of caste society (...) doomed to (...) spinsterhood'<sup>20</sup>. But Sarah (influenced by literature – and so is Maggie - e.g. by the novels of Austen or Scott) longs for freedom and escape from the dull life of a provincial governess (unlike Maggie, she does not have any responsibilities towards anyone). She finds the right way to do it and follows it consistently.

Sarah's way of achieving freedom is self-creation, creating fictional, false story and letting people believe it. She presents herself to the society as a whore, a fallen woman - a French Lieutenant's Woman. She does it, as she says, 'To be what I must be. An outcast.'<sup>21</sup> She says it when presenting to Charles her fictional story, adding that 'No insult, no blame can touch me. Because I have set myself beyond the pale.'<sup>22</sup> But that is only the first step. To break totally free from the social bounds, Sarah must become a real outcast – a real whore



(according to Victorian standards). That's why she manipulates Charles: tells him her fictional story in full details, leaves Mrs Poulteney and begs him for help, and finally seduces him. By having sex with Charles Sarah makes her story real. Now she can set off, free to search for her identity – and finds her happiness living in a community of decadent, socially unaccepted artists (Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood – outcasts who were shocking for the Victorian society just like Sarah was). Freedom is for Sarah the major value, thus she rejects Charles's proposal, saying 'I do not want to share my life. I wish to be what I am, not what a husband (...) must expect me to become in marriage'<sup>23</sup>. She is No One's Woman – neither a husband, nor the society can limit her or rule over her.

Sarah does not only manipulate and seduce Charles (she's compared to biblical Eve as 'The Fall myth underlies the novel'<sup>24</sup> according to Peter Conradi; comparison to Eve points also to Fowles' division of Adam and Eve societies, where Eve is associated with progress and innovation). Because she truly loves him, she wants to give him something she loves more – she tries to teach him freedom. And though she hurts Charles, she makes him perceive that he has become, while still alive, as if dead (like one of the fossils he collects), caught in a vicious circle of social conventions. Charles understands Sarah's aim during his vision in a church, when he sees that one can be free but 'crucified' and then sees Sarah as the one who can 'uncrucify' him. But he is still does not understand he has to respect her freedom – and for this reason they part (in the last and the most probable ending, which guarantees freedom to both Sarah and Charles, though it is painful freedom)

Sarah Woodruff is important not only because she is a literary portrait of a Victorian woman who manages to be free and realise herself. She is important, because she embodies the main theme of the novel, existential freedom, on the level of characters (on the level of narration Sarah's counterpart is the narrator, who abandons all conventions and sets a narratee free).

Existential philosophy (in its main assumptions) views man as totally free, limited only by his own previous choices – as man must be responsible for his life, must shape it himself (as Marx' epigraph for the whole novel says 'Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relations to man himself'<sup>25</sup>), and his duty is to achieve authenticity and not to accept a false public image of himself. That is what Sarah does, although to do it she must become an outcast (Fowles agrees with Sartre that 'existential truth is always in inverse proportion to social integration'<sup>26</sup>) and it's the only way she can achieve independence in the Victorian society (Fowles writes in 'The Aristos': 'Existentialism is the revolt of the individual against all those systems of thought (...), and social and political pressures that attempt to rob him of his

individuality<sup>27</sup> – and the Victorian society certainly was a one that exerted such pressure). Sarah, if she had been a real person, could have been a paragon for 19<sup>th</sup> century women (though existential philosophy was almost unknown then, there appeared ideas close to it; both quotations from the last chapter of 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' – Marx and Matthew Arnold's – come from 19<sup>th</sup> century). But Sarah is a 20<sup>th</sup> century literary heroine and that's why she is rather to be an example for us. The narrator, just like Sarah to Charles, tries to give to us a lesson of existential freedom – or rather show us an example of such kind of freedom, as we have to learn it ourselves.

Feminist critics interpret 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' in a different way, claiming that Sarah is not an individual heroine, but a projection of the narrator's psyche, as she embodies the stereotypical ways in which men perceive women (an angel versus a whore). But it cannot be forgotten that Victorian society was male-dominated, and to enable Sarah to become an outcast and to become free in this society, the narrator had to make her adopt a clearly negative stereotype.

## Conclusion

Victorian women that George Eliot and John Fowles portray in their fiction have similar personalities and share a similar position in society, but either of the authors shows us the protagonists from a different perspective. They shape the lives of their heroines differently, because they represent different ideologies and different narrative strategies. But by presenting women opposed to the Victorian society (and interestingly Sarah's and Maggie's attitude to the social convention is somehow parallel to the narrators' attitudes to the literary convention) both Fowles and Eliot convey a moral message. By comparing the literary heroines we compare the ideas that they embody. So on the example of the 19<sup>th</sup> century literary heroines we can perceive the differences in the real women's situation, the literary convention, and the views and the attitudes of us, the 20<sup>th</sup> century readers, and the Victorians.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, p.1606

<sup>2</sup> Eliot, p.16

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p.119

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- <sup>4</sup> Fowles 1996, p.259  
<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p.259  
<sup>6</sup> Fowles 1980, p.157  
<sup>7</sup> Fowles 1996, p.26  
<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p.26  
<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p.94  
<sup>10</sup> Eliot, p.339  
<sup>11</sup> Conradi, p.63  
<sup>12</sup> Fowles 1996, p.31  
<sup>13</sup> Eliot, p.339  
<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.379  
<sup>15</sup> Showalter, p.126  
<sup>16</sup> Eliot, p.280  
<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.528  
<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.487  
<sup>19</sup> Fowles 1996, p.58  
<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p.59  
<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.171  
<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p.171  
<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.430  
<sup>24</sup> Conradi, p.60  
<sup>25</sup> Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The epigraph has been removed from the Vintage edition, but can be found in other editions of the book  
<sup>26</sup> Conradi, p.66  
<sup>27</sup> Fowles 1980, p.115

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Joanna Moczyńska

## Deciding on a Narrating Voice as the Key to the Development of a Novel.

An Analysis of the Strengths and Limitations  
of the Narrating Voices in Anthony Burgess's  
*A Clockwork Orange* and Angela Carter's  
*Nights at the Circus*\*

Anthony Burgess's "A Clockwork Orange" and Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus" seem to have a lot in common. Both are, to a certain extent, psychological novels in their preoccupation with 'the mental lives of the characters'<sup>1</sup> through which, basically, the action is shown; both contain some elements of Bildungsroman in their narrators' formulation of plausible theories on achieving maturity or 'completion'; and both are related by the narrators (most of them unreliable) that are conscious of their task, addressing the readers by 'you' or 'we' and structuring their discourse in a conspicuous manner. However, in respect of narrators, both authors have chosen two opposite solutions: Burgess opted for univocalism, while Carter adopted a multivocalist scheme. It is interesting to see how these two techniques, one fairly traditional and the other experimental, are a potential trap for the books to come short of 'the appearance of being true or real even when fantastic'<sup>2</sup>, and how their inherent possibilities may be used to make up for such a loss. In other words,

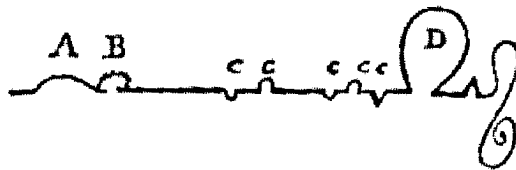
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\* The paper has been submitted for the course 2013: *Narrative Strategies in 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Fiction* run by Ms Dominika Materska, PhD.

verisimilitude in Burgess's and Carter's works is achieved differently, the contrasting representations being to a great extent determined by the bad and the good sides of the narrating voices chosen to lead the discourse. The result of trying to retain the balance between such strong and weak points is most evident in the narration, time rendering and the 'message' – the meaning beyond the apparent situation, evoked in the reader's minds.

I would like to support this analysis with certain excerpts from Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy", one of the most revealing works on narrative concerns. Their function is to trace the authors' basic premises underlying the narrating voices employed by Burgess and Carter respectively.

These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes. – In the fifth volume I have been very good, – the precise line I have described in it being this:



In this last volume I have done better still – for from the end of *Le Fever's* episode, to the beginning of my uncle *Toby's* campaigns, – I have scarce stepped a yard out of my way.

If I mend it at this rate, it is not impossible – by the good leave of his grace of *Benevento's* devils – but I may arrive hereafter at the excellency of going on even thus:

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which is a line drawn as straight as I could draw it, by a writing-master's ruler (borrowed for that purpose), turning neither to the right hand or to the left.<sup>3</sup>

Anthony Burgess adopted a straight line as the framework of "A Clockwork Orange". Aware of the danger of oversimplification, however, he tried to incorporate into it some of the complications of the crooked one. First of all, Burgess's Alex is a homodiegetic narrator and a persona focalizing everything internally. This narrowing of the perceptual and psychological facets, a substantial limitation to the diversity of action, is manifest throughout the book: because of Alex's sensitivity to music and vision, what the readers mostly get are descriptions and onomatopoeia, appealing to the selected senses. However, this restriction is partly remedied, and the plot intensified, by means of the full use made of the ideological facet possibilities, which give more meaning to his monotonous interests. Alex, as the narrator, produces constant

proof of his fanaticism, exceedingly admiring smartness and style ('the latest fashion' concentration, weakness for 'shining white zobbies'<sup>4</sup> or 'gentleman's goloss', the discrimination of the 'starry' and the 'vonny') and delighting in violence, even if directed against himself ('[Dim] chained me gentle and artistic like on the glazlids'<sup>5</sup>). Moreover, the narrating voice's distinction between Bog and God is revealing in the emphasis it puts on 'my choice' and 'their choice'. Bog is the 'God' of Alex and his droogs, whom they can contact at the Korova Milkbar or call in 'Bog bust and bleed you, you grahzny bastards'<sup>6</sup>, while God is the value of the ordinary 'harmless' people, and Alex states: 'You were not put on this earth just to get in touch with *God*'<sup>7</sup>. In fact, it is the only point by which Alex, a totally 'internal' character, given no surname and no age till the end of Part One, refers to the outside world with any sort of understanding.

The problem of external reality, not taken into consideration by Alex the brute, but certainly something that the readers should be awoken to, is overcome, rather artificially, by incorporating into the narrative whole passages both in perfect English and in nadsat, that present points of view that are not paid attention to by Alex, either because they come from his inferiors and are 'cal', or because they are beyond his grasp. But this rather strained narrative device (too coherent to be the inconsiderate Alex's invention) seems necessary regarding the process of reception of the narrative. At first, the outside reality of Alex appears to be the readers' reality: evening 'sessions' of watching television, danger of being attacked by young thugs, police and prison as protection. The background being commonplace, the narrating voice is what the readers focus on and try to see through. Just as Alex, in all his limitations of perception and outlook upon life, is analysed and 'reader-internalised' as the narrator, the reality around him changes in a way that the readers' probably would not. The only element that remains familiar and predictable to us is Alex. In this way, this rather narrow, oversimplified character and narrating voice can be seen as genuine and, in a certain sense, even reliable. We know what to expect of him and how to interpret his words.

Other interpretations continue to arrive from Alex's surroundings, like his being the youngest of the former band, forever 'little Alex', and the scientific exposition on his psychology together with the meaning ascribed to his person by different political groupings, while the hero is concentrated only on recreating his old self. Thus the limitation inherent in the author's premises is turned into the strong point of the book, joining the two worlds of Alex and Government in the readers' minds, without joining them in the actual plot. One of the most significant examples of this can be seen in the fact that when Alex protests against the use of Ludwig van Beethoven's music as the background for

the images of savagery, he totally fails to acknowledge the fact that he used it for the same purpose. As the staff do not know about this 'internal' Alex, they also cannot provide the clue. It takes the readers to see through the double screen of Alex's ideas and his reporting the words of the 'unenlightened' world.

Moving on to the problem of time, in the narrative of one relatively uncomplicated and straightforward persona the order and chronology seem to be a basic factor. Alex tries to account for the chronicled time in its continuity, explaining all the 'blanks' by means of summary (for example, even his sleep is 'filled' with a prophetic dream) and presenting the action with descriptions or scenes. All the time he recalls the events of 'those days', which, by the fact of being the central memories, spell essentials of his story, and thus guarantee it to be meaningful. The narrating voice tries at the end to fight the clear arbitrariness of the feeling of decisive selection in the very text, by speaking to the readers: 'You have been *everywhere* with your little droog Alex'<sup>8</sup>, and by suggesting to them an image of his youth walking in a straight line and thoughtlessly bumping into things. But even before, there are attempts to exorcise this necessity of giving order to something that has no general order, the 'traditional book' feature that would seem at first glance too simple and conventional in the already restricted narrative, in view of the fact that 'Delimitation is always difficult. The world is one, life is one'<sup>9</sup>. These attempts consist of the cause-and-effect indications, such as Alex's idea, even before the Ludovico treatment, that 'one thing always leads to another'<sup>10</sup>, and the constant reminders from the outside world on the importance of the therapy being the result of his original choice. The strength of such a statement on the discourse level proves right when the leitmotifs are added, including 'objects' such as moloko as well as associations, such as window-death (the Manse and the flatblock), all changing their meaning slightly in a way that seems a natural course of affairs. The sentiment of everything seeming pre-determined is strengthened by Alex's belief, voiced twice, that probably Fate does operate in his and his droogs' lives.

In this way, the double unreality – exclusively the cause-and-effect operation, the leitmotifs - adds up to something like verisimilitude of the work, the idea that it should be completed within itself. Here, the narrating voice's successful efforts to 'close' the form are the great strong point of his possibilities. Structuring his story like a sermon, in his past narration, he directly ties the question asked in four major points of the action with one 'That's what it's going to be then, brothers, as I come to the like end of this tale'<sup>11</sup>. Thus the limitations lead to a firm unification of the inner workings of the book.



One more strong point of the narrating voice is its use of Russian words, although the protagonist is perfectly able to use sophisticated English. In addition, there are numerous allusions to the conceptions the readers may have of Russian culture. Those with bad connotations are gratified with 'millicents' and 'Id Molotov'<sup>12</sup> indicated in the text. Other examples are the indirect suggestions of the 'all being equal, but some more equal than others' (reminding one of Orwell's "Animal Farm") as revealed in Alex's narration of the group's behaviour-pattern quarrel in which, while retaining their perfectly reasonable arguments, he is intent on leadership; and the English 'knife' used in reference to stars and drugs and 'nozh' or 'britva' to blood and fight. For the readers with good connotations, especially literary ones, the narrative voice displays a contrast. Alex certainly is a poetical soul, but only in the descriptions of mayhem and gore, and defamiliarizing to an excessive degree. He circles around Christ as 'the holy bearded veck all nagoy hanging on a cross'<sup>13</sup>, and around the swastika, 'that like crooked cross all malchicks at school love to draw'<sup>14</sup>, while he is familiar both with the legend of Christ, distinctly stylizing himself as 'turning the other cheek', and with the German eagles, the Nazi flags and the dates of WW2. All the above-mentioned Russian associations, either negative or positive, do not seem to subtract from the narrative, but rather they build around it one more level of individual interpretation. For the readers that do not know Russian, constant repetitions and occasional translations are provided. Their imagination may be stirred by unfamiliar words into many other images, and steered by the English sentences recounted by the narrating voice without losing any of their syntactic or semantic integrity.

All these devices show how Burgess, choosing the linear form confined into one persona's perspective – the 'line drawn as straight as [he] could draw it'<sup>15</sup> – strives to force into it as much internal complexity as possible. The narrative gives a sort of united background, in which neither F. Alexander and prison charlie's philosophical teachings nor Alex's impressions are multi-layered and decisive within themselves, but operate side by side. The former's views are the backcloth for the latter's last image of a toy man as an orange turned in the hands of Bog, who, in the reader's associative memory, murmurs to Himself, 'What's it going to be then, eh?'<sup>16</sup>. The spirit of the possible reception is above literalness (the plot explores the danger of literal solutions), and the readers are to keep above the two radical opinions. The book itself is put above its literal context by its title and suggests the Chinese-box structure, with its seemingly separate stages consistent within themselves to be joined by the person of the reader, who, through the action of internalizing the narrative, himself reinforces the straight line. 'This right line' for a traditionally constructed novel, one playing a role in the relevance of Alex's final change, too.

This *right line*, – the path-way for Christians to walk in! say divines –  
 – The emblem of moral rectitude! says Cicero –  
 – The *best line!* say cabbage planters – is the shortest line, says *Archimedes*,  
 which can be drawn from one given point to another – 17

– I care not which way he enter'd, quoth I, provided he be not in such a hurry  
 to take me out with him – for I have forty volumes to write, and forty thousand  
 things to say and do which no body in the world will say and do for me<sup>18</sup>

– But your worships chuse rather that I give you the length, breadth, and  
 perpendicular height of the great parish-church, or drawing of the facade of the  
 abbey of Saint *Austerberie*  
 [...] your worships and reverences may all measure them at your leisures – but  
 he who measures thee, *Janatone*, must do it now – thou carriest the principles of  
 change within thy frame<sup>19</sup>

In Angela Carter's "Nights at the Circus", there appears a definitely omniscient narrator, whose interpretation of the writer's mission is similar to Tristram's. This particular narrator belongs to the twentieth century, and looks back to the end of the previous one: 'For we are at the fag-end, the smouldering cigar-butt, of a nineteenth century which is just about to be ground out in the ashtray of history'<sup>20</sup>. The narrator is aware of the changes that happened later, which he/she indicates in speaking about Petersburg and indirectly mentioning the communist revolution. However, assuming the superior position in the narrative with historical perspective, the intrusive narrator cannot him/herself discuss the ideology behind the mechanisms of the world. That is why the creeds are confined solely to the protagonists' own speeches. Lizzie, the most ideologically conscious of the characters, expresses herself separately, not even being given the position of a narrating voice. Thus limited in respect of ideological facet, the narrator counterbalances this loss with the unusually broadened range of perceptual and psychological facets.

One of the strengths of the omniscient narrator lies in his/her power of external focalization, recounting the stories of characters, also those that could not speak for themselves. The embedded stories, together with their subjects' feelings and even memories they no longer possess (Mignon is said to have an exceedingly poor memory), are meant to make them real, even though externally they must have seemed mere dummies to their contemporaries. Moreover, the fellow-characters can be made by the omniscient narrator to experience the burden of such figures' lives, without any actual knowledge of their stories. It is enough for a reader to be informed, for example Walser and Fevvers are crying at Mignon's song right after her history has been told by the

narrating voice only for the readers' ears, and her smile for Walser 'contained her entire story and was scarcely to be borne'<sup>21</sup>. In this way, Mignon is 'saved' by the narrator from oblivion, put in the context of Walser and Fevvers's relationship, and then hers with the Princess of Abyssinia, similarly accounted for. It is also significant that Madame Schreck, featuring but not really existing even in Fevvers's narrative, decomposes like an insect, not credited with being seen as a human being.

Furthermore, the omniscient narrator in Carter's book is awarded the privilege of choosing his two potential fellow-narrators from among his heroes. They are Fevvers and Walser, but described at first critically by the leading voice and shown deeply rooted in their contexts by the initial presentation, they seem highly unreliable. Too unreliable, in fact, to be trusted with first person narration, Fevvers with her affected and Cockney manner of speech, Walser directly dismissed as 'a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness'<sup>22</sup>. This mode of introductory narration proves a limitation in the author's intentions, so the omniscient narrator has to solve it by means of a far-fetched remark: 'Let me tell you something about Fevvers, if you haven't noticed it for yourself already; she is a girl of philosophical bent'<sup>23</sup>. From then on, Fevvers will be given the occasional right to narrate in the first person, parallel to the omniscient narrator, even to the point of her 'paragraphs' mingling with those of the latter. Walser, on the other hand, is rehabilitated by being given within the narrative the same rank as that of the chief narrating voice. He is the keeper of stories that are evidence determining the reality of, for example, Fevvers or the Siberian mother<sup>24</sup>. He is the one to give form to his own life tale, and will probably precise Fevvers's as well<sup>25</sup>. This, in addition, authenticates the omniscient narrator's status.

Another strength of the pattern of the narrating voices is the richness of time construction. All three types of tenses: past, present and future are used, sometimes switching even from paragraph to paragraph. Future stresses the omniscience of the chief narrator, present the immediacy of Fevvers's account and picture-like scenes such as the circus at Petersburg, and past the handling of Fevvers and Walser (in third person narratives), as well as minor characters (in the embedded stories) by the omniscient narrator. However, the closer the turn of the nineteenth century, the more the narrating voices textually blur the time parameters. From the past of Fevvers and Lizzie's memory comes the Sleeping Beauty – the girl with no present, dreaming the coming era, fading and weeping. Lizzie, with her limited powers over the time flow, but always within the confines of logic, loses the grasp of them 'somewhere in the middle of nowhere', with the lost clock's hands set either on noon or midnight. In the case of the former it would mean Fevvers, 'Year One'<sup>26</sup>, cannot really exist, because

the new Millennium would never come. The reiterated image of a spiral, spinning around the centre, necessitates two possible answers: either there is a centre, or there is no such thing, and consequently there is nothing.

This idea, vital in the question about fact and fiction, but bringing too much instability into the story, is overcome by the introduction of Siberian specificity (no history, only geography) by the omniscient narrator, the only narrating voice with an insight into it. In fact, this place of 'magic realism', and the meaningful journey through particular locations, seems to replace the need for time continuity. The right time can be found in the right place, as it is found here by Lizzie just before the final resolution in a Siberian settlement. Even at 'point zero' the chaos is invoked not with its being a precise moment on the time scale, but with the laugh turning into some sort of Ludic Game, everyone surrendering to the effects of Fevvers's successful deception. Also the richness of the narrative's internal links, the recurrent cultural snippets belonging to a Western man's general knowledge are used so that there appears an idea that they are stable and fixed neither in form nor in time as, for example, the prose recounting of 'Mignon's song', featuring earlier in the poetry of the German Romantics, seems to suggest.

In this way, the form and the ideas given by the narrating voices, as well as their inherent strong and weak points revealed in the course of the narrative, contribute to a peculiar play with the reader. He/she is shown that neither unshakeable fact nor a fixed time are vital in the rendering of a consistent reality of any kind. On the textual level, they are told that they want to believe in fiction, not in truth, however appealingly strange the latter may be, and that the majority of humankind would prefer time to stop altogether<sup>27</sup>. Shaman-like, they knock on the narrating voice's door, and it answers, 'I fooled you!'<sup>28</sup>. Because the way to a recognition of the verisimilitude of a work of art leads through a basic principle that 'there's nothing like confidence'<sup>29</sup>, and the reader has to adjust to the various changes of perspective throughout the discourse.

The above discussion's aim was to show how two different narrating voice modes specify the authors' further decisions by presenting them with their choices' strong and weak points. These influence the narrative techniques, time representation and readers' involvement. Also, often the clues to the overall structure are comprised within the texts of the books. The objectives of both Burgess's and Carter's works have clearly been not only the presentation of the story, but also some coherent representation of the reality that underlies it, either by forcing it into a line or rendering it through details that are momentary but important. The use of suitable methods of solving the tensions and exploiting the possibilities connected with those designs can transpose a novel into its own, genuine narrative world.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Cudder, p. 756
- <sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 1022
- <sup>3</sup> Sterne, pp. 347-8
- <sup>4</sup> Burgess, p. 77
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p.53
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.53
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.7
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p.148
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.91 [dr Brodsky's words]
- <sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p.40
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.* p.148
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.36
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p.50
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.89
- <sup>15</sup> Sterne, p. 348
- <sup>16</sup> Burgess, p. 5
- <sup>17</sup> Sterne, p. 348
- <sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.350
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.* pp.357-8
- <sup>20</sup> Carter, p. 11
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.144
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p.10
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p.185
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.285
- <sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.293-4
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.198
- <sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p.265
- <sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.257
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.295

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Aleksandra Nawrot

## Humbert's Horror or Losing Identity\*

### Prologue: Setting the Scene for Murder

...there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a principedom by the sea.<sup>1</sup>

Lo the nymphet, Hum the depraved. Bonnie and Clyde, lovers from a story told by a criminal. A girl-child and an old pervert, they received the whole three hundred pages of a book just for themselves, enough to tempt filmmakers to give them even more. And so they also got 152 minutes of moving portrait, and then again 137 minutes. Three hundred pages of teasing the reader's imagination and four hours fifty four minutes of confronting their vision.

The book has two central figures, the object – Lolita – and the subject, Humbert Humbert. Dolores is a person, an actual child he meets and falls in love with. But Lolita – the nymphette – is Humbert's construct, produced by his unfulfilled desires. That is, in short, how Humbert explains it. Neither he, nor Nabokov had to believe Freud and psychoanalysis to convince the reader; it is enough that the reader did. There might have been no Lola playing tennis on hotel courts. In fact, was there any? Or is Humbert just pulling our leg? Is Quilty the bad pervert following the good pervert, or is he just the "good" pervert's dark id personified? And Charlotte Haze, is she the toxic mother and nagging wife, or again an anecdote, provided by the skilful storyteller to add some more spice to the story?

This we cannot know, for the first person narrator – the teller – remains in total control of the story told. Humbert not at all the Humble chooses the

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\* The paper has been submitted for the course 1302: *A Study of an American Prose Writer* run by Ms Agnieszka Graff, PhD.

scenery, draws the characters and sets the order in which we are confronted with the facts. Waterproof. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the subject of the book is the spider and his web, and the prey, the fly, is Lolita, and also you and me. As Hum the Spider weaves his web, we are aware that it is he who sets the rules. And although he loses control over the course of events, he does not let the story out of his hands, and as Lolita escapes, the reader remains caught by Humbert the Hunter, watching helplessly at how the predator is playing with his prey's emotions, disgusting, enraging and making us sympathise with him. We have before us a great deceiver, a genius, who managed to remain alive for three hundred pages of the book, although perhaps he should have died. And just as we fell in love with him – we saw him die in spotlights, die for almost five long hours, walking, eating, sleeping, withering. No, he did not die a natural death. He was murdered. Look at this tangle of thorns.

I would like to present you

## Exhibit Number One

1962

**Defendants: Stanley Kubrick, Vladimir Nabokov, James Mason**

First, it would be only just to say that Nabokov is mentioned here for purely formal reasons. It is true that he wrote the screenplay and was even nominated for an Oscar, but it is also true that what Kubrick actually made of it was very distant from his idea of "Lolita". Dmitri Nabokov wrote: "Vladimir Nabokov generously praises the first film and its actors but says it has little to do with the book, making him feel like a supine patient in an ambulance, watching powerless as the landscape goes by."<sup>2</sup>

Leaving Nabokov aside, we have some facts to deal with. Fifteen-year old Sue Lyon, a young woman instead of a child; Quilty present from the very first dialogue, killing the suspense; but most of all, the mute Humbert, dead Humbert, Humbert the Zombie.

This may be the fault of James Mason, the way Humbert only shows the half-certain smile, the way he withdraws in confusion, tense and anxious. When the charming Shelley Winters invites him to dance, all he can do is clumsily give in. The ball shows him helplessly listening to Jean and John, plotting against him with Charlotte, planning his "relationship" with the Big Haze. It is surprising to see the man who, nine years earlier, stabbed Julius Caesar as Brutus in Shakespearean drama, so inert, allowing others to play with him as if he were a puppet. It is interesting to observe how Humbert is transformed from the almighty creator of his arbitrary world into a perfect background for other characters. All the others have their little moments of glory on the screen, when

they show off, exaggerate, shine like crazy diamonds before they vanish forever. A part in Kubrick's film is a demanding one; Shelley Winters as Charlotte is perfectly aware of this and sings not speaks, dances not walks, makes her character a caricature, but a caricature to remember. Whenever Mrs Haze appears, Humbert humbly falls into confused silence, attempting to create an air of ironic distance, but in fact looking as if he was trying to escape from the too loud place. In their first conversation, she is ridiculous, but he is boring.

This becomes painfully blown to extreme whenever Quilty enters the screen. Peter Sellers is indeed Humbert's dark side – he has everything our lost hero is lacking. Wit, irony and distance, imagination and chameleon's nature. But wait a minute – was not Humbert the chief deceiver in this game? Kubrick's film shows clearly why Humbert could not keep Lolita. In Kubrick's film Humbert Humbert is a loser, the only character that has nothing to say. His "nymphette theory" becomes a spur-of-the-moment thing, the idea invented only to justify his feelings towards a child – pardon, a young woman. He disappears every time another character appears on the screen. He bores us to tears, his face shows no emotion (except perhaps for the rather hysterical laughter at Charlotte's letter), his commentary as narrator is not convincing and bears little trace of deep thought and emotion. What the audience is left with is a witty comedy with a couple of well-drawn characters, lively and gripping, but lacking the main character. For God's sake, he is even deprived of the right to give the name to his beloved – Dolores is not Lolita in Humbert's dreams, there is no Dolores at all! Lolita is the name mother calls the girl, the common name devoid of the special charm of intimacy that made parents stop naming their daughters so. Humbert – oh dear Humbert is dead.

## Exhibit Number Two

1997

**Defendants: Adrian Lyne, Stephen Schiff, Jeremy Irons**

Lyne and Schiff apparently tried to avoid Kubrick's greatest sin, the one Nabokov mourned – namely, complete detachment from the literary original. They decided to return to the path already set, following the pattern of gradually revealing the truth of Humbert's deception. Jeremy Irons drives his car with a gun on the seat next to him, with bloody stains on his face, and we know, just as in the book, what the end will be. Or we think we know. He speaks – and his first words are those of his literary soul, words of love, passion and sorrow; Lolle-ta. We get glimpses of the "initial girl-child", Annabel, for the director is anxious to recreate the psychological truth underlying the story of perversion. Lyne tries to make a step towards humanity in creating his Humbert Humbert.



Jeremy Irons said of this character: "it's about a man who fell in love with a dream he lost, and who remained in love with it"<sup>3</sup>. Irons as Humbert is trying to save the romanticism, giving up perversion. Here there is fidelity we were vainly looking for in Kubrick's work. There is the attempt to save references, to recreate the settings, a drive towards both the naturalistic presentation of reality (the Haze house) and Lolita's vulgar charm (Dominique Swan has done her homework) and towards recreating the poetry of language. Here, it was translated into the visual language, the signs, the images. Irons as Humbert is at least alive; he quietly observes, but ceases to be that apathetic puppet we saw pushed and pulled from one side to another in the 1962 version. He does think, he does feel, he is guilty and he is obsessed. He loses control a little in becoming perhaps too sentimental, as Lyne wanted a romantic rather than a pervert; nevertheless, although the focus is on Lolita, Humbert manages to remain the focalizer.

The problem with Lyne's film is that it does not reveal anything, does not interpret, does not bring in anything new to the subject. It recreates the book, scene by scene, cutting some longer parts, showing the images in colour, adding details, painting a realistic, psychologically motivated picture. Only the picture is lifeless. The story begins, unfolds and ends, and all it leaves in our minds is the image, beautiful but motionless, lacking the reading-between-the-lines phenomenon behind the pretty picture.

## **Epilogue: The Verdict**

Is it the fault of the translator into the visual medium, the director? Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, Humbert Humbert has been murdered twice. In Kubrick's film he is a zombie, in Lyne's – a painted figure. The five hours we get of the Creator is the five hours of actors struggling through the uncertainty who it actually is they are playing (Mason) and the destructive urge to save the romanticism of the character played at all costs (Irons). Perhaps they feared scandal; perhaps they were afraid of public opinion. Perhaps, having admired Peter Sellers, we no longer care for Humbert in the second version and this is what removes Jeremy Irons into the background. Perhaps it is just impossible to translate the work of art into another language without losing its soul, as the weak flesh eventually defeats the willing spirit? Or perhaps we need a true creator to recreate the act of creation? Until the answer is found, Humbert the Haunting will keep turning in his grave.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Nabokov, p.9

<sup>2</sup> quoted at the web page devoted to Lync's *Lolita* at <http://www.pathe-lolita.com>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

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Magda Szwedowska

## Man in the Modern Metropolis or a 'Dissociated Mind in a Disintegrated City' in Selected Poems of Charles Baudelaire and T.S. Eliot\*

Hell is a city much like London  
There are all sorts of people undone  
And there is little or no fun done

PB. Shelley

The 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about, among other great inventions, the industrial revolution whose most prominent consequence was urbanisation, resulting in a massive migration of people from rural areas to cities. On the verge of the industrial era, the city went through a spectacular transformation, as it had to accommodate thousands of workers, who were to live beside the nobility and aristocracy which had populated urban areas before. Not only did new homes have to be provided for them, but also workplaces had to be created, which transformed cities into gigantic anthills. The industrial city, as it was a new invention, attracted the attention of artists, as it allowed for anonymity and solitude, so dearly longed for by them in particular, and yet it was the place where they could mingle with the aristocracy and fellow writers.

The city, with its extremes, being on one hand fascinating in its novelty and on the other ugly and dangerous, became a major source of inspiration for

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\* The paper has been submitted for the course 1002: *English Satire* run by Ms Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, PhD.

some writers and poets world-wide. In this essay I have chosen to examine the ways of perceiving the modern city, namely Paris and London, by two poets, the former of whom had an impact on the latter's work: Charles Baudelaire and Thomas Stearns Eliot.

T. S. Eliot, in his early poetry in particular, seems to be fascinated by the city he is surrounded by and makes it the setting of some of his poems. Not only is the city itself presented and personified under various forms, but Eliot also examines the extent to which the environment determines the minds of its inhabitants. The aspects of the development of the modern man are a recurring subject of Eliot's poetry. 'The giant city, nature (the physical, non-human world), the community, the church [...] are the main units of the environment of modern man. And the adaptability of man to these forms of life, or the lack of adaptability, shows his response to environment.'<sup>1</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the city became the primary setting of man forcing him to establish his attitude toward it, at first welcoming him then gradually turning against him.

I would like to discuss the image of the modern city presented in the poems of Baudelaire and Eliot according to the classification of the stages of development of cities first drafted by Patrick Geddes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, differentiating five such stages from polis to nekropolis, later modified and expanded by Lewis Mumford in his book *The Culture of Cities*. Mumford divides the life cycle of a modern city into six stages, namely copolis, polis, metropolis, megalopolis, tyrannopolis and finally nekropolis. Although the cities described by Baudelaire and Eliot, are observed in different times, they seem to be at the same phase of development - they are on the verge of two stages - the metropolis and megalopolis.

The megalopolis, according to Mumford, is a city in full development at the beginning of the decline. "It concentrates on bigness and power."<sup>2</sup> What triumphs in this environment is mechanisation, bureaucracy and wealth. It is also called the paper city, as direct contact among people is replaced by newspapers and books. "What is visible and real in this world is only what has been transferred to paper. The essential gossip of the metropolis is no longer that of people meeting face to face on the crossroads, at the dinner table, in the market-place: a few dozen people writing in the newspapers, a dozen more broadcasting over the radio, provide the daily interpretation of movements and happenings."<sup>3</sup> People believe in the ethos of labour and production for the sake of the city. Everything must be the biggest and best. As the city expands spatially, it incorporates smaller villages around it, making it a huge jungle of concrete with countless narrow streets, tall buildings and a growing amount of waste produced by millions of its inhabitants. On one hand, the city provides man with

anonymity, one can easily escape the busy main street by turning into a deserted pathway, but on the other, one is deprived of intimacy. The personal space of an individual is dangerously shrunk to several square meters of a flat or house and garden. There is no space for the sacrum, therefore everything becomes the profane. Religious rites are replaced by the developing entertainment industry. The anonymity of the city, its impersonality is a positive encouragement to a-social or anti-social actions.<sup>4</sup> All this results in frustration and conflicts between the citizens belonging to different social classes, confined to their own districts. Despite the increasing volume, the downward movement in the cycle is inevitable.<sup>5</sup>

Other distinctive features of the modern city are its love for parades and crowds and places such as restaurants and cafes which serve as surrogate homes offering company, food and drink. "[...] stimulation through food and drink has a place in metropolitan routine that was once reserved for special feasts and celebrations. The restaurants, cafes, the saloons and pubs, are necessarily ubiquitous: and their trade is intensified by the fact that the home itself plays a smaller part in furnishing such stimuli."<sup>6</sup>

The masses are the driving force of the industrial city and they are catered for as well. The many cabarets and restaurants are available only to the rich, the bourgeoisie. The masses cannot afford them, but it is the neon, twinkling lights on the avenues nearby that are created especially for them to tempt and deepen class differences. Moreover, the metropolis opens new possibilities for man - it is a perfect hiding place, a novelty for people previously living in confined village space. "The city with its endless streets provides shelter from prying eyes: here the liason that might disrupt a provincial family can be consummated with a minimum of exposure. A man and a woman incur less danger from gossip by going to bed together in a metropolitan hotel than they would if they merely dined together in the restaurant of a provincial town."<sup>7</sup> It all creates a sort of negative vitality, as human nature is violated in this new environment. The frustration comes back in destructive forms: "drugs, anodynes, aphrodisiacs, hypnotics, sedatives which are a necessary accompaniment of this exacerbated state, strenuous efforts to recover the normal equilibrium of the healthy body and the healthy mind [...]"<sup>8</sup> The state of man in the modern city seems to be, according to Mumford "a dissociated mind in a disintegrated city: perhaps the normal mind of the world metropolis."<sup>9</sup>

Both Baudelaire and Eliot talk about some of the above elements in their poems. Crowds, estrangement of the individual from the city, labyrinth of streets, the red-light district, lights and cafes are recurring images in their poetry, presented by the means of metaphors, similes and personification.

Baudelaire's Paris and Eliot's London, although distant in time and space, are in fact one modern city in the course of development. The paradox of the metropolis, is that it was created to provide a safe environment for man but it turned out to be a perilous, war-oriented, barbarous place, that was hostile towards people. The city today seems nothing more than what Hawthorne called it 'a paved solitude'.<sup>10</sup> The constant changes of the city resulted in "a growing despair over the increasing difficulty of achieving a balanced relationship between the individual person and his social environment."<sup>11</sup>

The "City" is by any definition a social image. Throughout history it always represented an image of a community. Both Baudelaire and Eliot discussed the issue of the individual against a community and the opposition of the terms of "multitude" and "solitude".<sup>12</sup> In a part of *The Spleen of Paris* entitled "Les foules" [Crowds] Baudelaire focuses on the position of an individual - an artist in the Parisian crowd.

Multitude, solitude: equal and convertible terms for the active and fecund poet.  
 He who does not know how to people his solitude will not know either how  
 to be alone in a bustling crowd  
 [...] The solitary and pensive walker draws from this universal communion a  
 singular sense of intoxication.<sup>13</sup>

The artist in a city must adapt to the new environment he encounters. Not only does he have to know how to move about in the concrete jungle but also how to deal with the multitude of people overflowing in the streets, who can be both an inspiration and obstacle. The poet can be part of the crowd, representing the thoughts of the community or be the only one, "solitary and pensive" able to join the crowd and communicate with it through his poetry. Contrary to the members of the crowds who are bound together, he is free to choose his standing, whether to integrate with the community or disintegrate it.

In nineteenth and twentieth century literature two types of characters show up with increasing frequency. That of the solitary alienated figure, usually an artist and a crowd of people as an undifferentiated mass, forming almost an anti-community which has power but no instinct. In Eliot's poetry both of them are present, though his main focus is on the troubled individual of the 'Prufrock type', and he makes an attempt at examining the London crowd.

Unreal city,  
 Under the brown fog of winter dawn,  
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
 I had not thought death had undone so many.  
 [...]  
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.<sup>14</sup>

Then the narrator sees someone he had known before - Steston, drawing the attention from the mechanical, monotony of the moving crowd and focusing on the person. However, it is the lost individual who is of primary importance to Eliot. He is either a man with a name such as J.Alfred Prufrock or simply a nameless character as in "The Waste Land", wandering about in the dreary streets or describing disembodied images of different parts of London. Burton Pike in his book *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* calls "The Waste Land", "the epic of dissociated urban life in the earlier part of the twentieth century" with the central metaphor being that of the 'unreal city' which in turn was taken from Baudelaire where in the poem "Le sept vieillards" [Seven Old Men] he calls the city 'la fourmillante cite' translated by Roy Campbell into 'ant-seething city'.

Ant-seething city, city full of dreams  
Where ghosts by daylight tug the passer's sleeve  
Mystery, like sap, through all its conduit-streams,  
Quickens the dread Colossus that they weave.<sup>15</sup>

In "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock", the main character is alone in the city. Not only is he alienated from the community, but also he sees that the community has disintegrated. It is no longer homogenous and united. It is a crowd of defeated individuals. "He sees the isolated lives of others in the city as a projection of his defeated life"<sup>16</sup>

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning  
out of windows?...<sup>17</sup>

Prufrock is no different from the masses, he is one of them. "There is no external sign which would indicate the uniqueness of his [Prufrock] psychical complexity" claims Marta Sienicka in her dissertation *Dimension of Man as Seen by T.S. Eliot* <sup>18</sup>, and follows to point out that "Modern society has lost its role in the forming of an individual. It creates masses and not separate people."<sup>19</sup> Despite his links with the community, man has also lost the ability to communicate. He is detached and alienated and is incapable of establishing any intimate relationship with the world around him. He is full of anxiety, doubt and uncertainty and sceptical if not cynical. He is lost in the new environment he must live in, he does not know yet how to take advantage of it. Therefore, the solitary, alienated man and the crowd are in fact one entity to be observed from two points of focus.

In Romantic poetry nature and art were presented from an individual point of view, that of the artist, who was gifted enough to see things that others

failed to notice. The late 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries brought about several changes. One was the thematic shift from nature to civilisation and another the broadening of the point of view. In Eliot's early poems phenomena such as sunrise, sunset or stars are seen by all, they are no longer 'available' solely to the sensitive poet. This, in turn, takes away the uniqueness and exceptionality of these things, they become common and banal. Even though both Eliot and Baudelaire in their poetry frequently employ the individual as the lyrical I, who is an observer and commentator, he is not the chosen one anymore, he is one of the crowd, one of us.

Let us see how the two poets deal with natural phenomena such as seasons, sun, darkness, twilight or mist and whether their analysis follows romantic patterns. Both Eliot and Baudelaire frequently employ weather imagery. Darkness, smoke, mist and fog, twilight, autumn, winter, spring and wind accompany almost every description of the city. They seem to be used to intensify the effect of grimness and hostility of the urban environment. Hardly ever do we read about sunny, gay yet peaceful days. Even the mornings are deprived of the freshness that is commonly associated with them. When modern man wakes up he does not see the sun nor does he hear birds singing. From the very first minute he is reminded that he lives in the city and he is not alone.

The morning comes to consciousness  
Of faint stale smells of beer  
From the saw-dust-trampled street  
With all its muddy feet that press  
To early coffee-stands.<sup>20</sup>

He realises that he is not permitted to savour and cherish the few moments in his life that he finds beautiful. There is no more intimacy, everything is public and common. This might generate feelings of disappointment, as everyone at one time or another would like to think that something is uniquely for him to know and if someone else notices it as well, the beauty is lost. People do not like to share, but in the city they must. So, in the morning, with all the noise coming from the street,

One thinks of all the hands  
That are rising from the dingy shades  
In a thousand furnished rooms.<sup>21</sup>

Man is never alone in the city - the city never sleeps. Not even at night. On one hand the afternoons and evenings are 'soft', 'coming and settling down' calmly, but on the other they are 'restless', 'revealing in a thousand sordid



images', 'smoky and grey'. The lonely man walking the streets at night encounters different peculiarities and people that come out only at night. The evenings or 'the burnt out ends of smoky days'<sup>22</sup> is very often introduced by the means of fog and smoke entering the image. Eliot treats fog as a kind of transition period between night and day. It covers the ugliness and poverty and allows to forget about the pointlessness of one's life 'like a patient etherised upon a table'<sup>23</sup>. The misty sunset (in Eliot's poems) and foggy sunrise (Baudelaire) seem to be the only time of day when the streets are empty or 'half deserted'. It is a time for the two worlds - of light and darkness - to hide and come out. In "The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock" it is personified fog that brings the evening about.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes  
 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening  
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
 And seeing that it was a soft October night,  
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.<sup>24</sup>

Baudelaire on the other hand, associates mist and fog with the morning, not as the end of the day but as the beginning, revealing the city in full with its mystery and sadness.

Foul yellow mist had filled the whole of space:  
 Steeling my nerves to play a hero's part,  
 I coaxed my weary soul with me to pace  
 The backstreets shaken by each lumbering cart.<sup>25</sup>

In the backstreets the narrator sees dirt, cripples, gambling and drunkards. Through the image prevails dirt and sin, which seems to have inspired Eliot in his descriptions of the city. Another meaningful image of Paris, encompassing the aforementioned elements including personification, is presented in the poem "Morning Twilight".

The wind of morning blew upon the lamps.  
 It was the hour when evil dreams in swarms  
 On pillows twist brown, adolescent forms:  
 When the bleeding eye that's twitched with pain  
 Each lantern smudged the day with crimson stain  
 The soul, against its body's weight of brawn,

Lay struggling, like the lanterns with the dawn:  
 Like a sad face whose tears the breezes dry  
 The air grew tremulous with things that fly.  
 [...]
   
 Like seas the mists round every building poured  
 While agonising patients in the ward,  
 In broken hiccoughs, rattled out their lives:  
 And worn-out rakes reeled homeward to their wives.  
 Aurora, in a shift of rose and green, came shivering down the  
 Seine's deserted scene  
 And Paris, as he rubbed his eyes, began  
 To sort his tools, laborious old man.<sup>26</sup>

In Eliot's poetry the imagery of fog, mist, smoke and darkness are used to evoke feelings of alienation, loneliness and death. However, not necessarily solitude, as man may only be alone in his room, or house but even then he cannot shut himself away from the outside world as he cannot help hearing the noises of the city, which are intensified and blurred. The lyrical I of "Preludes" describes the cycle of day and night perceived by the senses from the inside, from the perspective of a person staying in bed exposed to sounds only. The sounds are so familiar though, that they instantly elicit the well-known images of

[...] insistent feet  
 At four or five and six o'clock;  
 And short square fingers stuffing pipes, And evening newspapers and eyes  
 Assured of certain certainties, The conscience of a blackened street  
 Impatient to assume the world.<sup>27</sup>

The outside world is restless, especially at night. As has been mentioned already, the city provides favourable conditions for promiscuity and this theme recurs in the poems of both Eliot and Baudelaire, most often appearing at night in poems such as "Evening twilight" by Baudelaire, and Eliot's "The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Rhapsody On a Windy Night". Prostitutes are either referred to directly as 'whores', or indirectly through mentioning 'one-night cheap hotels' or women 'hesitating towards you in the light of the door'. But they are an inseparable part of the modern city accepted if not praised by the community. This alongside gambling and drinking, seem to be the chief leisure activities of the masses inhabiting the city and invading it during the day, as well as at night.

The individual, educated man, who is the protagonist of the poems is limited to the confines of houses - his own or that of his friends. He seems to be walking through the narrow, endless, back streets only when travelling between

buildings. He is only an uncertain passer-by, trying not to become one of the crowd. He is struggling between two forces. One encouraging him to be different and to act and the other depriving him of any feelings of superiority over the masses, making him stop moving and allowing him to indulge in his dreams and memories.<sup>28</sup> He says:

For I have known them all already, known them all  
 Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
 I have measured out my life with coffee spoons:  
 I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
 Beneath the music from a farther room  
 So how should I presume?<sup>29</sup>

The modern man is torn between what had passed, what is and what will be, between tradition and the new. Baudelaire in his poem "The Swan" says "Old Paris is no more cities renew / Quicker than human hearts, their changing spell."<sup>30</sup> Paris is also present as a pleasant memory juxtaposed with the troubled life of a Londoner in Eliot's "Portrait Of A Lady".

I smile, of course and go on drinking tea.  
 "Yet with these April sunsets, that somehow recall  
 My buried life, and Paris in the Spring  
 I feel immeasurably at peace and find the world  
 To be wonderful and youthful, after all."<sup>31</sup>

That Paris in particular is recalled seems to be of little importance as the person is longing more for his past, his previous life which he remembers through images. Wherever he is at the moment, he feels isolated from. He does not feel at ease, is self-conscious and uncertain. The modern city, his immediate environment overpowers and paralyzes him. Adaptation to the new surroundings would mean inner-disintegration and final loss of his personality and individuality. That is what man fears and tries to avoid and thus stagnates. According to Eliot, there are two solutions, namely either man 'accepts the standard patterns of the social intercourse and due to this conformity is similar to everybody else; or he does not behave and think in the required way and is rejected by the society.'<sup>32</sup> This and the growing hostility, conflicts and class differences in the contemporary metropolis are elements leading to the disintegration of the society and the dissociation of the human mind. To conclude I would like to cite Louis Aragon's "Roman inachevee", inspired by a poem of P.B. Shelley whose fragment I have chosen to be the motto of this essay, presenting an apocalyptic vision of the modern city.

City, you resemble hell  
Even though there are no flames nor pain  
Streets are full of the damned  
[...]  
Who sold their souls and as for love,  
It is no longer there.<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Sienicka, p. 47
- <sup>2</sup> Mumford, p. 289
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256
- <sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 290
- <sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267
- <sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 266
- <sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 271
- <sup>9</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> cited after Pike, p. xi
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. xiii
- <sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26
- <sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.25
- <sup>14</sup> Eliot, p. 81
- <sup>15</sup> Baudelaire, p. 118
- <sup>16</sup> Pike, p. 103
- <sup>17</sup> Eliot, p. 6
- <sup>18</sup> Sienicka, p. 59
- <sup>19</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Eliot, p. 36
- <sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37
- <sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36
- <sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p.
- <sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4-5
- <sup>25</sup> Baudelaire, p. 118
- <sup>26</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Eliot, p. 37

<sup>28</sup> Eliot, p. XLI

<sup>29</sup> Eliot, p. 6

<sup>30</sup> Baudelaire, p. 116

<sup>31</sup> Eliot, p. 23

<sup>32</sup> Sienicka, p. 12

<sup>33</sup> Aragon, Louis "Roman inachevée", [in:] *Approches Littéraires*, p. 218

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# His tory

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Ewa Świdarska

## Aims and Limitations of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863\*

Over a hundred years after it was signed in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln and first announced to the country torn by the Civil War, the Emancipation Proclamation continues to be a highly controversial document. Its proponents like to see it as part of a conscious effort to put an end to the “peculiar institution” of slavery. Revisionists, on the other hand, defiantly dismiss it as a document, which unwillingly promoted the demise of slavery solely to secure white people’s political interests. Notwithstanding these views the Proclamation continues to be viewed as a single most important document in American history since the drafting of the Constitution in 1787. Because the truth usually lies in the middle it is worth taking a closer look at what Lincoln called the greatest achievement of his Administration.<sup>1</sup>

The most important factor in understanding the Emancipation Proclamation is undeniably its genesis. There is no doubt that the Proclamation was issued as a “fit and necessary war measure”, to use the document’s exact wording.<sup>2</sup> It was used primarily to help to “preserve the Union” and not to free all slaves. Lincoln never designed it to put an end to slavery as such but when he felt that this was the proper move to meet his goals he went ahead with it. The President asserted his train of thought on many occasions but perhaps most famously in his open letter to Horace Greeley in August of 1862 where he decided not “to leave any one in doubt” of his course of action.<sup>3</sup>

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\* The paper has been submitted for the course *African American History Since 1865* run by Mr Okete Shiroya, PhD at the Valdosta State University, USA.

If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union;<sup>4</sup>

There were two reasons why proclaiming the slaves free in rebellious states was essential for restoring the Union. First of all, the Confederate war effort depended almost entirely on slave labor. The Proclamation aimed at undercutting Southern resources and military capability by taking this workforce away in a mass. This worked like a charm and shortly after the Proclamation was issued freemen started fleeing the South leaving it virtually without the ability to wage war effectively. Thus the Southern empire crumbled, and not only economically but also morally. For many people in the South slaveholding was an essential and inseparable part of the antebellum way of life, something that was taken for granted and to them a part of their right to self-government. Now it was taken away and not by a bloody slave revolution or passionate abolitionist crusade but by a carefully worded document, whose limitations, but also ultimate strength, lay in its exercise of constitutionally vested powers.

It is important to remember, however, that there was also another rationale, which would have perhaps imposed on Lincoln the same course of action even if military expediency did not dictate it. In his "House Divided" speech Lincoln asserted "A house divided against itself cannot stand".<sup>5</sup> In short he realized that if the Union is to be restored it has to either entirely accept slavery or entirely reject it.<sup>6</sup> The issue had to be resolved so that the reason of this war would vanish never to endanger the "perpetuity of the Union" again.<sup>7</sup> That the reason was slavery was asserted by Lincoln in his Second Inaugural address:

[In the South] slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest ... To strengthen perpetuate and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war .<sup>8</sup>

To add to the argument that slavery was targeted by Lincoln only because it served national interest, white interest that is, it is interesting to point to the Preliminary Proclamation issued on September 22, 1862 which stated that slaves would be proclaimed free only if the Confederate states remained in a state of rebellion.<sup>9</sup> Although at this point Lincoln seemed to acknowledge that slavery was doomed he was not inclined to rush things or to alienate the South as well as the loyal Middle States, or even many Northerners.<sup>10</sup> That is why he favored "gradual emancipation", proposed compensation to slaveholders for



freed slaves and championed the idea of the colonization of freemen “upon this continent, or elsewhere”.<sup>11</sup> It was only the stubbornness of the rebels that led the President to sign such a sweeping and bearing measure as the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 without as much as a mention of his preliminary concessions. Before we go on to assess the direct impact of this act, however, let us not forget Lincoln’s purposeful influence over its final outcome. To accurately assess Lincoln’s merits or lack of thereof in the history of emancipation and to go beyond what has been said above, one has to consider him separately as Chief Executive and as a private person. Lincoln himself often pointed to this distinction because it was crucial for grasping the difference between what he sincerely believed in as a person and what he felt the Constitution obliged him to stand for as President, a firm and undisturbed protector of the Union. As a private speaker, Lincoln never denied his contempt for slavery. In his Speech on the Kansas- Nebraska Act in October 1854 he emphasized what he was to assert many times in the course of years: that when he was “under no official obligation to suppress [his] feelings”<sup>12</sup> he would lash out against the perpetuation of slavery and its basic assumptions, which he “did not *feel* like favoring”.<sup>13</sup> He did not hesitate to dub slave-dealers “tyrants” stopping short of challenging all Southerners with that name. He defied the notion of slaves being mere “property”:

... your sense of justice, and human sympathy continually [tell] you, that the poor negro has some natural right to himself [and] that those who deny it, and make mere merchandise of him, deserve kickings, contempt and death.<sup>14</sup>

In his Second Inaugural Address Lincoln also stated that he believed “American slavery [to be] one of those offences” which God has shown his will to remove through “this terrible war”.<sup>15</sup> At this point, he was speaking as President and this is precisely why he was very careful to look for vindication of his words against slavery in the authority of God and history.

Before one goes on, however, to proclaim Lincoln the Great Liberator of conscience, one has to look at the limitations of his abolitionist views. Although he sincerely proclaimed his “personal wish that all men everywhere could be free”<sup>16</sup> he asserted equally openly that he did not “contend for the establishment of political and social equality between whites and blacks”. He also opposed the expansion of slavery westward to have those territories “for the homes of free white people”<sup>17</sup>. Lincoln’s aforementioned ideas of colonizing former slaves “elsewhere” and after only gradual emancipation probably had as much to do with his political tactics as his personal beliefs. His

conviction that slavery would be slow to end and politically serious in its consequences was expressed in his letter to George Robertson. It was 1855 and Lincoln wrote:

...experience has demonstrated, I think, that there is no peaceful extinction of slavery in prospect for us ...; the condition of the negro slave in America is now ... fixed and hopeless of change for the better.<sup>18</sup>

It is certain that the awareness of how deeply the divisions over slavery ran in the country made Lincoln a cautious President. At the same time he must have seen black Americans as fully capable of faring well in the society. There was plenty of proof for that in the successes and respectability of a number of them in the North. He was aware, however that after years of bondage slaves would be helpless or at least severely handicapped in every aspect of life in a new political environment. This apprehension seems to come through in the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of late 1863 when he was calling freemen, truthfully but inevitably sadly "a laboring, landless and homeless class"<sup>19</sup>. Meaningfully the primary legislation he called for concerning the newly freed was educational.

These assumptions only fortified Lincoln's intentions as Chief Executive of first restoring the Union and only later, and much more slowly, if ever, of addressing the slave issue. In his political doings Lincoln saw himself primarily "as a manager not a reformer" to put it in his own words.<sup>20</sup> It has to be repeated that his "paramount" concern was for the Union and he would do whatever was necessary to preserve it short of actually enslaving people. But Lincoln refused to be reduced to one dimension. We shall see that all of the mentioned components of his personality and opinion played a role. Only in its full complexity do they provide an answer to why he was slow to reach the point where he deemed the Emancipation Proclamation inevitable and why it imposed certain limitations on the effectiveness and scope of this document. They will also help to understand, however, his carefulness to create a legitimate and self standing document, which would provide for lasting freedom to the new class of free men.

Let us first look beyond its symbolic relevance at what the Proclamation actually said and meant. First of all many people accused Lincoln of not speaking strongly enough in moral terms.<sup>21</sup> But as we shall see later it seems the President did that for particular purposes. It was also the case when it came to two of the biggest drawbacks of the document, which practically undermined whatever active anti-slavery position it aimed at and seemingly reduced the Proclamation to a formality. Firstly the document did not free all the slaves and

secondly it had the power to emancipate hardly any.<sup>22</sup> Both of these failures were the result of two basic assumptions Lincoln made when signing the Proclamation : not to alienate the loyal Middle States and Northerners as well as the South; and to include only those provisions he could guarantee to be carried out.<sup>23</sup> The first has an explanation in Lincoln's unwithered aim of restoring the Union and at this point, of rebuilding the society torn by the Civil War. That is why the emancipation theoretically concerned only persons who were held as slaves in rebellious states allowing slavery to remain in the Middle states and designated parts of the South. But before one condemns Lincoln's hypocrisy, one has to acknowledge his political genius. It has already been said that Lincoln realized at one point in this conflict that the country could never again return to being divided - it had to embrace slavery completely or completely reject it. The Proclamation has officially denounced slavery by the force of executive power for the first time in the nation's history thus making it vulnerable and ultimately doomed within the United States.<sup>24</sup> Lincoln did not want to treat the Middle states, which after all remained loyal with the same contempt he had for the Confederacy. This was perhaps a matter of consistency with the history of the development of the war and political decisions concerning it. Notwithstanding, slavery as a recognized or suffered institution was ultimately and "henceforth" rejected. To his critics Lincoln had only this to say, "we can never finish this, if we never begin it".<sup>25</sup>

There was also a lot of controversy over the designated parts of rebellious states, which at the moment of signing the Proclamation were no more in the state of insurgency and were practically allowed to further hold their slaves i.e. in parts of Louisiana. Lincoln, however, was quick to point out that the issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation was possible only thanks to designating it as a military measure and there was simply no Constitutional basis for military intervention in parts of the Southern states which were part of the Union on January 1, 1963.<sup>26</sup>

Another weakness, said the Proclamation's critics, concerned its effectiveness. They justly claimed and Lincoln acknowledged the fact that there was no way that the provisions of the proclamation could be carried out in relevant states at once on January 1.<sup>27</sup> Only as the Union army progressed South could it practically free the slaves and "recognize and maintain" their freedom.<sup>28</sup> This indeed seems a drawback of the Proclamation. It is not so for those, however, who remember why it was issued in the first place. Lincoln had signed the Proclamation not to announce to the slaves that they would be rescued from their oppression by the Northern troops but in order to encourage them and give a signal that they were free to leave and they would be guaranteed their freedom once they came under the Union's control.

No less important in the viewing of the actual achievements of the Proclamation was the accusation that the language of the passage where Lincoln spoke of allowing freemen to join the armed forces was at least shy.<sup>29</sup> When speaking of freedom for the slaves he said "I do order and declare" whereas in the passage about the openness of service in the Union army to freemen he "declared and made [it] known".<sup>30</sup> This difference is no coincidence. Indeed the tone of the passage hardly suggests that the newly freed men would be armed and allowed into combat even if it was the case in reality. Instead, they would be "received" into it to fill "positions". Of course the phrasing of the passage did not stop more than 180,000 black men to enlist following the issuing of the Proclamation but it hid an important political purpose.<sup>31</sup> Lincoln, again, consciously put the future good of the nation and the Union before the sentiments and longings of slaves. Whereas calling them to arms would probably multiply the number of those who enlisted, it would also mean dangerous alienation of Southerners as well as many people in the Middle states and the North. Some of them might have favored emancipation but many at the same time felt uneasy at the thought of former slaves bearing arms. The prophecies of bloody slave revolution unless slaves were forever held in iron bondage circulated the South well before the war and echoed in the North as a serious counter argument against abolitionist rhetoric. Moreover, many of people still owned slaves, while others viewed the emancipation struggle as an attempt to violate property rights. If they could be tarnished on the account of slaves, ran the argument, it could also be undermined on other bases alike.<sup>32</sup> Lincoln was all too aware of these sentiments and although he went ahead with what he thought unthinkable in his lifetime, the emancipation of slaves, he was very cautious to make it serve the ending of the war rather than stirring it up anew.

Perhaps the most sweeping allegation towards the Emancipation Proclamation is that it only hinted at the future of freemen and that in the vaguest way possible. Whereas the Preliminary Proclamation recommended and spoke approvingly of state legislation concerning freemen and colonization, in the final document Lincoln merely "recommend[ed] that ... they labor faithfully for reasonable wages".<sup>33</sup> Some historians claim this happened primarily because Lincoln as an official focused on seeing evil in slavery and not in slaveholders.<sup>34</sup> That is why he did not pursue a change in the Southern political system. This aided Lincoln's goal of restoring the Union also as a nation of men, and was reflected in the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 1863, where all those who took the oath of loyalty were embraced as proper citizens. Lack of direct condemnation of the Southern

system of government, which had after all legitimized and served to perpetuate slavery proved to have very serious consequences.<sup>35</sup> The men had their irons taken off but the Southern system was to keep them in bondage of disenfranchisement, lack of political say, sharecropping and violence long after 1863. The Proclamation's defenders claim that the omission of relevant provisions of the Preliminary Proclamation as well as an overall lack of substantial address to the problems of freemen's future in the Proclamation was necessary. First of all, it had to be done to keep in line with the military character of the document so its full legitimacy would not be jeopardized. In issuing it, Lincoln relied on extended executive power due to war expediency.<sup>36</sup> These powers would be forfeited when the war was over. How would he then keep his promises? Secondly, in order to be assertive and effective, the document had to come right to the point to avoid watering it down to a list of far-fetched plans.<sup>37</sup> It was supposed to be only the beginning Lincoln had spoken about but it needed to be a strong start.

The President was not uninterested in the future of freed "persons held slave". His belief was probably that a lot of time and effort had to be put into finding a redefined place in the society for those who were held slaves all their lives. His lack of resolve as to their future might have had to do with the suddenness and enormity of what had happened. In his Second Inaugural Address he asserted that when the war started "each looked for ... a result less fundamental and astounding".<sup>38</sup> But he was also quick to propose in 1864 that the Republican Party include a calling for the abolition of slavery through constitutional amendment in its political platform and, nominated for a second term, he called it "a fitting and necessary conclusion to the final success of the Union cause".<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, we shall never find out how Lincoln would guide the US through Reconstruction, to what effects and whether he would vindicate the Proclamation.

The institution of slavery might have tumbled but it is very unfortunate that in result the Proclamation only technically freed the slaves leaving them between a rock and the hard place. Again, the nature of this document and its genesis were largely responsible for that. Many may condemn Lincoln for his overblown precaution and almost fanatical obedience to the letter of the Constitution which led him to what can be perceived as cool, ruthless calculation and seriously limited the effectiveness of the Proclamation. I believe one can argue, however, that this is precisely where the ultimate strength and prestige of this document come from. Before the war no one knew what the Constitutional basis for undermining slavery could be. Lincoln himself did not see it.<sup>40</sup> He asserted, however, that because of the war the Constitution vested

in him extraordinary executive privileges, which could be invoked to put down the rebellion. The trouble was no one knew exactly what were those privileges. But in order to be recognized, whatever they might be, these powers had to obey the Constitution and military statutes to a letter. In wording the Proclamation Lincoln went as far as the law permitted him.<sup>41</sup> He wanted to make sure, to the very last word, that no one could challenge this document, ever. That is why Lincoln wrote the document largely himself and it became the first of his proclamations where his full titles were quoted.<sup>42</sup>

There is no doubt that the Emancipation Proclamation served as a military tool and that the abolishment of slavery was mainly hostage to political developments. It is also true that this document had limitations so numerous that some may claim it did as much service as disservice to the slaves as far as their free existence was concerned. These shortcomings caused the Proclamation to become a mere symbol to many. Notwithstanding that the Emancipation Proclamation was said to have been at once "deemed important" and only the Thirteenth Amendment has evoked similar enthusiasm.<sup>43</sup> When it was announced its wording seemed irrelevant because everybody realized the ultimate implication. It was in the words of the Proclamation "an act of justice".<sup>44</sup>

## Notes:

1 "Emancipation Proclamation"

2 "The Emancipation Proclamation"

3 "Letter to Horace Greeley"

4 Ibid.

5 Franklin, vol.25, no.2, p.2

6 Ibid. p.2

7 "Lincoln's First Inaugural Address"

8 "Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address"

9 "Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, 1862"

10 Anastaplo, p.6

11 "Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation"

12 "Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act"

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 "Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address"

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- 16 "Letter to Horace Greeley"
  - 17 "Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act"
  - 18 *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, p.317
  - 19 "Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction"
  - 20 "Lincoln's First Inaugural Address"
  - 21 "First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation"
  - 22 Franklin, p.3
  - 23 To read more see Anastaplo.
  - 24 "Lincoln's Greatest Speech"
  - 25 Ibid.
  - 26 Anastaplo, p.19
  - 27 Ibid., p.22
  - 28 "The Emancipation Proclamation"
  - 29 Anastaplo, p.21
  - 30 "The Emancipation Proclamation"
  - 31 "First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation"
  - 32 Anastaplo, p.9
  - 33 "The Emancipation Proclamation"
  - 34 Anastaplo, p.10
  - 35 Franklin, p.4
  - 36 Ibid., p.5
  - 37 Anastaplo, p.18
  - 38 "Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address"
  - 39 Franklin, p.3
  - 40 "Speech on Kansas-Nebraska Act"
  - 41 Franklin, p.5
  - 42 Ibid., p.8
  - 43 Franklin, p.4
  - 44 "The Emancipation Proclamation"

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"The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863", *University of Oklahoma Law Center Page*, WWW



Ewa Świdarska

## Learning from a War that Never Was. The Cuban Missile Crisis as a Lesson in Nuclear Age Politics\*

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was a landmark event for at least two reasons. First of all, it was the first and so far the last confrontation of the nuclear age that might have actually led to a nuclear war. Secondly, because of the peculiarities of the crisis, its environment and eventual outcome, it became one of the first and certainly most important lessons in the conduct of politics in the nuclear age providing insight into the traps and opportunities that the emergence of nuclear weapons brought into the old patterns of policy making. Some developments of the crisis had vindicated the basic assumptions of the American democracy and system of government; other revealed its imperfections and dangers of its misuse and excessive idolizing. A lot was to be learned about the conceptualizing of other countries and their motives. Altogether the Cuban Missile Crisis offered a unique opportunity to learn from mistakes which luckily fell short of pushing the world into the abyss of nuclear war.

Perhaps some of the most important policy lessons can be found in looking at the genesis of the Cuban crisis. During the crisis, the Soviet side maintained that the placement of nuclear missiles on the island was a purely defensive move designed to protect the island from the American threat.<sup>1</sup> This statement tended to be scorned by Americans as a face-saving cover up of the real Soviet intentions of directly threatening the US and holding it hostage to the Cuban arsenal. The unwavering belief in Soviet malice and, in part, the

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opportunity of political gain drove the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, and his advisor team known as the Ex Comm to choose the path of confrontation from the moment the U-2 pictures revealed missile installations in Cuba. The uncompromising US stance was based on the same Cold War assumptions formulated by presidential advisor Clark Clifford for President Harry S Truman in 1946. They presented the Soviets as uncompromising expansionists driven solely by a goal of igniting worldwide revolution.<sup>2</sup> This position denied the Soviet Union the credit of any rationality besides its ideology, which in fact meant the lack of rationality in the traditional sense. Similarly, all communist movements that emerged worldwide were categorized as Soviet outposts created in preparation for the Soviet takeover.

It has to be said that the cautiousness and lack of trust towards the Soviets were hardly baseless. It is certain that the Chairman of the Soviet Communist Party and the country's leader Nikita Khrushchev intended to gain a better bargaining position with the placement of missiles and use them as a quiet blackmail in negotiations with the US. He was also angered at the presence of the Jupiter missiles in Turkey and probably sought to even the score as well as create the illusion that the missile gap between the USSR and the US, which was as large as ever, was disappearing.<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that the secrecy and deceit that accompanied Khrushchev's attempts to somewhat shift the balance of power, even if only superfluously, rightly outraged and disturbed the Kennedy Administration. It seems clear, however, that the argument of the defensive role of the missiles cannot be dismissed and should not have been pushed so far aside when deciding to move towards nuclear ultimatum. President Dwight D. Eisenhower pointed out that the deployment of US missiles in Italy and Turkey, which was in fact done, would be a "provocative" step comparable to the deployment of missiles by the USSR in "Mexico or Cuba".<sup>4</sup> Ironically, in the midst of the tensions, Kennedy expressed a similar view but quickly dismissed the issue altogether commenting that "that was five years ago" [*sic*].<sup>5</sup> Significantly, these US missiles became operational in April 1962, the same month that Khrushchev proposed to send Soviet weapons to Cuba.<sup>6</sup> Moreover the undeniable fact was that since Castro's coming to power the US government was hyperactive in attempts to assassinate him and to overthrow his regime. Multifaceted "Operation Mongoose" was to "stir things up on the island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder" in Robert Kennedy's own words.<sup>7</sup> Cane fields were burned, factories blown up and goods heading for Cuba from Europe contaminated. This was followed by Cuba's ousting from the Organization of American States and an economic embargo.<sup>8</sup>

The fact is that US policymakers refused to admit that the missile crisis was a culmination of the ongoing tensions between the two neighbors. Through

its historically ambivalent and imperialist outlook on Cuba and the politics of isolation the United States virtually invited the Soviets to the island.<sup>9</sup> American reaction to the crisis bordering on hysteria and putting the military on nuclear alert, had less to do with the actual fears of being attacked and more with adherence to the Cold War assumptions about the Soviets, the conduct of the Cold War and the idea of containment. When one reads the memoirs by Robert Kennedy, the United States Attorney General at the time of the crisis, one concludes that most of the presidential advisors realized that Khrushchev would not dare to launch an initial attack.<sup>10</sup> That, however, was hardly enough to stop the ExComm and the President from staging an ultimatum that held world peace hostage. Although often convenient for policy conduct, such oversimplifications proved very dangerous and harmful to the US before, in Korea and the Bay of Pigs, and turned into tragedy in Vietnam. The latter, unfortunately, showed how slow the US was to learn that lesson.

An attempt to make ones life easier by basing ones policies on mere assumptions without a very careful study of the problems can be extremely dangerous and even more so in an age when war is bound to last about an hour and result in the complete annihilation of mankind. The Cuban crisis was good proof, although one with a favorable outcome. It was a lesson of how the nature of decision-making in the nuclear age changed or should change. Already during the crisis Khrushchev and Kennedy realized that if one was not careful, a political chain-reaction could ensue. Khrushchev compared this to pulling a rope and tightening the knot. After a certain point the forces that tied it can no longer undo the knot unless by cutting it. That is to say, that war, when unleashed, can no longer be halted by those who started it in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Again, this is crucial in the nuclear age when the result would be immediate with hardly anyone to witness the end of the war once it started. Both the Soviet and the American leaders seemed to agree on that and it is to their credit that amidst such a charged and chaotic time they managed to perceive such trappings and their consequences. Their praise has to be checked by remembering it was their decisions that introduced the crisis in the first place and made the world hold its breath in the face of nuclear threat. Nevertheless, Khrushchev's levelheadedness comes through in his allegedly emotional and chaotic first letter to the President. Robert Kennedy dismissed calling the message erratic or vague and claimed it simply revealed a level of concern and commitment on Khrushchev's part.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the latter's language may have been marked by stress and anxiousness but Khrushchev was at all times conscious of the gravity of the situation and tried to appease and advise the much younger and less experienced Kennedy of the inadvisability of reckless or

excessively dramatic actions. The President, on the other hand, was praised by his brother for managing to stay calm and focused while the members of the Ex Comm were slowly giving in to tremendous pressure, lack of sleep and mood swings. Brotherly love aside, Kennedy indeed seem to have kept his nerve and was very anxious to allow the same to the other side by giving the Soviets room to make rational instead of politicized decisions.<sup>13</sup> The fact that these two men withstood the pressure and were able to rise to the challenge of the moment had as much to do with their statesmanship as it had with plain luck. As one historian noted, history is not chemistry. Thus one can never exactly predict the end result even if the ingredients *seem* well matched.<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, the mixture of politicians' personalities, historic contexts, political pressures, and coincidence can prove quite explosive.

Just how much luck contributed or helped to the successful outcome of the Cuban crisis is still becoming evident. Increasingly, the idea of the Cuban crisis as a model example of crisis management is being undermined and becoming a part of the mythology of the Kennedy era. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, pointed out that the decision-making process on all sides of the conflict was marked by "misinformation, miscalculation and misjudgment"<sup>15</sup> and according to one of John Kennedy's principal aids, Theodore Sorensen, it "came close to spinning out of control before it was ended".<sup>16</sup> This was due to several factors, among others lack of quick and direct communication between the White House and the Kremlin. The strangest but perhaps most telling example of that is the role of John Scali, an ABC journalist asked by the Soviets to act as a messenger to the White House.<sup>17</sup> Apart from having to rely on intermediaries, it turned out that the level of executive control on both sides was limited to the extent that, on his own authority, a US Navy commander dropped a depth charge on a Soviet submarine to force its surfacing during the critical hours of the crisis. Another was the case of an American intelligence plane, which violated Soviet airspace probably due to technical problems.<sup>18</sup> It has also been said that certain actions, which American officials took for deliberate "signals" from Moscow had not been consulted with Khrushchev.<sup>19</sup> Last but not least, there was the question of the ability to conduct rational decision-making. We have noted that both sides were doing their best all things considered not to slip into nuclear confrontation by a reckless mistake. One has to mention, however, Robert Kennedy's comments on the increasing exhaustion and frustration of the members of the Ex Comm as the crisis deepened. Unwillingly, he had to admit that the pressure the situation created overwhelmed even those "brilliant, self confident and experienced men".<sup>20</sup>

The importance of direct and undisturbed communication between Washington and Moscow was promptly recognized and a hot line established.

Additionally the television era and the subsequent explosion of the mass media diminished the information gap to a minimum. Nevertheless, the question of human predisposition and fallibility remains. It was then and still is not only true of the top policymakers but, most of all, of the military establishment.

Even as judged by its contemporaries, the crisis vindicated the concept of civilian control over the military.<sup>21</sup> In his memoirs, Robert Kennedy repeatedly commented on the uncompromising position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military establishment in general. From the moment the existence of Soviet installations in Cuba was confirmed they not only were the strongest and uncompromising advocates of general air strikes followed by an invasion but also seemed oblivious to the likely consequences of such a move. When asked by the President how the Soviets would react to a US attack on Cuba, the Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay assured him "there would be no reaction".<sup>22</sup> Another member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested using nuclear weapons in an attack on Cuba arguing that it was what the USSR would surely do if they were in American shoes. Most chilling comment, however, came from one of the principal Chiefs of Staff who confided in the Attorney General that he believed in a preventive attack against the Soviet Union. Robert Kennedy concluded that the military were always eager and ready to jump into combat as dangerous and self destructive as it was and he and the President were irritated by such irresponsibility and lack of insight.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps because of the nature and goals of the military they best reflect what has been described by historians as a general tendency of humans to engage in self-destructive conflicts.<sup>24</sup>

Despite its seeming lack of rationality the reaction of the military establishment to the Cuban crisis should not be surprising. The military everywhere is an organization with a very high degree of competitiveness, designed for combat and not oriented towards political discussions. Its objective is to prevail at any cost. Accustomed to be in the position of unchallenged authority, top-ranking officers find civilian control extremely frustrating and may seek to avert that balance when called on to provide expertise. Thus more often than not, the military will push for war partly because this was originally the rationale for its emergence. During the Cuban crisis, the radical stance of the military was dismissed but in Vietnam their ambitious persistence caused tragedy.

Another truism supported by the events of the Cuban crisis is that the mechanisms by which groundbreaking decisions are made can seriously influence the output of policymaking. Paradoxically, the missile crisis revealed two things about the condition of democracy in politics of the nuclear era. First,

it works like a charm, second, it does not really exist. On the one hand, the plurality that lies at the heart of democracy was exactly what John Kennedy was aiming at when he created the Ex Comm. He included in it such surprising choices as the Secretary of Treasury Douglas Dillon, greatly valuing his wisdom.<sup>25</sup> He wanted to hear as many opinions and rebuttals as possible and even preferred the latter.<sup>26</sup> In his insightful memoirs, Robert Kennedy noted that the President deliberately chose not to attend some of the Ex Comm meetings to assure the free flow of ideas, which according to his experience, was effectively halted in the presence of the President of the United States.<sup>27</sup> This openness to debate and insistence that all Ex Comm members as well as occasional outside consultants be regarded as peers was crucial for selecting, if not the best, then surely one of the least hazardous paths. Luckily for Kennedy, he knew how to learn from mistakes i.e. from the Bay of Pigs disaster when he relied solely on Central Intelligence Agency's expertise and advice. This time round, he took no chances and looked for varied opinions, and encouraged criticism. The latter was especially important to highlight possible and potentially costly flaws in each of the proposed courses of action. Kennedy deliberately called on people whose wisdom and expertise were valued not only by himself but he knew would be valued by others even if their position varied considerably.<sup>28</sup> It would seem that this collegial model<sup>29</sup> of decision-making, quite efficient during this crisis would be readily employed in the future to a greater advantage, if only in foreign policy conduct. This was not often the case because management style has always greatly depended on the preferences of a particular president. Thus the next United States President, Lyndon B. Johnson, although surrounded by a trusted group of advisors tended to exclude critical voices from his team. Therefore, he hardly took advice from the military establishment during the height of the Vietnam War and depended solely on his uncritical and mostly unanimous aids. As the war progressed and generated increasing criticism, Johnson enclosed himself even more in his inner circle and at one point refused to send his advisors to congressional hearings.<sup>30</sup> Thus emphasis of plurality and free expression of opinions cannot be exaggerated while praising the advisory model Kennedy had adopted, which was hardly his idea and was built around the National Security Council, which until that time was a rather irrelevant body.<sup>31</sup>

One must not forget, however, that although the Ex Comm functioned like a mini democracy the fact that a small group of mostly unelected officials makes decisions that could drive an entire nation into war is inherently undemocratic. Having said that one must look at the problem closer to determine whether such a situation is disturbing or perhaps is a necessity in a

nuclear age when decisions should belong to the best informed and, theoretically, best suited to make them. The fact is that the United States Congress had not been informed of the crisis until two hours before President Kennedy's televised address on October 22, 1962 and only to be presented with a decision about the blockade. The congressional leaders, among others Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, who met with Kennedy, were understandably frustrated and angered. Concluding from Robert Kennedy's account, however, they were even closer to hysterics and sharply criticized the President for not taking more decisive steps, such as an air strike.<sup>32</sup> Thus the question of a potential role of Congress had it been informed is a valid one. Firstly, the exchange between Congress and the President would sooner or later reveal American knowledge of Soviet installations in Cuba, thus reducing US advantage and limiting policy options.<sup>33</sup> Secondly Congress's expertise in this case would hardly be reliable because it lacked the immediate information and update the President had available. Thirdly, as one political scientist noted when it comes to foreign policy, Congress has the disadvantage of sometimes having "535 secretaries of state". In fact, recognizing its limitations Congress voluntarily stepped back to give the office of President the initiative in foreign affairs during the Cold War to avoid any appearance of divisions which could work to the advantage of the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Kennedy's use of this implied authority proved successful over the short run. Lyndon Johnson, however, abused it while implementing the same Cold War assumptions his predecessor was following and escalated the war without as much as an informed consent from Congress<sup>35</sup>, which after all solely holds constitutional power to declare war. The subsequent tragedy of Vietnam vindicated the congressional role in the system of checks-and-balances and catalyzed the passage of the 1973 War Powers Act.

Apart from posing numerous policy questions, the Cuban missile crisis is itself a huge question mark. Should it have ever taken place? Many believe that it was an unnecessary and reckless risk, which has not only been catalyzed by United States hard-line policy towards Cuba but also exploited by it for mostly political reasons because the strategic significance of missiles in Cuba was relatively small.<sup>36</sup> After all, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco Kennedy looked for the "insult ... to be redressed rather quickly" and asserted that the placement of Soviet weapons in Cuba gave clear impression that they were "co-equal with us".<sup>37</sup> Moreover no one from the Kennedy circle disputed Secretary McNamara's conclusion that the missiles did not seriously affect the existing strategic balance. This was beside the point. The American side was looking for a convincing "victory" to make up for the humiliations of the Bay of Pigs and

Soviet sneaking in its missiles to Cuba. That is why when it had been implied that Jupiter missiles in Turkey would disappear after the Soviets withdrew from Cuba, the USSR had been warned that That is why should the word "deal" leak out the United States would withdraw its offer.<sup>38</sup>

There are those who, however, are inclined to think that the crisis was useful in that it provided a shock, a "punctuated equilibrium", a sudden shift in environment that introduces new status quo under changed conditions.<sup>39</sup> While the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs introduced the world to the shock of nuclear power, the Cuban Crisis was a realization that retaliation is a valid issue. This understanding of the ultimate obsolescence of war is said to have served as a stabilizing factor.<sup>40</sup> It seems to be true since the world has not witnessed a similar confrontation in nearly four decades while the "nuclear club" membership has significantly grown and the number of conflicts worldwide is still considerable.

One should not underestimate the successful solution of the Cuban Missile Crisis. No one can answer how the world would look if it ended in nuclear contest. Would there be anyone left to learn its lessons. As it is, it seems that history has vindicated some of the political mechanisms used to manage the crisis and helped to reconsider other. It posed fundamental questions about the limitations of categorizing and generalizing about foreign policy issues and showed the importance of putting oneself in the other country's position.<sup>41</sup> It also highlighted the new dangers but also peculiar opportunities that the presence of nuclear weapons brought about. Let us hope that learning and reason if not instinct can help us defy a grim prophecy Einstein made when he said that "the unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our models of thinking and thus we drift toward unparalleled catastrophe".<sup>42</sup>

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, p.66

<sup>2</sup> Clifford, p.106

<sup>3</sup> Hyland, pp.128-129

<sup>4</sup> Kornbluh, Chang

<sup>5</sup> Paterson, p. 279

<sup>6</sup> Kornbluh, Chang, p. 4, Paterson, p. 276



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- 7 Paterson, p.276
  - 8 Ibid. pp. 276-277
  - 9 Ibid. p.276
  - 10 Kennedy, p.40
  - 11 Ibid. pp.6765
  - 12 Ibid. p.64
  - 13 Ibid. p. 105
  - 14 Gaddis, p. 107
  - 15 Kornbluh, Chang, p. 3
  - 16 Ibid. p.3
  - 17 Kennedy, p. 68
  - 18 Paterson, pp.282-283
  - 19 Kornbluh, Chang, p.3
  - 20 Kennedy, p.22
  - 21 Ibid. p.97
  - 22 Ibid. p. 14
  - 23 Ibid. pp.26-97
  - 24 Gaddis, p. 105
  - 25 Kennedy, p. 96
  - 26 Ibid. pp.95-96
  - 27 Ibid. p.11
  - 28 Allison, Neustadt, p.121
  - 29 Snow, Brown, p.107
  - 30 Ibid. p.111, also I am indebted to Doctor Jim Peterson's lecture points on presidential management styles.
  - 31 Doctor Peterson's lecture insights on the role of the NSC throughout US history.
  - 32 Kennedy, pp. 31-32 and Allison, Neustadt, p. 119
  - 33 Kennedy, p.17
  - 34 Snow, Brown, pp. 186-187
  - 35 To read more on the Gulf of Tonkin resolution see Frankel
  - 36 Strategic insignificance of Cuban missiles see Allison, Neustadt pp.123-124
  - 37 Paterson, pp.275-279
  - 38 Ibid. p.282
  - 39 Gaddis, p.109
  - 40 Ibid. p.109
  - 41 Kennedy, p.102
  - 42 Gaddis, p.105

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Katarzyna Topolska

## Mistranslation Problems as Exemplified in the Polish Translation of *Wyrd Sisters* by Terry Pratchett\*

Successful translation demands from a translator a conscious mastering of a variety of skills from a translator. However, as not all translators are aware of the theoretical requirements of their work, their translations often fail to achieve the standards of the original text. The most common mistakes the translators make derive from a number of issues: a lack of linguistic competence in either source and/or the target language, a misunderstanding and/or a misinterpretation of some aspect of the source text, an inability to balance fidelity to the original with creativity, and finally a simple carelessness. In my paper, I will try to illustrate these mistranslation problems with the example of the Polish translation of Terry Pratchett's novel *Wyrd Sisters : Trzy Wiedźmy*, translated by Piotr W. Cholewa.

The most striking and unacceptable of the above reasons is that of linguistic incompetence. Most often, being a translator means that one of the involved languages is the translator's mother tongue and the other one – his/her second language at a fairly proficient level. However, neither the native knowledge of a language nor a proficiency in grammar and vocabulary of the second language can guarantee correctness. Very few translators can claim philological knowledge of their mother tongue and at the same time understanding of the cultural and social aspects and nuances of their second language. In practice, such a discrepancy is usually visible in either clumsiness

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\* The paper has been submitted for the course 197: *History of Translation Theory* run by Ms Aniela Korzeniowska, PhD.

or inaccuracy of translated expressions. Using Cholewa's translation as an example, one can truly question his competence in Polish: the phrase "king of Lancre"<sup>1</sup> Cholewa translates as "król Lancre"<sup>2</sup>. According to the Polish rules of declination the correct form should be: "król Lancre'u", whereas Cholewa's translation suggests that "Lancre" is the proper name of the king, which as seen from the original, this is clearly not the case.

Sometimes, mistranslation derives not so much from linguistic incompetence as from a misunderstanding or a misinterpretation of expressions which may have different meanings/significance depending on their context. This seems to be the case in the translation of the following example from Pratchett :

' They had a bun too, sir. All except young Roger, who isn't allowed fruit, sir, on account of his trouble.'

The duke sagged back on the window seat and put his hand over his eyes. I was born to rule down on the plains, he thought, where ... there are people who don't appear to be made of dough. **He's going to tell me** what this Roger had.

' He had a biscuit, sir'<sup>3</sup>

In Cholewa's translation, the phrase in bold is as follows: "Ten sierzant musi mi powiedzieć, co dała Rogerowi."<sup>4</sup> This translation of "be going to" is rather peculiar. Although the phrase can sometimes suggest a threat (e.g. "You're going to do it or..."), in this context it plays its most common function – that of a prediction of the future. Thus, the more appropriate translation in this case would be: "On zamierza mi powiedzieć/za chwilę mi powie, co dostał Roger".

The biggest problems in the work of translators are caused by the question of the border between fidelity and creativity. In practice, translators either treat these issues as mutually exclusive or forget altogether about the necessity to keep them in balance. Thus, they either become faithful duplicators of the source text to the extent of word for word translation or in their creative enthusiasm, they move far from the original. Cholewa has attempted to find the middle path between the two extremes, however, he has not managed to avoid all the traps altogether.

A good translator should remember that his primary obligation is to preserve the characteristics of the source text as much as possible. Therefore, one should remember that the choice of vocabulary, style and, tone is firstly dictated by that of the author of the original and that every word has its own importance and significance. This rule, however, is easy to follow only when the target language allows for a clear, unambiguous, "exact"<sup>5</sup> translation.

Translators seem to disregard this and their need for flexibility and inventiveness, when the target language does not provide the “exact” equivalent. This is one of Cholewa’s mistakes in the translation of the following fragment:

It was cold and draughty ... and the new chamberlain’s bladder wasn’t getting any younger.<sup>6</sup>

... było chłodno i wietrznie. A pęcherz nowego szambelana nie stawał się coraz młodszy<sup>7</sup>

The Polish translation sounds awkward and a non-English speaking reader, only with great difficulty may decipher from the translation the correct meaning of the original, which is: “the chamberlain’s bladder was getting older”. Hence, it would be more appropriate to write: “A pęcherz nowego szambelana był niestety coraz starszy”.

Another mistake of overfaithful translators derives from a dogmatic, uncritical use of dictionaries. Instead of verifying the dictionary equivalents with their contexts in the source text, some translators stop their research at the point of checking a dictionary explanation. Again, an example can be found in Cholewa’s work:

‘Pleased to meet you. I’m Champot, King of Lancre’

‘Verence. Likewise’<sup>8</sup>

- Milo mi poznać Jestem Champot, król Lancre.<sup>9</sup>

- Verence. Również.<sup>10</sup>

Stanislawski’s dictionary explains “likewise” as “podobnie, również, także”. Thus, Cholewa’s translation is correct in rendering the meaning of the word itself. However, the phrase in Polish sounds clumsy in the context and it clearly demands a more descriptive equivalent. A phrase like: “Także/ Również król Lancre`u” would be more accurate.

Some translators, in order to avoid “overfaithfulness”, put stress on the need for inventiveness. In the case of the above examples, certainly a degree of freedom and creativity was necessary to avoid what Peter Newmark calls “translationese”<sup>11</sup>. Sometimes, however, precious flexibility may turn into a vain attempt to improve the original by introducing unnecessary changes, “colouring” the style and, omitting repetitions or seemingly pointless sentences. Cholewa might have surrendered to such a temptation in translating the simple phrase: “in fact”. The expression is very characteristic of Pratchett and is used quite often with comic effect. Cholewa, however, translates it using varied

expressions, thus not preserving Pratchett's mannerism, even though the Polish "właściwie (to)..." renders perfectly the meaning<sup>12</sup> and allows the translator to maintain a characteristic feature of the author's style.

A very trivial, but frequently occurring reason for mistranslation is simple carelessness. It is hard to believe, in Cholewa's case, that mistranslations of expressions with clear, unambiguous meaning – which can be easily be translated with the help of a dictionary, without any problematic outcome – derive from his lack of knowledge. For instance: "smugły"<sup>13</sup> translated as "wzgardliwie"<sup>14</sup> instead of "z satysfakcją" and, "he'd done his best"<sup>15</sup> as "poradził sobie nieźle"<sup>16</sup> instead of "zrobił co mógł/dolożył wszelkich starań". In an objective piece of writing (e.g. a social novel) such changes would not be noticeable. In Pratchett's fiction, however, which is purely primarily entertaining and humorous, such small linguistic nuances are crucial to the overall comic effect and that is why they should be included among the examples of mistranslation. Also, a careless choice of words may create unnecessary ambiguity, hence making imagery confusing. The following fragment from Pratchett: "Granny kicked a bush. Her boot went right through it"<sup>17</sup>, is translated by Cholewa as: "Babcia kopnęła krzak. Jej but przebił się na wylot."<sup>18</sup> "Przebił się" may suggest that the shoe got damaged rather than the bush, which is clearly not the case in the source text. Therefore, an expression like "przeszedł" would be more acceptable.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the above discussion refers only to unwitting mistranslation. Summing up, the majority of mistranslation problems resulting simply mainly from the fact that translation is treated more as an intuitive process rather than conscious and careful labour. Finally, it should also be noted that However, mistranslation may be also be a deliberate and conscious manipulation of the source text for ideological reasons – either explicable, as in the case of domestication, when a source text is adopted to the realities of the target culture, or unjustifiable, as in the case of pure political manipulation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pratchett, p.18

<sup>2</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.21

<sup>3</sup> Pratchett, p.45

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- <sup>4</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.51
- <sup>5</sup> Although perfect equivalence does not exist, I use the word “exact” consciously, as I believe that certain SL and TL expressions, in the same context, have the same meaning, e.g. “love” and “kochać”, in reference to a couple, mean exactly the same.
- <sup>6</sup> Pratchett, p.34
- <sup>7</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.39
- <sup>8</sup> Pratchett, p.18
- <sup>9</sup> sic (see: previous remarks)
- <sup>10</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.21
- <sup>11</sup> Peter Newmark, cited by Aniela Korzeniowska, 1994, p.145.
- <sup>12</sup> It is successful in all cases as far as I could check.
- <sup>13</sup> Pratchett, p. 16
- <sup>14</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.19
- <sup>15</sup> Pratchett, p.22
- <sup>16</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.26
- <sup>17</sup> Pratchett, p.32
- <sup>18</sup> Pratchett, trans. Cholewa, p.36

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Katarzyna Kosińska

## The Interface between Ambiguity and Politeness. How Negation Hampers Everyday Communication\*

Negation is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get.

According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ambiguity can be defined as the “use of words that allows alternative interpretations”. Under this definition, negation is ambiguous on numerous levels. In this paper, I shall try to present these aspects of ambiguity which can be employed in the use of politeness (or impoliteness) strategies. Starting with a fresh look at negation in logic, I would like to proceed to describing the role of beliefs in disambiguating negation, and end with a look at double negation and a brief remark on the metalinguistic negation and the clinical denial.

Let me start with the post-Strawsonian account of the semantic ambiguity of negation. The sentence “The King of France is not bald” is ambiguous between the presupposition preserving and the presupposition-cancelling readings. The internal negation, which can be expressed by “The King of France is not-bald”, preserves the presupposition that there exists an individual with the property of being the sole king of France. The external negation, in turn, disambiguated to an extent by the reading “It is not the case that the King of France is bald”, cancels the existential presupposition. As soon as the presupposition is cancelled, there arise difficulties with assigning a truth-

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value to the proposition. Aristotle, Russell and the post-Strawsonians postulated that it is true, while Strawson proposed a truth value gap. The Atlas-Kempson thesis, in turn, suggests that negation is not lexically ambiguous, but rather non-specific, and the context helps us decipher it. The notion of context can also be employed to a rather different analysis. According to the theory of relevance, speakers seek the best balance of effort and effect, for "an act of (overt) communication brings with it a presumption that there is information worth processing".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, uttering a statement about the King of France with a presupposition-cancelling meaning requires the hearer not only to process the already psychologically marked negation, but also - drawing on the pragmatic context and the principle of informativeness - "read as much into an utterance as is consistent with what you know about the world"<sup>2</sup> - reprocess it as meaning "The King of France does not exist". However, the speaker seems to have flouted the Gricean Maxim of Manner (in failing to avoid the ambiguity and obscurity of expression). Therefore, puzzled by the cruelty of this garden-path utterance, the hearer is bound to reprocess it yet again, seeking pragmatic implicatures (in order to gain some effect for his effort) and arriving at a potentially infinite number of inferences, including the conclusion that the speaker is trying to annoy the hearer, or that the speaker is simply joking. Thus, it appears that centuries of linguistic investigation concerning the nature of a proposition about a non-existent King of France have been based on a joke. However, one has to bear in mind the fact that joking is a positive politeness strategy.

As soon as we get the hearer annoyed by the constant reprocessing of negation, we may consider other ways of employing negation both as a face-threatening and a face-saving act. Let us consider first the example of inviting our guest to have something to eat.<sup>3</sup> Instead of uttering the most regular "Will you have anything to eat?", we may attempt at a more polite "Will you have something to eat?", which implicates the polite belief that *s* assumes that *h* wants something to eat. This politeness implicature is consistent with the Politeness Principle: "Minimize the expression of polite beliefs. Maximize the expression of polite beliefs".<sup>4</sup> The addition of a negation to both of the statements adds a degree of politeness. Thus, "Won't you have anything to eat?" is doubly polite in that it pays *h* the compliment of assuming that he is polite (it is polite to make an offer, but it also threatens *h*'s negative face, so it is often more polite to decline an offer and thus avoid the threat of incurring a debt). However, *s* may refuse to accept this politeness and prove that he is wholeheartedly committed to his offer (thus adhering to the Tact Maxim) and employ the negation in "Won't you have something to eat?" This most polite

expression implicates all the assumptions of the previous ones, but adds one more: *s* assumes that *h* assumes that *s* is being polite. It can be seen that every additional implicature of polite beliefs adds an extra degree of politeness - and both are augmented by the increasing obliquity. Although there is a risk of threatening the hearer's positive face (by being indirect) and slipping into irony, the addition of the negation generally contributes to the level of politeness resulting from an increasing adherence to the Tact Maxim and the Generosity Maxim. However, if a customs official chooses to ask "Haven't you anything to declare?" or - even worse - "Haven't you something to declare?" instead of the neutral "Have you anything to declare?", he is practically accusing the hearer of smuggling. In this case, the addition of the negation actually makes the question less polite and threatens the positive face of the hearer by the challenge. Obliquity works in the opposite direction due to, of course, the ambiguous nature of negation - when employed with impolite beliefs (such as "You have something to declare"), increasing indirectness is accompanied by increasing impoliteness. The dual function of the negation can also be clearly seen in Polish. "Chyba nie chcesz teraz wyjść?" uttered to a guest is clearly much more polite than "Chyba nie chcesz teraz jeść?" Although both utterances pose a threat to the hearer's negative face (by questioning his authority in deciding about his own actions), only the first one shows awareness of his positive face and, in addition, expresses the polite belief that the host is having a good time with the guest and does not want him to leave. For the sake of avoiding going further into ambiguities, let us disregard the fact that a polite belief is what the speaker purports to believe, and not what he actually believes.

If even single negation is so problematic, it comes as no surprise that double negation presents itself both as a nest of ambiguity and a politeness (or impoliteness) strategy. The sentence "It is not an impossible task." is ambiguous between the semantic reading (consistent with the logical Law of Double Negation): "It is a possible task." and the pragmatic reading, in which the two negations do not cancel each other, but instead serve as a device for showing hesitation and uncertainty. The second reading allows the speaker to adhere to the Agreement Maxim: "Minimize disagreement between self and other", thus showing awareness of the hearer's positive face, employing a mitigating device and exhibiting a will to negotiate the propositional content of the utterance. However, the ambiguity of an utterance containing a double negation may reach even farther, as the speaker may choose to employ the Irony Principle. By saying "You are not an unwelcome guest.", the speaker's intention may be indeed to offend the hearer and discourage him from visiting the speaker's house (mock-politeness). This understanding would be further corroborated by

referring again to the notion of beliefs. What people tend to understate via litotes are impolite beliefs. For instance, the marked and apparently uninformative construction "I wasn't overimpressed by her speech." is perceived as an indirect - and therefore polite - way of expressing disapproval. Whenever a polite belief is present in the speaker's mind, it tends to be exaggerated, as in the hyperbole "That was a delicious meal!"<sup>5</sup> Unless, of course, the praise is directed towards the speaker - then it tends to be understated, as in "That wasn't such a bad meal that I cooked." However, a litotes of the kind "You are not an unwelcome guest." always carries the risk of being misunderstood by the hearer as mock-impoliteness, and - according to the Banter Principle - interpreted as a wholehearted invitation. Therefore, although the flouting of the R-Principle (minimization of form) is always understood as a necessary precondition for observing the Q-Principle (sufficiency of informative content), the informative content loaded by the speaker is not always the same as the one unloaded by the hearer. The inadequacy of the conduit metaphor (expressed e.g. by the saying "Never load a sentence with more words than it can hold" <sup>6</sup>) is therefore a result of the ambiguity of negation, which always has to be read in close connection with its pragmatic background. Only this way will the flouting of the Maxim of Quality (by a hyperbole) and of the Maxim of Quantity (by a litotes) give rise to politeness implicatures.

If we choose to accept the pragmatic ambiguity of negation together with the existence of Horn's metalinguistic negation, the statement "I didn't manage to trap two MONGEES, I managed to trap two MONGOOSES." in response to "So you managed to trap two mongeese." is downright impolite. According to courses for teachers, linguistic mistakes are to be corrected by overtalking and not by explicit specification of the offending item. Thus, the pedagogically correct response to "So you managed to trap two mongeese." would probably be: "Yes. I managed to trap two mongooses. Do you like mongooses?" It would also show awareness of the interlocutor's positive face by not making him feel inferior or inadequate in any way.

Some people have claimed that negation, after all, is absolutely non-ambiguous. Freud understood clinical denial in a very definite way: "~p doesn't just presuppose p ..., ~p asserts p!"<sup>7</sup> Such an attitude in an obvious face-threatening act, as it threatens the patient's negative face. He is not free from impositions not only in the sphere of actions, but also in his own thoughts. Most of us would, however, agree with Kurrik: "Negation is always tantalizing, provocative, and ambiguous".<sup>8</sup> Its ambiguity not only threatens our face, but also makes communication more difficult. One might therefore wonder why negation is still present in natural languages. Let me answer this problem by saying: "We don't know."

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Blakemore, p. 34

<sup>2</sup> Levinson, p. 146

<sup>3</sup> The present discussion is based on Leech, pp. 160-171.

<sup>4</sup> Leech, p. 81

<sup>5</sup> The tendency to overstate polite beliefs can be attributed to the Pollyanna Hypothesis. The heroine of Eleanor H. Porter's novel *Pollyanna* was famous for her optimism. Although all members of the household hated Mondays because of the washing that was done on them, Pollyanna found a reason for liking them - for a whole week was ahead before the next Monday.

<sup>6</sup> Reddy, p. 167

<sup>7</sup> Horn, p. 93

<sup>8</sup> Kurrik, p. 207

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## On the Nature of Negation: Markedness and Echoic Use\*

Steps on the stairs are heard  
But not those.  
The hand that puts fish on the plate  
not the one that used to.  
Something does not start  
at its usual time.  
Something does not take place  
as it should.<sup>1</sup>

The basic philosophical question concerning negation is ontological in nature: can and does negation exist on its own, in itself, independently? Do negative statements refer to states of affairs in the same way as affirmatives do? Many philosophers and linguists object to such a possibility, since if we look closer at the distribution of negation, it becomes quite clear that it is an entity of a distinct function.

The belief of the priority of affirmation can be traced back to Saint Thomas Aquinas<sup>2</sup>, who claimed that the pronunciation of affirmatives is simpler, and thus prior to negatives. Affirmation is also unmarked and psychologically less complex; consequently, acquired first. The notion of markedness is usually applied to pairs of simple rather than complex lexical items, such as happy – unhappy, in which the unmarked item may be understood as a superordinate referring to both, like man (superordinate) comprises man (masculine) and woman. At first sight, pairs of sentences do not seem to share

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this property, since "positive sentences and predicates do not normally exhibit an extended use which is neutral as between the unmarked (positive) and marked (negative) members of the entire category."<sup>3</sup> There are, however, arguments showing that we may speak about markedness of negative utterances.

The first comes from the analogy with fixed binominals and freezes, that is conjunctions with fixed ordering of their conjuncts, for instance "big and small", "happy and unhappy", "more or less". It is clear that the behaviour of the pairs of affirmatives and negatives is in some cases similar, for example:

- (1) He did or he didn't – it doesn't matter.
- (1a) \*He didn't or he did – it doesn't matter.
- (2) You are guilty or you aren't – it won't bring her back to life.
- (2a) \*You aren't guilty or you are – it won't bring her back to life.

The next piece of evidence comes from general who-questions in Polish. If we can say that the ungrammatical form (3) *Kto pukala do drzwi?* (Who knocked at the door? – with the feminine ending of the verb) is a proof that *kobieta* (woman) is marked, we may also consider the improbability of the negative (4) *Kto nie pukal do drzwi?* (Who didn't knock at the door?) as a proof that negation is marked. There is of course a difference, since we may find a context in which the sentence could have been uttered: for example during a TV show where there is a family competition in which everybody has to knock at the door or during a door-knocking training session. But still, we need a very special context, so the sentence is not neutral.

The small survey (or rather an experiment) that I have made<sup>4</sup> has shown that the negative sentences my respondents had to consider, although all probably true, were treated as weird and uttered in special contexts only. The distribution of negation shows that in a reasonable and relevance ruled conversation it always has to refer to something.

Therefore negation is normally not used in an opening context. Imagine someone giving a speech: it is natural to expect that she will start it by:

- (5) Ladies and gentlemen. My name is Jane Basket. I will be talking about the state of English agriculture...
- and not by:
- (5a) Ladies and gentlemen. My name is not Jane Basket. I won't be talking about the state of English agriculture...

The second opening could have taken place only if there had been a change in the schedule and the hearers expected Jane Basket and a speech about agriculture.

As we can see here, negation may refer to a certain expectation: of a group of people as in (5a) or one person

(6) A to B: I can't help you. – only if B expects A can help him.

or even society

(7) He doesn't want to make a career. (And it is expected by society that people make careers).

Very often different expectations are mixed, because for example social or cultural expectations get internalised. Sometimes an expectation of one of the speakers may be found false by another:

(8)

A: He doesn't give me any money.

B: Well, I don't think he should.

It shows that there is clearly an implicature of A's statement: He should/is expected to give me some money.

The notion of expectation seems, however, to be too narrow to cover all negative utterances. Horn's examples of metalinguistic negation<sup>5</sup> escape the possibility of treating them as referring to some expectation<sup>6</sup>. In:

(9) We didn't see the hippopotamuses. We saw the hippopotami.

it's the specific form of plural that is negated or, we may say, a belief or an assumption of the speaker that the plural is formed in this way. In

(10) Tables don't have teeth. (one of the survey examples)

it is also a certain belief (of a child probably) that is negated. Such a belief or assumption may be directly or indirectly uttered by a speaker; it may also be hidden, but assumed by the speaker.

Carston observes that metalinguistic negation could be understood as an echoic phenomenon,<sup>7</sup> developing the notion of echoic utterances proposed by Sperber and Wilson.<sup>8</sup> Sperber and Wilson divide representations (utterances and thoughts) into descriptive (representing states of affairs) and interpretive (based on resemblance and representing another representation – for example, the thought of a speaker). Interpretive utterances cover loose talk, metaphor and, what interests us most, irony and other echoic utterances. Carston rightly observes that metalinguistic negation is also echoic in nature: the most convincing examples here are those in which the clause on which negation operates does not undergo any changes although in descriptive negation it would:

(11) He has some money.

(11a) He doesn't have *some* money – he is a bloody millionaire!

(11b) He doesn't have *any* money – he's gone bankrupt. (examples mine)



Metalinguistic negation is undoubtedly echoic: but what about descriptive negation? Carston writes that treating descriptive negation also as echoic would "collapse all negations into a single category (of echoic use) while the one thing everyone seems agreed on is that there are two distinct types, those that have been generally assumed to be descriptive/truth-conditional and those that have been called metalinguistic."<sup>9</sup> Such a way of reasoning is, however, unfounded.

Firstly, saying that all negation is echoic does not prevent us from dividing it into descriptive and metalinguistic. Secondly, the distinction into descriptive and metalinguistic negation is not clear-cut, even the examples that Carston gives show that the negative utterance:

(12) He doesn't need FOUR MATS; he needs MORE EATS.

is not only metalinguistic and echoic, but also operates on truth conditions, whereas in the example with hippopotamuses the negation concerns only the language level. There are also many examples in between, like:

(13) I haven't DEPRIVED you of my lecture on negation; I have SPARED you it.

In which only a non-truth-conditional aspect of the utterance is negated, but still there is a certain descriptive aspect of the negation. Irony is echoic, but may operate both on truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional content. In the standard example:

(14) It's a lovely day for a picnic, indeed.

the speaker rejects the opinion previously uttered, denying a certain state of affairs, whereas in

(15) You saw the hippopotamuses, really?

the ironic repetition of the ill-formed plural does not affect the truth-conditional content of the previously uttered sentence.

In both (14) and (15) the ironical sentences can be replaced by negative statements:

(16) It's not a lovely day for a picnic.

(17) You didn't see the hippopotamuses, you saw the hippopotami.

Then, if we agree that (17) is echoic, we should say the same about (16) and many other cases of descriptive negation.

Echoicity is gradable: that is it is not a matter of 'either-or', but rather of the extent to which utterances echo some other utterances. It is true about irony: (14) could have been uttered as a repetition of somebody's statement (e.g.

another person said the day before that the following day would be a lovely day for a picnic), but not necessarily: it may be sarcastic repetition of the thought of the speaker or an assumed thought of someone else. For example, if someone invites you for a picnic you may think that he has checked the weather forecast and knows that the weather would be fine. Similar thing happens in negation. The same negative statement may be more or less echoic, depending on the context.

Let us now briefly look at some of the examples from the experiment in different contexts.

(18a)

A: (a child) I had a horrible dream this night. There was a table and it had teeth and it bit me.

B: (his mother) Tables don't have teeth.

(18b)

A: Mum, the table bit me.

B: Tables don't have teeth.

(18c)

A: I'm afraid of the table!!!

B: Tables don't have teeth.

(18d)

A: Aaaa...!!!??!!!!

B: Tables don't have teeth.

(19a)

A: (a drunken uncle) Give him some beer (pointing to a baby). He likes it.

B: (mother) My one-month-old baby doesn't drink beer.

(19b)

A: (a drunken uncle – gives a bottle of beer to a baby without saying anything)

B: My one-month-old baby doesn't drink beer.

(20a)

A: (father, talking about his 1-year-old daughter) We may leave her in the garden and take a nap.

B: (mother) Children are not plants. We can't leave her alone.

(20b)

(The father left the child on the sun)

B: (mother) Children are not plants. She needs some protection against the sun.

As we see, the negative utterance may be either a denial of what has been said, or what has been implicated or merely thought or assumed. We may say that when negation operates on what has been said it is more echoic than when the speaker only assumes that something has been thought. Theoretically we may also utter thousands of negative statements which are not echoic – therefore I do not want to say that all negative utterances are echoic - but as reasonable creatures we just do not do it in real-life situations.

A piece of poetry that I gave in the motto of this essay is not only for decoration: an analysis of different sorts of written texts shows how negation behaves, and that its use depends on register. Why is it so widely used in poetry and rarely used for example in "National Geographic"? Well, the answer may be that texts from the magazine are informative, that is their main function is to introduce new information, whereas poetry, especially if it deals with some philosophy of the world, is usually to reflect on, reanalyse and rewrite questions and answers that have been stated for ages, so before introducing his own order of the world, the author must deny the one that was found true by his predecessors.

## Appendix - an experiment

I have asked a few people to discuss the sentences and decide if and when they may possibly have been / be uttered. The experiment does not aim at giving any statistics on the subject, but only at presenting some examples of possible contexts and general attitudes to "weird" negative sentences.

### Sentences

(1) Tables don't have teeth.

A parent to a young child who's had a nightmare.

Maybe uttered by a mother to a child who is scared of the table. Similar to the expression: "It won't bite."

Improbable.

So your bad feelings are unreasonable. I still think we should buy this one.

It is said by a mother to a young child after he has hit his head on the table and is very angry with a table.

Sounds okay. Conceivable in a discussion about the nature of categories either in the abstract or when discussing kinds of saws.

I think it's OK. The situation: a child sitting at the table suddenly shouts "The table bit me!".

Well, the sentence is true, but I can't imagine a context in which it could be uttered.

It doesn't make sense.

(2) There is nothing in this house: no elephants, no postmen, no cockroaches.

OK. Two friends, a bit drunk, have joked about a deserted house and go and see if the jokes were true..

OK. In answer to an investigative line of inquiry.

So therefore go back to bed and sleep.

The sentence is said by a real estate agent when accused of trying to sell a cockroach infected house to a buyer.

Two situations come to mind: 1) miniature house, toy elephant, postmen, cockroaches or 2) a really bad script for an adventure film with elephants, postmen and cockroaches as continuing motifs.

Weird indeed

It's difficult to figure out why someone could expect to find elephants, postmen or cockroaches in a house. What I find most strange is the presence of so heterogeneous items in the enumeration. Maybe with one item it would be easier to find a context.

It doesn't make sense. You can't keep cockroaches or elephants at home.

(3) My one-month-old baby doesn't drink beer.

OK.: a parent to a drunken uncle who wants to feed the baby some of his beer. Difficult to think of context.

I lactate milk, don't I? (angry response by an alcoholic mother)

Sentence three is said to a doctor after he informs the mother he can find no reason for the child's dizzy spells.

Sounds OK. Many situations: A mother talking to another mother whose behaviour shocks her or to relatives who are teasing her.

OK.

I think the sentence is okay. A possible context: a parent in a marginal neighbourhood refusing the accusation of giving beer to her baby in order to make him/her sleep.

(4) I'm not a table.

OK.; Me (1.52 metres) telling my friend not to place something on my head (really happened).

Ironical.

Fine, perhaps uttered by somebody who has to wait too long holding a drink/plate of food for somebody.

Get that plate off my back! (in response to misfired joke, while kneeling on the floor)

The sentence is said by an abused wife after her husband slams in fist down hard on the dining room table

Sounds okay. A comment one person makes to another who is overloading the first with staff or asking for detailed statistical information.

Probably this can be said to an over-playful child.

I think the sentence is OK. A possible context: as an answer to someone who asks me to hold a lot of things he carry because he wants his hands to be free to do something that I think is not important at all.

Nobody is a table, so it doesn't make sense.

(5) Dzudzuwiribaridzudzuwaranserta does not exist.

OK.: a family playing scrabble.

..and there is no bunyip under your bed either, so go back to sleep

It is said to his teacher by a student who is receiving an "F" on a paper he was supposed to write on James Joyce's "Finnegans Wake."

A line from a classical Indian religious text?

A person assumes Dzudzu... exists and asks a question about it. However, I think that the reaction "What on earth is Dzudzu" is more natural.

Maybe in a tale where someone talks about someone or something called "Dzu..." and another character of the story thinks it doesn't exist

(6) Children are not plants.

OK. Parents discussing the education of their kids.

... They need love and affection as well as simple nourishment. Fine.

They need exercise! Go take them to the park, will you?

The sentence is said by a mother to her husband who refuses to play with their child preferring to watch television.

Sounds okay. An FBI official vetoing the use of child agents, an announcement on the amount of sun exposure safe for children...

A possible context: as an answer to someone who leaves his children alone in the garden for a long time.

(7) Don't play this aria on your nose.

?

This reminds me of the Monthly Python sketch about the "Man with a tape recorder up his nose"...

Blow it properly before you start singing.

The sentence is said by a music teacher whose student can't get a tune right.

One nose flute player giving advice on musical selections to another.

Don't make sounds with your nose or don't play standing on your nose (in a circus).

Hmm, this was tough...maybe an adult telling a nasty boy not to make strange noises with his nose...

## General comments

People who took part in the survey are my friends (mostly e-mail friends) or relatives of different age. They are intelligent and creative – that's why there were many quite inventive answers. I think that among people with no education there would be much more answers of the type "It's rubbish", although I haven't checked it. There were also many comments about spelling (by accident my spelling of cockroaches was wrong so many people wrote that what was wrong with the sentence was this particular spelling mistake). I haven't put such answers in the summary, since they are irrelevant. I also got the answers like: "Are you kidding or it's serious?" and "It's all rubbish", which show that the sentences do not occur in neutral context and people don't know what to do with them. There were also general comments, like: "The sentences would not be uttered in a normal conversation" or: "They are all okay, but within a special context. Typically, all it requires is a bit of imagination to make just anything acceptable.", but also "Of course they may have been uttered. Saturday night, absolutely drunk."

Of course one may be prone to ask why I have chosen weird sentences to show that negative sentences are echoic. Of course they are not more echoic than "normal" negative statements, but when I tried to ask people using normal examples, like "I don't have money.", they would just say "It's true." or "It's OK.", because such sentences are so often used that we don't really realise that for saying "Mark doesn't have money" we must assume that he should or could have some, since we won't tell that if Mark is a dog. Funny sentences were much better for finding appropriate contexts.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Wisława Szymborska, "Kot w pustym mieszkaniu" (A Cat in an Empty Flat), translation mine, in Szymborska (1997)
- <sup>2</sup> Quoted by Horn (1989), p 154
- <sup>3</sup> Horn (1989), p. 154
- <sup>4</sup> The full description of the survey is in the APPENDIX
- <sup>5</sup> Quoted by Carston (1996)
- <sup>6</sup> One must be careful with the notion of expectation, since we may also say that forming the plural hippopotamuses comes from the expectation that this form will be correct. The notions of expectation, belief and assumption are very imprecise and they need further discussion.
- <sup>7</sup> Carston (1996)
- <sup>8</sup> D. Sperber and D. Wilson (1995), D. Wilson and D. Sperber (1998)
- <sup>9</sup> Carston (1996), p. 325

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