FOLIO

A STUDENTS' JOURNAL

LITERATURE | CULTURE | LINGUISTICS

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The assistant editors are new, but the 'old' ones were helping them, and there is a new member on the Board representing American studies. As you might have noticed, the cover is also new. What has not changed is the main editor and the fact that we give you the best essays written by the students of our Institute.

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In the meantime, as always, enjoy reading!

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The Male Perspective on Femmes Fatales:
The Comparative Analysis of Alfred Tennyson's "Lady Poems"

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Alfred Tennyson's interest in the woman question was so thoroughly explored in his poetry that around the publication of *Idylls of the King*, Alfred Austin, the following Poet Laureate, accused Tennyson's work of effeminization in lieu of former grandeur (Peterson 39). Even though the shift of focus from epic heroes to female characters might have baffled contemporary critics, Tennyson's poems about women were still significantly shaped by the masculine perspective. Despite their explicit agency, the heroines could not fully exert it as their efforts became violently suppressed. For this reason, the dilemma whether Tennyson was a feminist acknowledging the inferior position of Victorian women or a conservative supporter of the separate spheres ideology is difficult to solve. However, what I would like to demonstrate is that the ambiguous images of women in his early poetry reveal the anxiety that the superior status of masculinity might be endangered. The threat was a direct result of changing attitudes towards the social position of women in the nineteenth century. This process, in turn, led to the emergence of literary heroines whose physical allure combined with social or sexual transgressions gave them the status of femmes fatales. Such a label can be also used to describe many heroines that appear in Tennyson's early poetry, such as the titular characters of "Kate," "Rosalind," and "Lilian."

The first two pieces were published as part of *Poems* (1832) while the third one comes from the collection *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). Both of these volumes contain numerous lyrics entitled with female names, which became described by the critics as "the lady poems." Despite the fact that the texts, seemingly dealing with feminine emotionality, were the main reason for accusing Tennyson of unmanliness, as Łuczyńska-Hołdys points out, the poems are much more reflective of the masculine perception of women (134). In fact, the heroine in each of the three poems is described by her male lover or suitor who displays a negative attitude towards her as a result of her non-compliance with the desirable norms of femininity. Consequently, in all the three poems, female characters are exposed to maltreatment and injustice, which makes them victims not only of

men's ignorance but also the Victorian code of conduct. Interestingly, the poems, which seem to be focused on the heroines, act simultaneously as dramatic monologues and reveal much more about the male speakers. Since, even though the heroines' power becomes acknowledged, it is simultaneously subdued by the men who describe them. Such an approach reflects the uncertainty about the gender roles in society where the strict division between the feminine and the masculine spheres starts being questioned. Therefore, Tennyson in his early poems addresses one of the most important issues in Victorian literature, which Christ identifies as a connection between gender and authorship (385). In the initial part of the essay, I will analyse the representations of women in each of the three poems. Then, I will concentrate on the speakers and their violence directed at the heroines as a subconscious strategy used to repress the fear of emasculation. Finally, I will present some ambiguous images that allow for a more empowering reading on behalf of the female characters.

The three analysed poems are just a few among Tennyson's lyrics that reflect his interest in the social status of Victorian women. Despite the fact that Kate and Rosalind are the names of Shakespearean characters who appear in, respectively, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *As You Like It*, Tennyson uses their characters to explore feminine nature and the social role of contemporary women (Peterson 25–26). The choice of Kate, the "shrew" subjected to her lover's abuse aimed at imposing her obedience, and Rosalind, the exuberant and influential character who ignores the restraints of her gender in the name of love, provides a meaningful insight into the situation of Victorian women. In fact, the restrictions placed on the Shakespearean characters accurately reflect the rules of proper behaviour and societal expectations imposed on women in nineteenth-century England.

At the beginning of the poem, Kate is portrayed as somewhat frightening. All her features – her angry air, "brightblack" hair and eyes (2), laughter sounding "wild and shrill" (3) – make her demonic and, therefore, opposed to the "angel in the house" ideal. By being outspoken and demanding, Kate rejects the desired standard of femininity, which, in turn, leads to her being rejected by the speaker. Through his description of Kate, he mostly aims at humiliating her and, for that purpose, he uses military imagery, which dominates in her portrayal. For instance, Kate's features are compared with certain characteristics of weapons ("Kate hath a spirit ever strung / Like a new bow, and bright and sharp / As edges of the scymetar" [10–12]) and the lady herself is described as "pure and true as blades of steel" (16). Even though such images might appear positive, in fact, they serve as means of ridiculing Kate's behaviour. The idea of a woman-soldier seems

unnatural to the speaker as it indicates crossing the boundaries between the separate spheres of men and women. Kate's bold attitude and controversial views, including her perception of men as weak, reveal her lack of submissiveness and passivity that she is expected to display as a woman. According to the speaker, such a conduct is a clear sign of Kate's arrogance, for which she should be punished. Therefore, he combines the imagery of weapons and knighthood, which are associated with the men's sphere, with the unladylike Kate's qualities, creating the portrayal of a highly undesirable femininity. The speaker's description of Kate indicates that the lack of compliance with the societal expectations imposed on women is met with rejection from that society. In order for Kate to be desired by men, she must act according to the rules they make or else she will be ridiculed, humiliated and unable to marry.

The threat of rejection underlines the depiction of Rosalind as well. She is portrayed as bold, careless and light-hearted. Her presentation is dominated by vivid nature imagery, which reflects Rosalind's energy and freshness. Indeed, she is characterised by very dynamic images – lightning flash, leaping stream, or driving sunlight, which symbolise the impulsiveness and vivacity of her nature. Despite apparently positive associations with such imagery, for the speaker, a woman overflowing with energy and passion is undesirable. After all, Victorian ladies were supposed to be passive and static rather than active and dynamic. For this reason, he diminishes Rosalind accusing her of recklessness ("Careless both of wind and weather" [7]), selfishness ("You care not for another's pains, / Because you are the soul of joy" [19–20]), and outspokenness ("And your words are seeming-bitter, / Sharp and few" [30–31]). Rosalind's independent spirit is reminiscent of the wit and vitality displayed by her Shakespearean namesake whose scope of agency becomes extended when she enters into the male sphere dressed up as a shepherd. According to Park, the male disguise not only keeps her from social rejection experienced, for example, by Kate from *The Taming of the Shrew* (however, as Tennyson's "Kate" demonstrates, the male disguise is no protection whatsoever if attributed to a woman by a man) but it also allows her to fully exercise her power (270–271). Since Tennyson's Rosalind does not hide behind the mask of masculinity, she exposes her bold spirit to the speaker's resentment. What is more, the source of Rosalind's energy might be sexual, which becomes indicated by the allusions to spring – the season associated with youth and fertility. However, Rosalind's awakening sexuality is condemned by the speaker. He believes that women should suppress their desires instead of acting upon them or, otherwise, men are obliged to remind women of the "proper" behaviour. This idea is indicated by how Rosalind, compared to a flying falcon, is

being dragged down from the sky by the speaker and literally trapped on the earth. The image of Rosalind's flight can also reflect her desire to realise some ambitions outside the domestic sphere, which would make her less susceptible to the speaker's influence. Since he does not want to lose control over Rosalind, he depicts her as a bird, bound and tamed, completely reliant upon the speaker's will. Yet, it is worth emphasising that the bird to which Rosalind is compared – the falcon – is associated with independent and predatory nature, which makes the entrapping attempts even more humiliating and cruel.

The suppression of female agency dominates also the image of Lilian, which is characterised by clear infantilization and, consequently, imposed inferiority. The speaker presents Lilian as if she was a child especially through the language he uses. For instance, he addresses her as little, describes her hands as tiny, or names her "Airy, Fairy Lilian" (1), which is reminiscent of a child's nickname. The prosody is equally meaningful as the poem's rhythm resembles the one of a nursery rhyme. Moreover, the speaker's description of Lilian is very ambiguous – she is both "innocent-arch" (13) and "cunning-simple" (13); she has "baby-roses with her cheeks" (17) and "lightning laughters" (16). Peterson attributes this inability to properly interpret Lilian's character to the frustration he feels because of his sexual desire towards her (30). Such contradictions of her nature also illustrate the opposition of "angel in the house" and "fallen woman" – two major labels available for Victorian women, which influenced the way they were perceived by men. The speaker is not sure which of the images – the pure respectable lady or the promiscuous seducer – should be applied to Lilian, so he blames her unstable nature for this dilemma. However, at the end of the poem any label of femininity cannot protect Lilian from his abuse. The speaker threatens to crush her just like the rose-leaf whose delicacy symbolises Lilian's femininity. As a result, the fragile nature of Lilian that apparently needs man's protection becomes subjected to his destruction.

The representations of all three heroines are very similar in their pejorative character. However, it must be emphasised that these images are constructed by the male speakers who share some crucial characteristics as well. All of them love or desire the female characters but their affection is not unconditional – they expect women to satisfy the requirements of a Victorian ideal implying docility and obedience. The speakers' expectations of women are socially approved so any failure to comply with these standards puts the female characters at risk of social contempt. In fact, it is the threat of rejection that the speakers use as a tool of imposing obedience. The speaker in "Kate" implies that the lack of a husband would make it difficult for Kate to survive in society while the speakers of

"Rosalind" and "Lilian" threaten the female characters to lose respect and become condemned as fallen women. Enforcing femininity associated with purity, modesty and submissiveness allows the speakers to feel in control. Moreover, such a strategy enables them to cover their own anxieties resulting from the fear of losing their superior status. In order to enhance their dominance, the speakers stoop to either emotional abuse (like the speaker in "Kate" who ridicules her), or physical violence (like the speakers in "Rosalind" and "Lilian").

The cruelty of Kate's suitor is displayed through the mocking portrayal of her that he creates after having been rejected and accused of weakness. As a response, he claims that even if he was a victorious knight fighting valiantly in battles, he would still be unable to meet Kate's unreasonable expectations of men. However, simultaneously, he seems to overlook the fact that the expectations imposed on women are even more excessive. Moreover, the speaker's fantasy about becoming "an armed knight" who dreams about Kate as his courtly lady might indicate the nostalgia for the chivalric tradition (Łuczyńska-Hołdys 140). Inside the speaker's fantasy, he would not have to dread emasculation since the realm dominated by the chivalric ideals would make the gender boundaries less likely to become violated. Therefore, the speaker's mockery of Kate is prompted not only by his self-centredness and offended pride but it also results from his fear. The speaker states that if he is not bold enough for Kate, no man ever will be, because, as strength and bravery are traditionally "manly" features, he perceives Kate's accusations as a challenge to his masculinity. In order to prevent her from entering the men's sphere and endangering his superior position, he turns to a defence mechanism and ridicules her as a woman-soldier. He warns her that crossing the borders of feminine behaviour is unwelcome and would make her look absurd.

The threat in "Rosalind" is articulated in the last section of the poem, in which the speaker suggests that the woman's sexual desire leads to her being deceitful and to play with man's feelings. In other words, he threatens Rosalind that if she does not suppress her drives, she risks becoming a "fallen woman"– the only alternative choice if she decides to reject the role of an "angel in the house." The speaker's intention derives from his need of control over his lover and anxiety about losing his influence. Therefore, he wants to make sure that he is still able to execute his power and, for this reason, he turns to sexual violence, which is implied by his binding of Rosalind "in silken cords" (49) and silencing her by "kiss[ing] away the bitter words" (50). What is identified as the most powerful trigger for the speaker's aggression is the perplexing sight of the heroine, which he describes as bright, glittering, and piercing (him) with light. Being subjected to Rosalind's stare

causes the speaker's anxiety, which he represses by depriving Rosalind of the possibility to exert her agency. The disturbing effect that Rosalind's gaze has on the speaker can be associated with another femme fatale figure – Medusa – whose deadly sight brought death upon men. The metaphorical death that the speaker fears can be related to the realisation of his weaknesses, such as possessiveness or jealousy. Moreover, the speaker's encounter with the female gaze is reflective of the power relations between him and Rosalind since becoming the subject of her sight deprives him of his masculine authority. In fact, according to Christ, one of the major concerns in relation to gender representation in Tennyson's poetry is "how to preserve the power and gratification that the gaze bestows without its accompanying curse" (388). Therefore, the speaker desires to be a gazer himself without bearing the consequences of becoming simultaneously the object of the woman's sight. Since Rosalind's brave and vivacious nature indicating her desire for freedom reminds him that the power assigned to him on behalf of his masculinity has its limits, he uses violence in order to provide himself with an illusion of complete dominance. What is also perplexing about the portrayal of violence in "Rosalind" is the implication that the cruel attitude of the speaker is shared by men in general. Łuczyńska-Hołdys draws attention to how the speaker's singular "I" is transformed into the plural "we" ("We must bind / And keep you fast, my Rosalind" [42-43]), which, apart from suggesting the generic masculine perspective, implies the use of group violence to subdue the female character (142).

The image of physical assault is also prevalent in "Lilian." In the last stanza, the speaker directly threatens the heroine that he will "crush" her, which implies inflicting not only psychological but also physical pain. The speaker attributes the reason for the use of violence to Lilian – its victim. He claims that it is her playing with the speaker's feelings that provokes his anger and resentment. However, the use of violence is a sign of his own frustration, desire, and uncertainty that he is unable to manage. Therefore, he needs to ensure himself in his position of authority by imposing fear and taking control. Hughes attributes the masculine uncertainty to the general tendency of Tennyson's poetry identified as a blend of male and female counterparts of the self (97). The speaker's inability to interact with women and embrace his feminine aspect results in "the vertiginous sexual panic, self-alienation, and resentful emotional dependence behind the brittle male front" (103). Therefore, in order to suppress any indications of his feminine self, the speaker turns to the "masculine" expression associated with physical strength, which he channels into brutality. What is more, by calling Lilian "cruel," he projects on her his own cruelty as if to distance himself from his own

behaviour. However, what seems particularly striking in the image of violence in the poem is the clash between the infantile tone and the speaker's brutality. In this case, the child-like representation of Lilian has an effect of enhancing the speaker's image as a violent tyrant.

Even though all three poems can be perceived as utter condemnation of the hopeless heroines, some images used by Tennyson are ambivalent and allow for an alternative interpretation which empowers the female characters. For example, in "Kate" the military imagery which aims at presenting the lady as masculine and, therefore, unnatural and contemptible, might be read as a symbol of powerful femininity. Because Kate is outspoken, blunt and courageous, she can be seen as a speaker's equal who does not need his protection. Her strength is the reason why she elicits the speaker's fear about his superior status. Moreover, the bird symbolism in "Kate" and "Rosalind" is similarly ambivalent. Kate's laughter is compared to a sound made by the woodpecker. This comparison exposes the stridency of her voice, which completes Kate's image of a crude and wild creature. In "Rosalind," the speaker addresses the lady with a patronizing expression "my falcon Rosalind" (18), which is an ironic manner of mocking her boldness and recklessness. Nonetheless, birds are culturally associated with freedom, so their images used by the speakers to diminish the female characters might be perversely read as the empowering implications of freedom the women desire.

In addition, the poems indicate the prevalence of the male perspective in the portrayal of women, which is frequently used to improve men's own image of themselves. This idea is apparent in the case of Lilian who, at first, does not seem as bold and powerful as Kate and Rosalind. Because of the speaker's infantilising description and the threat of violence, Lilian can be easily read only as a vulnerable victim. However, her portrayal seems much more complex. Since the speaker cannot bear the Lilian's laughter and penetrating sight, he wants to "hush" her – deprive the heroine of her voice, agency and control over her own image. He manipulates Lilian's portrayal because in her confident look, he notices her awareness of his weaknesses and impulses. Even though Lilian might not be as bold or vivacious as Kate and Rosalind, she is perceptive and smart, so she must be punished and presented as the one to blame. The distortion of her image, as well as those of Kate's and Rosalind's, indicates the problem of men's dominant perspective, which deprives women of their own voice and power over their own image. Consequently, women's fate and social approval become subjected to men's, not necessarily fair, judgement. Yet, the mere fact of silencing women indicates that what they might want to say could be powerful, challenging, and, therefore, unwelcome.

To conclude, Tennyson's lady poems – Kate," "Rosalind," and "Lilian" – are clearly ambiguous in their representation of female characters, which reveals the underlying concern about the decline of distinctive gender roles and growing independence of women. For this reason, Tennyson's heroines, whose bluntness and energy contradict the desired "angel in the house" ideal, are ridiculed, silenced, or even assaulted by the male speakers. In fact, the distorted images of women and the threats of violence are used as defence mechanisms behind which the speakers hide their anxieties about losing superiority. Therefore, the poems are about the female characters as much as about the male speakers who, by describing the heroines, undeliberately reveal their fears. Even though it is not clear whether Tennyson identified with his speakers in terms of their concerns, he undoubtedly captured the psychological complexities of the reaction to substantial changes which undermine the status quo. However, the poems do not indicate that such anxieties should prevent social developments. The recurrent implications of the heroines' independence and agency indicate that, despite the attempts to suppress their freedom, the female characters will continue to strive for independence until they achieve it.

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A Play with Laurel Wreath, Crown of Thorns, Iron Rod and Only One Throne

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Each year in 15th century medieval Europe, university students in many countries, but most prominently in the city of Cracow, Poland, gained power over the whole city during the feast called *Breve Regnum*, or brief reign. They would choose among themselves the King and Queen, as well as the entire royal court. The feast was intended for fun and the days were spent rejoicing and drinking. Also the students sang many medieval songs including *Breve Regnum*, a melody extolling the time of their rule. Still, in the song's words lurks the awareness that the reign, indeed, is short and will not last.

It may seem counter-intuitive, but desires like those of the celebrating Cracovian students are not unlike the longings expressed by the characters of the play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams (henceforth *SND*). Some of the characters resemble unfulfilled semi-royal figures who reign for a short period of time, with the difference that at times they fail to notice that their reign should be merely for fun – although this point may, nevertheless, be discerned by the vigilant audience. Ultimately, the play is mainly focused on the female character Blanche DuBois (Adler 35). Still, different accents and angles are visible when the play is actually staged and brought to life. Then, as was apparent in the inaugural performances, the figure of Stanley Kowalski – played at the time by Marlon Brando – also comes to the fore, to the point of nearly overshadowing the role of Blanche (Spector 546-547). Therefore, these two core personalities in the play may be metaphorically "coupled together" when it comes to their royal desires. Furthermore, they will be joined together in sexual intercourse, which, although forced, will on a certain level seal their relationship in the play. As John J. Fritscher points out, various elements and symbols in *A Streetcar* bear a resemblance to religious imagery; the play "moves its people in a deftly choreographed ritual from the introit of scene one, played appropriately on the steps of the house, to Stella's offertory to Blanche, to Blanche's repetitious ritual cleansing in white tubs of water, to the ritual of *The Poker Night* played around an altar of a table by men whom Williams' stage directions place in ritual vestments of primary colors" (201). Such intricate imagery almost instantly evokes the image

of the royal court together with its elaborate rituals and rules of proper conduct. Yet the Stanley-Blanche relationship resembles more a dynamic of a despotic and imperious monarch to his subordinate spouse. The best historical example to embody such a relation is probably that of King Henry VIII of England, who beheaded two of his wives. Hence, the familial relationship between Stanley Kowalski and Blanche DuBois resembles a semi-royal marriage, not out of love but external circumstances, wherein the absolute monarch ultimately prevails and – showing the fullness of power he wields – destroys his noble spouse.

Blanche DuBois is the more important of the two main characters in the play. She is Stella's sister and Stanley's sister-in-law. For her lascivious behavior she was expelled from her home town of Laurel. She had also lost the family estate called somewhat ironically Belle Reve, which in French means "Beautiful Dream" (*SND* 96fn). She indeed lost many of her beautiful dreams and this is why, banned from the town, she was forced to seek refuge in the tiny Kowalski household in New Orleans. Sometimes, especially at the play's very beginning, she tries to become the symbolic embodiment of a white and pure lily. Later, however, that simile is ridiculed by Stanley (*SND* 134) and the reader may see that this "lily" actually likes at times to play a risky game (*SND* 138). Thomas P. Adler indicates that the color symbolism in the play reflects Blanche's contradictory and divided nature. On the one hand, she is a figure of white purity and femininity, wearing light colors, taking refreshing and purifying baths, and expressing her desire to pass away at sea. On the other hand, she is also a dangerous temptress clad in shades of red to denote her aggression and possible determination that turns weaknesses into strength (31). Later in the play, she likens herself to a tarantula that captures her prey. This inherent imbalance inevitably disrupts her mental health and therefore she may safely be called a hysteric. Adler methodically analyzes all major symptoms of medical hysteria and concludes that – not surprisingly – virtually all of them are embodied in Blanche (42). The coffin of her innocence is probably sealed by her inability to relate to her deceased homosexual husband. As one critic shows, the discovery of her spouse's sexual orientation and the subsequent accusation that ultimately caused his death could at most be a proof of her stupidity, when she did not handle the discovery responsibly enough to avoid compromising her husband. The crux of the problem is, however, that she learned about his orientation by accident, and not directly from her husband (Berkman 36). This is, hence, indicative that the bottom line of the marriage was still some kind of distrust.

Blanche's streak to royalty and her self-appointed crown are visible at many points in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Even other characters notice her noble

inclinations and – especially Stanley – do not fail to pin-point them. She imposes courtly manners, even if others do not intend at all to show them or meekly try to play along, taking part in the play she is creating. Ms. DuBois insists the poker players remain seated, although they did not intend to get up in the first place (*SND* 110). During her date with Mitch, she does her best to create a French atmosphere, with the poor supplies and settings she has (*SND* 129). In many scenes in the play she seems weak and indicates her femineity and dependence on the opposite sex. She arrives at the apartment tired and is badly in need of a long, hot bath. She spends long hours calming her nerves in the bathroom, and in that the reader may see her royal part, evidenced by her idleness and reliance on luxury as well as the ability of the slightest problems to disrupt her mental well-being and balance. Another facet of Blanche's weakness is evident when she cannot support herself. Jacqueline O'Connor points out that Blanche is economically dependent on Stanley (44). She gets everything in the Kowalski apartment from either Stan or Stella and even the money she receives from Stella does not come directly from her sister, but was earned by Stanley. Notwithstanding, DuBois insists on her internal strength, which would seem a noble quality, were it true. She claims it is difficult to hurt her as she possesses internal resilience (*SND* 107). Her behavior as a queen is not unnoticed by Stanley, who – in a mocking tone – says to her: "you are the Queen of the Nile!" (*SND* 148) Also earlier on, he refers to her and Stella as two queens, when they insist that he show proper manners at the birthday table (*SND* 138).

Stanley Kowalski is the other central character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He is a bold man, at the peak of his physical powers and strength, evident as he enters the apartment (*SND* 101). The post-bellum reality is for him bleak, and he has had to take up a mundane job that does not provide the same thrill as World War II did. Although the war was fought in part to defend the American Dream, that very possibility is now inaccessible to Stanley (Adler 3). Therefore, Mr. Kowalski is a violent individual who tries to fight his way through life. His attitude is evident when his actions are marked by pure malevolence and vengefulness. He chooses to find an outlet for these emotions by smashing not only objects around him but also people (Adler 53). Also, as Adler notices, even his baby, which should be a gift and the fruition of his love for Stella, is instead more of a sign of his procreative prowess and virility (63). Furthermore, these same sexual powers, later in the play, set a barrier for him. As Berkman indicates, Stanley could not reveal the truth about the rape to Stella, and this in some way made him vulnerable (39).

Stanley Kowalski is well aware of his undivided authority over the household. The blatant words he utters after accusing Blanche and Stella of posing for royalty indicate this deeply-rooted conviction. He quotes the words of Louisiana demagogue Huey Long and proclaims "Every Man is a King!" (*SND* 138), with the obvious conclusion that, since he is a man, he is included. Stanley, therefore, leaves no doubt as to who should be the absolute ruler in the apartment. His power seems to stem from his physical strength, but O'Connor adds that "[h]e acknowledges that his power over her is sexual, even rather violent" (47), which epitomizes his attitude towards his wife and compels him to later rape her sister in order to prove his power and desire to control. Furthermore, the reader is bound to notice that Stanley has unquestioned authority over his fellow poker players. Although they are a circle of friends and workmates, he dominates them and requires much strength to be tamed in his fury. In addition, Stella expresses her conviction that he is the only one from the poker night players who can achieve anything.

At this point, one cannot overlook the dissimilarities between Blanche and Stanley; they are as different as they may possibly be. Thomas P. Adler created a chart listing many of the dichotomies between the two characters, which proves that there is much more that separates them than unites them (32-33). Still, there are some characteristics that make them somewhat alike. Adler writes that "if there exists a Stanley-side to Blanche's character, as her red satin robe suggests, there also seems to be a Blanche-side to Stanley. Stanley's sobs of anguish over the fear that Stella has left are inklings of a softer element" (54). Yet there is still one trait which the two characters have in common, namely their royal inclinations, apparent in their behavior and words. So the two "royal" figures are put together and the pressure of the ambient situation gradually increases. They start clashing with an increasing impetus, which may either create a unified amalgam or lead to an explosion. O'Connor points out that the action of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a progression towards increasingly smaller spaces: from the expansive plantation of Belle Reve, Blanche moves to a cramped two-room apartment, yet, because of her mental predisposition and circumstances, she chooses to spend long hours in an even tinier space of the bathroom (21). Hence, as the space becomes smaller and smaller and the tension of the play increases, the "king" and the "queen" of the place are bound to clash.

Initially, even before Blanche had become acquainted with Stanley, she feared his indifference. She wanted her presence and person to be acknowledged and voiced that apprehension when she asked her sister: "Will Stanley like me, or will I be just a visiting in-law, Stella? I couldn't stand that" (*SND* 99). She thus

decided to act accordingly and not allow to be classified as a typical, well-behaved sister-in-law. She entirely changed her strategy to what it had been like upon entering the apartment and decided to pose as a coquette (*SND* 105). Then she went even further than that and found dubious courage to admit to Stella that she had flirted with her husband – Stanley (*SND* 108). She started behaving erratically, like an audacious person who does not mind the consequences of her deeds, so as to be noticed by Stanley. Finally, she dares to claim that she understands Stanley better than his wife (*SND* 107). However, as time passes by, she starts discerning all the problems that arise when her queenly status collides with Stan's absolute monarch power. She admits that she no longer can live with Stanley under one roof (*SND* 120). She seems to have some kind of prophetic premonition when – in a bout of hysteria – she cries out that she will leave the Kowalskis' household soon and she "*won't* hang around until he—throws [her] out" (*SND* 125). Therefore, it is safe to say that she sensed her impending doom and eviction and knew she was not welcome in the apartment any more. Stanley also expresses his desire to get rid of Blanche (*SND* 139). Before the culmination of the action resulting in over-throwing Blanche as a queen, there is a minor retardation of the plot. Stanley, alone with Blanche in the room while his wife is waiting to deliver a baby, cunningly makes an offer: "Shall we bury the hatchet and make it a loving-cup? Huh?" (*SND* 147) And indeed, they make it a loving-cup, or rather a chalice of bitterness when Blanche – at her most vulnerable – is raped by Stanley. Thus, it is he who ultimately prevails and wins, and Blanche is driven out. In Berkman's words, "[i]t is specifically the intermingling of sex with compassion that Blanche longs for; sex without compassion, that she cannot accept" (38). She receives what she cannot accept and therefore is forced to go away, in spatial terms, but also by descending into the imaginary universe of her madness. This is why at the play's very end, Blanche is kindly led by her "royal entourage" out of the apartment, and her noble companions respectfully show their gallantry, as she, with self-respect, affirms her descent into the kingdom of her wishful fantasies. This is why Holditch summarizes the journey from the outside as "a steady decline from the trans-cendent poetic vision . . . to face first reality and then the brutal facts of a Naturalistic world" (157).

When taken as a whole, *A Streetcar Named Desire* can be analyzed from the royal angle, where the two central characters resemble a semi-royal marriage. And so both Blanche and Stanley pose as noble figures, yet in truth they are rather a pair of royal imposters. Still, Stanley acts as a king of his little two-room realm and succeeds in exercising his power. He disposes of the corresponding "royal partner" by driving her out. As with the aforementioned figure of King Henry VIII,

who ruled with a rod of iron, he symbolically decapitated Blanche. Although not doing so literally, which was the sad ending that befell two spouses of the British monarch, he was no doubt instrumental in Blanche losing her head when she descended into madness. The leaving of the house was merely a conclusive sealing of her downfall and defeat. Yet it is still difficult to posit that Stanley Kowalski is the complete victor either. The realm over which he can exercise his power is clearly pathetic and his pride hugely exaggerated. So, both these central characters in *A Streetcar* can be read as a King and Queen, but the reader sees that the characters' conviction and seriousness about that usurped status merely adds a layer of dark humor to the play and makes it a more multifaceted work, which can teach the readers or viewers even more about the surrounding world and about themselves.

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Interaction between Place and Identity in
James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*

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James Baldwin did not write from a political standpoint; he examined artificial boundaries and moved beyond fixed identity categories: "his politics were personal, the politics of identity" (Campbell 193-194). In his writing, he describes the challenging pursuit of a meaningful and authentic identity as well as shows how cultural constructs limit the self. In Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, places exert a powerful influence on the identities of the characters. The aim of this article is to examine the links between places and articulations of characters' flexible, non-normative identities. The late modern context prefers a lack of stable determinants of identity; relationships are often open-ended and temporary (Bokszański 255). The ideal of authenticity assumes that it is the subject who molds and articulates his/her identity (Taylor 66). Identity is no longer imposed on the subject by society. Still, such freedom is not available to all as, for example, expressing non-normative identity is not possible everywhere. Some places and spaces are welcoming and safe, while others are limiting and threatening in regard to articulating one's identity. The ways in which characters occupy and interact with places show whether they feel free to articulate their identities or they are locked in a metaphorical prison.

Nomadic consciousness and the figure of a flâneur

In order to analyze the function of space in Baldwin's fiction, I will apply the new materialist subject characterized by nomadic consciousness. Though Rosi Braidotti invented this term in connection with the feminist subject, it can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of subjectivity in general. Braidotti defines the nomadic subject in the following way: "In so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once" (4). Nomadic consciousness is an "identity that rests not on fixity but on contingency;" moreover, it "combines coherence

with mobility. It aims to rethink the unity of the subject" (Braidotti 31). Although at first it may seem counter-intuitive that consciousness is not a stable concept, especially to readers who have internalized, consciously or not, the Cartesian definition of subjectivity, actually human identity is not fixed, it constantly changes and evolves. Nomadic consciousness refuses to settle into socially constructed normative behaviors and thought patterns.

The concept of nomadic subjectivity can be approached from a spatial perspective. The non-normative identity of characters in Baldwin's fiction is often articulated through the descriptions of places. Different terms have been applied to analyze space and mobility in Baldwin's novels. Kaplan and Schwarz suggest that these include "transnational, transatlantic, cosmopolitan, exile, expatriate." Yet they add that "Whether any one of them catches the complexities of his situation, though, is another matter" (8). I will try to demonstrate that the complexity of Baldwin's fiction can be productively explained with Braidotti's notion of nomadic consciousness. As Braidotti says, the "nomadic state has the potential for positive renaming, for opening up new possibilities for life and thought" (8). It does not limit the subject but rather opens him/her to the vast array of possibilities. A subject in transition is not limited by one fixed identity.

Braidotti's concept of nomadic consciousness is not only about spatial movement although increased spatial mobility is a sign of late modernity. In nomadic consciousness, no identity is considered superior or unchanging but it still allows to build a certain basis for identity. A person with nomadic consciousness is constantly in the process of becoming, s/he builds relationships in mutual respect for different subjects (Mąkowska 146). Braidotti states that it is important to apply "critical resistance to hegemonic identities of all kind" (10). Withstanding assimilation into mainstream ways of representation of the self is a crucial aspect of nomadic consciousness. The scholar makes a clear distinction between migration, exile and the nomadic state. Migration is motivated by financial reasons, exile by political ones, while the nomadic subject "is usually beyond classification, a sort of classless unit" (Braidotti 22).

A figure that exemplifies nomadism is a flâneur. This figure is typically located in the city, wandering around and observing the city life. Charles Baudelaire wrote that the flâneur lives in multitude, in motion, in the infinite; this is a person who is outside the house yet at the same time feels at home anywhere s/he goes (317). Walter Benjamin, who analyzed Baudelaire's flâneur, did not produce a clear definition of this figure. However, he provided numerous associations such as free time, crowd, alienation, detachment, observation and strolling (Solnit 299). He distinguished between a passer-by, who is embedded in

the crowd, and a flâneur, who needs open space and always walks off the beaten track (Benjamin 81).

The connection between being a flâneur and having a nomadic consciousness is particularly noteworthy. Świerczewska claims that these two are similar, the main difference between them being that the former is connected to a temporary action and the latter is a permanent state (41). Both assume that a fixed place is not necessary for a human being. Feeling at home wherever one goes and accommodating with ease is a predominant characteristic of both these notions. Characters from Baldwin's fiction can serve as examples of this understanding of flexible identity, and the figure of the flâneur, symbolically related to Paris, adds to the appeal of this city as the setting of his novels.

Nomadic consciousness and the figure of a flâneur in *Giovanni's Room*

According to Zaborowska, Baldwin considered Paris as "the ultimate twentieth-century space for troubled white American exiles" (45). One of the reasons why Baldwin chose to set *Giovanni's Room* in Paris is that "the mythical freedoms the city grants its temporary residents are central to the behavior of the book's narrator, David. He is enabled to follow, for a short season, his natural desire … love" (Campbell 118). David embarks on an almost ritual journey to Europe as many Americans have done before him (Zaborowska 57). He is an example of a character with a nomadic consciousness, e.g. he says: "I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well – by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion" (Baldwin 18). This "constant motion" allows him to rethink his identity. He reflects on the reason for his arrival in France by saying: "I wanted to find myself" (18-19). This phrase suggests that he does not feel himself when he is in the US. The character continues: "I think now that if I had had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home" (18-19). The change does not come only with the spatial movement; the person has to transform internally. Nevertheless, at that point in the novel, David seems to regard his self as constant.

In the 17th and 18th century "the flight from the Old World to the New is generally seen to be a flight from oppression and limitation to freedom and possibility" (Morrison 34). In the 20th century, when James Baldwin's novels are set, this perception has already changed. From the African American perspective, it is the Old World that is believed to guarantee freedom and lack of discrimination. For Baldwin's characters, Paris becomes a synecdoche for the Old

World. His characters arrive in the French capital searching for their identities that are being restricted or even lost back in the New World (Zaborowska 45). As Campbell observes, it was rather "quitting America" than arriving in Europe that was significant to Baldwin (24).

When David and Giovanni are drinking at a bar, both of them toast the place of origin of the other person. Giovanni toasts America and David – Europe (Baldwin 33). It shows that the freedom that they desire always lies someplace else than where they come from. This urge to relocate is deeply embedded in them. It is worthwhile to juxtapose this scene with the one where David thinks about the instrumental ways in which Giovanni uses the term American. David knows that his Americanness is, at least in part, the reason why Giovanni is attracted to him. Yet this attraction is quite paradoxical. The adjective American is used as an insult by Giovanni, despite toasting the US in the earlier scene. On the other hand, when Giovanni was pleased with David, he would say that David was not at all behaving like an American. For David, both of these disturb him, and he comments on these feelings: "And I resented this: resented being called an American (and resented resenting it) because it seemed to make me nothing more than that, whatever that was; and I resented being called *not* an American because it seemed to make me nothing" (79; emphasis added). This scene represents a longing for a stable identity that David sometimes has since fluid identity and nomadism can be intimidating.

According to Zaborowska, "Baldwin's new American innocent abroad is haunted by a twentieth-century malaise, which manifests itself as an inability to dwell" (46). The need for constant movement and change is important for David in *Giovanni's Room*. He is "being torn between his allegiance to American notions of morality and his attraction to European openness about eroticism" (Zaborowska 46). The impossibility of making a choice and assuming just one identity shows that the fluidity of identity is necessary for David. Relocating to the Old World enables David "to glimpse scary freedom of desire far away from his father's America, and deep within himself" (58). David's idea of a home stands in stark contrast to the one hold by his father. When his father tells him about settling down, David thinks "of the sediment at the bottom of a stagnant pond" (Baldwin 20). Staying in one place for his whole life or going back to the place of his childhood is not the way he wants to lead his life. Only in constant movement, there is the life he wants to live. It all comes back to the notion of nomadic consciousness. David is exactly this kind of character who does not need to have roots in a certain place in order to feel secure and protected. He finds freedom in the possibility to move and change.

When David talks with Hella, she asks him if he thinks they should come back home. What she really means by saying the word home is stability and security associated with getting married and having children. When she asks David what he wants, he is unable to voice his answer. Hella asks him "where *are* you? You've gone away somewhere and I can't find you. If you'd only let me *reach* you – !" (Baldwin 142; emphasis added). This quote shows that a place where a person can go does not have to be a physical, geographical place. David and Hella are here together yet she cannot communicate with him as if he was someplace else. David has to decide if stability of a home is what he needs right now.

On the other hand, this sudden freedom is sometimes too frightening for David and the need to reinvent himself is a demanding task. There are times when he longs for his childhood home, namely America. He expresses his longing by saying: "I ached abruptly, intolerably, with a longing to go home; … home across the ocean, to things and people I knew and understood" (Baldwin 54-55). The familiarity of the things and people is comforting so when David feels insecure, he yearns for the things he knows. He comments on his homesickness and how it surprised him: "I had never realized such a sentiment in myself before, and it frightened me. I saw myself, sharply, as a wanderer, an adventurer, rocking through the world, unanchored" (254-255). This quote shows that it is not always easy to embrace the changing nature of one's life. Home is associated with love and protection, so it is understandable that in the moment of struggle David wants to be back at home.

Metaphorical prison for identity in *Giovanni's Room*

David's ambivalence towards nomadism is visible in the ways that he experiences the spaces of Paris. He represents a different attitude toward the city than Giovanni. It is illustrated by the scene in which they decide to go to Les Halles. David is fascinated, yet at the same time repulsed by congested Paris. The crowd is overwhelming and intimidating. What is more, the protagonist's "descriptive emphasis on male bodies and desires suggests, too, that they are the source of David's deepest fascination and fear. … Despite the openness, diversity, and fluidity of the spaces of Les Halles, David feels imprisoned, boxed-in, and, in essence, closeted, once again" (Zaborowska 56). Giovanni enjoys being in an impetuous city, while David would rather be home, away from the terrifying masses. Some other time, David stares "at absurd Paris, which was as cluttered now, under the scalding sun, as the landscape of my heart" (Baldwin 84). As Tuan notes, "the world feels spacious and friendly when it accommodates our desires,

and cramped when it frustrates them" (65). Although it would seem that Les Halles should be spacious and welcoming, for David they are overcrowded and frightening.

In *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin opposes interiors and exteriors, the former being metaphorical prisons for identity and the latter spaces of liberation. The descriptions of Giovanni's room, David's house in the French countryside, Les Halles, bars, cafés and Parisian streets – a series of interiors and exteriors – are essential to the novel's meaning and come as depictions of silenced queerness. This spatial tension "manifests itself in the narrative design of the text" (Zaborowska 53). There is an important difference between place and space that needs to be mentioned: "place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other" (Tuan 3). Yi-Fu Tuan describes spaciousness as "closely associated with the sense of being free. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act" (52). Place is an "enclosed and humanized space" (54). Humans need both space and place; they constantly move between the notions of "shelter and venture, attachment and freedom" (54).

For a short time filled with desire and love, Giovanni's room is a space of liberation, but later, according to Zaborowska, the room changes into David's "projection of his American fears and self-hatred" (55). The way Giovanni's cluttered room is presented in the novel shows David's emotions and his changing possibilities of expressing himself. When Giovanni decides to make some alternations in the room, David comments on it: "In a way he was doing it for me, to prove his love for me. He wanted me to stay in the room with him" (Baldwin 101-102). Descriptions of the room from David's point of view are ambivalent and metaphorical, they represent his emotions toward Giovanni. The room becomes a reflection of David's interior and exterior (Zaborowska 55). At the end of the relationship with Giovanni, David wants nothing more than to leave the room. Having finally received money from his father, David does not use it to help Giovanni, he uses it "to escape his room" (Baldwin 68). The room is an architectonic representation of David's conflicted identity and his understanding of traditional American manhood.

Prison can be a physical space; on the other hand, it can be a metaphorical representation of a character's identity that cannot find its outlet. When Giovanni awaits his execution, David is staying in a house in the French countryside. It is spacious, but it manages to bring back David's memories about Giovanni's room anyway: "The bathroom is tiny and square, with one frosted window. It reminds me of that claustrophobic room in Paris" (Baldwin 62-63). David has such a strong emotional connection to Giovanni's room that every small, confined space

reminds him of Giovanni. He describes his time in the countryside: "I walk up and down this house … I think of prison. … to be in prison was simply not to live, the death penalty was the only merciful verdict any jury could deliver" (100). He also wonders whether Giovanni's cell is bigger than his room. Zaborowska claims that it is not only Giovanni who ends up in prison. David has annihilated a possibility of a relationship with Giovanni. Now he finds himself "locked forever in an 'airless, labeled cell' of his conflicted identity" (53). The narrator is confined to a prison, even if only in his imagination.

Conclusion

Places both influence and express the identities of characters in Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, and thus, their construction can be approached from a spatial perspective. Many descriptions of places in the novel provide an insight into the characters' non-normative identities. Through the tension between interiors and exteriors, Baldwin describes both liberating and limiting places and spaces. The transformation of one's identity does not come only with spatial movement, one has to change internally through the examination of one's mind.

An analysis of the places where Baldwin's characters dwell and their interaction with them shows how they articulate their non-normative identities. The movements of characters through domestic and urban environments demonstrate the characteristics of safe or menacing places and spaces. Nomadic consciousness is the characters' way of defying limiting identity categories, since relying too heavily on them prevents them from finding their authentic selves. In order to embrace oneself, an individual must abandon restrictive labels and acknowledge that one's identity is not fixed but fluid. Yet, as David's example shows, people might desire the freedom offered by nomadism and might be terrified by it at the same time, which ultimately prevents them from leaving the symbolic prison of stable identities and social expectations.

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Sylvia Plath: A Feminist? Feminism in Sylvia Plath's Works

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Feminism is the social, political, and cultural movement that aims to establish equality between men and women. Its main goal is to end the discrimination of women, abusive patriarchy, and sexist power structures. Feminism occurred very frequently as a literary theme especially in 20th-century American literature which expressed ideas and supported the goals of the movement. One of the writers, in whose works feminist ideology can be observed is Sylvia Plath, an American novelist and confessional poet. In her writings, both in her poems and in her one novel, Plath uses feminist discourse, although she never considered herself feminist. Her works reflect the issues of the second wave of feminism such as objectification and discrimination of women, the role of perfect housewives and mothers imposed on them, male dominance and also the feeling of anger resulting from it all, Plath continues to be an important figure for the movement fighting for women's rights and equality.

"Lady Lazarus", one of Plath's most crucial poems, reflects the feminist theme of male oppression. A woman speaker in the poem claims to have been resurrected for the third time, like the biblical Lazarus. However, she complains that her suicide attempts are misunderstood as cries for help and attention, while she is not grateful for bringing her back to life and still wants to die. She does not want to live in the male-dominated, patriarchal world anymore. The speaker also talks about herself as a "featureless face" (line 8), indicating that as a woman she feels empty, lacking identity, a sense of self. Living in a patriarchal society causes such feelings, along with the feelings of anger and desire for revenge on men:

> Out of the ash
> I rise with my red hair
> And I eat men like air. (lines 82-84)

All those feelings are very well expressed in this last stanza.

Another feminist theme that appears in "Lady Lazarus" is the dehumanization of women, as the poem employs many references to the

Holocaust, the Jews, and the Nazis. According to Neelima Choudaraju's research article, "Plath uses the imagery of the Holocaust to emphasize dehumanization of women when compared to Jewish prisoners in concentration camps" (741). Such comparison may seem exaggerated but in fact, it very well highlights the hopeless situation of women and their desperate feelings, which have been hidden for so long, and finally come to the surface.

In "Daddy", Plath touches upon the subjects of male oppression and women's attempt to free themselves from it. The woman speaker in the poem lost her father at the age of ten and, as Choudaraju explains, "She misses her father so much that her love towards him turns to hatred" (741). Only now does she realize the extent to which she idealized the figure of her father and the oppressive power he had over her. The poem "opens with a reference to the father's black shoe, in which the daughter has lived like a foot, which suggests her subservience and entanglement" (Altaf 4). Later, the speaker addresses her father in many other ways, calling him a Nazi, a Fascist, a swastika. All those references to Nazi concentration camps emphasize the sense of oppression experienced by the woman speaker. Additionally, such references critique male superiority over women and undermine the widely-spread stereotype that every woman needs a powerful man in her life. The woman admits: "I have always been scared of you" (line 42) as she recalls her painful and difficult relationship with her father. Now, she feels she no longer needs him and tries to finally break free of his influence. She has to metaphorically kill him since this is the only way she can liberate herself from patriarchal oppression.

Plath's only novel, *The Bell Jar*, deals with the feminist issue of "selfhood: what it means to be a woman and to be an individual being" (Sakane 27). Because of living in a male-dominated society, Esther Greenwood, the main protagonist, has completely lost her sense of identity. Her situation proves that the social construct of a woman, womanhood, and social roles ascribed to them are oppressive. Consequently, "women's searches for self begins with a deconstruction of the concepts of womanhood that have been socially established and ideologically internalized within women's psyches" (Sakane 27).

In the *The Bell Jar,* Plath also reflects on another feminist topic, namely the work-family conflict women face and that they cannot reconcile the two. Esther's perception of the fig tree illustrates this struggle: "I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest" (62-63). A woman has to choose: either she focuses on her career and remains alone or she abandons her work life,

aspirations, personal needs, desires, and devotes herself entirely to motherhood and marriage. The choice of one necessarily produces the loss of the other. Unlike a man, in a patriarchal society, a woman cannot have both a family and a career.

Feminist discourse is present in Plath's works. They reflect themes associated with the second wave of feminism- themes of male oppression, dehumanization of women, search for women's self-identity, and the role conflict they face. Although Plath never identified herself with feminists and was not one of them, they identify themselves with the speakers in her works and treated her writings as expressions of what they felt but could not name, what was socially unacceptable for women to feel, for example frustration or anger, resulting from their lack of freedom. Therefore, Plath was and is a crucial figure for the feminist movement, and even though I have analyzed her works from the anachronistic perspective, nowadays they still hold true. In some countries, women continuously have to fight for basic, fundamental rights, fight against the patriarchal society, their exclusion from the public sphere just because they are not men. Such issues are persistently valid today, but they were also valid in Plath's times, which is well visible in her works.

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Signs and Symbols as a Postmodern Approach to Mental Illness and the Narrative Frame

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Vladimir Nabokov was born in 1899 and passed away in 1977. His life was strongly connected with the changes in the political landscape, as he travelled further and further westwards, first escaping from Russia to Germany, then to France and eventually to the United States. In 1961 he returned to Europe and settled in Switzerland long after World War II was gone. In his life he had many interests, including translatory work, but he is arguably most renowned for his influence on literature as a writer. He wrote both in Russian (initially) and English (later on). One of the more intriguing literary pieces he birthed was the story *Signs and Symbols*, which embodies or, in a way, anticipates some postmodern philosophical movements and touches upon the territory of mental illnesses.

The plot

The story is divided into 3 acts. The first one begins with an old couple deciding on a gift for their child. They pick something that would neither confuse nor scare their son. They travel by subway to an understaffed asylum where they learn that their possibly sole descendant has had again attempted to take his own life. They give up on giving the gift and decide to return home. On the way home we learn that there has been a scientific study conducted on their son but, simultaneously, the parents had their own idea of what their son's condition might be – a "referential mania".

The second one focuses on the family's return from the asylum and them reminiscing about their past. We learn that they come from Minsk, nowadays Belarus, but at the time of the publication of the story it was part of the Soviet Union. These memories take us on a journey from that city, throughout Europe and eventually leaving to, presumably, the United States.

The third act focuses on issues the couple has at night. They have insomnia. During that time, the husband decides that it is time to take their child back home. The moment he ends his speech, the telephone rings. A girl on the line asks if she

can speak to Charlie. Man dismissed her, saying she called the wrong number. Moments after they returned to the discussion on returning their child home, the phone rang again. The same voice asked more or less the same question to which it received more or less the same answer. The couple then had "an unexpected festive midnight tea," possibly to celebrate the plan to bring their son home. The story ends with the phone ringing for the third time.

The heritage of the family and the "referential mania"

The structure of the story evokes in the reader a feeling of discomfort. The plot ends seemingly halfway. Nabokov has set backgrounds for the character that seemed to be pointing towards some direction, regarding their troubled past and relation with the son. We learn that the family had the son in Europe already, when they were moving from place to place. We also have reasons to suspect that the relocations were due to the political situation in first Russia and then Germany: "Minsk, the Revolution, Leipzig, Berlin, Leipzig, a slanting house front badly out of focus" (Nabokov 2). And, later on: "Aunt Rosa, a fussy, angular, wild-eyed old lady, who had lived in a tremulous world of bad news, bankruptcies, train accidents, cancerous growths – until the Germans put her to death, together with all the people she had worried about" (Nabokov 2-3). Such a case is further suggested because we have reasons to suspect that the family was of Jewish descendance. The husband's brother's name is Isaac, which is a typical name for a person of such lineage. In that vein, we may also conclude that the son might have been another factor for moving from Germany, and later Europe, as Nazis were often concerned with the eugenics – were they to discover that the son is mentally challenged in one way or another, he would be inevitably disposed of, like others who were posing a threat to the purity of the Aryan blood. It is also worth mentioning that the family's journey somehow mimics Nabokov's own journey through Europe.

The plot of *Signs and Symbols* revolves around son's illness. We learn that his "system of delusions" (Nabokov 2) is a subject of scientific inquiry, as his contemporary medicine struggles to explain his symptoms via a singular medical term. The parents, however, had long ago established that their son suffers from "referential mania". The disease is said to be named by Herman Brink. According to the family, it involves a masterful suspicion into the most trivial elements of the world by making connections wherever possible to prove that there is an ongoing conspiracy against the subject of the condition. Some scholars point out to the connections that the name "Herman Brink" evoke. It is the main character of

a short story by Alexander Pushkin called *The Queen of Spades* (Lane 153). That figure also suffers from such disease. He makes obsessive connections to the set of cards he was told to be key to winning the fortune back by Tomsky's grandmother, three, seven and ace, and puts the world around him into the frame of interpretation stemming from this set of cards (Lane 153).

The symbolic sphere

Throughout the several pages we are shown numerous events that seem unimportant to the main plot. The travel by the subway, the festive after the decision to bring the son back. A common reaction while reading any story is to give an event a meaning: either literal or symbolic. This tendency is especially valid in the case of short stories. The compact nature of the genre makes it an inescapable effort. However, the problem with *Signs and Symbols* is that we are given very little context since, as mentioned earlier, the story seems to be cut midway. The tension is being built by three consecutive phone calls with the third one remaining an unanswered mystery. The number of calls can also be understood with reference to *The Queen of Spades* as one of Herman Brink's cards. This further evokes a feeling of uncertainty, as the sequence is unfinished in that reading. Staying at the subject of cards, we can also try to see them in a different manner. One of the most known books that resolves around this theme is *Alice in Wonderland*, coincidentally translated by Nabokov into Russian. This perspective turns us towards a mysterious atmosphere that might be spread around cards – which are a subject that is evoked twice in *Signs and Symbols*.

Another element of symbolism in this story is the journey taken by the family. As mentioned earlier, it mimics Nabokov's own journey of life, when he, at the point of releasing the story, was at the end of his travel, reaching as far as the United States. He was running away from several layers of oppression, where belonging to a particular class (he comes from an aristocratic family) or race (a Russian escaping the Nazis). The family took a similar route. In that manner we may read this story as an escapist tale, where a person, or a collective, is trying to run away from the cruelties surrounding them, looking for a place to settle. That way we may also turn back to the topic of the son – he was down with the referential mania which made him believe that everything and, most likely, everyone was in a conspiracy against him. His method of escape from those persecution of objects and people was to turn away from life: "What he really wanted to do was to tear a hole in his world and escape" (Nabokov 2). The son's suicide attempts were an approachable method of doing the labor his parents

already did. Even if they were not real, he wanted to get away from the conspiracies surrounding him, just like his parents wanted to escape the Revolution in Russia and, later, persecutions of the Nazis.

This layer may also lead us to another author and piece of literature. In "Self-Reliance" Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of everyone of its members" (Emerson 83). The passage can be understood in this way: society wants to limit the abilities of every one of its members in order to grant a better position of the majority. Therefore, it constitutes a conspiracy against everyone, because any person who tries to exceed is immediately thrown back into a position of submission. Thus, Emerson creates a sort of referential mania, where a great person is withheld from attaining a strong position, equivalent to their potential, due to society's nature to make everyone equal.

Perhaps the most controversial interpretation would stem from a single utterance present in the text. Among the "festive" present at the end of the story, we can find a mention of "beech plum" (Nabokov 4) that was one of the tastes present on the labels read by the husband. The reader might make this into a connection to a famous poem by William Carlos Williams "This is Just to Say". In this work, the author talks about a great guilt that is evoked in the speaker because he ate the plums that were left by another person, the addressee of the poem. A popular interpretation of this poem suggests that it is about the original sin and how the urge to eat the fruit is too strong to be conquered and how the speaker fell victim of it. Similarly, the parents have finally made the decision to retrieve their child from the asylum. Satisfied with the idea, they decided to commence a kind of festivity. The story, along with preparations for the feast, is ended by the third call. We do not know what is beyond that. The ending may point us towards any direction, including one, where the son makes yet another attempt on his life, maybe this time successful, and the call is meant to inform the parents that their child is already dead. One other interpretation might be that the son was actually in a really poor state after his previous attempt, and the criminally understaffed institution has failed to inform parents about his actual condition, which can be inferred from a passage: "a tiny half-dead unfledged bird was helplessly twitching in a puddle" (Nabokov 1), as long as we interpret it as a metaphor of what was happening to the son. The openness of the final act creates a multitude of possibilities for us. It forces us to interpret the signs to figure out the fate of the characters.

Simulacra and Deconstruction

At this point we may turn towards the title of the story: what does it mean? A sign is something that refers us to another thing, most of the time in a literal or, at least, a transparent manner. A symbol is also something that refers us to another thing, but it can also have underlying meanings. As we can see, this distinction can be rather vague. A more comprehensive, postmodern reading of the relation between the sign and symbols and the elements which they refer us to was made by Jean Baudrillard. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, the French semiotician differentiates four stages of sign. The first stage is imitation of reality, where sign imitates some sort of reality, just like a painting does. The second is perversion of reality, as in the case of a child faking a symptom of an illness to the point where it produces some of those symptoms. The third stage masks the absence of reality, where, for example, a single fake news attempts to constitute a new reality, in which there is no problem with it not referring to any factual reality. The fourth is a sphere of pure simulation, where the simulacra, different fake news, create a network of self-justification. Each refers to another and creates a *precession*, which speeds up the pace at which each one is spreading to the point where no one notices that those simulacra do not refer to anything other than themselves (Baudrillard 1). In a similar vein Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction takes a step further and shows us that it is not the meaning that creates the network of signs which helps us navigate the underlying meaning. The meaning is constituted by the network of signs. The relations between them are what creates what we can comprehend. Paraphrasing Heidegger's famous example of hammer – we do not understand what a hammer is until we are equipped to make use of it – we do not understand what the sign means until we learn of its position in a complex system of signs.

What is the story about?

Those two approaches can be useful in explaining what *Signs and Symbols* really is about. The titular elements are what it is all about. Nabokov purposefully introduces a fictitious illness to accelerate the pendulum, to make the simulacra present in the text rotate and move faster and faster. The story is cut in half in order to *make us* look for signs and symbols. They can lead us anywhere; we can find the references in our own experience. The story may evoke within us associations with virtually any element; that way, this essay treated about Emerson, William Carlos Williams, Pushkin, and Holocaust, all of which were not present explicitly

in the text. In the course of the analysis, we have made associations between the journeys of the family and the life of the author trying to figure out what the story was trying to tell us. However, at this point we have lost one vital element: the referential mania. The story explains it that way: "[…] the patient imagines that everything happening around him is a veiled reference to his personality and existence" (Nabokov 2). We have woven conspiracy like a patient who suffers from the referential mania. In the course of reading the text, analyzing, and searching for the meaning of *Signs and Symbols*, we ourselves have come down with the illness by obsessively looking for elements that are not necessarily there. At the same time, we have woven a net of signs that, in a whole, constitute a sense but hide the fact, that there is no meaning outside of it. The story may not evoke the same effects in each and every one of its readers, but any search for the meaning, in any text for that matter, is similar to weaving that net of signs.

Conclusion

Signs and Symbols is a story that takes its title very literally. It anticipates the future postmodernist movements in philosophy which reconstruct traditional conceptions of signs and by subverting our expectations stemming from traditional approach to interpretation, creates a text that is capable of evoking manic episodes in a search for its meaning. Brilliant and original approach to the idea of writing by Nabokov constitutes a piece of worthwhile lecture that can make us ask ourselves if we are, in fact, the ones that came down with referential mania.

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The Feminine Beauty Ideal in Elizabethan England

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The Elizabethan period – commencing in 1558 and lasting until 1603 – was one of the greatest in English history, regarded by many as the Golden Age. During that time, England's growing prosperity positively impacted the country's wealth, international esteem and culture with its marvellous composers, painters or writers. No one can dispute the fact that, for instance, William Shakespeare is considered to be the most renowned English playwright and is still instantly recognisable today. Queen Elizabeth I's great devotion to her country contributed in many respects to its strong position, which eventually resulted in England being in the forefront of other European nations. Her successful reign is predominantly associated with the restoration of Protestantism albeit with the introduction of the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, which attempted to conciliate between the two sides involved in the religious conflict: Roman Catholicism and the above-mentioned faith. Moreover, famously defeating the Spanish Armada, forming the firm and properly functioning government or popularising exploration were, among many other merits, the primary causes of England's flourishing in that period. With Queen Elizabeth I at the top of the social hierarchy, the feminine beauty ideal – comprising such elements as fashion or make-up – may represent the country's excellence as well as reveal the preferences or even social standing of people coming from that age.

Contrary to what one may assume about the distant past, appearance and fashion in general were not a trifle; quite the opposite, they occupied a prominent place among both the lower and upper strata of Elizabethan society. The importance of this statement and the attention directed to this issue by the Elizabethans is confirmed by the specifically enforced rules called sumptuary laws – the restrictions imposed on people to control sumptuousness, extravagance, fortunes and clear class division. The unconventional attitude towards the English beauty ideal, its growing significance, and the heightened awareness of one's outward appearance render this topic worth closer scrutiny. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to focus upon the social significance of the appearance and discuss

women's attire, jewellery, make-up, hairstyles as well as the impact of Queen Elizabeth I's position and ageing on the emerging fashion and beauty trends.

The period of Renaissance, which embraced many religious, artistic or cultural transformations, had unquestionably reinforced the fashion trends and allowed people to look at dressing or the notion of luxury from an unusual angle. Significantly, the word *renaissance* in French means "rebirth" and this connotation is not accidental. It was precisely during this period that a person was encouraged to recognise his or her own individuality, which consequently induced people to become more conscious of their own appearance and methods they may employ to project as well as shape their public persona. A huge improvement in self-image and self-consciousness was achieved when glass mirrors became more accessible and less expensive too (Rublack). Additionally, due to the fact that England's financial situation improved, some women had an opportunity to purchase luxurious items such as clothes and accessories in particular. This substantial change in the way fashion was treated highlighted the introduction of consumer culture by means of which the affluent were able to exhibit their wealth in the easiest manner while also expressing their personality.

These aspects illustrated the dominant motifs of fashion growing in popularity in Europe during the Renaissance. From that moment on, this distinctive 16th century style became a social construct and an instrument of power that functioned as a tool for those fashionably dressed to exert authority. It is absolutely essential to stress that it was Queen Elizabeth herself, superior in all aspects, who dominated the fashion industry. The monarch imposed certain trends on her subjects, which originated at the Royal Court and then reached from the aristocracy to the middle class, omitting the lower, working class, who generally had not only insufficient income but also time they could spend on fashion. This descension of fashionable clothes along the social ladder is a typical course of events for a traditional class society. Interestingly, the alterations made to the fashion and the rapid pace of their implementation were astounding as it was difficult to follow all the latest changes. However, as tedious as it may sound, an Elizabethan commoner had little choice since the proper outfit was a fundamental component to score a personal triumph in business transactions or at the court, which may further indicate that appearance held power.

Voluminous clothes, more complex, elaborate shapes, rigidity, visual grandeur, dazzlement or rejection of medieval naturality are adequate terms connoting Elizabethan costumes. Another important word that can be used to characterise women's outfits is "stiffness" – needless to say, these certainly not comfortable pieces of clothing restrained female users' every move. The upper-

class women had to conform to slight modifications in regard to their garments in the first and late period of Elizabeth's reign. First of all, women's skirts, which were the basic constituents of the 16th century fashion, were detached from the tight bodice and formed two pieces of clothing. Skirts were based on the farthingale – a type of an underskirt that originated from Spain and consisted of round shaped hoops growing in size from the midriff down to the floor. Initially a rope or wire and only then whalebone was needed to support this structure, which not surprisingly became the object of ridicule and mockery of writers composing at that time (Cartwright). This device was designed in order to make the waist even more slender and to conceal the hips, which in other words, signalled women's willingness to sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of an attractive and socially desired appearance. For the women for whom the farthingale was unattainable, a bum roll, its less expensive equivalent, was still an acceptable solution, though the effect it produced was definitely more modest. The reasons for this particular beauty standard are still not satisfactorily identified but Spanish influences are one of the most easily recognisable factors affecting fashion trends emerging in the Golden Age of England. As was previously explained, the farthingale arrived from Spain and it can be dated back to the time of Catherine of Aragon, a Spanish princess and at the same time Queen Mary's (Elizabeth I's half-sister) mother. She was the one to introduce England to her Spanish customs, clothes and court ladies whose task was to spread the Spanish fashion. This event initiated the use of Spanish farthingale for the first time in England's history.

Turning now to the upper parts of women's attire, the neckline also deserves mentioning. Ruffs were the most frequently chosen adornment as a part of the neckwear and could assume various shapes or sizes, depending on one's social rank, age and style preference (Picard). The material from which they were made of was mainly linen and so as to be stiff, a wire and starching were commonly used. Sleeves were another essential item, occurring in numerous variations. Voluminous and puffed, while combined with the entire outfit, were supposed to leave the impression of a silhouette being slimmer or tinier than in reality. What is more, accessories such as brooches, buttons or laces fulfilled a vital decorative function; moreover, some women, for instance, sewed silver lace onto the seams, which proves their meticulous attention to detail. Jewels were placed on different pieces of clothing or accessories like shoes, belts or hatbands. Pendants, in the form of a single pearl or another jewel, encrusted with smaller gems, or even double pendants with the family initials, small portraits presenting relatives, were in demand too. Unexpectedly, earrings were quite unnoticeable and consisted of a pearl or other priceless gems. It is noteworthy, however, that these

types of jewellery were obtainable exclusively for the rich. Those of a lower rank on the social ladder possessed their more discreet substitutes made of less valuable gemstones; whereas for the lowest classes, a simple wedding ring or a wooden necklace – if any at all – was an extraordinary piece of jewellery. This is a similar situation to the one discernible in the theme of clothing as the middle classes modelled themselves on those of higher social status by complementing their image perfectly with the particular kind of jewellery.

In the latter part of the Elizabethan Era, specifically after 1580, fashion underwent a remarkable transformation and possibly went to extremes to amplify the dedicated followers' styles. The possibility is that, with the Queen's advanced age, these changes were inevitable and the most appropriate way to disguise her signs of ageing. One may scarcely believe it, but sleeves turned out to be even wider and waists narrower in comparison with the previously introduced tenets. The former stated parts of clothing were constantly presented in a different manner and became rapidly out of date on the basis of their ability to be easily separated from the remaining apparel. Women's look was still far from being natural with their deformed bodies deeply V-shaped at the level of hips. The revamped version of ruffs may somewhat startle people living today, since the rigid collar in its most exaggerated form was enlarged to around thirty cementers. The 1590s saw also the replacement of the Spanish farthingale with a French one, resembling a circular structure with a pleated frill covering the hoop above the skirt (Elgin, *Elizabethan England. Costume and Fashion Source Books* 13). This mechanism produced the effect of wide hips and lowered the waistline. Importantly, skirts were finally not that long and exposed shoes, which was unprecedented. However, the common features which unite these two periods are: a great discomfort, splendour, spectacular embellishments, fabrics encrusted with embroidery or the distortion of most notably waists, hips and shoulders. The following conclusion can be reached hitherto, namely that women and the clothes they were in possession of were not a unity, inasmuch as Elizabethans were induced to conceal themselves behind these elaborate costumes and in a similar vein assumed false identities by using such indicators of inaccessibility as fans or masks.

Notwithstanding the description of clothes provided above, make-up and hairstyle are another factor determining the immense value attached to the way affluent, upper-class Elizabethan women presented themselves in front of others, while at the same time perfectly complementing their carefully selected costumes and emphasising their artificiality. Such highly poisonous substances as lead or mercury, posing a deadly threat to one's life, were used to reach a prime objective in the form of a porcelain skin, rouged cheeks, ruby lips and dark eyes

(Charleston). It was basically a widely held myth that the former quality – seen as a symbol of youthfulness, fertility, nobility or wealth – informed others that there was no need for women with such a complexion to work outdoors. Since currently there is still insufficient evidence for skin whitening, scientists can only hypothesise about possible arguments. The most credible and plausible explanation is the fact that it was a political statement implying a willingness to be viewed as distinct from other nations, Spain in particular. This country was viewed as the key marine power and England's arch enemy during that period, so there is no doubt that pale skin, among many other things, was a sign of accentuating the English look and distancing from their chief competitor at all possible levels. Venetian ceruse, an exemplary whitening mixture – which was meant to be spread over one's face – was made from white lead, borax, lemon juice or vinegar and it triggered the skin to achieve fairness not only English women, but also Spanish or Italian aspired to (Elgin, *A History of Fashion and Costume. Elizabethan England* 38). A bright red substance known as cochineal tinged their lips red and black kohl combined together with a deadly nightshade – a very pernicious plant – accentuated their eyes by darkening them in the eye area and enlarging the pupils respectively. The fact that the English are not known for their full lips, but rather tiny ones, was also purposely highlighted by means of make-up to put Elizabethan women in the spotlight. Another quite ingenious, but this time simple and harmless, technique to make a woman's eyes look bigger was to wear a lipstick that created the illusion of a smaller mouth. When it comes to cheeks, blush spread on them was deemed to bring health and life to the skin, which is why women applied it down from the cheekbone to bring about the effect of a natural flush, unlike the mixtures presented above. The original recipe for this rosiness or freshness contained a composition of madder root and beeswax, which marked a profound shift away from noxious substances. Elizabethans recognised fine, invisible eyebrows and a high hairline as the real beauty, which is quite the opposite to what we consider as striking and charming today.

These completely normal and widespread at that time practices, though ruining females' health and making their skins dry or flaky, were promoted because all that mattered was the ultimate effect of the bleached skin devoid of wrinkles and damages inflicted in the aftermath of acute diseases. This second reason applied to Queen Elizabeth herself, who once contracted smallpox, which left permanent scars on her face. She decided to apply white covering to her skin for the sake of her fading peerless beauty and this habit turned into a vicious circle as when the condition of her skin was deteriorating, she was putting even more of this toxic substance to cover all her blemishes and the outcome of the actual

product itself. Disappointingly, other women soon followed suit. What can be also underlined, is that attractive appearance seemed to thrive and downplay common sense, despite the fact that the use of these cosmetics resulted – in the worst-case scenario – in a premature death when slathered excessively for a lengthy period. Surprisingly, Elizabethan women neglected to remove this white covering at best for a week, which therefore irritated their skin making it wrinkled or grey. To make the situation even worse, the ingredients such as mercury combined with rosewater and eggshells, which were added to the facial cleanser, were lethal in contradistinction to the smooth skin they caused. Raw egg whites were supposed to ease their pain and left their faces glazed and softer. The idea of the "Mask of Youth",[1] coined by Sir Roy Strong, is what comes to mind while tackling the issue of longevity because it concerns the previously discussed aspect of beauty and may even clarify certain rationale for women treating their skins in such an inappropriate way. To illustrate the point more clearly, this concept was framed to present the illusion of the youth during the late period of Elizabeth I's rule, demonstrating how she manipulated her own look and transcended generations. The underlying logic behind this reasoning was the premise that as long as she retained youthfulness, she would be treated seriously by her counsellors as well as on the international stage – hence the Queen and other women suffered from irreparable skin damage.

Exploring the theme of hairstyle, with the virtual disappearance of coifs or hoods, coiffures were placed very high on the list of priorities alongside clothes or make-up. The ideal they conformed to was golden hair attained by means of dyeing. The Queen's hair was of a red colour, whereas the other Englishwomen' was quite bright and, willing to follow her example, they used saffron, celandine or cumin seeds and oil to bear a close resemblance to their style icon. Moreover, hair was arranged in the back of a woman's head, exposing a high forehead, which was accomplished by the disposition of front hair. They made this sacrifice to appear knowledgeable and from a higher social class. A gradual departure from naturalness could be noticed also in this respect: horsehair wigs were preferred as well as elaborate hairdos that were ornamented with decorative hairpins and pearls favoured by the Queen and thus her other subjects who could afford them. There is no coincidence in Gloriana's red hair as, in spite of possessing variously coloured wigs, she still chose red, which raised a question of the underlying

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[1] The short clip explaining the idea of „The Mask of Youth" is available on the website of the Royal Museum of Greenwitch: https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/elizabeth-i-fashion-beauty.

motives behind her preference.[2] First and foremost, she scotched rumours of her own illegitimacy by displaying a ginger hue she acquired from her father, Henry VIII. The red colour denotes uniqueness, rareness or outstanding qualities and, when combined with whiteness, it rendered her image inimitable and created a northern European look, which ran counter to the Spanish one. Furthermore, politically speaking, these two colours were associated with England's patron saint, St George (Harvey). Therefore, those who tried to imitate Elizabeth's hair were not only expressing their loyalty but also, along with their Queen, they showed their distinctiveness as Protestant England and stressed their divergence as a country from Catholic Europe. It simply became fashionable to look as close to Elizabeth and as English at the same time because these two were interconnected. This imitation is, however, not exceptional – even today, contemporary people take their fashion lead from the Royals, celebrities and the rich, making them their idols.

In Elizabethan times, the monarch was not only the head of state but she was also very high in the popularity and admiration stakes, which is visible from the numerous aforementioned instances, in which regular women were intent on being the spitting image of their role model. Virtually everybody wanted to look like the Queen and emulate her success in this field. It is worth mentioning that as Elizabeth was ageing, her decayed and rotten teeth revealed her sugar cravings and some women being under her enormous influence began to stain their own teeth as well – it confirms that she was the biggest trendsetter in the 16th century England as women were even capable of disfiguring themselves to follow her example. Her clothes, make-up and the entire look impacted the cult of Virgin Queen, inspired lots of commoners dwelling in the country and have definitely left us with an enduring image of her as an iconic ruler. Gloriana was a very conscious monarch amidst a patriarchal society, being perfectly aware of the value of appearance in public life and the fact that it strengthened her position or respect. Elizabeth's identity, which came to be England's hallmark, gave her recognition and assurance that she was suitable for being addressed as a Queen. She, therefore, embodies feminine beauty ideal, the one every woman from the past was trying to live up to and the epitome of which could be observed in the majority of the upper-class women during virtually the entire period of her reign.

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[2] To find out more about this red hair phenomenon see: Harvey, Jacky Collins. *Natural History of the Redhead.* 2015.

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"Want a hair tie?": The Portrayal of Women in *Birds of Prey*

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"Take, sir, a young woman, unhappy and persecuted; add to it a brutal tyrant" – this particular remark, made by Louis Reybaud, aptly encapsulates the portrayal of women in '007' series, as Umberto Eco did suggest in "Narrative Structures in Fleming" (172). Women in James Bond novels have little to no agency; as Eco stated, their main purpose is to be seduced and taken by the agent, who will then inevitably lose them (156). And the more unhappy, helpless, and oppressed by some nefarious forces they are, the better. Unfortunately, this kind of approach to constructing any female character is not restricted to Fleming's novels or even their screen adaptations; it seems that this strategy has dominated the whole genre of action films. But, thankfully, there are some exceptions that challenge this stereotype, like the newest Harley Quinn motion picture. *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*, released in 2020 and directed by Cathy Yan, differs from a typical action movie in its portrayal of women since it gives them agency and power to act, rejects the male gaze, and provides interesting and meaningful interactions between female characters.

Birds of Prey tells a story of four women: Harley Quinn, Black Canary, Helena Bertinelli and Renee Montoya, who join forces in order to protect a young girl – Cassandra Cain – from an evil crime lord, Roman Sionis. Despite this cliché plot, the film's approach towards the power relations between men and women is anything but ordinary. It is clear that all of the above-mentioned women have experienced the struggle of living in a "man's world." Detective Montoya was constantly ridiculed and underappreciated by her male boss and co-workers; Black Canary was forced to work for Sionis; Bertinelli had seen her whole family die because of one man's greed; finally, Harley Quinn has just ended an extremely abusive relationship with Joker. Since the story is narrated by Harley, it is her struggle and journey to empowerment that seems to be highlighted in the movie. It is neither easy nor straightforward — she grieves, errs, and nearly falls again under another man's control; but in the end, she stands her ground and confronts Sionis, emerging victorious and free at last. Quinn liberates herself from the toxic, male influence, and she is not the only one to do so: Montoya quits her job, Black

Canary betrays her boss, and Helena gets revenge on her tormentor and his associates. By refusing to stay passive, they truly carve their own paths.

In contrast to *Birds of Prey*, most typical action movies do depict women as passive, even object-like. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey describes the concept of a "male gaze": it is the way the camera, the audience, and, most importantly, the male hero looks at or captures the woman as an object of desire that exists only for the pleasure of the viewer (11-12). The male gaze is predominant in action movies, e.g. in *Die Another Day* (2002), when Bond looks through binoculars at Jinx Johnson (Halle Berry), who emerges in a bikini from the water. While the woman is introduced as an NSA agent, it seems that a "damsel in distress" could have been a more apt description of Berry's character – Agent 007 has to intervene and save her from villainous forces twice over the course of the film. This apparent refusal to portray her as a self-sufficient professional, coupled with the "coming out of the sea" scene as well as most of the other shots concerning Jinx, clearly indicate that Johnson's main role is to be Bond's – and audience's – eye candy. Alas, such a portrayal of female characters is practically the hallmark of 007 films; the above-mentioned scene in *Die Another Day* is but a homage to the similar sequence in *Dr. No* (1962) – a movie released 40 years earlier – which proves that the series' tendency of applying the male gaze and creating a certain image of a woman has not changed much over the decades.

While many more motion pictures in the action genre unfortunately tend to share that approach, *Birds of Prey* is not one of them. Here, the story is told and filmed from the perspective of a woman: there is both a female director and narrator. Harley is the one who ultimately controls the story and her non-linear narration serves as a good reminder of this fact. However, this control is not such an easy task for her; while the humorous tone of the narrator makes it easy to forget about Quinn's inner turmoil, the scene in Sionis' club does shed a light onto the fact that Harley still struggles with herself in order to take up the reins of her recently-upturned life. During her conversation with Black Canary, she remarks that "A harlequin is nothing without a master" (*Birds of Prey* 0:27:03–0:27:06). This is probably the most insightful piece of information about Harley and Joker's relationship that one will get from the whole film; the pain, the insecurity, and the underlying admission concerning Quinn's awareness of the true, twisted nature of their past union – it is all there. The topic is not explored more thoroughly in the movie, but it may be a conscious choice of the director – Harley in *Birds of Prey* concentrates on finding her own way, not being stuck in the past. She leaves behind Joker's vision of her, this metaphorical male gaze that tried unsuccessfully to reduce her to merely a role of an object that exists to satisfy his desires –

his faithful Harlequin. Furthermore, in the end, she truly manages to escape any lingering shadow of Joker's influence by not giving into any of Sionis' taunts and defeating him once and for all.

Moreover, what also distinguishes *Birds of Prey* from most of the action films is the distinct lack of the objectifying male gaze. The outfits of the women – especially those of Harley – are flattering, but their role is to convey the spirit of the character, not to sexualize them. In fact, Quinn's most frequent costume is first and foremost a statement: gone is the 'iconic' shirt from *Suicide Squad* (2016) that read "Daddy's Lil Monster"; it is replaced by a T-shirt patterned with her own name that subtly highlights the reclaimed ownership of her body and mind. And while not only Harley, but also other women portrayed in this movie are certainly not self-conscious about their bodies, the camera does not overtly and unnecessarily emphasize their sexiness. Actually, the most voyeuristic-like sequence seems to be the one about making a sandwich; the extreme close-ups, the slow motion, and sensual music create an intimate atmosphere that might be a quip at the similar in climate, fetishistic representation of women in most media.

Birds of Prey rejects this stereotypical objectification of female bodies as well as opposes the practice of silencing women in cinema, which is an alarmingly common phenomenon. One of the tools used to monitor such occurrences is the Bechdel Test. The criteria for passing the test are very basic: (1) a film has to feature at least two women (2) who talk to each other (3) about something besides men (Mariani). And yet, according to a graph made by Daniel Mariani, it seems that over 60% of action movies listed on the Bechdel Test website do not meet the requirements. *Birds of Prey* not only passes the test, but also provides a multitude of interesting and meaningful interactions between the female protagonists. From bestowing unorthodox life advice, preparing for a final battle to lending a hair tie during a fight, these women do not merely talk with one another — they actively cooperate and, through this, shape their fate.

As Black Canary sang: "This is a man's world, but it wouldn't be nothing without a woman or a girl" (*Birds of Prey* 0:23:06–0:23:23). While most female characters depicted in action films seem to adhere to the first part of these lyrics, the protagonists of *Birds of Prey* do the second part justice: through overturning power relations between men and women, rejecting the male gaze and turning to active cooperation and communication, they change this "man's world" to the women's world. Let us hope that in the years to come more and more movies with this kind of portrayal will appear on the big screen.

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African Americans' Motivations behind Voting for Trump in 2020

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The purpose of this essay is to pinpoint possible causes of the popularity surge of Donald J. Trump in the African-American communities and finding reasons for the gender discrepancy visible in the group during the 2020 presidential election. The essay initially provides a summary of Donald Trump's conduct before and during his four-year term that could have potentially repelled or attracted black voters in the 2020 election. Next, an analysis of several online articles and data gathered from polls and surveys provides potential causes that could have induced some African Americans to vote for the Republican candidate.

The 2020 presidential election in the United States has proven once again that the overwhelming majority of the African Americans remain loyal to Democratic candidates, a tendency that has been visible ever since the election of Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 (Jackson; "Changing Face of America"). Joe Biden's win, yet, does not completely undermine his competitor's popularity in these communities. According to exit polls conducted by CNN, Donald J. Trump persuaded 12% of black voters, while his opponent managed to sway 87% of them on his side ("National Results"). Interestingly enough, African-American voters chose the Republican candidate in greater proportion than in the 2016 election, when he clashed with Hillary Clinton and got only 8% of their votes ("Exit Polls 2016"). Both elections showed a discrepancy between black women and men – a greater percentage of the latter group voted for Trump.

Trump's unpopularity with African Americans had been initiated by himself and of his own will. When Barack Obama was the president of the U.S., he perpetuated "the birther theory" which falsely claimed that the first black president was not born in the U.S. but in Africa, thus should not have been elected (Inwood 584). He focused on himself the disdain of millions of African Americans, for whom Obama symbolizes a milestone of the progress of racial relations in the United States. Yet, the same allegations were important in inspiring support from the white majority of society. After five years of perpetuating the lie, he admitted his mistake but managed to enduringly offend the majority of the

African Americans who, consequently, opposed him (Haberman and Rappeport; Towler and Parker 8).

Among his many exaggerated slogans, the one in which he said that he is "the least racist person that you have ever met" has been under special scrutiny since he had become the candidate for the election in 2016 (Scott). Regardless of his words, in January 2020, eight in ten African Americans believed that he was racist and that during his term racism in the United States had become a greater issue ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 6-7). The same percentage of black respondents claimed that he opened the doors for the people who wanted to express their racist views ("National Survey") Although Trump's most explicitly bigoted comments comprise those directed at Latino and Muslim immigrants before his election (Lopez), the list of discrimination complaints is long for the African Americans as well.

Before the 2016 elections, Trump exhibited what he thought about African Americans, labeling them as a uniform category of people who lived in poverty, had no access to employment and quality education, thus, having nothing to lose (LoBianco and Killough). In 2017, after the Charlottesville protests, he resisted condemning the white supremacists, and praised "some very fine people on both sides" (Kessler). The comments inspired David Duke, the ex-leader of the KKK to thank him for his "honesty" (Thrush and Haberman). Later that year, Trump condemned the NFL players who decided to kneel during the national anthem as a sign of protest against police brutality and racism, by calling them "sons of bitches" (Kurtz). His negative view of the Black Lives Matter movement, together with his preference for "Blue Lives Matter" exposed his conservative position on issues regarding unequal treatment by the police and systemic racism (McManus 1044). In July 2019, he wrote on Twitter that four non-white congresswomen should "go back" to their original countries (Brown). Since all the women had been born in the United States, the comment was labeled as deceptive and racist (Rogers and Fandos). Although presenting himself as color-blind, his behavior exhibited his bias against African Americans and other people of color. He also abstained from supporting progressive anti-police brutality movements, and, perhaps most importantly, as stated by journalist, Peter Baker, he "fanned the flames" of racial hatred in America ("Trump Fans the Flames of a Racial Fire").

Despite his racist and divisive rhetoric, some of his actions benefited the African-American communities. The First Step act, implemented in 2018, retroactively reduced minimal mandatory sentences and allowed, for example, black victims of the crack epidemic to leave prisons earlier (Grawert). Following the enactment of the law, he paroled Alice Marie Johnson, a 63-year old life

convict sentenced for non-violent drug trafficking. Requested by Kim Kardashian and mainstreamed in one of Super Bowl commercials, this single act of goodness brought him great publicity (Mackelden and Sanchez; Karni). To address economic disparities, Trump had designed a plan to bring money to poor areas inhabited by African-American communities by offering a tax cut in return for investment in the "opportunity zones" (Drucker and Lipton). Although attracting predominantly white wealthy investors seeking a tax dodge, the project has the potential to decrease unemployment and improve the living conditions of many black residents of these areas (Gose). Together with signing the bill providing over 250 million dollars each year for historically black colleges and universities (Binkley), his actions portrayed him as not completely indifferent to the cause of African Americans.

During his term, the financial situation of African Americans improved. Unemployment and poverty rates in black communities reached their historical lows while income steadily rose, following the general trend in the country (Fitzgerald; "Poverty Rates"; Wilson). At least until the outburst of the coronavirus pandemic, when the unemployment rates skyrocketed to reach those from the Great Depression, and further highlighted the preexisting economical gap between African Americans and white Americans (Hardy and Logan 5). Regardless of the economical charts, in January 2020, two out of ten African Americans thought that during Trump's term their financial situation had improved, 26% claimed it had gotten worse, and 54% had not noticed any change ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 7). Yet, 20% of black respondents claimed, that Trump should be given credit for the historically lowest rate of unemployment ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 6). During the 2020 election, Trump promised African Americans a $500 billion investment called the "Platinum Plan", an unlikely vision due to the economic crisis and the need for many other government expenditures (Collins). The plan was supposed to benefit the black communities by enlarging the job market, increasing public funding, improving healthcare and education, and restricting immigration ("The Platinum Plan"). Hence, Trump's term could have been beneficial to the financial situation of some African Americans and the prospect of his budgetary policy presented in "The Plan" further convinced his African-American supporters.

Exploring the reasons for the surge of Trump's popularity in the African-American communities since the 2016 election is as challenging as it is complex. Nevertheless, pursuing this task is fascinating because there are visible differences in the group proving that African Americans are not uniform in their choices regarding certain indicators such as gender, age, their opinions on the state of the

country, and personal views. The greatest divergence in the 2020 elections among black voters is their gender. As much as 19% of all black men voted for Trump and only 9% of all black women, yet, women constituted 66% of all black voters ("National Results"). The difference is not new; in 2016, 13% of black males versus 4% of black women voted for Trump (Alcantara). Thus the difference in popularity among African-American men and women had been visible before he was elected.

Two important indicators to consider when delineating his supporters are political views and party affiliation. At the beginning of 2020, only 5% of all black voters considered themselves as Republicans ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 5), while 13% claimed that the GOP represented their interests well ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 7). 30% of African Americans who considered themselves politically conservative voted for Trump ("BlackPAC Black Monitor Poll" 23). 17% of Trump's African-American supporters voted for him due to him being the Republican party candidate; seven out of ten chose him simply out of fondness for him ("BET Poll"). Thus party affiliation did not play a major role for African Americans voting for Trump, however, conservative political views was a good indicator of his potential supporters.

The economical factor seems to be the most important when finding the reason behind Trump's popularity among black voters. The financial situation of African Americans improved, at least on the charts that showed record figures before the pandemic and Trump made it his success, regardless of his potential contribution. For 83% of black voters, the economy was one of the major factors when choosing the president ("BET Poll"); 17% believed that Trump would do a better job handling it. One of his many black celebrity supporters, Curtis James Jackson, commonly known as 50 Cent, claimed that, if Biden won, he would become "20 Cent" (Collins). Moreover, the prospect of Biden's tax-raising policy might have scared some African Americans who favored Trump and his neoliberal, laissez-faire attitude towards the economy.

Ever since the 2016 election, Trump underlined that Democrats had nothing to offer to African-American communities (LoBianco and Killough). His efforts were crowned by the creation of "Blexit", an organization aimed to encourage African Americans to dissociate from the Democratic party (Whiteside). 63% of black Trump supporters believed that the Democratic party had not done enough for the African-American communities (*BlackPac* 36). Of all black responders, 37% thought that Democrats in Congress did not understand the lives of African-American families ("National Survey"). Congruently, 29% considered that the Democratic party took their votes for granted ("BET Poll"),

and some felt pressure from other representatives of their race to vote Democrat (Nagesh). Joe Biden himself exhibited the "taken for granted" attitude mixed with what could be called an "identity blackmailing", when in an interview with Charlamagne Tha God, an African-American radio presenter, he said that "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't black" ("Biden Apologizes for Saying Black Voters 'Ain't Black'"). He later apologized for this controversial comment (Herndon and Glueck). Trump in return played the "race card" and sponsored a television advertisement condemning Biden's comment and highlighting the fact that in 1996 he had played a great part in signing the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, which accelerated mass incarceration ("Insulted Millions"; Fandos). Trump's efforts to diminish the Democratic party's ability to improve the lives of African Americans go back to the 2016 election, when he stood as a Republican candidate. In 2020 Biden's unfortunate comment was used against him, making his views on race more ambiguous, thus giving Trump a possible aid in winning the support of black voters.

Still, the Republican candidate has a greater history of racially divisive behaviors and comments. John McWhorter, *The Atlantic* journalist, claims that Trump's electors were aware of the fact that he is racist, but still were willing to vote for him ("The Black People Who Voted for Trump"). He calls attention to the history of black voters and the scarcity of choice they had had regarding the candidates' views on race. The African-American community is not without its problems when it comes to race. In a 2018 Harvard-Harris poll, 48% of African Americans judged that less than 250,000 immigrants should be admitted to the U.S. each year constituting the largest group opposing immigration (68). 20% of black respondents in the survey at the end of 2019 claimed that immigrants were "a burden" ("National Survey" 8). Yet racism is not the main reason for their anti-immigrant sentiments – some African Americans believe that mass immigration increases competition in the low-income job market (Seminara). Trump's racist rhetoric was not the main issue for his supporters, while his politics on immigration could have been persuasive for some African Americans worried about the future of their employment.

Trump, after his coronavirus hospitalization, addressed African Americans and Latinos saying that they "are rejecting the radical socialist left, and they're embracing our pro-jobs, pro-worker, pro-police . . . and pro-American agenda" (Collins). Hence, he might have done a great job at delineating his potential supporters. He knew that his supporters would cherish him despite his negative view of the Black Lives Matter campaign. In July 2020, 86% of African Americans

supported the movement (Thomas and Horowitz), while in October 2020 seven in hundred black respondents strongly opposed it ("BET Poll"); 13% answered that pre-election protests against racial inequality were not a factor when choosing a candidate ("BET Poll"). Moreover, 14% believed that in all U.S. the police treated different races on equal terms, while 28% had the same opinion regarding their communities ("Washington Post-Ipsos Poll" 7). Perhaps, the minority of African Americans who did not believe in active combat against police brutality and systemic racism, constituted a large part of Trump supporters.

African-American women constitute a loyal block of voters who choose democratic candidates and Julie Scelfo, the Boston Globe journalist, even calls them "the heart and soul of the Democratic party" ("Will Black Women Save Us . . . Again?"). Black women, despite being an especially disadvantaged group in the United States, exhibit great entrepreneurial abilities and are the main breadwinners in African-American families (DuMonthier et al. 12). One of possible explanations for their political inclinations is that the Republicans' take on women's rights and the tendency to maintain the patriarchal system gives them no better choice, but to vote Democrat (Coaston). What is more, seventeen sexual allegations towards Trump and his several sexist comments did not present him as a promising candidate in the light of the Me Too movement (Nelson and Frostenson). The choice of Biden entailed the subsequent election of Kamala Harris as the Vice President thus, in terms of representation of gender and race, she must have provided much better prospects for black women than Mike Pence. Despite strong pressure from other African Americans to vote Democrat, 9% of black women voted for Trump. To do that they had to disregard Trump's racist and sexist comments together with his propensity to critique important social movements. They chose the continuation of his tax and immigration-cutting politics, believing that this choice would provide an even brighter future for black communities.

19% of black men voted for Trump, hence his politics on the economy must have had a greater impact on this group. For them, Trump has been an "aspirational figure" even before he was elected (Coaston) – his successful life, wealth, businesslike attitude, macho behavior, confidence, and unapologetic style could be the clues to understand his popularity among African-American men. Bootstrapping, the domain of Trump's approach to the economy, has a long history in the United States and has been stereotypically associated with the male figure. This attitude was also implanted into the Black American consciousness, especially men, even though African Americans constituted a hugely dis-advantaged group for the majority of the country's past. Trump could be a symbol

for some of those who want to establish themselves as self-made men, and his politics appealed to them the most (Coaston; Janes). Coming from the business world that encourages individualism and opposes compassion, Trump had the opportunity to play his favorite role of being the boss on the political scene, and some decided to follow (Milanovic; Collins).

African Americans are one of the most influential minority groups who can sway the whole election to either side. The majority of them support Democratic candidates, and they constitute the most blue-leaning group in the country. Yet, four years of Trump's presidency persuaded some African Americans to vote for him in the 2020 election. His strict politics on immigration and liberal views on the economy could be the potential keys for his surge of popularity. It is unlikely that his voters supported the Black Lives Movement, and possibly, they were aware of Trump's racist sentiments. His macho style was detrimental in appealing to black men in particular, who had looked up to him ever since he had become a celebrity. Yet, the support he got was pitiful compared to the number of black voters who chose Biden and Harris. Democratic dominance among black voters has become a standard in the presidential election. Still, candidates of the blue party need to reconsider their "taken for granted" attitude, because there are black men and women in America for whom individual success and a guarantee of employment is more important than the expression of discontentment with systemic racism.

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"Bilbo Bagosz z Bagoszna":
The Reception of Jerzy Łoziński's Translation of
The Fellowship of the Ring in Poland

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The Lord of the Rings by J. R. R. Tolkien is believed to be one of the most influential fantasy series in the world. What stands Tolkien's books apart from the others is the setting: a fantastical universe, carefully crafted not only with regard to cultures and customs, but also the most intricate linguistic details, such as languages and names. Multiple layers of meanings conveyed by the Middle-earth vocabulary are especially difficult to preserve in translation. In Poland considerable controversy was aroused by Łoziński's domesticating approach to the challenge. The aim of this essay is to explore the relationship between the attitudes towards Łoziński's translation of the first part of the series – *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Tolkien) – and the norms established in the Polish literary system.

Polysystem theory

Polysystem theory was introduced in the 1970s by Itamar Even-Zohar, who had been greatly influenced by Russian Formalism and Czech Structuralism. From this perspective literature is seen as a complex, dynamic network of texts, which influence each other and compete for a dominant position (Munday 170-171).

Polysystem is a broad concept which might be discussed on a number of levels. First, there is the world polysystem consisting of all the literary texts ever written. Then, there are polysystems of certain cultures (or countries/languages) and, finally, polysystems of particular literary genres (Shuttleworth 176). Each polysystem has a specific hierarchy. The literary works occupying a central position in the given polysystem have the most impact on the given culture and its literary trends. The peripheral literature has the least impact on the above, being less likely to start any innovations (Munday 170-172).

Translated literature usually takes a peripheral position in a literary polysystem (Even-Zohar, "The Position" 50), which means that it is more likely to follow conservative norms pre-established by the original central literature (48).

However, this is not always the case. Even-Zohar lists three circumstances when a translated work might become central in a polysystem: (a) when a polysystem is young and "in the process of being established"; (b) when a polysystem takes a peripheral position in the world literary system; (c) when there are critical events or empty literary niches in a polysystem (47). As a result, in each of these situations, translated works become an "innovatory force", shaping or transforming the polysystem (46). They serve as a medium through which foreign elements are imported into the host culture. When this creates a need for the foreign elements, the transfer might be deemed successful; previously alien items have become "an integral part of the home repertoire" (Even-Zohar, "The Making of Culture").

The Lord of the Rings in the Polish literary polysystem

The Lord of the Rings is considered a prototypical text of the fantasy genre (Majkowski 169). Not only did it lay the foundations for the fantasy novel but it also has had an enormous impact on many other writers and critics (170). By assuming a central position in the world polysystem, *The Lord of the Rings* has largely contributed to the establishment of artistic norms and conventions.

The series enjoys a similar status in the Polish literary system. Although the term *fantasy* was introduced into the Polish vocabulary in 1970 by Stanisław Lem, original source texts in this genre had not been published until the 1980s (Majkowski 406, 408). The earliest novel, *Imperium: smoki Haldoru* by Jacek Piekara, was printed in 1987 (409). Prior to that, this category in Poland had been mostly associated with Anglo-Saxon literature, especially with J. R. R. Tolkien, since he had been the only fantasy writer whose books had been translated (Majkowski 355). Consequently, Tolkien's work was granted the central position in the Polish fantasy genre polysystem as well as in the Polish literary system as a whole.

At the same time, it needs to be emphasized that it is the translation that allowed for the success of *The Lord of the Rings* (and other Tolkien's texts) in Poland. The translation introduced a new genre which was lacking in the Polish literature, successfully transferring it into the Polish culture repertoire, which helped to fill the "literary vacuum" (Even-Zohar, "The Position" 47). The author of the first Polish translation of *The Lord of the Rings* (*Władca Pierścieni,* the first part being originally titled *Wyprawa*) was Maria Skibniewska and for almost 40 years it was the only translation of the trilogy that existed. Due to all these circumstances, Skibniewska's rendition might have firmly established itself in the minds of the Polish recipients and acquired a classical status.

Bractwo Pierścienia as a polemic translation

Foreign literary works that enjoy success in a given culture tend to be periodically republished and retranslated. A set of subsequent translations of a specific text is called a "translation series". New translations in a series are usually created in order to address the changes in the target language or in the receivers' expectations and background knowledge. Another motivation might be the translator's will to find new solutions to the challenges posed by an especially famous and difficult work (Szymańska 193-194). If a new translation is "systematically connected" with the previous ones and the translator consciously creates their own, different version, the translation might be considered "polemic". The polemic intention may be explicitly expressed by the translator in a preface or it might be implicit, namely it has to be inferred from a consistently distinctive strategy (Szymańska 194-195).

  Bractwo Pierścienia by Jerzy Łoziński is the second translation of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, published in 1996. Its polemic intention might be easily deduced from abundant evidence. First, what draws attention to itself from the beginning is a distinctive title, easily distinguishable from Skibniewska's *Wyprawa*. Second, there is a drastic change in the translation of the characters' names (e.g. Baggins – "Bagosz"; Sam Gamgee – "Sam Gaduła"), places (Shire – "Włość"; Rivendell – "Tajar"), nicknames (Strider – "Łazik" [cf. Skibniewska's "Obieżyświat"]) and race names (Stoors – "Tędzy", dwarf – "krzat" [cf. Skibniewska's "krasnolud"]). In contrast to Skibniewska's foreignizing approach, Łoziński consistently uses the strategy of domestication, additionally offering alternative translations to the terms already translated into Polish in *Wyprawa*. In numerous cases Łoziński introduces typically Polish words, more likely to be associated with *Potop* by Henryk Sienkiewicz (as a traditional Polish text) rather than an English-based fantastical world ("waszmościowie, Gorzaleń, Chmielko Maślak") (Sylwanowicz). Moreover, he Polonizes Tolkien's spelling of such names as Minas Tirith ("Minas Tirit") or Lothlorien ("Lotaroria"). These changes are explained in a number of annotations and, more generally, in the publisher's preface to the novel. The preface states that Łoziński's main goal was to obey Tolkien's translation guidelines as faithfully as possible, especially with regard to the proper names and the names of the places (Łoziński 5).

Tolkien's stance on the translation of nomenclature in his novels

Before proceeding to examine the reception of Łoziński's translation, it is important to mention Tolkien's perspective on the translation of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Having been disappointed with the first (Dutch and Swedish) translations, Tolkien from the very beginning had a very critical attitude towards domestication. In the 1950s he wrote a number of letters to his editors, where he vehemently objected to any sort of changes made to the nomenclature and demanded that translators contact him whenever in doubt. If necessary, a translator might add a glossary of names at the end of the book. Tolkien justified his position by pointing to the discrepancy between his original depiction of rural England and target language names. Additionally, he argued that such modifications indicate a lack of respect for the years of work he put in linguistic world-building (Carpenter 206-207, 218). To make matters even clearer, Tolkien was contacted by Skibniewska herself at the time she was translating *The Lord of the Rings*. He instructed her to preserve the "Englishry" of the text, leaving all the names intact and attaching a glossary as described above (246).

Nevertheless, after a few years Tolkien reconciled himself with the widespread tendency towards domestication and in the 1960s he wrote *Guide to the Names in the Lord of the Rings*, predominantly with the Germanic languages in mind. There, he provided a list of names that might be translated, with additional guidelines on what to preserve (meaning, etymology, obsolete/dialectical elements). The names not appearing on the list should stay intact (Tolkien 750-752).

The reception of *Bractwo Pierścienia* by the Polish readers: qualitative analysis

Bractwo Pierścienia has provoked severe criticism from the very moment of publication. As indicated previously, most of the disapproval has been directed at the domestication of proper names. *The Lord of the Rings*' fans have even coined the term *łozizm,* signifying a badly translated word (Borowski; Ostiak). Consequently, the publishers issued multiple corrected editions, reinstating (with Łoziński's consent) the names from Skibniewska's rendition (Ostiak). Currently, the original version of Łoziński's translation from 1996 is virtually unattainable in the Polish market.

For the purpose of this paper, I have conducted research into contemporary attitudes towards *Bractwo Pierścienia*. My analysis encompasses diverse digital sources, from comments posted on literary blogs, forums and the social cataloging website *Lubimyczytać.pl* to the opinions of literary critics. Additionally, I will attempt to identify the main subjects, tendencies and recurring themes appearing in the comments. Since they were originally written in Polish, my translations are enclosed in quotation marks.

The negative opinions vary from significantly emotional to strictly rational ones. People criticizing *Bractwo Pierścienia* on exclusively emotional grounds call it "unreadable", "rubbish" (Jarek), "terrible" (Valkirion), "the greatest crime against *The Lord of the Rings*" (Nensha). Valkirion reports that reading a short fragment of Łoziński's translation made him "want to vomit" and that such translations "do not work for him". Nensha "hates" this translation "with all her heart". Łoziński's translation choices were "nonsense", "tossed out" in the following editions (Muszyński), which "still has not increased the translation's value" ("Tłumaczenia Władcy Pierścieni"). WinterWolf comments that she "does not know what Łoziński had drunk or smoked before he started his work" but his translation "looks awful". Łoziński's proper name translations are "idiotic", "pathetic", "moronic", "sweep one off one's feet with idiocy" and had her in (desperate) "fits of laughter" ("Tłumaczenia Władcy Pierścieni").

A large number of the critical comments reflect the traditional "naïve" (as referred to by Szymańska 201) view that there is only one "original" translation of a source text. Some individuals openly admit that they have been strongly influenced by Skibniewska's translation as it was the first translation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* they have read (e.g. Wiewiórka w okularach). Galliusz claims that he is "too accustomed to Skibniewska's version … to give Łoziński's translation a chance". Zorg notes that after reading *Wyprawa* (Skibniewska), Łoziński's rendition seemed "unacceptable" for him. However, having finally read *Bractwo Pierścienia*, he came to the conclusion that he "did not mind". Marcink tries to justify the widespread endorsement of Skibniewska's translation, arguing that she "avoided controversial changes and was able to reflect the book's atmosphere" while Łoziński aimed to "create an innovative … text", which "did not fit" Tolkien's work.

More factual critical comments focus on the evaluation of Łoziński's choices as regards both the proper names and the style. I will start with the former. Many critics refer to the official Tolkien's stance on the translation of nomenclature, especially his early objection towards domestication (e.g. Ostiak). The users who do not cite Tolkien's statements directly, argue that *The Lord of the Rings* is not a Slavic series, therefore it should not be modified in order to pretend otherwise (Rakowska); Hobbiton is not a Polish countryside ("wieś spokojna, wieś wesoła") but "good, old England" (Wasila). Jakub Ślęzak maintains that such domestication contradicts "the spirit of the original". Another reported problem was that *Łazik* conveys too many associations with a tank or a Mars rover (Pioturu; Wiewiórka w okularach; Zdunek).

On the other hand, Tolkien's *Guide to the Names in the Lord of the Rings* much more frequently serves as an argument used by Łoziński's defendants (e.g. Fenske). At the same time, there are those who notice that Łoziński did not comply with the instructions (Ostiak). Łoziński's adherence to Tolkien's guidelines has been thoroughly examined by Agnieszka Sylwanowicz, a prolific translator and an expert on Tolkien. For her, the translation of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (or any translation at all) should primarily focus on the loyalty to both the author and the reader as well as on preserving the cohesion of the created world.

First of all, Sylwanowicz considers Łoziński's work "sloppy" and "unreliable" since it "obeys Tolkien's instructions only when it is convenient". While some of Tolkien's guidelines are followed (a number of translations preserve the original meaning, e.g. Bracegirdle – "Pasopust", Frogmorton – "Żabie Muły"), many names are translated in a way that contradicts Tolkien's will, either due to a different artistic vision (e.g. according to Tolkien, the translation of Baggins should preserve the meaning of 'bag', while Łoziński only added the suffix "-osz") or misunderstanding (e.g. Hollin should convey associations with holly, the plant ("ostrokrzew"), while Łoziński translated it as *Swent*, which is possibly connected with an Old-Slavic word signifying 'holy') (Sylwanowicz). Moreover, Łoziński changed the names which should be left untranslated (e.g. Everard Tuk – "Ekler Tuk"). Sylwanowicz notes that numerous stylistic errors committed by Łoziński stem from his lack of knowledge of *The Lord of the Rings* universum (e.g. Sam "zdusił obcasem iskierski" while hobbits do not wear shoes). Nonetheless, Sylwanowicz admits that *Bractwo Pierścienia* has some advantages. Łoziński successfully dealt with the translation of poems and managed to correct a number of mistakes made by Skibniewska (Sylwanowicz).

Another accomplished translator who took a position on Łoziński's case was Tadeusz Olszański. His approach is largely prescriptive. He argues that the assessment of any translation should be, first and foremost, based on the degree to which it is equivalent with the original. Fulfilling readers' needs is of secondary importance. Olszański considers Łoziński's mistakes "undisputable" and necessary for deletion, while the translation of nomenclature is "inappropriate". Additionally, he criticizes Łoziński's multiple additions to the source text (e.g. said – "skrzywił się z powątpiewaniem"). He summarizes all that has been said on *Bractwo Pierścienia,* evaluates Łoziński's translation choices with regard to their faithfulness to the source text (e.g. how well they manage to preserve the original meanings) and addresses the most burning questions, settling the disputes primarily in favour of Łoziński's critics.

When it comes to the style, there is no shortage of those who defend Łoziński's work. Łoziński's advocates (and even those who criticize his proper name translations) praise him for a great, "elevated" style ("Dlaczego Warto Sięgnąć") and an impeccable reflection of the original text's atmosphere (Ostiak). Although most users view Skibniewska's translation as the closest to the original, some fans claim that Łoziński's rendition (especially his language) is the most faithful reproduction of "the style of the original" (Anonimowy). Many positive comments refer to the excellent translation of poems (e.g. "Dlaczego warto sięgnąć; Setore"). However, it is worth noting that the corrected editions of *Bractwo Pierścienia* feature poems rendered by other translators, e.g. Marek Gumkowski (Anonimowy; Górska). Górska mentions that *Bractwo Pierścienia* is "more accessible" and easier to read than other translations. Setore states that she likes Łoziński's translation better because it has more "panache", it is more "literary" and "melodious" than Skibniewska's version. On the other hand, there are those who view Łoziński's style as "weird", "archaic" (Sowa) and consider some of his dialectic stylizations "irritating" (Gwathgor).

Łoziński's proponents note the tendency to despise *Bractwo Pierścienia* (1996) "just because", as a way conforming to the common belief that Łoziński's version is "worthless" (Kalevala). Some of them argue that domesticated translations in other languages (e.g. Spanish, French) do not provoke such controversies (Marcin). Others admit that *Bractwo Pierścienia* was the first of *The Lord of the Rings* translations they have read and they are sentimental about it (Pop_books).

Those who specifically defend Łoziński's proper name translation focus on the functionality and the equivalent effect for the target readers. Ostiak maintains that the original story was told from the hobbits' perspective, therefore the Polonization of the proper names preserves the relationship between the hobbits and the (foreign) world outside Shire. Since Tolkien aimed for the languages of different races to be different from each other, the hobbits' manner of speaking should be considered a rural dialect in comparison to the archaic and solemn speech of Gondor or Rohan (Ostiak). Marcin argues that for the English (source) readers Baggins or Hobbiton is as familiar as "Bagosz" and "Hobbitowo" for the Polish recipients. Foreignization would alter the effect the source text was intended to have on the readers.

Finally, there are fans who see Łoziński's choices as equivalent with the source text. In his emotional essay, a journalist and writer Tomasz Fenske justifies Łoziński's choices on historical and cultural grounds. He argues that Łoziński's work was created as a result of many analyses and reflections. Fenske praises Łoziński for not conforming to the norms established by the polysystem; he sees

his choices as more faithful to the original and more successful in achieving the equivalent effect for the Polish reader. For example, he cites Łoziński's original annotations that the words "krzat" and "krzatowie" might be found in *Średnio-wieczna poezya łacińska w Polsce* by A. Bruckner, while the canonical "krasnoludy" evoke strong associations with small, funny "krasnoludki" (little dwarves). Fenske notes that the changes made to the spelling of the elvish language (e.g. Orthank – "Ortank") highlight the differences between the speech of the elves and the orcs. Like most of Łoziński's supporters, Fenske defends the rendering of Strider as "Łazik" (cf. Skibniewska's "Obieżyświat") on the grounds that Aragorn's nickname was supposed to be disrespectful, therefore this translation is closer to the original and the author's intentions. He also defends Łoziński's decision to translate (domesticate) the names in "Common Speech" (the universal language of Middle-earth) since they should seem familiar and contrast with the foreign nomenclature of other races. Fenske views any accusations that *Bractwo Pierścienia* falsifies the source text as invalid since word-for-word (e.g. Skibniewska's) translation usually produces lower quality target texts and the changes introduced by Łoziński do not considerably alter the original meaning.

Indeed, some fans criticize Skibniewska for "taking the line of the least resistance" and they view linguistic creativity as a value in itself. Gwathgor writes that she "had fun" discovering subsequent "adorable" name translations. Shadow-sun praises Łoziński for his visible attempts to adapt the source text to the Polish reader. Samson Miodek appreciates Łoziński for trying to be creative because thanks to his translation the book has an additional flavor. He mentions that for him reading Łoziński was "the adventure of a lifetime" and he insists on readers being grateful that there are multiple Polish translations of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Conclusions

As discussed previously, Skibniewska's *Wyprawa* has a central position in both the Polish fantasy genre polysystem and the whole Polish literary polysystem. Consequently, her foreignizing approach towards nomenclature set norms and guidelines for any future translations of *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Any names she rendered into Polish (e.g. dwarves – "krasnoludy") have become an integral part of the Polish fantasy vocabulary – used both by fans and writers (Poradecki 126).

Łoziński's polemic translation broke with the tradition in two ways. First, it changed the nomenclature that was already an important part of the Polish

polysystem. Second, it ignored the growing tendency for foreignizing translations (since polemic translations usually tend to contradict more common domesticating approaches and uncover manipulations performed by the previous translators (Szymańska 195, 208). Łoziński failed twice to fulfill the readers' expectations, which was punished by the polysystem. Later corrected editions were the result of the compromise the system enforced.

However, there is one element whose change or modification did not bother any side of the discussion. It is the style. Since the general manner of writing is not as visible as the translation of specific words, a target text's style is usually assessed on its own, without comparison to the source text. If the style is "good" and the target text reads well or better than the source one (the language is more contemporary, fluent, natural or poetic), it tends to be positively evaluated, no matter if it resembles the author's style. Any disfluencies are often attributed exclusively to the translator. Although Łoziński uses a different style than Skibniewska, this modification is accepted and approved by the polysystem (hence the style stayed intact in later editions). Even though this change might have been yet another adaptation to the target culture, no user has commented on its inappropriateness nor complained that the language is "too smooth" or "too poetic", "too rich", "too easy to read" in comparison to Tolkien's diction.

The contradictory opinions voiced by the recipients of *Bractwo Pierścienia* reflect two divergent, even conflicting discourses that exist in the field of translation studies and refer to the question of the ultimate function of translation. The first discourse concerns the agents taking part in the translation process and pertains to the clash between the principle of equivalent effect and the loyalty to the author's intentions. The second one is focused on the text itself and refers to the opposite orientations: domestication (adapting a text to target readers) versus foreignization (fidelity to the source text). Controversies and strong emotions are likely to stem from the presumption that there is one, objective, correct way of translating; that there is strict translating policy and anything that deviates from this policy is "incorrect". More often than not, individual endorsement of a certain translation strategy is a matter of subjective feelings influenced by norms, customs and other social constructs. The problem arises when these subjective reasons are disguised with logical arguments and references to an objective value system according to which a translation may be judged as "right" or "wrong". There is certainly a need for a more flexible, conscious and dialectic approach to translation assessment. It is wholly desirable to have a specific opinion on what an "adequate" translation should look like (and present arguments or consider an ethical perspective), but one needs to simultaneously be aware of the fact that translation is a

largely subjective issue and there is not one "proper" way to translate, while our feelings often result from the text's position in the given literary polysystem.

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Full Stop is Dead; Long Live Full Stop!
A Brief Look at a New Mode of Punctuation

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In "Generation Z feels intimidated by full stops, experts find"*,* Helena Horton cautions the readers that using unnecessary full stops in messaging with Gen-Z individuals might be interpreted as a sign of "curt passive-aggression." This appears to be a textbook example of recycling journalism. Full stops were declared "dead" (Ramos), "out of style" (Bilefsky), and even "pissed" (Crair) years before Gen Z became the preferred target of disgruntled journalists. These sensationalist claims had been ridiculed by the very linguist Bilefsky quoted (Crystal, "On the Reported"). Full stops (or "periods") are here to stay, as they are useful on the internet. Just as the rest of punctuation marks, they have been refitted for new purposes. The reaction to Horton's piece was resentment expressed in the comments section underneath it – a typical response to what this article and numerous others describe is a sign of an ongoing shift in how people growing up "on the internet" use written language for effective communication. In the absence of intonation and stress patterns, facial expressions and hand gestures, non-standard use of punctuation marks took over the role of providing utterances with pragmatic substrate. Punctuation has become the vital component of emulating prosody and non-verbal cues in instant messaging.

The commenters' scorn for the younger generations' tendency to take a utilitarian approach to punctuation is, in fact, *nihil novi sub sole.* As far back as the first century BC, Cicero himself, a firm believer of a well-written sentence's ability to mark its own closing, thought punctuation marks were "unnecessary" (Crystal, *Making a Point*, ch. 1). This word can be considered the keyword, as needless punctuation may be nowadays read as hidden meaning. According to (McCulloch, ch. 4), "anything that takes more effort than necessary is a potential message. The dots must be indicating something left unsaid." What this passage refers to is older generations' (i.e. those who are linguistically offline-oriented) tendency to use multiple dots in order to link utterances together. Younger users, on the other hand, use line breaks. These two incompatible approaches to the problem of coming up with a way to link chunks of speech together in writing

without having to decide whether they are full sentences or just clausal fragments can generate misunderstandings spanning from inferred flirtatiousness to passive-aggression. Since trans-generational communication takes place in workplaces, universities, and families, it is conceivable receiver inferences not intended by the sender from both ends of the spectrum can lead to many unpleasant situations.

In their respective books, both Crystal and McCulloch touch upon many typographical symbols appropriated by internet culture. This paper, however, will focus on the most prominent example: the full stop. It attracts the attention of not only sensationalist journalists, but also legitimate researchers. Computational linguist Tyler Schnoebelen analysed a total of 157,305 text messages sent or received with about 1,100 people over the period of circa seven years to find that the probability of a full stop occurring in a message increased with its length, coming to 13% for messages shorter than 17 characters, and 60% for those that exceeded 72 characters (Steinmetz). These results suggest that this particular punctuation mark is still used as it was on paper; it is just redundant in case of short utterances, unless it also carries some information. Linguists tend to agree that it appears to be the carrier of gravitas. It can certainly change a mere observation ("John has come") into an ominous statement ("John has come."), or a casual remark ("fine, you can stay") into a passive-aggressive one ("fine. you can stay."), but that is not all it is being used for. What Schnoebelen also found is that, once message length was put aside, full stops were more likely to accompany words from the following set: 'told', 'feels', 'feel', 'felt', 'feelings', 'date', 'sad', 'seems' and 'talk'. To borrow Katy Steinmetz's wording, "... that gravity can also be kind, expressing sincere empathy when something bad has happened to a friend, or conveying the sincerity of your own feelings." Paradoxically, in more casual contexts, full stops can induce doubts about one's sincerity. A study conducted on one hundred twenty-six Binghampton University students revealed that simplistic, devoid of context messages are rated as less sincere (Gunraj et al.). The follow-up study with an extended set of three experiments showed that full stops make one-word messages less enthusiastic and more negative (Houghton et al.).

This divergence in possible undertones that full stops can carry may leave the receiver puzzled as to what should their inference be in a given situation. A solution to this problem was proposed by McCulloch. She advises to treat full stops as markers of falling intonation (ch. 4). Along with context, this allows for understanding the message in accordance with the intentions of the sender. What is more, this technique, through substitution, demonstrates that punctuation in messaging serves the same purpose as voice modulation in regular speech. While

reading, receivers can effectively *hear* the difference between "fine" and "fine." Thus, vocal intricacies of language transcend the acoustic.

Even though the new mode of punctuation prevails among millennials and zoomers alike, the full stop is neither "dead" nor "out of style", though it certainly may be "pissed" at times. Writing has not completely changed, it has "forked, into formal and informal versions" (McCulloch, ch. 4), or, as David Crystal puts it,

> The situation parallels what we see in the more general linguistic scenario that sociolinguists call diglossia (the simultaneous use in a society of a language that has two contrasting varieties, such as Classical Arabic and colloquial Arabic) – only here we would need to call it digraphia. In the offline world, Standard English punctuation is still alive and well; in the online world, nonstandard punctuation is alive and well. (*Making a Point*, ch. 33)

In situations like this digraphic predicament of the 21st century, effective code switching becomes crucial. Just as speakers tend to carefully choose words around their parents, teachers, and bosses, but freely indulge in profanities among friends, they need to learn to accommodate their punctuation marks use to those whom they write. Most people born after 1990 are well-versed in the ways of avoiding typographical cultural clashes daily. It is those who came before that struggle with the matter. The older a person is, the more difficult it becomes for them to keep up with all the new developments in language, the new mode of punctuation being only one of them. Along with their language, their world becomes limited. How fitting that the limits he spoke of are now marked with dots – just as borders are on a map.

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