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Dear Readers,

Virginia Woolf once said: “The essay is alive. There is no reason to despair”, and we could not agree more, especially after having read numerous brilliant and insightful works which were submitted this year. As a new editorial team, we had a lot of difficult decisions to make but finally, here they are – the best essays written by the students of our Institute.

This issue represents mostly literary and cultural perspectives, with one contribution on translation. Like last year, it opens with an essay on a 19th-century work, but chronologically speaking, our literary and cultural journey starts in the 14th, and the Green Knight and Morgan le Fay are our guides on page as well as on screen. Yet there is still more to discover: feminism, ecology, race, mental health, philosophy, and translation – these are just some of the topics that became the foundation of this year’s edition. Last but not least, the poetry section features three new pieces written by our BA student.

If you enjoy writing and would be interested in publishing your works in our journal, do not miss the next call for papers. And if you want to join the editorial team, do not wait and let us know now.

In the meantime, as always, enjoy reading!

The Editorial Team:

Katarzyna Boch
Emil Kusio
Józefina Kruszewska
& Lucyna Krawczyk-Żywko

The Painter in the House: The Woman Painter in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë

Józefina Kruszevska
BA student

Anne Brontë, as the youngest member of a literary family, seemed to be somewhat neglected by scholars who often tended to gravitate towards the renowned works of her sisters, Charlotte and Emily. Anne, in the past seen as a meek and inexperienced writer – even by her own sister, Charlotte (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 64) – produced two notable literary works during her short life: *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which, in recent years, started receiving more critical attention, especially from feminist critics. In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë brings to life a bold heroine, Helen Graham, who for some embodies an independent proto-feminist New Woman.

In the epistolary framing narrative of *The Tenant*, Gilbert Markham, a young gentleman farmer, recalls to his brother-in-law how he first fell in love with a mysterious Helen Graham. This lady, clothed in widow's mourning, arrived in Gilbert's neighbourhood and settled in a secluded Wildfell Hall with her little son, Arthur. She tried to avoid the prying local community and instead formed a friendship with Gilbert which, in time, turned into mutual affection. However, soon, Helen became a victim of local gossip which questioned her son's legitimacy and tarnished her reputation. To explain her situation to Gilbert, Helen presented him with a journal which covered the years of her married life. From the enclosed journal, the reader learns of her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, a cruel abusive man whose alcohol addiction and infidelity made Helen's life unbearable. In order to save her son's innocent soul, which would have been spoiled by his father's drunken behaviour, Helen devised a plan to change her name and escape her peremptory spouse. Being a skilled painter, she decided to support both herself and her little child with the work of her hands.

Anne Brontë's portrayal of the woman artist became the main interest of this essay. As Antonia Losano observes, "[c]ritics of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* have expended little energy considering the ramifications of the heroine's career as a professional painter" (*The Woman Painter* 64). Yet, Brontë's novel, published in 1848, undoubtedly adds an important voice to the discourse which surrounded

women painters at that time. Indeed, all of the Brontës had a keen interest in art, and, although painterly references appear in some of their novels, “the example of a woman whose art turns to be her profession is rare even among the Brontë sisters” (Pourgiv and Rahmati 130). Moreover, seeing Anne Brontë’s work from a socio-historical context sheds light on how her innovative characterisation of a woman painter challenges gender norms which shaped Victorian lives. Walter E. Houghton, in his book *Victorian Frame of Mind*, discusses Ruskin’s lecture *Of Queen’s Gardens* from 1865, in which the famous art critic of the era argued that women show no capacities for “invention and creation” but instead should rule the home and counsel their husbands when their professional work takes its toll (350). Indeed, the predominant Victorian ideology rested on the “sexual division” of the spheres which placed women in the private sphere of the home while men dwelled in the public sphere of professional work and business (Cherry 9).

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë through her character of Helen Graham reacts to the changes in gender roles and social politics surrounding women and women artists. Brontë challenges the Victorian frame of mind and the division of the feminine and masculine spheres by presenting the professionalisation of a woman artist, the process of artistic maturation, and subversive relations of space. The beginning of this essay discusses the condition of Victorian women painters and aims to show how, by making her heroine a professional painter, Anne Brontë questions Victorian gendered spheres. Next, this work analyses Helen’s development from an amateur to a professional artist. The final part of this essay considers gendered rules which governed the organisation of space in the Victorian house and analyses the implications of Helen Graham’s arranging a professional painting studio of her own in Wildfell Hall.

The most prominent transgression of Victorian feminine and masculine spheres which Anne Brontë seems to sketch in *The Tenant* lies in Helen’s artistic profession itself. Indeed, Brontë seems to “perceive an incompatibility between traditional and innovative notions of womanhood” (White 51). In the 1840s and 50s, so at the time Brontë wrote and published her novel, women were still underrepresented when it came to professionalised paid art production, but their numbers were quickly growing. More and more women took up brushes and palettes in the 19th century as “[c]ensus figures show that the number of women who chose to officially call themselves professional female artists doubled between 1851 and 1871; the number steadily increased as the century wore on”; however, this growing visibility of women artists soon became the topic of public discourse and issued debates among art historians and politicians (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 2).

Through their art, professional painting women were entering the public sphere (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 33), and thus “[w]omen who worked as artists challenged the exclusivity of masculine claims to professionalism” (Cherry 9). The differences between feminine and masculine occupations were firmly established in the bourgeois family organisation. Therefore, for middle-class professional women, preserving their reputation and respectability proved especially difficult as it was generally believed and thought proper that they should not work and, instead, be supported by their husbands (Cherry 38). Indeed, although the situation was improving towards the end of the 19th century “most people [still] considered it socially unacceptable for any middle-class woman to do paid work” (Mitchell 148). The role of the provider or the breadwinner in Victorian families fell to men. They ruled the professional public realm, owned property, and dealt with money. The ideal Victorian woman was meant to resemble “the angel in the house”, as advocated the poem by Coventry Patmore published in 1854. A model wife was defined by her devotion and submissiveness to her beloved husband. This image left little room for women’s resourcefulness or business acumen. As O’Gorman argues, “Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself” (73). Indeed, painting women were always creating in a social ordering in which “[t]hey negotiated, often on a daily basis, between a career and marriage, business and household management, between the practice of art and their responsibilities to their home, husband and children” (Cherry 20). Consequently, a woman artist was a difficult thing to bear for a Victorian mind. On the one hand, she was stepping over the line between the feminine and masculine spheres which defined the order of the prosperous Victorian society; on the other, she was obtaining her own financial means and this could lead to ownership and independence. Yet, marriage as a social institution entailed that all of a woman’s earnings and property belonged to her husband until as late as 1870 when married women started to manage their own incomes, and 1882 when the Married Women’s Property Act was passed (Mitchell 104–5).

On the whole, however, it remains clear that when it came to professional art production, women’s experiences varied from household to household. Some were able to practice painting in artistic family businesses where their position was firmly established (Cherry 19–44). For other women, unfortunately, marriage tended to inhibit the development of their artistic careers as they were often unable to balance their careers and domestic responsibilities; some, still, had to relinquish their art altogether (Cherry 33).

Anne Brontë’s Helen Graham comes from the upper-middle class and should rely on her husband’s income and protection but, in order to save her innocent child

from his corrupting influence, she decides to pursue an artistic career. Helen devises a plan which will enable her to support both herself and her little son far away from her abusive husband's reach: "Oh, I would take my precious charge at early dawn, take the coach to M—, flee to the port of —, cross the Atlantic, and seek a quiet, humble home in New England, where I would support myself and him by the labour of my hands. . ." (Brontë 373). Later, Helen implores Rachel, her only servant and an old childhood nurse, to find an art dealer in a remote town who would buy her already finished paintings and those she meant to create in the future. This arrangement seems to work out pretty well for the young painter as she settles in Wildfell Hall: "'Mamma sends all her pictures to London,' said Arthur; 'and somebody sells them for her there, and sends us the money.'" (43). After a life of turmoil and uncertainty at her husband's side, Helen Graham finds pleasure in her own work and financial independence: "I shall have so much more pleasure in my labour, my earnings, my frugal fare, and household economy when I know that I am paying my way honestly, and that what little I possess is legitimately all my own" (417). By showing these developments in her young heroine's life, Anne Brontë upturns societal expectations and gender norms which defined proper feminine behaviour in the 19th century. Helen remains a devoted mother, but "[a]s soon as [she] rejects her role as an angelic wife, the woman artist is born" (Pourgiv and Rahmati 134). Thus, as a professional woman painter, she might be seen as a fictional foremother of a New Woman who breaches the confining gendered spheres. Helen rejects her husband's money and protection and instead pursues a career which secures enough money for a comfortable living for a mother and son. This in itself produces a quite revolutionary narrative in which Brontë situates her woman artist in the public sphere primarily reserved for male agents.

Some scholars have argued that Brontë's novel can be seen as an example of a *Künstlerroman* (Pourgiv and Rahmati 131; Losano, "The Professionalization" 17). They noted, however, that *The Tenant* visibly stands apart from other works which focus on the journey and development of an artist. First and foremost, it presents the life of a woman painter. Indeed, one may argue that Brontë's novel aims to dissolve the line between the gendered spheres not only by making her heroine a professional painter but also by showing her progress from an amateur to an artist practising what the Victorians understood as High Art. During the 19th century, young women were expected to learn how to draw and paint. In fact, drawing and watercolour painting became desirable skills on their long list of feminine accomplishments (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 23). Thus, often under their governess' (or in some cases a painting master's) supervision many young ladies from the middle and upper classes practised art at an amateur level. Those who could not afford a governess or a professional

master could rely on girls' boarding schools which often offered drawing lessons among other required accomplishments such as singing or the pianoforte (Mitchell 185–86). Like all ladies' "accomplishments," however, skills such as drawing and painting were acquired for one major purpose – parlour entertaining. Owing to their accomplishments, young women became more desirable on the marriage market (White 33) while parlour displays of their art served as another element of the courtship game.

On the other hand, what was considered High Art started to change as the century went on, but the Victorians adhered to the 18th-century hierarchy of art which positioned history painting at the top followed by landscape art, portraiture, and still life (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 4). However, despite young women's apparent artistic education, these genres of painting were often considered unobtainable for them. An article published in 1836 in *L'Artiste*, a leading French art journal, discouraged women from attempting higher art genres which the author considered too masculine for them. Instead, they were instructed to direct their efforts towards miniatures, watercolours, and copying famous paintings on porcelain. The author notes, moreover, that immodest women are the ones who "mistaking the vocation of their sex, are filled with the desire to be painters in the same manner as men" and their "shy and tender imagination would be confused in the presence of the large canvases, and of subjects either too free or too restricting, such as those which normally form the basis of great painting" (Harrison and Wood 275, 276).

In *The Tenant*, Helen's artistic development goes from an amateur level deemed right for feminine skill to outdoor sketching and oil painting of landscapes and figures fitting for a male artist. Thus, the novel seems to challenge the boundaries between the gendered spheres once more. Helen Graham's art initially serves the purposes of courtship when her infatuation with Huntingdon first starts to develop: "In the course of the evening, Miss Wilmot was called upon to sing and play for the amusement of the company, and I to exhibit my drawings, and, though he likes music, and she is an accomplished musician, I think I am right in affirming, that he paid more attention to my drawings than to her music" (159–60). Young Helen tries to appeal to Huntingdon's tastes and competes with other ladies by presenting her "accomplishments." This is exactly the place for feminine art practised mainly for the sake of the approval of guests and potential suitors (Séllei 12). Later on, Huntingdon finds among her works his own sketched likeness, and he basks in self-complacency causing Helen much distress. The next day, Huntingdon catches Helen painting in the library. She is hard at work on something which she perhaps naively considers to be her "masterpiece:" a sunny scene with layers of bright foliage, "an amorous pair of turtle doves" and a young girl with flowing hair admiring them from

a bed of spring daisies. This Huntingdon calls “a very fitting study for a young lady” (164). Indeed, many women “were urged to restrict their painting to pastels, portraits, and pictures of flowers” (White 34). What is more, “Helen’s art [in this scene] has been reduced to an erotic stimulus for Arthur” (White 55). However, as the narrative progresses, Helen decides to improve her skills. When she chooses to sell her paintings, her style and aesthetic choices become more refined. Losano sees this change from “overtly sentimental, symbolic art” to a “less self-expressive art” as the artist’s development from “[a] starry-eyed amateur to rigorous professional” (“The Professionalization” 5). Helen possesses then a keen eye for realist renderings of her surroundings which she discusses with Gilbert Markham:

‘I almost wish I were not a painter,’ observed my companion.
‘Why so? one would think at such a time you would most exult in your privilege of being able to imitate the various brilliant and delightful touches of nature.’
‘No; for instead of delivering myself up to the full enjoyment of them as others do, I am always troubling my head about how I could produce the same effect upon canvas; and as that can never be done, it is mere vanity and vexation of spirit.’ (84–85)

Helen can often be seen sketching in the neighbourhood of Wildfell Hall; however, after a while, she complains about the lack of subjects. This is why she agrees to join her new acquaintances on their trip to the sea. There she intends to sketch the view in the preparation of a new canvas, and she chooses the right spot for that purpose: “she was seated [at] a narrow ledge of rock at the very verge of the cliff, which descended with a steep, precipitous slant, quite down to the rocky shore.” (64). One critic sees Helen here as “the iconic romantic artist desiring to reach for, to experience and to represent the sublime, a key aesthetic category in Romanticism, which is also highly gendered” (Séliei 11). This setting allows us to see her as a painterly genius, a role which would not fall to women as the production of ambitious original works was considered to be beyond their reach (Losano, “The Professionalization” 11). At the verge of the cliff, however, Helen evokes an image of a Friedrichian figure and steps beyond her proper sphere (Séliei 22–24). Thus, the woman artist of Brontë’s novel takes a revolutionary stand against the set gender roles of her era.

Brontë’s sensitivity to the plight of 19th-century women permeates the plot of *The Tenant*. Indeed, Brontë problematizes various challenges faced by Victorian

women, but, by making her main heroine a painter, she is able to explore specific conditions which determined women's creative work. These seem to include relations of space and their significance for women's artistic expression. Although the issue of space may seem an insignificant detail in the plotline of the novel, it can be argued that, by presenting Helen Graham's taking possession of a professional space to create and practice her art, Brontë questions the Victorian constructs of femininity and masculinity.

Even the Victorian house adhered to the rules of the division of spheres into the feminine and the masculine. According to Thad Logan, who in his book *The Victorian Parlour* discusses gender relations of the Victorian house, the 19th century saw a significant ideological change which introduced the separation of life into two spheres: the male-dominated professional public sphere and the female-dominated private sphere centred around the home (24). Thus, as Logan explains, at that time under the newly emerged "cult of domesticity," middle-class women became closely tied to the domestic realm which they were meant to cultivate at a safe distance from the male world of work, business, finance, and production (25). However, the professional workspace could not be entirely separated from the household. The masculine sphere was preserved in the 19th-century house in the form of an office, a study, a library, and a dining room (31). Sally Mitchell, in her book *Daily Life in Victorian England*, provides a detailed description of a typical middle-class house (111–14). Mitchell notes that for many the man's room served as a professional space for receiving clients and patients and was usually located on the ground floor (112). Even the location of the room makes it seem closer to the outside world. It also offered men a quiet space where their work would not be interrupted by other family members. The parlour, on the other hand, "was very distinctly gendered feminine" (Logan 31), which could be seen even in the colours and style of its furnishings and decorations (Logan 32; Mitchell 113, 118). Women spent most of their time in the parlour (also called the sitting room or the drawing-room). They usually withdrew there after breakfast to receive visitors and morning callers (Logan 30–31). All guests were invited to the parlour which in some houses was especially dedicated to that purpose (Logan 31) as a place "suitable for large and formal entertainments" (Mitchell 118). However, as Logan points out, the parlour was also a place devoted to the scenes of family life (31) and to "the display of feminine accomplishments" (35). In an essay *A Room of One's Own* published in 1929, Virginia Woolf famously wrote: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (4). Indeed, the organisation of a typical middle-class house prevented many women from embarking on writing and other creative pursuits even a hundred years before Woolf was able to voice her disapproval. Women simply had no private space to

pursue and practise their art, forever suspended between family obligations, hostess duties, and challenges of house management. This seems to be confirmed by the “desk” which was usually available to them: “[it] was not a piece of furniture but rather a portable wooden box with a slanted lid where writing materials were kept. A woman would fetch her desk and put it on the drawing-room table to write” (Mitchell 113). Thus, the portable desk indicates that women’s work was probably often interrupted and had to be put away when the parlour was needed for other purposes.

In Brontë’s novel, the titular Wildfell Hall has been uninhabited for a very long time, and with its overgrown garden and cold empty rooms, it has been pronounced a ruin by the entire neighbourhood. When a young widow Helen Graham unexpectedly settles in the secluded house, she immediately arouses curiosity in the local community which quickly starts teeming with gossip. With best intentions at heart, her friendly neighbours try to offer their advice and form their own opinion of the young recluse and her home. Gilbert Markham’s sister Rose is particularly eager to call on the lonely tenant of Wildfell Hall and implores Gilbert to accompany her on her visit. However, upon their arrival, they are greeted by the hostess in a quite unusual setting:

To our surprise, we were ushered into a room where the first object that met the eye was a painter’s easel, with a table beside it covered with rolls of canvas, bottles of oil and varnish, palette, brushes, paints, &c. Leaning against the wall were several sketches in various stages of progression, and a few finished paintings—mostly of landscapes and figures.

“I must make you welcome to my studio,” said Mrs. Graham; “there is no fire in the sitting-room to-day, and it is rather too cold to show you into a place with an empty grate.” (42)

This passage offers the first glimpse of Helen in her domestic setting, and proves to be extremely significant. It establishes her character as a painter engrossed in her work in a professional space, a studio. As Losano rightly observes in her book *The Woman Painter in Victorian Literature*, “Helen Graham arrives on the narrative scene as a fully formed, professional painter, defined by her relation to her artistic production” (76). Helen admits in her diary that her studio: “has assumed quite a professional, business-like appearance” (417). A closer look at Brontë’s description of the house and its management might indeed suggest that Helen’s Wildfell Hall subverts the gendered divisions of space characteristic of a 19th-century home. To

their surprise, Helen receives her visitors in a painter's studio rather than in a sitting room or a parlour, and, taking into account the organisation of a typical Victorian house, one should not wonder at their astonishment. Helen breaks the rules of Victorian propriety which dictated how and where one should receive their guests. The heroine observes that the fire was not lit in the sitting room either for her, the lady of the house, or her potential visitors. We may deduce from this statement that the room was not often used, and that Helen's priorities lie elsewhere. Indeed, she has organised for herself a workspace which, at the time, was closely associated with the professional masculine sphere. Thus, Helen seems to be functioning primarily in the space reserved for masculine occupations while the sitting room, a feminine realm, remains somewhat neglected. It seems like the centre of Helen's household, or, one might even say the hearth, has been shifted and can be found in her studio instead. Helen's attention seems to be focused on the space assigned to painting and her own artistic career. She might as well be seen as the mistress of the house or a genius at work who should not be disturbed when she decides to retreat into the depths of her studio.

In conclusion, the purpose of this essay was to examine how through Helen Graham, a heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë was able to challenge the dominant Victorian ideology which organised bourgeois life according to a gendered division. Helen bends the rules which saw her proper place in the private sphere of home and domesticity. By establishing herself as a professional painter with her own income, who masters her painterly skills, and designs her own professional space, Helen becomes a self-made woman quite at odds with the dominant idea of ideal femininity. The ties between early British feminism and visual arts were always strong (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 38) Many women novelists seeing the connection between painting and their own medium used the figure of a woman painter to discuss gender politics (Losano, *The Woman Painter* 1). For Helen Graham, art becomes a tool which enables her to defy the patriarchal order. After all, symbolically, when she is cornered by an unwanted male admirer at her husband's house, it is a palette knife she instinctively reaches for to protect herself.

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The Uprising of the Class-Unconscious: W.H. Auden's "Spain" as a Poetic Manifesto

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In 1937, Wystan Hugh Auden returned to England after his brief excursion to Barcelona, where he took part in the Spanish Civil War, although not on the war front itself (Hynes 251). After his return, he wrote the poem "Spain 1937". Along its verses, Auden presented his contemporary reality, troubled by the ongoing struggle, and argued for contributing to the struggle of the Spanish Civil War. The general air of the poem was that of hope, decisiveness, and determination. As Samuel Hynes points out in *The Auden Generation*, the poem had a more general, encompassing layer as well – the contemporary struggle of the Spanish Civil War served Auden as a means of presenting a universal metaphor for moral dilemmas (Hynes 254–255). In this paper, however, I would like to focus on that immediately recognisable layer, on the way in which the Spanish Civil War is discussed. In this context, "Spain" appears as more than just a poem – it appears as a *poetic manifesto*.

First and foremost, it is crucial to establish the terms used while discussing Auden's "Spain" as a poetic *manifesto*, and not simply a poem. It is not the purpose of this paper to prove that it was a poetic manifesto in the sense that T.S. Eliot's "The Waste-Land" or K. Tetmajer's "Eviva L'arte" may, and should, be considered. To be exact, I do not propose to discuss "Spain" as a *manifesto for poetics*, but as a manifesto embodied *in the poetic form*. Primarily a poem, "Spain" nevertheless presents features typical, even formative, for classic manifestos, and thus acquires new connotations and opens new fields for discussion. In his *Poetry of the Revolution*, Martin Puchner points to three main features of the manifesto as a genre: the contextual position of the work, the performative and theatrical aspect of it, and the revolutionary challenge posed by the inherently authoritative form (23). Additionally, as Kathi Weeks shows, it is a utopian genre, and as such is bound to generate "estrangement from the present and hope for a better future" (3).

"Spain", written in 1937, had its context stated loud and clear not only in its very title but in contemporary newspaper headlines as well – the Spanish Civil War, the "great struggle" of the 1930s. It was to Spain that international volunteers flocked to fight against the fascist regime, but also for a better, more egalitarian future for

“the people” of Spain, and – as they hoped – of the whole world. This frame of mind, this utopian dream of equality and fraternity, is precisely what George Orwell described in his account of the war in *Homage to Catalonia*; a struggle of not only an anti-fascist but – generally speaking – of a socialist character. This pro-active aspect of the war, however, could have been easily omitted, especially if one had no mind for revolutionary social changes whatsoever. And so, the title itself is by far insufficient to reveal a clear-cut context for the poem’s content. As pointed out by Puchner, this is an inherent attribute of a manifesto – “it is through the very speech acts of the manifesto that the context and the agent are being wrought” (24). That is to say, neither context nor authority could be perceived before the subject of the poem reveals itself to its audience in full shape.

Auden does not involve his own excursion to the Spanish Civil War as the scene for his poem, nor as an experience that would grant him the right to speak from an authoritative position, but he does make it clearly visible that the ideas which were the driving force of the anti-fascist opposition are close to his own. However, as the poem begins to chant “but to-day the struggle”, (lines 16, 20, 24) the context of the Spanish Civil War appears clearly enough, and it is from that very context that the manifesto’s authority is derived. It is the spirit of the revolution, the force which had already driven so many to the Iberian Peninsula, now arrived in England to preach and inspire all who should be able to comprehend its language.

Moreover, Auden enhances the strength of this authority, quite straightforwardly, by calling upon an interventionist, descending, involved deity (stanzas 11–13). This comparison poses a great challenge to the intention behind it. One would expect a manifesto for involvement in a socialist, or at least anti-fascist, struggle to be ideologically coherent; that is to say, consistent with the traditional Marxist approach to class struggle. And yet, Auden makes the subject take up metaphysical, even religious, connotations. However, as the poem reads, the “spirit” refuses to act as an authoritative deity:

And the life, if it answers at all, replied
from the heart

.....
‘O no, I am not the mover;
Not to-day; not to you. To you, I am the

Yes-man, the bar-companion, the
easily-duped.

I am whatever you do. (lines 45–50)

The word “companion” indicates that the initiative does not lie with the supernatural, but with humankind. Nevertheless, it is that same supernatural that will aid humankind in whatever just venture it chooses to undertake – as per the best of romanticist tradition, which Auden seems unable to reject.

This dialogue between the subject and the reluctant spirit they try to invoke brings about a theatrical aesthetic to the poem. It is further strengthened by the scenery Auden’s poem inspires – everyday activities, historical and cultural events, even friendly leisure and discussion serve as a metaphor for our whole civilisation. Auden describes action, not landscape or still images, thus making his manifesto a theatrical performance, instead of a poetic, arbitrary monologue: “abolition of fairies”, “carving of angels”, “construction of railways” (lines 9–18) force the audience to imagine active scenes, instead of pictures.

Manifestos, as they had primarily been performed, rather than read, are in their nature theatrical speech acts, as Puchner suggests (25). This feature of the genre, however, its theatricality, distances the audience from the whole performance, demoting in the process the authority that manifestos strive to gain through performance. Therefore, for a manifesto to retain its manifesting effect, it is crucial to establish a clear division between the naturally and irrevocably theatrical, distancing form, and the message and content of the performed manifesto: “speech acts must battle and conquer the threat of theatricality in order to become speech acts” (25).

Nevertheless, Puchner underlines that the theatrical form of the manifesto is, paradoxically, precisely what allows it to be heard at all. It is through that form that the manifesto can attract attention despite presenting itself as a performance completely detached from present reality (26). This detachment, in turn, is what enables the manifesto to create, describe, and manifest a utopian vision of the future – as Weeks points out, in order to acquire the means to inspire a hopeful, futuristic vision, a manifesto always “generates estrangement from the present” (3).

This particular aspect is well visible in “Spain”. Indeed, Auden’s way of generating estrangement from the present lies not only on the semantic level of the poem but in the very way of structuring its sentences. Even though Auden describes, in the first stanzas, “the past” that is all yesterday, what it stands for constitutes not only all that which had happened before the Spanish Civil War but also all that was happening alongside those events, though the division appears to be rather blurred (stanzas 1–6). It is all “yesterday” – the thought, architecture, exploration, and trade

of Europe – while “the struggle of to-day” is clearly cut out from all the rest with the depreciating “but”. No judgement or emotional connotations can be traced towards the past and present described as the yesterday, for it seems as if it were not to be considered today, but pushed aside to make way for more pressing matters.

The future, however, fitting Weeks’ analysis perfectly, is drawn as a very pleasant time – it is there that we find all that we enjoy and take pride in, be that science, art, craft, or leisure. There are no limitations to human creativity, and all flourishes under Liberty, with the capital L – evidently won in the struggle of to-day. This particular fragment calls for attention also because it is the only time in the poem that the character of the Spanish Civil War is addressed in a definite way. One could argue that Auden does not, in fact, alienate the audience from the present, as he does describe the struggle precisely as the present, as “to-day”. Nevertheless, if we should consider the circumstances of the manifesto, as well as its subject, it appears that the ongoing struggle is actually extremely distant, both in space and in meaning.

First of all, in understanding the present as a necessary aspect of the utopian feature of a manifesto, this present is the circumstances the change of which the manifesto proposes. That is to say, even if a manifesto is performed during a time of rapid social changes, it never addresses the changes themselves as the contemporary “present”, but instead distances the status quo. That was the case of the *Communist Manifesto*, and it is also the case of Auden’s poem. Additionally, the struggle in which “Spain” is involved takes place, in the text as well as in reality, in far-off Spain, nowhere near the performed manifesto or its audience:

Many have heard it on remote peninsulas
.....
On that arid square, that fragment nipped
Off from hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive
Europe; (lines 57-66)

As Samuel Hynes points out, “Auden’s Spain is a shape on the map, or the earth seen from a great height” (254). It is also not addressed directly – there is no mention of what the struggle is for or who takes part in it: “Many ... / Have heard and migrated like gulls or the / seeds of a flower” (lines 57–60). As a result, it appears as a distant, spectral idea, rather than an ongoing revolution.

Finally, it is important to note that the manifesto as a genre is a speech act, that is, designed for live performance (Puchner 24). However, in the twentieth century, such a performance would have reached a limited audience, in a limited time and space. Written, printed, and distributed word is not subject to those limitations, and can be phrased in the form of a poem – it is, therefore, understandable that this was the form chosen by Auden. As a consequence of this choice, however, the theatrical aspect of the manifesto, that which allows the genre to attempt to gain authority and context, is no longer an inherent part of the manifesto itself. The text can be interpreted, the performance imagined, but it is the performing agent that develops it all into a speech act and completes the process of creating a manifesto.

The question stands, then, why would an educated, conscious individual such as Auden attempt to create a poetic manifesto for the Spanish Civil War in the first place? The problem may seem complex, however, a statement could be risked that the explanation is actually quite universal for all politically involved poets.

In his “Politics of Poetry”, David Orr explains the reason why poets get involved in politics at all. He points to the fact that both poetry and politics are deeply involved in the same sphere of life. He bases his arguments on quotes from P.B. Shelley and W.H. Auden, on poetry’s part, and Franklin D. Roosevelt on the part of politics (411–412). The main idea presented by Orr is that both poetry and politics describe themselves as necessary parties for recognising and contemplating great ideas – “a totalizing vision” of the future and the present, as he calls it (412). And indeed, considering Auden’s “Spain”, the most visible feature of the language and scenes used in the poem is their totality, even if they are not precise in it at all; “the shapes of our fever [which] / Are precise and alive” (lines 68–69), “the young poets exploding like bombs” (line 89) or “the weeks of perfect communion” (line 90) leave nothing in the grey.

Involvement in politics can take various forms, and Orr provides evidence enough to say that poetry is one of them. Manifestos, however, are not poetic forms, and so one should wonder why Auden chose to transform his poem in such a way. Here, Orr relies again on a quote, this time by W.R. Johnson, where he points to the problems that poetry faces, namely the frustration and anxiety caused by the form of performance, or rather the form that fails to perform – the printed page, and the lack of direct audience (Orr 413). To Auden, the manifesto could present itself as a hopeful alternative. However, it is not only his own assessment of the situation that seems to have pushed him in this direction.

It was Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser who stated that it is the ruling ideology of our social structure that dictates the way we live, think, and, most

importantly, create. For Gramsci, the determining factor was the structure of intellectuality, the caste of intellectuals inherently bound to the ruling ideology, and their impact on the general “rest”. He stated that “every social group ... creates ... one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function” (1). That is to say, every newly emerging social group, be that a nation, a social class, or an artistic niche, in order to establish a sense of coherence and distinction, creates in its own structure a hierarchy of individuals, which brings along a hierarchy of the ideas they present. Although he pointed out that this hierarchy is, in truth, completely arbitrary, the position one could gain through this initial process is not – “all men are intellectuals ... but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals” (Gramsci 3). In the case of early modernist poetry, the initial process of distinction was extremely rapid and radical, and so the intellectual norms and ideas which emerged from it were very strictly described and valued.

These new, modernist ideas were incorporated in a new, modernist ideology for poetry. And as in every other ideology, processes that Althusser described as ISAs emerged. As he put it in his text, “the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ... very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic” (Althusser 8). That is to say, the oppression of the ISAs is not enforced by physical, direct forces, but is predominantly inscribed into the conscience of an individual. Should they not follow in the direction given by that oppressed conscience, the castes of intellectuals higher in the social group’s hierarchy enforce it upon them through various means of symbolic repression. Therefore, for a young poet trying to make his way in the emerging social group of modernist poets, it was crucial and natural that he should incorporate and follow the rules dictated by the founding artists and their works. It was a path unconsciously chosen by every young poet of his time, and Auden walked it quite successfully.

However, this devotion to his contemporary, avant-garde ideas poses new questions in the analysis of Auden’s work. In “Ideology of Modernism”, Georg Lukács points out that the modernist image of a human being, firmly rooted in modernist rules and ideas, is not one of a cooperating, social creature – “Man, for these writers, is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings” (3). That is to say, in modernist literature individuals are only that – individuals par excellence. They do not cooperate, they do not share, group, or establish meaningful relationships. They do not seek common grounds or points of reference to other individuals. If therefore, we assume that this image was a basis for the idea of humanity presented in Auden’s poem, the effect appears rather curious. After all, “Spain” is a manifesto for the exact opposite of what the modernist

individual presents – *cooperation* against a *common* enemy, with no apparent personal benefits in sight.

Coming back to the features of the form of a manifesto, it is important to note that the main goal of such a work is to inspire its audience, be that to action or reflection. It was the goal of the *Communist Manifesto*, the avant-garde manifestos of the 1930s, and it was also the goal of Auden’s “Spain”. However, considering the covered topic, the form, and the prospective audience, a new, crucial issue arises – the issue of the author’s and the poem’s social position and background.

In “Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste”, Pierre Bourdieu points to the fact, that the widely understood “taste” in art is not, as it could be assumed, a naturally acquired skill, but a result of various class-related factors:

Whereas the ideology of charisma regards tastes in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education: surveys establish that all cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading, etc.) and preferences in literature, painting, or music, are closely linked to educational level (measured by qualifications or length of schooling) and secondarily to social origin. (Bourdieu 1)

It is important to note, however, that “taste” here is understood as an ability to connect and understand a work of art, not only as an aesthetic preference. That is to say, all individuals conceive cultural texts through the prism of their previous experiences, most importantly their education and social origin. Therefore, a work of art adequate to the taste of a middle-class person is extremely different from those which may make their way into the “high culture”, as understood by the experts, or – to use Gramsci’s term once again – by the group of intellectuals bound to the discipline.

Furthermore, Bourdieu argues that it is not only the social background that influences one’s taste in art, but it is also the self-recognised taste that becomes a part of the social background (6). That is to say, recognising and appreciating certain works of art as valuable places the audience on a particular tier of the social structure. Taste in art becomes a characteristic feature of every social group, an inherent part of class consciousness. Members of the same group build their sense of integrity on common aspects, and primarily on aspects which, although popular in their own group, separate them from the rest.

Moreover, these differences in taste, as Bourdieu points out, are rooted far deeper than the aesthetic or historical aspects of art – they are based primarily on the

values cherished by particular groups, of which taste in art is only the manifestation (5–6). As a result, different tastes in art appear to those concerned as not only different preferences but, in fact, as different moral codes, different languages of understanding. Bourdieu mentions the fact that the means of approaching a work of art depend primarily on the individual's preparation for such endeavours. That disposition, which Bourdieu calls the “pure gaze”, is the immediate recognition of different styles or schools, the ability to dive further into the work of art than its – often obscure – form. According to Bourdieu, these are not skills that one can acquire through formal education, but rather they require early, regular contact with “high” culture, which is only available to higher social classes (4). Understood in this way, any conflicts on the grounds of artistic preferences and choices may easily contribute to inflaming class animosities, as the most radical differences appear between individuals of disparate social standing.

In the case of Auden's poem, this relation of taste with social origin and education appears decisive in the poem's performance as a manifesto. A modernist poem, it bears the features of modernist ideology, which, built upon the separation of art from the physical, everyday reality, is completely unrelatable to popular taste. The modernist image of individuals, their unavailability, distance, and complexity is only strengthened by the distancing of present reality, by “generating estrangement from the present”. The metaphors contributing to the presentation of reality, of the common world, are so intricate in their poetic form and divided lines that for an audience that does not possess the “pure gaze” they are unsolvable. To such an audience, the struggle of to-day, emerging in contrast to the depicted scenes of yesterday, may appear as a catchy epistrophe only, as it is precisely the kind of analytic skill that one may acquire through formal schooling.

As it appears, “Spain” presents features typical of a manifesto, and as such brings about issues that seem especially important in the context of social understanding of art and poetry. The influence of the modernist tradition on the form had a tremendous effect on the manifesto's performance, and the consequences of this influence, although unexpected, have been crucial in the impact the poem was to have on its prospective audience. The manifesto has long been a popular form for presenting new, often revolutionary ideas, however, the genre appears to have lost its inspirational aura, its impact on the audience. The case of Auden's poem is especially transparent, as the combination of modernist poetry and socialist revolution is not a very common thing, and the discrepancy between the formal intention and outcomes appears, in its distinction, unique.

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The (In)Visibility of the White Body: Tracing Postmodern Racial Identities in *Caucasia* by Danzy Senna

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Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition.

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

In the well-acclaimed Nella Larsen's novel *Passing*, the protagonist, Irene discusses the phenomenon of passing with her friend Hugh, and draws a conclusion: "It's easy for a Negro to 'pass' for white. But I don't think it would be so simple for a white person to 'pass' for colored" (Larsen 78). Living as a white person by concealing one's black identity, i.e., the attempt to cross the color line has been a recurring theme in African American literature. The erasure of blackness in order to escape the weight of systemic racism and racial segregation (whether before or after the Civil Rights Act of 1964) has been the reality and common practice for many colored people who, due to racial mixing, had fair skin and/or straight hair – features considered Caucasian. Passing was first a way of escaping slavery, and later on, of gaining new opportunities reserved only for white people, like the possibility of voting in the South or getting a job in the office instead of a job cleaning the office ("Passing Racial 'Passing' in Literature and in History"). The "one-drop rule," a social and legal belief prominent in the 20th century that a person of any non-white heritage is considered colored, automatically put all mixed-race people in the discriminated category of blackness, hence passing was a way of escaping racism. To this day, it is practically impossible to state how many black people passed for white in American society – primarily, because of the mere nature of the act of passing, and also due to the taboo regarding it among both whites and blacks.

The figure of the “tragic mulatto” – so well portrayed in classic Harlem Renaissance novels like *Passing* by Nella Larsen or *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* by James Weldon Johnson – deals with the constant anxiety of being exposed, the burden and guilt of “betraying” their own race or being a sell-out, and many other emotional and psychological dilemmas concerning identity which are neither black nor white (Rummel 1). But the mere narrative of passing is possible precisely due to the racial black/white binary, in which there are no in-betweens. These novels, as Kathryn Rummel notes, “reinforce the one-drop rule of blackness as well as the notion of ‘blackness’ itself,” meaning that they depict protagonists whose solid identity *is* black, but they are *pretending to be* white (1). This essentialist perspective on race assumes that only one of these identities (black) is authentic and the other is a costume that gives the passer the yearned invisibility.

Unlike blackness or any kind of otherness, whiteness does have/give the privilege of invisibility. Yet, it is not that kind of privilege that we think of often, i.e., a favored state, an earned power, an advantaged condition conferred by birth or luck (McIntosh 179). It is a systemically granted privilege of being perceived as the norm in the society, a part of its cultural code, and as a body that can represent the whole. To examine this invisibility of the white body of the mixed-raced subject in the American context, I turn to the literary character of Birdie Lee, the narrator and protagonist of Danzy Senna’s novel *Caucasia*, a novel which, as its author claims, interrogates the normative meanings of whiteness and Americanness (Senna and Milian Arias 447).

Birdie Lee is a half-black young girl with a black father and a white mother living in Boston during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s. Her parents are deeply engaged in the movement; her father, Deck – on the theoretical side, and her mother more actively: hiding political activists in their attic and plotting radical forms of protest. When her mother, Sandy, engages herself with the wrong people, which results in a serious threat of an FBI investigation, the family has to part ways; Deck travels to Brazil with Birdie’s older sister Cole hoping to discover a raceless society, and Sandy disappears underground with Birdie who, for their safety, passes as white. Their life on the run begins.

Performing blackness

Seemingly, *Caucasia* inscribes itself into that pessimistic tradition of literature of passing, where the tragic mulatto chooses better life conditions (or safety) over their identity and battles with regrets for the rest of their life. However, what distinguishes Senna’s novel from the traditional use of the literary trope of passing, is the reversal

of the desired/undesired identity, as well as the refusal of the black/white dichotomy. Senna aims at moving away from the binary, reinterpreting racial identifications and rethinking racial boundaries.

For the most part of her childhood, Birdie feels betrayed by her “beige flesh” (Senna 233). Birdie’s first and most important role model is her three years older sister, Cole. The two girls are inseparable in the first few years of their lives. “Back then, I was content to see only Cole ..., and imagine that her face – cinnamon-skinned, curly-haired, serious – was my own. ... That face was me and I was that face and that was how the story went” (Senna 5). However, even in her early years of childhood, Birdie starts to suspect that there is a significant difference between her and her sister. This difference makes strangers treat and look at them in different ways, often raising eyebrows when discovering that they are sisters.

Because Birdie’s skin is light, her hair straight and slick, and her mouth thin, her whiteness is immediately assumed not only by strangers but by her own family as well. Her own mother says that she looks like “a little Sicilian” (Senna 27), and she is clearly favored by her white grandmother who passionately and proudly shows her their family tree which begins with Cotton Mather, while blatantly ignoring Cole, as if she was not a part of the same family.

(Un)surprisingly, Birdie’s relationship with her black side of the family is also contaminated by them perceiving her as white. The relationship with her black father is confusing at best. He seems to be uninterested in a deeper emotional connection with her, clearly favoring his firstborn, Cole. When he and Sandy separate as a couple, and he regularly comes to visit his daughters, with every visit Birdie feels invisible, sitting in the back of the car, while Deck explains race theories addressing only Cole. “When they came together, I disappeared,” (Senna 56) Birdie says because Cole is Deck’s comfort and proof that he “hadn’t been completely blanched” (Senna 56) by marrying a white woman and spending years in Harvard and, most importantly, by having a “white” daughter. Interestingly, no one in the family refers to Birdie as “black,” just as nobody ever negates Cole’s blackness (Rummel 4).

It is tragic that Birdie’s identity is only “read based on the visible” (Botelho 85), especially by the people closest to her, who are supposed to understand that how she looks has nothing to do with who she is” (Boudreau 64). Because of her body, she becomes the “racially other” no matter where she is: in a black environment, because of her visible whiteness, and in a white environment because of her invisible blackness. This problem, which is the main conflict of the novel, exposes, as Teresa Botelho writes,

the contradictions of the dominant criteria of racial classification which, on the one hand, require the body to visibly carry signs of difference while on the other hand deny the sufficiency of this visible evidence and locate difference elsewhere, in a vague attribute called “blood,” “ancestry” or “culture” (85).

As a result, she tries to be both black and white, yet, unable to find a space in-between, she ends up only “performing,” instead of “being.”

Some scholars who analyzed *Caucasia*, applied Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity (Rummel, Botelho), which, regrettably does not allow space for an authentic identity, a true self, since it claims that everything is an internalized performance. Senna, however, wishes to demonstrate that a performative identity might be a vehicle for uncovering the authentic one, as in Birdie’s case, which I am going to demonstrate further.

Birdie and Cole go to Nkrumah School, which is a Black Power school focused on teaching black history and taking pride in dark skin color, and again, they have two completely different experiences in the same environment. Cole enjoys the school, although other kids make fun of her tangled kinky hair, which Sandy is unable to take care of, given her lack of experience with black people’s hair. Moreover, she is unable to admit her failure as a mother, until Cole is finally taken to a professional hair salon after explaining to her father that “Mom just doesn’t know how to handle raising a black child” (Senna 55). Hence, in Nkrumah, Cole learns to enhance and embrace her blackness, also through mastering new speech and clothing style, while Birdie has to keep up with her sister and learn how to merely signal it because she is being rejected by her peers for her looks.

On the first day of school, a boy hisses at her: “What you doin’ in this school? You white?” (Senna 43). Kids generally do not have a positive reaction to her light skin and straight hair. Another boy calls her ugly in front of the whole class (45), and then her popular classmate, Maria, threatens to cut her ponytail off in the bathroom, saying “Why you so stuck up? You think you’re fine? ... She thinks she’s all that just ‘cause she got long stringy hair. I say we give Ms. Thang a makeover. Cherise, go get some scissors from the art room” (46).

An interesting interracial problem is pointed out in this scene. The mainstream beauty ideal in American society, generally, means white (and skinny, with blond hair, etc.); however, in the black environment, like the Nkrumah School, still existing in the society but following Malcolm X’s “Black is beautiful” and affirming different beauty standards, it is black features that are desired as attractive:

curly hair, dark skin, dark eyes. This affirmation of black beauty is, indeed, a part of the school's curriculum and practice: at the end of each class, each student stands up and says loudly: "Black is beautiful." However, in the bathroom scene, the mainstream beauty standards echo very clearly: "She thinks she's all that just 'cause she got long, stringy hair" and remind us that they have been internalized by these girls in a white society, which does not allow them to escape the double-consciousness and makes them subconsciously envy Birdie because the normative discourse "constructs blackness as undesirable and whiteness as desirable, yet unattainable" (Botelho 87).

Ironically enough, it is Maria who gives Birdie a "racial make-over" (Botelho 89) later in the novel, when they actually become friends. She curls her hair, which "softens her features" (Senna 69), lends her clothes, teaches her how to wear braids, hoops, jeans, and white Nikes. Birdie looks in the mirror at her new self and realizes that her blackness is simply "imagined" – that is, that she is again putting on a costume and giving a performance of the empty category of blackness (Rummel 5). Senna implies that race is an artificial disguise that, absurdly, has been defining real material subjectivities, despite being "empty at its core" (Rummel 5).

The performance pays off, and Birdie is admitted to the Brown Sugars, which is a club for girls who have boyfriends, and her position in the school hierarchy skyrockets. In the meantime, from an article in *Ebony*, she and Cole discover that they "don't talk like black people," so they start practicing black speech:

Cole continued: "They have examples in here. Like, don't say, 'I'm going to the store.' Say, 'I'm goin' to de sto'.'. Get it? And don't say, 'Tell the truth.' Instead, say, 'Tell de troof.' Okay?" I nodded, and whispered to myself, "Tell de troof." (Senna 53)

In order to pass as black, Birdie has to perform with her body, speech and behavior, until her peers "stop believing their eyes" (Rummel 4). The mere act of "passing for black" is a complete reversal of the usual passing trope dynamics (Rummel 3) and conventions, where blackness, not whiteness, is the desired, and where the light skin color becomes a disadvantage. This allows Senna to expose the absurdity of race and of its performative aspect, as well as the burden of living in a dichotomous Black and White world as a mixed raced individual.

However, it is important to note that Birdie's strongest motivation for this performance is not to fit in with her peers, but to maintain and deepen her relationship with Cole (Rummel 4), i.e., the most genuine bond she has that allows her to be the most authentic self: simultaneously black and white. Therefore, her racial perfor-

mance, though staged, makes it possible for her to escape the hegemony's script and conventions, and discover a part of her racial authenticity (Botelho 89).

Performing whiteness

The modernist identity essentialism fueled the black nationalist movement's understanding of race in the sixties (Gilroy 98), yet it refused to acknowledge the identities on the border, ones that did not or could not perfectly inscribe into the category of blackness. Postmodernism, on the contrary, criticizes the modernist approach and proposes a fluid, in-process, hybrid idea of identity. In *Caucasia*, the essentialist approach is represented by the members of the Black Power Movement who never discuss the patriarchy and the position of women in the movement, and one of them even says to Deck: "Don't get black and proud on me. You're the one with the white daughter" (Senna 16) demonstrating a clear misunderstanding of the complexity of identity. Noticeably, the achievements of the 1960s and 1970s social movements were racialized, and neither class nor gender was taken into account. Birdie's struggles are a representation of the postmodern conversation around identity. She becomes the epitome of a body living on the border, in a hybrid state.

Unlike in the 1970s, when the novel takes place, scholars now agree that race is hardly a stable concept (McMann 201). Racial identities were created on purely corporal features and imposed on the subject externally. The race is a constructed cultural and learned identity of imprecise borders that seeks to place bodies in categories and impose a certain cultural context on them (McMann 201). *Caucasia* illustrates vividly how in a society obsessed with racial categories, the subject cannot speak for themselves, because their body does it for them.

When the family separates because of the FBI investigation of Sandy's involvement in the underground Black Power movement, Birdie runs with her mother because she looks more like her, and Cole goes to Brazil with her father because of her resemblance to him. Teresa Botelho called this moment "the ultimate act of racialization" (90), a final confirmation that the physical body is expected to be the vehicle of racial identity.

Because the FBI is hunting a white woman with a black child, Birdie's whiteness is key to their disappearance and to the creation of their new fake identities. Sandy tells her: "You've got a lot of choices, babe. You can be anything. Puerto Rican, Sicilian, Pakistani, Greek. ... And, of course, you could always be Jewish. What do you think?" (Senna 130). She then makes the choice for her, baptizing her with a new Jewish name, Jesse Goldman, and a new dead Jewish father. The mere act of choosing among a few white identities is telling because it

demonstrates that whiteness, contrary to the way it aims to present itself, is not a monolithic category (Rummel 7).

When discussing race, whiteness seems to be completely excluded from the conversation. The white body is the default human body: in media, in pop culture, in politics. It is not unforeseeable then that any group that doesn't inscribe into the category of whiteness has always been struggling for representation in the public space. But while the emphasis is put on the representation of "otherness" of, for example, black, Latinx, and disabled bodies, there seems to be little discussion about the non-other, i.e., whiteness. Because why would the dominant culture want to put itself in the position of being analyzed as "the other," when its agenda focuses on maintaining the position of normativity? In *Caucasia*, Deck tells his daughters: "Try pointing out to a white boy that he's white, and he'll wince, because you've looked at him, and they don't like to be looked at" (Senna 72). What Deck says is that whiteness draws power from its invisibility, while the rest of the society remains bodies for it to study. Just like any other racialized identity, whiteness is constructed socially, but it also masquerades itself as "generic – unadorned, basic, essential," i.e., universal (Frankenberg 205). However, as a postmodern approach asserts, white identity is constantly in the process of self-construction, and it especially likes to define itself as the *opposite* of blackness, which has been serving as the signifier of difference and otherness (McMann 201).

In Birdie's case, although she benefits from her body's invisibility and normativity, she is also constantly aware of her performance as a white Jewish girl. When, after several years of running from town to town and hiding in motels and dodgy diners, Sandy finally decides to settle down in New Hampshire and send her daughter to school, Birdie is forced to dress up as Jesse Goldman every day, create relationships as Jesse, and think like Jesse. At first, she even exaggerates this performance:

From the outside, it must have looked like I was changing into one of those New Hampshire girls. I talked the talk, walked the walk, swayed my hips to the sound of heavy metal, learned to wear blue eyeliner and frosted lipstick, and snap my gum. (Senna 233)

However, Birdie needs to remind herself that she is performing, so that this new identity of Jesse Goldman stays in the sphere of a game, of make-believe. If she keeps feeling strange within her "new" body, she can nourish the hope to, someday, return to her "real self" and reunite with her sister and father (Boudreau 68). But every time she puts on this costume of whiteness, the feeling of betraying her sister

and guilt creep up, which disconnects her from her own body. Birdie has several “out-of-body” experiences when she looks at herself from afar (Senna 219, 263). She distances herself from this white body that had betrayed her when she was younger, and now it only serves her as a means of safety. Whiteness protects Birdie from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence – literally because it allows her to run away from the physical danger that her mother has put her in – but also within the invisible sphere of micro-aggressions and systemic racism.

Yet, her internal identity is always in conflict with her external appearance, even when it works to her advantage. That is until she realizes that she is two girls in one body, that the name Jesse does not feel funny anymore on her tongue (Senna 190), nor when her mother calls her that. Jesse/Birdie discovers that she actually wants to belong to something ordinary, she wants to blend in within the stream of bodies, she “yearns to be a part of the visible world” (Senna 219–20). This yearning can be understood quite literally, i.e., that Birdie wishes she stopped hiding behind a fake personality, but also as hunger for belonging to the “racially generic” world of whiteness: a much simpler world, where one’s (racial) identity is given and obvious and not under the omnipresent magnifying glass of the hostile, inquisitive society.

In the scene where she lays in bed with her white neighbors’ teenage son, Nick Marsh, and almost has sex with him, two things happen. First, her white body is validated by his (white) male gaze, which could be the decisive confirmation of her white identity. However, then he proposes to her that they have sex, and for a moment she considers the idea, but finally refuses. This rejection is a renunciation of final ratification of her artificial white identity, of Jesse’s Goldman’s existence. Notably, it is when Birdie decides not to „let her body speak” for herself (Senna 1).

Finding mixedness

In order not to become Jesse Goldman, she forces herself to believe that her “real self” is underneath her beige flesh and its New Hampshire clothes. She does not know what her real authentic self is, though. Her whole life she had already existing constructed identities forced upon her, and not one person ever asked her whom she thought she was. In a caricatural postmodern understanding of identity, she has to constantly reinvent herself in different contexts (Farrokhi and Jahantigh 15) but because she is unaware of the mere possibility of hybridization, she cannot fully embrace it.

Hybridity seeks to cope with ambivalence and a transgression of racial boundaries, a search for “the third space” (Farrokhi and Jahantigh 9). A world narrowed to only two “slots” can be painful for hybrid individuals in that it fuels the

lack of a sense of belonging (9). Birdie is constantly looking for a reflection of her face in other faces – in New Hampshire, at school, when she visits New York with her white friend Mona, Sandy, and her new boyfriend – but she cannot find it, which makes her feel ashamed and abnormal (Boudreau 66). Since there are no bodies similar to hers, she cannot attain a sense of belonging.

Gloria Anzaldúa, one of the most prominent contributors to Chicana feminist thought, introduced the figure of *mestiza*, a being living on the “borderlands,” physically and metaphorically. Living on the “borderlands” can mean living literally on the US/Mexico border, but also being of many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Originally, *la mestiza* in Anzaldúa famous work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, meant being of mixed Indian and Spanish heritage. However, in hers and works that followed her thought, the term came to signify “mixed, period—a blending, an amalgam of cultures, sexual orientations, colors, and ideas” (Martinez 559) and space of struggles with sexism, racism, and heteronormativity. On the “borderlands,” “[I]a mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (Anzaldúa qtd. in Martinez 559) with herself and with the hegemonic forces and is compelled to become a junction of multiple voices and paradigms (560). In order to survive on this cultural crossroad, *la mestiza* has to cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity, she has to include multiple views, cultures, sexualities. She can’t lock herself in rigid, essentialist boundaries and identities because rigidity means death (Anzaldúa 101).

It is because Birdie actually refuses to privilege one racial identity over the other that we can call her *la mestiza*. Birdie is unable to find her identity in a dualistic world, and rightly so. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes,

La mestiza learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (101)

In Birdie’s case, this “something else” is the realization that she can be simultaneously black and white; she can be her father’s daughter and Mona’s friend; she can believe that “black is beautiful” and accept her white flesh; she can enjoy her life in the white New Hampshire and love her sister.

When Birdie finally meets her father and tells him that she has been living as a white girl for the last few years, he tells her that there is no such a thing as passing since race is an artificial construct. Birdie is irritated because, although she has

discovered this truth already, for her, switching between blackness and whiteness is very real, as she has experienced it with her own body. As Frankenberg writes, “race, like gender, is ‘real’ in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects in the world and real, tangible, and complex impact on individuals’ sense of self, experiences, and life chances” (11). Racial identity is Birdie’s “borderlands,” an imaginary site of real struggles, that she calls “Caucasia.”

The sisters’ reunion at the end of the novel takes place in Oakland, after Birdie’s tireless quest for reconnecting with the lost part of her family. The last scene depicts Birdie in the street, on her way to a bakery, when catches a glimpse of a “cinnamon-skinned girl on the bus . . . black like me, a mixed girl” (Senna 413). For a moment, Birdie’s breath shortens, but then she remembers that she has already found what she was looking for – her sister, but also her identity. This is the first and only time in the novel when Birdie refers to herself as “mixed.” It is her final rejection of the binary, a de-essentialization of categories of blackness and whiteness (Botelho 92).

Senna’s interest in deconstructing the premise of race manifests itself in pointing out the invisibility of the groups that do not fit into the black/white paradigm (Senna and Claudia M. Milian Arias 448). In the “post-racial” America, the mulatto represents assimilation and the end of race and racism. However, Senna’s novel is evidence that it is a far-fetched assumption: since Birdie cannot locate herself (or be located) into one precise racial category, the obsession around her racial identity flourishes. Always racially other, no matter where she is, as she identifies herself as black *and* white, she has to situate herself in a hybrid state where she allows herself to be everything she is at once. Finally, she escapes the chains of identity performance. In Anzaldúa’s words, she gains the *mestiza* consciousness and transcends duality (102).

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Ecology and Masculinity in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

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From the second half of the twentieth century onward, the post-apocalyptic imagination has been making ground within the global pop culture. This trend – which is probably most conspicuous in the United States, where it is common for film audiences to see their country annihilated by all sorts of cataclysms (Church 21) – is indicative of the rising popularity of apocalyptic rhetoric. Its prevalence in fiction, moreover, seems to be accompanied by a widespread interest in survivalism and apocalypse preparedness, with TV shows like *Doomsday Preppers*, *Running Wild with Bear Grylls*, and *Survivor* attracting considerable numbers of viewers. At the same time, subreddits devoted to survival, zombie apocalypse or catastrophic futurology attract millions of registered users in total, and many of them have significantly grown in popularity in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.¹

Although the apocalypse has been an important trope in many cultures since antiquity (Garrard 85), this surge in the popularity of apocalyptic rhetoric is usually attributed to a ubiquitous sense that humanity has reached a point in which it is capable of completely annihilating all life, both human and non-human – a premonition often concretized in images of nuclear detonation. According to Greg Garrard, this kind of imagery, beginning with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), “redefined popular conceptions of the end of the world” (94). The popularity of the genre is also reinforced by the recognition that rampant global free-market economy, along with its insistence on economic growth, its morbid and intemperate consumerism, and its unsustainable use of natural resources, has a detrimental effect on the ecosystem. Mark Fisher writes in *Capitalist Realism* that “[t]he relationship between capitalism and eco-disaster is neither coincidental nor accidental: capital's ‘need of a constantly expanding market,’ its ‘growth fetish,’ mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability” (18–19). In Fisher's view, one of the functions that post-apocalyptic and anti-capitalist movies like *Wall-E* (2008) perform in contemporary culture is to concretize people's anxiety regarding

¹ Data available at subredditstats.com.

the instability of the current system.² Lawrence Buell similarly observes that “apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” – a metaphor that in his view might “convince people that something is wrong” (285).

Furthermore, Briohny Doyle notices that this increased interest in post-apocalypse and survivalism can also be attributed to what is sometimes referred to as “the crisis in masculinity,” which can be defined as an increasing uncertainty, a “moral panic” (Davis et al. 5), which has by now become prevalent among young men in Western societies, regarding what it actually means to be a man given that the traditional models of masculinity have become obsolete.³ The fact that many survivalist and post-apocalyptic films feature (more often than not) white male protagonists “whose survivalist challenge is also a challenge to display ‘traditional’ masculine characteristics” (Doyle 3) is indicative of the ubiquity of this trend. In Doyle’s view, post-apocalypse, despite the atrociousness of its imagery, might actually be perversely comforting because it offers a compensatory fantasy of a nostalgic return to the supposedly “natural,” premodern state of things in which traditional masculinity could be reimplemented (3). The category of the “natural,” the critic argues, is necessary to maintain the validity of survivalism, because much of the cogency of the genre derives precisely from the premonition that the crisis which makes the protagonist resort to survival techniques reveals the truth about both the character and about the world he inhabits. By the same token, to extend Doyle’s argument, the logic inherent in many post-apocalyptic narratives is that the apocalypse is indeed a revelation in its Greek sense, and if it brings about a return of a conservative model of masculinity and of gender roles, it is because they are a part of that disclosed “truth” – they are “natural” and thus become revealed once civilizational standards are removed. Nevertheless, despite this insistence on truth and authenticity within apocalyptic rhetoric, the conservative stance on the issue seems hardly tenable, as it is not uncommon for conservative ideas to be legitimized by the means of disguising them as “natural” (Doyle 9) while ignoring their constructedness. An ecofeminist critic Riane Eisler, who studied prehistoric matriarchal

² Fisher’s argument is of course a little more complicated than that. He goes on to say that the impending environmental catastrophe is not so much repressed from contemporary culture than “incorporated into advertising and marketing” (18). Once the apocalypse becomes a product, it functions as a kind of anesthetic “perform[ing] our anti-capitalism for us” (12), hence absolving the audience from any need to engage in sociopolitical activism towards systemic change. We might then say that the pop-cultural post-apocalypse is not so much a return of the repressed as it is a return of the commodified.

³ For a more in-depth analysis of various critical views on the crisis in masculinity, its symptoms, origins and consequences see Morgan.

religions, found that within agrarian cultures that worshipped goddesses, masculinity was not necessarily associated with dominance or with the subjugation of women and non-human life (Fiedorczuk 131–32). In these cultures, traits that are nowadays considered “feminine” (like empathy) were valued, not denigrated. Hence, it is not true to say that modern pop-cultural representations of the post-apocalypse reveal the only possible natural order of things in which the embracement of traditional masculinity (and, by association, the subjugation and marginalization of women) is an unavoidable necessity and the only mode of existence guarantying survival.

Post-apocalyptic fiction, therefore, seems to be a fertile ground for eco-feminist criticism which postulates the inseparability of ecological domination and the subjugation of women in patriarchal societies (Fiedorczuk 121). Accordingly, the conservative message of many of those post-apocalyptic films and novels is what has attracted a great deal of criticism from theorists affiliated with ecocritical and feminist thought. The problem with many of those productions, as Susan Kollin writes, following Susan Sontag, is that they often “leave intact elements of the very technology and hypermodernity that contributed to the crisis” (Kollin 164; Sontag 223). In other words, although the pop-cultural post-apocalypse may be the end of the world as we know it, it is rarely a wake-up call, as it does not abolish the very elements of our culture that conduce to the apocalypse. As the case of traditional masculinity demonstrates – it can also promote and intensify those elements. Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, the book which is the focus of this paper, seems to have been similarly criticized on the grounds of its supposed conservatism, especially with regard to his treatment of women (Åström; Phillips; Egan). This essay argues that if, indeed, McCarthy’s treatment of women and masculinity comes across as conservative, it is so because of the author’s deployment of a close third person mode of narration, the use of which results in certain elements of the story being obfuscated by the father’s masculine subjectivity. Thus, while the novel’s narrator states at one point that the father “saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world” (McCarthy 130), this essay argues that the father’s “revelation” should not be taken at its face value, as his revelation might be different from the revelation experienced by his son, by his wife, and – finally – by the reader. McCarthy’s novel offers a much more nuanced and ambiguous critique of both capitalist ecological domination and traditional masculinity than some critics were willing to acknowledge. This subtle critique is what in my view makes the novel stand out within contemporary apocalyptic rhetoric. Outlining the elements of this critique within McCarthy’s novel will be the subject of this essay.

To begin with, it is necessary to situate *The Road* in its historical context. The novel was published five years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 – an event that shattered the illusion of untroubled and impenetrable security in the minds of many Americans. McCarthy himself links the apocalyptic mode of *The Road* with the post-9/11 mentality in a television interview conducted by Oprah Winfrey. Oprah comments that if people had read the novel 20 to 25 years before, the audience would have perceived it as “futuristic.” “But something about [*The Road*],” she goes on to say, “feels ominous and real.” McCarthy answers that one of the things that 9/11 changed in America is that people have become “more concerned about apocalyptic issues,” as they no longer have the same sense of security they had before the attacks, and as they became more aware of the fragility of their privilege (“Cormac McCarthy Interview on the Oprah Winfrey Show” 6:30–7:14).

Additionally, *The Road* was published a year after hurricane Katrina. Susan Kollin elaborates on this issue by referring to a book by Chester Hartman and Gregory Squires, who claimed in their comprehensive study of the 2005 hurricane that “there is no such thing as a natural disaster” (Kollin 159; Hartman and Squires). Kollin states that “[h]uman history certainly contributed to the scope of the catastrophe in New Orleans; from global warming and decades of haphazard urban planning before the crisis to government ineptitude and inaction after the catastrophe” (159). In Hartman and Squires’s view, in other words, there was much more that contributed to the catastrophe than mere natural processes. Kollin goes on to say that “McCarthy’s book is a novel of disaster, a horrifying account of environmental decline in the context of larger social failings” (159). Whether hurricane Katrina influenced McCarthy in the process of writing *The Road* is open to conjecture. Perhaps the father’s childhood memory of “a hurricane years past” which made the shore of the lake full of stumps of “windfall trees” (13) is an echo of what occurred in 2005. Regardless, it is quite safe to say that the memory of Katrina might be one of the things that make the apocalypse of McCarthy’s novel seem “real” to Oprah and other American readers.

The novel depicts a father and his son traveling through a desolate, arid landscape of “what used to be called the states” (McCarthy 43). There are hardly any human survivors, and those who did survive are only “creedless shells of men tottering. . . like migrants in a feverland” (28). The land is “barren” (4) with “nothing living anywhere” (30); everything is covered in dust and ash (7); there are fires, earthquakes, and dead trees falling to the ground; the “banished” (32) sun, blocked by either smoke or dust, is like a “mother” grieving the death of its child – the Earth.

Birds flew away and the man “never heard them again” (53) leaving the land “silent” (4) and “birdless” (215), echoing Carson’s apocalyptic vision in *Silent Spring*.

These horrifying descriptions produce a feeling of entrapment, which is further intensified by the apparent pointlessness of the journey of the two protagonists. The father says at one point that they need to go south because the winter might be too severe for them to survive if they stay where they are (4). At the same time, the man repeatedly insists on reaching the coast, although the logic behind this idea is never explicitly explained. The father himself feels that there is actually no point to their journey: “waking in the night he knew that all of this was empty and no substance to it” (29). This feeling of absurdity is further accentuated when the father states that “[t]here’s nothing to be done” (50) for a man hit by a lightning, echoing the beginning of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. The similarity between these two texts is even greater if we consider the way time functions in McCarthy’s novel – “there is no past” but also, as we are told a few sentences onward, “there is no later” (54), as if – just as in the world of Beckett’s play – everything was frozen in an indefinite “now” without any possibility for change or for a better future. Incidentally, *Waiting for Godot* also takes place on “a country road,” and its “single tree” (Beckett) also suggests the arid austerity of *The Road*. The myth of Sisyphus might be another intertextual reference informing the novel’s narrative and aesthetics, as the following passages demonstrate: “[t]he air grew thin and he thought the summit could not be far. Perhaps tomorrow. Tomorrow came and went ... [P]ushing the cart up those grades was exhausting work” (30). And later: “they stopped to rest and he turned the cart sideways in the road against it rolling” (159). Both of these apparent echoes function in the text as reminders of the supposedly inescapable absurdity the man and the boy find themselves in.

The way the two protagonists are described also seems quite significant. They push a shopping cart in which they store their clothes, blankets, and other possessions; they are dressed in dirty clothes and pieces of plastic tarp which they often wear on top of their shoes so that their feet do not get wet. All in all, the way the two characters are dressed might bring to mind a description of a homeless person, which seems hardly coincidental given the fact that “ecology” derives etymologically from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “house.” The death (or near-death) of the ecosystem in *The Road* is thus indeed literal homelessness, indicating that there is no refuge from absurdity without the environment. Even technology cannot bring much comfort as, for instance, the lamp they carry needs oil to be of any use, and the sextant the father finds is useless without the sun. The question the novel poses is then whether any meaningful human existence is possible after the death of the

ecosystem, and whether such existence could be anything else than a perpetuation of suffering and absurdity.

The novel never explicitly specifies what caused the cataclysm which brought the father and the son on the road. We are only told that “[t]he clocks stopped at 1:17. [There was a] long shear of light and then a series of low concussions” (52). Critics differ in their interpretations of the source of the cataclysm – some identify this “long shear of light” as a comet strike, while others see it as the beginning of a nuclear war (Huebert 83). As David Huebert points out, McCarthy himself stated in an interview for *The Wall Street Journal* that the cause of the cataclysm is not really important (83). The novel itself, however, seems replete with evidence for the anthropogenic origin of the cataclysm.

First of all, it is necessary to point out that the apocalypse in *The Road* was probably anticipated by the characters of the novel. It is hinted, for instance, in the father’s impulse to fill the bathtub with water the moment he sees “a long shear of light” through the window (52). This impulse might seem puzzling to readers at first, and it is certainly puzzling even for the man’s wife who asks whether he is taking a bath (52). The incentive behind the father’s action, however, stems from his intuition that there was going to be a shortage of drinking water. Perhaps, water had already been becoming more and more scarce before the cataclysm occurred, as it is hinted in the father’s childhood memory of the “sandy shallows” of a lake near his uncle’s house (13). This growing scarcity would explain the father’s decisiveness in the first moments of the novel’s main cataclysm. In such a case, the burning cities he sees from his window could be indicative of an ongoing conflict for resources, drinking water among them. Another piece of evidence indicating that *The Road*’s crisis was anticipated might be the bunker full of supplies the man and the boy find (138), which, of course, can be a relic of the Cold War paranoia. However, because the reason behind building such a shelter remains unknown, the reader may surmise that it could have been built in preparation for the unspecified cataclysm that began with a “long shear of light.”

Furthermore, the landscape of *The Road* can certainly be called, as Kollin puts it, “post-abundant” and “post-capitalist” as it is swarmed with the remnants of capitalist production (Kollin 1). At the very beginning of the novel, we are presented with the following passage: “[w]hen he got back the boy was still asleep. He pulled the blue *plastic* tarp off of him and folded it and carried it out to the grocery cart and packed it and came back with their plates and some cornmeal cakes in a *plastic* bag and a *plastic* bottle of syrup” (McCarthy 4; emphasis added). The word “plastic” is repeated three times in a single sentence, and many more times later in the novel, indicating the ubiquity of this material within a capitalist economy, and pointing to

this material's slow decomposition rate. After all, the merchandise and the waste scattered over *The Road's* landscape have outlived the civilization that produced them.⁴ At the same time, the shopping cart mentioned in the passage above can be interpreted as a figure of late-capitalist consumerism (Kollin 161).

In his essay "Eating and Mourning the Corpse of the World," David Huebert observes that the theme of environmental destruction in *The Road* is in consort with the novel's frequent depictions of cannibalistic consumption (67). The critic argues that the excessive and unsustainable use of natural resources, which is what we experience now under late capitalism, is already a kind of cannibalism, even though there is no literal consumption of human flesh involved. He explains:

McCarthy offers the reader a profusion of cannibalism not for shock value, nor to thicken *The Road's* atmosphere of darkness and desolation, but because these humans eating other humans serve as monstrous emissaries of a possible future, demonstrating what may become of a species already engaged in the act of eating itself. ... What I call "traditional cannibalism" is the standard notion of cannibalism or anthropophagy: the intraspecies consumption of human flesh. I also present a more original notion of "ecological cannibalism" – humans are ecological cannibals insofar as they excessively devour their own planetary body. (67)

It is no accident, the critic argues, that the landscape of *The Road* is described as if it were a dead body⁵ – humanity had been continually devouring it long before the cataclysm occurred. The cannibalistic consumption in McCarthy's novel is then not really an inconceivable deviation from the principles of a contemporary consumerist society, but rather the logical consequence of those very principles (Huebert 75). This is why McCarthy writes about "men who would eat your children in front of our eyes. . . crawl[ing] from the rubble white of tooth and eye carrying charred and anonymous tins of food in nylon nets like shoppers in the commissaries of hell" (181). This juxtaposition of cannibalism with "shoppers," the critic argues, conflates

⁴ This point is reinforced when the man and the boy look at a dam which "will probably be there for hundreds of years. Thousands, even" (20). Later they find an abandoned train which they both know "would sit there slowly decomposing for all eternity" (180).

⁵ Huebert notices McCarthy's use of words like "cauterized" and "limbless." I would also add the author's repeated use of the word "shrouded" with reference to the landscape (McCarthy 51, 117, 181, 219, 221) as if it were a body prepared for burial. The aforementioned comparison of the sun to "a grieving mother" further accentuates this effect.

the demise of civilization with rampant consumerism (75). If there are no limits to consumption and the questions of sustainability are generally disregarded, then once natural resources are depleted, other people become the resource.

To develop this argument, let us consider the scene in which the man and the boy see the anachronistic “phalanx” of men with spears: “[a]n army in tennis shoes, tramping ... Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant” (McCarthy 91–92). These women are certainly – at least in part – kept for sex. More importantly, however, the infants they give birth to can later be eaten, affording the men who own them prolonged survival. This is an example of a woman’s body being treated as a resource.⁶ Moreover, keeping these women alive at all instead of eating them right away is then, by the same exploitative capitalist logic, a perverse investment. Thus, the man and his son are “the good guys,” Huebert argues, only insofar as they represent the earlier stage of cannibalistic consumption. To some extent, the critic writes, it does make them morally superior to the ruthless literal cannibals in the novel; nevertheless, it insufficiently absolves them from complicity in the ecological degradation of *The Road*’s landscape (Huebert 76).

Huebert develops his interpretation of *The Road* as an environmental novel by looking at its treatment of animals. The critic brings up one of the father’s childhood memories, in which he and other “rough men” burn snakes alive with gasoline (McCarthy 188). He argues that this scene “describes industrial endeavor in suggestively consumptive language,” which is characteristic of what the critic calls “ecological cannibalism” (74). Apart from recognizing the scene’s obvious Christian symbolism,⁷ the critic writes that it is

crucial ... that these men are killing innocent nonhuman animals, animals that become enormously precious to the man once they are lost to the world he knows. Beyond the great wastefulness of this senseless slaughter, however, it is significant that the men burn the snakes with gasoline, the single substance most recognizable as a catalyst of climate change. ... The workers also kill these animals so

⁶ Huebert does not use the example I provide above. Instead, the critic observes that when the man enters the house where he later finds a cellar full of slaves harvested for meat, he thinks of “slaves [who] had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver strays” (McCarthy 106). The critic goes on to say, following Stanley Cavell, that “slavery is a form of cannibalism” and that this juxtaposition of slavery and cannibalism conflates those two categories within the novel (Huebert 72).

⁷ The critic argues that the snakes represent Satan, while the way in which the men pry open the grotto is as if they were opening a gateway to hell (Huebert 74).

that they may extract resources from the earth, disrupting natural harmonies and pillaging the world for its inner goods – symbolically harvesting the meat of the earth. (74)

The critic rightfully recognizes the men’s action as “harvesting for the meat of the earth” because indeed in that scene the planet is again described as a body, with snakes being like “the bowels of some great beast” (McCarthy 188). Furthermore, having killed those animals, the men “go home to their suppers” (189), which, according to Huebert, is indicative of how violence towards non-human nature is conflated with metabolic consumption within the novel (74). In the context of this essay, it is also necessary to acknowledge that the people responsible for this slaughter are “rough men” – the adjective suggesting traditional masculine characteristics like strength, resilience, or a drive towards domination. This ambiguous scene, therefore, conflates not two, but three categories within *The Road* – violence towards non-human nature, human consumption, and traditional masculinity – simultaneously making the father an inheritor to this precarious tradition.⁸

Huebert’s argument regarding the treatment of animals in McCarthy’s book can be expanded with reference to how another animal – the deer – functions in the novel. This animal is mentioned only twice – once as a decorative deerhead hung on the wall of a grocery store (McCarthy 214), the other time as a plastic deer standing in a yard (185). The former image once again brings to mind the violence against non-human life. The fact that the deerhead is placed in a grocery store further accentuates Huebert’s point regarding the interconnectedness of consumption and human cruelty. The plastic deer, on the other hand, functions here not only as a mere imitation of the real animal, but as a simulacrum of a non-existent pastoral ideal in which humanity coexists with nature. It evokes, in other words, a contradictory and impossible fantasy in which wild animals live peacefully in people’s yards in the suburbs. This plastic deer, therefore, resembles many shopping malls which oftentimes utilize this pastoral ideal having plants, fountains, ponds and artificial waterfalls incorporated into their design, staging for the consumer an imaginary harmony with the “natural.” This tension between the real deer killed by a hunter and the fake deer manufactured as a compensatory commodity, is thus indicative of a

⁸ I also think that the silence with which snakes burn alive (“they were mute [and] there were no screams of pain”) is echoed in the scene when the man and his son hide from the marauders driving the truck (the men “neither spoke nor called to each other”). There seem to be a great number of instances within the novel when the distinction between the animal and the human becomes blurred. However, a detailed analysis of the animal/human binary in *The Road* is beyond the scope of this essay.

broader reflection within the novel regarding the logic of consumer culture which capitalizes on a nostalgic return of the very things it destroys.

Summing up the issue of the anthropogenicity of the environmental disaster in *The Road*, let us take a look at the following passage:

On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadow-lands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where a roadworks lay abandoned. ... He got the binoculars out of the cart and stood in the road and glassed the plain down there where the shape of a city stood in the grayness like a charcoal drawing sketched across the waste. Nothing to see. No smoke. (McCarthy 8)

The accumulation of words like “black,” “burn,” “charred,” “raw,” “red,” “smoke” makes this passage exemplary in *The Road*'s consistent emphasis on incineration within its descriptions of landscape. David Huebert rightfully notices that such language may “evoke the apocalyptic discourse of climate change,” and that it “render[s] the novel’s setting as a kind of future Dante-esque inferno” (73). However, it also seems important to acknowledge that such insistence on incineration should sensitize the reader to the ambiguity of the novel’s central phrase – “to carry the fire.” Although in the vocabulary of the two protagonists this phrase means simply “being the good guys who don’t consume human flesh,” the fire can also be read as a synecdoche for civilization. As I have showed in the paragraphs above, the father and his son are inheritors to a much more ambiguous civilizational tradition than the father seems to acknowledge – a tradition which perhaps produced some of the goodness within the characters, and which possibly enabled some of the father’s pleasant memories of his childhood or of the time he spent with his wife, but also one which brought an end both to itself and to the ecosystem.

Although Mark Fisher proclaimed that McCarthy’s *The Road* “does nothing to undermine the truth of Jameson’s famous claim that ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’” as the novel “does not clear a space for any sort of alternative to it” (“Post-Apocalypse Now” 73), the subsequent part of this essay argues that it is not the novel itself that provides no alternative, but rather, as I have already noted, that it is the father’s masculine subjectivity that prohibits the emergence of new solutions. As Arielle Zibrak remarked, “[t]he man’s voice is

authoritative – indeed it is almost completely aligned with the voice of the narrator. In the entire text, there is never a thought from the boy’s head presented outside of dialog. On the few occasions when the man and the boy are separated from one another, the narrator follows the man” (107). Moreover, going back to the point I made at the beginning of the essay, I think that nothing outside the post-apocalypse is attainable for the man precisely because this struggle for survival, however atrocious it may be, gives him a sense of purpose, and a sense of mission. He keeps repeating that taking care of the boy is his “job,” and, at one point, he even claims that he “was appointed to do that by God” (McCarthy 77), which is indicative of him having a sense of being a distinguished agent of a godly plan. This, in turn, not only reassures him of his purpose but can also legitimize some of his uncalled-for cruelty which will be discussed below. Everything is permitted if you are appointed by God to do something. I subscribe to Morgenstern’s remark that in *The Road* “the world ends precisely so that [the father] can know who he is and what he must do” (37). Transgressing the post-apocalypse is then the more difficult the more comfort it brings, however perverse such comfort might be. The following paragraphs offer an outline and a critique of the father’s masculine subjectivity, which prevents both this character and – to some extent – the reader from seeing beyond the capitalist patriarchal framework.

It is important to acknowledge that the perspective that *The Road* affords its readers is vastly masculinized from the novel’s beginning almost until its very end. At one point, the narrator says that the man and the boy are “each the other’s world entire,” (6) as if nothing else outside their relationship existed, thus indicating the impenetrability of their perspective – at least on the father’s part, as the boy seems to develop his own perspective later on. The feminine perspective seems also completely excluded from the father’s memories of his childhood as he remembers mostly his uncle and his father. The man’s mother is mentioned only once in the novel when the man and the boy visit the man’s former family house. When they enter the dining room, the narrator says that “the firebrick in the heath was as yellow as the day it was laid because his mother could not bear to see it blackened” (26). The mother’s aversion to using the furnace, as Berit Åström argues, serves as a symbolic expression of the fact that women in *The Road* are generally excluded from the quest of “carrying the fire,” thus rendering the preservation of humanity and civilization an exclusively masculine domain (117). This feeling of the novel’s encapsulation within patriarchal subjectivity is reinforced by the man’s sense that perhaps his “fathers” watch him, “weighting” his actions “in their ledgerbook” (196). Being a “good guy” is then synonymous with remaining faithful to his fathers’ teachings and their patriarchal legacy.

Furthermore, there are very few women in the novel and their perspective remains to a large extent unknown to the reader. The most important female character is certainly the boy's mother, but what we learn about her remains highly ambiguous. This ambiguity is what has drawn a great deal of criticism on McCarthy. Some critics pointed to how easily he eliminates the mother from the story (Åström 114; Morgentstern 41; Egan) while simultaneously presenting her as a "two-dimensional" (Egan), strangely cold and distant character, rendering her relationship with the boy inferior to the bond the father and his son share.⁹ Åström goes as far as to say that the mother "contributes nothing to the family or the story" (125).

Despite the apparent popularity of such an interpretation of this character, I think that the mother's perspective is actually crucial for the reader to understand the totality of the novel's more subtle implications as she provides a very acute commentary on the interconnectedness of patriarchy and post-apocalypse, which constitutes an important counterpoint to the father's ideological position. "We're the walking dead in a horror film," she says – a remark which sounds as if she were referring to the zombie apocalypse – a popular subgenre of post-apocalyptic cinema. She seems acutely aware that she is a part of a culture within which people share a ubiquitous belief that once the illusion of civilizational comforts is removed, patriarchal domination and violence become "the truth." Knowing that there is no place for feminine agency and women's autonomy after the apocalypse, she realizes there is nothing she can do to protect either herself or the child. "I didnt bring myself to this. I was brought" (56) she says indicating her own cultural marginalization and her lack of agency. Then, she says: "They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I cant" (56). She knows that if she goes on living, she will have to endure the death of her son, and later she will become like the pregnant slaves from the phalanx mentioned above and be treated as a resource. If being an autonomous woman is impossible in the post-apocalypse, then the only way to survive would be to embrace traditional masculine characteristics, but that would involve becoming what she resents. Thus, remaining true to herself requires not existing at all: "[t]hey say that women dream of danger to those in their care and men of danger to themselves, But I dont dream at all. You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take" (57). I read the phrase "I dont dream at all" as her refusal to participate in the oppressive manhood/womanhood duality in the first place. Her

⁹ Compare, for instance, how different the boy's reaction is to the death of his mother and to the death of his father (Åström 122). The question is, however, whether the boy was actually indifferent to his mother's death, or whether this is how the father remembers his reaction. The novel grants us limited access to the boy's feelings as all of them – at least up to the point when the father dies – are mediated to us by the man's subjectivity.

decision to commit suicide is, then, deeply self-affirmative, as she refuses to take part in the perpetuation of suffering, violence, and absurdity, as well as the commodification of her body (Donnelly 162). Finally, it must be emphasized that the woman's deed is fundamentally heroic – she chooses to cut her veins with an obsidian so that the man and the boy would have two bullets left (McCarthy 56), making it possible for them to end their lives more quickly and less painfully in comparison to the death she chose for herself, and also potentially saving them from having to die an atrocious death at the hands of merciless cannibals. What she does is then not “selfish and disloyal” (124), as Åström puts it, but quite the opposite.

As Ross Church notices, the mother's suicide challenges the beliefs of her husband for whom death is a kind of defeat and, hence, emasculation (26). Knowing that the man will not understand her decision to abandon him and their child, she ironizes her position by referring to “the patriarchal discourse which is hostile to female agency” (Church 25), and which conflates any deviation from the patriarchal ideal of womanhood as motherhood with sexual deviancy.¹⁰ She knows that the father will interpret her action from this conservative perspective. This is why she tells him: “think of me as a faithless slut *if you like*” (McCarthy 56–57; emphasis added). Thus, the mother's speech not only undermines the validity of the father's ideological position but also makes her probably the most acute, perceptive, and independent character in the novel.

The Road problematizes yet another issue which bears on its ecocritical implications – it challenges binary oppositions. Many ecofeminist critics (e.g. Val Plumwood and Karen J. Warren) postulate that dualistic thinking, in which one thing is usually more valued than the other, is at the heart of the intellectual framework of patriarchal societies (Fiedorczuk 122–24). Those dualisms include concepts like, for instance, man/woman, culture/nature, body/mind, etc., and they serve to legitimize the mechanisms of oppression within those societies, and to justify power relations in which one subject is allowed to dominate another (Fiedorczuk 123–24). *The Road* confirms the arbitrariness and instability of such dualisms. For example, the novel's central dichotomy – “bad guys” / “good guys” – imposed by the father in order to ground himself and his son within a modicum of ideological consistency – proves to be extremely unstable. The following paragraphs argue that McCarthy effectively blurs the distinction between these two categories, thus exposing the fragility and dubiousness of the father's perspective.

¹⁰ Church draws this connection by referring to Revelation 17:4, where – as the critic says – “evil is equated with, and expressed as, feminine sexuality” (23).

In the course of the narrative, we observe the father become almost everything he condemns, save for eating human flesh. Early in the novel, when the man and the boy encounter a group of “truck people,” the father ends up threatening one of the marauders with a gun, addressing the man the following way: “the bullet travels faster than sound. It will be in your brain before you can hear it. To hear it you will need a frontal lobe and things with names like colliculus and temporal gyrus and you wont have them anymore. They’ll just be soup” (64). The medical and scientific jargon the father uses in this passage is most likely indicative of his former learnedness – possibly, he acquired higher education before the cataclysm. This kind of language is what makes the other man ask: “[a]re you a doctor?” (64). But the father’s pre-apocalypse personality by that point is already partly disintegrated, and so he answers: “I’m not anything” (64).

One might compare it to another scene which takes place much later in the book, when a man takes away the father and the boy’s cart of supplies. The father chases the man, pulls out his gun and says: “If you dont put down the knife and get away from the cart ... I’m going to blow your brains out” (256). The father’s eloquent matter-of-factness from the former passage turns into a violent and crude threat in the latter, which bespeaks a mental and moral atrophy of this character over the course of the novel. Ross Church rightfully comments that “[f]rom using the precise language of neuroscience, the man regresses to macho, cowboy language. He is enacting, for a moment at least, the patriarchal fantasy of the male” (27). The father’s regression is also quite interestingly hinted at in the scene in which he looks at his face reflected in a mirror, and realizes that he looks as if he had no chin (McCarthy 152). This is an interesting remark from the evolutionary perspective because *Homo Sapiens* is the only primate that possesses a chin – no other primates have it, nor did any extinct human relatives (Pampush 127). The lack of this body part may then be a metaphor for the father’s eroded humanity.

Moreover, the father repeatedly calls the man a thief, while the fact is the man found their cart when the father and the boy were not near it.¹¹ The man, as Arielle Zibrak points out, could have taken it thinking that these supplies had been abandoned and were no longer anybody’s property, just as the father and his son do repeatedly throughout the novel (120). Thus, when the father tells the man to take off his clothes and give them everything he owns adding “[y]ou didnt mind doing it do us” (McCarthy 257), it is important to realize that the man *did not* do to them

¹¹ Compare how this scene is changed in Hillcoat’s movie adaptation. There, the boy falls asleep next to the cart, and when he wakes up, the cart is no longer there. In this case the man’s action is indeed theft.

what the father does to him (Zibrak 120). The father's disproportionate cruelty towards the man is then an echo of his earlier nihilistic thought that in the world there was generally "more punishment than crime" (McCarthy 33). Indeed, it is very much so in the context of this scene because the punishment the father inflicts on the man is practically synonymous with death penalty, as the boy rightfully notices (260). The father then becomes an agent for the very cynical and self-serving cruelty.¹²

The father's cruelty in the scene, along with his general reluctance to help others or to empathize with them (like with the "little boy" or with Ely) makes the boy become increasingly suspicious of his father's teachings, asking whether they still are "the good guys" (77). The boy gradually detects a conflict between the values the father tries to pass on to him in the "old stories of courage and justice" (41), and what the father actually does. "Those stories are not true," says the boy, "in the stories we're always helping people and we don't help people" (268). Furthermore, the boy senses that his father's paranoia is in some instances obsessive because he mistrusts everyone they meet, even if there are no actual grounds for suspicion, like in the case of Ely. The father is even mistrustful of his own dreams and claims that "the right dreams for a man in peril [are] dreams of peril and all else [is] the call of languor and death" (18). From the father's perspective, therefore, being a man and "carrying the fire" is inseparable from living in fear. Fear is then what paradoxically enables masculinity – perhaps because the father believes it is only by living in fear, and by overcoming it, that one is able to attain courage, thus living up to the legacy of the heroes of the stories "about courage and justice." The truth is, however, that the father never stops being scared. What was supposed to enable courage has led to paranoia, which then turns either into cruelty, as in the case of the thief of their cart, or into indifference to other people's suffering – "nothing to be done."

This is not to say that the father's alertness is totally redundant – there are numerous instances in the novel when he correctly identifies danger, and his aplomb and ingenuity save both his life and the life of his son. Indeed, it is the case that there are people in the novel who are ruthless and cruel and who should be avoided at all costs – like the "four bearded men and two women" who harvest the meat of the slaves they keep in their cellar (McCarthy 111). However, the man never acknowledges that there may be multiple stages of goodness between the totalizing "good guys"/ "bad guys" dichotomy. For example, as Zibrak points out, the novel never proposes a distinction between "those who cannibalize the living and those who only

¹² Notice also how this "bad guys/good guys" confusion is symbolically represented earlier in the novel when the man and the boy walk into an abandoned house and see themselves in a mirror, which makes the father instinctively draw his gun. This scene accentuates how difficult it is for the protagonists to distinguish themselves from the "bad guys" (see McCarthy 132).

cannibalize the dead” (108). Perhaps, Ely is the latter type of a cannibal, as he says at one point: “You dont want to know the things I’ve eaten” (172). Zibrak further argues that in *The Road* “[a]ll other people are insistently looked upon as agents of death, when they might be seen as avenues for survival or cultural reunification” (108). The father’s perspective is then too limited both by his paranoia and by his narrow understanding of what it means to be “good” or “bad” to be able to establish a long-lasting connection with anybody other than his son.

The boy, on the other hand, becomes more and more aware that his father’s fear-driven perspective is no way to live, even if it grants them survival. Hence, he consistently longs for a connection: he wants to adopt the dog and the little boy as well as take care of Ely. When they arrive to the seashore, the boy builds a “small village” in the sand (224), which is quite peculiar because he had never seen a populated village, nor had he ever lived in one. Soon after, he asks his father if he can write a letter to “the good guys” on the sand. The boy’s fantasy of living within a community is thus conflated with his quest of finding “the good guys.” On some level, the father knows that finding “the good guys” is necessary, and he urges his son to do so before he dies.

The father’s recognition that uniting with other survivors is necessary is latently expressed in the following dialogue:

[Boy:] Do you think there might be crows somewhere?

[Father:] I dont know.

But what do you think?

I think it’s unlikely.

Could they fly to Mars or someplace?

No. They couldnt.

Because it’s too far?

Yes.

Even if they wanted to.

Even if they wanted to.

What if they tried and they just got half way or something and then they were too tired. Would they fall back down?

Well. They really couldnt get halfway because they’d be in space and there’s not any air in space so they wouldnt be able to fly and besides it would be too cold and they’d freeze to death.

Oh.

Anyway they wouldnt know where Mars was.

Do we know where Mars is?

Sort of.

If we had a spaceship could we go there?

Well. If you had a really good spaceship and you had people to help you I suppose you could go. (McCarthy 157)

This passage juxtaposes two different ways of going to Mars. The former involves crows trying to fly to Mars each on its own, resulting in their death – an image which evokes Icarus’ pernicious self-confidence. The latter image, on the other hand, suggests that great things can only be achieved in cooperation – you can go to Mars only “if you. . . had people to help you.” The implication is then that the boy, if he is not to die like Icarus, should seek connection with others, rather than rely on the myth of masculine self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, it is exactly the father’s philosophy that would have prevented the boy from doing so.

Finally, when the boy says at one point that he wishes he were with his mom, his father notices: “[y]ou mean you wish you were dead,” thus implicating that the boy contemplates his own death, or his possible suicide (McCarthy 55). If that is the case, then I think the central idea of James Hillman’s *Suicide and the Soul* – that contemplating suicide is not pathological, but merely indicative of a need for a psychological transformation – seems most appropriate in the context of the boy. Indeed, something does need to die in order for the boy to go on living.

Despite the palpable poignancy of the scene in which the father and the son have their final conversation before the former’s death, it is important to acknowledge the explicit conservatism of the father’s message. “Do everything the way we did it” (278), he says. The statement feels almost narcissistic because its implication is that the life the father had devised for himself and the boy is the only way to survive, that all he had done was right, and, therefore, the boy should never diverge from the father’s path. What is more, the father insists that he will still be with the boy in spirit, and the boy can talk to him anytime he wants, thus establishing an analogous relationship to the one the father had with his “fathers” by whom he felt watched and judged throughout the novel. Finally, the father tells the boy: “[y]ou need to find the good guys but you cant take any chances” (278). This is an anti-theoretical piece of advice – finding the good guys *is* taking chances, which is something the father never had the courage to do.

The father then leaves the boy with a set of very contradictory and, to some extent, also oppressive principles to live by. Even though the boy pledges fidelity to his father’s teachings saying “I’ll talk to you every day. . . . And I wont forget. No matter what” (286), he breaks the father’s rule of not taking any chances the first opportunity he gets. The arrival of the family which rescues the boy is not a naïve

deus ex machina, but rather, such a dynamic change within the novel's tone is indicative of how dominant the father's perspective had been up to that point. The very moment the father dies, the perspective changes both for the son and for the reader. All the same, the ending remains highly ambiguous as the reader is scarcely informed about what the future brings to the boy and to the world of *The Road* in general. However, it is important to realize that, at least for a moment, the novel enables the pursuit of alternatives. It is the boy's perspective that considerably broadens the scope of the novel's ideological framework as he seems to succeed in transgressing the patriarchal logic of dominance endorsed by his father. The fact that the boy's perspective is generally favored in *The Road* is foreshadowed in the very first paragraph of the novel describing the father's quasi-Platonic dream in which a child leads him through a cave by the hand, hence granting the child a dominant role. Thus, I read the novel's ending as predominantly optimistic. The final paragraph of the novel, describing an idyllic natural scenery, however, is not an image of a future renewal within the world of *The Road* as it describes things "older than man" which "cannot be put back." Rather, as Huebert writes, this fragment "mourn[s] the past as witnessed by a hypothetical future. Therefore, McCarthy offers an acknowledgment of, and effective engagement with, a loss to come" (68). By evoking this kind of environmental grief at the very end of the novel, McCarthy echoes the boy's psychological transformation by attempting to initiate a transformation within the reader.

McCarthy's novel constitutes an interesting deviation from the prevailing post-apocalyptic narratives, as it is replete with subtleties which run counter to the genre's usual conservatism as described by Doyle and others. With its complex treatment of masculinity, its sensitivity both to the predicaments of late capitalism and to environmental degradation, *The Road* lends itself to effective feminist and ecocritical analysis. Hence, in contrast to Mark Fisher's defeatist interpretation of McCarthy's novel, I believe *The Road* adds an important voice to the discussion about the alternatives to capitalist-realist apocalypticism.

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The Malicious or Benevolent Mastermind? The Role of Morgan le Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its Film Adaptation

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The role of Morgan le Fay is a murky one, even to this day; this is especially true for the tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Her first appearance in Arthurian tales was in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (ca 1150) as an enchantress and great healer, and from there she became a recurring character in the myth. Throughout her appearances, she has been described as a mix of a trickster, fairy, enchantress, goddess, and finally a witch. With all these different roles, it is difficult at times to tell what her intentions are in the tales that she is present in; some versions tell of Morgan being on the side of Arthur and his knights, while others tell of how she is a malevolent figure that wishes to bring the downfall of Camelot. All this proves to be somewhat true with the anonymously written romantic poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ca 14th century). In this story, Morgan never makes an actual appearance despite being named the mastermind behind the quest of one of the titular characters, Gawain. Even more so, scholars cannot agree on whether her motives in the poem are malicious or benevolent in intent; the only thing they can be unanimous on is her hatred for Guinevere. For this reason, the quest that she creates for Gawain is still up for interpretation, with the poem giving its readers the rare chance to make their own conclusions on whether Morgan's plot was sinister or not. This open discussion has resulted in a recent film which attempts to redefine the poem and Morgan's role within it for a modern audience. *The Green Knight* (2021), written and directed by David Lowery, sets out to not only redefine the medieval romantic poem as something akin to a coming of age story but also reinvent Morgan's role from a potentially sinister trickster of the court to that of a concerned mother. This essay will solely look into the role of Morgan in both the poem and the film in order to compare how both depicted Morgan as a witch figure.

To begin with, a synopsis of the poem is needed in order to better understand the plot and intention of Morgan in both the chivalric romance and the film adaptation. It all begins around the time of Christmas in Camelot where Arthur and his knights are celebrating the birth of Christ and the coming of a new year. While

the celebrations are going on, a giant green knight (the other half of the titular characters) suddenly bursts into the hall and declares that he wishes to play a beheading game with the bravest of Arthur's knights. At first, no one accepts the challenge which goes on to enrage Arthur into almost taking it on himself, but Gawain – one of the favoured knights of the Round Table and Arthur's nephew – offers himself up instead. He beheads the knight on the condition that he meet the knight in one year's time to have the same done to him. A year passes with Gawain trying to prepare for what he believes is his imminent death. Eventually, he sets off and wanders the countryside trying to find the Green Knight's dwelling, the Green Chapel with much to no avail. While riding in a terrible storm at night, Gawain happens upon a castle of a great lord who welcomes him in as a guest with the promise to reveal the location of the Green Chapel. The lord of the castle goes out hunting almost every day, and asks Gawain that, in exchange for the hunting prizes that he brings back to the castle, he will also give him what he has obtained throughout the day. Three days pass where the lord brings back a deer, a fox, and a boar. Meanwhile, Gawain, who is visited every morning by the lord's wife, must return the favour and bestow the three kisses he received to the lord. Eventually, the time comes for Gawain to meet with the Green Knight, and before he leaves the castle, he gives in to the lady and takes a girdle that supposedly saves the person wearing it from harm. Once at the Green Chapel, Gawain flinches one time before getting nicked in the neck by the Green Knight on the third try. After this incident, the Green Knight reveals to Gawain that he is, in fact, the lord that let him stay in the castle. The knight, now revealed to be Bertilak de Hautdesert, tells Gawain that he was sent by Morgan le Fay not only to test the Round Table's pride and reputation but also to scare Guinevere to death. Bertilak also admits that he was testing Gawain's resolve and virtue by sending his wife to him every morning to see if he would take advantage of her. However, Gawain received a cut on his neck as the girdle that he has on is actually Bertilak's. Bertilak relieves Gawain of the quest and sends him home to Arthur as a hero and also as a warning of Morgan's powers and feelings towards the court.

In the poem, the role that Morgan plays could be that of a trickster, though a more malicious one due to her intent on fatally scaring Guinevere. This animosity between Morgan and Guinevere is a reminder, "of the marked element of female rivalry in the tales of Morgain la Fée" (Loomis 196). In some of the Arthurian myths, Morgan is in contention with Guinevere and resents her for being Arthur's wife. In others, she is trying to win the attention of Lancelot all the while working against her former mentor and teacher, Merlin, to seize power over the court. With these animosities, it would be plausible to assume that Morgan would make a physical

appearance at least once to show her superiority over her rivals, but she never really shows up in the poem. However, despite this apparent absence of both herself and her magic – it is revealed at the end of the poem that Morgan was indeed present in some form. At the end of the quest, Bercilak reveals to Gawain that Morgan is “at my castle, the old lady” and that she wore this disguise in order to avoid spoiling her great plot (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ll. 2463). It is well noted that “Morgan le Fay acts behind-the-scenes in most of Arthurian romance” and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is no exception to this (Gulmovich 191).

However, in the film *The Green Knight*, Morgan makes some appearances and is even shown to be on good terms with Guinevere. Although she is aged up to depict her as a motherly figure to the film version of Gawain, she is not presented as an ugly old woman as in the poem. For this, Lowery could have been drawing inspiration from her more beautiful and elegant depictions before Thomas Malory aligned her character with black magic in *Le Morte d’Arthur*. The old and ugly companion of Bercilak’s wife is still present in the film, and this could still be Lowery’s decision to rewrite the plot with the idea that Morgan is using this disguise in order to keep an eye out on her son as he completes the quest.

Morgan’s disguise that she uses in both the poem and the film is what was believed to be a typical appearance of a witch at the time: she was not only incredibly intimidating but also grossly revolting. Throughout Gawain’s time spent at Bercilak’s court, the old woman/Morgan – also referred to as an auncian¹³ in the original Middle English text – is described as having an aura of an *other* being:

this suggested meaning of ‘other’, other-worldly or supernatural, ... serves a two-fold purpose: locally it distinguishes the auncian from and relates her to the lady, and in the larger thematic of the poem it is a reference to the undeclared, unknown element that underpins the action. (Narin 63)

This mysterious and otherworldly air that the old woman/Morgan carries is heightened by the fact that she never interacts with anyone at court, save the wife of Bercilak. Her physical appearance is also what grabs and repulses Gawain’s attention in the first place. In comparison to the ethereal beauty of the lady, the auncian is described in an almost revulsion. When describing her face, the poet notes that only

¹³ The University of Michigan’s Middle English Compendium states that an auncian is “(a) Of persons: aged, old; (b) wise or experienced by reason of age, venerable; (c) ~ age, old age; (d) as noun: an aged person” (“Auncien and Auncient – Middle English Compendium”).

her grey eyebrows,
her eyes and nose and her bare lips,
which were ghastly to look at and horribly chapped.
(*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ll. 961–963)

Although in the movie her hideousness is never meant to be the focus as it is in the poem, this kind of description, along with her physical description being noted as short and fat with a wide bottom, fits the stereotypical descriptions of a witch. It is also important to note that Elisa Narin wrote of how

[t]he Gawain poet uses a conventional antithesis of youth and age, beauty and ugliness, to locate the auncian [the old lady/Morgan] in the poem, to set up a relationship between the auncian and the lady, and to emphasize the features of the auncian in a way that points to a presence for whom the auncian is an obvious and conventional disguise. (Narin 61)

This knowledge about Morgan's disguise gives the reader a better understanding of how she still remained relevant to the plot. Although in the poem her lack of interaction with Gawain and the overall plot was defended as her refusing to reveal herself, "[G.L.] Kittredge describes her rather as an intrusion, an attempt by the English poet to draw his story more solidly into the Arthurian tradition" (Friedman 260). This would generally make sense for the poem as Morgan is all but lacking in interactions and presence in her own scheme. In comparison, the film shows Morgan being more proactive, going so far as to disguise herself in Bercilak's castle just to be sure that her son is staying on track with his quest.

Morgan's appearance is not the only factor that greatly differs between the poem and the film. The presence of magic is an incredibly significant feature that is almost completely absent in the poem. It is never seen nor described in great detail how Morgan transforms Bercilak into the Green Knight, nor is it really revealed how the spell is completed once the quest is done. This lack of magic casting makes it hard to prove whether the plot of the poem was magic driven and/or was an act done supernaturally. The only time magic is even referred to is when Bercilak tells Gawain the reason behind the beheading game in the first place:

It's all through her power, Morgan Le Fay, who lives, in my house

and by well-studied arts has learned the knowledge of wisdom, including many of the skills of Merlin (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ll. 24445–2448).

After this explanation, there is no other reference to magic in the poem. Although this is a different take on the character, it appears that it is not the only source that fails to show Morgan using magic as Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485) proves to be the same. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, "Malory's narratives exhibit a heavy reliance on magical compulsion and the treacherous maneuvers of an enchantress who, though indispensable to the plot, barely emerges from the background of events" (McAlindon 122–123). Although this works for literary works, it does not sit well with theatre audiences if the mastermind of the quest does not show up at least once in the film. This could have been noticed by Lowery as well, in so making him change the narrative of the character from a behind-the-scenes figure that lurks in a disguise, to a more active participant in the plot. For this, Lowery had to reinvent Morgan's character from a trickster aunt and sister in the shadows of Camelot to a mother who is concerned that her son is not becoming the man he needs to be. In most versions of the legends, Gawain is the son of Arthur's sister, Morgause and King Lot of Orkney and Lothian; in comparison, Morgan is related to Arthur through his mother. This alteration presents the quest with a different interpretation compared to the testing of the might of Arthur and his knights. Nevertheless, the goals of the beheading game were to remain the same in the film: "by it Gawain gains only greater glory, and Arthur's court a better reputation. Being an enchantress, she of course knew what would be the outcome of her scheme" (J. R. Hulbert qt. in Baughan 242). In order to show Morgan's more active role in the development of the events, Lowery had to film scenes where magic was being performed.

There are two crucial scenes to focus on, the first one being when Morgan and her attendants are gathered around a magic circle that was created with sticks and dirt. During the casting of the spell in order to transform and summon Bercilak/the Green Knight to Camelot, the women are shown to be working with a mossy piece of wood, a tooth from a dead animal, and a green stone which they plant in the soil in the centre of the circle. The mossy piece of wood could have been the ingredient to transform Bercilak into the wooden-like figure that he becomes in the film, while the tooth of the animal could have been an object that he had previously touched, thus giving the spell a source to latch onto. It also could have been representative of how he will be able to survive the killing blow as the tooth came from an already decapitated animal. Thus the ensuing death could have been directed to the skull instead of Bercilak. As for the green stone, it could be Bercilak's which

would enhance the spell, but it could also have been that of Gawain's which would then solely bind him to the beheading game. This demonstration of Morgan's magic in the film shows her using a mix of sympathetic and contagious magic in order to execute her spell. The use of sympathetic magic is done by taking something that resembles or is symbolically associated with the target of the spell. In the spell, the tooth of the decapitated animal could represent Bercilak as he is known to be a hunter and deal with the butchering of the animals he kills. Whereas contagious magic is where something that was once in the possession of the subject of the spell is used due to its former association. The stone could be the anchor of the spell to him as it might have been in his possession before it came to Morgan.

While this is happening, two of the attendants are carving what appear to be runes on tablets. Despite the fact that the contents of the tablets are not completely shown in the film, it can be deduced that they are akin to curse tablets that would be used in order to inflict pain and even death on others. These tablets might have been used in order to bind Gawain to the spell and ensure that he would be the only one to take up the axe; at the same time, these tablets might have been used to prevent other knights or attendants from interfering with the game. In essence, these tablets could have been used by Morgan to maintain control over the whole event as, "[f]rom the moment the Green Knight enters Arthur's hall until Gawain returns safely to the same hall the actions of the romance is severely conditioned by the influence of Morgan le Fay's magic" (Markman 580). With this kind of control over the events, Morgan's new role as a concerned and doting mother would make more sense for the character. This would also ensure that the spell and her son's quest would not go beyond her control.

It is interesting to note that, throughout the magic casting scene, Morgan is blindfolded while writing a letter which is later revealed to be the same letter which the Green Knight uses to communicate the rules of the game. This message could have had another spell attached to it, where it would only rouse Gawain into action while keeping the rest of the knights silent. This would show, as Angelique Gulmovich has noted, that "Morgan le Fay's words are more often used to trick or to stir up contention," and this would be particularly true if it were directed at certain people (Gulmovich 189). Morgan's message for the Green Knight/Bercilak also shows how intricately layered her magic can be. The way in which the Green Knight goes on to receive the message from Morgan, however, is closer in representation to that of a modern interpretation of a witch, as when she delivers it to the magic circle it spontaneously bursts into flames with its ashes spreading out over the circle.

Returning to the blindfold that she is seen wearing during the scene, it is important to note that it is also worn by the auncian in the film. Just like her poetic

counterpart, the film version of the auncian solely interacts with Bercilak's wife, and hardly ever speaks. There is one peculiar scene where she randomly meets Gawain outside his door, and this could be Morgan checking to see how her son is fairing. The covering of the auncian's eyes could not only serve as a way to focus more intently on the overall spell of the quest, but also be a way to guarantee that Gawain would not recognise his mother solely by her eyes. If he were to recognise her, then he would come to suspect that she had orchestrated the entire ruse just to push him towards a more noble life fit for a knight of Arthur's company. This would be linked to how "some critics have gone so far as to identify her as the puppet-master of the whole plot" (Warner 346). This viewpoint proves to be true in the film as Morgan is not only determined to see her son complete the quest but also how concerned she is for his well-being throughout the whole ordeal. This leads into the second and last example of Morgan's magic which is the girdle.

Although in the poem the girdle is a gift from Bercilak's wife to Gawain, in the film it is both Morgan and Bercilak's wife who give it to Gawain. At one point in the film, the girdle is stolen and Bercilak's wife appears to have either found it somewhere or has one very similar to the one Morgan made. Both the poem and the film maintain that the girdle, or "lovelace" as it is sometimes referred to, guarantees:

[f]or anyone who wears this length of green lace,
as long as he keeps it tied tightly round him,
there's no warrior on earth who is able to hurt him,
and he can't be killed by any means in the world.
(*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* ll. 1851–1854)

Despite the lack of magical evidence behind this claim in the poem, the reader is led to believe that the girdle holds some hidden power and really does protect whoever should wear it from harm. In the end, the Green Knight/Bercilak reveals to Gawain that he ordered his wife to give Gawain the girdle (which is actually, Bercilak's to begin with) to test the knight's nerves. So there really is no proof as to whether the girdle in the poem is actually magical or not as Gawain goes on to wear it as a symbol of his mistake in taking it in the first place, as well as a sort of souvenir of the quest. This is completely different in the film as the girdle is shown being made by the attendants and Morgan. Together, these women wove the green girdle while Morgan incorporates spells physically as well as verbally while she weaves. This protective, magically altered girdle is then used to protect her son as he journeys throughout the British countryside looking for the Green Chapel. Regardless of its origins, the girdle comes to be a literal and figurative safety belt for both the poem

and film version of Gawain as he battles the instinct to flee in the face of death. However, the two versions of the tale show different outcomes of Gawain wearing the girdle in the Green Chapel. The poetic Gawain returns with the girdle prominently displayed on his chest to show his moment of cowardice; in comparison, the film Gawain is subjected to a life-like illusion of him fleeing the chapel and living out his days as a paranoid king until he tears off the girdle, thus losing his head and returning to the present day where he again quickly discards the girdle in order to face the axe where the film ends. These different interpretations of the girdle show how magic – whether done by Morgan or not – is a big proponent to the overall tale of Gawain and his journey to find the Green Knight; it also shows the reader how one can come to rely on the magic in order to save their own life.

Overall, the figure of Morgan in the tale of Gawain and the Green Knight – whether hidden in the background and never interacting with the plot, or fully present and utterly consumed with the well-being of her child – is incredibly important to the plot and understanding how the whole beheading game came to be. Whether this was done in order to show the mighty power of Arthur and his knights (and/or kill his wife from shock) or to push her stagnant son on to his destiny, Morgan’s magic is a great example of her power and will in the court. This is especially true for Bercilak’s/the Green Knight’s role in the entire plot as he is not “the victim of magic, but the agent of magic, the marvellous man whose single purpose in the romance is to serve as the agent of Morgan le Fay’s will;” the same proves true to Gawain in both the sense that he is the enforcer of the spell and the one who is able to see it to the end (Markman 579). Even if Morgan’s part within Arthurian myth never settles on one particular role, the plots she devises with the help of her magic show that she is doing what she believes is best for Camelot and for her family.

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The Possibility of the Third Cinema in the First World: A Case for Haile Gerima

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In the opening scene of the 1975 film *Bush Mama* we see a police intervention on the streets of Los Angeles. Shot from a considerable distance, in gritty black and white, it seems not to *belong* to the rest of the film as the action proper starts a few moments later when the main character Dorothy is introduced. After all, what we see at the beginning of *Bush Mama* is no fiction, but documentary footage showing the director of the film, Haile Gerima, and a member of his crew, being harassed by the LAPD simply because two Black men in possession of expensive film equipment have been a view suspicious enough to the officers to stop them (Massood 110). This textbook case of guerrilla filmmaking shows us the perils a new generation of politically involved filmmakers had to face in the era of ongoing social struggle and systemic racism, still very visible at the time. Gerima, an Ethiopian immigrant to the US, today considered a key member of the L.A. Rebellion movement that flourished in the 1970s, has made film camera his weapon to fight the oppressive state and explore the issues of economic inequalities, political awareness, and urban violence. Influenced and empowered by the work of Ousmane Sembène and Med Hondo, the Ethiopian filmmaker has for decades embraced the ideas of the Third Cinema, a diverse worldwide movement that gave voice to filmmakers from newly liberated or politically awakening peoples of South America, Africa, and Asia. The Third Cinema is usually referred to as a “tricontinental call to arms against social injustice and post-imperial exploitation” (Guneratne 4), but the example of Gerima calls for an expansion of the definition. Aware of the fact that what the Third Cinema movement cared for most was not classification, but the revolutionary praxis, I am going to argue that the Ethiopian filmmaker was not only an important part of American independent cinema but also of a larger international movement of the Third Cinema. The affiliation with the latter becomes apparent through a careful analysis of different aspects of the director’s oeuvre; it enables one to acknowledge that American films can also belong to this seemingly West-excluding category. In his African inspirations, Third-Worldist ideas, social activity, and the empowering message of his films, Gerima proves to be an example of an essentially Third Cinema

filmmaker. He extends the movement's geographical scope to include the United States, creating uncompromising militant cinema in the very center of cinematic escapism that Los Angeles has been for about a century now.

The movement that we know as the Third Cinema owes its name to an influential manifesto "Towards a Third Cinema," written by the leftist Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. Therein, they introduced the concept of the cinema that could be a legitimate weapon against oppression of the peoples of not only Argentina but also every country that had to deal with problems related to colonialism in many of its forms (Solanas and Getino 1). In the text, three types of cinema were distinguished. "First cinema," satisfying "the commercial needs of production companies" was synonymous with Hollywood, whereas "second cinema" referred to mostly European auteur films. The latter, despite being considered a step forward, nonetheless failed at "achieving any profound change" and developed its own production culture (Chanan 375–376). Solanas and Getino saw an antidote to the two former types of cinema in the "Third Cinema," which set out to speak for the oppressed masses and call for political change, raising class and racial awareness. Equating the camera, "albeit somewhat rhetorically, to the gun," and thus restoring the original meaning of the term *avant-garde*, the Third Cinema filmmakers benefited greatly from the technological advancements in the field; from the 1960s onwards, due to "the introduction of lightweight hand-held cameras and tape-recorders, fast film stock that could be shot in available light," radical filmmakers around the world could speak for themselves for the first time (Chanan 374, 376).

However optimistic the aims of Solanas and Getino may now seem (since the movement they described was rarely able to influence the off-screen reality), the Third Cinema definitely captured the spirit of the turbulent yet hopeful times of the fall of colonialism (376, 388). The manifesto was first published in 1969 when revolutionary filmmaking was already spreading around the world, with filmmakers such as Jorge Sanjinés of Bolivia and Ousmane Sembène of Senegal already creating politically engaged, anti-colonial narratives for the big screen. Though varying greatly in terms of style, narration, and popularity, these filmmakers have long been considered a part of the loosely affiliated Third Cinema movement, whose importance peaked in the 1970s but continued to inspire the next generations of filmmakers all around the world (Gunaratne i).

Around the same time, an experimental course in filmmaking at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) enabled several Black, Latino, and Indigenous American students to train in the field and create their own low-budget films (Gerima qtd. in Thomas 101–102). Among the ones that studied there in the

1970s were such figures as Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Larry Clark, and Ethiopian-born Haile Gerima. The movement that emerged out of the experimental course became known as the L.A. Rebellion. Supported by the instructors and enjoying artistic freedom, these filmmakers have created some of the boldest and uncompromising films of the era, both in terms of their politics and form (Field et al. xiii).

Born and bred in rural Ethiopia, Gerima came to the U.S. in the mid-1960s. There he experienced not only anti-Black racism but also the African Americans' political awakening marked by the activity of the integrationist Civil Rights Movement and the militant Black Power Movement (Ukadike 253–254; Jackson 27). Gerima's unique perspective as both a Black person and an outsider to the African American community gave him a particular insight into its socio-political reality, as well as the psychological state of its members. From the very first films he made, the director told stories of Black individuals trapped in a reality that subjects them to unjust laws, exposes them to direct acts of racism, and offers no prospects. Bleak as their reality may be, Gerima's characters are, nevertheless, going through the process of gaining political awareness, which reflects the experience of the director himself (Field et al. 24-26). In his first short film *Hour Glass*, a Black college basketball player undergoes political awakening through the reading of revolutionary texts. "That is a constant and very insistent theme in my work: transformation, change, realization," claims Gerima (qtd. in Howard 29). An even more radical transformation is experienced by Dorothy, captivatingly portrayed in *Bush Mama* by the director's frequent collaborator Barbara O. Jones. An underprivileged woman with her partner imprisoned and daughter sexually assaulted by a policeman, she explodes and, both literally and metaphorically, gets rid of her straight hair wig – "a symbol of assimilation" (Field et al. 24; Field 106). Throughout the film, the protagonist "comes to an awakened political consciousness, understanding her situation in relation to broader global, systemic oppressive mechanisms. Gerima directly aligns Dorothy's plight with anti-imperialist struggles in places like Angola." (Field et al. 24)

Gerima's mission to "decolonize" the mind of his characters and audiences alike, is in accordance with the practice of other radical filmmakers of the time (Field et al. 27). In an interview conducted by Ukadike for his book *Questioning African Cinema*, Gerima talks about his being greatly influenced by the pioneering African filmmakers, such as Med Hondo and Ousmane Sembène, both of whom are considered prominent representatives of the Third Cinema (258). Though equally militant as his mentors, Gerima and his films are rarely mentioned in film criticism connected to the movement, which I believe is a great oversight. One can, of course,

express a doubt if a filmmaker professionally active in the U.S., rather than formerly colonized countries, can be legitimately classified as a member of the so-called Third Cinema. Although most of the films associated with the movement were indeed produced in what we know as the Third World, there were some exceptions (Chanan 374). First of all, the very definition of the Third World is problematic; originally the term was used in reference to countries supporting neither the U.S. (First World) nor the USSR (Second World), and apart from most of the African and South American countries, this category incorporated states as varied as Mexico, India, or Sweden. More accurately describing the realm of the Third Cinema is the term Global South, which I am going to use instead from now on.

Gerima's filmmaking activity in the U.S. should not be an obstacle to consider him a Third Cinema director. In fact, *Harvest: 3000 Years*, the second full-length work of his, but the first one to be released, was shot entirely in rural Ethiopia with dialogues in Amharic. As a key Third Cinema critic Teshome Gabriel put it in his seminal book *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*, *Harvest: 3000 Years*, a film so "long and repetitive" that it resembles an oral epos, bears a deeply "Fanonian influence in [its] depiction of the Third World peasant class as the principal revolutionary force to reckon with" (40, 90). It is worth noting that the works of Frantz Fanon, alongside that of Amílcar Cabral, influenced the Third Cinema movement in the most profound of ways, providing a critical point of reference for filmmakers across the African continent (14, 39). In the film career that had spanned four decades, Gerima came back to his homeland to shoot also two documentaries, *Imperfect Journey* and *Adwa – An African Victory*, and the critically acclaimed *Teza* that dealt with the tragic outcomes of the Derg regime in the 1970s and 1980s. Interestingly, Gabriel recognizes *Harvest: 3000 Years* only as an important Third Cinema work. Despite such a selective treatment of Gerima's rich and diverse oeuvre, it could still be argued that his affiliation with the Third Cinema is evident even if Gerima had not made a single film outside of the United States. As the film historian Michael Chanan notes, "even in the original conception of the idea," the films coming from the "First World" cannot be dismissed as not belonging to the Third Cinema films solely on the basis of their place of origin (374). For example, many scholars include in the canon of the Third Cinema a 1966 film called *Battle of Algiers*, a faithful cinematic reconstruction of the events of the Algerian fight for independence, directed by the Italian Gillo Pontecorvo. The film, despite being a work of a European director and co-produced by Europeans, provides a fierce anti-colonial message and bursts in revolutionary energy and can easily function as a companion piece to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Taylor 145).

It is impossible to overlook the weight of the political engagement that the films of Gerima contain; and, what is more, this engagement is very much in the vein of the Pan-African and anti-imperialist works of the director's African colleagues. From the very first short films, through the celebrated *Bush Mama* and *Harvest: 3000 Years*, to the slavery story *Sankofa* and the most recent *Teza*, Gerima's cinema has not lost any of its fierce criticism of man-made suffering and the unjust systems that legitimize it. Similarly to other Third Cinema directors, the Ethiopian demonstrates the insufferable existence of non-White individuals in places governed by the essentially imperialist and racist regimes. The United States is still, and certainly was in the 1970s, an arena of social struggle in many ways similar to that of Africans in Africa or Indigenous populations in South America. We see the use of powerful images already in the filmmaker's juvenilia, such as *Hour Glass*, which uses dream-like sequences to envision the change that the young basketball player undergoes. The short film opens with the protagonist being portrayed as a to-be hangman (a reference to the practice of lynching) with the next shot surprisingly associating the loop around his neck with a basket during a basketball game. The athlete soon gives up on entertaining the White audience like a gladiator in an ancient Roman arena and embarks on his road to "decolonize his mind" through ardent self-education. According to Field, the film echoes the case of "players such as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar ... who boycotted the 1968 Olympics in protest against America's treatment of its Black citizens" (96). Gerima continued to expand on the issues troubling the Black communities in his subsequent films such as an Angela Davis-inspired story *Child of Resistance* and the UCLA thesis feature film *Bush Mama*. In the latter, "he evokes the U.S. war and occupation of Vietnam and the Angolan peoples' war of independence against Portuguese rule; he also references the Cuban revolution, which for many in the L.A. Collective was a source of inspiration, example, and solidarity" (Martin 214).

Low level of social mobility, petty crime, everyday humiliation, and the oppression of women were the experiences not only of colonized or freshly independent African nations plagued with neocolonial exploitation but also de facto oligarchic and United States-dependent Latin American states. Similar problems continue to affect the lives of racial minorities in the U.S. which, despite hailing itself the Land of Opportunity, has victimized its people, not unlike white imperialism did in the Global South. The 1970s was the time when Black directors could finally make films, both in Africa and in the United States. Though successful productions of the time, such as Gordon Parks's *Shaft* or films by Melvin Van Peebles, tackled the issues of racism and the underprivileged, no director went as far in social critique and rebelliousness as Gerima and his fellow UCLA colleagues soon did, gaining the

well-earned name for the group. The uniqueness of the L.A. Rebellion films lies in the combination of the two aspects: the challenging formal side, and the personal experience of the filmmakers and their communities that the films show and problematize. Gerima's work, though rooted in anger and determination for change, was always much subtler and artistically ambitious than that of many Third Cinema filmmakers, but certainly on a par with the most celebrated ones. Like Djibril Diop Mambety or Glauber Rocha, Gerima often avoided straightforwardness or easy answers and used avant-garde techniques in storytelling and editing. *Bush Mama* is an example of unorthodox filmmaking which eschewed the conventional solutions in favor of "elliptical montages, mixing documentary and fiction as well as multiple levels of audio with extremely fragmented editing" (Horak 124). This "cacophony of sounds and images," containing "flashbacks, flash-forwards, dream sequences, and newsreel montages, as well as nonsynchronous loops of dialogue from the welfare office, police sirens, radio sermons, and political speeches," helped to create a convincing "soundscape of oppression" that the main character experiences (138).

The important aspect of the Third Cinema had always been its attempt to influence reality directly through the medium of film. Though rarely generating a measurable social change, some of the films connected to the movement indeed achieved the assumed effect. One of the more spectacular of such instances are the screenings of the 1969 film *The Blood of the Condor*, in which the Bolivian director Jorge Sanjinés exposed a shameful procedure of the sterilization of Indigenous women by the American Peace Corps organization, all under the guise of medical treatment. The film was shown not only in cinemas but also in rural communities, generating a nationwide uproar resulting in the eventual banishment of the organization from Bolivia (Burton 40). Despite none of the L.A. Rebellion films having had such a direct political impact as *The Blood of the Condor*, Gerima and other directors associated with the movement have greatly contributed to America's Black culture. Independent African American cinema "must be umbilically linked to the community from which it comes," wrote Gerima in one of his most important essays called "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinkesh vs Lucy" (86). Though never considering himself an African American filmmaker, he grew profound ties to the Washington community he has lived in since (Gerima qtd. in Ukadike 256). Not limiting himself to the practice of a filmmaker, Gerima has worked as an instructor at Howard University and contributed to the transnational discussion on the state and prospects of Black cinema around the world (Field et al. 48). On numerous occasions, the director openly admitted to his appreciation of the Third Cinema as an artistic and social project (Ukadike 269–270). An activist in his own right, Gerima founded and has since managed the Sankofa bookstore in

Washington D.C. The venue, apart from offering Black history books, is also a café and a film center and hosts many of the local Black community's cultural events.

Easily considered a key representative of the L.A. Rebellion movement, Haile Gerima clearly belongs also to the wider group of filmmakers associated with what film historians refer to as the Third Cinema. The militant cinema, whose ambition is to raise ethnic and class awareness and inspire to unite and act, does not have to be strictly a phenomenon of the post-colonial Global South. Thanks to the work of Gerima, a connection between the decolonization movements and the experience of American Blacks fighting their way towards self-governance and equal treatment has been formed.

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The Uncanny and Abjection in *Candyman*: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Bernard Rose's Horror Film

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Since its premiere in 1992, the horror film *Candyman* has been analyzed extensively from race and gender studies perspectives. The film tells the story of Helen Lyle, a graduate student who investigates the urban legend of Candyman, a boogeyman with a hook for a hand who appears when his name is called five times in front of a mirror. Eventually, she becomes both his victim and an unwilling accomplice. In this essay, I aim to inspect Helen's role as the victim and the perpetrator of Candyman's murders through a psychoanalytical reading of the film utilizing the Freudian and Lacanian concepts of the uncanny. In "The Uncanny," Freud suggests that this concept applies to what is terrifying despite, or perhaps because of, its familiarity (2). Therefore, according to Freud, the terror caused by the uncanny is, in fact, the outcome of thoughts and emotions repressed in our unconscious. In "Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan," Jacques Lacan expounds on the concept of the uncanny, comparing it to an imaginary castration and associating it with a sense of void and lack (42). Additionally, I shall analyze *Candyman* through another psychoanalytical term: the concept of abjection. Julia Kristeva defines the concept of the abject as the elements that were once categorized as a feature of one's identity and have since been rejected and now represent taboo parts of the self (2). This article will utilize the concepts of the uncanny and the abject to analyze the character of Helen Lyle and her relationship with Candyman in order to indicate that the titular Candyman represents her unconscious.

Freud argues that repression causes the feeling of the uncanny and is triggered by the resurgence of the repressed (13). Furthermore, it is strongly connected to the concept of doubling which occurs when children create projections of themselves (9); encountering such repressed projections of the double later in life is associated with the feeling of the uncanny. In *Candyman*, it is the titular Candyman who is Helen Lyle's double. Helen and Candyman are both intellectuals who lose their status and are rejected by their respective communities as they become victims of systematic oppression. For Candyman, known at the time as Daniel Robitaille, it is the fact that he engaged in an interracial affair with a white woman while it was

still socially unacceptable in the 19th century. For Helen, it is her status as a woman in the male-dominated world of academia and the seemingly unfair accusations painting her as a mentally unstable murderer. Throughout the movie, mirrors are frequently utilized to establish Candyman as Helen's double. Firstly, Candyman can only access her world through mirrors; Helen must look into her reflection to evoke him. This can be linked to Wayne's interpretation of mirrors as a portal through which "repressed injustice" can enter (208). Furthermore, the movie constantly blurs the line between the real and the imaginary. This evokes Freud's claim that the feeling of the uncanny occurs when the distinction between imagination and reality blurs (14). The unreliability of Helen's visions is conveyed through romantic string music, extreme close-ups, and a lack of linear narrative movement. This contributes to an uncanny, oneiric atmosphere, suggesting that, within the movie, Candyman may be a product of Helen's imagination rather than a real supernatural being.

Moreover, Candyman's appearance plays a key role in the problem of abjection. After being attacked and lynched by a mob for his relationship with a white woman, his hand was cut off; as a result, in the present-day Candyman is portrayed with a hook for a hand. A hand cut off at the wrist is one of the examples named by Freud when discussing the uncanny as being connected to the human ambivalence towards the dead (13). He believes that seeing the lack of a body part, such as the hand or the head, triggers the feeling of uncanniness through its connection to the castration complex. This is supported by Kee, according to whom the hook in *Candyman* also represents a metonymic castration (52). Candyman's hook is therefore one of the most important symbols of his identity. Donaldson argues that it is a reminder of the violence and exploitation of his body and the tragic ending to Candyman's human life (39); at the same time, it is also the tool he uses when killing. Thus, the hook places Candyman as both the victim and the villain, much like Helen herself, suggesting another instance of doubling in *Candyman*.

Whilst discussing Candyman's appearance, it is important to analyze the concept of the abject. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject refers to a part of the self, while the object refers to that which exists independently of the self ("The Mirror Stage" 344). Kristeva states that the abject exists between these two concepts and represents taboo elements of the self: what one rejects with the help of the superego, representative of civilization and culture (10). Candyman, the son of a slave, lynched and killed for engaging in a romantic relationship with a white woman, seems to represent the taboos of slavery, racism, classism, and oppression. Despite being a part of American history, they are now repressed by society, much like Candyman himself. Candyman's racial identity is crucial to the concept of the abject. Wood argues that we group "racial others" into the category of the uncanny

(168). This is further supported by Elizabeth Young's claim that Black men are frequently depicted as "subhuman and feral" (310), rejected by society and yet familiar, just like the abject repressed by the superego, but never ultimately erased. As the film progresses, Helen becomes the subject of oppression herself, and her privilege shrinks. Her work is undermined by her husband and other male professors, she is physically assaulted and finally rejected by her community when Candyman's attacks are attributed to her. As a supposedly mad woman and a murderer, rejected and thus repressed by her friends and her spouse, she becomes the taboo and the abject, much like the traitors, liars, and shameless killers mentioned by Kristeva. She further compares the abject to the process of vomiting through which the filth and waste, which was once a part of the body, can be excreted in order to protect the human body (2-4). Similarly, Candyman and subsequently Helen are cast out from society through the ugly process of "shattering violence". Through their deaths, Candyman and Helen become literal corpses; it is important to note that Kristeva referred to dead bodies as one of the most prominent sources of the abject (3). Paradoxically, Candyman and Helen's deaths bring them to the border of life and death; they never cease to exist, living the rest of their lives as urban legends and scary stories to tell in the dark. After their exile from society, they still linger, alive in the fading, repressed memories of those they harmed. As Kristeva claims, the abject both repulses and entreats (5); Trevor, Helen's husband, clearly attempts to repulse her from his conscience due to him feeling ashamed for betraying her, but ultimately succumbs to it, finding his end in the memory of Helen.

Finally, the theme of death plays an important role throughout the movie. Kristeva refers to the time when the abject is rejected as a "primal repression" (10): the point before the establishment of the opposition between consciousness and the unconscious. Kristeva associates this with the eruption of the Real into our lives and a denial of the reality of death. The theme of death and the duality of death and pleasure is prevalent in *Candyman* through rich symbolism. For instance, the bees associated with Candyman can both produce sweet honey and sting painfully. The same combination of sweetness and pain or danger is true for the razors wrapped inside the candy found by Helen. This intertwining of pleasure and death linked to Candyman can be traced back to the concept of the abject, which represents the blurring of the lines between the consciousness and the unconscious. Kristeva refers to the aspect of the abject called *jouissance*: a type of joyousness so pleasant that victims of the abject often return for more (9). This applies to Helen's relationship with Candyman; despite physical evidence suggesting that he is dangerous, Helen submits to the ordeal of the abject through her relationship with him, finding both

immense pleasure and horror in these experiences. She becomes the “fascinated victim of the abject” (Kristeva 9), welcoming it into her life and embodying it.

By analyzing *Candyman* utilizing the concept of the uncanny and the abject, I have attempted to prove that the titular Candyman is a representation of the female protagonist’s repressed unconscious. His position as an oppressed, disfigured Black man is a manifestation of the repressed taboo connected to both the uncanny and the abject, visible through the imagery of the bees, the candy, and the hook. Finally, the doubling of Helen and Candyman through the symbolism of mirrors and parallels between their storylines suggests that he is a product of Helen’s imagination connected to her repressed unconscious.

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The Portrayal of Mental Health Issues in CW's *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*

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When we look at the past few years, the culture surrounding visual media has been developing at an incredibly rapid pace. With this constant change, supported by the rise of streaming platforms, we could ask a seemingly trivial question – what are we still looking for in television? A few years ago, an obvious answer would be escapism. TV shows provide us with the possibility to take a break from the boredom and exhaustion of everyday life. Using made-up problems of made-up people as a means of distraction from our very real, very not made-up lives is a familiar concept, and most people draw great pleasure from this experience. However, different criteria of value should be taken into consideration as well, and the criteria in question would be called relatability – the quality of a given work that somehow makes personality traits and struggles of fictional characters seem familiar to us. This makes the process of reading or watching something much more demanding, since the viewer, subconsciously or not, relates their own experiences to those of a given character in a TV show. Such an approach is actually not something recent – as a matter of fact, we can trace it way back to the nineteenth century and Romantic literature. During the Romantic movement, a new kind of relationship between the artist and the audience was formed. For instance, in the case of literature, the writers expected a potential reader to actively engage with their work (Szturc 26). They wanted to rouse the sheer excitement and wonder which come with the impression that our thoughts and feelings are being reflected in a work of an artist. Appealing to people's imagination was meant to promote a new way of consuming literature – one based on a chaotic network of associations perceived as proof of the everlasting poetic spirit of both the writer and the reader (Szturc 27).

What does the Romantic way of reading literature has in common with contemporary television? Seemingly, not much. First of all, we are talking about two different mediums. Secondly, there is a two hundred year gap between them. However, the discourse between the creator and the consumer in popular culture is something that we can easily observe to this day. Partially, it all comes back to the previously mentioned criteria of relatability. In order to think of something as

relatable, the viewer needs to feel a strong connection to the piece of media. Such an effect is achieved by the creator constructing a dialogue between their work and the audience, one which demands an active engagement on the side of the latter (Rixon 1). Such a dialogue is often expressed by a character addressing the viewer directly through, for instance, a prompt look into a camera (*Fleabag*, *Euphoria*). The other possibility is much less direct and can be found in the actual lines spoken by the characters of a show.

Nevertheless, we need to remember that relatability is only an asset when the problems portrayed in a TV show are presented in a sensitive and accurate way. Otherwise, it can do much more harm than good. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the way in which CW's *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* creates a bond with the viewer through its portrayal of mental health issues. Three songs from the show will be analyzed in order to show how each one of them represents a certain stage in the internal development of Rebecca Bunch, the show's protagonist. The primary aim of this analysis is to investigate how the show uses the conventions of musical theater to portray Rebecca's struggles with mental health. Additionally, it is important to specify what is actually meant by the phrase "mental health issues" included in the title. In the show, Rebecca is diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The paper will not be focusing on the specifics of this particular condition, but rather on the show's general approach towards the topic of mental health.

This is the subject that has been appearing more and more often in visual media compared to previous years. The frequency, however, would not influence any significant changes, if it was not followed by sensitivity. Just as recently as only a few years ago, contemporary TV shows would often assign mental illness only to criminals. A study cited by Diana Castillo in her paper "Mental illness in visual media" reveals that: "A mentally ill character in a prime time American TV show commits violent crime at ten to twenty percent rate higher than those who have mental illness in reality" (Fawcett qtd. in Castillo 1). Other ways in which TV often misrepresents mental illness would be romanticizing it, oversimplifying the road to recovery, not giving the character a clear diagnosis, or perpetuating stereotypes about medications. It seems that some genres are better at conveying those issues than others, and perhaps surprisingly, contemporary musicals turned out to be a very adequate medium for this. As Rachel Bloom, the co-creator of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* said in one of the interviews: "Musical theater comes from the idea that when the emotion is too strong to speak, you sing. The melodies feel great, and they make you feel a certain way, and the beats make you feel a certain way, but they don't really go with what life is actually like. So it's the gap that I'm fascinated with: here's what the song says I should feel. Here's how I actually feel" (Quartz 00:02:42-00:03:01).

The contrast between the world constructed in one's own mind and the reality – outside vs inside – is what lies at the core of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*. However, before focusing solely on the show, it would be beneficial to look at the broader historical context of portraying mental illness in musical theater. In 1886, a musical version of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was produced and staged at the Prince of Wales Theater in the West End. Even though the reviews seemed to generally be in favour of the production, there was also some criticism. As Sean Gibson points out in his paper "How is mental illness represented in Musical Theater", the omission of the subjects such as mental health problems and drug use was considered controversial by some of the reviewers. Now, we could wonder whether it was actually an "omission" since those aspects of the book are not explicitly described in the text therefore it is more the problem of interpretation. In this case, perhaps we shall look at it simply as an artistic choice. The other suggestion, proposed by Gibson, is that the nineteenth-century theater audience was not able to fully understand the complexity of human mental conditions and as an obvious result, the creators did not care about the accurate representation of it on stage. What is more, it is likely that the audience was more interested in the spectacle's fantastical, supernatural aspects than in the accurate representation of the character's internal struggles (Gibson 4). Another production, *Lady in the Dark* (1941), could be considered one of the actual earliest examples of a musical where the subject of mental health is discussed directly. Gibson puts the production in the historical context: in 1959 the "Mental Health Act" replaced "Lunacy and Mental Treatment Acts" and the "Mental Deficiency Act." Since media such as theater, cinema, literature very often reflect the views of the contemporary audience, it could be assumed that *Lady in the Dark* reflected their changing perception of people who struggle with mental health. The protagonist of the musical, Liza, is haunted by a dream that puts her in such a state of distress that she decides to seek professional help (Gibson 5).

A more recent example would be *Next to Normal*, a rock musical from 2008. This one seems to have the most in common with *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* not only since the subject of mental health is the central plot of the musical, but also because the protagonist, Diana Goodman, was diagnosed with bipolar personality disorder. The musical discusses subjects such as suicide, drug abuse, but also the effects worsening mental health has on the whole family (Gibson 8).

These are just a few examples of musicals which concern themselves with mental health issues. When it comes to TV, *Glee* (2009) hinted at the topic from time to time, but mental disorders never really became central to the plot of any of the episodes, since the premise of the show was something completely different. This is one of the reasons *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, a TV show written by Rachel Bloom and

Aline Brosh McKenna, can be considered special. It filled a void that no one even knew was there – a romantic (to a certain point) musical comedy-drama that made mental illness its most important theme. The show never had incredibly high ratings. However, it gained the critics’ approval, with the second season scoring 100% on Rotten Tomatoes and winning multiple awards such as Primetime Emmy Awards, a Golden Globe, and a Critics Choice Award (“Crazy Ex-Girlfriend”).

The premise of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* seems to follow the path of many romantic comedies: Rebecca Bunch is a successful but also miserable New York City lawyer. She is very good at her job but does not feel particularly passionate about it. One day, she stumbles upon her ex-boyfriend, Josh Chan, whom she has not seen since they were both sixteen. Having realized she is still in love with him (at least, that’s what she thinks at the time), Rebecca makes an impulsive decision to leave New York and move to West Covina in California. The woman will at first deny going there because of Josh – in the first song performed on the show, she will sing: “I didn’t move here for Josh/ I just needed a change/”Cause to move here for Josh/ Now that’d be strange” (“West Covina”). This is the moment which actually proves to the audience that the show defies the conventions of a romantic comedy. In a 2018 interview, Rachel Bloom describes the process of coming up with the idea for Rebecca’s story: “I think people in romantic comedies are generally psychotic. Okay, a woman moving across a country to be with a guy, a woman bursting into a song and then we said, okay, if this took place in reality, what would this person be like? And the first answer was, she would be dreadfully unhappy” (Quartz 0:00:27–00:00:40).

Rebecca is, in fact, dreadfully unhappy, and in Josh, she sees her chance for a happy life. As it will turn out, she could not be more wrong, not only about that particular man but also about treating a romantic partner as a key to happiness. As the show progresses, we find out that it was always about the main character realizing who she really is and what she wants from life. It is very often highlighted in the show that Rebecca has no idea who she is supposed to be without taking directions from other people. She goes from being a lawyer in New York (fulfilling her mother’s dream) to being a lawyer in West Covina, to owning a pretzel stand to finally embracing the fact that all she ever wanted to do was to write music. Her ending the show with the words “This is the song that I wrote” sums up her personal journey. It also shows the audience that Rebecca is now ready to tell her own story. When it comes to the songs themselves, the range of references is very wide. In the show, we can find *Oklahoma!* inspired dream ballet (“The Group Mind Has Decided You’re In Love”), a parody of *Hairspray*’s “Without Love” (“Without Love You Can Save the World”) or Rebecca’s own version of “Cell Block Tango” from *Chicago*

(“What’s Your Story?”). The songs in the show are very funny and witty, but it is not because Rebecca intentionally sings them in this way. Very often she just gets lost in her own thoughts while singing, or she is presenting her own interpretation of the given genre. It does not mean that someone with very superficial knowledge about musical theater will feel lost while watching the show. Most of the time, the writers make sure that the audience feels included in the joke, for example by making Rebecca provide social commentary in the songs. References are also not always strictly musical theater-related – we can also find numbers inspired by Beyonce, Katy Perry, and Spice Girls. Even though the show started out as a comedy with a funny, intelligent (albeit slightly obsessive and delusional) protagonist, there was always a sense of something much darker going on underneath the bubbly facade. As the show progresses, the viewers start to realize what is happening to Rebecca and become a part of her journey. Her struggles with mental health are something that people can relate to. Youtube comments under the clips from the show are full of people saying how much *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* helped them realize the importance of therapy and proper treatment. Particularly one song played a very big role in destigmatizing mental illness – “Anti-depressants Are So Not A Big Deal”, a *La La Land* inspired musical number from season 4, which brought the show an Emmy award in 2019 (Dorwart; Tolsky). This song is very important for a number of reasons, the first of them being that it makes us feel like the show came full circle. The first episode of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* showed Rebecca throwing away all of her pills and choosing to self-medicate with the prospect of “true love” (“Josh Just Happens to Live Here!”). Four seasons later, she once again wants to give up on the medication because of the stigma surrounding it. It is also important that we bear in mind that, so far, whenever any kind of pills appeared in the show, it was usually the sign of something bad happening to Rebecca. One of such examples would be an episode from season 3, where after being forcefully medicated by her mother, she uses the same pills to try to commit suicide (“Josh is Irrelevant.”).

The episode “I Have to Get Out” starts with Rebecca talking to her therapist, Dr. Akopian, with whom she shares her doubts. She is very surprised when the psychiatrist reassures her that nowadays, “everybody” is on antidepressants. Then, we hear the piano and other patients singing the names of various (made-up) medications. They go out onto the street, where a lot of people from their community join the musical number: “the butcher, the baker, the grocery clerk, they’re all on 20 milligrams or so” (00:04:07-00:04:12). A list of reasons why they chose to be medicated appears – the death of a husband, losing a job – and the possible side-effects with advice on how to deal with them. The song ends with Rebecca realizing that there is nothing wrong with her taking antidepressants, and she symbolically

embraces the idea by accepting a big pill-box and taking tapping shoes out of them, so she can join the dance routine. Rachel Bloom revealed the intention behind the song on Twitter, writing that: “Before I went on antidepressants, I too bought into the idea of being shameful or a cop out. I was wrong. So this song is about destigmatizing this particular pursuit of happiness” (qtd. in Dorwart). As colorful and joyful as the number is, it managed to convey a very important message. If we look how this song relates to other numbers from the show, we could assume that it is the reverse version of “No One Else is Singing My Song” from the first episode of season four, where Rebecca and other characters feel they are completely alone with their struggles because every single one of them is unique. Both songs teach a hard but valuable lesson, namely that sometimes it is okay to be just like everyone else – the sense of belonging helps us normalize things like taking antidepressants or seeing a therapist. Marissa Martinelli, the author of the article “You’ve Never Heard the Music of *La La Land* Quite Like This Before” makes an interesting point, showing how choosing this specific film makes sense in the context of the whole show. Even though visually the number resembles more *La La Land’s* “Someone in The Crowd”, Martinelli makes the connection between “Anti-depressants Are So Not A Big Deal” and “Another Day of Sun”, with the latter being about how every person in Los Angeles dreams about becoming a famous artist. The author suggests that the show decided to twist this message by changing aspiring actors and singers into the residents of West Covina and replacing dreams of stardom with taking antidepressants: “From the moment that we learn to walk and speak / Our parents tell us “Everyone’s unique”/ Now, I’m not saying that advice is bad / But honey, you’re not special cause you’re sad” (00:03:34–00:04:11).

However, Rebecca has gone a long way to end up in the position where she actively tries to take care of her mental health. Going back to the episode “Josh is Going to Hawaii!” from season one and the song “I’m The Villain in My Own Story” (00:32:05–00:34:57), we can pinpoint the moment where she starts to realize that her actions make her look more like a villain than a hero. Rebecca perceives herself as the main character, so naturally, it is obvious to her that she is a good person: “I try to be good to others/ treat my fellow men like brothers and sisters/ That’s the story I’m the hero in/ so how come I can’t zero in/ why does this song sound so sinister?” (00:32:05–00:32:26). Both the musical and visual aspects are inspired by Disney films – the song by “Poor Unfortunate Souls” performed by Ursula from *Little Mermaid*, and Rebecca’s witchy persona by the evil stepmother from *Snow White*. Apart from those, there are other Disney references – “I told myself that I’m Jasmine, but now I realize I’m Jaffar” (*Alladin*) and “Zero to hero” (*Hercules*). This is a very interesting spin on how Disney villains would sound if they were as self-aware as

Rebecca is in her song. The whole song consists of the woman trying to convince herself that she cannot be a bad person since she is doing things that are commonly associated with “goodness” (giving annually to UNICEF, helping a lady cross the street “who was super old and deaf”). Perhaps we could go as far as claiming this song as one of the most important in the whole series when it comes to Rebecca’s character development. It reveals one of her biggest problems, which is seeing her life as a romantic comedy – if you are a hero of the story, everything will always go your way and you will eventually gain the love of your love interest. This conviction leads to Rebecca believing that love is the ultimate “prize” and without it, she will never be happy – “We say that love conquers / all but it only applies to the hero/Is the enemy what I’m meant to be?” (00:34:15–00:34:32). We also realize that Rebecca’s judgment of what makes someone a “good” person is very simplified.

The third song, titled “After Everything You Made Me Do (That You Didn’t Ask for)” is a number performed in the episode of season three called “To Josh, with Love” (00:37:10–00:40:50). It is a reprise of “After Everything I’ve Done for You (That You Didn’t Ask for)” from season one. The performance could be considered a detailed list of all the things that Rebecca did for Josh, one being more terrifying than the other. After he broke Rebecca’s heart, leaving her at the altar to become a priest in the season two finale, the woman decided to seek revenge by showing up at the seminary’s church service he attended. She was wearing her wedding dress and before the song starts, her appearance is signaled by the roll of thunder. Both the visual and musical aspects of the performance make it look like a scene from either a horror movie or a psychological thriller. The number resembles songs such as “Rose’s Turn” from *Gypsy* with Rebecca feeling taken for granted and used by Josh. As the song progresses, she pushes him slowly closer and closer towards the altar, mimicking the direction in which both of them would move if they actually went through with the wedding. It seems like a continuation of “I’m The Villain in My Own Story”, with Rebecca fully confessing to everything. The difference is, the previous song was much more genuine and self-aware. “After Everything You Made Me Do...” makes it look like finally embracing everything she ever did actually made Rebecca think that all of her actions were justified and there was nothing condemnable about them.

This is a song that awakens a lot of conflicted feelings in a viewer. On one hand, Rebecca has done a lot of terrible things to Josh, lying, stalking, and manipulating him from the beginning of the show. However, her character, even with all the flaws, is still incredibly likeable, and the audience feels more connected to Rebecca than to Josh. When she confesses and makes her feelings clear in the song, we find ourselves rooting for her till the number ends, and the weight of everything she has

said just dawns upon us. It does not help that the song ends with Rebecca shouting “I held you up, despite the fact, you lack brain and ability” – the sentiment regarding Josh shared by a significant number of fans if Youtube comments are to be believed. Despite all of that, even though our sympathies lie with her, we cannot pretend anymore that what Rebecca was doing was not morally questionable, to say the least. There is something very striking about hearing all her wrongs presented in such a simple and matter-of-fact way, stripped of their comedic context. The viewers realize that Rebecca’s actions have gone way too far.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend handles the subject of mental illness with great respect and empathy but also makes it abundantly clear that it cannot always be used as an excuse for one’s actions. The songs do not soften the blow, but only emphasize both comedic and tragic aspects of Rebecca’s troubles. A musical TV show was a perfect medium to convey this particular story, simply because of the intensity of the protagonist’s feelings and her unique perception of the world. The audience feels connected to the heroine, because her feelings are often the same as their own, even if they are much more extreme. Sometimes it may seem like the songs do not show a logical progression of Rebecca’s character development, but this only makes the show even more realistic. In one of the songs performed on the show, we hear that “life doesn’t make narrative sense”, and the series reflects that perfectly.

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Memory Narratives: Remembering and Retelling Or Reimagining and Revising? The Cases of *One! Hundred! Demons!* and *Fun Home*

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What is the tongue-
between trauma &
Incident &

span
terror?
accident?

Think *on these things.*

—Yona Harvey

The medium of comics has been known to tell stories with very different subject matter and aesthetics in compelling ways. Even though initially one might have expected mostly purely fictional characters for entertainment purposes, currently we have evidence of the rich tradition of all kinds of storytelling. According to Charles Hatfield, “unlike [prose] first-person narration, which works from the inside out, ... cartooning ostensibly works *from the outside in*” (115; emphasis in original), which is why the way autobiographical graphic narratives portray remembering can be of particular interest. To elaborate, the formal features of comics can be said to “replicate the structure of traumatic memory” (Chute, *Graphic Women* 114) due to condensation and fragmentation. For instance, Alice Bechdel’s *Fun Home* and Lynda Barry’s *One! Hundred! Demons!* both deal with reminiscing about childhood experiences, their family relations, and the way they have the power to shape who we become. Focusing on the abovementioned works, this essay will attempt to explore how narrating memories goes around recollecting events in a chronological sequence and, instead, involves active revision and reimagining, which in turn disrupts temporalities and creates emergent meanings.

In her autofiction biography, Barry tackles her “demons” one by one and approaches them in a humorous manner. Each chapter gives the reader a glimpse into one troublesome “demonic” aspect of her past (and also, her present); but the central trauma never resurfaces on the page. What the reader gets is piecing together the

assemblage of memories and their imminent returns, which feeds into Lynda Barry's own thinking process about remembering: the paradox of forgetting trauma but not *fully*. In contrast, Bechdel's family tragicomic is structured around one central event: her father's alleged suicide. By recollecting various events of her childhood, she creates a complex, multi-layered narrative that works as an attempt to make sense of her father's death (and his life). Both works do not refer to memories, especially traumatic ones, as unmediated truth but rather as an interpretative process that is emergent from the perspective of a grown-up self.

If recollecting memories is not just retelling the sequence of events in question, it might be putting the events and their experience into the current body and mind. If the past events, thoughts, and feelings morph under the pressure of the newly-found clarity (or its absence), then it might allow to (re)configure, (re)align, and (re)assign cause-and-effect relations, see what had not been seen before. For the following discussion, the work of Annette Kuhn may be of particular relevance. In *Journey Through Memory*, she writes about memory work, which she defines as:

an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory. Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as 'truth' but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory. (Kuhn 186)

Such "conscious and purposeful staging of memory" can be used, for example, to reflect on one's gender and sexuality. Looking back on one's childhood may make one ponder the reasons for becoming "who I am" and consider all the accompanying what-ifs. Let us then consider Lynda Barry's reflections on femininity in "Girlness" and Alison Bechdel's thoughts on gender and sexuality in connection (or even juxtaposition) with her father.

"Would she have been a more momish mom if the war had never happened? Would I have been a more girlish girl?" (Barry 192) reads the caption above the image of a young Lynda staring at her own reflection in the mirror. This chapter takes the reader through the memories of Barry's girlhood and is structured mostly on oppositions: *us* tomboys and *them* girlish girls, a Japanese mom and a Philippine mom, the young Lynda barred from a girlish style by her mom and her adult self embracing both the girlish and the "childish". Memory work in "Girlness" disrupts

temporalities and is very interrogative in a Barryesque way: we get to witness key “demonic” situations that informed her gender presentations, but the chapter ends up being not only her story. That is to say that she ponders what would have happened if her mom had not had to go through the war: would she be a different mom and, as a result, would Lynda be a more “girlish girl”?

The narrative is thus reminiscent of the idea of postmemory: “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (Hirsch 22). To elaborate, she compares herself to the daughter of a Japanese immigrant, who was in the same war as her mother, yet on the other side of the conflict. In doing so, she also tells the story of her working-class neighbourhood and the second generation of immigrants. This is due to the fact that gender is not a stand-alone category, it always exists in the context of race and class, among other things. The young Lynda felt “furious envy” (Barry 190) at the sight of “girlish girls” but the narrating adult Lynda points out the ways the trauma of their mothers had a huge impact on the way they treated their daughters. The hypotheticals of Barry’s narratives often close these chapters, and her special nonlinear intergenerational memory work produces emergent meanings. One such example is one of the panels that reads: “If you could have taken me and Mariko and mixed us together, *stirring until our mothers dissolved*, you would have gotten Norabelle, a true powerful girl” (195; emphasis added).

Another mirror panel – this time in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* – comes with the caption: “Not only were we inverts. We were inversions of one another” (Bechdel 98). Alison and her father, Bruce, do not look at their own reflections but rather at the reflections of each other. Similar to Barry’s oppositions, a part of *Fun Home* examines the dichotomy of a feminine father and a masculine daughter, which went beyond just gender presentation: “I was Spartan to my father’s Athenian. Modern to his Victorian. Butch to his Nelly. Utilitarian to this aesthete” (Bechdel 15). The memory work Bechdel implements also disrupts temporalities, as she depicts the fashion confrontations stretching from early childhood to supposedly late teens: such a condensed and fragmented portrayal of her childhood foregrounds her and her father’s desires, where a fashion style is only indexical. For instance, while looking at the magazine picture of a man lying down wearing a suit with a vest (and the part of his chest exposed), Alison suggests her father getting one and he agrees, but then she writes: “the objects of our desire were quite different” (Bechdel 99). The next page, transition to which is temporally non-linear, is a full spread of the drawn photo

of half-naked Roy, the babysitter. It presents one of the key moments in documenting “evidence” of Bruce’s previously unseen life.

According to Cvetkovich, *Fun Home* can be viewed as a queer archive, and writing it as articulating the witness Alison bore to her father’s (and her own) sexuality (111–113). On page 99, Alison is holding the magazine with the masculine imagery in her hands, while her father is standing over her shoulder with his eyes directed at the picture too. The pages 100–101 spread is Alison’s hand again, this time holding a photo of a similarly-posed Roy but the reader learns that it happened after her father’s death, so there is no Bruce to look at it. Different “objects of desire” from the previous page now gain deeper meanings: not about tweed and suits or velvet and pearls, but rather – the sexual attraction.

His felt absence in the full spread, with only a photograph as a sign of the “having been” (Hirsch 36), is amplified by the contrasting presence in the preceding pages. Bechdel writes that this absence “resonated retroactively, echoing back through all the time I knew him” (Bechdel 23), which also points to how often (traumatic) memory may unsettle a feeling of temporal order. Her father’s personality (and his “secret life”) made it too easy for the remembering and narrating Bechdel to “ache as if he were already gone” (23). What is left is to piece together all the different memories, diary entries, maps, photographs, shared book discussions to somehow reimagine and make sense of her father, his sexuality, and his death.

Even though Bechdel does not try to broaden the story to include her town or her generation, she does situate her family “within a larger public history and one that is significantly queer” (Cvetkovich 122) by referencing the major events and actors of the sexual liberation movements. Along the lines of the essay’s argument, she does not simply recollect the LGBTQ+ histories of the USA or her and her father’s life events, but she rather revises her remembering through different lenses, queer history being one of them. And yet, *Fun Home* cannot but ask more what-ifs: for example, would Bruce’s life, or at least its end, be any different if he had been born in the culture of the 1970s instead? Just as memory frequently does not provide clear answers, the tragicomic certainly does not give any.

In conclusion, there is so much more memory work to be emphasized in the works by Lynda Barry and Alison Bechdel: the ordinariness of trauma, haunting symbols (sounds, smells, books, etc.), the “can’t remember; can’t forget” paradox. In this essay, I tried to showcase how memory narratives resist chronological temporality and, instead, involve the active process of remembering through re-examining and questioning. And the medium of comics seems to be perfect for telling these kinds of stories using memory work, as “comics is inherently about the relationship of word and image, which is to say, about different ways of

communicating. It makes readers aware of the limits. ... Its very grammar ... evokes the unsaid, or inexpressible” (Chute, *Why Comics?* 34). Finally, to connect the epigraph with the content of the essay: comics is not unlike poetry, where fragmentation and condensation force readers to be active co-creators of interpretation and where trauma may hide in the line breaks or the gutters.

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Decadence in the History of Culture

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Henry Winthrop states that the idea of decadence is an *evaluative* term (511), meaning that cultural texts marked by its specificity conceal a diagnosis or disapproval of broader socio-cultural sentiments and changes. This paper begins by reviewing and systematizing the concept of decadence over time. Even though the usage of the term has a lengthy history, the topic of decadence is especially relevant nowadays, since we live in the age of climate change, global pandemic, consumerism, and technologically driven revolution. In the popular imagination, all these phenomena or processes are connected to – or are perceived as the result of – decadence. The concept of decadence understood as fear of the elapse of time, of moral decay, economic inequality, and omnipresence of mass media is related and close to current social issues. Finally, the paper moves to the section which coins the term postmodern decadence. The purpose of constituting this idea is to point out the dysfunctions of the most contemporary phase of decadence resulting from people living in an environment of late capitalism. Postmodern decadence is understood as the birth of the schizophrenic subject, a notion derived from Fredric Jameson's theory. This conceptual connection to Jameson ties postmodern decadence to the end of grand narratives and the gradual sense of depersonalization caused by space-time changes in postmodernity.

Time Awareness – Decadence in Antiquity and The Bible

The notion of decadence is a recurring motif in the history of culture. The traces of decadent properties can be found already amongst the ancient authors and philosophers. As Matei Calinescu states: “The myth of decadence was known, in one form or another, to nearly all ancient peoples. The destructiveness of time and the fatality of decline are among the outstanding motifs of all great mythical-religious traditions” (151). Michael Silk seconds the Romanian literary historian and also detaches the term decadence from its strong cultural connection to the nineteenth century: “decadence is not specifically or purely modern: the antiworldly Socrates was a prime decadent; so too was Plato, who inaugurated the idealist denial of the

world” (594). Calinescu as well notes one of the constitutive features of decadence in Platonic philosophy, more precisely in Plato’s theory of Forms. The researcher argues that:

the Platonic theory of Ideas clearly implies a metaphysical concept of decadence (or degeneration) when it describes the relationship between those archetypal, perfect, unchanging, real models of all things and their mere ‘shadows’ in the sensible world of perceived objects, where everything is subject to the corrupting influence of time and change. (151–152)

The scholar refers here to the Allegory of the Cave, where Plato presents a group of people who are locked and isolated. They are facing an empty wall, where fall only the shadows of the objects forming an incomplete representation of reality. One of the main symbols of the Cave Allegory is the fact that the physical world is the impoverished version of the ideal truth. What is important for the concept of decadence is the assumption that the true ideas are *a priori* to their mediocre corporeality. Plato attempts here to answer the question of the origins of the world and absolute knowledge, which inextricably amounts to a decadent idealization of the past.

In the presented Greek philosophy, much attention falls on the vertical (Calinescu 153) experience of time. This is best explained in the Platonic idealistic philosophy, where archetypal ideas come from the better prior. This kind of time understanding stands in the opposition to its theological consideration:

The originality of the Jewish and then Christian philosophy of history comes from its *eschatological* character, from its belief – which makes the progression of time linear and irreversible – in an end to history, in a *last day* ..., after which (in the Christian view) the elect will enjoy the eternal felicity for which Man was created, while the sinful will forever suffer the tortures of hell. (Calinescu 152; emphasis in original)

This time experience is called horizontal (Calinescu 153), where historical events play an important role, understood globally, but also, and perhaps above all for Christians, individually, as in the experience of linear time, every second and every decision can affect The Salvation. Thus, linear time is characterized by a certain amount of hysteria; time here is no more or less than a time until the inevitable end.

This type of thinking in the consciousness of Christians is strongly connected and even constituted by the visionary Apocalypse of St. John. B. Jaye Miller outlines:

John's vision is of a fallen world, tested by a jealous God and visited by numerous plagues and disasters. Most importantly, his apocalypse involves an unveiling or disclosure of the future, in this case a future of bliss and joy when God's faithful children are raised from the dead and brought to dwell with him in a new earth and heaven. (364–365)

The lives of Catholics are marked by the conviction that future eternal life is not given in advance but must be earned. Those who are deserving will be rewarded, and those who have not fulfilled the earthly plan of righteousness must reckon with the unknown after death. Calinescu observes: "Christian apocalypticism, even when it does not manifest itself overtly, results in a dramatically increased time awareness" (154). Therefore, the biblical tradition introduced a strong fear from the time elapse.

As the ancient Greeks begin the conceptualization of the term decadence by the glorification of the past, this biblical recognition adds to it the fear of an uncertain future. Religiously interpreted, life inscribed in passing time is a collection of merits that are going to be judged in the final encounter with God.

Decay of the Moral Values – The Collapse of the Roman Empire

The term decadence was first officially applied to describe the historical event of the fall of the Roman Empire (Rasch 201). The date 476 A.D. is interpreted as a borderline, making it an archetype of power degradation and a gradual decline of the pompous civilization, bringing in the Middle Ages. Wolfdietrich Rasch writes: "For centuries after the end of the ancient world, the fall of Rome provided a constant source of intense reflection on the causes and circumstances of man's falling from might and greatness" (201). Whereas, the earlier sub-chapter of the paper dealt with the experience of time in establishing the concept of decadence, the analysis of the fall of the Roman Empire explains how decadence became associated with moral decay.

There are cyclical historians like Oswald Spengler who believe that every civilization that thrives for a long time must come to a moment of decline (Morley 573). As a result, the social system is being depleted, and there is nothing left other than to destroy an old and establish a new order. The origin of this reasoning comes from the analysis of individual human life: "The historical drama of human life was

seen in terms of a cycle, the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death, and rebirth” (Miller 376). Nevertheless, even if the Empire was doomed from the start, what areas of civilizational life can be considered the reasons behind the final collapse?

Rasch lists “the ending of the republican freedoms” (201); the rulers exploited the slaves and the state budget, while military levies greatly drained the financial capacity. As a result, at the level of common citizens, Rome was plagued by immense poverty and subservience. In addition, there was “the deterioration of public morality” (Rasch 201), the state was deeply corrupted and lawless, the position of the ruler was almost equal to a death sentence – in seventy-five years the Empire had twenty different rulers, mainly because of the murders of the predecessors. All of these circumstances led to the weakening of the Roman legions, lack of community, and eventually to the conquest of the Empire by barbarian tribes.

The Empire has become a paradigmatic instance of splendor, injustice and humans’ weakness for unbridled pleasure. Neville Morley, on the basis of this event, notes: “The crucial question for twentieth-century historians of decline was whether, since civilization had already shown its propensity to collapse, repetition was inevitable” (579). The fall has perhaps become such a powerful cultural symbol, because of the imparting conviction that man will never be able to produce an ideal system to live in it. No wonder this moment in history returned to the collective consciousness, mapping the anxieties of technological development. Somewhat, becoming a telling rhetorical figure to comment on the political and social situations, attracting the artists around the world. The Romantic painter Thomas Cole and his series *The Course of Empire* juxtaposed it with a contemplation upon the industrialization of colonized America. The artist, next to pastoral pieces, presented the sublime imagery not only modelling the triumph of humanity, but also evoking a certain amount of fear related to the encroachment of man and machine into the intact nature.

For French literature and poetry, the fall of the Roman Empire became a frequently used theme in the nineteenth century. The representative of the French symbolists, Paul Verlaine, starts his sonnet “Languor” from 1883 explicitly: “I am the Empire in its final decadence” ([*Je suis l’Empire à la fin de la decadence*] Verlaine 134–135), stating the congruence between the fall of the Empire and the political and economic situation in France. Thereby, Patrick Brantlinger draws parallels between the state of modern countries and the history of the earlier empires:

Rome or Byzantium could be at once utopia and dystopia, a model of decadent behavior to be admired and imitated but also an exemplar of imperial hubris and futility – the ironic mirror of the

decadents' own bourgeois, industrial, imperial society which, they declared, was rapidly becoming another tottering empire like the one that had fallen. (115)

To conclude, the image of the collapse of the Roman Empire has become a remark on social unrest and the metaphor for the decay of values, commenting on the profound socio-economic transformations of the forming modernity.

The Decadent Aspects of Modernity – Karl Marx and Capital Accumulation

It would be wrong to say that modernity brings only negative consequences. On the contrary, it is an unprecedented period in the history of mankind, in many ways improving the human condition. However, from the viewpoint of my essay, I would like to associate the experience of modernity with the overwhelming primacy of progress. Undoubtedly, this type of reasoning is closely related to modernization and industrialization, bringing significant changes in everyday living. Two philosophers of modernity, who have presented criticisms of development and pointed out its negative implications are Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche, both highly influential. Therefore, my tracing of the atmosphere of decadence could not exist without outlining some of their ideas. In the case of Marxist philosophy, I want to draw attention to the concept of decadence “applied socially” (Calinescu 197), so to the theories related to capital accumulation and class struggle.

In order to outline the rhythm of the modern era it is worth quoting Marshall Berman's sketch of modernity at length:

This is a landscape of steam engines, automatic factories, railroads, vast new industrial zones; of teeming cities that have grown overnight, often with dreadful human consequences; of daily newspapers, telegraphs, telephones and other mass media, communicating on an ever wider scale; of increasingly strong national states and multinational aggregations of capital; ... of an ever expanding world market embracing all, capable of the most spectacular growth, capable of appalling waste and devastation, capable of everything except solidity and stability. (18–19)

Such an environment imposes transformations that have revolutionized virtually every aspect of subsistence, giving tremendous freedom, whether in terms of

mobility, information acquisition, leisure activities, and most importantly, in gaining capital; earning, and creating goods and services.

Nonetheless, in *The Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels contrasted the productive vision of modernity with the atmosphere of social division: “Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (3). Brantlinger reinforces this division with the industrial development; he points out: “Industrialization devours the old class alignments and the natural environment as well, converting the potentially democratic ‘people’ into rich and poor, and dehumanizing both classes in the process – ‘people’ become capital and labor, owners and masses” (134). Hence, it can be argued that technological achievements contributed to the exacerbation of social inequality, to which decadent sentiments can certainly be attributed.

In Marx’s view, the world of bourgeois society is the world of international markets expansion and the creation of new needs: “The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere” (7). This surplus resulted in a much higher income but also increased the anxiety of losing custody over it. Without denying the full panache of the market development, Berman also notes the atmosphere of unease that started to haunt society:

Marx’s images also express what must accompany any genuine sense of wonder: a sense of dread. For this miraculous and magical world is also demonic and terrifying, swinging wildly out of control, menacing and destroying blindly as it moves. (101)

Marx’s images of “dread” arise not only because of the instability of the new circumstances but also because of how this market progress has been achieved. The certain rush of creating and mechanical manufacturing grew out of proletariat exploitation and contributed to the deepening of class conflict. The rich accumulate in their hands all the capital; however, the production of these resources is carried out by the working class.

Here the problem of alienation should be mentioned, which follows the paradoxical mechanism, where the goods are often produced under harsh conditions for a low wage:

Not only are they [proletarians] slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. The average price of wage-labor is the minimum wage, i.e., that quantum of the means of subsistence, which is absolutely requisite to keep the laborer in bare existence as a laborer. What, therefore, the wage-laborer appropriates by means of his labor, merely suffices to prolong and reproduce a bare existence. (Marx and Engels 13)

Consequently, the products manufactured by the blue-collar workers are often too expensive for them to buy, proletarians work beyond their strength, and for marginal wages that do not allow them to make a decent living. This practice, however, is carried out deliberately for the capitalist. In this way, the capital holder earns money from the product, whose production value is lower than the selling price.

As mentioned before, the affluent are behind this destructive class division, and while they are unwilling to recognize their fault, they have been creating narratives that affirmed work and possession as a higher value: “They [the bourgeoisie] have produced vivid new images and paradigms of the good life as a life of action” (Berman 93–94). The exploitation has to produce images of potential fulfillment in order to prevent rebellion. Moreover, many years of affirmation of momentum and ownership have permanently changed the logic of people living in a capitalist economic system.

Concluding, in modernity, the world has moved at a tremendous pace, as if sacrificing a sense of calm, assuming that the revolution, in this case, the Industrial Revolution, is governed by its laws: “In this world, stability can only mean entropy, slow death, while our sense of progress and growth is our only way of knowing for sure that we are alive. To say that our society is falling apart is only to say that it is alive and well” (Berman 95). As a result, modern society generated a mood of interpersonal indifference, compounded by the expanding population of cities where people are becoming more and more anonymous. Leaving aside the market aspects, to look at the modern man from the perspective of his existence immersed in the culture, I will turn to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche.

The Decadent Aspects of Modernity – Friedrich Nietzsche and the Critique of Ideologies

The idea of decadence, understood as the cultural doctrine and pervasive pessimism, was particularly close to Friedrich Nietzsche's scholarly work: "The terms *décadence* and *décadent* offered Nietzsche the opportunity to synthesize and unify a great many related ideas (decline, degeneration, sickness, etc.) that had become constitutive elements of his dialectic of life against death" (Calinescu 187; emphasis in original). However, it was not only the universality of the term that drew the philosopher's attention. To a large extent, Nietzsche's usage of decadence is about strenuously overcoming human weaknesses. The internal struggle has brought the philosopher's most influential theses, including The Will to Power or *Übermensch*.

Man, on the other hand, is not alone to blame in reproducing an attitude of pessimism, Nietzsche aimed his criticism at ideologies that capture the minds of people in order to deliberately produce weak and average individuals. As George de Huszar notes: "Nietzsche's critique of decadence was applied mainly to Greece, Christianity, and the nineteenth century" (260). Thus, my following portrayal is a synthesis of the Nietzschean decadence of ancient Greece in the face of modernity and mass culture.

In the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy conceptualized by Nietzsche, the power of art, could not fulfill its transcendental task using only the sphere of reason represented by Apollo. The complementary to the god with the "sun-like" (Nietzsche, "The Dionysiac World View" 120) eyes is Dionysus, responsible for transgressive states of the human psyche. One of the Hellenistic tragedies deeply rooted in the Dionysian myth is Euripides' *Bacchantes*, full of madness, sexuality, music and wine drinking. According to Nietzsche's philosophy, only these two deities together represent the full spectrum of human nature, in "The Dionysiac World View" philosopher writes: "there are two states in which human beings attain to the feeling of delight in existence, namely in *dream* and in *intoxication*" (119; emphasis in original). To put it in other words, Apollo through his dreams and poetry represents knowledge and reason, while Dionysus with wine and fertility represents desires and instincts, being the perfect duality enclosed in the Greek tragedy.

This Nietzschean recognition is the source of the criticism directed at the Greek philosopher Socrates, with whom Nietzsche repeatedly argues in his treatises. In *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, he observes that in Socratic philosophy: "Thinking serves life, while among all previous philosophers life had served thought and knowledge" (17), attributing to Socrates the authorship of the change of emphasis from reflection on the natural course of life to living rationally. Douglas Kellner states: "Socrates for Nietzsche was ... a symbol of decay, of atrophying life-instincts in which reason came to dominate the body and the passions, a process that intensified over the centuries and that Nietzsche saw as constitutive for the modern

era” (79). To better illustrate the character of hectic knowledge drive embodied in modern man, Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* introduces the Goethe protagonist – Faust:

Faust, who storms unsatisfied through all the faculties, who has devoted himself to magic and the devil out of the drive for knowledge; we only have to compare him with Socrates to realize that modern man is beginning to sense the limits of the Socratic lust for knowledge, and that he longs to reach some shore and get off the vast, barren sea of knowledge. (86)

Certainly, all modern progress is due to outstanding individuals and visionary ideas. However, in this elevation of reason, Nietzsche warns against losing the capacity to see the value in plain activities such as; the symbiotic encounters with nature or cultivating one’s sexuality. What is more, social life has become a code of norms; rights, duties or manners, which according to Nietzsche as well as to Sigmund Freud can be considered some of the reasons behind human suffering.

On this account, it was in Dionysian culture that Nietzsche saw the potential not only to open up suppressed instincts but also the opportunity for the communal experience: “Dionysiac excitement is able to transmit to an entire mass of people this artistic gift of seeing themselves surrounded by just such a crowd of spirits with which they know themselves to be inwardly at one” (Nietzsche, “The Birth of Tragedy” 43). Kellner explains:

Dionysian culture was eminently life-affirming, expressive of bodily energies and passions, and bound together individuals in shared cultural experiences of ecstasy, intoxication, and festivals, which Nietzsche believed created strong and healthy individuals and a vigorous culture. (80)

Therefore, abandonment of this kind of artistic energy was, in Nietzsche’s understanding, detrimental to the well-being of civilization as a whole. In his later work, he noted a similar mass-releasing potential in the music of Richard Wagner, but for the purposes of this essay I will not go deeper into this thread.

By strengthening Calinescu’s lead that: “Nietzsche’s theory of decadence is ultimately a theory and critique of ideology” (194), it is worth mentioning the Nietzschean attitude towards mass culture. Kellner writes:

Nietzsche was generally pessimistic about the impact of modern social processes. For the most part, he felt that modern society and culture had become so chaotic, fragmented, ‘arbitrary,’ and devoid of ‘creative force’ that it has lost the resources to create a vital culture and ultimately advanced the decline of the human species. (82)

Not forgetting that the nineteenth-century mass culture was largely the capitalistic effect of modern progress – “Production and consumption – and human needs – become increasingly international and cosmopolitan” (Berman 91). The high-profile mass culture is possible thanks to globalization. The substantive sphere often depends on the capitalist employer imposing a particular vision of the world on their recipients. Thus, production and consumption were followed by a mass media indoctrinated message.

In *Human, All Too Human – A Book for Free Spirits*, Nietzsche reflects on potential danger due to modern massification:

The danger facing these strong communities founded on similarly constituted, firm-charactered individuals is that of the gradually increasing inherited stupidity such as haunts all stability like its shadow. It is the more unfettered, uncertain and morally weaker individuals upon whom *spiritual progress* depends in such communities: it is the men who attempt new things and, in general, many things. (107; emphasis in original)

In the presented passage, Nietzsche expresses concern about spoiling the strong communities by outnumbered average individuals. In a society with mass media, there is a gradual homogenization of views into specific ideological groups. Furthermore, mass media enables much easier access to knowledge, and consequently, a proliferation of specialists often based on residual expertise in a given subject.

Kellner concludes: “mass culture in his [Nietzsche’s] middle and later writings is that which massifies, that which levels, that which produces a mediocre culture and individuals. Religion, ... was a form of mass culture for Nietzsche” (86). Nietzsche saw mass culture as an instrument of control, suppression, and stupefaction.

The philosopher, however, does not leave humanity on its own; on the contrary, he brings to life the figure of *Übermensch*, which contains a synthesis of his long-standing reflections on man’s being in the world, his free will, and morality.

Through the words of Zarathustra, the philosopher says: “*I teach you the overman. Human being is something that must be overcome. What have you done to overcome him*” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 5; emphasis in original) Paradoxically, at the basis of the construction of this life attitude is the great affirmation of man’s self-creation. Nietzsche wanted to free the individual from the primacy of ideology, giving him the right to seek his own happiness, sensitizing him to inherent freedom. By creating the concept of *Übermensch*, Nietzsche did not negate the existence of suffering and decay, but he did illuminate that man can only be limited by himself.

Postmodernism – Decadence in Late Capitalism

The capitalist system owes its extensive periodization to the German economist Werner Sombart, who divided it into four stages. From the perspective of this essay the fourth phase of capitalism, popularly known as “the late,” dated from the 1940s onwards, is the most important (20).

In this part of the paper, I would like to sketch the critique of postmodernism proposed by Fredric Jameson, which in my opinion, maps the deepening decadent tendencies in society. Jameson writes: “Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good. It is a more fully human world than the older one, but one in which ‘culture’ has become a veritable ‘second nature’” (ix). According to the quote, what is culturally constructed has become the dominant narrative. The popular opposition of culture/nature is changing to the supremacy of culture. However, as I tried to point out on the example of Nietzsche’s philosophy, the total subjugation of what is natural in favor of the often oppressive norms of culture does not entirely harmonize with the image of a healthy society.

In the introduction, Jameson recognizes

the way in which virtually any observation about the present can be mobilized in the very search for the present itself and pressed into service as a symptom and an index of the deeper logic of the postmodern, which imperceptibly turns into its own theory and the theory of itself. How could it be otherwise where there no longer exists any such ‘deeper logic’ for the surface to manifest and where the symptom has become its own disease (and vice versa, no doubt)? But the frenzy whereby virtually anything in the present is appealed to for testimony as to the latter’s uniqueness and radical difference from earlier moments of human time does indeed strike one some-

times as harboring a pathology distinctively autoreferential, as though our utter forgetfulness of the past exhausted itself in the vacant but mesmerized contemplation of a schizophrenic present that is incomparable virtually by definition. (xii)

Humanity without “deeper logic” hides a certain tragedy. It is deprived of the reference points previously marked on the timeline of historical development. This unquestionably affects the immersion of the individual in the present. The uniqueness of the postmodern present is undoubtedly shaped by the circumstances of massive economic and technological change.

In large part, postmodernism proposes a narrative of the end of grand narratives. Danielle Bukowski writes: “‘Metanarratives,’ or ‘master narratives,’ are those totalizing, universal stories which writers have been using to frame their individual stories for millennium: primitive to civilized, sin to redemption” (13). Meanwhile, David Harvey points out the following about the postmodern era: “universal and eternal truths, if they exist at all, cannot be specified” (45). Consequently, there is no stable knowledge and History to help name or understand reality. History has been understood as a story told over the years that changes under the influence of multiple points of view, and access to actual knowledge or initial experience will never be possible.

One of the consequences of the end of grand narratives and what interests me most in Jameson’s philosophy is the concept of the schizophrenic subject. It is the philosopher’s idea of the individual self in late capitalism. The very juxtaposition of the human being with a disease entity introduces some decadent, declining implications. Whereas the reader needs to remember that Jameson does not mean illness here in the clinical sense, he uses this nomenclature “as description rather than diagnosis” (26), the reference serves him as the “suggestive aesthetic model” (26).

To better understand the philosophical construction of the schizophrenic subject, it is worth noting that Jameson classifies postmodernism in opposition to modernism. He illustrates the subject in modernism through Edvard Munch’s painting – *The Scream*. In Jameson’s view it is: “a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude, social fragmentation, and isolation, a virtually programmatic emblem of what used to be called the age of anxiety” (11). While the modernist subject was alienated, the postmodernist subject is fragmented, Jameson writes: “shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter’s fragmentation” (14). Consequently, as Bukowski explains: “To Jameson, however, the fragmented subject is not a self in the same way that an alienated self is still a

self. To be alienated assumes a self which is alienated from a larger group. To be fragmented is to not have a cohesive self” (18). This cultural image is represented by Jameson with Andy Warhol’s pop art portrait of Marilyn Monroe. The painting depicts her four faces painted with different background colors or shades of makeup. The artwork is more reminiscent of an X-ray, imposing interpretations of a certain repetitiveness and banality on contemporary culture, also diagnosing the concept of image reproduction.

To problematize the fragmented subject and thus to describe a theory of postmodern schizophrenia, Jameson uses the philosophy of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, he writes: “Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning” (26). About Lacan’s conception, Jameson states:

His [Lacan’s] conception of the signifying chain essentially presupposes one of the basic principles (and one of the great discoveries) of Saussurean structuralism, namely, the proposition that meaning is not a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language, between a word or a name, and its referent or concept. Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier. ... When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers. (26)

The postmodern end of grand narratives has certainly brought about great changes in the reflection on language. As Jameson himself points out in the above quote, the very Lacan’s concepts are made possible by the methodology and cultural theory of Ferdinand de Saussure – structuralism. In a nutshell, what we owe to de Saussure’s structural linguistics is the breakdown of the sign into two components: the signifier, which is the verbal, graphic, or physical designation of the sign, and the signified, which is the set of ideas behind the sign.

In contrast, these late nineteenth and early twentieth-century reflections upon language in the second half of the twentieth century take the name poststructuralism. As Bukowski clearly explains: “While modernity was focused on the signifier and signified, postmodernity shows what will happen when that chain snaps. Without an ability to put events into sequence, postmodern citizens have no agency, and without

an ability to understand themselves temporally” (8). Thus, the logic of post-modernism also affects the human experience of space and time.

In conclusion, Jameson distinguishes two similarities between the schizophrenic psyche and postmodern “linguistic malfunction” (26):

first, that personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present; and, second, that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence, as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time. If we are unable to unify the past, present, and future of the sentence, then we are similarly unable to unify the past, present, and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life. With the breakdown of the signifying chain, therefore, the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. (26–27)

As in the schizophrenic state, the postmodern individuals have difficulty locating themselves in relation to the past and the future. What appears to them is a set of infinite presents, where events oscillate on the border between delusion and reality.

Conclusion

As this research has shown, decadence is a broad concept applied to many moments in culture and history. Texts of this nature have assessing potential and thus reveal and comment on major social transformations.

With antiquity and Platonic philosophy, this paper indicated the glorification of the past due to the idealistic approach. Then, respectively moved on to the biblically constructed time, where the Apocalypse of St. John forms the fear of the uncertain future of The Salvation. It further explored the application of the concept of decadence to the fall of the Roman Empire. It was to trace the disintegration of moral values and the corrupting potential of civilizational progress. The next subsection dealt with the critique of modernity. From Karl Marx, it depicted the deepening social divide between the Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie. As a result, it recognized the capitalistic exploitation that has been continuing to modern days. From Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy, the work acknowledged the negative consequences of an exaggerated affirmation of reason. Thus, Nietzsche points out the pitfalls of modernity, such as suppressing the instincts in favor of life in society.

Additionally, he denotes the negative homogenizing potential of mass media, which undoubtedly became control mechanisms in the twentieth century.

The goal of creating the concept of postmodern decadence was, by definition, to reveal the crisis in which people find themselves through capitalist mechanisms. The main focus here was on the construction of the schizophrenic subject. The very connotations with the disease indicate the cognitive dysfunctions we are victims of through, for example, information overload.

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On an Interlinguistic Constructional Mismatch: The Case of the Phrase *I find* in English-Polish Translation

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Languages differ in the way they come to organize syntactic units into patterns generally recognized as valid and well-formed. To put it simply, they differ in grammar. Theorists, in turn, diverge in what they consider as the exact mechanism that grammar attempts to describe and systematize. One school of thought reduces grammar to a set of arbitrary rules, thus drawing a sharp distinction between grammar and meaning. A more recent approach, cognitive grammar, eliminates this distinction: syntax is no longer treated as an autonomous category but as a significant contributor to semantics and pragmatics. In short, “grammar is meaningful” (Langacker 1). Grammar thus legitimizes linguistic expressions not by providing strict templates for assembling words into larger units but by constituting a set of meaningful constructions directly applied in any utterance (Szymańska 97). This is what lies at the heart of construction grammar, a subdiscipline of cognitive linguistics, which offers a useful framework for studying translation. This paper is not intended to argue for this particular approach in linguistics but to draw on it in an analysis of the translation process.

Constructions can be briefly defined as “form and meaning pairings” (Goldberg, “Constructions: A New” 30). This definition captures the essential feature of a construction – the inseparability of form and meaning. Representing certain syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties as inseparable from each other (Szymańska 95–96), constructions are meaningful in their own right and cannot be interpreted by looking at their components in isolation (Goldberg, “Constructions: a new” 88). This, in combination with the language-specificity of constructions, carries enormous consequences for translators, as they strive for “an ideal (theoretical) equivalence”, covering fully the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects at the same time (Szymańska 126). Needless to say, this all-encompassing equivalence is hardly ever attainable. It is here that gains and losses, types of equivalence, trade-offs, and strategies all come into play.

Before addressing these issues in the case-study section, it will be helpful to outline the basic assumptions behind the English [*X find NP ADJ/NP*] construction, later referred to as *find*-construction, exemplified by the sentences below:

I find it entertaining.
She found him a coward.

The *Oxford Learner's Dictionary* provides two definitions of *find* that are relevant for this construction: “to discover that something is true after you have tried it, tested it or experienced it” and “to have a particular feeling or opinion about something” (“Find”). Thus, what is of primary importance is the subject’s personal experience/feeling/opinion. This has been demonstrated by Wierzbicka (*English: Meaning* 220–224), who additionally explains the cultural underpinnings of the phrase *I find*. Relying on the idea of ‘ethno-grammar’, which corresponds to the already mentioned form-meaning relationship (Wierzbicka, *The Semantics* 12–14), she traces the existence and usage of the expression *I find* to “modern Anglo-culture, with its emphasis on empiricism, personal opinion, and antidogmaticism” (*English: Meaning* 224). Wierzbicka has no doubt that the interlinguistic variance in terms of lexicon and grammar reflects respective intercultural disparity (*The Semantics* 251). It is for this reason that she finds no equivalent of the phrase *I find* in the Polish language (*English: Meaning* 224). Now, I will discuss how this mismatch was accounted for by Polish translators of English literature.

The analysis will rest upon examples from the English nineteenth-century novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Telling this tragic gothic story about a romantic relationship set in Victorian England, Brontë creates a unique atmosphere by means of specific language, which engenders many possible translation strategies. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the novel has been dealt with by quite a few Polish translators, of whom the following three will be mentioned: Janina Sujkowska (translation from 1929), Hanna Pasierska (2009), and Piotr Grzesik (2014).

The lack of equivalence between English and Polish in terms of the *find*-construction led Janina Sujkowska to opt for a significant interference, as shown in table 1.

Table 1
Case study 1

She returned presently, bringing a smoking basin and a basket of work; and, having placed the former on the hob, drew in her seat, evidently pleased to find me so companionable (Brontë, “Wuthering Heights” 44).

Translation by Janina Sujkowska:

Gospodyni powróciła niebawem niosąc koszyk z robotą i dymiący talerz, który postawiła na kominku, po czym, najwidoczniej rada z zaproszenia, przysunęła się z krzesłem bliżej ognia (Brontë, “Wichrowe Wzgórza” 41 [1996]).

Translation by Piotr Grzesik:

Gospodyni niebawem wróciła, niosąc dymiącą wazę oraz koszyczek z robótką, i ustawivszy naczynie na płycie paleniska, przysunęła sobie krzesło, najwyraźniej zadowolona, znajdując mnie tak towarzyskim (Brontë, “Wichrowe Wzgórza” 48 [2014]).

This case can be analysed with reference to the demarcation and interaction between constructions, as “the basic unit[s] of linguistic analysis”, and constructs, as “actual linguistic expressions”, with the former “providing blueprints for licensing” the latter (Szymańska 86). The translator got rid not only of the very *find*-construction but also of the broader construct it is included in, filling the void with the single noun “zaproszenie” (“invitation”). Given that the word “companionable” is easily translatable into Polish, this deletion might seem completely unjustifiable. It is fundamental, however, to point out that the process of integrating constructions into constructs resembles “superimposing slides rather than adding building blocks in a linear fashion” (Szymańska 32). Since the resultant expression is more than a simple sum of its components (Taylor 13), any act of adding or subtracting will affect the remaining constructions, for instance by changing their compatibility with the surrounding units. In the light of this, it can be hypothesised that Sujkowska considered the word “rada” a poor companion for the Polish equivalent of “companionable”, hence her decision to introduce the word “zaproszenie” and generate a well-formed and stylistically flawless Polish expression “rada z zaproszenia”. This can be classified as a sacrifice of content for so-called “naturalness”, an intuitive concept used to refer to the expectation that the translation follows all the linguistic conventions of the target culture, or, to put it simply, that it flows. Nida linked naturalness with dynamic equivalence, the term he coined to talk about “the principle of equivalent effect” and the consideration of “modes of behaviour” within the target culture (129). What Sujkowska did is give precedence to the dynamic over formal

equivalence, concerned, by contrast, with the transfer of form and message (Nida 129).

The full focus on the pragmatic dimension allows a translator to overcome the interlinguistic constructional mismatch by selecting such a construction from the target language's inventory that carries the ease of expression and reproduces the cognitive effect of the original phrase. The real difficulty arises when it is the content and form that receive priority. The translation by Piotr Grzesik can be described as perfectly equivalent with respect to both form and meaning. The translator achieved congruence with the *find*-construction on the semantic and syntactic planes, but not on the pragmatic plane, which includes stylistic aspects (*Constructions. A Construction* 67). The Polish construction used is not sanctioned as a legitimate expression by the language users to the same extent as the English counterpart is by English speakers. While the English construction is well-established, frequently used, and flexible when it comes to its integration with other constructions, the Polish equivalent is marked by a certain degree of clumsiness and artificiality as well as high resistance in its interaction with other phrases.

Despite the gains and losses just outlined, both translations preserve, to a greater or lesser extent, the key feature of the *find*-construction, i.e. the focus on the subject and their own personal experience. The example below illustrates how this property can be lost in translation.

Table 2

Case study 2

<i>'With your husband's money, Miss Catherine?' I asked. 'You'll find him not so pliable as you calculate upon ... (Brontë, "Wuthering Heights" 81).</i>
Translation by Janina Sujkowska: <i>- Za pieniądze swego męża, panienko? Bardzo wątpię, czy Edgar da się tak łatwo nagiąć do tych planów (Brontë, "Wichrowe Wzgórza" 96 [1996]).</i>
Translation by Hanna Pasierska: <i>- Za pieniądze męża, panienko Catherine? - spytałam. - Przekona się panienka, że nie jest tak ustępliwy, jak sobie kalkulowałaś (Brontë, "Wichrowe Wzgórza" 97 [2017]).</i>

Once again Sujkowska deviated significantly from the original, this time changing the subject of the sentence thereby shifting the emphasis from Catherine to the first-person narrator and Edgar. Hanna Pasierska, by contrast, retained both the subject

function of Catherine and the stress on the character’s mental process. Nevertheless, while the *find*-construction (a so-called subject-raised construction (Wierzbicka, *English: Meaning* 221)) in the source text enabled rendering Edgar’s “pliability” as Catherine’s purely subjective impression, the Polish construction necessitated the use of a subordinate clause, which distorted the meaning in a way that it introduced objectivism. This case is a perfect illustration of how the prevention of losses in translation entails undesirable gains, or “ungains”, as coined by Szymańska (127).

The last example (see Table 3) constitutes yet another look at the constructional discrepancy and its implications. While neither Sujkowska nor Pasierska removed the element of personal experience inherent in the *find*-construction, the former replaced the noun “pride” with the adjective “dumny” (“proud”), which connotes slightly different ideas. This might have been either intentional or necessitated by the use of the phrase “żebym mógł być”. To keep the noun “pride” intact would require a shift in emphasis from the speaker to the object, which is what Grzesik did in his translation. However, this shift led to a loss of the source text’s subjective tone, which the translator failed to make up for, even partially, despite available means, such as inserting the phrase “dla mnie” (“for me”). Therefore, it is Pasierska’s translation that renders both the centrality of the speaker and the appeal of the word “pride”, yet this might have come at a cost to naturalness.

Table 3
Case study 3

<p><i>... if I wished any blessing in the world, it was to find him a worthy object of pride ...</i> (Brontë, “Wuthering Heights” 180).</p>
<p>Translation by Janina Sujkowska: <i>Jeżeli pragnąłem czego na świecie, to tego, żebym mógł być z niego dumny</i> (Brontë, “Wichrowe Wzgórza” 245 [1996]).</p>
<p>Translation by Hanna Pasierska: <i>Jeśli pragnąłem jakiejś łaski na tym świecie, to tej, by w nim znaleźć godny powód do dumy</i> (Brontë, “Wichrowe Wzgórza” 244 [2017]).</p>
<p>Translation by Piotr Grzesik: <i>Jeśli pragnąłbym jakiegoś błogosławieństwa na tym świecie, to takiego tylko, aby był on istotą godną dumy ...</i> (Brontë, “Wichrowe Wzgórza” 252 [2014]).</p>

The vast repertoire of constructions that language users have at their disposal turns out to be insufficient to permit perfect interlinguistic translatability. The direct reason becomes clear when the linguistic output is presented not as a derivation process according to certain grammatical rules but as a direct application of constructions – inseparable pairings of form and meaning. The integrity of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, together with a certain degree of resistance in blending constructions, is what creates friction in translation. Faced with an interlinguistic constructional mismatch, the translator has to weigh in losses across all the functional properties of the source text with most often undesirable gains (or “ungains”). This must be done with respect to all textual units simultaneously, from individual words to sentences to the text as a whole. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the English *find*-construction, which lacks its counterpart in the Polish language, has brought about very distinct translation choices, from attempts to imitate the original expression to introducing constructions that breach the semantic correspondence but line up with the cognitive and behavioural modes of the target culture. To opt for the latter approach is to give up on trying to coerce the language to represent cultural features alien to its native users. To choose the former, by contrast, is to bring otherness to the readers. Which side dominates in this balancing act is up to translators and their strategies.

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Poetry

Michał Frankiewicz
BA student

Dear Sylvia,

Perceive this ghastly brood you never could
Memento mori of the modern world
The ghoulish frame conceals a heavy hood
The string of life imagined as a cord.

No wonder lightly, as you did, you spoke
Of overwhelming pain. The edge of mind
Is not enough for the sulfuric smoke.
The greatest sins belong to human kind.

And greater pains belong to human flesh.
In horror turns away a creature from
The sight of mutilation of the mesh
Which once believed to be the perfect form

It was. To blood and bone it comes at last.
The spirit's gone and desolate is man.
Rekindle flames which ones would turn to dust
You never could and so I never can.

And now, as lights are flickering before
The faces of the ones who have escaped
The time of human evil at its core,
I once again unveil the gruesome cape.

To see myself the threat of losing faith
In ever-hopeful probability
That when I leave my mute abode to bathe
In rays, the world will halt hostility.

Thus never shall I fear again to feel
The pains of disillusioned mind because
The closer to the very soul you peel
The sharper come to be the human claws.

A dog

A dog abandoned by its master
On guard of rocks piled in a cluster.
Oh, what's its intent
To waste days hardly spent
With its face engraved with disaster?

One Sunny Day

Do you remember the day
When the morning sun was
Coating the streets in its rays –
Sleepy fathers of moss –

And we were walking down
Those paths to be ready
When the bus comes
To ascend it and go

And we followed the course
Of the shadows swept aside
By the dawn of morning hours
When we were to abide

And we fought against
The wind that breaks
The character of heroes;
We were just to chatter,

And we did speak to each other
As the sun shone down our paths
Neither one of us bothered
To believe it would last

And we reached the sign
At which the bus would stop
As the final drops of sunshine
Smiled into our hopes

The day which normal, as it seemed,
Was meant to matter for us two
Rays of sunshine beamed
And we had something to do?

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