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Section Code: C024

Intro:

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On Solitude and other Demons

Whenever we refer to solitude we unconsciously become a little bit sadder, more serious and why not more "frightened" than the usual. We immediately and almost instinctively straighten our backs, we meditatively close our eyes, as if we were in a church, we quickly swallow our saliva and we uncomfortably sit on the chair, but towards the edge of it, ready to run away, as if we were in the dentist's waiting room. It's definitely a serious topic, it's a big deal, it somehow touched our inner nerve, so to say, and as a consequence our whole body reacts accordingly. We don't even realize where exactly does this visceral, fast and spontaneous reaction come from. And we simply do not know for sure what is the particular reason for this specific reaction and what atavistic automatisms are actually hidden behind this reactivity.

We were certainly taught the elegiac tones and melancholy colouration of this reality of our selves from an early age. All the cultural products we have continuously metabolized would end up associating loneliness with an intense elegiac feeling, since most artists created rather a bitter cake from this particular ingredient and thus loneliness was constantly described as a kind of a cold and dark fountain that eventually swallows us in its abysses. Most people, whenever they talk about loneliness, they somehow associate it with the inner hell of any living being. It is as worse as it gets. And everyone runs away from it and they sometimes pay dearly just to avoid it. At any cost! No price is too high! Just don't be left alone! If you ask them why, they will all say that no-one should

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be alone, since solitude is not the natural state of a human being. Few will actually admit that loneliness itself is in fact the very natural state of any living soul. Some will use commonplaces, kitsch pills that Facebook have turned into real hits lately; in moments of nausea, sayings such as: "we are all born alone, we all die alone" are simply recurrent and empty. But these being said in moments of fear or thrill, none of those who utter them really appropriate the meaning of the words they've articulated and thus they quickly forget them. They will not make this the very theme of their daily meditations and they will not pay attention to the very root of these statements. Why? Because they really do not believe that this feeling actually represents the inner genuine state of any human being. Don't worry, they might think, maybe God is also alone and that's the reason for Him creating us, to simply keep Him company. So why not let Him have fun, while we enjoy ourselves along our mortal days... After all, didn't He throw us out and exiled us from paradise as if He were merely disposing of garbage so we wouldn't stink the place? We already smelled badly enough and He didn't really want to pollute that sacred place anymore, given His sensitive nostrils... Never-mind that, we can definitely handle it since He chose to leave us to our own devices.

We are, therefore, those children who were left alone at home by their parents. And we do mean it in the metaphysical sense also. What can we do then? We are obviously exaggerating and wasting the essential! Especially modern fiction largely explores and absorbs lamentations on loneliness, on isolation and alienation and they are generally perceived as forms of the Edenic fall and they all hint to the human awareness of this particular terrible tragedy, with all its variants: social stigmatization, the constant struggle to fit in, lack of meaning of life and in life, debauchery, etc.

All the lyrical creations that grow around this kernel do actually bear bitter fruit, terribly tasting of nothingness and collapse. All the novels that coagulate the expressions of this "terrible" state of being do actually become both epics of uprooting and desperate pictures of human helplessness. Literature becomes thus similar to a battle-field covered with corpses, as an immediate result of a terrible war in which everyone is defeated and there are no actual winners. In this respect, literature also becomes a nightmare factory, quite similar to the world, a space in which this nightmare of simply existing is not only expressed, but mostly lived to the fullest. How many literary myths concerned with the artist's loneliness, who sacrifices the living in the name of art, just to create art and immortality are we familiarized with? How many

dramatic tremors caused by this isolation and self-isolation within the cold cage of creation, how many birth pains, how many elegiac expressions of the artist's struggle in solitude closed in himself and shattered, eviscerated, tormented by his own demon of creation, all these being consumed in the steamy puddle of loneliness – how many did we engulf along our life? And we might go on and on ...

However, very few artists will accurately express this experience as one of heavenly joy, ascension, sweet fever and enveloping chills, all those tasting as the forgotten and lost paradise. And quite few of them actually remember the happiness of a victory on the threshold of a mysterious, hidden world, like a mythical Shambala, which, for a split second, you were given to taste. Few speak of this joy of creation in which one must step aside in order to let the lost fallen world breathe inside of you. Few refer to the fullness of loneliness, to the positive connotations of loneliness, to its sacredness. Maybe only the mystics do that, since for them seclusion, collapse in itself and blessed isolation – they all mean something completely different than for the artists, something completely different than for the ordinary individuals. But let's get serious: we don't take these weirdos' credo for granted because they don't even know what life is like... We have nothing to do with them, they must be left alone to live their madness, provided they let us live ours as well.

We have to point it out: "madness" is not complete unless one is fully identified with it, unless one lives his/ her fantasies as absolute truths, the axioms as universal laws, totally metabolized and scattered in all cells of one's being. Obviously, Don Quixote acts as a perfect example, since out of his mind a whole world was feeding, with its own laws...
There is nonetheless a certainty: that loneliness is lived and appropriated and experienced in different ways. It is clear, however, that humanity loves its dramas, embraces dramatizations and enthusiastically cultivates its fear of things never experienced and never truly known. We obviously prefer to avoid knowing them, facing them, avoid waking up and prefer to keep on sleeping, avoid taking on any real responsibility and instead we'd rather intoxicate ourselves with stories uttered by all sorts of conspiracy dragons, so we can bake steaming narratives that would eventually indulge our fanatical hunger. And no-one is allowed to snatch these toys from our hand, because the reaction will be similar to that of a hysterical child, and we will roll on the floor, we will punch and scream. This actually happens because these toys actually cover and conceal deep dramas conceived

by humanity and humanity really loves them and consumes them especially in the evenings. Paradoxically enough, humanity sleeps "well" only if it consumes nightmares; the smooth and peaceful sleep terribly annoys humanity, it does not represent a reality since humanity is not willing to acknowledge its possibility. Thus we actually live what we create within our mind, that's why we exclusively experience and digest the things in which we choose to believe. Generally speaking, the consequences are not really taken into account in this world where we sleep and keep falling asleep and we keep avoiding the painful truth. Why is that? Simply because we love dramas so much and we have become so accustomed to fear that we actually swim in it like a fish in the water, without ever noticing that everything around us is so stinky that it ultimately suffocates us. And as for loneliness, we constantly choose to escape it, we don't want to acknowledge it simply because we instinctively associate it with a demonic flavor. We desperately cling to each other for the visceral fear of loneliness and we choose not to walk together as free beings as we should do due to our already acquired self-knowledge.

But let's refer to another popular saying: "If you are afraid of something, be sure that you cannot avoid it." We are definitely afraid of loneliness and, by the very fact that we do not actually know its true sphere, this particular ingenuine version of it would eventually catch up with us and imprison us within its negativity simply because we have always misunderstood it. And thus in every cell of our being we actually store drops of poison resulted from the bitterness of our noisy fall from paradise. Obviously, we will choose to hyper-dramatize since the pleasure of dramatization is much stronger than the joy of actually looking for a way back to the essence. In the tragi-comic carnival of running away from, in an icy loneliness, we actually end up living in a sick world, where everyone consumes their own illness, alone, near each other, but never really together. Each with his/ her own disease, each with his/ her own madness, dealing with everything by ourselves: ill with Covid, ill with power, ill with loneliness, ill with hypochondria, paranoia and so on. After all, the list can go on and on: each individual is ultimately consuming his/ her own loneliness, his/ her own disease...

We are human beings. We have been given the power and grace of creation. We can create worlds, even if we are not really aware of it. That is why our creative fantasy somehow becomes over-excited in difficult and crisis moments. It is, in some extent, similar to a valve meant to set our inner world free; it can also be accepted as an inner

form of expression. It ultimately depends on what we do with it, on how we want to use it. If the collective unconscious has been constantly burdened with nightmares, the nightmares would coagulate on the basis of common resonance. If the delusional force of collective paranoia is unleashed, we are already acting as inner components of the mechanism described by a Caragiale character. Nevertheless, life surpasses literature, or, more likely, life imitates literature. Aren't we actually living in an upside-down world? In Caragiale's world, on the other hand, the basic rule reads as it follows: there is an intrinsic connection between fear, curiosity, the very birth of an idea, terror and later on hypochondria and paranoia. Romanian literature has displayed two character patterns: one is the collective character who has succumbed to its own fantastic and nebulous madness out of which there is no way out, thus missing the power of creation (in this particular respect, the relapse into the chaos of collective drowsiness after a brief noisy awakening of loneliness actually represents the very end of the opus because the creation of a new world is possible only through collective catharsis.); the other one is the character multiplied in Caragiale's works: the one who is quite persuasive, although he has no idea whatsoever what he is really talking about and he does so with firm conviction and with the prophetic morgue of uttering the absolute truth. It should also be added here that the gift of opinion brooding in the dangerous loneliness of the mind, not of the being, is fatally associated with the fear of loneliness. One has to be generous with the products of the mind, since one never actually knows what the mind can really generate and degenerate... One cannot issue such a beautiful theory, one cannot create such a masterpiece of the mind if one does not share it.

In this particular loneliness of the restless mind (a mind which is definitely a lover of hand-assembled dramas and false prophecies), materialized expressions of the nightmares live in the underground unconscious and they begin to be fabricated in all the great moments of humanity's crisis. They had been already living there for a long time, blind and jawed monsters lurking fiercely in the stinking cellars of hidden feelings, and now it is high time to bring them to light and let them run free, as bulls were once unleashed on the sunny streets of Pamplona. And we run blindly along with the bull on our tracks and the blood fills with adrenaline hearing its hooves beating the stones and it's fun, of course, a game of life and death, and in this run we are all alone, so alone that we push aside and we push off the road the one next to us, not really caring if the beast would grab him or not. What really

matters is for me to survive or maybe not even myself, who actually cares? We are really amusing ourselves as long as the game gets more and more dangerous and it eventually turns into a life and death matter.

We are all alone in this sick chase without even realizing it, and we can not avoid the very subjects of our inner fear; we are afraid of loneliness, but we are equally afraid of being together. So we run, we run for our lives, more and more imprisoned by the rhythm of the clothes of our soles riding, in contrast to the hooves of the bull that follows us, and we keep on running until we forget who are we running from and what do we fear the most: is it the bull or ourselves? Where is the real danger? Outside or inside ourselves? Since we got so used to running that it doesn't even cross our minds to even stop for a moment, to gather all our courage and look behind us. Still, there is another possibility, the story may have another outcome: maybe we have been running alone for a long time, no one is with us anymore and maybe our bull is tired, it retired somewhere and grazes fresh grass in peace, salivating peacefully. It is no longer upset with us. Or maybe no one actually followed you. Have you thought about this?

Solitude

Literary -Isms

La solitude

Études littéraires

Solitude in Anne Brontë's *The Tennant of Wildfell Hall* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

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Abstract

A period of doom followed Romanticism, which stirred emotions of ambiguity concerning the future. Human peace was being sacrificed and this feeling of uncertainty unavoidably conducted people to fears of loneliness. With the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species', and the swift expansion of industrialisation and property, the Victorians underwent a significant period of transformation. Numerous Victorians missed their former way of life, and therefore distanced themselves from this new changing world, which made them feel incredibly lonely. Due to the prolific nature of the lonely protagonist in 19th-century fiction, it can be claimed that solitude becomes a trope that apprises readers of women's issues across all social classes throughout the Victorian age. This paper aims to explore the ways in which solitude is represented in Victorian literature, especially in Anne Brontë's "The Tennant of Wildfell Hall" and Charlotte Brontë's "Villette". We will examine how these writers depict female heroines enduring solitude and how this expression becomes a vehicle for a discussion of women's roles.

Key words: *solitude, The Tennant of Wildfell Hall, Villette.*

1.   Introduction

The picture of Queen Victoria in continual mourning is rooted in solitude and gloom after Prince Albert's death and is prolific due to the

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link between her maternal and spousal duties and her reign as ruler. Gail Turley Houston illustrates this paradox of leader and domestic goddess as a "historical aberration" and declares that Victorians were "deeply conflicted about, antagonistic toward, yet on the whole profoundly loyal to the concept of a queen regent. Victorians saw their female ruler as "... acceptable, if sometimes disturbing". Victoria was portrayed as unsettling because, as Turley Houston asserts, "she was a reigning queen in an age whose dominant ideology situated women as queens in the private sphere and warned them against participation in the public sphere" (Houston 1999:1). This dichotomy between ruler and ruled becomes one of the motivating issues under discussion as women's positions shift during the 19th century.

Victoria, a woman tied to the throne, and to her position as wife and mother, and her representation as a continually mourning dowager, exhibits an awful sense of solitude in several novels of the late Victorian era. Her solitude as a part of constructing her public representation, and arguably her affliction from it, can be seen as a model for mourning women in fiction. As a symbol of authentic femininity, the idea of solitude may justify its usage in literary works of the 19th century; however, solitary personalities are only an odd appearance in literature. There are several novels that emphasize the topic of solitude, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret (*1862), Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard* (1901), and Henry James' *The Tum of the Screw* (1898), George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1892), Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), Wilkie Collins' *Heart and Science* (1883), and Lucas Malet's *Mrs. Lorimer: A Sketch in Black and White* (1882), novels that express distinct views of solitude as an expression of the demand for female agency. What arises from the expanding discussions of women's social hierarchy is a female protagonist who endures solitude because she cannot find a mutual understanding, social mobility or love. It is this need to have an independence that shapes characters who bear profound desperation and possess no expectation of escaping because of their lack of social agency.

Many heroines partake this affliction from stern solitude that generates a discussion of hope for alteration in their status in the community. This paper, on how a specific loneliness trope informs readers about the issues facing women concentrates on Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), and Anne Brontë's *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). We will examine how these writers depict female heroines enduring solitude throughout the 19th century, exhibiting a precise

need for change for women. To focus our analysis, we will examine female heroines' representation and how the characters' various reactions influence the perceptions encompassing solitude, and how they present an intense awareness of their lack of agency.

2. Solitude and Critical Approaches

As asserted earlier, we want to investigate a distinct employment and representation of solitude encountered in Victorian literary writings that highlight a central female heroine who is displayed without power of choosing, agency, and with restrained occupation. The following study will examine how solitude is represented as a part of how women were affected by their designated positions in community. In this section, we present some definitions from psychological examinations that will support us in establishing the particular elements of solitude expression. For example, John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, in their work, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, supply a brief description of solitude:

> In English, we have a word for pain and a word for thirst, but no single, specific terms that mean the opposite. We merely reference the absence of these aversive conditions, which makes sense, because their absence is not considered part of the normal state ... 'not lonely' there is no better, more specific term for it is also, like 'not thirsty' or 'not in pain,' very much part of the normal state. Health and well-being for a member of our species require, among other things, being satisfied in our bonds with other people, a condition of 'not being lonely' that, for want of a better word, we call social connection (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008: 8).

As described by Cacioppo and Patrick, solitude is characterized by a lack, and it is this lack that is common to these characters' discussion of the social constructions that surround their lives. As there exists no way to quickly discuss a lack of agency without stating that something is missing from the root agency, loneliness is an expression of missing components. The characters exhibit "lack" of agency and loneliness, to manifest a complex coded language of the need for change. Cacioppo and Patrick's definition centers on how society describes solitude as a harmful "condition," but more importantly, to express the need for social connection.

In his *Loneliness in Philosophy, Psychology and Literature*, Ben Lazare Mijuskovic relies profoundly on Husserl and Hegel, especially on their investigation into phenomenology, to examine how the human being is in itself a solitary presence. Determining why

people are solitary is significant to Mijuskovic because "what does it matter... if we formulate a 'philosophy of death' if we [fail] antecedently to grasp the significance of individual human life, of the existential uniqueness of aloneness?" (Mijuskovic 100). Mijuskovic presents the need to study solitude as a field, but more interestingly, he relies massively on the Victorian era to justify his argument that people suffer from solitude, particularly George Eliot's Silas Marner (1861) and Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure (1895). His analysis accentuates the examination of solitude as an essential philosophical progress that must be investigated further. But unlike Mijuskovic, we are using a *posteriori* approach to why solitude is a significant part of each of the following female protagonists' narratives. To support this discussion, we present some other critical angles to solitude that address identity as part of their discussion of lack. The first, *Loneliness and Time: The Story of British Travel Writing* by Mark Cocker, claims that travel literature has been "looked over" for its significance to self-definition. He divides travel literature into international sections, Greece and Tibet, for example, and views the travel literature from each region in its wholeness. Even if he does not concentrate greatly on loneliness in his study, he applies it as a motivating determinant of travel narratives in general. He maintains his argument for the use of solitude in understanding Victorian view outside of the melodrama and moral compass of the novel. Most importantly to his study is how he settles Victorian thought and history within the context of the self-banishment of travel. He provides an appraisal of Victorian thought and travel:

> The key issue is that, in the interior landscape of the traveler, Britain seemed to represent, and to place on his or her experience, some kind of limitation. This [limitation] applies equally to their [the traveler's] interpretation of foreign places. Whatever it was they claimed to find overseas, whatever it was which seemed more fully expressed in foreign society, is really only the detail. The central, unifying principle in travel books is that abroad is always a metaphysical blank sheet on which the traveler could write and rewrite the story, as he or she would wish it to be (Cocker 1992:18).

He accentuates a topic that connects directly to lack of agency and solitude for how authors employ solitude as an instrument to reclaim female identity. Most of the heroines are characterized as isolated from the community, as Cocker presents in his study of the English traveler abroad. What is different about this form of solitude is how each female heroine is explicit about her emotions and her lack of agency to change her place that leads to these feelings of loneliness.

In the literary works preferred for this study, Lucy Snowe, in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, sees others marry and form social relationships. Her reasons for not engaging in these social traditions revolve around her own uncertainties, but also in her absence of any siblings, capital, as she moves to Brussels. Hardy's *Tess*, when rejected by her husband, is left with no support but to wander the countryside alone. In fact, Tess is arguably alone throughout the whole novel because of men who can display authority over her life and use this authority quite often. In the case of Hepworth Dixon's work, even with the choice of career, the protagonist accepts the male characters' wishes over her own, making her career a derivative of that choice instead of one from agency. The landscape and travel, as Cocker claims, becomes the lens to sharpen the solitude these characters reveal as they relieve their own lack of social agency. The second study that uses loneliness as a critical approach is John Sitter's *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (1982). He explains how solitude continues to appear when describing the relationship between the reader and writer. The depiction of solitude as a power of change can be observed in Sitter's study as he employs the word *solitude* to define the literary shift in the 18th century from public to private, for both the writer and the reader:

> the emergence and articulation of this [what Sitter refers to as a 'purity of words' between writer and reader] desire point to a broader sense of literary loneliness, that is, to the isolation of 'literature' itself as a category .. .in terms of the semantic change in which the word 'literature' shifts in meaning from (roughly) everything written to 'imaginative' writing and in terms of economic specialization of industrial capitalism (Sitter 218-219).

Sitter's analysis of literature's semiotics conducts him to consider literature as a lonely-both for the reader and the writer-vocation. Lucy, in *Villette*, utilizes this dichotomy as it sails between narrator, character, and her direct addresses to the reader. Even if Sitter does not apply solitude as undeviatingly as the approach of this paper, his analysis is essential in the construction of solitude as a larger part of literary expression.

3. Solitude in Anne Brontë's *The Tennant of Wildfell Hall* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*

Two significant novels with the theme of solitude are Anne Brontë's *The Tennant of Wildfell Hall* and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. Both literary writings emphasize solitary protagonists. Solitude expression is linked

straight to the female central characters' agency. The female heroines in both works expose solitude in different ways that make clear the narrative aim of solitude in the book, which is to indicate the significance of lack of agency regarding women in the 19th century. Both Charlotte's and Anne's novels are essential in treating the zeitgeist in the time of their writing for many female writers. These writers take a position for women's rights in their personal and public writings and their subject topic is significantly adjusted to the problems facing women of their day. The female characters that they write about display a need for change in several forms, and they endure solitude as a result of their social status and not only due to the lack of contact. So, solitude is a crucial narrative device in this analysis of the need for change. In *Tennant of Wildfell Hall*, the protagonist marries a rich man who mistreats her. In her journal, she reveals her desperate solitude and lack of agency, until she feels compelled to take action to protect her son from coming to be like his father.

Solitude in *Tennant of Wildfell Hall* works as the result of her troubled marriage. From the start, Helen is in turmoil with Arthur. As penance, he then lets her alone for some months in the country and her solitude suppresses her-he is utterly aware that solitude can be used as a punishment. She straight addresses her husband in her diary:

> "Arthur, why won't you corne! [W]hy won't you -write to me at least! You talked about my health how can you expect me to gather bloom and vigour here; pining in solitude and restless anxiety from day to day? .. I would beg my uncle or aunt, or my brother to corne and see me, but I do not like to complain of my loneliness to them, and indeed, loneliness is the least of my sufferings; but what is he doing what is it that keeps him away? It is this ever-recurring question and the horrible suggestions it raises distracts me" (Brontë 2008:186)

Lonely, she believes that she cannot go to her family, and in her loneliness, this character worries that Arthur is misbehaving against her that she is powerless to stop. She claims that solitude is useless, but solitude generates moments of desperation in which she calls to him directly in her diary. Her personal approaches are essential in building the psychology of solitude. In Cohn's analysis of drawing consciousness from narrative, his criterion elucidates Helen's use of conscious narrative in her diary: "the narrated monologue is by no means the only method used for rendering consciousness in a figural context: we have already seen that the consonant type of psycho-narration and the unsignaled quoted monologue often supplement, and sometimes supplant, the narrated monologue form" (Cohn 1984: 500). It is crucial

that Helen can transcend her diary as a personal reflection for a direct call for help and to action. It is this narrative shift that produces loneliness as a social consequence in the literary work.

In *Villette*, Lucy's solitude is also linked to her status. Lucy's early life's narrative serves to build the basis of the lonely language, such as the tone of her childhood, and relationships to other characters, such as her connections to Paulina and the doctor, from childhood to Brussels, for the remainder of the novel. From childhood, Lucy's life is always filled with sorrow and toil. Her life with the Brettons is opposed to that of Paulina, the Bretton's young ward, which aligns with Peters' argument of antithesis. The whole household, including Lucy, rotates around Paulina. Without family, and few friends, she is bound to make connections on her own. She remains lonely until M. Emmanuel falls in love with her, only to be lost at sea. Lucy's solitary nature is a direct expression of her lack of agency. M. Emmanuel attempts to give her agency, with supporting her start her private school, but she is, however, oppressed by one of the few employment options open to her and a lack of connection. *Villette's* narrator is an older Lucy Snowe who builds her narrative within a context of constant reflection on solitude. After her short stay in London, she then spends a lonely trip to Brussels, where she has intentions to become a tutor or teacher of English. Her progress to what she names as an "un-English" and "foreign land" presents her more desolate than she was before in London, though she is still lonely, she is farther removed from others because of the linguistic and cultural boundary (Brontë 2006: 1350). Intriguing to the reader, Lucy wants to seclude herself in a more marginalized situation when accepting a position abroad.

Biographers and scholars analyze Charlotte as alone later in life when *Villette* was created. This connection between her actual self and her writing obscures the analysis of solitude from a critical viewpoint. Through this lens, readers of her writing start to blur the lines between fiction and Charlotte's biography. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith, in their introduction to the 1984 Clarendon Press edition of *Villette*, consider the "period between the publication of Shirley in October 1849, and the publication of Villette in January 1853, "[as] a time of unbearable loneliness and bitter depression, of recurring illness and nagging selfdoubt [for Charlotte] ... her need for companionship was so intense that it often numbed her creative faculties and rendered the effort of composition futile" (Rosengarten and Smith 1984:11). Several biographies and critical writings portray Charlotte as experiencing a sorrowful solitude that influences her later writings, especially, *Villette*. Much of her correspondence, and the subsequent

death of the rest of her family, confirms this view of her. But this attitude does not permit for a more in-depth reading of Charlotte's use of solitude-in these critics' reading, Charlotte's characters are lonely because she is lonely and for no other reason.

It would be a misreading, then, to allow an examination of the solitude described in *Villette* only as based in the author's personal tragedy. Elaine Showalter states that Gaskell's belief of Charlotte as a tragic figure has become a part of the "Brontë myth" (Showalter 1977:106). The associations between Charlotte's life and *Villette* make it evident that not only is the solitude in *Villette* functioning as personal narrative, as Helen Moglen suggests in *Charlotte* Brontë*: The Self Conceived* (1976), but solitude could also be a component of the narrative of women's social stratification (Moglen 190-191). Moglen's concentration on self-discovery as a purpose of Charlotte's writing is based on her personal history; however, it can be argued that Charlotte's solitude, regardless of personal history, is a part of her social status as a woman. In a correspondence to W. S. Williams, Charlotte Brontë admits that: "lonely as I am-how should I be if Providence had never given me courage to adopt a career-perseverence [sic] to plead through two long, weary years with publishers till they admitted me?" (Gaskell 1975:3). This quotation shows that she was clear on her beliefs on the social status of women and the ways in which these beliefs influenced her both professionally and personally. Just as in the situation of Charlotte, Anne's biography is connected to her writing, and just as readings of Charlotte's works endure extreme comparison with her biography, Anne's writings also experience an over-abundant critical comparison between her own and both of her sisters' work. Reducing the Brontes to their biographies is problematic when analyzing their discussion of women's roles.

4. Conclusions

The solitary portrait of the widow Queen Victoria, and the solitude of female heroines in the Victorian novel, depict an absence of social agency. Victoria is always dressed in black because she is mourning her husband, and as many records indicate, she never leaves, publicly, this image. Solitude, when portrayed in literature, is complex. This paper attempted to examine the narrative function of solitude as displayed by female heroines with a precise examination of how social standards influence them. Anne and Charlotte Bronte use solitude concerning women's social status in different ways. Lucy Snowe's character sees her life with the lens of solitude and it is with this lens that she reveals

the reader the desire for more options for women of lower social standing. Likewise, Helen endures solitude through an absence of shared understanding. Anne formulates a dialogue about women's marital rights through this solitude, which makes her social standing critical to approaching an audience with more power to improve women's position. The narrative forms in each text, the memoir and the diary, highlight the employment of solitude in these novels. Solitude becomes a narrative device in both works, and it works to strengthen the critical necessities of the protagonists produced by situations outside of their social control.

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Solitude in Selected Novels by Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to present an analysis of the theme of solitude, which is present in the novels written by Virginia Woolf and Graham Swift. This theme unites the two authors' novels and explains the way they create the lyrical type of novel, by starting out with intertextual references to the British Romantic poets, where loneliness is a common theme. In order to illustrate the theme of solitude, a selection of moments and characters' situations will be analyzed in the present paper, according to the features that Modernism and Postmodernism have in common. The theme of loneliness adds to the features of previous movements used in Modernist and Postmodernist novels, which together create the lyrical novel. The lyrical novel shows the same reconciliation of contradictions which was found in Romantic poetry. Characters experience contradictory feelings and thoughts regarding various aspects of their lives, and all of them are united by being expressed in the lyrical novel.*

Key words: *lyrical novel, Modernism, Postmodernism, individualism.*

Solitude is a theme that is specific to the literary works of several ages, from the age of the Renaissance (Caferro 2011: 32), continuing with the eighteenth century or the Age of Reason (Wittler 2013), Neoclassicism (Havens 1954), moving along with the Romantic age (Stafford 2012:

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34), followed by Victorian Age (Hendry 2019), Modernism (Engelberg 2001) and Postmodernism (Hegarty 2009). Hendry (2019) draws attention to the women's problem, whose lives are defined by social structures, during the Victorian Age. In this case, solitude corresponds with the feeling that their wishes are not understood and not allowed by society. Women during those times were not allowed to live as they wanted, in the liberal forms which are permitted today.

At the same time, these ages where solitude is present correspond to the development of Individualism. With the end of the Middle Ages, when people were focused on a religious way of life which would guarantee them a good life after death, with the Renaissance they became focused on secularism, meaning on life here and now, as well as on the individual's achievements, with the development of inventions (McClinton 2006). In the Victorian age, women become more aware of their situation and begin to think about focusing on their own person and achievements, instead of carrying out the traditional role of caring about others. However, there was the need to wait until Modernism to sort the issues out, and even then the Victorian mindset meant, for Woolf, the traditional mindset, while the Modernist mindset meant the new, individualist type of mindset. In Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, it is stated that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 1977: 7). All this means that women too will focus more on themselves as individuals in her work and that they will start reflecting in solitude, as illustrated by the main characters in Woolf's novels.

Solitude, as a theme typical with Modernism (Woolf 1921), can be associated with the stream-of-consciousness, as it leads to the reader's access to the characters' inner world. The main issue with Modernism is the instability of self and identity, since, in the previous societies, the identity was determined by the social source. As a result, once the women distance themselves from the imposed traditional role of the "angel in the house" of the previous, Victorian age, they experience the same dilemmas as the male characters, regarding who they are and how they could find their place in the society they live in, while also taking care of their own individual values. The solitude of the characters is underlined by the way that the story in the novels of Woolf and Swift is told. In their novels, the stories are told by various characters, as first-person or third person narrators, but focusing on the story from their perspective. There is no omniscient narrator, and this shows that Modernism and Postmodernism are ages when the existence of an absolute truth is questioned. We only have interpretations of reality, and opinions, as well as different perspectives

on the same story. Since each character has his/ her own perspective, it is difficult to reach a main point of agreement, so conflict among characters is frequently encountered. Such conflicts have to do with the relationships among the characters, in the novels of both writers.

In the Modernist novels, the characters have contradictory moods and opinions about the other characters, due to the atmosphere of fragmentation during this time. Kaivola (1991), in *All Contraries Confounded*, draws attention to contradiction as the feature of the lyrical novel. Connectedness and isolation are part of contradictions (Teigen 2006-2007: 32) with respect to Woolf's characters. For instance, the characters can feel strongly connected with their surroundings, such as nature, or the city of London, with crowds, but at the same time they can feel isolated from these. This feeling can also be found in Graham Swift's novels. In *The Light of Day*, Kristina, the Croatian refugee, feels connected to the home she left, while at the same time she cannot feel connected to the changes brought there by the war, as she cannot accept them. Thus, Kristina feels connected to her place as it was, but disconnected from the place as it had been changed by the war. Since she is in a foreign country, Kristina feels isolated and also a prisoner in the home of the Nash family, where she is, after all, being offered a shelter, or a temporary home:

> This was her home now, her place, but it was as though she was trying not to be there. She said things, mumbled things to herself, but they weren't in English, or any other language that Sarah could understand. She just sat there, like a prisoner, in Beecham Close. (Swift 2004: 50)

The word "home" appears here in contrast with its usual associations, and Kristina is living in another imaginary reality, of her own lost home, or, better said, of the way her home used to be in the past. The loss of her home coincides with Kristina's feeling of being lost; she wonders who she actually is, since she no longer feels connected to the place where she is in at the moment, with the Nash family. Sarah, Bob's wife, also experiences ambivalent, contradictory feelings for Kristina: on the one hand she pities her, and wishes to protect her, giving her an embrace, while on the other hand, when she finds out that her husband has had an affair with her, she becomes jealous and wishes to have her sent back to Croatia, her home country. Back home, Kristina will be confronted with the reality of her home no longer being what it used to be before the war. Such a change leads to the feeling of life being discontinuous, and as a result, of the character's identity not being coherent. War causes a violent break in the usual understanding of life and personal identity.

Postmodernist and Modernist writers both deal with fragmentation and lack of unity of experience (Blanton 2009, Brooker 2014). In Swift's novel *Shuttlecock*, Prentis tries to better understand his father by reading his war memoir. However, his father proves, in fact, not to have been the hero everyone knew he was. The unity of experience is thus shattered for Prentis, who tries to understand what had happened during the war and also to reconstruct the relationship between him and his father. Postmodernist and Modernist writers go back to previous literary movements in an attempt to find the needed stability. These movements are Romanticism and Victorianism, to which both Woolf and Swift go back through means of intertextuality. In *Ever After* by Graham Swift, Bill Unwin goes through his Victorian ancestor's diary in order to better understand his own existential crisis. In Woolf's novel *The Voyage Out*, there is a similar existential crisis going on for Rachel, and throughout this novel traditional Victorian values are visible, regarding the role of women and their trajectory in life.

Regarding the going back to previous literary movement, first of all, solitude is shared among Modernism, Postmodernism, as well as Romanticism and Victorianism. With Romantic poetry, solitude meant that the artist was feeling lonely (Kermode 2020), and, thus, more prone to confession to the reader. According to Malcolm (2003), the characters in Swift's novels confess to the reader. Woolf's characters are also more open to the reader, since they are introverted in her novels as well.

With respect to all novels by Graham Swift, we can notice that the characters' solitude reminds of that of Romantic lyric poetry:

> the popular idea of the solitary poet, at once wanderer and wonderer. *The Solitary Reaper* [...] records the poet's response to a figure of complete self-sufficiency, whose striking isolation makes a similarly powerful impression on the reader's imagination [...] (Stafford 2012: 36).

As examples from Woolf's novels, we can see the difficulties in communication between Clarissa in *Mrs Dalloway* and her husband Richard Dalloway. Richard Dalloway himself "struggles and subsequently fails to verbalise his romantic feelings for his wife" (Delgado Garcia 2010: 19). Clarissa also has difficulties in communicating with Peter Walsh, the one she had been in love with in her youth: "For they might be parted for hundreds of years, she and Peter; she never wrote a letter and his were dry sticks". At the same time, Clarissa shows an individualistic mindset related to marriage:

> For in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him. (Where was he this morning for instance? Some committee, she never asked what.) But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. (Woolf 2002)

Thus, Clarissa is described as looking for independence within marriage, but also for a need to feel understood with her valuing her sense of privacy at times.

In Swift's novels, we encounter the same theme of solitude in relationships. First of all, we notice the same issues of communication among the characters, such as when it comes to Tom Crick in *Waterland*, when we notice that his pupils do not truly understand him, as they belong to a different generation. We can notice the impossibility of reconciling public and private lives in Swift's novels, which was a Romantic ideal (Lang 1982).

In the novel *Out of This World*, similarly, all the characters speak to themselves, but are not understood by the others. The same happens in the novel *The Sweetshop Owner*, where William Chapman is not understood by his wife and by his daughter, and does not communicate well with them. Conflictual relations lead to the characters' isolation. For instance, we can find the conflict between parents and children in the novels *Shuttlecock*, *Last Orders*, *Out of This World*, *The Light of Day*, *Mothering Sunday*, and *Here We Are*. In the novels *Wish You Were Here*, *The Sweetshop Owner*, *Last Orders*, *Shuttlecock*, and *Ever After* we can witness the conflict between husband and wife. In *Out of This World* by Swift, there are various relationships where there is conflict and lack of understanding: between Harry and his father, between Harry and his wife, Anna, and between Harry and his daughter. Each of the characters is alone in his/her exploration of personal identity and relationship with the others. This fact is underlined through the way the story is told, through the characters' inner monologues.

Rachel in *The Voyage Out* wishes for honesty in communication: "It appeared that nobody ever said a thing they meant, or ever talked about a feeling they felt, but that was what music was for." (Woolf 2006: 29). As a result, she retreats into her own world, and only confesses her feelings and impressions to the reader. At times, she does not feel part of a crowd and, thus, not understood by the others, which leads to her sense of separation from the others:

> Rachel looked round. She felt herself surrounded, like a child at a

party, by the faces of strangers all hostile to her, with hooked noses and sneering, indifferent eyes. She was by a window, she pushed it open with a jerk, and stepped out into the garden. Her eyes swam with tears of rage. (Woolf 2006: 30)

Since she feels distant from the others, this is all the more highlighted through presenting her lyrical monologue by using third-person narration.

Rachel dies since she rejects all the norms imposed on her through collectivist, and not individualist, values, of her time:

> Rachel as an out of time, out of place heroine does not fit into her surroundings emotionally, physically, or intellectually. She is not like the other characters, she feels apart from them and they sense this, she does not communicate well with them, and she has intense aversions to what her contemporaries consider the normal life for a young woman. She is not 'avant garde', but neither is she a character of a previous time. Her early development is suppressed […], her education is incomplete and based on irrelevancies, and she doesn't have a clear vision of a future that is meaningful. Woolf very systematically places Rachel opposite characters that are in time and in place, and in the end Woolf has no choice but to write Rachel's death because Rachel never finds the time or place where she fits in. (Walker 1998:1).

Thus, Rachel is a character that does not fit in with what collectivist norms have set out for her. In her turning towards individualistic values, she meets the opposition of a society that is still, mostly, collectivistic.

In Swift's novels *The Sweetshop Owner* and *Mothering Sunday*, there is a similar situation regarding restrictions on someone's life and relationships imposed by society. In *The Sweetshop Owner*, Irene's family never listens to what she wants, and they force her to get married. They impose Hancock on her, who rapes her. She eventually manages to choose William as a husband, only to escape her family and have a feeling that she can have her own, independent choice, to some extent. Like Rachel, Irene is pressured to have a certain lifestyle by her rigid family, and she feels trapped by the rules and norms of the society she lives in. Marriage is, in Swift's novel, as well as in Woolf's, a factor restricting the freedom of the woman. In *Mothering Sunday*, strict rules do not allow marriage and a relationship between the maid and the son of an aristocratic family. The son himself is forced into an arranged marriage. The result is tragic, since he has a car accident on the way to his fiancée. The ending is similar with *The Voyage Out*, only

that this time it is the male character that dies, and the female character lives a long life, and becomes accomplished as a writer. Irene in *The Sweetshop Owner* is sick and has a sad, isolated life, also making her husband sad and isolated. Irene dies a slow death, unlike Rachel, while both get sick before dying, and in both cases a connection with their unhappiness can be established.

Rachel cannot find means of adapting to this world, so she dies. Here the Modernist mindset is visible, since, when it came to the Romantics, a balance was supposed to be achieved between public and private lives, which does not occur in the case of Rachel:

> But because Romanticism also inherited the 18th-century idea of social sympathy, Romantic solitude existed in a dialectical relationship with sociability — if less for Rousseau and still less for Thoreau, the most famous solitary of all, then certainly for Wordsworth, Melville, Whitman, and many others. For Emerson, "the soul environs itself with friends, that it may enter into a grander self-acquaintance or solitude; and it goes alone, for a season, that it may exalt its conversation or society." The Romantic practice of solitude is neatly captured by Trilling's "sincerity": the belief that the self is validated by a congruity of public appearance and private essence, one that stabilizes its relationship with both itself and others. (Deresiewicz 2009)

The balance between private and public life, between what she wants and what her family force her to do, does not happen in the case of Irene as well. The male character in *Mothering Sunday* who is in love with the maid has a fast death in the form of the car accident while on the way to the fiancée chosen by his family. His death can be interpreted as a form of protest and revenge, although it was not intentional, just like in the case of Rachel.

As a result of the impossibility of achieving private and public life balance, Rachel's story can be seen as going towards the Modernist path of understanding solitude, since Modernism's

> notion of solitude was harsher, more adversarial, more isolating. As a model of the self and its interactions, Hume's social sympathy gave way to Pater's thick wall of personality and Freud's narcissism — the sense that the soul, self-enclosed and inaccessible to others, can't choose but be alone. (Deresiewicz 2009)

What is more, Rachel and Terence discover that no honest communication is possible. This is a common problem with couples in Woolf's novels. Lucrezia and Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway* also deal with

the same issue. We can also witness in their case the same problem of failing to reconcile public and private lives as sustained by the Romantics. As an example we can look at Lucrezia's thoughts regarding her life with Septimus, while he is suffering from shell-shock:

> To love makes one solitary, she thought. She could tell nobody, not even Septimus now, and looking back, she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up, staring. And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now. (Woolf 2002)

As a result, Lucrezia feels alone, while Septimus also feels the same: "The most acute lack of connection with other selves is found in Septimus." (Delgado Garcia 2010: 19). Each of them have their own reasons, as Septimus has lost, during the war, his friend Evans, and Lucrezia has lost the connection to her husband, as presented in the quotations from Woolf's novel selected by Delgado Garcia (2010: 19): "Lucrezia's isolation in dealing with her husband's post-traumatic stress disorder is repeatedly expressed, for instance: 'I am alone; I am alone! she cried' (Woolf 2000: 20), and: 'she was very lonely, she was very unhappy!' (Woolf 2000: 76)."

In the same situation of difficult communication we can find other characters in Woolf's novels, such as Rose in the novel *The Years*, who will eventually go through an individualist phase, while sustaining the rights of women in her adult years.

The wish to connect to one another is highlighted by Pasold (104): "love may bridge the natural gap between human beings, as Eleanor says: 'Anyhow, she thought, they are aware of each other, they live in each other; what else is love, she asked, listening to their laughter' (*The Years,* p. 282)."

The same concern with solitude can be seen in the relationship of Flush and Elizabeth Barrett, in the novel titled *Flush* by Woolf. Flush, the cocker spaniel, feels he cannot truly communicate with his mistress: "What was horrible to Flush, as they talked, was his loneliness. Once he had felt that he and Miss Barrett were together, in a firelit cave. Now the cave was no longer firelit; it was dark and damp; Miss Barrett was outside." This happens after Mr Browning appears, and all the attention of Elizabeth is taken over by her feelings of love for the poet. At this point, the cocker spaniel feels neglected, and also jealous of Mr Browning. The situation reminds of the one found in Swift's novel *Wish You Were Here*, where the wife ends up feeling she cannot communicate with her husband due to the ghost of his dead brother, who was killed in the war. At the same time, the husband does

not feel understood by his wife in his grief.

In the case of Orlando, in the novel with the same title, solitude feels like a part of the character's identity. Orlando prefers solitude, like any Romantic poet:

> He was careful to avoid meeting anyone. There was Stubbs, the gardener, coming along the path. He hid behind a tree till he had passed. [...] There is perhaps a kinship among qualities; one draws another along with it; and the biographer should here call attention to the fact that this clumsiness is often mated with a love of solitude. Having stumbled over a chest, Orlando naturally loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone. (Woolf 1998: 8)

Jacob is another solitary character in Woolf's novel, *Jacob's Room*, who sees solitude as impossible to get over with: "the individual is never able to form a lasting relationship and remains isolated in a world where it is impossible to ever really know another." (Long 1975)

Another novel dealing with a similar issue, between lack of communication (Mills 33-34) and conflict between public and private lives is *Between the Acts*. Conversation appears as fragmented:

> the fragmented nature of much speech, both in the intervals and in the pageant itself. At the end of one interval, "the audience turned to one another and began to talk. Scraps and fragments reached Miss La Trobe" (p. 90). In the final scene of the pageant, all the participants appeared, with each declaiming some phrase or fragment from their parts (p. 134). (Mills 33-34).

Thus, the characters' vision of history is fragmented, as well as chaotic. They cannot arrange history in a coherent way, and what they have retained from it are only disparate episodes. The links among events are not clear in their minds.

The chaotic, fragmented world encountered in Woolf's novels is also found in Swift's novels. The characters may feel not completely understood in their relationships or even imprisoned. For instance, in *The Light of Day*, Sarah and George Webb's relationship is described in terms of imprisonment and mutual dependency. George Webb's life feels chaotic due to losing his job and also his wife. Such a change makes him analyse his life and try to better understand who he is and what he wants. In *Last Orders*, while on a trip to scatter the ashes of their friend Jack at Margate, his friends reflect on the various moments of their lives together with their friend. The reader finds out that Jack and his wife had some difficulties in communication, and had not felt

understood in their relationship.

In *Night and Day*, we encounter the same difficulties of communication, for instance, between Katherine and William Rodney. Katherine's difficulties, however, are temporary, as she will eventually marry someone else.

The novel *The Waves* illustrates the search for identity, according to Li (2011: 78):

> The monologues of the six characters reveal the modern man's search for the self. In the modern world, everyone feels alone. For example, Rhoda said, 'Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness' (Woolf 2000: 23).

As far as the novel *To the Lighthouse* is concerned, we can notice a lack of communication and connection among the characters:

> In the long interior monologues of the characters, a sense of disconnection is born; Mr. Ramsay emerges as a philosopher alienated by his own thoughts, unable to fulfill his responsibilities as a husband or a father; Lily finds herself isolated and frustrated by the restrictions and obligations society places on her, perceiving herself under constant attack by patriarchal men and the domestic woman, embodied in Mrs. Ramsay; James' Oedipal desire for attention leaves him feeling angered by his father and abandoned by his mother, a disposition that persists until the final pages of the narrative. (de la Cuesta)

The lack of connection among characters could be caused by the deprivation of free will that traditional societies imposed on individuals. Mostly, marriages were arranged, and also the characters were supposed to behave in a certain way, to live and think in a certain way, and respect the values imposed on them. When trying to actually express their own wishes and understanding themselves and their relationships, they find out that there is no mutual understanding between them and the others. The consequences of arranged marriages and relationships that are forced on the characters are suggested through these feelings of isolation. In presenting such relationships where communication is not possible, the novelists draw attention to the rising sense of individualism, and to the questioning of existing norms that restrict their individual freedom.

The mixture of genres (prose and poetry), together with intertextuality, as well as the subjectivity of the characters are all present in the lyrical novel (Drobot 2014).

In conclusion, the novels by Woolf and Swift combine various ideologies, which exist at the time they are writing their novels. In some novels, the readers notice the conflict between traditional values and tendency towards modern values. Clinging to traditional values means restricting the freedom of the new generation, which ends, most of the times, in a tragic way. This happens in order to underline the deprivation of individual freedom and the way the individual cannot realize his/her dreams, due to the restrictions imposed by the collectivist culture. The death of the characters is a figurative form of expressing their individuality being killed by the norms of society, which end up wishing to make everyone look and behave in the same way. The most commonly discussed ideology in their novels is that of libertarianism, in the form of expressing increasing individualism. This leads to subjectivism, and questioning of objective reality. This latter aspect is expressed in their fiction, together with the fact that their stories are told from the point of view of the characters.

Thus, there is no objective truth, and the characters can express their own, individual views on the story. Since everything is subjective, we can correlate the experience of the characters with both lyricism and individualism. The characters are individualized, and they are, most of the time, at odds with the values imposed on them by society or by their family.

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The Sinister Aspects of Solitude: Corrupted Loners in Flannery O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First"

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Abstract

Offering a close reading of Flannery O'Connor's short story, "The Lame Shall Enter First," and drawing on concepts of social psychology, this paper argues that the tragic outcome of the interactions between the three protagonists is due to their extended solitude and isolation from other people. Due to their long-term solitude, they have suffered emotional, moral or intellectual damage, which results in mutually destructive social interactions when they intermittently take place. In addition to this aspect of isolation, the clash of beliefs and attitudes is also examined as a contributing factor to the ensuing disaster.

Key words: O'Connor, loneliness, grief, altruism, compassion

The concept of solitude, aloneness and loneliness are separate but related ones. Solitude is defined as "that state or condition of living alone . . . without the pain of loneliness or isolation being an intrinsic component of that state or condition" (Gotesky 236). Thus, the main difference between the two according to this definition is that solitude is not associated with negative emotions, and it also denotes the fact of being without companions. As Mijuskovic explains, Gotesky's matrix clearly distinguishes between aloneness, loneliness, isolation and

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solitude: the first is neutral, the second and the third are negative and the last one is a condition of positive value (62-65).

Based on such conceptualisations that favourably contrasted it with loneliness, solitude has become increasingly linked with positive emotions and outcomes. Margalit describes solitude as the necessary context and requisite for individual freedom. She also highlights the role of solitude in fostering creativity by allowing the individual to establish new connections between ideas, thus developing novel patterns of thought (10). While some authors in the field define solitude as a state that is chosen willingly (Margalit 38). others stipulate that solitude is simply the state of being alone, regardless of the individual's preferences (Baltus 285). In contrast with solitude, loneliness indicates a subjective, psychological state of distress due to a perceived insufficiency of social interactions or intimate interrelations: this state is unwanted and undesirable (Baltus 285; Margalit 9). Moreover, loneliness can be experienced while in the company of others (Margalit 9). A third related term is aloneness, which is sometimes used synonymously with solitude. (Baltus 285). Gotesky conceptualises aloneness as a neutral experience that might evolve into alienation if negative emotions emerge: this alienation either manifests itself as loneliness or as isolation (219).

In spite of the apparent consensus in terms of regarding solitude as a condition of positive value, some theorists, while accepting the fundamentally beneficial nature of solitude, still strike a note of caution, drawing attention to the dangers inherent in it: "Although a person cannot will an experience of nothingness, solitude makes it more likely to occur. Many people have difficulty with solitude because the nothingness in solitude often precedes the fulfillment of being in solitude" (Kraft 39). Kraft's notion of nothingness indicates a person's inability to make sense of life events (139) and put these in a coherent narrative, thus constructing a stable sense of self. Hence, Kraft seems to suggest that without social interrelations and interactions, our very sense of self might become threatened.

The lack of social connections, as demonstrated by Cacioppo and Patrick, causes a sensation akin to physical pain since the same region of the brain is activated when the person feels rejected. As they explain, the "social pain" of loneliness evolved in humans to call attention to the very real danger of being left alone, as it meant deprivation of assistance and protection by others – a similar instinct "to maintain proximity" is also observed in all mammals. Also, in ancient societies, one of the the most severe punishments was exile

from the community, and traces of this form of chastisement survives in the solitary confinement of prisoners. What is more, since the uniquely human ability of complex cognition was developed via social exchange, a person's very ability to think clearly may be adversely affected by a sense of being alone (8-11).

In the face of such compelling evidence from neuroscience and psychology, the increasingly strong endorsement of solitude by both experts and journalists today – and such commendations started to be voiced well before the pandemic – seems baffling. One possible explanation presents itself by the insistent emphasis that most writings commending solitude lay on its role in artistic creation. The conceptualisation of the artist as a solitary creator originates in the ideas of Romanticism, specifically, in the seminal ideas of Burke and Kant who both dealt with the two contrasting categories of the beautiful and the sublime and coupled the former with society and the latter with the individual who is isolated either by the fact of his solitude or separated from others by his own superior qualities (Ferguson 3). The notion of the solitary and heroic individual who is able to transcend himself and connect with God or Nature more intimately than the average person found the perfect exemplar in the figure of the creative artist, who was able to recognise and recreate the sublime. Although this conceptualisation of individuation marked a crucial stage in the development of Western thinking, for the writer of the twentieth century, it proved to be constricting, even debilitating, in its lofty, perfectionist agenda.

One mid-twentieth-century writer who took issue with this romanticised idea of the solitary writer was Flannery O'Connor:

> There is one myth about writers that I have always felt was particularly pernicious and untruthful – the myth of the "lonely writer," the myth that writing is a lonely occupation, involving much suffering because, supposedly, the writer exists in a state of sensitivity which cuts him off, or raises him above, or casts him below the community around him. This is a common cliché, a hangover probably from the romantic period and the idea of the artist as a Sufferer and a Rebel. . . . The isolated imagination is easily corrupted by theory, but the writer inside his community seldom has such a problem. (1970, 52-54)

O'Connor ensconces her critique of the Romantic concept of the solitary genius in the political context of the defeated and denigrated South. She gives voice to her conviction that valuable literary works can only be written by authors who feel part of their local community, who are in touch with the issues that matter to the people around

them and whose identity is rooted in their own local culture. She argues that communication must be the goal of writing and communication is only possible in the context of others, in a community: that is why the writer must belong. It is the alienated writer who "feels the need of expatriation" – a tendency she observes in numerous contemporary American writers who wallow in their self-imposed loneliness. Such aloofness, O'Connor argues, comes at the price of losing touch with factual reality and common experience (1970, 52-53), which might result in a certain hollowness at the heart of such writing.

The idea that belonging and solidarity are prerequisites for not only a depth of feeling but also for an adequate degree of "common sense" is a recurrent one in many of O'Connor's short stories. The conjunction of compassion and morality is certainly arguable. Morality is often oriented towards, and even made possible by, the recognition of the individual that they are part of a community towards the members of which they are responsible to some degree. Numerous philosophers have dealt with this connection between ethics and community. Perhaps one of the most enduring and relevant today is John Stuart Mill's quintessential assertion that the boundaries of individual freedom are determined by those points at which it infringes the liberty of other people (Mill 12-13). Therefore, it can be seen that even a fiercely individualist political philosophy as liberalism recognises the individual's responsibility to the community. This example illustrates the essentially social nature of all ethical considerations, and conversely, all social interactions involve moral aspects and choices between right and wrong (Smith et al. 559). When O'Connor takes issue with the exalted superiority of the solitary hero, she goes against a long-established tradition in American fiction, in much of which the protagonists "enjoy the dignity, and suffer the terror, of perfect freedom." Ragen argues that O'Connor's characters are never completely isolated because they are pursued by "God's enascapable love" (9). While their freedom is thus limited and, in a cosmic sense, they are spared complete isolation, I contend that some of O'Connor's characters are severely alienated from the social world, from the community around them, either because of their outcast and underprivileged status or by an assumption of their own intellectual superiority.

The idea that an individual cannot contribute anything of value to the world unless they feel part of a community is crucial to O'Connor's short story "The Lame Shall Enter First." The three protagonists are all very isolated characters. While not all of them

experience loneliness, each is considerably damaged – morally, emotionally and intellectually – by their extended state of solitude. This paper argues that solitude – the fact of spending much time alone – is represented in O'Connor's "The Lame Shall Enter First" as a perniciously detrimental condition that significantly harms social interaction, when this sporadically or eventually occurs, thereby causing psychological – and even physical – destruction to either the self or others.

Most of the story is focalised through the consciousness of Sheppard, a young widower with a ten-year-old son, Norton. Both are introduced though their interactions at breakfast: just as Norton's initial characterisation is provided by the father's short interior monologue, Sheppard himself seems to be summed up in what he thinks of his son: "The boy's future was written in his face. He would be a banker. No, worse, He would operate a small loan company. All he wanted for the child was that he be good and unselfish and neither seemed likely" (O'Connor 445). The reader's first impression is that Sheppard must be a very "good" and altruistic person since these are the qualities he values the most, while he despises greed, and also because of the narrator's simile between his white hair and a saint's halo. In the opening breakfast scene, Sheppard is observing his son having breakfast disapprovingly, taking the fact that the child is eating a small piece of stale cake with peanut butter and ketchup as solid evidence of his selfishness, and talking to him about a young delinquent he gives counselling to at the reformatory where he does voluntary work.

He proceeds to contrast the abject poverty and underprivileged background of the delinquent – Rufus Johnson – and the apparent abundance and advantages that Norton enjoys. He wants to impress the boy with the plight of the underprivileged and registers with growing annoyance that the child remains completely unmoved. Sheppard starts listing Johnson's misfortunes, including Johnson's mother being in prison. At this, the child suddenly breaks out sobbing: "'If she was in the penitentiary,' he began in a kind of racking bellow, 'I could go to seeeeee her.' Tears rolled down his face and the ketchup dribbled on his chin. He looked as if he had been hit in the mouth" (O'Connor 447). At this point, the reader realises for the first time that Norton was deeply attached to his mother and he must be undergoing excruciating psychological pain, having lost her at such a tender age. Also, his father does not seem to be of much emotional comfort to him: Sheppard is "helpless and miserable" when confronted with the child's violent pain, which strikes him as "some elemental force of

nature." Even though he feels that the unexpected and uncontrollable manifestations of the boy's grief are "racking" and "agonizing," he is unwilling or unable to show him affection. The only solace he can offer is the advice of doing good deeds to help others, and he also presents himself as a role model in doing so. Although this sounds like wise advice, a few disquieting incongruities in Sheppard's attitude and way of thinking emerge from this opening scene.

The first oddity concerns Sheppard's advice to his son. It is commonly recommended to people who are engulfed in sorrow and self-pity to turn their attention to others, recognise their suffering and try to help them, thereby alleviating their own pain. However, according to social psychology, such behaviour is not altruistic since it is motivated by egoistic desires for personal rewards – even if the reward in this case is that it allows the helper to increase their sense of mastery, to feel good about themselves. In order to qualify as an altruistic deed, helping must be motivated by the desire to increase another's well-being without regard for any benefit for the helper (Smith et al. 169). Dovidio and Penner sum up the main difference between the two types of motivation to provide assistance to others: "Whereas sadness and personal distress produce egoistic motivations to help, empathic concern creates altruistic motivation" (170). In other words, helping is morally right only if it is prompted by compassion.

According to this conceptualisation of the motives for helping, Sheppard's words seem to indicate that he is motivated by selfish reasons to help others: his voluntary work as counsellor at the reformatory serves the function of coping mechanism to deal with his grief. Thus, his disapproving assessment of Norton as selfish because the child does not engage in charitable work becomes questionable. Although Norton seems to have adopted a coping mechanism of his own – selling seeds to win a thousand-dollar reward – to Sheppard's mind, this petty mercenary activity is very unfavourably contrasted with his own high-minded voluntary work, and as such, becomes another piece of evidence to support his condemnation of the child as utterly egoistic.

What is more, after the child's violent outburst of grief at his father's tactless remark, Sheppard still persists in pushing his charitable agenda on the child, prodding him to give away his prospective prize money to "children less fortunate than yourself:" "Wouldn't you like to buy poor Rufus Johnson a new shoe?" (O'Connor 448). In answer to this question, Norton leans over his plate and vomits up all he has eaten for breakfast – all the food that

Sheppard has begrudged him. Similarly to his fit of crying, this reaction is also viscerally "natural:" a straightforward and elemental, nonverbal response to his father's preoccupation with other children's well-being. Yet even Norton's being sick does not move him, instead serves as further evidence of his son's undeservingness: "his own child, selfish, unresponsive, greedy, had so much that he threw it up. . . . Johnson had a capacity for real response and had been deprived of everything from birth; Norton was average or below and had had every advantage" (O'Connor 449). Sheppard's moral disapproval of Norton as selfish seems to be compounded, at this point, with a general contempt for the boy, not only for his perceived character deficiencies but also for his supposed dumbness. From now on, it is becoming increasingly clear that Sheppard is not only obsessed with the plight of young delinquents but also with the idea of intellectual superiority.

Sheppard's fixation on this particular delinquent teenager can be explained by the circumstance that Johnson appears to represent both emblematic figures so dear to Sheppard's mindset: the underprivileged orphan and the misunderstood genius – both of whom are eminently deserving of help. In contrast, Norton does not deserve any care and attention since he is responsible for his own moral and intellectual torpor, being too lazy to use "every advantage." The notion of deservingness, in social psychology, denotes the perception that an individual genuinely needs and merits assistance. When assessing deservingness, people often rely on their attributions made about controllability: whether the person who is in trouble could have prevented the misfortune, or their plight is entirely due to external circumstances. In the latter case, people think the individual deserves help and are more likely to provide this assistance. Groups of people typically judged deserving are the elderly, the disabled (Smith et al. 530) and poor or orphaned children. Rufus, who is fatherless, destitute and also has a club foot, ticks almost all of these categories, in addition to his apparently outstanding intellect which Sheppard values so highly. Nevertheless, even a socio-psychological explanation fails to account for the fact that Sheppard judges his own child, who is also a half-orphan and much younger than Rufus, completely unworthy of sympathy and care: as Smith et al. explain, people usually prioritise their own relatives when deciding whom to help (Smith et al. 536). Browning explains the father's unwillingness to recognise Norton's need for help by Sheppard's inordinate desire to see himself as uncompromisingly altruistic: his idea of selflessness demand that he must help those who have no "claim upon him" such

as his own son has (121).

Having presented Sheppard's peculiarly aloof and contemptuous attitude towards his son and his obsession with helping the unfortunate, the narration moves on to introduce another fixation of Sheppard's: the adulation of superior intellect. It is the boy's I.Q. score of 140 that first piques Sheppard's interest. A flashback to their first counselling session gives the reader a sense of the nature of the interactions between the two people: while Sheppard tries to win the boy over with flattery and encouragement, Johnson behaves in a stand-offish, contemptuous and slightly hostile manner. Noticing the deformed foot, Sheppard immediately comes to the conclusion that the reason for the boy's acts of "senseless destruction" of private and public property must be this minor but very obtrusive disability. However, Johnson tells him otherwise: "A black sheen appeared in the boy's eyes. 'Satan,' he said. 'He has me in his power.' . . . [Sheppard] felt a momentary dull despair as if he were faced with some elemental warping of nature that had happened too long ago to be corrected now" (O'Connor 450-451). Again, Sheppard is confronted with an "elemental" human passion and again he is baffled and helpless. Apparently, Sheppard is ill- equipped to deal with instinctive, crude emotions uninformed by the intellect. As Seel contends: "Sheppard is a man dangerously cut off from his instinctual, libidinal core" (148), which is another sign that his philanthropy is not motivated by deeply-felt compassion but rather by excessive intellectualism, which is made clear in his response to the boy. His contemptuous dismissal of the supernatural conveys that he, Sheppard, is the one who is too clever to believe in the transcendent dimension to life and, by way of refutation, he immediately contrasts it with science. Sheppard refuses to acknowledge any instinctive or intuitive knowledge such as this first glimpse into the total depravity of the young delinquent, his "elemental warping of nature": he explains it away so that he does not have to deal with what he does not understand.

The way in which Sheppard deals with Johnson and his son has many similarities: in both cases, he tries to spoonfeed them his own ideas about what they should think and how they should live their lives: for the clever boy, scientific pursuits are recommended, for the dumb one, philanthropy. By concentrating on influencing their minds in the direction he sees fit, he ignores the boys' own peculiar dispositions. He shows only a superficial interest in the boys' motivations, but after a few questions about their plans he goes on to push his own agenda on them. That is why he does not notice that

Norton's small-scale money-making activity is pursued to divert the boy's attention from his constant emotional pain and that Johnson's high I.Q. score is not coupled with any intellectual curiosity. He fails to notice that Johnson, however underprivileged, is a ruthless predator, and his son, however many advantages he has, is a sensitive, vulnerable child, undergoing a severe emotional crisis and extreme loneliness.

This situation is ripe for tragedy as soon as Johnson is invited to Sheppard's house. Having been given a key to the house by Sheppard, Johnson lets himself in. The moments before Johnson enters the house are described in terms of impending doom and it also highlights Norton's absolute solitude: "Norton was alone in the house, squatting on the floor of his room arranging packages of flower seeds in rows around himself. He squatted motionless like large pale frog in the midst of this potential garden. . . . The silence was heavy as if the downpour had been hushed by violence" (O'Connor 452). Norton is presented here as a gardener, associated with flowers – however, flowers that are only "potential": this foreshadows that he may not live to plant the seeds or see these flowers blossom, and also that the sensitive and flower-like beauty of his nature is not perceived or recognised by his environment. The image of him as a toad in the garden is also indicative of feeling unwanted: out of place and unwelcome in his own home.

When he is confronted with Johnson, the older boy intimidates him with a subtle threat referring to his brick-like orthopaedic shoe. Johnson deftly turns his disability into a weapon: indeed, it becomes apparent that his clubfoot has grown to be part of his identity as Satan's accomplice. Behaving like a bully, he makes Norton serve him food, then proceeds to talk disparagingly about Norton's father, indicating that Sheppard is stupid. When Norton protests that his father is a good person, Johnson replies with ferocious anger: "I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't *right*!" (O'Connor 454). Johnson's peculiar distinction between "good" and "right" is crucial to the main conflicts and tragic misinterpretations in this short story. What Johnson seems to hint at is that Sheppard is going about doing charitable work and trying to inculcate altruistic and intellectual inclinations in young people, yet this "goodness" is dished out indiscriminately, without proper attention to, and understanding of, the real inclinations and needs of the people he is trying to help. Indeed, Sheppard is unable to deal with actual people, instead, he reduces them to "an abstract image" of themselves (Browning 121-122) and then proceeds to manipulate these cutpaper figures as a

benevolent puppetmaster.

When Sheppard arrives, Johnson changes tactics, making a show of being engrossed in studying a thick book. Sheppard is completely duped by this stage-setting cunningly engineered by the delinquent: "The wall behind [Johnson] was lined with books from floor to ceiling. . . . This was the perfect setting for the boy" (O'Connor 456). As Sheppard is deliberating how to persuade the still quite disagreeable boy to stay at their house, he finds Norton in the closet, evidently hiding from Johnson: "An old grey winter coat of his wife's still hung there. He pushed it aside but it didn't move. He pulled it open roughly and winced as if he had seen the larva inside a cocoon. Norton stood in it, his face swollen and pale, with a drugged look of misery on it" (O'Connor 457). Sheppard's annoyance at the sight of his wife's coat and his impatience to move it out of sight betrays his desire to forget about her. The metaphor of Norton as the larva inside the cocoon of his mother's coat indicates that Sheppard's wilful neglect and his growing dislike of the child may be due to Norton's constantly reminding him of his dead wife, which prevents him from starting his life anew.

Using Norton as an excuse, Sheppard begs Johnson to stay with them: he declares that "we need another boy in the house" to teach Norton "what it means to share." Sheppard's "genuine desperation" at this moment is fuelled by his growing aversion to Norton: his proposal sounds like an attempt to replace him with "another boy." When Norton furiously denounces Johnson for his rummaging among his mother's belongings and his disparaging remarks about his father, Sheppard gives a little speech, declaring that "If I can help a person, all I want is to do it. I'm above and beyond simple pettiness" (O'Connor 458). Instead of being angry at Norton for tattling about him, Johnson's fury is directed at Sheppard, whose "altruistic" behaviour is clearly a tool for inflating his ego, his image of himself as a great benefactor of mankind. As Edmondson observes, it follows from Sheppard's atheistic outlook on life that he replaces the deity with himself (101).

Although Johnson seems to hate Sheppard but not Norton, as soon as he glimpses a chance to get a hold over the boy and use his power to harm him, he does so. The occasion arises when they try out the new telescope Sheppard has bought for Johnson. For Sheppard, the rational humanitarian, the telescope is an instrument for man's ultimate conquest of the stars – the crowning achievement of science (Spivey 67). The implication is that man may become like God – omniscient and omnipotent, an underlying principle of Sheppard's

scientific humanitarianism. As Rufus turns the conversation to one of his favourite topics, hell and everlasting damnation, Norton begins to question him whether his mother might be in hell. Sheppard tries to interfere with his benevolently rational explanations, in which he does not recognise the tactlessness bordering on cruelty: "'Your mother isn't anywhere.' His lot would have been easier if when his wife died he had told Norton she had gone to heaven and that some day he would see her again, but he could not allow himself to bring him up on a lie" (O'Connor 461). Sheppard did not tell this to Norton simply because he had no regard for the child's feelings. He does not have any compassion for the boy at this point, either: "Sheppard's pity turned to revulsion. The boy would rather she be in hell than nowhere" (O'Connor 462). Sheppard fails to take into account that a child cannot comprehend the finality of death, especially if the one who died is the one he loved the most. While he endures any number of insults, insolence and ridicule from Johnson, the slightest resistance on Norton's part drives him mad.

Johnson soon perceives that Norton's deepest desire is to reunite with the lost mother and that, by using this promise as bait, he can manipulate the boy and ultimately inflict punishment on his infuriatingly smug benefactor: "There was a narrow gleam in his eyes now like a beam holding steady on its target" (O'Connor 462). The distance between Norton and his father has been growing since Johnson was established in their home: "[Norton] appeared so far away that Sheppard might have been looking at him through the wrong end of the telescope" (O'Connor 460). The rope the child is absent-mindedly playing with foreshadows the tragic outcome of Johnson's influence.

In the days that follow, Sheppard notices the change in the two boys' relationship: a close bond seems to have been created by their common interest in the afterlife. Sheppard dismisses his momentary inkling that Rufus will have a bad influence on Norton: "Norton was not bright enough to be damaged much. . . . Why try to make him superior? Heaven and hell were for the mediocre, and he was that if he was anything" (O'Connor 463). Sheppard now seems to have completely abandoned his child to his fate, his merciless assessment of him as mediocre and the association between superiority, a high intellect and scientific knowledge betrays Sheppard's own sense of intellectual superiority to the rest of mankind: this signifies a lack of humility incompatible with true altruism he lays claim to. His assumption that his child is not clever enough to be corrupted much is especially cruel and it also shows his uncritical adulation of intellect

at the expense of other human qualities.

Shortly after this scene, Johnson is apprehended by the police because he was caught red-handed after another break-in and destruction of private property. Sheppard refuses to believe his denials so Johnson spends the night in jail. Even though he favours Johnson over his own child, sparing no expense to spoil him with new clothes, a telescope and ordering a new orthopaedic shoe for him, when Johnson pleads with him, he feels no compassion for him, either. It is only after the patrol car drives away that he, with an effort of the will, "summoned his compassion" (O'Connor 465). It seems that Sheppard is unable to feel genuine empathy towards other people. What Sheppard is most concerned about is whether he might be mistaken and Johnson is indeed unreformable, especially when the police reports further break-ins committed by the boy.

Subsequently, Sheppard pins all his hope of rehabilitating Johnson on the new orthopaedic shoe they are about to collect in a few days. Whitt draws attention to the symbolic significance of Johnson's clubfoot: for Sheppard, it represents the source of the adolescent's inferiority complex, but for the boy, it is the sign of his election as Satan's helper (142). However, he experiences the next, and probably the greatest, disappointment, when, having tried on the new shoe, Johnson refuses to wear it, even though it enables him to walk without putting his spine out of line. "It was as if he had given the boy a new spine" (O'Connor 470), he thinks delightedly, indulging for a moment in his Christ-like image of himself. When Johnson deprives him of this self-image as miracle-maker and healer, he cannot forgive him anymore. It becomes obvious that Sheppard's self-image has become inextricably linked with this Christ-like image and Johnson, by refusing to be healed by him, undermines this, forcing him to realise his own limitations, at best, and his total misguidedness, at worst.

When the police officer comes by for the third time, again suspecting Johnson of wrong-doing, Sheppard vehemently asserts that the boy has been with him all evening. After the officer leaves, however, Johnson shows his true colours to Sheppard: he confesses to doing all of the break-ins he has been accused of. When his vision of himself as a saviour crumbles, Sheppard becomes conscious of an intense feeling of hatred for Johnson and he also recognises that the defects he wanted to correct in the delinquent are integral parts of the teenager's make-up: "The pieced-together shoe appeared to grin at him with Johnson's own face. . . . He hated the shoe, hated the foot, hated the boy. . . . He was aghast at himself" (O'Connor 473). Despite

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his realisations of his true feelings for the boy, Sheppard still clings on to the appearance of being his benefactor: "'I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph.' 'Not when it ain't true,' the boy said. 'Not when it ain't right'" (O'Connor 474). Again, Johnson makes a distinction between "good" and "right" or "true," suggesting that "goodness" devoid of genuine emotions is not only counterproductive and harmful but also morally wrong, especially when its main aim is to serve the purpose of self-aggrandisation as is the case with Sheppard. As Browning sums up the main conflict in the story is the clash of "faith versus works": of Johnson's "demonic" and malignant belief and Sheppard's rationalised and self-serving good deeds (119). Sheppard now wishes for Johnson's departure although he still cannot bring himself to ask him openly to leave. He has come to regret bringing Johnson into their home and it seems to dawn on him that he started to engage in the project of saving Johnson partly in order to ease his own loneliness, but he still does not recognise the immensity of his error.

At the dinner table, Sheppard provokes an argument with Johnson about a Bible he is reading with Norton hunched beside him. However, he does not seem to have more compassion for his own son than formerly as he reacts to Johnson's flippant admission that they shoplifted the book with rage. Even though he notices that his son has changed considerably, he attributes it to the wrong reasons: "There was a strange new life in [Norton], the sign of new and more rugged vices" (O'Connor 476). Johnson has managed to call forth a dormant energy in the younger boy (Browning 122). Although by this time, Sheppard has realised that Johnson is too depraved to be reformed, he still clings to the notion that at least he was right about the boy being intelligent. Johnson is resolved, however, to dissipate his every illusion about the rationale of his charitable project: "'I ain't too intelligent,' the boy muttered. 'You don't know nothing about me'" (O'Connor 477). At the culmination of their heated argument, Sheppard finds the situation ripe for telling him to go: "At the door he paused, a small black figure on the threshold of some dark apocalypse. 'The devil has you in his power," he said in a jubilant voice and disappeared" (O'Connor 478). This is another one of the many forshadowings in the story that a tragedy is about to happen – and very soon, as the phrase "on the threshold" indicates.

Now even Sheppard senses the impending gloom over his home despite Johnson's departure. Again, he rationalises his intuition of danger by speculating about a potential vengeful attack on his home by Johnson, still not having an inkling of the damage wrought in the

mind of his own son. Apart from his poorly developed ability to empathise, perhaps the real hubris of Sheppard's character is his inability to face his own and other people's emotions and intuitions: as he intellectualises away all manifestations of the human psyche that is not linked to the intellect, he becomes blinded to the real, deep-seated motivations at work behind people's – including his own – actions and behaviour. This leads him to misjudge both himself and other people, which, in turn, also prevents him from relating to others in a meaningful way. This is the reason why he is an intensely isolated character even though he is presented as interacting with more people than the other two protagonists.

Set on edge by his premonitions, Sheppard goes up to the attic to ask Norton if he has seen Johnson. Even at this point, he only searches for and talks to his son when he is looking for the delinquent – although this time out of fear and suspicion. With "an unnatural brightness about his eyes," Norton excitedly announces that he has found "Mamma" through the telescope he has been peering through for the last few days: "Sheppard steadied himself in the door way. The jungle of shadows around the child thickened" (O'Connor 478). Norton calls out to him to "come and look" but again he does not respond to the child when he is reaching out to him. Instead, he again denies Norton's experience and belief, orders him strictly to go to bed, then leaves the boy alone.

A police car arrives at his house for the fourth time. They have apprehended Johnson, this time with solid evidence to send him to jail. Johnson's outrage at Sheppard's self-aggrandising behaviour and way of thinking outweighs all considerations for his own welfare: he deliberately gets caught in order to prove Sheppard, who has furnished him with an alibi on two earlier occasions, a liar. In his hatred of Sheppard, Johnson also insinuates that he attempted to molest him sexually. Sheppard wants to clear himself of the accusation before they take the delinquent away, but this only ratchets up Johnson's rage: "'I lie and steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a thing to do with it! The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me . . .'" (O'Connor 480). It becomes apparent that Sheppard not only wants to preserve his self-image as a benefactor but he is also anxious that others see him as such. As soon as his reputation as an upright man is threatened, he "comes down one step" from his assumed air of indifference to other people's opinion of him and makes a a "desperate effort to save himself." Johnson managed to completely demolish Sheppard's identity as a Christ-like saviour: his old self is about to die.

Yet there is one more realisation to make before he can grasp the full immensity of his hubris. "'I have nothing to reproach myself with,' he repeated. His voice sounded dry and harsh. 'I did more for him than I did for my own child.' He was swept with a sudden panic. He heard the boy's jubilant voice. Satan has you in his power" (O'Connor 481). The realisation of how fatally he misjudged himself, his own son and Johnson flashes at him like a revelation.

As he remembers his last glimpse of Norton as he was sitting at the telescope, he becomes aware that he, Sheppard, needs saving, too, and he can only be saved by his son's love: "A rush of agonizing love for the child rushed over him like a transfusion of life." However, this epiphany comes too late. The tragedy of the child's suicide is compounded with the fact he committed it with the help of the telescope: the tool he meant to be a means of salvation for one boy, turned out to be the instrument of death for the other and not only because he used it to execute his suicide but also because it served as a means of the child's growing obsession with life after death.

The ending of the story is particularly unsettling not only because of the suicide of a neglected, motherless child but also because of the harsh indictment of Sheppard, "who is, by conventional standards, very good" (Simon 50). Simon argues that an in-depth examination of innermost motifs are indispensable in order to avoid the devastating consequences of self-deception such as Sheppard must confront – a moral imperative that applies to religious as well as secular approaches to purportedly altruistic deeds (50-51). Any attempt to deny the existence of evil, O'Connor seems to suggest, results only in the extended dominion of sinister forces.

The tragic outcome of the interactions between these three solitary protagonists is essentially due to their isolation from other people. It is due to their being cut off from a nurturing community that these characters flounder in their own excessive, distorted beliefs. Spivey defines the main conflict in the story as one between hypocrisy and fundamentalism: "a decaying humanitarianism, which, as [Rufus] says in effect, does good for people but is not based on truth, and . . . a religious fanaticism that holds to truth but does no good" (66). Thus, it is both faith and action that is required to achieve a true closeness to people.

Sheppard's delusions about himself as a Saviour is due to his loneliness after his wife's death as he himself acknowledges: "He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton" (O'Connor 481). He also realises quite early on that, while his wife was alive, he "had never noticed . . . that the child was selfish" (O'Connor 446). It

is not only the misguided image of himself as benefactor that emerges as a result of his grief but, even more importantly, his inability to pay attention to other people, observe them carefully and make the right judgements about them – all of these stem from his grief and resulting depression. Also, his need to construct this inflated self-image might be connected to low self-esteem, which, in turn, is also linked to grief, as psychological research demonstrates a close relationship between "the dissolution of social bonds" experienced as rejection, the resulting loneliness and low sense of self-worth (Leary 120). Norton is obviously the most forlorn and neglected character out of the three protagonists. Blinded to reality by his grief and unable to bear the pain alone – as he must since his father has rejected and abandoned him – the child is gradually driven insane by his desire to be loved: Johnson's distorted teachings about the Bible and the afterlife only gives him a final push towards self-destructive madness.

The most enigmatic figure of the three is Johnson, for whose motives throughout the story is difficult to find a consistent explanation. His solitude and isolation are emphasised the most by Sheppard. Although he does not feel lonely on that account, he has been deformed by his isolation in the most spectacular manner: envisioning himself as the envoy of Satan who might just get saved in the nick of time due to his disability. It would be easy for him, with a little diplomacy, to humour Sheppard's delusion and thus remain well-fed, well-clad and safe in Sheppard's home, as a sort of adopted son, who is preferred to Sheppard's own flesh and blood. His outbursts of straightforward confessions and revelations can only be accounted for by an irrepressible fury at Sheppard's hypocrisy and self-delusion – however, this is only a partial explanation since other people around Sheppard seems to tolerate his Christ-complex quite well. The other possibility seems to be a symbolic-supernatural explanation according to which Johnson is an incarnation of, or at least, has been possessed by, the Devil just like he asserts repeatedly and how Sheppard himself comes to regard him during his epiphany.

What is certain is that the delinquent boy has a very sharp insight into the psyche of other people: he is able to observe their deepest desires and motivations, possibly because he relies on his intuitions and emotions instead of his intellect. Johnson is also the catalyst for both other protagonists to realise their most cherished wishes: for Sheppard, to become Christ – that is why he is named after Christ, the Good Shepherd, one of the emblematic representations of Jesus in Christian art – and for Norton to be reunited with his mother and thus escape from this world of isolation and pain. Finally, the

name Johnson might be a reference to John the Baptist who proclaimed the advent of Christ: at one point, Rufus acknowledges his ambition to become a preacher. The interpretation of Johnson's paradoxical figure decides if the entire story is regarded as a religious parable or a socio-psychologically acute piece of fiction – either way, it provides a cathartic experience, prompting readers to examine their own motives, the authenticity of their own self-image as well as the veracity of their assumptions about other people and the gravity of what is at stake in making these assumptions.

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Oscar Wilde's "Salomé": Solitude and Gaze

Dana Sala[1]

Abstract:
Oscar Wilde's "Salome" was created from the very beginning with an emphasis on the relationship text-image. The images were produced by Audrey Beardsley. He placed Salome in Victorian settings. Therefore the frame of antiquity is present in the text, but it is very pale. The most complicated relationship of the play is between Herodias and her daughter. Mother-daughter relationship brings the necessary tension to counter-balance this impossibility. Is Salomé just like Dorian Gray in the moment of wanting to grant immortality to himself, offering in turn only the intensity of his desire? In a way, yes. Art can grant immortality because art means that the artist had already paid a price. Desire alone cannot bring the transubstantiation of beauty into immortality. This seems to be the conflict in Wilde's play Salomé.

Key words*: gaze, ancient myths, Wilde, beauty, ideal, decadence, mask, narcissism, Salomé, solitude, desire*

Gaze and Desire. The Mask of Solitude

In Oscar Wilde's play, the eponymous heroine Salomé identifies gaze as the culprit behind her dejection. Addressing Jokanaan (John the Baptist), she says: "Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me."[2]

The poetics of the gaze is present in Oscar Wilde's one-act play, *Salomé,* tightly interwoven with Narcissus' myth, erotic desire, urge of transgression, and the hybris of appropriating what is taboo, once the interdiction of sight has been violated. The gaze is more important than the political conflict between possible different parties and rulers of the

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2 Oscar Wilde. *Salomé. Collected Works, The Plays, The Poems, The Stories and the Essays including De profundis*. Wordsworth Editions Ltd 1997, p.741.

ancient world. The emphasis on Biblical elements and context is kept at a minimum. The myth of Narcissus is the destiny of an assumed solitude, triggered by desire, in which the transgression towards other horizons falls back into the reflection of self. The poetics of the gaze is *Salomé* can unravel many interpretations: female gaze, male gaze, voyeurism, power dynamics etc.

The dialectics between desire and gaze is the main focus of our interpretation. In *Salomé*, the gaze becomes a hybris. Its power is enhanced by the powers of words. Jokanaan is the only one who refuses this association. He thus stays away from Medusa-like type of gaze. His prison is in a cistern. Herod's palace is more a prison than the prison of Jonakaan, because so many deaths have happened in the palace. After the young Syrian dies because he is in love with Salomé, the bad omen reigns.

Jokanaan's space is similar to Jonah's inside the whale. No mirror reflection is possible in this space. The mirror reflection accompanies Salomé suggesting the presence of a Narcissus-like Eros. She introduces the mirror as an object connected with the death of John the Baptist by requiring "a silver charger" even before uttering her wish, to which Herod replies:

> "What is it you would have in a silver charger, O sweet and fair Salomé,you who are fairer than all the daughters of Judæa? What would you havethem bring thee in a silver charger? Tell me. Whatsoever it may be, they shall give it you. My treasures belong to thee. What is it, Salomé?"[3]

Jokanaan cannot leave his space of imprisonment. His head "on a silver shield" makes Herod recoil, he feels the need to hide his face at the sight of Jokanaan after decapitation. Salomé is ambiguous in her desires, while Herodias smiles, needing the fan:

> [A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of Jokanaan. Salomé seizes it. Herod hides his face with his cloak. Herodias smiles and fans herself. TheNazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray.] [4]

Jokanaan does not need mirrors. Through faith and through the power of the verb, he makes the sinners see their own sins. They cannot escape hearing his voice, although he is in the cistern. His voice is heard even

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3 Ibidem, p. 737.
4 Ibidem, p. 740.

after his death. His role is to bring the truth forth. Herod uses the phrase "of a truth" very often.

Voicing his faith in God, speaking up the sins of the king, of the queen, the bloody events that are to come, Jokanaan relies on the power of his words to win the battle between sight and speech.

In her game with The Young Syrian, earlier in the play, Salomé uses gaze as a contrast between absence and presence, with a fatal effect. Salomé is aware of the beauty arising from her physical appearance in her dialogue with the young captain infatuated with her:

> "SALOMÉ [smiling] You will do this thing for me, Narraboth. You know that you will do this thing for me. And tomorrow when I pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at you through the muslin veils, I will look at you, Narraboth, it may be I will smile at you."[5]

Narraboth's unrequited love becomes so unbearable in the evidence of Salomé desiring John the Baptist that he kills himself. The space for Salomé's dance becomes thus stained with blood. Salomé's own love interest, Jokanaan, refuses to contemplate altogether her beauty. He denies her any form of bondage with him. Jokanaan's religious values seek only the immortality bestowed by Christ. Salomé, in turn, will seek the glimpse of immortality in her desire:

> "Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood?...But perchance it is the taste of love..." [6]

Salomé's most ardent desire is to kiss Jokanaan. Pursuing her desire at any costs, she becomes "her mother's child". She exploits and capitalizes on her desire, counting that the king will fulfil her wish. When Herod gives in, he says: "Let her be given what she asks! Of a truth she is her mother's child!"[7]

Suave and gentle, a virgin princess, Salomé is very unlike her mother, Herodias. Transgression into the threshold of death to steal a kiss of desire, to quench her amorous obsession will become the purpose of her life. Her dance will stir up jealousy. She will cause polarization between Herod and Herodias. As a ruler, Herod understands the danger of killing John the Baptist at Salomé' s wish.

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5 Ibidem, p. 723.

6 Ibidem, p. 724.

7 Ibidem, p. 740.

There are other forces released, there are people who will rebel against him for it.

The dialectics of gaze and desire is at play involving most characters. Herodias feels the desire in Herod's eyes, his lust for her daughter. She wants to obstruct this desire by all means. She has no other 'weapon' than words. Herodias is threatened by Herod's gaze on her daughter: "You are looking again at my daughter. You must not look at her. I have already said so."[8]

Narraboth was secretly loved by the Page of Herodias. The latter towards the Young Syrian just like Herodias confronting Herod. The Page wants to prevent his love interest from seeing Salomé, actually from gazing at her too intensely.

> "You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous tolook at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen. "[9]

The Page is the only one who suffers at the suicide of his friend. The Page had given him gifts like perfumes and ear-rings, maybe more in an attempt to make visible his infatuation than as a token of real friendship.

The fact that the characters are so caught up in unrequited love stories and triangular desires speaks about the solitude that permeates the play like a catching disease.

With the price of her life, Salomé crossed the threshold between the impossible desire and the actual fulfilment of it. What is awaiting her? The solitude spreads towards the other characters like some plague. Salomé is not triumphant in her happiness. On the contrary, she quenched her thirst. But she brings in a bigger thirst and an inexorable sadness. And this sadness seals the lives of others with damnation. Just a moment before giving the order that kills Salomé, Herod confesses that he needs the palace to prevent things from looking at him, from conquering him. He is now not the seer, in the most privileged position. He is seen from above and from near him.

> I will not stay here. Come, I tell you. Surely some terrible thing will befall. Manasseh, Issachar, Ozias, put out the torches. I will not look at things. I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! Hide the stars! Let us hide ourselves in our palace,

8 Ibidem, p. 733.
9 Ibidem, p. 719.

Herodias. I begin to be afraid.[10]

Salomé, in its unraveling, conjures an impassible deity. This deity is solitude. It grins after the last mask has fallen. Solitude grins behind author's last mask. It appears like the ultimate winner of any game, like a fatal divinity. The play has been just a way to stage solitude up, to deconstruct it.

All characters, with the exception of Jokanaan, have their desires rooted in something with a potential for tragedy.

"Thy voice was a censer that scattered strange perfumes, and when I looked on thee I heard a strange music. Ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? Behind thine hands and thy curses thou didst hide thy face. Thou didst put upon thine eyes the covering of him who would see his God. Well, thou hast seen thy God, Jokanaan, but me, me, thou didst never see. If thou hadst seen me thou wouldst have loved me. I, I saw thee, Jokanaan, and I loved thee. Oh, how I loved thee! I love thee yet, Jokanaan, I love thee only…. I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan? Neither the floods nor the great waters can quench my passion. I was a princess, and thou didst scorn me. I was a virgin, and thou didst take my virginity from me. I was chaste, and thou didst fill my veins with fire…. Ah! ah! wherefore didst thou not look at me, Jokanaan? If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me. Well I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death. Love only should one consider. "[11]

Autor's Masks, Text and Image

Salomé's death reveals what happens after her imagined transgression of the threshold between beauty and death has been enacted. Her death has not changed anything in the world, her death remains as the stigma and the blazoned shield of solitude.

The culmination act is the power of verb (as embodied by

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10 SALOMÉ, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT:TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF OSCAR WILDE, WITH SIXTEEN DRAWINGS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEYLONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMVII see The project Gutenberg Ebook of Salome, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42704/42704-h/42704-h.htm, consulted on 21.02.2020

11 Oscar Wilde. *Salomé*. *Collected Works, The Plays, The Poems, The Stories and the Essays including De profundis*. Wordsworth Editions Ltd 1997, p.741.

Jokanaan) versus the power of dance (as embodied by Salomé). Jokanaan's speech precedes his appearance. It also lingers about after his death. In a way, Jokanaan's speech is victorious. Salomé's last act increases the solitude on earth.

The tension between gaze and desire in *Salomé* is both a poetical tension and a dramatic tension. Three important names of real people are to be linked to this play: lord Alfred Douglas, Aubrey Beardsley, Sarah Bernhardt.

Wilde's love interest, lord Alfred Douglas, appears on the very front page as the translator from French into English, thus intimately connected to the realm of words, the author's dearest realm. Aubrey Beardsley is the illustrator, namely the interpreter of Salomé as a play suited for fin-de-siècle surroundings and Art Nouveau fine lines. He connects the play to the settings of the art in Victorian times and he shapes the reception of the reader. He carves fin-de-siècle niches. They are already included in the praxis of the book.

The play was supposedly written with the actress Sarah Bernhardt in mind. Oscar Wilde wrote precisely that it was not on purpose for anyone. This aspect is important because it must have created quite a stir at the time, through the association with Sarah Bernhardt. Salomé could not be performed with Sarah Bernhardt as it was not granted the licence. (see Sharon Marcus, *Salomé!! Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde and the Drama of Celebrity*)[12]. However, the association with Sarah Bernhardt, an icon of her time, a woman who shaped the art of theatrical interpretation, puts the play in connection to stage (and performance) rather than to the act of reading.

All these three people are directly and indirectly creators and revealers of Wilde's masks. The author hides behind three masks as a way to regain freedom. At the same time, the mask is the last veil to be torn. Solitude is what stays behind the mask.

The masks come with a triple distance from the constraints of Victorian society. At the same time, the author can hide behind these masks for the purpose of interpreting a Biblical theme in his own way, closer to decadence and baroque ramifications.

Let us see the three masks in detail. The first one is the mask of words, the second one is the mask of art and the third one is the mask of theatre (dance and stage performing).

Language was the first mask the author resorted to. Oscar Wilde preferred to experiment in French as he wanted to find a new course for his words, to experiment with sensuousness, to create something in

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12 PMLA. Vol 126. Nr. 4, p. 999-1021 https://www.jstor.org/stable/41414172, consulted on 4.01.2020

the vein of French decadentism (see Eells)[13]. Emily Eells points the double distance undertaken by Wilde by creating in French. [14]Wilde was escaping the constraints of Victorian society.

As for the second mask, that of art, it is achieved through Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations. *Salomé* lost the connection with antiquity, reducing it to a pale hint only. The sinuous lines, the Art Nouveau elements and the mixture of gender-charged elements, disconnected from the main stream of Victorian prudishness, created a unique artefact in the form of the book. Now the booklet was itself a work of art, a work containing a different tension, containing also the author's mask. The drawing entitled "Enter Herodias", (which can be seen here, at this link, number 9: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/aubrey-beardsley-illustrations-for-salome-by-oscar-wilde) contains a jester with an owl superimposed on him, tightly clenched to his book with the inscription Salomé on the cover.

Femininity and feminization are the key words for this second mask, that of art.

Therefore, although *Salomé,* the play, is clear in its settings, it was reinterpreted already in the unique synthesis text-image. It stood there as an artefact.

> "Salomé incorporates the conflict that led to its censorship, over who owns religion and has the right to determine how others will present sacred figures such as gods, saints, and monarchs. In refusing Wilde's play a license for public performance, the lord chamberlain's office objected both to the portrayal of biblical figures onstage and to how Wilde portrayed them: as carnal objects of erotic desire whose physical attributes are often described through biblical citations that adapt 'scriptural phraseology to situations the reverse of sacred' " ("Books"). (Marcus: p. 1014)

As for the third mask, that of theatre, Sharon Marcus also describes the dialectic between fan and idol in the play and off stage. This relationship is modelled in the play by the presence of perceived beauty. This is the dance and the theatre as a living act, the Dionysian unity with the work of art.

The most important religion for Oscar Wilde seems to be the religion of beauty. The biblical inspiration for his play is subordinated

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[13]Emily Eells, « Wilde's French Salomé », Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens [online], 72 Automne | 2010, consulted 12.07.2020. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/cve/2729 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.2729
14 Ibidem.

to his cult of beauty.

A fourth mask appears as a theatrical twist. This fourth mask is that of the author himself. He is under cover: a jester. The jester holds in his hands a copy of *Salomé*- a mise en abyme. By placing the mise en abyme in the image rather than in the text, Oscar Wilde, through his illustrator, diverts the expectations of the reader.

These four masks create a strange web of intersections. This web covers the moral conflict of the drama. Beauty allures us with the promise of something transcendental. But can we reach it? Can we keep it? It is less than beauty if it does not connect us with the realm of the absolute? We cannot hold, possess, keep tight that ideal.

Salomé wants to live a moment of full sensuality by experiencing the forbidden taste of Jokanaan's beauty. Herod wants to experience the rapture of her dance, while she is not aware of herself.

Wrapped in his religious feelings, Jonakaan is a devotee of Christ. He is devoted with all his being. His devotion has the quality of living according to something transcendental, an ideal. On the other hand, for Salomé the beauty and the resistance of Jonakaan have the quality of something transcendental. They become her ideal. Is her ideal anchored in a moral vision of the world? Her ideal changes, is slightly alterable. She longs for Jokanaan's face, then she rejects it and says that she longs for his body. Salomé's power over men is actually the power over the present moment, unaware of herself, as in dance. There is a connection now between the undulations of the gaze, as reflected in any aquatic mirror, and the undulations of her dance of the seven veils.

Like in an ancient tragedy, two forces play against each other, in a no-exit situation. Jokanaan is peaceful in his certitude of after-life realm, waiting for him after his absolute resistance to sin, this being his only weapon. But the rest of the main characters have no peace.

Oscar Wilde's play is even named *A Tragedy in One act*.

Language undertakes some of the functions of the gaze. From this point of view, Jonakaan remains the only one unmasked. His words are the echo of his life even after his death. They achieve what Salome's dance could not achieve: they transcend.

Salomé in her dance is the very glory of the present. Through this glory she receives what she desires. But her present time cannot be prolonged.

The dance of solitude
It is only Jokanaan, John the Baptist who escapes the part of seduction, the one who is not seduced. The only character exempted from this

scheme of desire and gaze, of longing and impossibility is Jonakaan, the prophet, who appears as a voice first and is imprisoned in the cistern. He will be summoned first by Salomé's bidding and then he will be sent to death by her dance. It is Salomé who asks for her reward, the head of John the Baptist, and in doing so she is outside of her mother's influence.

Jokanaan is the only one left out of the circle of impossibility. The other main characters are damned to an unfulfilled life.

In *Salomé*, desire meets impossibility. Exception: John The Baptist.

As the martyr, he is uninfluenced by the decadent religion of beauty. He is the one who sees the centaurs in waters and the nymphs and sirens under the leaves. Therefore, the world of mythos is upside down. That kingdom of the reign of mythical hybrid creatures is no longer valid. Now man is in charge, man reigns in full power and he lets the evil co-reign with him.

One can imagine that the power of his verb is not confined to the limits of his human existence. The power of his word goes beyond Jokanaan's life, it is the power of the curse contained in his voice as a way to transgress human existence. The grace of Salomé's dance will be crashed by the soldiers who received the command to kill her from Herod.

Through his voice, Jokanaan bear thus the mark of somebody belonging to the spiritual realm. He can be mirrored in Beardsley`s images only after his death. He undergoes the act of mirroring through his death, since his head is placed on a silver tray. It is impossible to catch him as voice in the drawings, his voice is the one dominating all others.

More than in *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* Oscar Wilde is fascinated now by the theme of **Eros-Thanatos**. This theme was invented by European culture during the Middle Ages, through the poetry of minstrels and chivalrous romances like Tristan and Isolde. A new fascination with the theme emerged also at the end of the 20th century, it was also present sometimes in the new Gothic.

Eros-Thanatos

The French painter Gustave Moreau dedicated some paintings to the biblical subject of Salomé. Flaubert had the courage to put the subject into a short-story on Herodias. The French symbolist painter Moreau expressed the fascination of the epoch with the theme of the dance and of the beheaded John the Baptist on a tray. The movement is also present, movement implying dynamism and tension. Oscar Wilde`s

play is about desire and beauty. Had we not been drawn to beauty, what would happen to us ? All our desires would have been weak. Therefore, we must keep the connection between beauty and desire alive, it is part of the beauty of life, but we must also know that desire alone cannot bring us beauty. We must reflect on the link between them. This seems to be the philosophical conflict of the play. Of all the characters in the play, only Salomé fulfils her desire. Her desire is to transgress the limit between life and death and get her desire accomplished even in spite of this limit. But she cannot grant eternity to this moment. As for Narcissus, it is a moment of fusion, of reaching a threshold, the illusion that embracing the beauty beyond a limit (the water surface) will mean reaching the absolute. She has forced the death of John the Baptist, unlike in the biblical episode, where the request of the prophet`s head is the wish of her mother.

Herod feels betrayed. Herod had his moment when he grasped something beyond reach. That moment happened during the dance. He has obtained the dance from Salomé, he has seen Salomé in the perfection of her movement and allurement, but his moment of fulfilled desire cannot be eternal. The theme of the gaze and seduction is suggested by the presence of veils. Even the moon is witnessing everything with a dead face. The Young Syrian notices the clouds as some veils around the moon. The characters feel watched by the moon and gaze at it in turn, giving an astral projection of the events in the court of Herod`s palace.

> She has a strange look! She is like a little princess, whose eyes are eyes of amber. Through the clouds of muslin she is smiling like a little princess. [15]

Herodias and the Underworld

Herodias appears as a dominating queen. She is connected to wine. In this way, she occupies the position opposite John the Baptist. He is imprisoned in the cistern, but she is the queen of the underworld.

Salomé opposes her and tends to be like her. Salome wants that moment when her feminine power is overwhelming. Unconsciously, she imitates her mother although she is not a woman and she will die without becoming a woman. She has her wish achieved only in the

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15 SALOMÉ, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT:TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF OSCAR WILDE, WITH SIXTEEN DRAWINGS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEYLONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMVII see The project Gutenberg Ebook of Salome, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42704/42704-h/42704-h.htm, consulted on 21.02.2020

moment when she coincides perfectly with her mother. Her desire for Jokanaan is an act of reclaiming identity. In her desire to kiss the dead lips of Jokanaan she is unlike her mother. In her desire to see him dead, to see his dead head on a silver tray, she unconsciously stretched her identity to coincide fully with her mother.

The most complicated relationship of the play is between Herodias and her daughter. Herodias appears as the character whose presence is central. She is the last one to appear, after Salome and after Herod. Her first lines are a contradiction of Herod`s desire to stare at Salomé and to watch her dancing. Before, her Page ad the Young Syrian had referred to the blue scintillating powder of her black hair. She is truly majestic in the way she appears. She continuously denies her daughter, in negative sentences. Her only affirmation is when her daughter asks for the head of Jonakaan. Her most secret desire, her subconscious desire is fulfilled by her daughter. But her daughter does not ask for the beheading only to please her mother. She asks for Jokanaan's life to punish him because he will not have her and she cannot have him. This way, she will go after him to kiss his dead lips after he can no longer reject her. She lives under the illusion that no other man can be more astonishing than John the Baptist. Yet, in doing so, in asking for his death, she pleases her mother who has forgotten now about her jealousy on Salomé. This is the moment when Salomé is no longer the young woman at the beginning. There is cruelty in her desire. She is now her mother`s daughter. She will bring silence but the price will be dangerous.

Another theme present and reverted is that of the sacrifice. The sacrifice is real only for Jonakaan. There is no sacrifice in the mother-daughter relationship, hence its tragic ending. John The Baptist`s sacrifice brings a change in the world in good terms.

The Age and The Stage

Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* was first written in French. This can be viewed as an attempt of its author to escape, to disguise himself under a mask. He is even present under the mask of a jester, as some critics noticed. There is a man who costumed as a commedia dell`arte Arlecchino. He wears a mask and he has a book under his arm, the very book containing the written theatre play[16]."Four of the illustrations contain images of Wilde in caricature [see detail below from the 'Enter Herodias' plate], although critics have argued that Beardsley used

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16 http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/special-collections/featuresalome.pdf, retrieved 2.02.2019.

caricature both with and without hostile intent. "[17]

Oscar Wilde`s mask is lifted. It looks like the overlapped image of an owl. He opens his arms as if saying: Let the play begin!

There are three candles suggesting movement associated with flame and wind. The author holds a scepter but with the same hand seems to hold very tightly the book *Salomé*, with the inscription visible. It is strange that he prefers to place his other hand on the flame. It is in fact the flame of an imaginary candle after all, because it belongs to the world of the stage. What could the candles symbolize? I think they represent a triangle, a woman between two men, because the middle one has a resemblance with the iliac bone, the bone in form of a butterfly. Underneath the middle candle there is also the same pattern that appears in Herodias` hair. The middle candle could be based on a shape of a crab. Actually, the crab is a strong lunar symbol. The figure three is obvious also in the lines that are forming a stylized candle, accompanied by three small flowers. Could they suggest Salomé between Herod and Jonakaan? Herodias is the central, majestic presence, impossible to be displaced. After all, this drawing in entitled 'Enter Herodias' .

Brigid Brophy writes about Audrey Beardsley. He is "lyrical by virtue of his gift of line, which resembles the gift of melodic invention. Sheerly, Beardsley's lines, like great tunes, go up and down in beautiful places... A Beardsley sequence is like a sonnet sequence. Yet it is never the literary content of an image that concerns him. His portraits, including those of himself, are less portraits than icons. He is drawing not persons but personages; he is dramatizing not the relationships between personalities but the pure, geometric essence of relationship. He is out to capture sheer tension: tension contained within, and summed up by, his always ambivalent images."[18]

And yet Beardsley's images are very unique. Although Beardsley is lyrical, he can convey the tension of certain relationships and he is fascinated by this very tension, along with the grotesque and sometimes the morbid.

Coming back to the author`s mask, we can say that even the language of the play *Salomé* was a form of escapism. We are here in the presence of escapism in its different renditions, after Baudelaire. Almost a century before, around 1800, the generation of the romantics found an escape in dream, in drugs, in exotic voyages of the mind or in another historical epoch, like that of the Middle Ages. After nearly a

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17 Ibidem
18   https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/01/25/aubrey-beardsley-oscar-wilde-salome/ consulted 12.05.2020

century, in the last decade of the 19th century, the sense of escape was different. The sense of crisis was accompanying the escape. The artist or the writer longing to escape was also aware of the fact that crisis was inescapable. Therefore, a new attempt was to replace nature with culture.

The incipit of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde contrasts even from the first dialogue two worlds: on one hand nature with all its vitality, with the sense of becoming, of natural processes, on the other hand the indoors space, a private space, where a different life could be constructed, a life far away from the rigors of the society and far away from its hypocrisy. But this life indoors meant a protective screen, of heavy curtains, velvet curtains, embroideries, artefacts, everything that could give the owner a sense of controlled beauty. Another type of evasion was the evasion through drugs, opium, for instance. Life took the path of a stage performance because this way it was not so close to nature with its organic uncontrollable growth. Citizens loved to act as if they were on a stage. The reign of queen Victoria, in its entirety, brought new institutions which were so well founded that are valid nowadays, too (some of them). These institutions presupposed a public life, a social life. This social life was a kind of theatre script with special acts and special routines for everybody belonging to the middle class and to the aristocracy.

As one critic remarked, Audrey Beardsley made use of Victorian surroundings[19]. How do we know? The fashion is not a real indicator, the garments do not belong to the fashion of the crinolines, they are a combination. The hairstyle of the characters in the drawings is also a combination between antiquity and Victorian age. The curves, the figures, the lines, the ornaments, the mirrors, the flowers and the little animals and furniture pieces present in Beardsley`s drawings are definitely Art Nouveau-style, even if this is now just the beginning of a new artistic movement. All the lines are sinuous, they imitate the spiral of the snails or of oysters, they are not interrupted. Jewellery is symbolic, it is not a simple ornament. The termination of a line in a scroll-shaped figure, that is something present in these drawings. Somebody could come with a deep analysis of the jewelries present in these images.

But what points explicitly to the Victorian age are the books on the shelves. They are books by Sade and Zola, as C. Nassaar has explained[20].

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19 Christopher S. Nassaar, Wilde`s Salome and the Victorian Religious landscape, http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/nassaar2.html consulted 18.09.2020
20 Christopher S. Nassaar, Wilde`s Salome and the Victorian Religious landscape,

Even from the preface of the book we can find out something surprising about the Censor of the time, stirred by the publication of Wilde's SALOME[21]. Thus, when the play appeared at the end of the 19th century, in 1892, more precisely, it embodied the synthesis of a new Weltanschauung[22].

The Religion of Beauty

Salomé contains the very core of aestheticism. This is done not only through the sensuality of representation, but also through the very concept of finding the supreme value in the religion of beauty. Salomé's religion of beauty is to taste the impossible beauty, even if it is a transgression punished with losing her life. The perceived beauty of Jokanaan becomes the ideal beauty, because it is a beauty that refuses itself to any mortal woman. Jokanaan keeps himself apart from the sin. Jokanaan, i. e. John The Baptist, has as religion the following of Christ. He makes room for no woman in his heart and he sees the court of Judaea through the eyes of his religion. Therefore, this court is doomed to have no future because it is based on a rotten foundation: the incest and the lust, the venality of its rulers.

Nowadays, we can read this play as the incarnation of a new prototype. This prototype, emergent in the fin-de-siècle English literature, is that of the *femme fatale*. There are other examples of the epoch. In visual arts, Alphonse Mucha was the illustrator of such a prototype. In *The Beetle*, by Richard Marsh, there is the Woman of Songs who comes from Orient and she is a priestess. In a way, we can say that Salomé is the priestess of pure love. A love so pure that it is altered by the mere act of living it with the other one. Therefore she chooses somebody perfectly impossible for her wish.

We find out more data from the very first lines of the first editions. "*SALOMÉ* has made the author's name a household word wherever the English language is not spoken. Few English plays have such a peculiar history. Written in French in 1892 it was in full rehearsal by Madame Bernhardt at the Palace Theatre when it was prohibited by the Censor. Oscar Wilde immediately announced his

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http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/wilde/nassaar2.html
21 SALOMÉ, A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT:TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF OSCAR WILDE, WITH SIXTEEN DRAWINGS BY AUBREY BEARDSLEYLONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD, NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMVII see The project Gutenberg Ebook of Salome, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42704/42704-h/42704-h.htm
22 A German word used to describe a particular philosophy or view of life; the world view of an individual or group, see https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weltanschauung

intention of changing his nationality, a characteristic jest, which was only taken seriously, oddly enough, in Ireland. The interference of the Censor has seldom been more popular or more heartily endorsed by English critics. (...)The correctness of the French was, of course, impugned, although the scrip had been passed by a distinguished French writer, to whom I have heard the whole work attributed. (The Times, while depreciating the drama, gave its author credit for a *tour de force*, in being capable of writing a French play for Madame Bernhardt (...)When "Salomé" was translated into English by Lord Alfred Douglas, the illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley, shared some of the obloquy heaped on Wilde. It is interesting that he should have found inspiration for his finest work in a play he never admired and by a writer he cordially disliked."[23]

Why is the play Salomé so similar to the Picture of Dorian Gray? In both writings we can find the myth of Narcissus. In *Salomé,* Narcissus appears as a story about the impossibility of loving the other one, about the impossibility of facing alterity. Salomé is trapped into the game of seduction. She seems to forget that seduction is a kind of condemnation.

The truth belongs to Jonakaan the prophet. He is a follower of Christ, a follower of the most profound definitions. Jesus said: "I am the Truth, the Way and the Life".

In contrast with that, Salomé can live her transgression only for a moment. Audrey Beardsley was inspired to call that drawing The Climax. (See here, number 15 : https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/aubrey-beardsley-illustrations-for-salome-by-oscar-wilde) It is the drawing in which Salome has just kissed the dead lips of Jonakaan, with blood flowing under the shape of organic forms, imitating nature but trying to dominate nature. Thus, the comparison to a Narcissus flower was present even since the very beginning. But it becomes alive now in the play, at this moment of action:

"«She is like a narcissus trembling in the wind . . . She is like a silver flower.»

The drawing corresponding to this part is that named *J`ai baisé ta bouche, Jonakaan* or *The Climax*. The blood from Jonakaan`s head can form a pool. A flower appears, it is very stylized in Beardsley`s drawings. It could be a narcissus. The two heads, Salome`s and Jokanaan's, are face to face like in a mirror, snakes replace the hair of Jonakaan, because they must express the terror and the trembling in front of such an absolute transgression.

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23 https://www.gutenberg.org/files/42704/42704-h/42704-h.htm

Conclusions

Oscar Wilde`s mask is lifted. It looks like the overlapped image of an owl. He opens his arms as if saying: Let the play begin! The blood from Jokanaan's head (in the drawings) can form a pool. A flower appears, it is very stylized in Beardsley`s drawings. It could be a narcissus. The two heads, Salome`s and Jokanaan's, are face to face like in a mirror. The play is about the myth of Narcissus, the myth of perpetual solitude and the illusion of loving another when in fact there is only the love for oneself, a narcissistic love, present. This impossible love will bring further misfortunes but at the same time the characters reveal their frailties, and this adds extra-tension to the play.

Desire alone cannot bring the transubstantiation of beauty into immortality. The poetics of the gaze is very present in this play. On one hand, the sinners cannot look their sins in the face, and this is the role of Jokanaan, to make them see frontally their own sins. On the other way, the act of seeing connects man with beauty. To be alive means to long for beauty, to want to experience it. We cannot suppress our need to experience beauty. But we must reflect that desire alone can have an intensity that pushes us on the verge of destruction, into solitude, into the realm of Narcissus' love. Art can balance this desire because art has the power to transubstantiate beauty.

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https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/aubrey-beardsley-illustrations-for-salome-by-oscar-wilde

The Reflection of Solitude in Selected Works of American Literature

András Tarnóc[1]

Abstract

The aim of the essay is to explore the manifestations of solitude in three works of American literary culture. The texts in question are the recollections of Daniel Boone serving as the prototype of the western hero, one of Washington Irving's best-known short stories, "Rip Van Winkle," and an example of the Indian captivity narrative written by Rachel Plummer. The given plots take place in a shared location, the frontier, and reflect the concept of captivity either in a literal or figurative form. The interdisciplinary inquiry applying the tools of psychology and literary studies explores the impact of solitude on the given protagonists' psyche, personality, and life in general.

Key words: *authentic solitude, initiation, liminality, hero cycle, designer environment*

I

The purpose of this essay is the exploration of the motif of solitude in selected works of American literature. Solitude appears to be an overarching theme of American literary discourse manifested among others in the works of Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, or Herman Melville. My analysis utilizes three texts related to the American frontier and the concept of captivity: the biography of Daniel Boone, Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," and the narrative of

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Rachel Plummer.

The idea of captivity appears both in its literal and figurative form in the given materials. Daniel Boone is the legendary frontiersman, who was captured by Indians during his mission to explore the Kentucky region. Irving's hero chooses to break out of the confinement imposed on him by "petticoat government," and Rachel Plummer suffered almost two years as a captive of Comanche Indians after being forcefully removed from her home. The encounter with the supernatural is a shared element in the short story and Mrs. Plummer's captivity account as well.

Solitude especially in the context of nature is a central theme of pastoral poetry ranging from Horace through William Wordsworth to the works of Robert Frost. One of the most potent expressions of the regenerative power of nature is provided by the Transcendentalists. Solitude is also associated with one of the core values of American civilization, individualism, which is manifested in such time-worn images as the self-made man, or the western hero.

The forthcoming inquiry combines research tools provided by psychology, sociology, and literary criticism. Accordingly, the exploration of the psychological aspects of solitude utilizes the works of James R. Averill, Louise Sundararajan and Yao Wang, while the theories of Victor Turner, Joseph Campbell, and Richard VanDerBeets will be instrumental in identifying the cultural and literary dimensions. I consider solitude as a phase in a continuum of Separation, Transformation, and Return espoused by VanDerBeets and to a certain extent by Campbell. Consequently, I examine the events preceding the actual solitary condition or the specific cause of removal from one's original community, the actual "decision", and the respective physical and psychological impact. Additionally, I explore whether the concept of authentic solitude is applicable in any of the given cases.

II
Theoretical apparatus

Simply put, solitude implies spending a certain amount of time alone as a result of one's decision. Such self-imposed isolation differs from loneliness as the latter can have a negative connotation entailing abandonment, vulnerability, and ontological destitution. Conversely, solitude is a sought condition (Ferguson 1). Averill and Sundararajan assert that "the capacity for solitude depends on the ability to preserve a sense of community while alone"(8). Solitude can appear in authentic form and also as a pseudo-condition or "monkish virtue" rejected by David Hume for promoting self-denial, fasting, or unwanted isolation (3-4).

Authentic solitude also means that the solitary individual is only responsible to himself or herself (Averill and Sundararajan 9). Long et al (2003) divided this condition into two major categories. Inner-directed solitude connotes self-discovery, inner peace, creativity, and problem solving, while outer-directed solitude is comprised of intimacy and spirituality (Averill and Sundararajan 10). Solitude is associated with the cognitive space and mainly refers to a state of mind during a certain time period rarely lasting through the full term of the given adventure.

Pointing to the paradoxical aspect of solitude, Averill and Sundrarajan assert that in case of its authentic version we are never completely alone and the resultant creativity fosters emotional and intellectual innovation. Solitude takes place in a "designer environment" different from everyday physical and social reality. Designer environments are contexts in which the individual is compelled "to think, reason and perform [...] to install complex skills such an environment demands" (16-17). One of the paramount skills in such solitary contexts is emotional creativity. While authentic solitude appears in three interrelated themes: the achievement of the authentic self, or enlightenment; true liberty, that is freedom; and ideal community, in other words communion, loneliness always lurks behind (Averill and Sundararajan 20).

The concept of solitude is coterminous with a rite of passage advocated by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. In the former's view the frontier itself presents an opportunity for such an experience via separation from the original group, entering a transitional or liminal state, followed by reintegration into the home community. Turner reiterates Gennep's model while highlighting the ambiguous aspect of the transitional phase. Richard VanDerBeets' cyclical interpretation of the Indian captivity experience or Joseph Campbell's hero's journey model reflect the same idea. VanDerBeets divides the plot of confinement narratives into Separation, Transformation, and Return (Captivity 562), while Campbell places the hero on a mission including three main stations: Departure, Initiation, and Return (28-29). Thus, solitude becomes applicable either in VanderBeets' Transformation or Campbell's Initiation phase. In both cases the given journey takes place in two locations, the ordinary and the unknown world and solitude sets in after leaving the former and entering the latter. Solitude is often simultaneous with "moments of comeuppance" or "times and circumstances in life that cut across everything we want to do or become," aptly named by Emerson "the lords of life" (Ferguson 3).

One example of how the "lords of life disrupt the human condition" (Ferguson 4) is provided by the Indian captivity narrative.

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The Indian captivity narrative being one of the forms of American autobiography in itself commemorates a test, or tribulation as its protagonist, primarily white women living in frontier settlements, are forcefully removed from their culture and compelled to spend a given period of time with their captor. The first narratives originate from the beginning decades of the sixteenth century and the genre lasted until the Indian Wars of the Plains (1864-1890), although Indian captivity was commemorated even in the 1920s. The period when most of the captivity stories were written was the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In the estimation of Christopher Castiglia in New England between 1673 and 1763 over 770 people were captured by Native Americans and only a fraction 270 of them were men (31).One of the best known narratives is Mary Rowlandson's account.[2] The captivity narratives' plot had two versions as the protagonist either returned to the original community as Rowlandson, Hannah Dustan, or Rachel Plummer did. The other outcome was staying with the captors as the example of Mary Jemison shows. The captivity narratives served as vehicles for anti-Indian propaganda or the promotion and defense of the tenets of Puritanism (Pearce 9).

The literature of the American frontier included the so-called hunter narrative as well. One of the best examples is Benjamin Church's *Entertaining Passages* (1716) commemorating "the first literary vaulting over the hedge," or in other words crossing into the wilderness (Slotkin 177). While the work focuses on Church's activities during King Philip's War (1675-76), the protagonist anticipates such real and fictional hunter heroes as Daniel Boone and Natty Bumppo respectively. The myth of the hunter, or the frontier explorer emphasizing the regenerative aspects of the woodlands attempts to refute the image of nature as a site of evil promoted among others by Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) fearing a" devilish Indian behind every tree" (525).

In addition to the accounts of the Indian captive and the explorer of the land, the physical and spiritual struggles of settlers were commemorated by one of the leading forms of Puritan literary culture, the journal. Jonathan Edwards, a prominent figure of the Great Awakening reports in his *Personal Narrative* (1743) how he found emotional and spiritual comfort in nature. The fiery preacher notes:

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2 The Sovereignty and Goodness of GOD, together with the Faithfulness of his Promises displayed: being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682)

I very frequently used to retire into a solitary Place, on the Banks of the *Hudson's* River, at some Distance from the City, for Contemplation on Divine Things, and secret Converse with GOD; and had many sweet Hours there (330).

Daniel Boone

The adventures of Daniel Boone were put down to paper by John Filson (1747-1788). Filson started his career as a schoolmaster, later worked as a land surveyor and turned out to be a land speculator too. Based upon the narrated account of Daniel Boone he wrote "The Adventures of Col. *Daniel Boon*" as part of his *The Discovery, Settlement, and present State of Kentucke* (1784). Filson's work in effect created the first western hero, the frontiersman. Daniel Boone began his Westering mission in 1769 "by resigning his domestic happiness [...] to wander through the wilderness of America, in quest of the country of Kentucke" (Filson 491). Accompanied with five other men, he started from his home in North Carolina and reached the Red River a month later. The explorers sustained themselves with hunting and lived a relatively harmonious life until they were captured by Indians. While Boone escaped unharmed one week later, one of his companions died in captivity. Eventually he was reunited with his brother Squire Boone and the two weathered the winter of 1769-1770 together. However, when the supplies ran low, Squire had to return home leaving Daniel "by himself without bread, salt, or sugar, without company of [...] fellow creatures, or even a horse or dog," (Filson 493) in other words, utter solitude.

Due to its brevity the captivity stage does not have a decisive role in Boone's overall frontier experience as compared to that of the solitude. Since he could have returned home with his brother, but he didn't, his solitude can be considered intentional. The application of Gennep's model to his exploits retraces the rite of passage. At the same time, his story includes several instances of separation, or initiation. Accordingly, a departure from his original community does not directly result in solitude. Although as the manifestation of the first Separation he was captured by Indians and was able to escape as well, he did not return to his home and continued his exploratory mission. Solitude sets in after he is left by Squire going home for replenishing their supplies.

Being on his own after Squire's departure, Boone displays signs of liminality. The ambiguity of the respective transitional stage is expressed by his recognition of the need "to exercise philosophy and fortitude" in order to fend off disturbing thoughts of being missed by his family and ease his concern over his own "exposed situation" (Filson 493). He struggles with "a thousand dreadful apprehensions" in order to avoid melancholy (Filson 493). Although he experiences both

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physical and metaphysical solitude, he finds nature a source of comfort and regeneration:

> One day I undertook a tour through the country, and the diversity and beauties of nature I met with in this charming season, expelled every gloomy and vexatious thought [...] I had gained the summit of a commanding ridge, and, looking round with astonishing delight, beheld the ample plains, the beauteous tracts below. On the other hand, I surveyed the famous river Ohio that rolled in silent dignity, marking the western boundary of Kentucke with inconceivable grandeur. At a vast distance I beheld the mountains lift their venerable brows, and penetrate the clouds (Filson 493).

The passage indicates that Boone has achieved authentic solitude and bears sole responsibility to himself. His solitary state imposes on him the task of preserving his psychological integrity, and he meets this challenge by engaging in "sylvan pleasures" (Filson 493). Having been able to fully immerse himself in nature, he achieves the authentic self. His description of the view from the "commanding ridge" entails enchantment and veneration of his surroundings, in other words, a spiritual experience. The terms "silent dignity, inconceivable grandeur, venerable brows penetrating the clouds" present nature in a divine, transcendental light. His attitude to nature is notably different from the traditional Puritan approach as instead of achieving control over his surroundings, he comes to respect the wilderness.

Boone confesses to gaining freedom from "all the varieties of commerce and stately structures" (Filson 493) via achieving communion with nature. The chiasmic statement: "Thus I was surrounded with plenty in the midst of want. I was happy in the midst of dangers and inconveniences. In such a diversity it was impossible I should be disposed to melancholy" (Filson 493) reinforces the preservation of his mental balance. Hence, by directing his attention outside, to his surroundings, he is able to overcome the feelings of loneliness and abandonment to achieve inner peace.

Boone follows Csíkszentmihályi's model of the autotelic person dealing with a crisis situation by focusing on their environs. The autotelic personality model includes setting an objective, immersion in the given activity, concentrating on the present, and the evaluation of the direct experience (288-294). For Boone the obvious objective is to preserve his mental balance. This he achieves by physical activity and by becoming one with nature. His awareness of a potential Indian threat forces him to concentrate on the present, and his direct experience is the freedom and elation he gains from nature.

After his reunion with his brother he returned to his family with renewed strength and was able to continue his mission until 1771. Eventually he settled his family in the "second paradise" (Filson 493) offered by the Kentucky region. Subsequently, Boone became an active participant in anti-Indian campaigns and even established a settlement named Boonsborough after him.

Rip Van Winkle

Unlike Daniel Boone, Rip Van Winkle is a fictional character, one of the memorable heroes from Washington Irving's *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon Gent* (1819-20). Rip as a "simple, good-natured fellow" (Irving 1249) functions as a prototype of the American underdog and an antithesis to the Protestant work ethic. Continuously scolded by his nagging wife, he finds escape in nature. Maintaining an "insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (Irving 1250), and rather "starve on a penny than work for a pound," (Irving 1251) he struggles to gain independence from "petticoat government" (Irving 1258). While his figure could provide a parallel with the average American during the Revolution, his trip in the Kaatskills, or his "errand in the wilderness" deserves further mention.

His experience can be divided into the Separation, Transformation, Return cycles too. Whereas just like for Boone hunting is an important activity for him, Rip is not fulfilling a national mission promoting settlement in the West. His chief objective is to find some tranquility from domestic tribulation. Also, while Boone goes to explore an unknown area, Rip takes a sojourn in the immediate vicinity of his home. In the same vein, while Boone leaves on his exploratory campaign with a group and gradually loses his companions, Rip is only accompanied on his errand with his dog Wolf.

For Rip entering the wilderness is "his only alternative" as he is "reduced almost to despair" (Irving 1252). Hence, while Boone's campaign is pre-planned, Rip's outing is a result of a spur of the moment decision. Another potential difference is that unlike Boone Rip is fully familiar with his surroundings. Also, while Boone happens to experience solitude, Rip intentionally seeks it. Irving's protagonist enters the liminal or transitory state after "unconsciously scrambling to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains" (Irving 1252). Like Boone, he is enthralled by nature and his description of the scenery resembles the one the frontiersman gained from "the summit of the commanding ridge:"

> He saw at a distance the lordly Hudson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, with the reflection of a purple cloud, or

the sail of a lagging bark, here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands (Irving 1252).

However, unlike Boone who is able to overcome a sense of despondency by immersing into the landscape, Rip's story veers off into the supernatural as he first encounters figures reminding him of the glorious Dutch heritage of the region. The stranger dressed in the "antique Dutch fashion" (Irving 1253) lures Rip on an adventure reminiscent of Campbell's hero cycle. Having taken a gulp from the old Dutchman's keg, Rip falls into a long sleep eventually lasting twenty years during which he enters the Underworld indicated by a rock formation in the shape of an amphitheater. It is only after returning to the village he is able to realize the true duration of the time he spent away from his home.

Rip enjoyed authentic solitude. The inner-directed aspect resulted in problem solving, namely, finding internal peace. The spiritual dimension is manifested in meeting the heroes of the Dutch past. It is noteworthy that while he is positioned in a designer environment, he is not compelled to rely on his skills and talent to survive. He lets things happen to him, while Boone consciously shapes his life.

Rip gains temporary freedom from a continuously nagging spouse, and experiences communion or companionship with "Hendrick Hudson and his crew" (Irving 1259). Retracing Campbell's model, he suffers symbolic death represented by the twenty-year sleep, but after his return he becomes one of the revered patriarchs of the village. Testifying to the relevance of loneliness even in case of authentic solitude, Rip experiences abandonment and intimidation when considered as an intruder on the nine pins game of the mythical figures of the Dutch past he is greeted by "the gravest faces, the most mysterious silence" (Irving 1253).

Upon waking up from his sleep he enters a second phase of solitude as his dog does not accompany him anymore. He also seems to be lost as he revisits the scene of his earlier "vision," but cannot find anybody or anything there. While previously he was able to immerse himself in the landscape, now nature appears ominous and foreboding:

> The rocks presented a high, impenetrable wall, over which the torrent came tumbling in a sheet of feathery foam, and fell into a broad deep basin, black from the shadows of the surrounding forest. Here, then, poor Rip was brought to a stand (Irving 1254).

At this point Rip faces abandonment and loneliness. The openness of

the river flowing freely across the land gives way to obstacles, and nature, which heretofore provided solace, appears to deny him its "sylvan pleasures." Despite being shunned by the wilderness Rip's story reinforces the regenerative aspects of nature in comparison to the urban world. It can be concluded that just like Filson does in the case of Boone, through Rip's escapades Irving glorifies the rural setting over city life.

Rachel Plummer

Rachel Plummer is a protagonist of a traditional captivity narrative.[3] Her settlement, Parker's Fort in the Texas frontier was attacked by Comanche Indians. She fell into captivity with her eighteen-month old son James Pratt while she was four months pregnant as well. The assault took place on May 19, 1836. The Indian attack resulted in the death of five settlers, and additional five including Rachel's aunt and two of her cousins were taken captive. She would spend two years in captivity and gained her freedom after a Mexican trader commissioned by Colonel William Dohono purchased her from her captors and eventually returned her to her original community.

Mrs. Plummer's captivity experience fully reflects VanDerBeets' cyclical model. The Separation stage is followed by Transformation during which she is exposed to physical and psychological brutality. After she gives birth to her child, the infant is cruelly murdered. One of the turning points in her captivity experience is an actual fight undertaken during her forced march in the Rocky Mountains. As an indication of increasing freedom within the framework of captivity, she decided to explore a cave. Eventually accompanied by a squaw, she was allowed to descend into the cavern. After her guard became frightened of the cave, she wanted to return, but Rachel's refusal resulted in a struggle. Subsequently Mrs. Plummer went back with her guard to the mouth of the cave, but was allowed to return alone. It is noteworthy that her experience of solitude is preceded by a physical altercation in which she aggressively stands up for herself.

Upon descending into the cave, she is enchanted by the beauty of the underground: "Reader, you may fancy yourself viewing, at once, an entirely new planetary system, a thousand times more sublime and more beautiful than our own, and you fall far short of the reality I here witnessed" (349).

Being exhausted from the underground expedition, she sat down

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3 "A Narrative of the Capture and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer, Written by Herself."

and fell into a deep sleep. Eventually she would spend two days and one night in the cave. Naturally this is the point of connection with Rip's experience. Just like Irving's hero, Mrs. Plummer encounters a figure, who provides consoling words to his soul and soothing balm for her aching body. Ultimately Rachel was found by her captors and continued her forced march westward. She experienced authentic solitude as the exploration of the cave was the result of her own intention. Although she was located in a designer environment, her skills were not put to the test as she was a passive recipient of supernatural help.

Whereas the abovementioned tribulations were her "moments of comeuppance," her test took place before experiencing solitude. She seeks solitude partly as an escape from her ordeal and partly to satisfy her curiosity. Just like Boone and Rip, she becomes one with nature, with a notable exception; namely her adventure takes place underground. The concept of freedom is relevant in her case too as she spends a relatively long time away from her captors. Communion is also applicable both in a physical and figurative sense as she compares the natural formations seen in the cave to a church or "a house of public worship, with a pulpit and three rows of seats around it" (350). Likewise, her recollections include hints at meeting a divine figure:

> Oh, could it have been possible that He who comforts the afflicted and gives strength to the weak, that God, in His bountiful mercy could have extended His hand to a poor wretch like me, whilst thus buried in the earth (351).

Her return, of course not to the original community, anticipates a change of social status. One indication of her "increased social value" is that the Indians made an extended effort to look for her. Also, soon after her return, following another fight with a younger Indian woman the chief commends her for her bravery: "You are brave to fight—good to a fallen enemy—you are directed by the Great Spirit" (353). In this vein, her underground experience can be interpreted in light of Campbell's hero cycle, that is, a sub-cycle within a larger one. Her physical descent is followed by apotheosis in the form of the chief's appreciative comments.

III

The examples discussed in this essay represent essentially identical physical locations for solitude, that is, nature. In all cases, nature, either as a whole in form of a scenery for Boone and Rip, or as its special segment, a cave for Rachel, provides much needed solace. The three

protagonists experience solitude as a stepping stone toward a greater control over their lives. In the beginning of their experience they are exposed to nature and they gradually find their authentic selves. Boone is capable of overcoming abject abandonment, Rip finds escape from domestic turmoil, and Plummer obtains crucial (divine?) assistance to weather her subsequent ordeal. If we consider the legacy or future impact of solitude, we can see Boone returning to his family and continuing the exploration of the Kentucky region, while Rip becomes a respected elder. Unfortunately, Plummer was unable to come to terms with the losses she suffered and died soon after returning to the remnants of her family.

It can be concluded that solitude is most beneficial if the individual is already equipped with the tools to cope with the given "moments of comeuppance." Boone points out that dealing with his situation calls for applying philosophy and as a forerunner of the Transcendentalists immerses himself in nature. Rip being accustomed to the Catskills as an antidote to domestic tribulation can also find solace in his walks. Plummer, however, being in an unexpected situation, is forced to rely on her heretofore hidden skills and physical strength. Out of the three protagonists the greatest deprivation or shock is suffered by her as she loses her loved ones. Boone is left alone only temporarily, and Rip, indicated by his wish to return, intentionally seeks solitude only for a limited time. While all three heroes undergo Gennep's rite of passage, solely Plummer's return means the continuation of her captivity experience.

The perception of time on the part of the protagonists is worth a further look. Only Boone experiences real time, that is, being left alone by his brother and fellow "adventurers" for about ninety days, his escapade takes place in the here and now. Both Rip and Rachel exit the actual framework of time. Their solitude removes them from objective time and positions them in subjective or imagined time. Rip went for an afternoon sojourn and returned twenty years later and Plummer unwittingly spent two and a half days in the cave. It must be noted that the respective physical and social surroundings change only in Rip's case.

Although the three protagonists reacted to solitude in different ways, it was a formative event in their lives and enabled them to meet their authentic selves. As it is stated by Averill and Sundararajan, only those people are capable of solitude who can preserve the feeling of an actual community. Boone alone in the Kentucky wilderness never gave up on returning. Rip was anxious about his wife's reaction upon his delayed arrival, and Plummer found additional strength in the cave to return and continue to struggle for her freedom and by extension, for

those left behind.

It is reasonable to argue that both Rip and Rachel have an underworld experience qualifying as examples of Wang's "designer environments." Thus, it follows that solitude can be considered an initiation and most frequently it is associated with natural surroundings. While on the one hand it implies a test, either as a response, or a way of coping with a given difficulty, the bottom line is that the solitary position Boone, Rip, and Mrs. Plummer enjoyed gave them additional strength to continue making their stand against the "lords of life."

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Solitude

Cultural-Isms

La solitude

Études culturelles

Instances of Experiencing Solitude

Magda Danciu, Claudia Judea Pusta[1]

Abstract.

The present paper aims at foregrounding facets of solitude as experienced by characters in contemporary Anglo-Saxon writings as a consequence of their social inhibition and lack of exposure to the challenges of physical environment they evolve in, as devised by their authors in a constant attempt to disclose the roots of the process of their isolation, loneliness, singleness, as well as some engaging ways of recovery within the context of their fictitious lives. The selection conflates texts and ideas gravitating around the mental, cognitive space that characters share, as well as the outcome of their particular state of confinement decided for them by their creators.

Key words: *solitude, loneliness, confinement, isolation*

There is no substitute admitted so far for the human closeness as it has been demonstrated that the brain activity of the people who share similar thoughts, beliefs, ideas, resonates in a beneficial way with individuals' mental health decoded in simple, natural gestures such as a hug, a handshake, a pat on one's shoulder, all of them resulting in boosting the general state of mind and in acting as a therapeutical agent. In its absence, solitude worms its way into one's life, developing premises for introspection, self-questioning, doubting about almost everything, questing for imaginary causes, eventually generating a condition of alienation, of isolation, even a tendency of permanent confinement because of the negative feelings they host, such as "hostility, stress, pessimism, anxiety, and low self-esteem", all of which

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representing a dispositional tendency that "activates neurobiological and behavioral mechanisms that contribute to adverse health outcomes" (Hawkley, Caccioppo, 2013) on the one hand, or, on the other hand, to a manifest aggresive attitude, as our examples of contemporary writings are to foreground.

The paradigm of the state of solitude

The researches on solitude carried out at several universities lead to the conclusion that "solitude is more a matter of the mind than of physical or social locale", that it is "profoundly relational" and based on "a decision to be alone" and that it presents "a challenge to be responsible to one's self" (Averill, Sundararajan, 2014: 9), in the individuals' strife to control their inner conflicts. It is mostly known as being a move away from people, ending in isolation as a reaction to the tendency of avoiding the tension generated by the mere presence of other people, sometimes accompanied by an estrangement from one's self (see Horney, 1992: 63), a sort of inability to define one's identity and to face one's emotional experiences, as suggested by Jude, an authentic solitary character, much aware of his condition:

> This loneliness is a recent discovery, and is different from the other lonelinesses he has experienced; it is not the childhood loneliness of not having parents; or of lying awake in a motel room with Brother Luke, trying not to move, not to rouse him, while the moon threw hard white stripes of light across the bed; or of the time he ran away from the home, the successful time, and spent the night wedged into the cleft of an oak tree's buckling roots that spread open like a pair of legs, making himself as small as he could. He had thought he was lonely then, but now he realizes that what he was feeling was not loneliness but fear. But now he has nothing to fear (Yanagihara, 2015: 308).

The character's consciousness of the state of loneliness he is to face as an induced option of his life history is seen as a resistance, a refusal to accept socialization, the very process of growing which „necessitates contact with other people" (Hurd, 1973: 95), and through which one is able to acquire the language, the communication tools and the standards of the social group to which he, Jude St. Francis, happens to belong as he himself often acknowledges:

> Sometimes he wonders whether this very idea of loneliness is something he would feel at all had he not been awakened to the fact that he *should* be feeling lonely, that there is something strange and unacceptable about the life he has (as a son of Harold, and Julia, and a friend of Willem, Malcolm and JB, Richard, Andy the doctor). (…).

> Some of them [friends] ask him with pity, and some ask him with suspicion: the first group feels sorry for him because they assume his singlehood is not his decision but a state imposed upon him; and the second group feels a kind of hostility for him, because they think that singlehood *is* his decision, a defiant violation of a fundamental law of adulthood (Yanagihara, 2015: 304).

Authentic solitude is regarded as a choice for a cognitive space against which individuals are ready to find meanings and explanations for their state of mind, to discover a proper representation, that is, "the one thing that is taken to stand for another, in a way relevant to the control of the behaviour and of some other decisions"(Godfrey-Smith, 2006: 45), that might supply the tools for understanding their own self: if expressed in a teleosemantic approach, that would mean to explore "the semantic properties of mental representations and to show how the internal states of a wholly physical agent could represent the world beyond them"(42), a condition so well captioned by the same protagonist:

> Loneliness is not hunger, or deprivation, or illness: it is not fatal. Its eradication is not owed him. He has a better life than so many people, a better life than he had ever thought he would have. To wish for companionship along with everything else he has seems a kind of greed, a gross entitlement (Yanagihara, 2015: 307).

In many studies, loneliness is associated with, or even replaced by, the term of social isolation (see Hawkley et al. 2013), perceived as a condition people may choose as a way of living, thus diminishing or neglecting the entire context and process of socializations which commonly "takes part in the immediate family and continues in the peer group, respectively, adulthood" (Hurd,1973: 102), in their pursuit of self-discovery, true liberty and ideal communion, as Hanya Yanagihara associated her controversial main character with:

> But as self-conscious as he [Jude] is about appearing normal, he doesn't want a relationship for propriety's sake: he wants it because he has realized he is lonely. He is so lonely that he sometimes feels it physically – a sodden clump of dirty laundry pressing against his chest. He cannot unlearn the feeling. (Yanagihara, 2015: 305).

When loneliness becomes the symptom of a kind of personality disorder, authors foreground the effects of the latter on the evolution of the characters in their evrydayness, using functional explanations that, in terms of teleosemantics, imply "an examination of the content"

(Macdonald, Papineau, 2006: 9) of their behaviour from a biological perspective, thus revealing their cognitive, emotional, bodily results:

> For Jude cutting himself was a a form of punishment and also of cleansing, it allowed him to drain everything toxic and spoiled from himself, it kept him fom shouting, from violence, it made him feel like his body, his life, was truly his and no one else's (Yanagihara, 2015: 490)

Seen from a teleosemantic perspective, this character's mental condition demonstrates how "external facts on which mental content supervenes are not only facts external to the representation but sometimes they relate to the very remote past. What we think and experience today depends on what is going on in us and around us and on the events and conditions that existed long ago and far away" (Dretske, 2006: 75).

Outcomes of social isolation

It is a fact that one's personality represents an absolutely perfect psycho-physiological coordination that maintains its condition in spite of the individuals' constant changes and their partial or transitory disruptions, proving to remain the repository of the remains of their past as well as of the promises of their future becoming (see Ribot, 1996: 136), by its very nature of being a general consensus in the shaping of one's self objectively. Personality variables are responsible for the way in which individuals respond to social, cultural stimuli in accordance with the changes that they have to face and experience as it has been proven that differences in the patterns of behavious are generated by human flexibility to "to adapt to wide variation in environment" since "human behaviour develops in the content of social interactions" (Hurd, 1973: 100).

Facing estrangement, loneliness, or isolation is regarded as a distressing feeling that accompanies individuals' perception of their own needs in the context of obtaining a proper quality of social relationship, a condition that can describe a level of alienation that often induces an aggressive behaviour against peers who might have rejected them, or against themselves in a rage of self-mutilation, a particular category of simulation, with a deep socio-psychologial significance, close to the borderline of self-destruction (see Dragomirescu, 1976: 55), as exemplified by the same character's reaction to his present state and status among his acquaitances:

> He sat down inside of the shower and took off his shirt and leaned his

back against the cool stone. His forearms were now so thickened from scar tissues that from a distance, they appeared to have been dipped in plaster, and you could barely distinguish where he had made the cuts in his suicide attempt: he had cut between and around each stripe, layering the cuts, camouflaging the scars. Lately he had begun concentrating more on his upper arms (not the biceps, which were also scarred, but the triceps, which were somehow less satisfying; he likes to see the cuts as he made them without twisting his neck), but now he made long, careful cuts downs his left tricep, counting the seconds it took to make each one – one, two, three against his breaths. Down he cut, four times on his left, and three times on his right, and as he was making the fourth, his hands fluttery from that delicious weakness, he had looked up and had seen Willem in the doorway, watching him. In all his decades of cutting himself, he had never been witnessed in the act itself, and he stopped, abruptly, the violation as shocking as if he had been slugged (Yanagihara, 2015: 492).

The difficulties of interacting with other persons so often occuring in everyday life commonly affect one's neuro-structure, frequently inducing a character disorder and causing a gradual process of avoiding people in one's effort to alleviate their inner conflicts (see Horney, 1992: 23) and to minimize the physical effects of particular mental facts in the form of bodily movements and spiritual practices (see Macdonald, 2006: 1) to which a possible answer could be the experience of meditating in a temple, such as the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center in New York or the temple in Maryland that Claire and Salinger have opted for, in spite of the cheapness of its furnishings:

> After services and meditation. Claire and Salinger met privately with Swam Premananda, who, to Claire, seemed as remarkable as the temple itself. After receiving instructions on breathing exercises and bestowing a donation on the guru, the couple was given a matra to repeat (...) and were initiated into the Self-Realization Fellowship (Slawenski, 2012: 266).

A negative social experience can tend to elicit a response to coincide with a solitary behaviour, with a distancing in isolation and sometimes, in the remoteness of an ashram with its soothing, relaxing environment of traditional siritual instruction and meditation, a sort of self-reinforcing loneliness loop accompanied by certain practitioners of specific techniques meant to help one achieve peacefulness, clarity, emotional stability through a particular way of introspection, as Joan Ashby is ready to start under the surveiilance of a connoiseur, Camille Nagy:

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The first thing you need to figure out is exactly who you are, only then can you become who you want to be (...). Before you enter this room, know that if you plan to circumambulate, you must do so in a clockwise direction (...). The monks in the room – Their heads bald, their faces tranquil and composed, their mouths ascetic, even as they engage in animated debate (...), animated prayer, their voices mingling and melding into a solid sound (...) in the temple courtyard. People are sitting in a circle on red pillows, with their eyes closed, chanting away. This must be the meditation class (...); there are twelve different voices at twelve different registers, but somehow they come together, a unified sound (Wolas, 2017: 339).

Getting beyond the discursive thinking in the process of completing the intended state of relaxation throgh prayers and the ritualistic exercises for body and mind, characters accept the exploration of these therapeutical ways of improving their condition, which requires "force of body and purpose of will" (338), carried out in an environment of a silent inter-communication:

> *"Namaste"*, Ela says (...) sweeping Camille into an embrace (...). Camille bends down, removes her low-heeled practical shoes, and places them off to the side. She makes her way onto the seventh pillow and closes her eyes (...). *"Moola Mantra",* Ela says, and eveyone's eyes, except Joan's, snap closed, and the chanting begins immediately (...). *Om* is the start of the chant. It goes *om sat chit*. Then she figures out it goes on *om sat chit ananda*, then all those long words, then *sri*, long words, *sri*, long words, back to *om*. She will never learn the mantra simply by listening, the long words are convoluted, impossible to decipher (351).

In view of this prismatic survey, we have found out different ways that authors employ in their elaborate seeking to provide readers with an emotional appraisal of their characters' psychological states so that readers might identify, observe and understand the situation that determins subjects to act and react through a certain behaviour. Exploring solitude and its correlates within the realm of contemporary fiction as we have attempted to do in the present paper, could be a good practice for revealing that emotions seem "to influnce the way in which we think", providing "a solution to the relevant consideration for a certain situation " (Price, 2006: 213), while simultaneously helping readers to comprehend how "the meaning and representational intent of neuro-biological state, organ, or mechanism" (Dretske, 2006: 42) function to indicate about the characters'world.

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Port na bPucaí: Representations of Solitude, Isolation and Otherworldly Encounters in Irish Poetry and Folk Theatre

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Abstract

Port na bPucaí or the tune of the fairies is a well-known piece in Irish traditional music that is reputed to have been heard by a musician during a period of solitude. It reflects a common motif in Irish folklore whereby individuals are inspired by or develop their craft and skills in solitude with suggestions of spiritual otherworldly assistance. The tale and tune are represented in Irish poetry and folk theatre. In this paper, I critically consider how the work of Irish poet Séamus Heaney and the theatre company Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland incorporates or is inspired by folklore and music related to solitude, isolation and encounters with an otherworld or spiritual dimension. Although there is no connection between the poet and the theatre company, I draw on three examples in which Heaney and Siamsa Tíre draw on similar points of inspiration from folklife and lore, reflecting the link between literature, art and folk culture. The examples reflect themes of solitude and isolation, both in relation to individuals and communities, and the creativity, wisdom and understanding attributed to moments of isolation. The article also reflects on the creative process and the importance of solitude for the artists.

Keywords: *Irish poetry; folk theatre; folklore; traditional music*

1.   Introduction

In Irish folklore and literature, it is often in moments of solitude that

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characters are inspired. The story of their sometimes otherworldly inspiration becomes the foundations for further creativity when artists adapt and rework these stories. In this paper, I critically consider the representation of these moments of solitude in the poetry and folk theatre of artists who reflect engagement with local and folk culture in different parts of Ireland. I focus on the work of poet Séamus Heaney (1939-2013), and theatre directors Pat Ahern (b.1932) and Oliver Hurley (b.1964). Although contemporaries, Heaney and Ahern did not work together but demonstrate similar approaches that echo their respective rural backgrounds and localities in Co. Derry and Co. Kerry in the north and south of the island respectively. Growing up in the town of Tralee, Co. Kerry, and performing with Siamsa Tíre, Hurley is directly influenced by Ahern from childhood and continues his legacy in one part of his artistic career, incorporating an urban perspective in his approach to representing folklore and folk culture while Artistic Director of the company.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how artists explore and represent solitude in their poetry and theatrical productions and how, in these artistic representations, solitude becomes an opportunity for creativity and inspiration, often with mystical connotations. Although a predominantly Roman Catholic society, a strong belief in fairies and the otherworld was observable in Ireland until at least the last quarter of the twentieth century and is evident in the poetic and theatrical creations of the artists. All of the examples reflect an interest in a spiritual or otherworldly dimension, the source of inspiration for creativity, and the mysteriousness of solitude.

While the examples focus on characters who experience moments of solitude, they do so in a broader context that places an emphasis on community. The Irish terms *muintearas*, referring to community, and *meitheal*, referring to situations where the community come together to help each other with tasks are relevant. Both concepts would have been familiar to Heaney and Ahern and are evident in the poetry and theatrical productions. Both reflect aspects of agrarian society that are familiar in other cultures and while there are many individual characters who work in solitude, such as the blacksmith and thatcher, they, along with the musician in this paper, contribute to and are integral to their society and community. Despite the close interrelations in Irish rural communities, these communities could also exist in solitude, particularly if on an island. The sense of being 'cut off' or separated may also be identified in feelings of isolation caused by the creation of a border in Ireland in 1921 and the ensuing political unrest, particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Nobel laureate Séamus Heaney is one of Ireland's best-known poets. He often engages with themes of the local in his writings, drawing on local characters and settings in his native Derry in the north of Ireland (O'Driscoll, 2009; Foster, 2020). There are many influences of folklore also evident in his poetry. His first collection, *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), provides an autobiographically inspired collection that provides insight into Irish rural life. In this paper, I draw in particular on three poems: *Thatcher*, *The Forge*, and *The Given Note* from his second collection of poetry, *Door Into the Dark* (1969) as well as his sixth collection, *Station Island* (1984). While Heaney was influenced by and made reference to Irish politics in his poetry, in this paper I avoid interpretations of his poetry that focus on the period known as the Troubles, a time of political and civil unrest in Northern Ireland.

Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland was developed by Fr Pat Ahern as a result of community choral and theatre activities in the 1960s (Foley 2013; Kearney 2013a; 2013b; 2015; Phelan 2014). Early projects and productions engaged with liturgical themes but subsequently focused on local folk culture inspired by his own life experiences growing up in rural Ireland. Now established with a theatre building in Tralee, Co. Kerry in the southwest of Ireland, Siamsa Tíre includes a number of productions in its repertoire, which have been devised by the company. Like Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist*, Ahern's original Siamsa production, *Fadó Fadó* (1968), provides autobiographical insights into Ahern's experiences in rural Ireland. In this paper, I consider scenes from three productions that parallel the themes in the selected poems by Heaney: *Fadó Fadó* (1968), *Ding Dong Dederó* (1991), and *Oileán* (2003). While *Fadó Fadó* and *Ding Dong Dederó* were directed by Ahern and based on his concepts, *Oileán* was directed by later artistic director Oliver Hurley, who also directed two productions on the theme of Halloween, both entitled *Samhain* (Kearney, 2016). Hurley joined Siamsa Tíre as a young boy and, under the tutelage of Ahern performed and assisted in devising in many productions. He became a member of the professional company in 1985 and later the Artistic Director from 2001-2007. All three productions were devised with the members of the company with the involvement of external collaborators, notably choreographers in *Ding Dong Dederó* and *Oileán*.

The three examples in this paper centre on encounters by lone individuals engaged in a craft or skill, often with implied encounters with creatures or spirits of the otherworld. In the first example, the central character is a thatcher, engaged in fixing the roof of a thatched

cottage with hay or straw. In the second example, the central character is the blacksmith but, allied to this, the focus is the forge as a mystical space. In the third instance, the central character is a musician who performs a piece of music inspired by nature or, as represented, that he inherits from a magical source. In all three instances, fairies encountered during a moment of solitude are represented as the source of artistic inspiration. There is a mix of both pre-Christian and Christian references, which reflect the Irish Catholic upbringing of the artists and the society they are representing in their poems and productions. It is noteworthy that Ahern pursued his vocation as a Roman Catholic priest in addition to his work in theatre and Siamsa Tíre is preceded by a number of community-based productions based on Christian religious themes. There is recurring engagement with the sacred in the poetry of Heaney and a search for both origins and the self (Tobin, 1999) and the individuals' connection to community.

All three artists provide, through their poetry and theatrical productions, insights into Irish life, culture and the psyche of Irish people but there is relevance in the themes, motifs and stories across other cultures. Within their output are motifs of or characters who experience solitude. Solitude provides an opportunity to engage with nature and a spiritual world, as well as the self. The expression of solitude as an opportunity to develop creative instinctiveness or inherit artistry from a mystical source is encapsulated here in the dreaming thatcher, the mystical blacksmith and the wandering musician.

2.   The Dreaming Thatcher

Heaney and Ahern came from rural agrarian backgrounds where the thatched cottage would have been a familiar sight on the landscape. Both mens' rural background and the skills and practices of rural life are evident in their work. In *Digging*, from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966), Heaney reflects on his father digging potatoes or turf. In the poem *Follower*, from the same collection, Heaney describes his father ploughing, a solitary exercise, aside from the team horses or, in this instance, the child stumbling 'in his hobnailed wake'. Similar scenes are presented in *Fadó Fadó*, for which Ahern worked with the original performers with Siamsóirí na Ríochta to represent his childhood memories in a farming community. Tasks such as making the butter are a communal activity and a represented with reference to *piseogs* or folk beliefs – the churn was blessed before the process began and visitors to the home took a turn at the dash of the churn, both in an effort to ward off evil spirits.

While many of the tasks represented are communal tasks and

involve the members of the community working together, some tasks are undertaken by skilled and experienced individuals who may work in solitude. One of the characters presented in *Fadó Fadó* is the thatcher. He inspects the roof and sets about making scallops from small sticks, which he will use to knit in the new straw. He sets about repairing the roof of the cottage on the stage, clearing the old straw and, after a brief time, when other characters have left the stage, he makes himself comfortable and falls asleep while atop the ladder. The cottage was a pivotal part of the set in *Fadó Fadó* and represented the home. Indeed, the window in the set was salvaged from the Ahern family home. In a dream sequence, the thatcher is surrounded by the Strawboys and sings a traditional song, 'An Poc Ar Buile', made popular in Ireland during the 1960s by Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann and the singer Seán Ó Sé. In *Fadó Fadó*, the scene is theatricalised. Rather than telling the story of the song, which refers to a puck goat that attacks a man on his way to work in the fields, the goat is replaced by figures clad in straw costumes. Appearing first like haystacks or mounds of straw, they dance around the thatcher before disappearing, allowing the thatcher to return to his sleeping position atop the ladder.

Writing about Irish folk drama, Alan Gailey makes a connection between mummers, wrenboys and strawboys. In relation to the latter, he states: 'Taking their name from their disguise, individuals who were known as 'strawmen' or 'strawboys' used to visit the parties held after the solemnizing of marriages in many parts of Ireland' (91). While wrenboys and mummers typically sought money, Gailey notes that the intention of the strawboys was 'to bring luck and happiness to the newly-weds, to wish them health and prosperity' and '[u]sually their visitation take place after darkness has fallen' (ibid). Despite their well-meaning, sometimes these occasions resulted in arguments and even arrest on rare occasion. Reflecting on Ireland's performative culture, Bernadette Sweeney notes the traditions, such as the Strawboys, 'affect notions of performance' and how many folk rituals, superstitions, and traditions 'have often featured in canonical Irish dramas by J.M. Synge, Brian Friel, and Marina Carr, among others' (21). Unlike the largely benevolent strawboys presented by Gailey, Sweeney notes the potential menace of costumed folk performers, which is evident in the scene in *Fadó Fadó*. The straw costumes and anonymity of the characters adds to the mysteriousness of their identity and suggests an otherworldly connection.

Thatching, for Heaney, is a metaphor for making poems (Heaney, 1982) and in the poem *Thatcher* he ascribes skill and knowledge to the thatcher, despite an initial underwhelming and

almost comedic characterisation. Indeed, the characterisation is similar to that employed by Ahern (and performed by Ahern's brother Seán for over forty years). Whereas Ahern's thatcher is part of the community represented on the stage, Heaney's thatcher is a visitor. A lone traveller on the road who turns up unexpectedly. He works with a natural material, straw, and turns it into something that protects those who dwell in the house. The task takes several days to complete and the thatcher is absorbed in his task. Comparing the finished thatch to 'sloped honeycomb' created with a Midas, there is a sense that the thatcher has some magical skill, perhaps gained from some otherworldly source. He works alone and ultimately his craft falls victim to modernisation.

3. The Forge

The forge had an important role in Irish towns and villages up to the mid-twentieth century and the blacksmith was often viewed as a mystical character (Jennings, 2014). Indeed, Irish folklore ascribes great skill, wisdom and power to the blacksmith or *gabha*. While the thatcher works outside, connected with the natural world and the brightness of the day, the blacksmith works inside the forge, a dark space illuminated by the fire and the glow or sparks from heated iron. The forge is an elemental space where the blacksmith uses wind (the bellows), fire, water and earth (iron),

The Blacksmith is the central character in Heaney's poem *The Forge* and the space is given mystical qualities. The poet presents the blacksmith as an individual engaged in a spiritual ritual. With the anvil presented as an altar, there are echoes of a priest's routine and preparations. Like the thatcher, the blacksmith engages in his craft alone but he and his work are integral to the life of the community. There is rhythm and music in the work of the blacksmith, from 'the hammered anvil's short-pitched ring' and 'hiss when a new shoe toughens in water'. There is a reference to an otherworldly creature, the unicorn, another metaphor for the 'altar' that is the anvil. The 'door into the dark' is an opportunity for the poet and reader to glance into the blacksmith's solitude and in this magic space he creates.

The development of creativity in the solitude of the forge is represented again in Siamsa Tíre's production *Ding Dong Dederó* (1991). The production, devised by Ahern and the core company of Siamsa Tíre, focuses on the life of North Kerry dancing-master Jeremiah Molyneaux, otherwise known as Jerry Munnix (Phelan, 2014). Munnix taught Ahern and is a significant influence on the development of a regional dance style, identified by ethnochoreologist

Catherine Foley (2014, 226) as a kinaesthetic identity marker of the Siamsa Tíre company. This dance style continues to be central to the work of the company to the present and the production creates a narrative for its origins and development, effectively creating an origin myth for the company itself. The subtitle, *Forging the Dance*, reflects the portrayal of creating and crafting the dance, mirroring the blacksmiths craft by creating with the body through a pattern of bangs, twists and turns in a rhythmic performance.

There are a number of instances in the production where solitude leads to encounters that inspire the development of the dance. While the audience first experience the dance as a communal activity, a basic form derived from an Irish dance style known as sean nós or old style, Munnix develops an individual solo step dance style that he teaches to the community. Beyond the stage, individual dancers in the community value the variations and individuality in different steps. They are like the 'real iron' creations in Heaney's forge or Heaney's own poetry.

In *Ding Dong Dederó*, the young Munnix first experiences dance through the play of other children. It is when he is alone that he encounters a travelling dancing master[2] who teaches the boy a hornpipe step before leaving him alone again to practice. Munnix struggles to remember the steps learned from this mysterious character but is inspired by the shapes of the tools in his father's forge to embody these shapes. Later, while everybody else attends mass, the boy dances alone in his father's forge, tapping out the dance steps to the rhythm of the Ár nAthair, the Irish language translation of the Lord's Prayer. As with Heaney's poem *The Forge*, the anvil becomes an altar, this time for the boy to beat out the steps of the dance. The forge is again a magical space of solitude, central to but somehow disconnected from the everyday life beyond.

The connection between the dance and the spirit world, is further developed and complicated through the fire dance, a dream sequence during which spirit dancers emerge from the fire in the forge and dance around the young Munnix. These masked dancers frighten and inspire the young Munnix, reflecting the paradoxical gift and burden of responsibility on the artist. In *Ding Dong Dederó*, a spiritual source for the dance – both Christian and pagan – is implied as the

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2 It is worth noting that this narrative of the dance is extended backwards historically in the production *Tearmann*, which is inspired in part by the story of Moreen, an earlier dancing master (Foley, 2015). *Tearmann* also has a scene, set in the workhouse, where the dancing master passes on his steps to a younger character (see also, Phelan, 2014).

young boy dances to the prayers and chants of the community attending mass and encounters spirits from the fire in a dream-like sequence.

4. Music and the Lone Wanderer

A recurring trope in Irish folklore is the encounter between a lone individual and characters from the Otherworld. Heaney captures this folk tale trope and the mystification of music in his poem *The Given Note*. In the work of Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, there are several scenes across many of the company's productions that represent such a moment. In some instances, this also represents a moment of inspiration and creativity, reflecting a link between solitude, the creative mind and the Otherworld. The example examined in this paper is that of *Oileán*, a production depicting life on the Blasket Islands in the early part of the twentieth century directed by Oliver Hurley. Two aspects of solitude are noted – the solitude of the island community and the experience of a lone musician who performs music inspired by the environment. The depiction of the island and, in particular, the impact of storms on an isolated island community is reflected in Heaney's poem *Storm on the Island* from the collection *Death of a Naturalist* (1966).

The reference to a folk tale and tune from the Blasket Islands, a formerly inhabited group of islands located approximately two kilometres from the mainland, directly links *Oileán* and *The Given Note*. These islands have occupied a prominent place in the Irish cultural imagination, largely due to the literature produced by some of its former inhabitants (Kearney, 2017). Geographer David Lowenthall (2007) notes that the human fascination with islands has existed since antiquity and society's preoccupation with islands today 'is fuelled by yearning for seclusion from modernity' (203). Another geographer, John Gillis states that remoteness in the context of islands can imply physical distance but also "travel through time" (2001: 40). There is an opportunity to encounter remnants of the past, which are sometimes idealised in contrast to modern life. Islands feature in Irish theatre and literature, not just as physical places but a metaphor for remoteness, both in space and time, and as a counterpoint to modernity (Morash and Richards, 2013). Islands provide opportunities for solitude, engagement with the soul or spiritual experiences (such as on pilgrimage), and inspiration for creativity.

Heaney's poem *The Given Note* is explicitly located on 'the most westerly Blasket' where the character 'got this air out of the night'. Although the tale is usually associated with Inishvickallane, there is

some ambiguity as to which island Heaney is referring – Tearaght being an uninhabited, rocky island further west. Heaney places the character in 'a dry-stone hut', perhaps a reference to or suggestive of monks in solitude. On the nearby mainland and further south on the island of Skellig Mhicíl are located clusters of beehive huts created by the most westerly congregation in Europe during the Middle Ages. Critically here, Heaney states that the character 'had gone alone into the island'. He suggests that others had heard parts of the melody but it was this fiddle player who brings it back complete. The melody is a reference to understanding brought about by engagement with nature and the self. This is a quest that many embark on but, like periods of pilgrimage or planned escapes from everyday life, many do not sustain solitude long enough to develop a full understanding.

Reflecting on Heaney's poem, Sean Crossan states: 'traditional music is portrayed as mystical and almost otherworldly, idealized, romanticized and fulfilling a primarily aesthetic function' (90). Crucially, he goes on to state: 'What is notable in the poem, however, is Heaney's focus on the individual. It is an individual man who gets this "air out of the night" after going "alone into the island" and taking it, he suggests, "from nowhere"' (91). Although the modern imagination of Irish traditional music is as a communal activity, solo music making was more prevalent prior to the twentieth century. However, the musician, like the thatcher and the blacksmith performed an important role in the community, particularly in an age before radio and television.

In *Oileán*, a folk theatre production interpreted as "island", Siamsa Tíre engages with the traditions, customs, narratives, tunes and sayings of the Blasket Islands and nearby mainland. The production is heavily influenced by books written by members of the Blasket Island community in the early part of the twentieth century such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain's Irish-language autobiographical novel *An tOileánach (The Islandman)* (1929). Ó Criomhthain (1856–1937), Peig Sayers (1873–1958), Muiris Ó Suilleabháin (1904–1950) and others encapsulate a way of life on the island and incorporate folklore and tales. In *Oileán*, one scene presents a man leaving a gathering to walk home alone. The waves, represented by three dancers, come to life and the strains of a tune are heard. The man takes his fiddle and repeats the phrases, which become a unified melody, known in the tradition as Port na bPucaí or the song of the fairies, an air sourced to islander Seán Cheaist Ó Catháin (d. 1972) but popularised by Seán Ó Riada and subsequent musicians. The Pooka is a very particular fairy in the Irish tradition and Ó hÓgáin (2006) notes that there is a specific body of

folklore related to this character.

The inclusion of *Port na bPúcaí*, also known as '*Caoineadh na BhFairies*' or '*Caoineadh na Sióg*' (The Fairies Lament) (Uí Ogáin, 2012, 27), represents a direct reference to the musical life and lore of the Blasket Islands but also reflects a common trope in Irish folklore whereby an individual hears or is gifted music from the fairies while wandering home alone at night. The story of receiving the tune is included by Robin Flower in *The Western Island* (1944, 116), highlighting the importance of music in the intersection of the fairy world with the mortal world (Uí Ógáin 2012). In later productions, a decision was made to use a recording of *Port na bPúcaí* without an enactment and removing the narrative of the legend. Critically, while the folklore, poem and theatrical production point to the fiddle player receiving the tune in a moment of solitude, the tune becomes part of a tradition and representative of a place and community.

The fiddle player is in nature and at one with his environment, reproducing the sound of his environment as if by magic on the fiddle, communicating nature to those who do not experience it in the same way. He reflects philosopher John Moriarty's description of the Tuatha Dé Dannan, ancient and mythical inhabitants of Ireland, who became 'harmonised to all things [they] were of one mind with the wind and rain. Now again, you could walk through the land and not know they are in it' (28). It may be read that the fiddler is inheriting or learning the ancient music of Ireland from nature and the wind. The story is neither Heaney's nor Hurley's own creation but they retell it through poetry and dramatisation. Like the fiddler, they too draw inspiration from the wind in moments of solitude and shape it using their instruments, the pen and stage replacing the fiddle as their instruments of choice.

There is a braoder relationship between Heaney's poetry and Siamsa Tíre's production, reflecting a juxtaposition between solitude and community. Reflecting on the inspiration for the *Oileán*, Hurley states:

The idea in *Oileán* was very simple. We were going through the whole process of the Celtic Tiger, busy busy, and that was really informed by Máire Begley saying one day she went out to the Blasket Islands … In one of our sessions, she said 'I set out to the island to get away from the humdrum of everyday life' and I said sitting there 'that's the show'. When you go out there you are just removed from the everyday troubles and woes. It's a different feeling out there so that kind of informed the idea of how one could get into bringing the Blaskets back to life. (Interview, 25 June 2013)

The Blasket Islands today are no longer inhabited but prior to their evacuation in 1953 there was a thriving community that struggled with the harsh conditions. Prompted by visitors, a number of islanders documented their lives and experiences in a number of books, many of which were used as inspiration for scenes in *Oileán*. Thus, there is a paradox whereby the inspiration is to get away to an abandoned island but, in doing so, encountering a community or rediscovering through literature a way of life that provides messages for living in the contemporary world. The character in the opening scene who moves alone in a crowd of dancers all dressed in black, is an individual who experiences solitude despite being surrounded by people, all going about their daily business. There are moments when the dancers all perform the same rhythmic motif or gather, as if for a bus or a train, before dispersing again, reflective of Lefebvre's theories of rhythmanalysis (2004). Eventually the first character, who demonstrates arrtyhmias through dance, is left alone on stage. The mechanical and percussive soundtrack that represents modern life replaced by a melodic and free flowing piece on piano, whistle and fiddle.

The transition in the scene reveals the set, representative of the island. When this character reaches the lonely island, she experiences community as characters based on historical accounts emerge. They are ghost like characters who emerge behind a gauze, evoking the names of places on the island in the Irish language. It is chant like, with the voices coming with short bursts from different locations on the stage. As the gauze lifts and the lights changes, the characters loosen up and go about their tasks. It is a community and together the women gather seaweed, the men mend fishing gear and the children play. This is a community out of time with the world that we, the audience and the character, have left behind.

Islands typically represent solitude but, in *Oileán*, the central character and audience encounter community. The experience inspires a change to the way that the character dances, a metaphor for how we might live our lives. Heaney's sixth volume of poetry, *Station Island (1984)*, also engages with a journey to an island, St Patrick's Purgatory on Lough Derg. In the title poem, a pilgrimage is implied. Heaney went on pilgrimage to this island several times while at university in Belfast (O'Driscoll, 2008: 232). Like the Blasket Islands, Station Island occupies a particular place in Irish folk memory; an almost mythical place to where people go to escape contemporary life. Heaney's collection includes a narrative autobiographical sequence in which Heaney meets with ghosts from the past. It is an opportunity for the

poet to engage with history and his own consciousness. The characters that Heaney meets in the poem in *Section V* provide him with inspiration. They are ghosts who occupy his mind when he is in solitude.

In the manner of the 'fun in the village motiff' utilised by international folk groups (Shay, 2002) and prominent in *Fadó Fadó* (Kearney, 2013), the Blasket Island community is romanticised and idealised but the challenges of island life are also represented. Critically, this is a community that exists in solitude. There are other visitors, represented by the stranger who comes and writes down notes about what he experiences and reflective of individual scholars such as the aforementioned Robin Flower. The remoteness of the island, however, is emphasised at the opening of the second act when the women gather at the cliff to say prayers, hearing the church bell from the mainland. The climax of the production is a storm during which a young boy loses his life. Historically, this was a key episode in the decision to leave the island. Many of the islanders maintained a sense of community, which was integral to surviving life on the island, and an example of this persisted in Boston, USA.

The challenge of surviving on a remote island is also presented in Heaney's *Storm on the Island*. The community that is represented in *Oileán* is also evident in Heaney's poem. Although an unspecified island, which may be interpreted as Stormont,[3] the challenges faced by the inhabitants of this treeless island mirror the narratives of the Blasket Islanders. There is a sense of confidence in the opening lines when the speakers state "We are prepared", pre-empting the harsh conditions that manifest in a storm. While the storm in Heaney's poem is physically devastating for the landscape, it is the loss of life in *Oileán*, not directly connected with the storm itself but rather the isolation of the island, that is notable. Unlike Heaney's islanders who develop their architecture and farming methods to cope with the harsh conditions of the weather and island life, the Blasket Islanders were also confronted with adversarial government policies and faced little choice but to leave. Even though they were, in themselves a community, they existed in solitude, cut off and effectively abandoned by the state.

In the stage production *Oileán*, as the islanders leave the island for the last time with their meagre belongings, walking out into the auditorium to represent their journey overseas, we are left with the character from the opening alone again on stage, dressed again in

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3 Stormont is the Northern Island seat of Government. The first eight letters of the title spell 'Stormont' and the storm may refer to the Troubles. Here, I pursue a more literal interpretation.

black. The soundtrack changes again to the metallic rhythms and individual dancers dressed in black re-emerge on stage, representing a return to contemporary life and society but the character remains in solitude. Gradually these individuals come together to dance in commune, no longer individuals but connected in their movements, albeit with slight arrhythmias. A subtle costuming effect, which reveals a little element of colour reminiscent of the island costumes in the black contemporary costumes, evokes a sense of connection to a past community and that we all share something that connects us.

5. Solitude and the Creative Self
Heaney, Ahern and Hurley perform important roles as artists in, responding to and reflecting society and their own communities. As artists they both create in solitude and through participation with others. Heaney provided a voice for his community through his poetry while Ahern created a space for communities to express themselves. Hurley led the community of artists established by Ahern but expanded the repertoire to explore more themes beyond their direct experience. All three artists rely on their participation in a community but also opportunities to develop their thoughts in solitude. As Dawe notes in the context of Irish poetry:

The see-sawing between 'participation' and 'solitude' is central to the make-up of our literary culture precisely because an equilibrium between them has rarely been struck [...] The writer does not opt for either solitude or participation but claims both as a condition of his work. (Dawe, 105, 107)

Fadó Fadó was developed from a series of vignettes devised by a small group of performers under the direction of Ahern. Various members put forward ideas from their own life experiences and using their individual skills in music, song and dance. For the production *Oileán*, Hurley again engaged in a process of devising theatre with a team of performers from a subsequent generation, many of whom had trained with the company and been inspired by the original cast members of *Fadó Fadó*. The process of devising was informed by research by each of the individuals in solitude, primarily reading about the life experiences of others, before plotting out the structure and elements of the production under Hurley's leadership. Unlike the individual poet who creates primarily alone, Ahern and Hurley create as part of a community of practice but value moments of solitude that allow them to develop his own ideas or gain inspiration. Describing the process of developing shows with Siamsa Tíre in conversation with me, Hurley notes the importance of reading at the start of the artistic

process, with each member of the creative team working alone before bringing ideas to the table for collaborative development (interview with author, 25 June 2013).

For Ahern and Heaney, solitude has been part of their creative development. Injured in the USA in 1975, Ahern spent time recuperating at home in Kerry, where he experienced solitude and during which time he composed church music and reflected on the development of Siamsa Tíre. Ahern was also significantly influenced by the philosopher John Moriarty (1938-2007), who also came from the same part of rural north Kerry. After resigning from his position at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg in June 1971, Moriarty returned to Ireland where he lived largely in solitude, seeking to connect with nature, the natural world and engage with his soul. This quest for a deeper understanding of the human experience influences Ahern's quest to establish a national folk theatre that reflects both the local and universal in what we understand as culture. Moriarty's desire to embrace solitude and his related quest to engage with the self is echoed in the writings of Anthony Storr:

The creative person is constantly seeking to discover himself, to remodel his own identity, and to find meaning in the universe through what he creates. ... His most significant moments are those in which he attains some new insight, or makes some new discovery; and these moments are chiefly, if not invariably, those in which he is alone (2005, xiv).

Poetry and the priesthood may both be viewed as individual pursuits, valuing solitude for reflection and both Ahern and Heaney may be read in the characters and situations in their outputs, explicitly and metaphorically. In keeping with Moriarty, Ahern suggests that we have an instinctiveness to our creativity. Hurley also emphasises research in solitude, principally reading as an individual, as part of his methodology for creative development. His articulation of the moment of inspiration that led to the development of *Oileán* highlights the instinctiveness of creativity.

Whilst the influence of Wordsworth on Heaney is well established and acknowledged by the poet himself, Wordsworthian approaches are also evident in the work of Ahern and, albeit more fleetingly, Hurley. Mirroring the philosophies of Ahern and Moriarty, the desire to the artist to search for a greater insight into the human soul is evident in the poetry of Heaney. Like Ahern and Moriarty, periods of solitude lead to creativity that is then shared with others through artistry. Writing about the purchase of a house in 1988, Heaney remarks:

Equally importantly, they were days when I had time to myself – I was just at the beginning of a sabbatical year from Harvard – and when I retreated under the slate roof and behind the stone walls of the cottage, it became a listening post where I could hear down into the very foundations of my sixth-sensed self (Heaney, 2002, np).

The sixth sense reflects Heaney's awareness of the poetic music, and in this essay he reflects on the inspiration of nature and a spiritual awareness that emerged after the deaths of his parents. Heaney's poetry is also intensely political, if sometimes not explicitly so. Echoing the writing of Declan Kiberd, Daniel Tobin states:

On the one hand, he literally stands within the border of the Irish Republic and looks out over the lough to Northern Ireland. On the other, figurally, he stands within the "free state" of his art, seemingly apart from the urgencies of history-a state of "splendid isolation." (1).

Unconcerned with the politics of Northern Ireland, the work of Ahern and Hurley is also political, albeit in the context of memory and social consciousness, representing the lives of people at the margins, ecology and traditional ways of life that are threatened by modernity. Their work is not seeking just to preserve traditions but to translate, rework and find a role for and understanding of folk culture in contemporary life.

6. Conclusion

Through their poetry and theatrical productions, Heaney, Ahern and Hurley present stories of solitude, sometimes reflective of their own artistic journey in moments of solitude. Their representations affirm that solitude is not only relatable to the individual experience but can relate to the experience of a community. Cooperation in community activities was integral to rural Irish life in the twentieth century but these communities also relied on the skills of individuals, whose skills and talents were sometimes accredited mystical origins. The thatcher, blacksmith and musician were individuals who often engaged in their craft in solitude. While the blacksmith occupied the mysterious and elemental world of the forge, the thatcher and musician were often wandering labourers or travelling masters who were close to nature and the natural environment. In solitude, they experienced and benefitted from a connection with an otherworld.

The poetry and theatrical work of the three artists demonstrate an engagement with the theme of solitude, allied with a desire to understand the self, nature and the otherworld. While Hurley is arguably taking on and continuing Ahern's artistic vision as Artistic Director of Siamsa Tíre, he brings new perspectives and influences,

arguably moving further from a personal lived experience but utilising his own perspective to attempt to engage audiences with folk culture, traditions and stories. Beyond individual characters, all three artists are reflecting on place and community; solitude is normally a momentary experience in their creative practice. In each of the poems and theatrical productions, we encounter representations of the artists themselves, most impressingly in a moment of solitude when they or their characters become inspired. Heaney is not only the child looking on at the thatcher and blacksmith but the poet thatching and hammering words. Ahern is not only the child in the village but the thatcher encountering the spiritual world or the pupil of the master whose skills seem inspired by otherworldly beings. Hurley is the visitor to the island, escaping the present by reading the stories of a generation past or the fiddle player inspired or gifted music by the fairies. In their solitude each becomes the author of their solitude. Solitude provides opportunity for self-reflection and an exploration of the self in their environment and society.

Moments of solitude provide artists with time to engage with their creative thoughts and reflect on their own lived experience. In representing the solitude of others, they are also reflecting on their own solitude. In some instances, such as the three characters examined in this paper, the experience of solitude and the creativity of others reflects the artist themselves. The thatcher, blacksmith and musician are engaged in a craft, draw inspiration from nature and their community, and are imbued with a mystical quality.

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In the Most Fragile of Places: Solitude in Cartoon Saloon's Irish Folklore Trilogy

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Abstract

Between 2009 and 2020, the Irish animation studio Cartoon Saloon reworked Irish mythological and folkloric material for modern audiences, producing a "trilogy" that explored otherness, nature, and the rediscovery of ancient knowledge. This paper examines how an understanding of solitude and its benefits can be applied to the folklore trilogy, benefits that include a reconnection with nature, the attainment of knowledge and wisdom, and personal transformation. The three films – The Secret of Kells (2009), Song of the Sea (2014), and Wolfwalkers (2020) – are compared and contrasted with each other to determine how the trilogy's representation of solitude developed over time, and to identify recurring themes relating to solitude and isolation. The argument is ultimately made that the trilogy's depiction of solitude and its benefits is one that modern Irish audiences can, for the most part, learn from and apply in their own lives. However, weaknesses in the films' depictions of solitude are also identified, providing insight into how future folklore films can further explore the theme.

Key Words: *Irish animation, folklore, mythology, solitude.*

Introduction

The universal narrative of the hero venturing into the unknown world, separated from everything they understand, is explored in the three animated films that make up Cartoon Saloon's Irish folklore "trilogy". In the first instance, *The Secret of Kells* (2009), the central character Brendan enters the forest against his uncle's wishes, discovering a realm of natural beauty and peril. *Song of the Sea* (2014) similarly follows the young Saoirse and Ben in their exploration of a vast and deadly otherworld, ultimately realising truths about themselves. Finally, *Wolfwalkers* (2020) depicts a clash of cultures,

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with the central character Robyn Goodfellowe growing into a new body and literally seeing her world through new eyes. The idea of wisdom attained through isolation and solitude pervades these modern stories as much as it did their mythological source material.

This paper will examine how Cartoon Saloon's three reinterpretations of Irish myth and folklore depict solitude and its advantages to the development of the main characters, positing that solitude is treated by these films as a key requirement in the pursuit of a more fulfilling life. The pitfalls of this kind of message will also be examined, and it will be suggested that Cartoon Saloon successfully navigates these issues, resulting in a message that modern day audiences can relate to. Brendan, Saoirse, and Robyn's journeys mirror each other with respect to their portrayal the natural world and the rediscovery of truths hidden deep in our past. It will be argued that at the core of these messages is solitude both physical and mental – through solitude, reconnection with nature is possible, wisdom can be attained, and transformation can occur. Cartoon Saloon's trilogy therefore presents solitude, a scarce resource in an increasingly busy and urbanised world, as the path to personal enrichment.

If the utility and contemporary relevance of Cartoon Saloon's depiction of solitude is to be determined, the practicalities of achieving solitude today, the challenges faced when seeking it in modern Ireland, must be addressed. Nigel Thrift and Rob Kitchin (2009) argue that solitude and seclusion are harder to achieve today than ever before. Cheap and fast transport, by land, air, or sea, means that disparate regions can be linked together, immense wildernesses can be crossed with ease. Modern forms of communication and entertainment, such as the television, radio, telephone, and the internet, have minimised and even eliminated distance altogether. However, centuries-old teachings about seclusion can, and must, be reworked to fit into this new setting. Elements of these old teachers should be reinvented and incorporated into modern narratives, adjusting where necessary to account for a changing world. In his research exploring the methods by which old traditions can weather upheaval and modernisation, Jeff Todd Titon (2015) advocates for "resilience" in a move towards sustainability, specifically with regard to music. To him, the integrity of musical practices and knowledge is retained, but it changes when necessary to remain relevant in the modern world (157-158). This argument applies as much to mythology, folklore, or old understandings of solitude as it does to musical traditions. Irish musician Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (1981) similarly describes "reworking" as the creation of "new music out of the old". It is the gradual manner by which traditions are adopted and discarded, and to

him it is not only vital for the survival of those traditions, but it is also entirely natural (83). It will be argued that Cartoon Saloon's three folklore films effectively demonstrate how, through reworking and the acknowledgement of modern circumstances, solitude can still be portrayed in a way that modern audiences can relate to and learn from. Rather than fighting against modernity, stories promoting transformation through solitude can adapt, just as how mythology and folklore is adapted to screen.

1. The Folklore Trilogy

Set far apart in time and place, Cartoon Saloon's three folklore films nevertheless follow a similar structure, share thematic characteristics, and place young children at the centre of the adventure. *The Secret of Kells* sets the groundwork for the subsequent films in the trilogy by introducing Brendan, a disobedient and inquisitive boy who feels restrained by the monastery in which he lives. Without a father to guide him, Brendan is left with his uncle Cellach, the abbot, who provides little warmth. This relationship contrasts sharply with that of Brother Aidan who encourages the boy to explore the surrounding forest, to learn from nature, and to help complete the mythical Book of Iona/Kells. The journey sees Brendan face off against both the restrictive threat of the monastery and the supernatural threat of Crom Cruach,[2] ultimately shaping him into a heroic youth. As the familiar world of Kells and the otherworld of the forest collide, Brendan forges a friendship with a forest spirit, Aisling. Their bond is strengthened as they help to free each other, and to make each other's worlds better. Brendan's journey culminates with the boy going to live with Aidan who he eventually surpasses and replaces as a mentor to others. The story presents a message not only of cooperation between those who are different, but also one of inner growth and the discovery of one's strength by leaving the familiar world and venturing into a secluded realm. In the two narratives to follow, this idea is expanded further.

The second film in the trilogy, *Song of the Sea*, is set centuries later but similarly examines our relationship with nature, the desire for freedom, and the healing of both the familiar and the unfamiliar worlds, all through the reworking of mythological material. The mute Saoirse, a young selkie[3] who holds the key to saving the supernatural world, is thrust into an unfamiliar environment when her grandmother

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2 A Pagan deity associated with fertility and the sun, supposedly appeased through human sacrifice.

3 A creature of folklore with two forms, one resembling a woman, the other a seal, similar to a mermaid.

drags Saoirse and her brother, Ben, to the city. The story not only follows the children's arduous journey across Ireland, back to their island home, but the trials they encounter also gradually bring the two siblings closer together. A trek through woodlands and magical hidden caves, meeting a variety of sídhe, [4] becomes a transformative experience for the two. Ben becomes kinder and more understanding of his sister, while Saoirse achieves freedom, finding her voice through song and using it to free the sídhe from the sinister Macha.[5] The adventure climaxes with a dramatic physical transformation: under the ocean, the place where Saoirse had always felt most liberated, the girl sheds her human form and becomes a seal. Her transformation comes with the ultimate achievement of empowerment and freedom, coinciding with the realisation of her heritage as a half-selkie; the past reshapes the present. Here, the ocean replaces the forest as a secluded place of realisation and transformation, reinforcing the idea that solitude is a component in achieving mental, even spiritual, growth.

The final chapter in the series, *Wolfwalkers*, carries on the tradition of the heroic youth venturing into the supernatural unknown, in this case the woodlands near Kilkenny. Robyn, a young English girl who travels to Ireland with her father on a mission to exterminate wolves, enters the forest against the wishes of adults. Here, the film overlaps with *The Secret of Kells*, albeit with a female rather than a male protagonist. Her first exposure to the supernatural is Mebh, a wild girl living in the forest, who magically heals a wounded falcon. Robyn's adventure again mirrors Brendan's in the sense that she allies with the mysterious Mebh, learning how to shift into a wolf's form and becoming one with the forest around her. This transformative experience culminates in a challenge; much as how Brendan faced Crom, Robyn has to overcome the forces of the Lord Protector who seeks to wipe out the wolves entirely. Unlike *Song of the Sea* where Saoirse rejects a life among the sídhe and opts to remain with her father and brother, Robyn ultimately embraces the life of a wolfwalker, becoming a member of the pack. This film carries on the idea that secluded places are a source of restoration – as seen with the healing of the falcon – and of transformation – Robyn's shapeshifting abilities are similar to Saoirse's in that they reflect a deeper, spiritual transformation. Robyn's decision to remain in wolf-form, to take on an entirely new life, indicates how solitude can lead to a dramatic reshaping of one's lifestyle and worldview. The ideas presented by all

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4 Variously described as ancient ancestors, gods, or spirits of nature.
5 An Irish deity who was one aspect of the triple-goddess of war and fate, the Morrígan.

three films will be expanded over the next three sections.

2. Nature and Solitude

Separation from the distractions of modern life, the attainment of solitude, has the potential to encourage new ways of thinking, particularly the realisation of one's place in the wider world. Demonstrated in the films of Cartoon Saloon, this benefit of solitude ties into a greater appreciation and understanding of nature, whether one seeks separation deep within the forest, underground, or out at sea. It is a concept that has been explored extensively: when Irish poet John O'Donoghue (2011) described the sun as "the eye and face of God" (56), the implication was that the sacred and spiritual can be found in nature. By absorbing oneself in the natural world, transformative wisdom can therefore be achieved. This ecological engagement is a message that resounds throughout all three of Cartoon Saloon's Irish folkloric reworkings. In stories that depict the natural world as a source of wisdom and personal growth, it is not uncommon for the protagonist to become separated from the familiar and find solace in a hidden realm – C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (2001), and James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) are well-known examples.

This separation from distraction, seclusion within a world where nature and the supernatural blend, reflects the teachings of philosophers and religious leaders who argue that solitude, particularly within nature, is the path to enlightenment. In his *Meditation and the Bible* (1988), Aryeh Kaplan writes from a Judeo-Christian perspective, arguing that *hitbodedut* (the Jewish practice of self-isolation) in part requires physical isolation to aid in achieving internal seclusion. In limiting one's perceptive faculties, one's mind is opened up to the divine, and an effective way of achieving this is to contemplate the scale, beauty, and complexity of Creation. The vastness and diversity of the sea, the awe-inspiring immensity of the night sky – Kaplan describes the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Maimonides who suggested that prophets became shepherds because they sought a quiet and contemplative life surrounded by nature (5-10). Isolation within the natural world, therefore, can not only be a source of enlightenment, but it can also be a means of connecting to something greater than oneself.

The power of nature is central to the stories presented in Cartoon Saloon's Irish folklore trilogy: Brendan realises this power on his many outings into the forest, a mysterious place separated entirely from the security of Kells. Saoirse and Ben grow closer together, maturing on a journey that takes them through fields, woodlands, and a world

beneath the sea. In the untouched forests of medieval Ireland, disconnected from the people and society she knows, Robyn bonds with a wild girl called Mebh and is exposed to a completely new way of living. In all three cases, the protagonist finds this untamed otherworld alien and even frightening, but as they encounter supernatural allies, they soon become far more at home in sacred isolation. Nature exists on the outskirts in these films, pushed aside by the urban world, by industry, by a civilisation that refuses to acknowledge the power and wisdom contained in the natural landscape. Brendan, Saoirse, and Robyn's adventures represent a rediscovery of lost worlds and the personal growth resulting from it; Robyn is the most extreme example, choosing to live in the forest by the end, literally becoming an animal.

The trilogy's sympathetic depiction of nature is intertwined with its promotion of a life in simple solitude, oceans and forests acting as a doorway into spiritually enlightened realms. In a similar vein to O'Donoghue, Henry David Thoreau, the American naturalist, poet, and transcendentalist, made the case for a life surrounded by nature in his seminal work *Walden* (1854). His solitary excursion into the woodlands of Massachusetts lasted for two years, of which he wrote that "my nearest neighbour is a mile distant … I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself." (126) As a transcendentalist, Thoreau's philosophy was that humanity is at its best surrounded by nature, living simply, and being self-reliant – a philosophy that is evident in the films of Cartoon Saloon's trilogy.

Nature as an all-encompassing entity, a vast living world, is what grants it a certain sense of power – even divinity – throughout art, philosophy, and religion. This feeds into the idea that solitude within nature opens the door to such power. Geographer Yi-fu Tuan (2013) has questioned why it is that nature, particularly vast and wild landscapes, are so often linked to the divine. Deep forests, immense mountain ranges, dry deserts, they all evoke romantic ideas because, to Tuan, the mind is not distracted by questions of survival here; survival is impossible, and instead these places demand a more "playful and intellectual" approach (29-30). Holy mountains, such as Mt. Athos, Greece, which plays a significant role in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, have been the home of sheltered monks through the centuries. The spiritual journey of pilgrims that go to Athos follows the path that Gregory of Nyssa laid out: purification from egoism, enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, and union with God. These immaterial stages have their own geographical correlatives; entry into the desert beneath the mountain, ascent to the mountain wrapped in fog, and entering into the thick, dark clouds (43-44). The landscape and the path to spiritual

enlightenment blend so much here that they become one in the same.

In *Song of the Sea* in particular, the ever-changing and unpredictable landscape of the ocean becomes a source of natural power – Saoirse immerses herself within it, representing a complete breakaway from the known world and an embrace of the vast natural world. Tuan's descriptions of humanity's relationship with the ocean bears similarities to this. In the Bible, God created the world first as an ocean, and then gathered the waters "unto one place, and let the dry land appear" – for centuries, the ocean has been seen as primordial, chaotic – so distant and unexplored as to be incomprehensible (53). Such perceptions have led to literary and cinematic interpretations of the ocean as the abode of supernatural creatures and hidden knowledge. Humanity's interpretation of the landscape as both threatening and enlightening is effectively utilised by Cartoon Saloon in their depiction of nature as a wise, albeit harsh, teacher. On his first excursion, Brendan is led by Aisling through the woods, making their own path through dense undergrowth and across streams, and along the way she shows him all manner of natural phenomenon. Here, he learns from experience, seeing first-hand the forest in motion. Excursions into nature can be interpreted here as a learning experience. Therefore, solitude within nature can lead not only to growth, but also to a new understanding and respect for nature, an increasingly important insight in an age where the beauty and stability of nature is threatened by human activity.

The argument so far has constituted physical isolation, the literal separation of oneself from the chores, noise, and responsibilities of modern life. However, it is important not to forget the power of mental isolation, especially when physical separation from distractions is not possible. Sarah Shaw (2006) explores the dual nature of solitude and seclusion from the perspective of Buddhism, referencing the Pali canon, an early Buddhist scripture. In the *Itivuttaka*, a collection of the Buddha's teachings, the Seclusion Sutta makes a distinction between physical and spiritual isolation. It recommends seeking out "empty places" for meditation. By "disregarding sense pleasures", the truth can be seen, and the mind can be calmed (23-24). The *Samaññaphala* Sutta goes on to describe how solitude is found at "the roots of a forest tree, a mountain cave or a mountain cleft, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, or a heap of straw in the open air" (69-70). *The Secret of Kells*, *Song of the Sea*, and *Wolfwalkers* all align with this interpretation of solitude; physical solitude is given huge credence, be it Mebh's cave behind a waterfall or the Seanchaí's secluded lair. Such locations often have wondrous properties, and these scenes take place so far from

civilisation that they could be occurring at any point in history. An issue arises here, however, because while physical solitude – surrounding oneself with nature – is desirable, it is not often possible or practical.

The trilogy's strong emphasis on external isolation is understandable given the nature of the medium, internal isolation is far more difficult to portray. However, in an era when most of the population of Ireland live in large towns and cities, physical separation is difficult to achieve. In busy urban landscapes punctuated with sound pollution, rising populations, and long working hours, the necessary time and resources required to seek out solitude in nature are not abundant. The implication that solitude demands long, intense periods of external seclusion is not a message that modern Irish people can garner practical utility from. Modern circumstances demand an alteration to the ways we depict solitude and nature on screen. It is possible to incorporate older ideas, according to writers like Ó Súilleabháin, and in fact necessary; he argues that "reworking" old ideas and traditions is a central element of creativity because circumstances are always changing. He writes about reworking in the context of musical traditions and language, but the process of reworking applies as much to the films of Cartoon Saloon, a trilogy inspired by the folktales of centuries past. Titon similarly examines "adaptive management", the process of consciously altering artistic traditions to ensure their resilience and continued relevance. This process is often experimental, but it is vital if old traditions and teachings are to survive cultural and societal upheaval through the ages. These films move beyond promoting external isolation, touching on a deeper inner solitude that is not entirely dependent on external surroundings.

There are moments in all three films where external and internal isolation blend together, where solitude appears far more accessible. *The Secret of Kells* gives an example of this: when Brendan finally faces Crom Cruach, it is a battle in a bizarre realm where neither up nor down exist. It is entirely physically disconnected from the rest of the forest, Ben and Crom swimming about surrounded by twinkling Celtic patterns. The fight is so surreal that it could easily be happening in Brendan's head; it is his artistic abilities that eventually help him to defeat the dark god, not his physical strength. While the forest is a powerful image of isolation in the film, the realisation of Brendan's inner strength climaxes in this abstract space.

Wolfwalkers too places an emphasis on Robyn's mental space, putting the audience in her head at times by showing her point-of-view in wolf-form. Scenes like this, utilising the power of animation to

explore abstract spaces, emphasise the characters' internal state as much as their external surroundings. While the forest, the ocean, the cavern, and the island all provide invaluable solitude for the protagonists, they ultimately serve as catalysts for an internal process that involves the forging of friendships and the overcoming of personal doubts. It is vital that this internal solitude is emphasised as much as external solitude, something that future filmmakers can consider.

3. Wisdom in Solitude

If solitude within nature can lead to deeper insights about oneself and the world, solitude can be interpreted as a source of wisdom and a tool for rediscovering knowledge. It is an idea that can be explored through Cartoon Saloon's three films – the attainment of wisdom through isolation. This process, building inner strength or unearthing secret knowledge in solitude, is promoted by a number of religions, and referenced throughout world mythology. Examples include the Prophet Muhammad who sought isolation to attain revelations from God, similar to the Biblical figure Moses who climbed Mount Sinai alone to receive the Ten Commandments. The concept of *Khalwa* in Sufism, referring to "solitude", is the act of seeking complete isolation to learn from a mentor and become more in touch with the presence of the divine. A similar Eastern tradition, *Chilla*, is mostly performed in parts of India and the Middle East as an act of repentance and seclusion for forty days and nights. Christian hermits and Tibetan monks are among the many other examples in which religious practitioners seek isolation and detachment. As described by Shaw, the Buddha refers to "ten fruits" born from the contemplative life, including isolation and simplicity; seclusion brings joy and happiness that pervades throughout the mind and body of the practitioner. Seclusion leads to concentration which builds confidence and the "unification of the mind" (69-70). This very much emphasises the internal aspects of solitude, its potential to lead to personal discoveries, and as argued earlier, it is important for this internal process to be discussed as much as external solitude.

Solitude as a source of wisdom can be explored in the context of Cartoon Saloon's folklore trilogy too; the films' treatment of solitude bears some similarities to wider world mythology. Brendan's journey in the first film, reflects a kind of departure, initiation, and return, a journey of personal development. The forest and its many secluded locations, like the treetop where Aisling reveals the berries to him, are places where Brendan can face and embrace his curiosity and creativity, characteristics he was encouraged to suppress in Kells. At

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the abbey, Brendan was a kind of outsider, struggling with internal feelings of otherness in a regimented community. The forest, as a kind of Other in itself, provides an opportunity for him to express himself and integrate these suppressed qualities. By the end of the film, he has become a teacher and a wiseman, the author and illuminator of the Book of Kells. Having become Master of the Two Worlds, he has achieved a kind of internal unification. It is clear example of how entering into solitude, in this case retreating to the forest, leads to the discovery of wisdom and knowledge that can be applied to improve one's life.

Ways of achieving solitude beyond retreating into nature can provide audiences with an understanding of how to apply it in their own lives. Repeatedly, solitude is connected to a 'simple life', a separation from desires through which happiness and wisdom are attained. King-Kok Cheung (2013), comparing Western and Eastern considerations on isolation, discusses Chinese poet and recluse Tao Qian's appraisal of simple homes, far from civilisation and distracting worldly possessions, wherein is contained the "utmost moral power" (65-66). These gifts of solitude – moral teachings, connection with the divine, the rediscovery of old truths – are presented in the three animated films, much as how Irish mythology and folklore refers to isolation. Cú Chulainn, one of the most famous Irish mythological characters and a heroic figure in Irish myth, received his combat training far from the luxuries civilisation, on the Isle of Skye, and the hermit Tuan mac Cairill lived a simple life alone but he offered endless knowledge to visitors regarding the fantastical history of Ireland. In these examples from both Ireland and abroad, it is evident that wisdom and knowledge are linked to solitude, and solitude can be achieved through living a simple life with few distractions.

The potential for lost knowledge to be regained through solitude also ties into the idea of solitude as a source of personal fulfilment, a tool for rediscovery. The portrayal of enlightenment and knowledge gained through isolation is a characteristic of Gaelic cinema that David Martin-Jones (2010) examines in detail. In such films, this wisdom may be portrayed as past knowledge that has been sealed away, waiting to be rediscovered. When found, ancient knowledge has implications for the present, the distant past has the power to shape the future; *An Ìobairt* (1996) portrays ghostly apparitions emerging from the landscape, images of Druidic sacrifice blending with the modern day (Martin Jones 2010, pp.163-164). Similarly, *Seachd: The Inaccessible Pinnacle* (2007) explores the passing of memories and stories from one generation to the next. Old wisdom is attained and understood on the

protagonist's lonely journey. The Grandfather who tells these stories is himself revealed to be centuries-old, a mythic figure in his own right just like the story of Tuan. Secluded natural spaces as containers of historic wisdom are a recurring idea in the folklore trilogy. Brother Aidan teaches Brendan that there is more wisdom to be found in the forest than in any books, and the Great Seanchaí's lair is a repository for all the ancient wisdom in history, locked away in a cave, from which Ben learns about Macha's tragic story and Saoirse's past. This ties into the role that seanchaí – travelling storytellers/historians – have served throughout Irish history, maintaining an oral tradition while spreading knowledge. As demonstrated, solitude can be a way of retaining or protecting old knowledge and tradition – retreating into solitude allows for that knowledge to be rediscovered.

The characters of Cartoon Saloon's films venture into isolation, either willingly or unknowingly, and the experience changes them for the better. Threats and obstacles in the known world have solutions in the unknown world; these can be material boons such as the berries that Brendan needs to finish the Book of Iona/Kells. By far one of the greatest gifts of isolation however, as depicted in the films, is friendship and acceptance. Allies within the secluded otherworld both serve as companions and mentors, like Aisling, a native of the forest in *The Secret of Kells* who rescues, teaches, and plays with Brendan; apart from being a guide, she is the friend that he never had back in Kells. In *Song of the Sea*, multiple friendly mentors and allies emerge from the unknown world to guide the children, such as the Daoine Sídhe who not only teach the protagonists and the audience about the supernatural, but they also provide light-hearted entertainment. Mebh, although untamed and beast-like, is the kind of reliable mentor that Robyn could never have found back in the town, even helping Robyn to discover the ability to transform.

These experiences elevate the protagonists to a new way of seeing the world, and while the presence of a friend or mentor may seem antithetical to the concept of isolation, some worldviews consider it a vital component. Tao Qian, in his extensive writings about hermitage and life in the countryside, emphasised the importance of providing for one's family. To him, being in the presence of friends, children included, does not prevent one from finding solace in seclusion but rather contributes to it (68). Seclusion does not always have to mean loneliness and complete disconnection from the world, sometimes it can just be a modest and minimalist lifestyle. Paul Salmon and Susan Matarese (2014) write of "solitude in community", arguing that social interaction is an effective buffer against stress. They point

out that, while Henry Thoreau may have spent years in relative solitude, he was surrounded by a supportive network of friends. Thoreau (1854) himself claimed that solitude can be achieved in communal settings: "The really diligent student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as solitary as a dervis in the desert." (131) He went on to describe how his life in solitude consisted of the occasional visitor, and he welcomed them: "I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society." (135) This positive message, found at times in all three films, provides a realistic and attainable goal for modern viewers, relating back to the need for practical advice as discussed in the previous section.

So far, the benefits of solitude have been discussed, the rewards gained from retreating to seclusion or favouring a lifestyle comparable to that of our ancestors. The rediscovery of ancient wisdom, such as the knowledge and stories gifted by the Great Seanchaí to Ben, encourage us to disconnect from the present and look back to the past for guidance. Nigel Thrift and Rob Kitchin describe the contentment that comes from such a pursuit: young people seek to distance themselves from the communities where they grew up; artists pursue distance from distractions and find solace in isolation; self-imposed exile can provide benefits like protection. Distance and seclusion can also define geographical regions and identities, insulating peoples from danger or massive political upheaval occurring elsewhere. However, distance and isolation can also lead to a loss of contact between friends or can mean that some communities are unable to benefit from innovations happening far away. Remoteness can create adversity and myopia; it can put one at a disadvantage. The multi-faceted nature of solitude must be considered if it is to be effectively understood and promoted; there is the potential for it to be a regressive act, not a progressive or enlightening one.

Simple living is also far from idyllic; it may provide isolation, but it presents its own challenges. Tuan provides something of a counter to Tao Qian's veneration of the simple farmer's life, arguing that the escape from rural agriculture and the rise of populations in cities meant that the backbreaking work of farming could be avoided by most people (120-122). Evidently, a balance must be found between retreating into solitude and returning to everyday life. The pursuit of a simple life with few to no luxuries can be venerated to such an extent as to be harmful and misleading. In Cartoon Saloon's trilogy, some characters do discover that balance: Brendan may enjoy the seclusion of the forest, but the knowledge he gains must ultimately be brought back to his own people. He does not become a recluse, he becomes a travelling teacher,

spreading wisdom for all to hear. Saoirse similarly decides to remain with Ben and her father in the end; the secluded otherworld is a container of much wisdom, but she realises she cannot stay there forever. Solitude is a process, a means to attaining personal growth and wisdom, not the end itself.

The complexities of solitude and isolation are evident in the writings of other geographers. Stephen Royle (2014) may celebrate the insulative nature of islands in his work, but he is not unaware of the dangers of extreme isolation. Cultures can be preserved for centuries, but failure to communicate with the outside world can also result in self-destruction – he points to Rapa Nui (Easter Island) and its unique culture, shaped by isolation. The complete seclusion of the islanders led to the development of ancestor worship and the construction of hundreds of moai, monolithic statues. One theory for the lack of trees on the island is that the people of Rapa Nui exhausted all resources. By the time that settlers arrived, the island's population had shrunk significantly, and clan warfare was widespread. Extreme isolation has the potential to mould and insulate utterly unique cultures and religions, but failure to communicate with the outside through trade and the exchange of ideas can also set societies back. It is clear that a careful equilibrium has to be maintained when applying solitude, either on the scale of entire cultures or individual lifestyles.

Arguing for the abandonment of modern circumstances and returning to some mythical "greater" time, utilising mythological source material to romanticise nature and the ancient past, can quickly become a regressive and harmful message. Therefore, any reworking of myth that advocates for the virtues of isolation must find a balance, promoting the wisdom of the past and nature without glorification. Reflecting on Titon's writings about "adaptive management" and sustainability in artistic traditions, he argues that one of the purposes of adaptation is to account for weaknesses and adjust accordingly – depictions of solitude are vulnerable to becoming regressive and harmful, therefore modern reworkings of these ideas ought to be conscious of the pitfalls. *The Secret of Kells*, *Song of the Sea*, and *Wolfwalkers* are good examples of this approach in action: the outsider protagonist may gain a great deal from their seclusion, but they bring their own strength and wisdom with them into the unknown world. Brendan, Saoirse, and Robyn all undergo internal growth, but these outsiders ultimately rescue the worlds they have discovered, giving as much as they gain. These films depict an exchange of ideas and worldviews between past and present, between humanity and the natural world. The implication is that, through the practice of

seclusion, the past is something to learn from but not entirely return to; modernity and the city have the potential to evolve and should not be abandoned. Nature and the supernatural is also portrayed in a multifaceted way, full of as much terror and violence as it is wisdom and hope. Crom Cruach and Macha, both primary antagonists, are examples of this.

Cartoon Saloon's folkloric trilogy, in their exploration of solitude and the wisdom that it provides, are progressive rather than regressive. They depict the discovery of hidden truths within isolation as life-changing moments for the young protagonists, leading to maturity and open-mindedness; as worlds collide, they blend and benefit from each other's experiences. This process ultimately leads to a dramatic transformation, both physical and mental, born from the wisdom attained in solitude.

4. Transformation through Solitude

Throughout the trilogy, the wisdom and self-improvement that is achieved by the heroic characters eventually leads to a complete transformation, either physical or mental. This transformation is the third and final benefit of solitude that will be discussed here, and as with the two prior examples, the trilogy successfully incorporates and reworks old ideas regarding transformation through solitude. It is important to remember that while Saoirse or Robyn may undergo extreme bodily transformation, it is ultimately reflective of a deeper internal process. While Cheung is clear that Tao Qian's perspective on isolation is distinct in many ways from that of American writer and lecturer Ralph Waldo Emerson, they share a common understanding that isolation leads to an immense inner transformation. For the Chinese poet, this meant finding a deep self-respect while attaining humility in the knowledge that any individual is just a small part of a vast natural order. For Emerson, a close friend of Henry Thoreau of whom he shared many transcendentalist beliefs, solitude leads to connection with the divine and the realisation of one's immense potential, a kind of transcendence (68-69). Similarly, Cartoon Saloon's three folkloric reworkings depict solitude as a source of personal and physical transformation, all the while leaning more in favour of Tao Qian's worldview. Isolation within the supernatural world, disconnected from all that is familiar, first and foremost matures the young characters.

This is most prevalent in *Song of the Sea* as Ben and Saoirse's relationship, starting out as a childish sibling rivalry, grows into a deep mutual affection and urge to protect each other; a coming-of-age story.

Isolation also leads to the discovery or development of skills: Brendan's retreat into isolation results in artistic abilities that defeat Crom and complete the Book of Iona/Kells; Saoirse does not just discover her voice, she sings, and her song transforms the dying world of the Sídhe; Robyn masters her new form as a wolfwalker, harnessing transformative powers to defeat the Lord Protector's forces. This maturation and achievement of great feats, the transformation of the characters into heroes of myth, is only possible due to the solitude they all underwent.

This discovery of inner talent not only lends to hope in the external world, overcoming terrifying foes and protecting forgotten realms, it often represents the culmination of these characters' arcs and the completion of their path towards self-acceptance and self-cultivation. Again, it is a story that harkens back to Cú Chulainn in isolation, training with Scathach and developing combat skills that would be useful throughout the rest of his life. Fionn mac Cumhaill, another well-recognised hero of Irish mythology, was brought up in secret deep in the forest of Sliabh Bladma. Here, his isolation served as protection against those tracking him down, and in the forest, he learned how to hunt and fight. These cases of secluded self-improvement are also reminiscent of *chilla katna*, similar to the Eastern practice of *chilla*, in which an advanced practitioner of classical Hindustani music goes into extreme isolation for weeks to hone their talents. Throughout the world, solitude is not just seen as a source of wisdom, it provides an opportunity to reshape oneself entirely. In the case of Brendan, his transformation leads to Brother Aidan's eventual irrelevance; once the boy's mentor, Aidan is replaced by his own student. Brendan goes on to show the Book of Iona (now the Book of Kells) to the people of Ireland, passing on the wisdom he attained. It is a heroic transformation that William Indick (2004) describes as vital to the progression of the hero's journey. The Hero learns much from the Mentor, only to replace them in time – in this case, it demonstrates how solitude is a means of achieving immense personal transformation.

Song of the Sea deals with the tempestuous landscape of the ocean, itself a powerful image of transformation. Alain Chouinard (2010) describes the transformative and healing properties of water in Irish myth, and how it is interpreted in the works of Neil Jordan, something that can be applied to Cartoon Saloon's films and *Song of the Sea* in particular. To Chouinard, the ocean's "irrationality" and refusal to conform to any specific form, its complete isolation from the reliable shape of the land or the claustrophobia of the city, makes it a

powerful embodiment of transformative processes. It is a strong motif in *Song of the Sea* because it inherits centuries-worth of meaning. The ocean as a symbol of shapeshifting and the ever-changing world, when reworked by Cartoon Saloon, becomes a means of visually demonstrating the potential for self-reinvention. The depiction of physical transformation as a whole, be it into a seal or a wolf, is utilised in the trilogy to visually represent a process that might otherwise be difficult to portray, much as how surreal imagery is used to show internal isolation and place us in the mind of the characters.

External seclusion may be more difficult to achieve for some people, but transformation is ultimately portrayed by these films as an inner process. It is the result of an appreciation for one's place in the world, the achievement of self-respect, and the cultivation of relationships. Just as how meditative practices and connection with the natural world can improve one's mood and mental wellbeing, these films depict isolation and solitude as sources of personal transformation. Brendan, Saoirse, and Robyn go on isolated journeys, physically moving through supernatural spaces and taking on literal threats, and the audience is encouraged to seek out a similar, albeit far less literal, journey.

5. Conclusion

Cartoon Saloon's folklore trilogy, through the revitalisation of mythical characters and imagery, was an attempt to promote Ireland's past as a source of guidance in the present, to embolden appreciation for nature, and to provide answers to an audience seeking meaning in a rapidly changing world. The connective tissue of these issues was the portrayal of solitude both external and internal. It has been demonstrated that these three films succeed in their endorsement of solitude as a source of personal growth, vital in the pursuit of a more fulfilling life. While such a message can fall into many traps, it has also been shown that these films navigate the issue of solitude in the modern world with care, ultimately providing a message that is both practical and forward-looking.

Far from the first stories to promote self-isolation, these three films are the inheritors of a millennia-old tradition in which religious fables, myths, philosophical essays, and art have celebrated the personal benefits of solitude and seclusion. Solitude as a path to connection with the divine, a spiritual or meditative experience, is carried on in Cartoon Saloon's animations, the supernatural always hidden but accessible if one seeks it out. The implication that enlightenment can be tapped into in the depths of a forest, beneath the

sea, or on a secluded island urges the audience to look to nature for solace, a message that also lends to an environmentalist reading of these films. While there is the danger of overemphasising external isolation and glorifying a fictional version of the natural world, these films successfully urge the viewer to look beyond that, implying that external isolation is merely the gateway to a far more valuable internal process.

Solitude can provide more tangible benefits than esoteric wisdom or some appreciation for nature; skills and self-cultivation, developing a strong respect for oneself, are depicted as benefits. The presence of allies is also less of a distraction and more of a necessity in the pursuit of fulfilment. Solitude is additionally portrayed as the key to unlocking guidance from the past, a way of connecting with one's heritage and the history of the land. Far from suggesting a return to some earlier state of existence, the exchange of ideas between past and present in these films, particularly between characters like Brendan and Aisling, is a progressive and constructive message. The final result of seclusion, a self-rejuvenation that is depicted in these films as a dramatic transformation or the attainment of great powers, is something that audiences can strive for within their own lives. While taking on a fantastical and highly stylised form, exploring mythic places that feel a world away from the regimented, industrialised world in which we live, this cinematic trilogy's message about seclusion is one that has rung true throughout the centuries, regardless of the conditions.

As equally important as the message itself, the way it is presented mostly acknowledges and accommodates for the circumstances that modern audience find themselves in. *The Secret of Kells*, *Song of the Sea*, and *Wolfwalkers* may place a stronger emphasis on external isolation, and at times depict the urban landscape as if it were irredeemable, but these films lay the groundwork for future mythological adaptations and reworkings seeking to explore solitude. Future works can expand further on the theme, examining new ways in which modern people may apply it. Cartoon Saloon's trilogy shows that, just as how folklore remains relevant today, solitude can be a positive element in the lives of modern Irish people.

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

On Skepticism: Jonathan Coe's "Middle England" and All Things Political

(Jonathan Coe, *Middle England*. Penguin Random House Books, 2019)

Anemona Alb[1]

Saying that politics and literature get interspersed is by no means moot. It has seldom been the case that never the twain shall meet. On the contrary, paradigms begotten by, say, the politics of class, the politics of gender, the politics of writing have cropped up in literature of the British conviction, indeed they have been rife.

Jonathan Coe's work under scrutiny here is a case in point. Beyond its glaringly evident excellence in terms of literary craftsmanship, it equally yields a whopping chunk of all things political. Indeed, modern Britain is Coe's ideological playground. And does he play! It is with relentless humor and subtlety that Coe embraces the mishap of politicians, shadow cabinet ministers and aficionados in "Middle England".

Amid all the politicians prevaricating about crucial matters, to say nothing of the subsequent dither and delay, all this has done nothing to alleviate the misgivings of the British people. Brexit was no mishap; it was, more have come to believe, cynically brewed beforehand. Or was it mere political incompetence? Was Cameron genuinely gormless? There's ample room for debate on that conundrum.

Coe's novel "Middle England", published in 2018 is an ever so subtle critique of the meanderings and indeed tribulations of the UK in pre and post-Brexit times. David Cameron's Russian roulette-ish stance is the prompt here and all the minions of his doomed vision get to carry out his gambling, for lack of a better term, with Britain's future and get to fall into unavoidable ridicule in the process. An entanglement of lives and destinies in the post-Brexit vote reshuffling is laid bare by Coe in this fiercely satirical novel. The political elite formerly associated with Cameron, alongside a slew of journalists and aficionados undergo what can be arguably termed a post-traumatic stress disorder. No longer numbed by charismatic myths perpetuated by the top politicians of the land, indeed experiencing the predictable disenchantment thereof, these characters that would normally be backgrounded, relegated to the margins in more conventional fiction, are hereby brought to the fore by

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Coe and made to navigate, indeed mitigate, this political dystopia. But dystopia *per se* it is not, as Britain has genuinely, albeit unconvincingly, left the EU once and for all, the lingering nostalgia of all perks European all too poignant. They struggle and strive, indeed they scrum to make sense of Britain's ill-fated departure (from all things ethical and indeed from self-preservation), whilst the man responsible for all this retires to the Cotswolds-y comforts of the country-side and gets intent on writing his memoirs in a custom-tailored new shed specifically designed for a wannabe recluse. Britain was prised, forced out of The European Union by the vanity and ideological short-sightedness of one leader. And now this leader sets out to put forward what is likely to be a bland, humdrum, unabridged rendering of his life and times.

The distortedness of discourse matches up to the one of lives tainted, of destinies thwarted in post-Brexit Britain. The semantic ambiguity of political documents, as laid bare by Coe's characters is quite mind-boggling. The doggerel thereof, unmasked. Terms such as 'advisory' and to what extent that can miraculously turn into 'mandatory' or 'the people' as opposed to 'the public' are tackled with by the protagonist in all bewilderment. Semantic and pragmatic versatility relinquish complexity, just to gain the crystal-clear uni-directionality of what Arendt labels 'the banal nature of evil'; of political evil pervading the ages. The following quotation is a case in point:

> Nigel had been looking puzzled, but his face now cleared: 'Ah, you're talking about the *public*. Sorry, that's not what I meant by "people".
> 'What did you mean by "people"?'
> 'I meant people in the Conservative Party who keep banging on about how much they hate the EU and won't shut up until we do something about it.'
> 'Ah, *those* people.'
> 'Those people.'
> 'So that's why Cameron's promising this referendum. To silence *those* people.'
> 'Don't be silly, Douglas. Holding a referendum on such an important issue just to silence a few annoying people in his own party? That would be a highly irresponsible thing to do.'
> 'But that's just what you said he was doing.'
> 'No I didn't. I said nothing of the sort. Have you not *read* the manifesto?'
> 'Of course I have.'
> 'Well, it says here why we're promising the referendum.' (Coe 2019: 183)

In the same vein of newly-cast ambiguity and ambivalence, they go on chattering about the lo! and behold! myriad facets of the term 'advisory', as the following snippet shows:

> 'That sentence about the consent of the British people ...'
> 'Yes?'
> 'Just after that. Here...' He took the pamphlet back from Nigel and rapidly scanned the page. "Yes, here we are: "Membership of the European Union depends on the consent of the British people – *and in recent years that*

consent has worn wafer-thin."
'That's right. It has.'
'So what Cameron's doing is extremely risky, in other words?'
'Why do you say that?'
'Because he's proposing to hold an in-out referendum and he knows in advance that the majority is going to be wafer-thin.'
Nigel shook his head and tutted. 'Honestly, Douglas, you writers! With your ridiculously creative interpretations of things. You take a perfectly clear, perfectly innocent phrase and you twist it, you distort it …'
'I suppose you could always make the result dependent on a supermajority – sixty per cent or something like that.'
'That idea was suggested, but there's no real need.'
'Why not?'
'Because the referendum will be purely advisory.' (Coe 2019: 183-4)

And advisory it most obviously was not. Note the ambiguity of 'advisory', which became painfully 'mandatory' in the long run. Hence the Brexit-esque chaos, read turmoil. Britain could surely have had an upheaval triggered by a less frivolous, vacuous prompt, if upheaval was to be had.

On an equal satirical note, Coe has us know that political decisions are now made by Theresa May, *le nettoyeur,* as it were, by following the ideological intricacy of the news in The Daily Mail, of all places. Yep, that is her – makeshift, improvised - *modus operandi.* The inadequacy thereof, the frivolous levity of such discourse as the one promoted by a tabloid, the randomness of it all, all is only but fitting the state of ideological disarray that Britain has been left in after the Brexit vote of 2016. Equally saliently, the long-practised and well-honed pomposity and decorum of Mrs May is hilariously juxtaposed with the discoursal misalliance that a tabloid represents.

Arguably, the Tories' ideology has always been the pet peeve of the common Brit. However, as a perusal of "Middle England" yields, the rift between the political elite of Britain at large and the commoner goes far beyond Tory or Labour ideologies. It is bi-partisan arrogance that the common Brit deigns to extol. Nor does he forthright critique it, in all British decorum and stiff-upper-lip, never grumble, never complain. Hence the British dry humor and understatement that pervades Coe's style as well. In that sense, Jonathan Coe's voice is sounding loud and clear, if ever so subtly, across party lines. It is the skepticism of disenchantment of the British people with their reluctantly charismatic political leaders.

Undoubtedly, this is fiction that is bound to enthrall the enthusiast, the political gofers and the skeptics alike.

Rewriting Feminine Destinies or the Variegated Fates of Feminist Paradigms: Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet*
(Tinder Press, 2020)

Anemona Alb[1]

Maggie O'Farrell's novel, "Hamnet", published in 2020 and a winner of The Women's Prize for Fiction in 2020 is a multi-dimensional, multifaceted one, an excursion into alternative histories, biographies and femininities; the possible behind-the-scenes sequence of events regarding Shakespeare's biography, alongside the broader historical context of The Renaissance and the impossibility of alternative femininities, to say nothing of feminisms in Shakespeare's time are explored therein. The destinies of the offspring of famous parents are more often than not obscured by the brilliance *per se* of their parents' work or, at times, the hype around their parents' work. The former is the case with Shakespeare's children, some of whom died in infancy. Equally saliently, the broader socio-economic, cultural and historical contexts that made Shakespeare possible, but that also made his mishaps possible, are laid out by O'Farrell in this pseudo-*Bildungsroman*. For instance, historical events such as pandemics of the plague, of the bubonic fever etc. are the prompts for mishap in Shakespeare's biography. Equally poignantly, the (sociological) destinies of women are looked at in granular detail here.

The strand this review focuses on is the feminist one. The theoretical underpinnings of my approach are those of repressed femininity in times of yore, of paleo-feminism, as it were. The Bard's wife, named Agnes in the novel (as opposed to the real name of Shakespeare's wife, Anne Hathaway) is portrayed here in an elaborately implicit manner, instances when she 'speaks' her mind notwithstanding. I'm using the scare quotes here as hers is rather a muted expression of all things rebellious, more specifically she 'speaks' her mind by instantiating significant gestures of acceptance or rejection, as the case may be. Indeed, of compliance to the norms of Renaissance society, of the smallville mentality of Stratford-upon-Avon or the eschewing thereof. Agnes's trajectories in suburban Stratford and indeed in the household that she shares with kin are presented in granular detail. The minutiae of everyday life in such a household are meant to illustrate the micro-universe of constant, predictable, safe domesticity as opposed to the vagaries of the *agora*, of the

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public space, that only the men of the time could call their turf. Her trajectories in the household, from the scullery to the kitchen or the nursery configure an ideological map that celebrates her presence as a wife and a mother in the vein of what Coventry Patmore is later to term 'the angel of the house'. Not only is it a composite topography of sorts, it is equally all about the multi-functionality of womanhood. Utilitarian images of women were quite the thing in The Renaissance (see also the Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet"), as this was a departure from the idealized, woman-on-a pedestal, woman-as-object-of-desire iconography of womanhood prior to the Renaissance, *i.e.* in The Middle Ages. The 'damsel-in-distress' is on an egressive, *i.e.* exiting stance in The Renaissance, in comes the utilitarian (incipiently independent) woman. It just so happens that Agnes's independence is portrayed in this novel as being confined to eroticism, hence to the domestic space, and not to the public sphere. Agnes is the one who decides when acts of intimacy are to take place and her husband complies. It is quite telling that most of the crucial activities in her life, eroticism, child-rearing, or managing the homestead take place in a muted kind of way, with little discourse pervading them, but replete with gesture. Take for instance her tactile behaviors, as regards her kids and her husband. She touches her children constantly, ever so tenderly, the doting mother that she is. Not the same happens in her interactions with her husband, the tactility she allows him is sparse; for example, there is a gradual, incremental approach to their intimacy, once he returns from London, as if this were required for London mores to 'rub off' him, in O'Farrell's words:

> Judith sees, too, that for the first few days her mother will not look at him. She steps aside if he comes close; she leaves the room if he enters.
> He trails her, though, when he is not shut inside his chamber, working. Into the brewhouse, around the garden. He hooks a finger into her cuff. He comes to stand next to her in the outhouse while she works, ducking his head to see under her cap. Judith, crouching in the chamomile path, on the pretext of weeding, sees him pick a basket of apples and offer them, with a smile, to her mother. Agnes takes it without a word and puts it aside.
> After a few days, however, there will be a kind of thawing. Her mother will permit his hand to drop to her shoulder as he passes her chair. She will humour him, in the garden, answering his constant enquiries as to what is this flower, and this, and what is it used for? She listens as, holding an ancient-looking book, he compares her names for the plants to those in Latin. She will prepare a sage elixir for him, a tea of lovage and broom. She will carry it up the stairs, into the room where he is bent over his desk, shutting the door after her. She will take his arm when they walk together out in the street. Judith will hear laughter and talk from the outhouses.
> It's as if her mother needs London, and all that he does there, to rub off him before she can accept him back. (O'Farrell 2020: 330)

All this choreography of appeal and rejection is witnessed by the daughter, Judith, whose surveillance is but one of a myriad of surveillances in the house. Full-blown Foucault (not only is this extract redolent of tropes of Focauldean surveillance, but also of the technologies of the body as laid out by Foucault).

This is not to say that shedding the subdued stance of femininity and embracing a more assertive one at the time was by any means able to usurp the hegemony of male power, indeed of androcentrism. It is but Agnes's silent warfare against the absurdity of the gender power imbalance. And more importantly still, it is a matter of dialogical epistemologies, of whose knowledge matters, whose expertise? In the grand scheme of things, is it Shakespeare's genius as a playwright and sonneteer that matters more to humanity and to his own life, or is it his wife's muted and underrated vision and capability of raising their offspring and of helping them elude Death in a pandemic? It's the age-old dichotomy of nature *versus* culture; or, as the adage goes, 'What would you rather snatch out of a ravaging fire in your house, a Renoir canvas or a cat, if you could carry one thing only out of harm's way?' If Will's creativity and literary prowess is a matter of unrelenting momentum, so is Agnes's constant and no less spectacular juggling of all things maternal and matronly.

Within the broader strand of iconographies of femininity, as I mentioned before, surveillance paradigms are equally brought to the fore by O'Farrell. Foucault's framework of surveillance comes to mind when reading this novel, in the sense that the women in the house are perpetually observed by, *inter alia,* other women, above or beneath their status (for instance, Agnes is being watched by her mother-in-law and by the maid servants as well), each taxonomy exercising a different type of pressure: the pressure of being subservient to one's mother-in-law/to your elders on the one hand and the pressure of inflicting authority on the servants, on the other hand. There is what I label 'cultural voyeurism' at work here, in the sense of the ubiquitous eye kept on the woman in the culture of the household. Not only is the social palimpsest in the house incrementally built of layer over layer of generational, tribal pressure, it is also horizontally oppressive, by the multitude of staff, servants, scullions, maids about the place.

The mother's competence here is extended to the medical realm as well; quite tellingly, it is Agnes who spots the symptoms of infection in her offspring, and interprets those in all empirical semiology, not the (prescriptively male) physician; it is quite redundant to specify that it was a male doctor that was in charge with patients at the time, as historically speaking, only men could attend university in order to graduate as physicians or as any other professionals, whilst young ladies' education was confined to the private sphere and consisted mainly of domestic skills:

> She's got …the pestilence,' Hamnet whispers. Hasn't she? Mamma? Hasn't she? That's what you think, isn't it?'
> She is gripping Judith's wrist; the pulse is fluttering, inconstant, surging up and down, fading and galloping. Agnes's eye falls on the swelling at Judith's neck. The size of a hen's egg, newly laid. She reaches out and touches it gently, with the tip of her finger. It feels damp and watery, like marshy ground. She loosens the tie of Judith's shift and eases it down. There are other eggs, forming in her armpits, some small, some large and hideous, bulbous, straining at the skin.

> She has seen these before; there are few in the town, or even the country, who haven't at some time or other in their lives. They are what people most dread, what everyone hopes they will never find, on their own bodies or on those of the people they love. They occupy such a potent place in everyone's fears that she cannot quite believe she is actually seeing them, that they are not some figment or spectre summoned by her imagination. (O'Farrell 2020: 124)

What I term 'the semiotics of affliction' here is redolent of Susan Sontag's 'illness as metaphor', in this case the signs on the body, such as swellings and dubious bumps that only a mother can truly empathetically, but equally clinically accurately interpret and that are akin to what Sontag labels the metaphors of illness, in an ideological way, albeit her reference to the contemporary post-AIDS world. What equally comes to mind is the poignantly grotesque vision here, similar to that of Brueghel's rendition of the plague and plague-induced maiming of bodies in his paintings. Also, eroticism (looking at other people's bodies as regards couples, as the generalization goes) is supplanted by medical caution; a parable of the times.

Agnes's reaction to the telling signs on her child's body is two-tiered: body and mind get juxtaposed in all incongruity, the visceral and the intellectual striving to cohere:

> And yet here they are. Round swellings, pushing up from under her daughter's skin.
> Agnes seems split in two. Part of her gasps at the sight of the buboes. The other part hears the gasp, observes it, notes it: a gasp, very well. Tears spring into the eyes of the first Agnes, and her heart gives a great thud in her chest, an animal hurling itself against its cage of bones. The other Agnes is ticking off the signs: buboes, fever, deep sleep. The first Agnes is kissing her daughter, on the forehead, on the cheeks, at the place where hair meets skin on her temple; the other is thinking, a poultice of crumbed bread and roasted onion and boiled milk and mutton fat, a cordial of hips and powdered rue, borage and woodbine. (O'Farrell 2020: 124-5)

The mother is at first in utter disbelief that this could be happening to her child; then the 'mind over matter' stance kicks in and she becomes instantly pragmatic about it all, relinquishing sorrow and readily embracing the frantic chase for medical solutions. At this juncture, knowledge about the healing power of herbs is ushered in, indeed a sort of pseudo-witchcraft as subversive episteme is instantiated. (In terms of real biographies, Shakespeare himself was conversant with botanical taxonomies, with the names and uses of plants as spell-casting potions or as healing or, on the contrary, (temporary) death-inducing serums, as reflected in, say, "A Midsummer Night's Dream" or in "Romeo and Juliet"). Not only is witchcraft associated mainly with (knowledgeable) women, but equally saliently, it is the one scientific domain (the knowledge of the healing power of plants, of pharmacopeia) that was

accessible to women at the time and no wonder this domain was confined to the realm of obscurity in terms of popular recognition, as Woman's very position in society was hardly meant to be in the spotlight.

Nevertheless, O'Farrell has her character be appreciated for her uniqueness, for the idiosyncrasy of her thinking, in a non-prescriptive manner: she is cherished for her clever perception of the quirkiness of the cottage, in an epiphany-like moment, amid the banal of chores (as the house is the space where her imagination can run wild):

> She is untying a cloth bundle and laying out items on the floor when a voice from the bed makes her start.
> 'Where are you?' His voice, deep anyway, is made deeper still by sleep, by the muffled layer of curtain.
> 'Here,' she says, still crouched on the floor, holding a purse, a book, her crown – wilting now and dishevelled, but she will tie it up and dry the flowers and none will be lost.
> 'Come back.'
> She stands and, still holding her possessions, moves towards the bed, pushes aside the curtains and looks down at him.
> 'You're awake,' she says.
> 'And you're very far away,' he says, squinting up at her. 'What are you doing all the way over there when you should be here?' He points at the space next to him.
> 'I can't sleep.'
> 'Why not?'
> 'The house is an A.'
> There is a pause and she wonders if he heard her. 'Hmm?' he says, raising himself on one elbow.
> 'An A,' she repeats, shuffling everything she is holding into one hand so that she can inscribe the letter in the chill winter air between them. 'That is an A, is it not?'
> He nods at her gravely. "It is. But what has it to do with the house?'
> She cannot believe he can't see it as she does. 'The house slopes together at the top and has a floor across its middle. I do not know that I shall ever be able to sleep up here.'
> 'Up where?' he asks.
> 'Here.' She gestures around them. 'In this room.'
> 'Why ever not?'
> 'Because the floor is floating in mid-air, like the cross stroke of the A. There is no ground underneath it. Just empty space and more empty space.'
> His face breaks into a smile, his eyes examining her intently, and he flops back to the bed. 'Do you know,' he says, addressing the covering above him, 'that this is the foremost reason I love you?'
> 'That I cannot sleep in the air?'
> 'No. That you see the world as no one else does.' "(O'Farrell 2020: 134-5)

And that coming from a man who remarkably saw the world as no one else before him had!

As I mentioned before, O'Farrell's "Hamnet" yields more ideological

facets than one; feminism is but one of them. The politics of representation, of the marginal *versus* the central, the ontological *versus* the epistemological are several other possible keys to decoding this overwhelmingly complex novel. A riveting read indeed.

De l'archétype de la sorcière à la condition féminine de l'extrême contemporain

Mona Chollet. 2018. *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes*. Paris: Éditions Zones.

Teodora Cernău[1]

Journaliste et essayiste suisse, Mona Chollet a rédigé des ouvrages qui portent sur la condition féminine, le féminisme, les médias et l'imaginaire contemporain. Dans l'ouvrage *Sorcières. La puissance invaincue des femmes,* l'autrice nous offre un point de vue personnel sur la figure de la sorcière à travers les âges. En voyageant dans le temps, en décortiquant les systèmes de pensée, elle nous montre comment l'imagerie de la sorcière imprègne encore notre société. Cette synthèse fascinante de la figure de la sorcière propose une perspective argumentée, détaillée et constructive sur les archétypes féminins, qui ont infiltré l'inconscient collectif, sabotant les options existentielles des femmes.

Bien ancré dans le présent, cet ouvrage sociologique traite du féminisme et du statut de la femme à travers les siècles. L'étude a entamé de nouvelles pistes de réflexion sur la notion même de sorcière qui n'était au fond qu'une invention des hommes afin de conserver leur pouvoir. Dans l'introduction, l'autrice nous montre que la chasse aux sorcières est loin d'être un événement perdu dans les limbes de l'histoire, de la superstition et de l'obscurantisme. Bien qu'enveloppé de romantisme ou légèreté par les sorcières de la culture populaire, le phénomène a profondément marqué nos imaginaires et la façon dont nous considérons la femme, ses désirs et son rôle supposé dans la société.

À la place de l'image repoussoir héritée des procès et des bûchers de la Renaissance, Mona Chollet veut proposer une représentation différente de la sorcière, qui serait investie des puissances positives. Dans la riche introduction (41 pages), on retrouve des références littéraires et historiques qui nous font découvrir l'histoire niée ou déréalisée qui a façonné notre monde. Par le slogan féministe des années 1970 « Tremblez, tremblez, les sorcières sont revenues ! » (*Tremate, tremate, le streghe son tornate !*), les héritières revendiquent la puissance terrifiante prêtée à leurs ancêtres par les juges. Ensuite, la sorcière est un concept devenu rentable comme une marque

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qui risque d'être dépourvue de son sens magique. D'ailleurs, au cœur de l'ouvrage de Mona Chollet se trouve l'idée « d'explorer la postérité des sorcières. »

L'ouvrage est structuré en quatre chapitres qui explorent plusieurs hypostases des héritières de ces femmes qui furent accusées de sorcellerie : la femme indépendante, la femme sans enfants ou la femme âgée. Dans son premier chapitre, « Une vie à soi. Le fléau de l'indépendance féminine », Mona Chollet s'intéresse aux rôles de la féminité traditionnelle dont on nous fait une « propagande insistante ». Cela « nous affaiblit et nous appauvrit » (p. 56). À partir de la série des portraits de femmes autonomes, l'essayiste dresse la figure de l'aventurière qui tend vers la liberté et l'indépendance. Émancipées des schémas habituels, ces femmes n'auront pas pourtant la chance d'échapper de la perspective patriarcale qui les considère incomplètes et soumises à la misère de la solitude. Le modèle interdit de l'aventurière qui fait le choix du célibat est mis en relation avec le portrait de la femme qui suit les coutumes et les exigences reproductrices de la société. En tenant des rôles sociaux inférieurs, la femme traditionnelle est vue déchirée entre la maternité et le travail. Ce réflexe de servir et de se sacrifier rend impossible la chance de réussite de la femme de nos jours. Lorsque l'épanouissement personnel féminin passe par la maternité qui « flatte notre bonne conscience et notre narcissisme collectif », ce choix devient un « boulet au pied » (p. 82).

Nourri de nombreuses références culturelles, le deuxième chapitre intitulé « Le désir de la stérilité. Pas d'enfant, une possibilité » décrit la façon dont certaines femmes se sont éduquées pour croire en leur force, tout en refusant la procréation. Mona Chollet énumère des écrivaines telles que Simone de Beauvoir ou Virginia Woolf qui ont opté pour leur carrière au dépit du rôle de mère. Dans cette enquête fascinante, l'auteur analyse les raisons, qui ont pu motiver certaines femmes à résister à ce que le monde patriarcal leur imposa : devenir mères. Selon l'essayiste, il y a trois catégories de femmes : celle qui veut devenir mère, celle qui veut devenir tante, et celle qui devrait se tenir à distance de tout enfant.

Tout en revenant à l'époque de la Renaissance, l'image de la sorcière est mise en relation avec la figure de la guérisseuse qui était accusée d'empêcher ou interrompre des grossesses et de faire mourir des enfants. Ainsi la contraception, l'avortement et l'infanticide deviennent-ils des notions épineuses revendiquées par les grands thèmes féministes. La fin du chapitre dévoile le secret ou la transgression la plus grave qu'une femme puisse faire : regretter d'avoir eu des enfants.

Le troisième chapitre, «L'ivresse des cimes. Briser l'image de la 'vieille peau'», est le plus équilibré. L'auteur traite du thème de la vieillesse, tout en explorant les caractéristiques de la désirabilité et de l'attractivité des femmes plus âgées. Considérées indésirables par leur aspect et dangereuses par leur expérience, les vieilles femmes ont été les victimes de prédilection des chasses aux sorcières. Le culte de la jeunesse paru dans les dernières décennies ne fait qu'abîmer l'image du vieillissement féminin. Le poids de dissimuler les traits de la péremption est mis seulement sur la femme, car « les hommes ne

vieillissent pas mieux que les femmes, ils ont seulement l'autorisation de vieillir » (p. 165). Ces représentations continuent à nourrir notre imaginaire et à perpétuer ce tabou social.

Dans le dernier chapitre «Mettre ce monde cul par-dessus tête. Guerre à la nature, guerre aux femmes », Mona Chollet dresse un bilan méthodique de la condition féminine contemporaine. Elle nous invite à une lecture féministe de l'histoire par l'intermédiaire de la métaphore de la sorcière. Les chasses aux sorcières deviennent des symptômes d'un bouleversement plus profond de la société et du rôle de la femme dans son sein. L'univers de la femme proche de la nature a été remplacé par le monde nouveau des hommes : « La sorcière, symbole de la violence de la nature, déchaînait des orages, causait des maladies, détruisait les récoltes, empêchait la génération et tuait les jeunes enfants. La femme qui causait du désordre, comme la nature chaotique, devait être placée sous contrôle. » (p. 191). L'essayiste explore ainsi les liens entre la rationalité, la domination de la nature et celle des femmes.

Si le cheminement proposé par Mona Chollet est percutant, on trouve parfois que son argumentation finit par se contredire et perd sa force. Pourtant, la documentation et le travail de recherche de la journaliste nous offrent de nouvelles pistes de réflexion et affinent notre regard sur le monde et sur la place des femmes. L'héritage que les sorcières nous lèguent de nos jours nous aide à lever les stéréotypes féminins et les rôles socialement assignés.

Guilt, Identity & Belonging in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*
*(*Riverhead Books, 2003)

Ioana Cistelecan[1]

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-American novelist. His debut novel *The Kite Runner* was both a critical and a commercial success; the book, as well as his subsequent novels, have all been at least partially set in Afghanistan and has featured an Afghan as the protagonist. In March 2001, while practising medicine, K. Hosseini began writing his first novel, The Kite Runner, which was published by Riverhead Books in 2003. That debut went on to launch one of the biggest literary careers of our time. Today, Khaled Hosseini is one of the most recognized and bestselling authors in the world. His books: The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns and And the Mountains Echoed have been published in over seventy countries and sold more than 40 million copies worldwide.

Along the years, Khaled Hosseini earned the label of a "publishing phenomenon". His two heart-tugging, blockbuster novels, set in his native Afghanistan, offered simple tales of redemption and grace, while the ugly realities of war in the country rumbled through the news.

The Kite Runner *essentially tells t*he unforgettable, heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a wealthy boy and the son of his father's servant; it is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed. It is about the power of reading, the price of betrayal and the possibility of redemption; and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons - their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

A sweeping story of family, love and friendship told against the devastating backdrop of the history of Afghanistan over the last thirty years, The Kite Runner is definitely an unusual and also a powerful novel that has become a beloved, one-of-a-kind classic.

The narrative progressively follows two friends, Amir - who narrates in the first person – and Hassan. Although they do not know it when the narrative begins, Amir and Hassan are half-brothers by the same father, Baba, who lied in order to hide a secret affair he had with his servant's wife. Hassan is an ethnic Hazara and a Shi'a Muslim, while Amir, the protagonist, is Pashtun. Although they exist in separate strata of society, the two are basically

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inseparable. When Amir runs afoul of Assef, a blond, blue-eyed Pashtun, Hassan appears from behind Amir with his slingshot and threatens to take Assef's left eye if he does not leave them alone. This encounter begins a cycle of violence that cascades through the novel, spanning out into their adult lives.

The Kite Runner tells a moving story about family, love, friendship, betrayal and redemption. School Library Journal reviewer Penny Stevens called *The Kite Runner* a beautifully written first novel. Quite similar to a dark horse, it attracted some producers who turned it into a movie.

The Kite Runner may also be approached as a buildungsnovel, since it follows the narrator, Amir, from boyhood to middle age, focusing on his psychological and moral growth as he seeks redemption for his past actions. Khaled Hosseini inspiringly combines considerations of history and origin, identity and family in order to interrogate questions of belonging and selfhood.

The novel takes place between 1975 and 2002, interweaving the social and political narrative, as devastation is wrought upon Afghanistan, with Amir's personal narrative. At the beginning of the novel, Afghanistan is ruled by King Zahir and its capital of Kabul exists in relative peace. Amir's father, Baba, prospers and Amir and his playmate, Hassan, spend their days climbing poplar trees in an idyllic neighbourhood of Kabul.

Identity and belonging are also closely connected to the social status of each of the characters in The Kite *Runner: both* Hassan and Ali find their identity in their servitude and their status as Hazaras, while Amir and Baba enjoy privilege and freedom because they are Pashtuns. As a child, Amir had learned in one of his mother's old books about the persecution experienced by Hazaras and the unspeakable violence that Pashtuns had subjected them to in centuries gone by.

Even the name "Afghanistan" means "land of Pashtuns" and Baba and Amir have enjoyed intellectual and material freedom that Hazaras can only imagine. Even though Baba treats Ali and Hassan as family in many ways, they are still servants, sleeping in a mud hut and Amir even delights in contributing to Hassan's continued illiteracy. Although Baba and Hassan in no way support the supremacist views of Assef, Assef's discriminatory ideology contributes to the pervasiveness of Afghan prejudice against Hazaras. When Assef becomes a Taliban official, this again becomes a means of legitimizing the "culling" of Hazaras.

In choosing to adopt Sohrab, Amir defies the general's view that adoption is "not for" Afghans. He also finally embraces that what he had previously seen as "other", Hazaras, is actually an inner part of him. The defining moment comes when, while having dinner with the Taheris, the general refers to Sohrab as a "Hazara boy", with the residual prejudice clear in the general's tone. Despite feeling he has little in common with Sohrab, Amir's insistence that the general never call Sohrab a "Hazara boy" again signifies that Amir has finally reached a point where he can stand up not only for himself, but even more importantly, for others. The buildungsnovel

typically charts a character's moral journey and in this moment Amir shows he has developed a strong moral compass and sense of character.

Sohrab also struggles with gaining a sense of belonging and identity after being torn from the safety of his childhood home and forced into a life of orphanhood and sexual abuse. His strongest desire is to return to life of innocence and security he had before his mother's and his father's murder. The life that Amir and Soraya offer him is a haven of safety and stability, away from the inhumanity of the Taliban, but his sense of identity and belonging has been ravaged through the ruination of his childhood, which leaves him feeling so "full of sin" that he sees no place in this new world for himself.

Nevertheless, the ending of The Kite Runner is purposely ambiguous, offering the reader a mere glimpse of new beginnings. But as families and cultures blend as the family attends an Afghan gathering in San Francisco, the reader is left with the sense that identity and belonging no longer refer to blood, race, or even to country. Instead, a new kind of belonging can be found in an increased understanding of and empathy for other human beings, tentatively paving the way for a better world.

The inner turmoil Amir wrestles with after betraying Hassan drives the entire plot of the novel. This struggle denominates a conflict between the kind of man that Amir believes he is and the kind of man that Baba is. By allowing Hassan's rape, Amir fails Hassan profoundly and fundamentally. Even worse, Amir never corrects his failure for the rest of Hassan's life. Amir views Baba as just, strong and sure and finds himself lacking in comparison. Baba seems to share this perception of his son, but Amir ultimately learns that Baba too has deeply betrayed Ali in sleeping with his wife and that much of what Amir perceived as Baba's strength was Baba trying to atone for his failings.

The Kite Runner is primarily an example of *historical fiction* in that it is set against a backdrop of historic events in Afghanistan, from the collapse of the monarchy to the rise and fall of the Taliban. K. Hosseini's novel addresses the way real changes in Afghanistan's political power permanently alter the lives of his fictional characters: the arrival of the Soviets forces Amir and Baba to immigrate to America and the Taliban's reign leads to Hassan's execution and orphans Sohrab.

The Kite Runner's style is both personal and immediate. Because the novel is framed as a recollection of Amir's life, the opening pages describe Amir receiving a call from his "past of unatoned sins" and it establishes that something happened in "the winter of 1975" that shaped the rest of his life, solidifying Amir's voice and personal development as central to *The Kite Runner*. The rest of the novel plays out like a memoir, with Amir retelling his past as if the events are presently happening. The tonality of the novel is both remorseful and nostalgic. From the very beginning, Amir's ominous references to his childhood wrongdoing create a sense of inescapable regret. K. Hosseini's inclusion of these nostalgic details implies that Amir can never entirely escape his country of origin, his past.

Thought-Provoking Books

Harari, Yuval Noah. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2018.
Rosling, Hans, Rosling, Ola, Ronnlund Rosling, Anna. *Factfulness,* London: Sceptre, 2018.

Magda Danciu[1]

It has become a real challenge for us to explore and map our findings regarding the condition of the individual in the present age, so intricate, so dynamic, so unexpected in its turns and outcomes, in its evolution and its future directions in terms of possible scenarios regarding society, environment, technological advancement, scientific discoveries and solutions. Searching for answers to questions related to present-day tensions most often coincides with the quest for our own self, with our constant attempts to comprehend life, to redesign it so as to get it harmonized to the world's (im)perfections and personal (or global) aspirations. It also leads to discover the dimensions of our postmodern society, the complex and sometimes ambiguous process that lies beneath the huge interconnectedness between one's heritage, place on the globe, and individual identity, those elements that "are at the core of the continuous renegotiations of plural, hybrid, diverse societies worldwide" (Ashworth et al., 2007: 212).

The two books that have proven to serve as manuals for navigating reality are the now famous historian, Yuval Noah Harari's *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, respectively, *Factfulness*, authored by the global health and TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) expert, Hans Rosling and his long-time collaborators, Ola and Anna, two bestsellers, very much engaging and helpful in providing a window opened to clarity, which is power in "a world deluged by irrelevant information" (Harari, 2018: IX), and in fighting against the "devastating ignorance with a fact-based worldview" (Rosling, 2018: IX). The referred studies represent inspiring guidelines to suggesting possible ways to cope with our fears, anxieties and stressful negative instincts and misconceptions when trying to understand the topical concepts and realities of the age and the world we live in; in rendering the results of their investigations, both authors approach the above-mentioned issues from global perspectives and their impact on personal behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, reactions.

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Harari's research focuses on current affairs and their possible consequences upon our social and cultural tendencies   as it is based on multiple conversations with the public; he categorized the global dimensions he investigated into five chapters – **The Technological Challenge, The Political Challenge, Despair and Hope, Truth, Resilience -**, each of them particularly picturing aspects of our daily life and environment, such as work, war, nationalism, religion, immigration or education, and giving the readers a historical and a philosophical perspective, and, nevertheless, inciting them to come with questions, not with ultimate answers to our realities, as exemplified when examining the state-of-art of education: „The algorithms are watching you right now. They are watching where you go, what you buy, who you meet. Soon they will monitor all your steps, all your breaths, all your heartbeats (...). You live in the matrix (...). Of course, you might be perfectly happy ceding all authority to the algorithms and trusting them to decide things for you and for the rest of the world (...). If, however, you want to retainn some control of your personal existence and or the future of your life, you have to run faster than the algorithms, faster than Amazon and the government, and get to know yourself before they do."(Harari, 2018: 268).

Similar intentions are decoded in Rosling's panoramic view on key human (as compared to monkeys'!) perceptions and responses to facts and ideas competing in the 21st century, mostly when the authors' demonstrations point to how our mind operates in front of the massive assault of mediated data, providing that „the richness of our visual world is and illusion"(Blackmore et al., 2018: 68) , as we represent the world in our minds through the act of knowing, shaping our self by "facts about our experience"(455) and in interactions with the people around us and the events we witness or are part of. There is a well justified concern for the way in which lack of knowledge or attention for the data, as well as misinformation could generate false beliefs, misjudgment and biases when people try to comprehend the world surrounding them. In order to get a faithful image of the life on earth, the authors list, explain ten instincts that distort our perception of it, and offer ways for reaching a sounder judgment, namely, **1.The Gap Instinct** – "Control it, look for the majority (...), Beware comparisons of the averages (...). Beware comparisons of the extremes (...). Use the view from up here" (Rosling et al., 201846); **2. The Negativity Instinct** – "Recognizing when we get negative news (...). Good news is not news (...). Beware of the rosy pasts" (74); **3. The Straight Line Instinct** – "Don't assume straight lines" (100); **4. The Fear Instinct** – "risk = danger x exposure (...). Get calm before you carry on"(123); **5. The Size Instinct** – "Get things in proportions (...). Compare (...). Divide" (143); **6. The Generalization Instinct** - "Question your categories (...). Look for differences *within* groups (...). Look for similarities *across* groups (...). Look for *differences* across groups" (165); **7. The Destiny Instinct** – "Talk to Grandpa (...). Collect examples of cultural change" (184); **8. The Single Perspective Instinct** – "A single perspective can limit your imagination (...). Test your ideas" (202); **9. The Blame Instinct –** "Resist finding a

scapegoat (...). Look for causes, not villains (...). Look for systems, not heroes" (222); **10. The Urgency Instinct** – "Take small steps (...). Insist on the data (...). Be wary of drastic action."(242).

Dealing with critical topical issues, the two studies become useful manual for teaching and learning how to identify and prevent any erroneous projection on our understanding of our lives, our history and society, our past and present evolution, as well as to gain and further develop a clarity in thinking about the world in general.

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The Visual Echo of Uncertainty

Sorin Alexandrescu, *Lumea incertă a cotidianului* (*The Uncertain World of the Quotidian*), Iaşi, Polirom Publishing House, 2021.

Marius Miheţ[1]

What can you do when you cannot unlatch yourself from the motto of a book? Such as, for example, the following one: „La baza oricărei convingeri bine intenţionate stă o convingere care nu este întemeiată" ("At the foundation of every well-intentioned belief lies belief that is not well-founded"). Those three keywords – belief – intentioned – (un)founded – of Wittgenstein issue a warning on the method, and do not merely justify the intentionality of Sorin Alexandrescu. In other words, the essays in *Lumea incertă a cotidianului* must be read as we have become unaccustomed to. With the perspectives of the major arts that manifest simultaneously. By punctiliously inhabiting one of them, the others miss the influences. The literary critic of today, who neglects the kin arts and is interested to obtuseness only in one of them, might not be a completely lost cause themselves. Imprisoned in the culture of the visual, Sorin Alexandrescu turns the semiotic spectacle of the contemporary arts into a philosophy of fragility.

To find the internal coherence between one's favorite arts is no small feat. Especially when they summarize, each in its own way, instances of uncertainty. The latter, in fact, lies at the foundation of the contamination with Wittgenstein's idea. Which could be reformulated as any certainty is based on an uncertainty. The quotidian looks no different to Sorin Alexandrescu – covered in figurative multiplicity. And the Artist mediates the relations of the undeterminable. He also places, under the mark of the aforementioned concepts, the idea that Romanian literature does not relate to realism, and has, instead, become a literature of the uncertainty of the quotidian (of *"the question without answer"* („*[a] întrebării fără răspuns*")). Freed from ideology, the national quotidian forces us to accept the world that has again become "multiply reinterpretable" („multiplu reinterpretabilă"). In the same sense, the mobility of the quotidian has been replaced by repetitive motion – once strategic; so then, what remains *undiscerned* in post-communism?

A distinctive trait of all of professor Alexandrescu's writing is that it makes concepts that one believes meaning has exhausted operable. In other

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words, Sorin Alexandrescu is a restorer of the narrative image, a Neo-Impressionist painter pulling a theory from any pretext. The results match. Whereas Cioran spoke of "the Cult of Infinity," Alexandrescu proclaims the Cult of Uncertainty. The purpose is, as I have said, the rehabilitation of the narrativity in an image.

To be clearer, he rehabilitates the lost vigor of the discourse dedicated to the image. I believe that what matters is the manner in which the author realizes *the interference* between suggestion, ambiguity and the indeterminate – which oppose the fantastic (whose mystery is deciphered). All texts have the quality of electrifying the interference, of rendering it phosphorescent, visible, through the novelty of the perspective. That is something that can be said of the "in-definite" texts about Mircea Eliade, Ana Blandiana, D. Țepeneag, Mircea Nedelciu, the paintings of Ion Grigorescu, Marcel Iancu, Ștefan Câlția and Victor Brauner, going through the art of Brâncuși and the performances staged by Gavriil Pinte, the cinematographic vision of Adina Pintilie, along with fragments from numerous thinkers. We are in the midst of sumptuous analytical expenditures that agglomerate, frame and mutually support each other. If I had it my way, I would publish the texts separately as micro-syntheses.

Why these themes and not others? I believe that some are already part of his passion, while others, such as the film and drama chosen here, joined in by good fortune. It does not even matter, given that Sorin Alexandrescu can monograph any discourse of the image. Of course that, in each, the analyst takes the interpretation to novel conceptual mobilities. Room is needed to engage in critical dialog with Sorin Alexandrescu's ideas.

In *Noaptea de Sânziene* (*The Forbidden Forest*), the interpreter of the "super-determinate" world performs a monograph-like analysis of the novel. Absolutely memorable, although it does not is not meant for the general public. Sorin Alexandrescu's initiates have no choice, and familiarity with the "non-defined image of the narrated world" („imaginea indefinită a lumii narate") is mandatory. For example, he sees, through the lens of semiotics, how Biriș is "included" in Ștefan's profile, while Vădastra is his opposite. Along with Partenie, they complete this quadrilateral of characters "that are semantically connected" („legate semantic între ele"). Even upon re-reading the book, it seems clear to me that the three are doubles, variants of life and destiny, of revelation, even, for Ștefan. Simply put: an artistic double (Ciru Partenie), a philosophical double (Biriș) and an evil double (Spiridon). Each leaves trails that, like in fairy tales, the hero between worlds must use for their purpose, as a Chosen One (of a superior destiny). That is why Ciru dies *in his stead*, that is why he is "mistaken for," etc. The clones of his possible destiny, if we can call them that, return to the mirror (himself), all the more so as even Sorin Alexandrescu wonders whether this does not all boil down to a self-portrait of Eliade. All of the texts in this book are just as intriguing.

If I may exaggerate, I would say that Sorin Alexandrescu does not interpret, but instead reclaims the lost narration in the image. In the end, the climate created by the analyst functions like echoes of uncertainty in cultural

images. With an efficiency that becomes more heightened as he digs deeper into the context, Sorin Alexandrescu becomes not the interpreter, but the director of the theories. An *uncertainoholic*. A man possessed by uncertainty who cannot unlatch himself anymore from his passion-concept.

The Poetry in Science and the Science in Fiction

John Hands, *Cosmosapiens: Human Evolution from the Origin of the Universe* (*Cosmosapiens: evoluția omului de la originile universului*), translation by Carmen Strungaru and Doru Căstăian, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2019.

Marius Miheț[1]

If you cast even one glance towards the contents of the tome written by John Hands (1945-), you might get dizzy. The titles could easily claim the number one spot in any chart of concepts collected in one place. I am not even sure if a fearless reader would dare to go through with covering the American's voluminous edifice. However, once started, there is somewhat of a fluidity to reading the book. Even though it is more than once that the author brakes suddenly, and the reader risks disorientation when they least expect it. And so praise is due to the two translators, Carmen Strungaru and Doru Căstăian, only they know how they managed to traverse the abstract inferno. But, just so I do not pointlessly extend this introduction, I will say, from the get-go, that, when reading the contents, you feel like you are either smarter or clueless. If you can get even a few useful notions, here and there, to stick in your head, the book is truly a gold mine. I will not hide that, oftentimes, I was tempted to abandon it. After such thought, as if automatic, another attractive speculation arose. And so on.

As we know, debates around ideas no longer exist in our cultural world. At least not as they should. Almost never with the concepts on the table and with fertile examination. *Cosmo Sapiens. Evoluția omului de la originile universului* would have had such a quality to intellectuals. Alluring, no two ways about it. As for the author, John Hands is clearly from another world. Probably teleported from a century when encyclopedic systematization did not break down one's diopters, nor greatly tested one's seat. The man writes like an improvised offbeat scholar. One with no humors, but enough relativizations, who acknowledges that what he does not know deserves a dialog. Thus, he collaborates, to as satisfactory a level as possible, with over a hundred specialists. We will read the results of an extremely painstaking incursion in what concerns the manner in which science has clarified human destiny to us from the beginning until today.

The four parts trace: the emergence and evolution of the matter and energy that humans are made of, the second – the emergence and evolution

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of life, the next – the emergence and evolution of humans, and the last comparatively analyzes the coherent patterns from which we derive the conclusions. The essential question for Hands is not who we are, but what we are. And the answer, obviously, cannot be singular. As much as it is the sum of all solutions from various domains. It is also true that not once do certain categories and demonstrations swiftly hit rough patches. Plenty certain of the fact that science advances in time, while faith does not, Hands is determined to show how the myths of evolution and the evolutionary process (in which he believes we were involved) intersect. Elegantly, he warns that we, today, understand science through four words: hypothesis-theory and science-retrodiction („rezultat care a apărut în trecut, dar este dedus sau prezis pe baza unei legi sau teorii științifice ulterioare ("a result that appeared in the past, but is deduced or predicted based on a subsequent scientific law or theory")). A system of phenomena thus manifests in any formulation of a law / theory that science proposes, and it is also science that adds information about past phenomena. What is interesting still at this stage, I believe, is Popper's criterion of falsifiability, because scientists are certain that they can discern between scientific hypothesis and mere belief through the fact that the hypothesis must be subjected to empirical tests that can falsify it. If a scientific theory explains a generous tapestry of phenomena, then it is useful.

Hardly, but, I have no doubt, with some curiosity will philologists accept the following scientific hypothesis related to the origin myth: 13.7 billion years ago, the universe was born as an incandescent speck with infinite density and gigantic temperature, which cooled and kept the form it has today. In other words, the Big Bang. Of course, we may prefer the Orphic or Daoist myth, or the Heliopolitan myth, *the Upanishads*, the Scriptures… Hands is not content with ascertaining the fact that the origin of the myths, for example, presents the faces of the same reality. He wants "conclusive" proof. The American's explanations are oftentimes amusing. To him, these subjects are made short work of by systematically calling upon specialists, and it is no wonder that superstitions, for example, do not withstand scientific thought.

It took him a decade to write the book. It would have probably taken him just as much if he had comprehensively covered just the bibliography for the first chapter. And no, Eliade is nowhere to be found. I must, however, admit that, in several instances, science beats literature as an imaginary. And I believe that, he himself a writer, a famous one even, John Hands seeks not the truth of science as much as he does the truth of literature in its grandiose lie. Only he discovers it, this simple law, but a law beneficial to the readers caught in such a history of humanity from the beginning until today by taking ultra-roundabout paths.

I was saying that, sometimes, science beats fiction: for example, Hubble discovers that the stars are, in fact, galaxies shifting into red, that the white light is the mixture of all colors. In comparison with the immobile definition of the stars, the entire discovery is a poem in itself, a confirmed one, of the universe in expansion.

Just as attractive are the mathematicians' interventions on physicians' hypotheses related to the Big Bang. For example, the cosmologists investigate the veracity of statements such as the one on the immobility of the stars and their products – galaxies and galactic swarms - , as they do not move in space, and the space around them is the one moving by extending itself. The cosmological redshift led me back to reading the novel *Deplasarea spre roşu* (*The Redshift*) (2012) by Radu Mareş, which, on this occasion, I realize I have judged with a deficit of meaning. John Hands notices that most cosmologists believe their domain to be a science, confusing mathematical theories with scientific ones.

All sorts of speculations about the existence of anti-galaxies, matter-antimatter asymmetry, dark energy, eternal chaotic inflation, sacred geometry, uranic rays and the like, which surely would have seduced Nichita Stănescu and others, just as in love with the exotic relations between poetry and science. It is very clear that the conceptual dearth of contemporary poetry would find here, in the speculations of physics and mathematics, enough hotbeds.

But, just so you see how useful this scientific synthesis is for the contemporary philologist, I will give you one more example, one so common in literature that it has lost its consistency a long time ago: the universe. With the professional explanations, I can understand the error of literary theorists as well, when they refer to the multiverse; they are, in fact, in what is called a megaverse. The latter appears to be a presumptive universe with several dimensions in which our three-dimensional universe exists, while the multiverse is a presumptive cosmos that contains our universe plus a multitude or even an infinity of other universes with which we have no physical contact. Literature, otherwise, overflows with quantum multiverses... As I have said before, such exact adjustments also help to correctly categorize certain subgenres in fantasy literature, for example, as well as in other novelistic genres. Of course that, in what concerns the evolution of life, the author makes an extended stop in the Darwinist, neo-Darwinist and recent ultra-Darwinist zone, but, surprise!, no theory, not even if it comes from the new sciences, like astrobiology, ensures a unanimously accepted definition of life.

As for humans and their evolution, Hands seems to be the undeclared follower of Huxley, who saw conceptual thought itself as an essential quality of humans. He admits that there is no consensus on this matter either. Nothing new here. Going through the opinions of canonical paleoanthropologists, philosophers and intellectuals always gives off the impression of a short dictionary. Of course, it could not have been any other way, but we must leave them like that, the writer lists them only to prepare the reader for the ramifications of scientific thought. Extremely tonic will be the incidences of neuropsychology for philologists. Francis Crick, for example, in *The Astonishing Hypothesis*, says that "you" – with all of your memories, identity, free will, etc. – are, in fact, the behavior of a vast series of nerve cells and molecules associated to them. There is a geometric growth of

knowledge that constantly incites fundamental reformulations, but all of them lead, it seems, to what we already knew: that humans are unique.

John Hands' merit resides in the coherent systematization of the general concepts that have formed what we are today. We can agree or not accept to credit scientific reductionism as the sole method of scientific investigation. Just as how faith in physicalism and the theory according to which, on its own, physical matter is real and that the mind or consciousness will be explained as physical phenomena or as interactions between such phenomena remain intriguing. Also attractive for a certain type of literature is evolutionary psychology, which presents us as an accumulation of thousands of generations and random genetic mutations. In the end, the divergences do nothing but provide a plus to those who are always searching for a subject. I also enjoyed the way in which he demonstrates the limitations of science, recognizing the unbreachable boundaries.

Overall, however, the readers will intuit, in human evolution as a cosmic process, nothing other than major literature stemming from the conviction of (in) completeness. I have no doubt that John Hands has discovered, at the end of this encyclopaedic endeavour, that humans are the mystery that we know all and nothing about.

"My letter-writing uniform…"
(Book review: Adam Sisman (ed.). *More Dashing. Further Letters of Patrik Leigh Fermor*. London: Bloomsbury 2018.)

Dan Horațiu Popescu[1]

Patrick Leigh Fermor, one of the grand masters of British travel literature, had – according to Harry Mount, who wrote for the *Literary Review* on the author's books of selected letters – "the most famous case of writer's block of the last century" (2018). It was well known that Fermor, after having published, in the autumn of 1986, *Between the Woods and the Water* – the second part of his intended trilogy about his walking across Europe in the early 1930s – "spent years in agony, trying to finish the third volume" (Mount, 2018), which he left partly drafted in 1991, when he died at the age of ninety-six.

However, the flamboyant writer, in which a man of letters happily coexisted with a man of action – his major contradiction, actually, though there were others as well augmenting his charm – was extremely prolific when it came to writing to his friends. An extreme socializer, he kept in touch with most, if not all, of them, while enjoying the panic of being late for the post or indulging in apologies for his frequently belated answers. In this respect, "in sackcloth and ashes" used to be a regular beginning for many of his letters, pointing to what could have served, metaphorically, as a "letter-writing uniform". And he was *wearing* it even when spending significant interludes and experiencing solitude in various monastic shelters in the 1950s.

Almost 10000 of such letters might have been produced. This is the guess of Adam Sisman, the editor of both the first volume, *Dashing for the Post*, published by John Murray – with whose owners Fermor had a lifetime friendship – in 2016, and of the second, this time with Bloomsbury, two years later. In *Dashing for the Post*, Adam Sisman had managed to select about 200 letters, out of which Fermor's personality emerged in its entire complexity. "An unabashed snob and social climber who also relished the company of peasants and shepherds", would write, for instance, Charles MacGrath in his article for the *New York Review of Books* (2017).

We pondered for long over such comments when I met Adam Sisman in the afternoon of March 19, 2018. He was working hard on the sequel, *More*

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Dashing, and he had kindly invited me to explore the cozy rooms & parlours and even the slightly mysterious corners of the London Library, in St. James Square, where the famous Chatham House is also located. A couple of hours later, at a café nearby, we acknowledged the sometimes annoying obstacles and also the joy of working with manuscripts – i.e. identifying sources, getting in touch with people, basking in the glow of revelations, then selecting information and reconfiguring the puzzle. On looking back, our conversation somehow resonated with what one of the reviewers of *More Dashing* was going to write about Adam's endeavours – "The editor's sterling research in tracking down the most obscure references from Paddy's magpie mind is to be applauded" (Casey, 2018, 2).

Patrick Leigh Fermor, aka Paddy for his friends, has lived a long life *in the open* – literally and figuratively – and his correspondence bears testimony of all his choices. Nevertheless, some pieces of the puzzle, if ever there was one, can still be looked for in order to be added & fitted. Many modern authors, and contemporay ones as well, have learned the lesson of both exposing and negotiating their public figure. This is obvious in *More Dashing*, with Paddy's letters, according to Sisman, and as noticed by the press – "in most cases carefully honed with a view perhaps to future publication" (Casey, 2018, 2), although at times written in terrible haste.

In regard to the craft of writing, the second selection made by Adam Sisman, just like the first one, "should grace every bedside table" (Casey, 2018, 2). That was indeed the feeling I had when receiving my copy, as I took delight in the enhanced "breadth of subject matter with interesting intimate glimpses into Paddy's love life [and] working methods" (Casey, 2018, 2). However, for me, having researched the writer's life and work for three years already in 2018, the new selection meant tying certain [sic] loose ends concerning the Romanian connection. Patrick Leigh Fermor had spent four years in our country before 1939, when he returned to England to serve in the war. He left behind his lover, Princess Balasha Cantacuzène, to meet her only a quarter of a century after, in communist Romania.

In London, Adam Sisman had told me that he could only find less than twenty letters from Paddy to Balasha and that was, at least, one of the enigmas to be dealt with. Nine had been included in *Dashing for the Post*. Six made their way into the 2018 volume. After his lover's death in 1976, Paddy had been given by Pomme, Balasha's sister, "all [his] side of correspondence" – one detail I came across in excitement when reading *More Dashing* (Sisman, 2018, 365). Another letter, also in the book, pointed to the fact that he used to write to her on a regular basis. And in his archive, hosted by the National Library of Scotland, there are four files with more than 200 letters from Balasha. So, the question inevitably arises: where are the rest of Paddy's?

Balasha is, of course, one of the major correspondents addressed by Paddy in Adam Sisman's selections. Lady Diana Cooper, a famous beauty and London socialite in the 1920s, was another. Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, has to be mentioned too, as her more than half a century correspondence with Paddy had been published as *In Tearing Haste*, in 2008.

Alexander 'Xan' Fielding, Paddy's former brother-in-arms in wartime Crete, is given less room in *More Dashing*. Among the ones slightly overlooked, Lawrence Durrell should be countedas well, as his presence was more poignant in *Dashing for the Post*. Instead, Stephen Spender rises to prominence. Equal weight is bestowed, in the two volumes, on John Betjeman. All in all, the letters included in *More Dashing* "display more variety and nearly twice the number of correspondents as" *Dashing for the Post* (Casey, 2018, 2).

"Letters written before the nineteenth century", wrote Gérard Genette in his book on paratexts, "contain hardly any confidence about the literary activity of their authors" (1997, 372). Many modern authors, as already underlined, proved the opposite, and Paddy was no exception. The tribulations of writing are constantly hinted at in his letters to Jock Murray, his London publisher, and Rudolf Fischer, his Budapestan friend – two other correspondents on which equal weight in the two volumes is also bestowed. "Since the recovery of my fragmentary diary in Romania" – something that occurred when he and Balasha met again, in 1965 – "I long to write about the continuation of the journey from Constantinople", Paddy was writing to Jock on 20 May 1974, while working on what was going to be his first masterpiece, *A Time of Gifts*.

Following its publication, in 1978, his correspondence and friendship with Fischer emerged, as a result of Rudi's comments, in a first letter, to some inaccuracies he had come across when reading the book. From then on, Paddy would strictly take Rudi's invaluable pieces of advice into account, as he wanted to make no more mistakes in the sequel, the second masterpiece *Between the Woods and the Water*, published in 1986 to the same enthusiastic critical reception. I have counted more than 100 letters by Paddy to Rudy in Dagmar Fischer's personal collection, when paying her a visit in the autumn of 2017. Seven of them were included in *Dashing for the Post*. Six made their way into *More Dashing*, but Adam Sisman confessed of having too little time to go through them in a more relaxed manner. I believe that, together with the more than 400 letters by Rudi to Paddy, in the archive at the National Library of Scotland, a rich and beautiful book on the troubled history of Central Europe could be made up (or edited?).

One can only subscribe to the project, given its potential to match the quality of both *Dashing for the Post* and *More Dashing*. About the latter's *ecriture*, the same Harry Mount has written: "You can see the ease of writing in the letters here: breezy, funny and light, a pleasant contrast to the marvellous but heavy, sometimes overwrought prose of his books" (2018). Definitely, a challenging statement, an invitation for the travel literature scholars to seriously reconsider/recalibrate the works of a great stylist of 20th Century British prose.

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Pronunciation Made Practical: *PronPack 1-6*, Hancock McDonalds

(Hancock McDonald ELT, Chester. CH1 2AW UK)

Giulia Suciu[1]

Pronunciation is crucial for successful communication. Apparently two-thirds of communication breakdowns are due to mispronunciation[2]. However, limited or no space is devoted to pronunciation in language classes or learning materials. One of the most challenging aspects of teaching English as a foreign language - the teaching of pronunciation - is more often than not overlooked, as even experienced teachers seem to be reluctant to tackle pronunciation issues in the classroom. Why? Let me ask you one simple question: what's the first thing that crosses your mind when you hear '*English Phonetics*' or '*teaching pronunciation*'? Indecipherable hieroglyphs, aka the International Phonetic Alphabet? Endless theories about the speech mechanism and the way English sounds are articulated? Anatomical terminology difficult to remember? Boring drills? Well, let me contradict you: *teaching pronunciation can be fun*. But you probably won't be able to experience the fun-part of English Phonetics until you meet Mark Hancock.

Mark Hancock is a freelance EFL teacher, who has been teaching English for over 30 years in Sudan, Turkey, Brazil, Spain and the UK. His writing career began with the publication of the best-selling pronunciation book *Pronunciation Games*, more than 20 years ago. Apart from teaching and writing, he also presents at international conferences and leads on short teacher training courses.

The *PronPack* series is a set of 6 books meant to engage the learner and inspire their interest in a field that has driven many away – the field of English pronunciation. Mark Hancock's approach is based on his belief that both teaching and learning a language can and should be an enjoyable experience. Still not convinced? The first four books in the series won the 2018 ELTons Award for Innovation in Teacher Resources, a prestigious award that recognizes and celebrates innovation in the English language teaching sector and supports English learners and teachers to achieve their goals.

The PronPack series is conceived as a set of resource books for

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1 University of Oradea, Romania
2 Setter, Jane. Ee-Ling Low. John Walker – *English Pronunciation for a Global World*, Oxford University Press

teachers/learners, each volume focusing on a different aspect. *PronPack 1 – Pronunciation Workouts* comprises extended drills, comparable to the scales pianists practice on, but in this case it's the vocal articulators that are being trained. *PronPack 2 – Pronunciation Puzzles* engages the learners in game-like activities like mazes, Sudoku, word searches etc. all meant to raise learners' awareness to pronunciation patterns, aspects of stress or connected speech, in a fun and innovative way. *PronPack 3 – Pronunciation Pairworks* focuses mainly on pair work or small group work, relying heavily on the learners' accuracy in producing and understanding target structures. *PronPack 4 – Pronunciation Poems* offers a wealth of songs, limericks, raps and lyrics each focusing on a specific aspect of pronunciation, one benefit of such practice being the fact that the examples are easily memorable. The latest additions to the *PronPack* series, *PronPack 5 – Pronunciation of English for Spanish Speakers* and *PronPack 6 – Pronunciation of English for Brazilian Learners* draw on Mark Hancock's experience as a teacher in Spain and Brazil and focus on pronunciation difficulties encountered by Spanish and Brazilian learners of English.

While each book takes a slightly different approach to the teaching of pronunciation, all of them are based on the principle that the main reason for teaching pronunciation is to help learners understand and be understood. As listeners, they have to be aware of different aspects of connected speech and have to be exposed to as many varieties of English as possible, since approximately three quarters of users of English nowadays are non-natives. As speakers, they have to modify their own accent so that it becomes widely intelligible, since the main goal of the pronunciation class has moved from nativelikeness to comfortable intelligibility.

It goes without saying that a good pronunciation can boost other aspects of learning English, such as speaking, listening, vocabulary learning etc. so equipping our students with an internationally intelligible pronunciation is a must in a world where English has become the international language.

The Liminal as Power of Transformation in Miriam Borham Puyal's *Contemporary Rewritings of Liminal Women. Echoes of the Past*
(New York: Routledge, 2020)

Éva Székely[1]

An exhaustive and comprehensive monography, Miriam Borham Puyal's study considers 18th and 19th century narratives figuring liminal women such as vampires, prostitutes, quixotes and detectives as "polytemporal and multidirectional … as sites of potentiality" (18) for contemporary writings of liminal feminine identities. Using a diachronic and comparative approach, the book brings into focus the dialogue between liminal femininities of the past and their representation in present-day popular narratives: novels, graphic novels, films, television shows and videogames. The study is organized into five systematic and thoroughgoing chapters.

The first chapter of the book ("Introduction: Liminality, Feminocentric Narratives, and the Polytemporality of the New Woman") presents the theoretical framework on which the authoress builds the following four chapters. Borham Puyal surveys all the important critical studies that have been written on liminality since Arnold van Gennep's ground breaking study: *The Rites of Passage*: Victor Turner's *Liminal to Liminoid* and Bjorn Thomassen's *Liminality and the Modern. Living through the in-between* etc. She discusses Bakhtin's idea of carnival and carnivalesque as well as Homi Bhabha's "third space," and Northrop Frye's understanding of the role of the liminal in comedy and tragedy. She maintains that liminal theories are essential not only for understanding fiction but also for understanding history, and references Victoria Brown's study on *Feminism, Time and Non-linear History* as well as Claire Drewery's book: *Liminal and Liminoid Discourses in Modernist Women's Short Fiction : Performance, Spectatorship, and Cinema*. The following four chapters delve into specific liminal feminine identities and the revolutionary historical contexts that gave them birth in the 18th and the 19th centuries, and their resurgence in contemporary narratives.

Chapter 2 ("Female Vampires: on the Threshold of Time, Space, and Gender") examines 19th-century portrayals of vampiresses in the works of

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Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, and Elizabeth Brandon, works that articulate Victorian fears of assertive female sexuality and thirst for power. In the second half of the chapter, Miriam Borham Puyal analyzes contemporary vampire movies such as the Swedish *Let the Right One In (*2008), the British *Byzantium (2012),* the American *Only Lovers Left Alive (2013),* and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night (2014)* etc. She argues that though vampiresses are allowed to speak up in 21st-century narratives, and their sexuality ceases to be seen as transgressive, contemporary women protagonists of vampire stories continue to be controlled by their male counterparts.

Chapter 3 ("Good and Bad, Private and Public: Prostitution as Liminal Identity") focuses on 18th-century matter-of-fact portrayals of prostitutes in works by male authors such as Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, William Hoggarth's *A Harlot's Progress,* and *Harris's List of Covent Garden Girls* as well as Mary Wollstonecraft's sentimental gothic novel: *Maria*: *or The Wrongs of Woman*, considered to be the author's most radical work. Wollstonecraft's indignation at 18th-century society's objectification of women became the staple view of much 20th and 21st century historical narratives on prostitutes: *Dangerous Beauty (1998)*, Emma Donoghue's *Slammerkin* (2000) or the television show entitled *Harlots (2017-).*

Chapter 4 ("Between Madness and Rebellion: Rewriting the Female Quixote") presents the readers with *quixotism* that Miriam Borham Puyal, who wrote several studies on the subject, views as yet another female state-of-in-betweenness. Positioned between illusion and reality, quixotic female protagonists are compelling liminal characters attempting to escape or subvert their class and gender restrictions. From the 18th and 19th centuries Borham Puyal examines Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796)* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey (1818).* She emphasizes the latent rebelliousness of Emma's and Catherine's world of fancy. When examining such contemporary feminine quixotic characters as Amelie Poulain or Bridget Jones, Ofelia from *Pan's Labyrinth* and Florence Green from *The Bookshop* (2017), our critic contends that fictionalizing reality and daydreaming continue to be means with which women attempt to overcome the constraints of a patriarchal society in the 20th and the 21st centuries.

Lastly, Chapter 5 ("To Be and Not to Be: Female Detectives between Old and New Women") examines the liminal position of women detectives from the 19th century onwards. The works discussed include Andrew Forrester' s *The Female Detective* (1864), William Stephens Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864), three television shows – *Houdini & Doyle* (2016), *The Bletchley Circle (2012–14),* and *The Pinkertons (2014)* —, a graphic novel*: My Favorite Thing Is Monsters* (2018), and *The Baztan Trilogy* (2017) written by Dolores Redondo. Women detectives, usually older women, both Victorian and contemporary, are marginalized hybrid creatures, who to perform their duties successfully, have to adopt masculine characteristics.

In conclusion, Miriam Borham Puyal's monography is a commendable work that connects 18th and 19th century critically acclaimed novels to popular

contemporary narratives and media, pointing out the importance of the construction of liminal feminine identities and their difference from the traditional building of hegemonic masculine identities.

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Irina Petraș, *Eminescu - începutul continuu*
(Școala Ardeleană, Cluj-Napoca, 2021)

Anca Tomoioagă[1]

Contemporary literary criticism has developed numerous trends especially due to the inevitable possibilities of interaction with other fields of knowledge such as psychoanalysis, cultural studies, linguistics, sociology. Now, this aspect sometimes made the stake of literary criticism difficult to identify. When writing about Mihai Eminescu, his life and works, literary criticism itself looses ground to the detective biographies, mythologizing and demythologizing writings, to cultural studies that analyse the reception of Eminescu's works or other studies that focus on politics and so on. Nevertheless, there is still enough room for the aesthetic approach of literary criticism, even in the case of Eminescu's writings. In fact, there seems to appear a need for re-reading Eminescu, away from the noisy debates regarding the myth of the poet. The literary text is a priority again, at least when reading the prodigious Irina Petraș's new book about our national writer: *Eminescu, începutul continuu (2021).*

The literary critic Irina Petraș clearly states that re-reading the classics means an exercise of recognising and simultaneous re-knowing. As the title of the book suggests, when reading Eminescu we may always situate ourselves at the very beginning of this enterprise. The amount of potentialities that Eminescu's literary work has got, makes possible the continuous restart. Irina Petraș confessed that the present book resumes fragments from everything that she has written about Eminescu. Still, the author not only that she resumes most important studies from the past, but she also updates them with recent bibliography.

At a quick glance at the topics (romanticism and classicism, nature, time, love, the act of creation and the condition of the creator, the Evil in the world, death and fantastic) the author approaches here, reveal a study of literary criticism that considers the aesthetic canon a priority, the literary text and Eminescu's manuscripts of most importance in argumentation. The school of literary criticism from Cluj-Napoca is taking its toll. The topics are now well known when studying Eminescu, but Irina Petraș intends to focus mainly on what can make such topics surprising again.

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For instance, when I. Petraș refers to romanticism and classicism within Eminescu's literary works, she does not repeat the same discourse about the two contrastive tendencies but adds a new term *romantitate* that should be understood as a way of writing poetry - simple, clear and transparent, which is very fecund because it makes the phrase even more ambiguous and suggests a new horizon beyond trends and époques (10). This also expresses the fact that Eminescu is of constant actuality because *romantitate* means what is human *per se*. In other words, it is important not to insist on the distinctions classic/ romantic because they are limitative, a Procust bed; Eminescu's works are neither romantic, nor classic and should be defined through the term *romantitate*: "the openness towards everything, the creative dissatisfaction, the attempt of comprising the horizon" (25).

Irina Petraș defines her new terms and perspectives through close reading, through approaching most well known poems such as *Odă (în metru antic)* (where she sees an important instance of *intra-vital death*, 94) and through quoting the manuscripts. Most of the quotes are extraordinary: „The human being has only one master and this is the infinite. ms. 2257 (32).

Although romanticism is mainly constructed on the forceful emotion, Irina Petraș (in direct lineage of Ioana Em. Petrescu) sees in Eminescu's writings *obsesia noomorfică i.e.* an obsession for *nous*, for the power of thought. Through thought and culture, the poet could hope for an integrative and superior way of understanding the world and truth. As the human thought is limited, the human conscience swings around a centre – the mind – and this balancing can be seen in the whole poetic universe. In fact, such swinging (in nature, time and space) is „the condition itself of existence" (39). Not the world, not the feeling, but thought stays in the middle and "in the mind of the thinker, in the cosmic projection of his mind there is the truth itself" (44). Thought is empowered to create a new, perfect and original world as real for romantics as reality itself. Irina Petraș demonstrates the idea in *Sărmanul Dionis*.

Coming back to the balancing dynamics in Eminescu's poetic universe, the author defines the wave as being the absolute chronotope (56). Conclusively, the pendulating movement can be seen in time and space, in nature, in the dualisms of the poetry, even in the oxymoron usage. Nature expresses this swinging; even poetic language contributes to this; nature in poetry is a product of language. The poet "lives in the words about nature" (70), not in nature itself. Through language he projects an imaginary, but a perfect alternative to the world. When he comes back to nature, in fact he turns back to himself, because nature is just inner, mental and affective landscape (73). Similar approach can be seen in the reinterpretation of the poem *Luceafărul*. Hyperion and Cătălina are searching for what they were before the splitting of the ego, in an androgenic estate. The second self is not outside themselves but within themselves. The famous poem gets two other commentaries starting from two key terms: *trionticitate* (111 - the poetic ego detains three hypostases –the I, the You and They –) and *declinarea poeziei* (117 – the declension of poetry, a grammatical approach). According to them,

the end of the poem shows us not a defeated Hyperion but a victorious one. New and systematic analyses can be read in the book referring to poems such as *Melancolie* or *Demonism* and others.

An element of novelty refers also to the prose and the definition of fantastic. In the last chapter, Irina Petraș clearly states that Eminescu's prose is not fantastic at all and that Caillois's or Todorov's studies about the fantastic cannot be brought up when demonstrating it in Eminescu's prose. His prose is not fantastic but poetic (141). The protagonist is not hesitating whether something is real or unreal; he creates on purpose and in full awareness something imaginary as a projection of his own thought.

Thou difficult to read at times because of the terms and phrases which make the book less accessible for the common reader, Irina Petraș's study should be taken into consideration not only by specialists or academics but also by teachers who could update their lessons and creatively re-discuss some poems with their pupils through close reading. Moreover, the book makes several correlations with modern poetry which clearly suggest that Eminescu did not belong only to his times.

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Next Issue's Topic:

Love
in Modern and Postmodern Literature

Thématique du prochain numéro:

L'amour
dans la littérature moderne et postmoderne

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Myths et auteurs postmodernes
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Comme revue de recherche, son commencement remonte loin, dans l'année académique 1966/1967, lorsque sous le nom de *Travaux scientifiques,* la section de la recherche académique a démarré à l'Université d'Oradea. En 1991, la revue a changé son nom et sa forme se fixant sur des sujets d'intérêt immédiat et sur des études approfondies, sur la culture, sur la littérature roumaine, sur la littérature comparée. En 2006 a paru *Confluences,* un Fascicule de littérature moderne incluant des recherches académiques littéraires en anglais, en français, en allemand et en italien. L'année 2012 la revue a été classifiée niveau C par le Ministère de l'Education et de la Recherche de Roumanie

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L'administration du processus d'évaluation est la tâche des éditeurs évaluateurs. L'expéditeur du manuscrit ne connaît pas les noms des évaluateurs de son cas particulier mais seulement la liste complète des évaluateurs.