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Literary Trend Studies

Edited by Yang Gexin

Literary Text Studies

Edited by Wang Zuo



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Contents

Literary Trend Studies

- 167-170 Literary Trend after Theory: An Introduction
Yang Gexin
- 171-198 Fictions of Empire and the (Un-)Making of Imperialist Mentalities:
Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Criticism Revisited
Vera Nünning Ansgar Nünning
- 199-210 “World Literature” and Russia
Anne Lounsbery
- 211-229 Do “Minor Literatures” Still Exist?
Galina Tihanov
- 230-245 From Imitation to Construction: Steps towards Modernization in Nordic
Literature
Knut Brynhildsvoll
- 246-267 Ethical Contours of the (Sub)urban Space-Time Relationship in the Early
Postwar American Drama
Hyungseob Lee
- 268-281 Is Shakespeare Unethical?: A Critical Review of Shakespearean Ethics
WooSoo Park

Literary Texts Studies

- 282-285 Politics, History and Aesthetics as Tropes: An Introduction
Wang Zhuo
- 286-311 “A Strong House We Build to Protect Us in Need...”: On Welfare
Metaphors and Welfare Critique in Works by Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke
Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen
Anne-Marie Mai
- 312-327 The Artist’s Hand: The Aesthetics of Loss in Paul Auster’s *Sunset Park*
Jørgen Veisland
- 328-342 Toni Morrison’s Emotional Tropes in *A Mercy* as a Literary
Representation of Historical Truth
Agnieszka Łobodziec

目 录

文学思潮研究

- 167-170 理论之后的文学思潮：文学思潮研究导言
杨革新
- 171-198 帝国小说与帝国主义心态的废立：再论殖民话语与后殖民批评
维拉·纽宁 安斯拉·纽宁
- 199-210 “世界文学”和俄国
安妮·劳恩斯伯里
- 211-229 “非主流文学”存在吗？
加林·泰哈洛娃
- 230-245 从模仿到建构：北欧文学的现代化进程
克努特·布莱恩希尔兹沃
- 246-267 战后初期美国戏剧中城市与郊区时空关系的伦理轮廓图
李亨燮
- 268-281 莎士比亚没有伦理原则吗？：莎士比亚伦理学的批评判性评价
朴禹洙

文学文本研究

- 282-285 作为隐喻的政治、历史和美学：文学文本研究导言
王卓
- 286-311 “我们建造的安身立命的坚固房屋……”：论克尔斯滕·索拉普、
维贝克·格罗菲尔德、杰特·德维森作品中的社会福利隐喻和批判
安妮-玛丽·梅
- 312-327 艺术家之手：保罗·奥斯特《日落公园》的迷失美学
乔根·维斯兰德
- 328-342 托尼·莫里森《慈悲》中的情感比喻：一种历史真相的文学再现
阿格涅丝卡·洛伯迪兹克

Literary Trend after Theory: An Introduction

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Abstract This article is an introduction to the thematic cluster “Literary Trend Studies.” It begins with Nicholas Birns’s observation in his book *Theory after Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory from 1950 to the Early 21st Century* (2010). The bulk part of the article is devoted to explicating the major arguments of all the contributions. In doing so, it reveals, if theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever. However we are living now in the aftermath of what one might call high theory. We can never be “after theory,” in the sense that there can be no reflective human life without it. So it is quite possible for literary trend after theory to find a new way or revisit some particular styles of thinking to meet the demands of the changing situation.

Key words literary trend; theory after theory; ethical literary criticism

Author Yang Gexin is associate professor at Huazhong Agricultural University. His interests in scholarship include ethical literary criticism and contemporary American fiction. Yang’s latest publications include “Ethical Turn in Literary Studies and the Revival of American Ethical Criticism.” *Foreign Literature Studies* 6(2013):16-25; “Ethical Literary Criticism: A New Approach to Literature Studies.” *Forum for World Literature Studies* 6.2 (2014):335-8.

Nicholas Birns in his book *Theory after Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory from 1950 to the Early 21st Century* (2010) expresses his view that we currently exist in, not a theory-less time, but a period where we’re picking up the pieces and sorting through the rubble of the Theory Tsunami that struck the English Department at the end of the 20th century. Actually, among Birns’ central claims is that “the era of theory’s dominance is over”(11). How one views such an assertion, of course, depends very much on a definition of “dominance.” By it, does Birns suggest that we’ve emerged from a time of slavish conformity suffered under

a dictatorship? Or does he imply that a period of exceptional innovation has settled out into a new normal?

The real purpose of this cluster essays, then, is to situate the literary trend after the movement of the late 20th century in its historical and intellectual context. As Birns points out, “Theory was not suddenly interjected into the cultural system by aliens from outer space. It came out of a diagnosable set of historical processes and because of the existence of a few notable individuals” (40). The first essay of this cluster is a revisit to a notable individual — Edward Said. In the years that followed Said’s foundational argument regarding the relationship between knowledge of the colonial other and the exercise of colonial power, much of this work came to focus specifically on the way in which putatively liberatory efforts to represent colonized and racialized subjects fell into much same traps as overtly colonial representations.

While Vera Nünning from Heidelberg University and Ansgar Nünning, the founding director of the “Giessener Graduiertenzentrum Kulturwissenschaften” (GGK), of the “International Graduate Center for the Study of Culture” (GCSC), and of the European PhD Network “Literary and Cultural Studies,” focusing on the term “fictions of empire,” explore some issues that are of crucial importance for any attempt to come to grips with the logic of the fictions which provided the ideological backbone of British imperialism and rethink colonial discourse and post-colonial criticism with an attempt to conceptualize the relationship between fiction and reality, and between culture and imperialism, emphasizing the creative or performative role that works of fiction can play in the construction and deconstruction of the ideological fictions of imperialism. With the discussion on six of the main functions that both literary and conceptual fictions can fulfill with regard to the making, and unmaking, of imperialist mentalities, Vera and Ansgar conclude that a great deal of the value and relevance of the exploration of what we have called “fictions of empire” lies in the continuity between the past and the present. For Vera and Ansgar, it is surely a good place to start to demystify the discourse of popular imperialism by exploring fictions of empire from a postcolonial and narratological angle.

Following Vera and Ansgar’s exploration of British imperialism, Anne Lounsbury, from New York University, discusses the literature of another big power in Europe — Russia. What’s the relationship between “world literature” and Russian literature? Anne, focusing on Russia’s supposed provinciality, explains the importance of the *provintsiia* trope, in which Russia’s provincial places are characterized by an ambiguous, mixed-up temporality that reveals Russia itself to be neither “modern” nor straightforwardly “backward.” Here the the *provintsiia*

trope, in Anne's mind, is a mishmash of objects, styles, words, and times. By drawing a connection between chaotic simultaneity and creative potential, Anne observes Russia's insistence on its own provinciality helps illuminate how its tradition resists assimilation into "world literature."

If the British imperialism and Russian Literature can be called as "mainstream literatures," the next two contributions will switch to "minor literatures." Galin Tihanov, the George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary, University of London, revisits the notion of "minor literatures" and shows it to be an historical construct with a specific lifespan with regard to Bulgarian literature. Minor literatures, as Galin observes, first refer to a potential social and political energy that originates in the writing of a minority within a dominant majority, which is sustained in Deleuze and Guattari's classic book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, and then, an evaluative notion that sees "minor literatures" as small, derivative, deprived of originality when measured by the yardstick of "mainstream literatures," which has a longer pedigree that goes back to the intricate history of Eurocentrism since the 18th century.

Going on with the topic of minor literature, the cluster changes from East-European literature to the North-European with Knut's dealing with the modernization of Nordic literature in the 20th century and his showing the reasons why the aesthetic transition from imitation to construction produced completely new forms of literary expression. According to Knut, it is impossible to imitate what you cannot see or hear, the author is dependent on showing the reality behind reality with the help of constructions and models, which serve as door-openers into hidden connections.

The last two essays of this cluster are, to some extent, related to an approach to drama from a perspective of ethical literary criticism. Hyungseob Lee, from Hanyang University, Korea, using Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* and Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* as paradigmatic works, analyzes the (sub)urban time-space relationship in the early postwar American drama. According to Hyungseob, the four dramatic canvasses on which time is materially embodied point, in their totality, to a multi-layered experience of time which in turn opens up, to different degrees, an ethical space of reading. Thus the fundamentally conservative nature of the early post-war American drama and its general confidence in the representational validity of the realistic-naturalistic form reflects the overall socio-cultural confidence in the American conception of the post-war world and itself.

The cluster ends with WooSoo Park, also a Korean scholar from Hankuk

University of Foreign Studies. With regard to the question “Is Shakespeare Unethical?” WooSoo critically reviews some of the major ethical criticism of Shakespeare from Samuel Johnson to Ludwig Wittgenstein, and to suggest an alternative idea of imaginative ethics in Shakespeare as a man of imagination. For WooSoo, Shakespeare has his own principle of poetic justice: Shakespeare’s “mingled yarn” is more than a melodramatic and bipolar black and white. Shakespeare’s music of forgiveness is touched by his creative mercy beyond the earthly idea of morality. Shakespearean living ethics is the ethics of sympathetic imagination and tolerance oriented towards the realization of transcendental co-presence and musical harmony, as is represented in his final plays of romantic reconciliation and forgiveness.

We are living now in the aftermath of what one might call high theory, in an age which, having grown rich on the insights of thinkers like Althusser, Barthes and Derrida, has also in some ways moved beyond them. What is the way out after theory? As Terry Eagleton points out, “If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever”(2). We can never be “after theory,” in the sense that there can be no reflective human life without it. So it is quite possible for literary trend after theory to find a new way or revisit some particular styles of thinking to meet the demands of the changing situation.

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Fictions of Empire and the (Un-)Making of Imperialist Mentalities: Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Criticism Revisited

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Abstract This article explores some of the issues that are of crucial importance for any attempt to come to grips with the logic of the fictions which provided the ideological backbone of British imperialism. After briefly delineating the continuity of the imperial past in the present, section 2 provides a preliminary exploration of the meanings of the term “fictions of empire,” i.e. of the ambiguous title of this essay. Section 3 then provides an attempt to conceptualize the relationship between fiction and reality, and between culture and imperialism, emphasizing the creative or performative role that works of fiction can play in the construction and deconstruction of the ideological fictions of imperialism. Section 4 presents a narratologically informed revision of colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial criticism, which is the approach that informs this article. Section 5 discusses six of the main functions that both literary and conceptual fictions can fulfill with regard to the making, and unmaking, of imperialist mentalities, while the last section provides a brief conclusion.

Key words ideological fictions of British imperialism; colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial criticism; postcolonial narratology; functions of narrative fiction

Authors **Vera Nünning** is professor of English philology at Heidelberg University, where she has also acted as pro-rector for international affairs. She has published books on eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century British literature, and (co-)edited 21 volumes on contemporary literature and narrative theory. Her

articles deal with narrative theory, gender studies, cultural history from the 16th to the 19th century, and British literature from the 18th to the 21st century. Among her most recent works are *New Approaches to Narrative. Cognition – Culture – History* (ed., 2013), and *Ritual and Narrative* (co-edited with Jan Rupp and Gregor Ahn, 2013). Her book *Changing Fictions, Changing Minds*, and a collection of essays on unreliable narration appeared in 2014. She was a fellow in two Institutes of Advanced Studies and is associate editor of two book series and the international journal *English Studies*. **Ansgar Nünning** is professor of English and American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Giessen. He is the founding director of the “Giessener Graduiertenzentrum Kulturwissenschaften” (GGK), of the “International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture” (GCSC), and of the European PhD Network “Literary and Cultural Studies.” He has published widely on narrative theory, English and American literature, cultures of memory, and literary and cultural theory, including 15 monographs and text books as well as more than 200 scholarly articles in refereed journals and collections of essays. His narratological publications include articles on narratological approaches and concepts, e.g. unreliable narration, the implied author, multiperspectivity, description, and meta-narration. Recent publications include a special issue on “Recent Trends in Narratology” of the journal *GRM: Germanisch-Romanische-Monatsschrift* (2013).

More than any other, the Age of Empire cries out for demystification, just because we — and that includes the historians — are no longer in it, but do not know how much of it is still in us.

(E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* 5)

For fictions have their own logic and their own dialectic of growth or decline.

(Edward Said, *Orientalism* 62)

1. Introduction: On the Continuity of the Imperial Past in the Present

The Age of Empire lies in the past, but its ambivalent heritage is still very much with us. The British Empire, like the colonial empires of the other European powers, came to an end when independence was granted to previously colonized countries. But many of the values, preconceptions, and cultural stereotypes associated with the imperial world-view have been bequeathed to us. The reasons for this are not hard to determine. A plethora of books dealing with the British

imperial experience, as well as television, films, and the resources of other media, have contributed to preserving the glories of the imperial past in Britain's cultural memory and to constructing highly standardized images by means of which the British Empire continues to be remembered. Moreover, a host of novels, plays, and poems, many of which reflect a persistent imperial world-view, testify both to the fascination that the British Empire still has for authors and to the great importance that imperial heritage continues to have for the way Britain sees itself.

It is largely due to culture that the perceptual and ideological fictions that form the conceptual matrix of imperialism live on as an integral part of what has been called "cultural memory" and "collective identity." Referring to popular boys' adventure stories, Susan Bassnett has pointed out that "the values of those stories, however we may wish to repudiate them on the grounds of racism, sexism and xenophobia generally, are encoded into our thought patterns" (Bassnett, *Teaching British Cultural Studies* 71). This, of course, has nothing to do with a people's genes, but is the result of the discursive practices of cultural transmission.

Our project in this article will be to explore some of the issues that are of crucial importance for anyone trying to come to grips with the logic of the fictions which provided the ideological backbone of British imperialism. If one agrees with Hobsbawm and Said that "the Age of Empire cries out for demystification" (Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire* 5) and that "fictions have their own logic and their own dialectic of growth or decline" (Said, *Orientalism* 62), one is faced with the question of how such a revisionist project of exploring and demystifying the fictions of British imperialism is to be undertaken. We will suggest some issues which might be helpful for that enterprise, but which have mostly been neglected by scholars as yet.

One way of approaching the demystification of the Age of Empire is to take a revisionist look at the role that literary fictions have played in nurturing "the sentiment, rationale, and above all the imagination of empire" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 12) and in helping to create "imperialism's consolidating vision" (288). By making use of some insights of narratology, we will try to show ways to explore the fictions of empire and the relationship between literature and the complex process that Mangan has felicitously called "making imperial mentalities" ("Introduction" 1). Though the works of such authors as Tennyson, Rider Haggard, Kipling, Conrad, and Forster have already been interpreted as examples of colonial discourse, we will focus on the question of in how far a narratological analysis of such fictions of empire can serve to shed light on the making, and unmaking, of imperialist mentalities.

After this brief prologue, section 2 will be devoted to a preliminary exploration of the meanings of the term “fictions of empire”, i.e. of the ambiguous title of this essay. Section 3 will then attempt to conceptualize the relationship between fiction and reality, and between culture and imperialism, emphasizing the creative role that works of fiction can play in the construction and deconstruction of the ideological fictions of imperialism. Section 4 continues to outline the approach that informs this article, presenting a narratologically informed revision of colonial discourse analysis and post-colonial criticism. Section 5 discusses six of the main functions that both literary and conceptual fictions can fulfill with regard to the making, and unmaking, of imperialist mentalities. Section 6 will provide a brief conclusion.

2. Fictions of Empire and the Empires of Fiction

The title of this essay contains the key concept of *Fictions of Empire*, and one might as well begin by explaining what that phrase can mean. According to one of the standard works on the subject, “Empire is a relationship, formal or informal, in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of another political society” (Doyle, *Empires* 45). Although the meaning of the word “empire” is as clear as its reference, in the present context, to Britain’s overseas colonies or “possessions,” as they were often called, the British Empire’s “diverse character” needs to be stressed. The empire was, as John M. MacKenzie has emphasized,

at least four separate entities. It was the territories of settlement [...]. It was India [...]. It was a string of islands and staging posts, a combination of seventeenth-century sugar colonies and the spoils of wars with European rivals, China and other non-European cultures. And finally, Empire was the “dependent” territories acquired largely in the last decades of the nineteenth century. (MacKenzie, “Introduction” 1)

This highly diverse conglomeration of entities that made up the British Empire make it next to impossible to identify a single, consistent attitude among the contemporary British that could explain their actions. It does not allow for simple oppositions like “master race” and “dependent peoples,” for instance, and it certainly does not allow for the many generalizations that made the Empire so attractive to many British people. Politics did not help conceiving the Empire as a unity, because, as Charles Wentworth Dilke admitted in 1890, “[n]o country can be less homogeneous than a nation which includes within its territories the Oriental despotism of British India and States as democratic as Queensland”

(Dilke, *Greater Britain* 583). In 1883, one of the foremost “makers” of fictions of the Empire, the historian John Robert Seeley, wanted to change the as yet sceptical view of the Empire, which was difficult to reconcile with the ingrained belief in the English love of liberty (cf. V. Nünning, “Daß Jeder seine Pflicht thue”; *Where the Discourses; Where Literature*), which had allegedly informed the history of the nation. For him, the failure to realize the vital importance of the Empire was “one of those monsters [...] which are created not by imagination but by the want of imagination!” (Seeley, *The Expansion of England* 356). At least in one respect, Seeley was right; to think of Great Britain and her numerous dependencies all over the world as a unity indeed demanded an act of imagination. To conceptualize the co-existence of quite a number of different ethnicities in places geographically and culturally remote from England as an entity was not a matter of reflecting reality; the Empire of the mind had to be created.

Much more so than the loaded word “empire,” which at least at first sight seems to be self-explanatory, “fiction” is an ambiguous term which can easily generate confusion. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows, the word “fiction” has quite different meanings. On the one hand, the word can designate “[t]hat which, or something that, is imaginatively invented,” or more specifically, “[t]he species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters,” viz. “[a] work of fiction; a novel or tale” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “fiction”). On the other hand, “fiction” refers to any “supposition known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted for some reason of practical convenience, conformity with traditional usage, decorum, or the like” (*ibid.*). In this latter sense, fictions are used in law, for instance, with the fiction that a corporation is a person separate from its members being a case in point. Such legal fictions are theoretical constructs or rules that assume something as true that is clearly false or at variance with fact, but that is highly useful in dealing with complex phenomena and shapes our thinking as well as our actions.

The title of this essay is thus deliberately ambiguous, self-consciously alluding as it does to the double meaning of “fiction”: “the meaning of ‘fiction’ as literary, nonreferential narrative and its meaning (often [...] in its plural form) as theoretical construct” (Cohn, “Optics and Power” 18). This double meaning is essential for the questions that the article tries to answer in that we are concerned with the interplay between works of narrative fiction that deal with the British Empire and those theoretical and ideological constructs which constituted the imperial idea.

First, then, the phrase “fictions of empire” simply refers to those literary narratives that focus on the British Empire and that deal with the experience of the

empire. Nineteenth-century travel writing, the adventure fiction of such authors as Frederick Marryat, Robert Ballantyne, G.A. Henty and H. Rider Haggard, Kipling's stories and poems, and Conrad's novels not only constructed the imperial subject, but were also immensely popular and influential fictional models of imperialism and of the empire (cf. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire*; White, *Joseph Conrad*). But such a limited definition does not adequately account for the complexity of the issues involved in the relationship between culture and imperialism.

In a broader sense, the title of this essay also refers to the diversity of ideological constructs which the colonial discourse has projected. These constructs can also be called fictions since they were clearly at variance with fact. Such conceptual and ideological fictions can be defined as recurring images of the empire, of the imperialist, of what he regarded as his mission, and of the colonized, the "Other." Such fictions consist of predispositions, biases, values, and epistemological habits which provide both agreed-upon codes of understanding and cultural traditions of looking at the world. The fact that those who make use of them are usually not conscious of the fact that they are mere fictions and at variance with the facts does not detract from their influence; indeed, it might make them all the more powerful because they shape our thoughts without our critically reflecting upon them. In their entirety these fictions constitute that culturally sanctioned system of ideas, beliefs, presuppositions, and convictions which constitutes imperialist mentalities. Such ideological fictions are closely connected with literary fictions because they find their most succinct expression in conventional plot-lines, myths, and metaphors that support and legitimize the imperial project.

It is this second meaning of fiction that Said has in mind when he calls Orientalism a "system of ideological fictions" (Said, *Orientalism* 321) and when he equates that phrase with such terms as "a body of ideas, beliefs, clichés, or learning" (205), "systems of thought," "discourses of power," and with Blake's famous "mind-forg'd manacles" (328). Moreover, most of what Said says about those Western conceptions of the Orient he calls Orientalism is equally relevant for understanding the structure and functions of the ideological fictions of the British Empire that we are concerned with. Just as "the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in and for the West" (5), the British empire can also be profitably understood as a set of ingrained and largely unconscious beliefs, ideas, feelings, and values.

What this article, then, mainly attempts to explore are manifestations of the imperial idea, as reflected in or constructed by what we have designated as

fictions of empire, which served to create their own empires of fiction. As John MacKenzie has convincingly demonstrated in his seminal work *Propaganda and Empire*, in the late nineteenth century an ideological cluster of ideas known as the “New Imperialism” took shape and forged new links between imperialism and patriotism. It was compounded of Social Darwinism, militarism, and Christianity, and it fostered and led to the propagation of the belief that empire was an adventure and an ennobling responsibility. Moreover, MacKenzie argues that there was an extraordinary continuity in this system of ideas from late Victorian times until well into the twentieth century and that it was of central importance to British self-perception and pride.

The ideological fictions that constituted the New Imperialism were not just reflected in or produced by the canonical works of “high culture.” On the contrary, from the late nineteenth century to the second world war, nationalist and imperialist ideas were conveyed through various popular genres and media, e.g. boys’ stories and other fictions for young people, the music hall, popular art, school books, postcards, packaging, cinema, exhibitions, parades, and a broad range of other genres and media (see MacKenzie, “Introduction”; *Imperialism and Popular Culture*). In other words, although the empires of fiction are not the only fictions of empire that one should take into consideration if one wants to come to grips with the questions of what made up the imperial idea, for the purposes of this essay the focus will be on narrative fictions and their contribution to fostering, challenging or even deconstructing the imperial idea.

Instead of assuming that imperialism was merely reflected in literary works, we argue that narrative fictions, just like patriotic poetry, boys’ stories, history books, travellers’ tales, and a host of overtly propagandistic genres, played an active and constitutive role in creating the imperial idea and in making imperialist mentalities. Moreover, literary as well as nonliterary fictions of empire have arguably not only given the British Empire and the imperial idea form, and thus also reality and presence, but they have also secured the empire a lasting and significant place in Britain’s cultural memory. The ideological fictions of empire which such genres helped to create served as a filter through which the imperial experience came into the British public consciousness.

What are the most important ideological fictions of empire that constituted the conceptual backbone of imperialism and that determined contemporary perceptions of the Empire? One of the dominating fictions of British imperialism was the ingrained belief in English superiority and the concomitant conviction that the native peoples in the various colonies were in need of elevation and civilization.

Said even goes so far as to locate “the essence of Orientalism” in “the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (Said, *Orientalism* 42), which was itself based on the “binary typology of advanced and backward (or subject) races” (206). Because of what Said has called “the structures of attitude and reference” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 62, 73, 89, 114, 134, 157) that constituted the imperial world-view, this fiction went hand in hand with another assumption fostered by Social Darwinism, viz. the ingrained belief “that subject races should be ruled, that they *are* subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its own domain” (62). Said’s choice of words already indicates the unholy alliance between imperialist fictions and religion that developed during the late nineteenth century, when the discourses of Christianity and imperialism became closely entwined, and the hand of Providence was held to be responsible for territorial expansion. During that period, imperial conquest and rule by that “superior race” were invested with holy connotations; and many scholars even nowadays implicitly accept that the British felt a sense of mission, for which sacrifices had to be made (cf. V. Nünning, *Where Literature*).

Moreover, Said has drawn attention to two other important conceptual fictions of empire or features that are characteristic of imperialism as a mode of thought and a set of attitudes: “stereotypes about ‘the African’ [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind” and “the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples” (*Culture and Imperialism* xi). The colonized peoples were not only habitually regarded as inferior, but they were turned into undifferentiated types, the ingrained stereotypes about the Oriental or the African. This does not mean, however, that these stereotypes were not given different forms in many fictions. Many adventure stories by authors like George A. Henty, for instance, make use of the distinction between the “good native” — that is, those who help the British characters along and are said to be innocent, naïve and rather child-like — and the “bad natives,” who are attributed with cruelty, ingratitude and treachery, and compared to wild beasts (cf. V. Nünning, “Viktorianische Populärliteratur”). Such differentiations, and even the occasional exception to the rule, however, did not detract from, but rather served to confirm the underlying belief in the inferiority of the so-called “subject races” that emphasised the alleged superiority of the British, and thus even meliorated the hostility between the Scots, the Welsh, the Irish and the British, who were united in the imperial endeavour.

These processes of dividing up the world into “them” and “us,” of fostering a sense of one’s own superiority that was based on the principle of inequality, and

of creating cultural stereotypes in turn brought forth and legitimized the notion of “the White Man’s Burden.” According to this fiction, it was the White Man’s job, duty, and even mission to act as a bearer of moral and intellectual values, to bring humanity and civilization to primitive peoples, and to impose their benefits on a world of savagery. The deep-seated belief in European superiority over the alleged backwardness of indigenous peoples finds its most succinct expression in Kipling’s idea of ‘the White Man’, whose (self-imposed) burden of fulfilling his civilizing mission was regarded as his unalterable destiny.

Another important ideological fiction of British imperialism was “the ideology of empire as family” (Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire* 105), which was vividly expressed in the form of conceptual metaphors (see A. Nünning, “Metaphors the British Thought”; “On the Emergence”; “On the Knowledge”). The recurrent use of the family metaphor assigned the colonies the role of children dependent on the tutelage of the mother country. The widespread dissemination of this particular trope justifies calling the image of the British Empire as a world-wide family one of the metaphors that popular imperialism lived by (cf. A. Nünning, “Metaphors the British Thought,” “Metaphors of Empire”), to adapt the felicitous title of George Lakoff’s and Mark Johnson’s well-known book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Closely related to these ideological and metaphorical fictions was another recurrent feature of what Said has aptly called “the imperial lingua franca,” namely the tendency to delineate the relationship between Britain and its colonies “in terms of possession, in terms of a large geographical space wholly owned by an efficient colonial master” (Said, *Orientalism* 213).

As even a brief glance at a random selection of texts concerned with the British Empire will illustrate, talking about the relationship between Britain and its colonies in terms of possession often went hand in hand with another fiction of colonial and imperialist discourse, viz. with denigrating or even erasing the native population of the countries that were colonized. What is implied in such a phrase as the “many blank spaces on the earth” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 52), which fascinated Conrad’s Marlow in his boyhood, for instance, is that there are whole regions waiting desperately for the colonialist or imperialist to populate them: “Colonialism conceptually depopulated countries either by acknowledging the native but relegating him or her to the category of the subhuman, or simply by looking through the native and denying his/her existence” (Tiffin and Lawson, “Introduction” 5).

In addition to these ideological fictions and rhetorical figures that one encounters in colonial discourse, there are a number of other more specific fictions

of empire. In his thorough monograph *The Language of Empire*, R.H. MacDonald has provided an overview of some of the most influential myths and metaphors of popular imperialism. One of the main fictions imperialism lived by manifested itself in a “poetics of war” and in the “public school code of ‘playing the game’” (MacDonald, *Language of Empire* 19). Both are based on the “metaphor of war as sport — and its corollary, sport as war,” which encouraged people “to behave as though the battle-field was an extension of the playing field, requiring the same attitudes and spirit” (20). The vocabulary of war provided imperialism with a set of metaphors, of which “the trope of war-as-a-lesson” is another famous, or rather infamous, example. It also supplied the imperial project with stereotyped plots: “The framing narrative of imperialism, the ur-plot, was that of conquest: first came the traders and missionaries; the ‘natives’ resisted or ‘rebelled’; then came the army to conquer and pacify” (26). Although the above brief overview of some of the main ideological fictions of popular imperialism is anything but complete, it may at least serve to convince the sceptic that there is more to the phrase “fictions of empire” than meets the eye or than anyone thinking only in terms of narrative fiction may have anticipated.

3. Culture and Imperialism: Fictions of Empire and the Making of Imperialist Mentalities

Making a distinction between the literary fictions that deal with the British Empire and the conceptual and ideological fictions of popular imperialism, of course, raises the question of how the relationship between literature and imperialism can be conceptualized. In his important work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said provides a methodological framework for applying the well-known epigraph of E.M. Forster’s novel *Howard’s End* — “Only connect” — to the realms of culture and imperialism.

The present article follows the path laid out by Said in that it, too, considers literary fictions of empire within the context in which they were written and read, in order to “show the involvements of culture with expanding empires, to make observations about art that preserve its unique endowments and at the same time map its affiliations” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 5). Looking at the connections between fiction and the pursuit of imperial aims is, of course, something that has often been done before. Yet the question of how culture participates in imperialism has traditionally been posed in a mimetic framework, and we think that the contribution of literature to the making and unmaking of “fictions of empire” and thereby of shaping attitudes and encouraging actions is much more important than

this rather limited view allows for.

What has not been adequately explored as yet is the extent to which literature may have played a constitutive rather than a reflective role in colonial and imperialist discourse. This article questions the traditional assumption that the relationship between fiction and reality is based on mimesis. We argue that it is more rewarding to conceptualize fiction as an active force in its own right leading to the actual generation of ways of thinking and of attitudes and, thus, of something that stands behind historical developments. Rather than being merely a passive vehicle that reproduced the imperial ideology of their time, narrative fictions need to be conceptualized as a productive medium that can play a creative role in the production of the ideological fictions that provide the conceptual framework of imperialism.

The imperial idea and the fictions it projected did not merely copy features of the “objective” historical reality, but constructed an imperial ideology consisting of stereotypes, beliefs, feelings, and values. Studies dealing with popular imperialism ought to take to heart what Peter Burke has called the “philosophical foundation of the new history,” viz. “the idea that reality is socially or culturally constituted” (Burke, “Overture” 3). Such a view of the “social construction of reality,” to borrow Berger and Luckmann’s well-known formula, has important and far-reaching consequences for the conceptualization of the relationship between the language of popular imperialism and the reality of the British Empire: “Words did not just reflect social and political reality; they were instruments for transforming reality” (Hunt, “Introduction” 17). It bears emphasizing that the discursive practices of imperialism did not reflect objectively pre-existing properties. On the contrary, the conceptual and ideological fictions of empire constituted the very reality they purported merely to reflect. Creating their own reality, they not only assigned roles to the colonizer and the colonized, but they also gave meaning to the imperialist project.

Moreover, colonial discourse is highly self-referential in that what it considers to be a fact does not reflect historical reality, but the preconceptions, values, and perceptions of the colonialist who produces the discourse in the first place. Just like Orientalism, the colonial discourse which projected such ideological fictions as those outlined above “responded more to the culture that produced it than to its putative object, which was also produced by the West” (Said, *Orientalism* 22): “it ascribes reality and reference to objects (other words) of its own making” (321). The authors of one of the canonical texts of post-colonial criticism, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, make basically the same point when they warn

against what they call the “danger in ‘transcultural dialogues’,” viz.

that a new set of presuppositions, resulting from the interchange of cultures, is taken as the cultural reality of the Other. The described culture is therefore very much a product of the particular ethnographic encounter — the text creates the reality of the Other in the guise of describing it. (Ashcroft et al., *The Empire Writes Back* 59)

Such a constructivist conceptualization of the relationship between culture and imperialism is indebted to the insights of a number of fairly recent approaches, especially to the New Historicism (see Schwarzbach, “London and Literature” 112; Healy and Sawday, *Literature and the English Civil War* 2).

If one adopts such a view of the dialectical relationship between culture and imperialism, it becomes clear that narrative fictions, just like travelogues, poetical works and other genres involved in the imperial project, need not necessarily just reflect imperialist issues and preconceptions. Instead of merely reproducing the imperial ideology of their time, literary fictions concerned with the empire can just as well contest, criticize, or deconstruct the ideological and racist premises on which imperialism rested, serving to foster the unmaking rather than the making of imperialist mentalities. Joseph Conrad’s and E.M. Forster’s ambivalent fictions of empire are a case in point, whereas H. Rider Haggard’s and G.A. Henty’s works, for instance, show very little (if any) critical distance from the imperial project. On the other hand, some works of literature also fulfilled a crucial role in shaping “fictions of empire.” A novel such as Charles Kingsley’s *Westward Ho!* (1855), which was disseminated among British troops in order to boost morale during the Crimean War, employed some central fictions of British imperialism even before politicians like Disraeli (in his famous Crystal Palace speech of 1872) or historians like Robert Seeley. Projecting back onto the Elizabethan Period the idea of British superiority over “natives” as well as European rivals, along with the ideal of gentlemanly public service and a pronounced sense of duty as well as sacrifice, Kingsley’s novel provided a tradition of heroic empire builders and fostered central features of the “fictions of empire” (cf. V. Nünning, “Where Literature”).

It is therefore not the question of a correspondence, or the lack thereof, between the literary and ideological fictions of empire on the one hand and the “real” British empire on the other that is at issue, but the system of thought, feeling, and perception that constitutes the imperial idea and frame of mind. Said has poignantly argued why it was futile to “look for correspondence between the language used

to depict the Orient and the Orient itself”: “not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate” (*Orientalism* 71). The significance of literary “fictions of empire” to an analysis of imperialist discourse is thus not in the historical accuracy of the accounts they give of the historical events of colonialism, but in the light they throw on both the system of thought, attitudes, and values that informs imperialism and on the way fictions construct the past and shape cultural memory. Said has argued that such cultural forms as the novel “were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* xii). If the empire was viewed in a framework constructed largely out of literary and ideological fictions, then a revisionist analysis of the fictions, myths, and metaphors of British Imperialism is a good place to start in attempting to demystify the Age of Empire.

4. A Revisionist Look at Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Criticism from the Point of View of Postcolonial Narratology

A host of books and articles have provided critical reassessments of the discourses of colonialism and imperialism from the point of view of post-colonial criticism, focussing on a broad range of influential literary fictions that deal with the British Empire, but they have neither paid much attention to the formal and narrative techniques of the novels nor tried to illuminate the role these works have played in the making of imperialist mentalities and in creating Victorian England’s imperialist view of the world. By focussing on what Hayden White has called the “content of the form,” we will attempt to make some modest proposals as to how one can demystify what Andrea White has poignantly called “the energizing myth of English imperialism,” which, she argues, was “the culture’s dominant fiction” (White, *Joseph Conrad* 6).

What is needed for coming to grips with the complex relationship between literary fictions on the one hand and the making of imperial mentalities, the invention of traditions, and the constitution of a nation’s cultural heritage on the other is a cross-disciplinary approach to intercultural studies that takes into account both the insights that postcolonial criticism has provided and the analytical tools developed by narratology. Proceeding from the epistemological premise of radical constructivism, such an approach incorporates the anti-mimetic view of the relationship between literary texts and their extra-literary contexts, something which poststructuralism and New Historicism have both argued for. Such a view rests on the assumption that, instead of conceiving of culture and imperialism as two distinct entities, it is more profitable to explore the ways in which literature as

well as other media and the imperial project mutually influenced and reinforced one another. Moreover, the approach adopted is cross-disciplinary in orientation in that it draws on both the theoretical framework of the history of mentalities and the insights of post-colonial criticism.

One of the main goals of such an approach is to explore those peculiarities of colonial discourse that are characteristic of British imperialism. Following Michael Titzmann ("Skizze" 406), the term "discourse" can be defined as a system of thought, feeling, and argument that is characterized by three features: a specific topic or subject-matter, regularities of speech, and interdiscursive relations to other discourses. Colonial discourse can thus be defined as the set of codes, stereotypes, and vocabulary employed whenever the relationship between a colonial power and its colonies is written or spoken about (cf. Said, *Orientalism* 71). An analysis of colonial discourse must therefore look at "the variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control" (Williams and Chrisman, "Colonial Discourse" 5). Since any attempt at drawing up an encompassing and systematic inventory of the features of colonial discourse would be doomed to failure, this essay focusses on some of its most important features and on literary manifestations of the imperial idea.

As anyone familiar with current developments in literary theory will know, the approach outlined would be inconceivable without the insights provided by post-colonial criticism. This takes in a number of theoretical and critical approaches used to explore both the complex relationship between culture and colonialism and imperialism's ambivalent heritage. They focus either on the cultural products of the former colonies of the European empires or on the problems inherent in imperialist views and representations of the colonies and their relationship to their mother countries. Both varieties of post-colonial criticism offer revisionist counter-narratives to the tradition of European imperial narratives. The roots of post-colonial criticism, or colonial discourse theory and analysis, as it is sometimes called, go back to the important work of Frantz Fanon and to Michel Foucault's work on the history of systems of thought, which has drawn attention to the fact that knowledge and power are articulated in discursive practices. Among the leading practitioners and theorists of post-colonial criticism at present are such well-known scholars as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha, but Edward Said is often regarded as its founding-father.

Anyone trying to connect literary fictions with the imperial process of which they were a part is, of course, faced with the difficult problem of how one can

determine the imperialist, racist, or ideological bias of a given work. Since novels or poems do not generally do the critic the favour of making any direct statements for or against imperialism (or feminism, or anything else, for that matter), the critic has to expose them to detailed textual analysis. The things to look for, according to Said, “are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (*Orientalism* 21). If one substitutes the word “empire” for “Orient” in the following quote, one gets more than just an inkling of how to come to terms with the ways in which the ideological fictions of imperialism implied or created in literary fictions that deal with the British Empire can be ascertained:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text — all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking in its behalf. (Said, *Orientalism* 20).

Narratology in general, and postcolonial narratology in particular (cf. Knellwolf and King; Sommer) can provide some useful analytical tools and concepts which should be taken seriously if one believes in the content, or *sensu* Fredric Jameson, in the “ideology” of the form. A rather basic principle that, especially in older tales, is often of paramount significance, is the choice of the narrative voice: a heterodiegetic narrator is not involved in the fate of his characters; he stands aloof, knowing everything about them, and sometimes even judging them as well as drawing lessons from their behaviour. As Stanislaw Eile states, this kind of narrator does “not require verification”, but rather “verifies all other statements” (Eile, “Novel as an Expression” 120). If these narrators praise one of the characters, explain his/her behaviour in favourable terms or even appeal to the sympathy of the reader and use other devices in order to demonstrate the character’s worth, it is usually an important indicator of the kind of values a novel conveys. As Elizabeth Ermarth has shown, this kind of “omniscient” narrator often functions as the moral centre of the story (cf. Ermarth, *The English Novel* 71-89).

This is sometimes, but by no means always, also true with regard to the “homodiegetic” narrator, who narrates his story from a different time level, thus having an advantage over the other characters, but who is nonetheless, as an “experiencing I,” part of the story. In the context of postcolonial criticism and

postcolonial narratology (cf. Sommer), the position of the narrator is important: Is he/she writing from the centre or from the margins? Is he/she part of the culture which dominates “the other,” or is he/she providing an indigenous view of the affairs? And, most important of all, is she/he critical of the “fictions of imperialism,” or — maybe the most effective way of criticism — does he/she begin as someone who subscribes to the Imperial idea but is disillusioned and “convinced” by the fictional facts that he/she believed in a chimera? Scholes has done an excellent job at explaining why ethical, ideological and political approaches, and formalist approaches like narratology, can complement each other in that no kind of literary criticism can afford to ignore a detailed analysis of the formal issues involved in literary representation and narrative technique: “The political enters the study of English primarily through questions of representation: who is represented, who does the representing, who is object, who is subject — and how do these representations connect to the values of groups, communities, classes, tribes, sects, and nations?” (Scholes 153)

However, even with regard to overt narrators, who make pronounced value judgements, provide explanations, generalise, and even address the reader, thereby trying to establish a common ground and convince him/her of the correctness of one’s views, things may be more complex than a superficial view at the narrator’s position would suggest. Homodiegetic narrators are by no means to be trusted implicitly. Although it was not used very often, the phenomenon of ‘unreliable narration’ has to be taken into account. In Maria Edgeworth’s novel, *Castle Rackrent* (1801), for instance, the Irish servant Thady Quirk does nothing but praise his master’s family, but even a not very discerning reader gathers very quickly that this family, aptly called “Rackrent,” is as egoistic as it is unscrupulous, cruel and dumb. Narratologists have by now established a number of features, both text-internal and text-external, which can help us to discern even those “unreliable” narrators, who are much more complex and interesting as Thady Quirk is (cf. A. Nünning “But why will you say”; “On the Emergence”; Phelan and Martin “The Lessons of Weymouth”).

To concentrate on the narrative voice is therefore not enough; one also has to take its relation to the plot and the values that are believed in by the characters into account. In some cases, this is, again, quite simple: if the text is an “ideological” text, for example. This has been masterfully described by Sara Suleiman (*Authoritarian Fictions*), who argues that such writings provide many redundancies as far as the structure of the plot, statements and actions by the characters, as well as comments by the narrator are concerned — even though, as she rightly stresses,

even such texts are characterised by some elements which provide a “surplus” of meaning which cannot be fitted into the general system of values conveyed by such novels. Other texts, for example those by Forster, Kipling or Conrad, are much more complex and have to be analysed very closely, taking heed of as many strategies of narration and additional features such as the use of metaphors and symbols or the “semantisation of space” (*sensu* Lévi-Strauss) as possible.

Since the following categories have been identified even before the heyday of narratology, they can be mentioned only briefly. The structure of the plot and the question of “poetic justice” often play an important role: Does the plot and the ending confirm the system of values provided by the narrator and the main characters? Less complex works with a so-called “closed form” often confirm the dictum of the rather prudish governess in Oscar Wilde’s play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895): “The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily. That is what fiction means” (Wilde 22). That Wilde uses this statement in order to further expose the governess’ lack of insight and her prim belief in conservative values shows, however, that things are not often as easy as that. Moreover, sometimes there are “ideal” characters who can be taken to embody most of the values confirmed in a specific work. In older works, such characters often acted as the mentor of the hero or heroine, who realises the truth of their councils only at the end of the story. Another narrative strategy that has been amply employed from the end of the seventeenth century onwards is the “doctrine of the just distribution of sympathy” (Wolfgang Zach, *Poetic Justice* 305, 311, our translation) of the characters. The “good” characters have to be presented in a positive way, and the villains have to be painted as black as possible. It is doubtful, however, whether this way of characterisation is always easy to recognise. The very pious and moral author Samuel Richardson, for instance, was horrified when he heard that the villain of his novel *Clarissa* was thought to be very attractive by a number of his readers (cf. Sabor, “Richardson” 143). We therefore have to look at a large number of important narrative strategies and determine their interconnections.

Another important feature is the constellation of characters and the distribution of “focalisers,” i.e. of those whose consciousness we get insight into. The narrator — especially a “heterodiegetic,” “omniscient” one — may be quite reticent, but allow us insight into the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of quite a number of characters. In such novels, the distribution of “focalisation” is significant: It makes a world of difference, even if the same number of “colonisers” and “indigenous people” take part in the plot, whether we are presented mainly (or even exclusively) with the thoughts and feelings of one group. We tend to identify with the “heroes,”

those characters whose feelings, motives, fears and tribulations we are let to know at greater length — although there are, again, a few significant exceptions, such as “unreliable focalisers.” However, many people feel that in Jane Austen’s famous novel *Sense and Sensibility* Marianne is somewhat less praiseworthy than her more rational sister Elinor; but few notice that Elinor is by far the most important focaliser in this novel, and that we often even come to know (and evaluate) Marianne’s feelings by way of Elinor’s thoughts on them.

The seemingly basic feature of the quantity of the perspectives of narrators and characters that are presented is therefore just as important as the guiding principle behind the selection of characters and events. Even without the use of explicit narrators, for instance, woman novelists of the eighteenth century made ingenious use of such simple means as the selection of the perspective (concentrating, for instance, only on the smaller demeanours of the heroine and focussing on her remorse, instead of showing the damage she may have done to others), appealing to the reader’s sense of sympathy by punishing misdeeds to an unwarranted degree, staging conflicts between the sexes and emphasising female powerlessness, highlighting the narrow range of choices of women by the use of contrasts and mirrors, and exploring the problem of women’s use of speech (cf. V. Nünning, “Gender, Genre and Female Experience”) — and it does not need emphasizing that all of these strategies are important for an analysis of the relation between “the coloniser” and “the other.” In order to bolster the position of women in a society dominated by men, women writers also used ideal characters, who corresponded to an outstanding degree to dominant values, in order to highlight the deviant women’s positive qualities: Often, such characters admire or even love the character who rebels against some social mores, and explain their behaviour to the reader, thus providing a model for the reader’s reaction. Concomitantly, it has been a time-honoured tactic to put negative, misogynous opinions about women (which readers might agree with in “real” life), into the mouths of the most unattractive, dumb and ridiculous characters, thus discrediting the tale by way of the teller.

This very brief sketch of some of the most important narrative strategies that determine the “content” and the “ideology” of the form may have shown that it is not enough just to isolate one statement or even the values embodied by one character (even though he may be the protagonist or the narrator) and then condemn a work as “racist” or praise it for criticising dominant “fictions of empire.” Although many scholars continue to look just at the plot and the content, often concentrating on isolated instances while disregarding formal features like multiperspectivity, ways of characterisation or “focalisation,” any careful

interpretation of a novel's confirmation or critique of imperialist values should take heed of the categories that have been explored by narratology. Similarly, since poems restructure the empire through their use of metaphors, rhetorical tropes, and rhythms, it is these textual devices that provide insights into the complex relationship between culture and imperialism, between literary fictions of empire and the ideological fictions they project.

5. Functions of "Fictions of Empire": Making Imperialist Mentalities, Inventing Cultural Traditions, Legitimizing Imperialism, and others

The remarkable discrepancy between the often harsh and ignoble historical reality of the British Empire and the euphemistic myths and metaphors projected by both colonial discourse in general and narrative fictions in particular raises the question of why the British were so prone to constructing complacent and self-congratulatory fictions of empire. At least part of the answer can be sought in the fact that the word "empire" was generally regarded as an inappropriate term for designating the relationship between a mother country and her colonies. As late as 1905, Joseph Chamberlain asserted: "It is not an empire. We use that word; but it is not an empire in the sense in which other empires have existed on this globe" (Chamberlain, "Speech" 295). Another apologist of the empire, Lord Alfred Milner, admitted that the word "suggest[s] domination, ascendancy, the rule of a superior state over vassal states" (Milner, "Speech" 349). As James Anthony Froude succinctly put it: "One free people cannot govern another free people" (*Oceana* 2). This was somewhat unfortunate, as the English prided themselves on their love of liberty and the long tradition of representative government. The connotations of the words "empire" and "imperialism" constituted a threat to the notion of Englishness, i.e. to those traditions that were regarded as specifically English (cf. V. Nünning "Where the Discourses"; "Where Literature"). In order to overcome the negative connotations of the terms "empire" and "imperialism" (cf. Koebner and Schmidt, *Imperialism*; Williams and Chrisman, "Colonial Discourse" 1), and to provide the heterogeneous bundle of political unities that were subsumed under the term empire, therefore, the establishment of the "fictions of empire" fulfilled an important role. But significant though this insight into the unpopularity of these words in Britain is, it hardly suffices to answer the question of what functions the conceptual and ideological fictions of empire outlined above may have fulfilled.

In the first place, by reducing both the complexity and the strangeness of the empire's diverse character such fictions imposed form upon an untidy reality and served as models for thought. They turned vast geographical areas into

manageable entities, transformed complex series of diffuse events into simple imperialist myths, and made soldiers into heroes. Despite, or even because of, their inevitably reductive character, such conceptual fictions can fulfil heuristic or cognitive functions in that “they represent or stand for a very large entity, otherwise impossibly diffuse, which they enable one to grasp or see” (Said, *Orientalism* 66). In their capacity as mental models, fictions of empire served as means for explaining complex historical processes and constellations. They helped to make sense of the imperial experience and “familiarised the public with the bearings of the question[s]” (Froude, *Oceana* 390) that were raised by the debates and the agitation about the British Empire.

Secondly, the literary and conceptual fictions fulfilled normative functions because they authorized ideologically charged views of the relationship between the mother country and her colonies. Popularizing imperialist attitudes and norms, the myths and metaphors of empire established a configuration of values that was conducive to maintaining an imperial world view. Although colonial discourse purported merely to describe the empire and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, what it actually did was assign roles to them. Imposing not only structure but also transformations and corrections upon raw reality, the ideological fictions of popular imperialism shaped both the prevailing view of the relationship between the mother country and her colonies and the perception of the encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. By translating the foreignness of the imperial experience into a highly stylized language, literary as well as conceptual fictions of empire served to create habits of thought, feeling, and perception conducive to advancing the imperial project. More specifically, popular fictions helped to transform the public perception of the military which came to be viewed in a completely different light as a result of successful campaigns in the colonies (cf. MacKenzie, *Popular Imperialism*).

Thirdly, by establishing oppositions between “us” and “them,” between self and other, fictions of empire served as an important means of maintaining an advantageous British self-image and of constructing Britain’s national identity. In the imperial fiction of the “superior race,” the differences between Englishmen, Welshmen, the Scottish and the Irish could for once be forgotten. The fiction of the White Man’s Burden, for instance, supported, or even created, a pronounced sense of self-regard as a nation of great power destined to wield its civilizing influence over “an empire on which the sun never set” (as the famous formula had it). Colonial discourse and the fictions of empire it projected are closely bound up with the development of Britain’s cultural identity, because a people’s collective identity,

just like personal identity, is neither natural nor stable, but discursively constructed: "In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations [...] but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 60). Emphasizing one's own superiority, enhancing Britain's self-pride in its achievements, or denigrating stereotyped Orientals or Africans was thus not an end in itself, but part of that complex political and cultural process that Linda Colley has aptly called 'Forging the Nation' (Colley, *Britons*). In this respect, as in so many others, the so-called "Indian Mutiny" was one of the most significant ideological and moral turning-points because this key event of imperial history transformed both the reputation of the army and the conception Britain had of itself, of its national characteristics, and of its role in the world (cf. V. Nünning, "Daß Jeder seine Pflicht thue"; Erll, *Prämediation*).

Fourth, many of the literary as well as the conceptual fictions of empire constructed and propagated a patriotic view of imperial history and transmitted it from one generation to the next. Thus they played a significant part in the shaping of cultural memory that has been called the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Mangan "The Grit of Our Forefathers"). Popular history, historical novels, and the official historiography of empire created what MacDonald — using Tennyson's phrase — has called "the Island Story," which had "very little to do with fact, but a great deal to do with metaphorical or imaginative reality [...]. Like all good stories, it had a plot, with a beginning and an ending, and in between, a series of crises" (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 51). It was in the framework of these patriotic myths of imperialism that officers acquired the aura of heroes and that these British heroes won each battle against native villains. The history of imperialism was thereby reduced to a series of memorable and heroic moments, each of which was endowed with patriotic meaning. MacDonald has called these mythologized events which made the "Island Story" accessible and by which the imperial past has largely been remembered "Deeds of Glory", which "provided a pattern-book of heroism" (81) and which were modelled on "an aristocratic sense of chivalry" (90). For obvious reasons, representations of such deeds of glory are of great interest to the cultural historian seeking to identify the set of values underlying imperialism: "A hero is a product of his society, the culture gives the hero's life its particular meaning. The culture, ultimately, produces heroes who reflect its values" (82). The growth of legends about the allegedly exemplary lives and heroic deeds of such eminent Victorians as

Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, the two English champions of the Napoleonic wars, of General Charles Gordon, the epitome of the soldier as Christian martyr and gentleman, or of Sir Henry Havelock, who died a heroic death as a Christian soldier when he tried to relieve the besieged in Lucknow, provides typical examples of the role fictions of empire played in the construction of national identity and the shaping of cultural memory (cf. 81-111).

Fifth, fictions of empire fulfilled a legitimizing function because they provided rationalisations and justifications of imperialism. They legitimized colonial conquest and imperial rule by dignifying them with a high-minded mission which putatively aimed at conferring moral, religious, and material benefits onto the colonies. According to Said, the “important thing was to dignify simple conquest with an idea, to turn the appetite for more geographical space into a theory about the special relationship between geography on the one hand and civilized or uncivilized peoples on the other” (*Orientalism* 216). The ideological fictions that imperialism lived by served as means of retrospective and prospective justification, because they legitimized imperial rule in advance as well as after the fact.

Last but certainly not least, fictions of empire served as subtle means of propaganda and as ideological handmaidens of imperialism, because they glorified the imperial project, disseminated highly advantageous myths and metaphors of popular imperialism (cf. Nünning and Rupp), and created a cult of exemplary heroes. The overtly propagandistic function that literary fictions played in the making of imperial mentalities is particularly obvious in Victorian popular literature. The popular fictions of prolific writers like G.A. Henty, Robert M. Ballantyne, Frederick Marryat, Cutcliffe Hyne and Edgar Wallace “became handbooks for the imperial programme” (MacDonald, *The Language of Empire* 205).

Literary fictions of empire, in particular, could fulfil such normative, legitimizing, and propagandistic functions because they shaped habits of thought, feeling, and perception. Their plots, myths, and metaphors played an important part in making imperialist mentalities because they organised “the metaphorical realities of empire” and “conditioned the way in which those who used them thought of the world” (233). The limited imagery, rhetoric, and vocabulary of popular imperialism provided conceptual and normative frameworks which functioned as more or less distorting lenses through which the empire was experienced.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, anyone interested in the impact of literary fictions on the growth and

decline of popular imperialism and imperialist mentalities will find it worthwhile to explore the relationship between narrative fictions of empire and the ideological fictions they served to generate and disseminate. By discussing and deconstructing some of the central ideological fictions of imperialism that are inscribed in many literary (as well as nonliterary) works, this article has tried to demonstrate that high and popular culture have “a specific history of complicity with imperial power, which it would be Panglossian to call irrelevant” (Said, *Orientalism* 342).

Moreover, only if we understand the logic and structure of what we have called conceptual and ideological fictions of empire will we be able to recognize “where and how our view of things is inflected (or infected) by colonialism and its constituent elements of racism, over-categorization, and deferral to the centre” (Tiffin and Lawson, “Introduction” 9). A great deal of the value and relevance of the exploration of what we have called ‘fictions of empire’ lies in the continuity between the past and the present: “Mentalities created by yesterday’s certainties survive more frequently than some would like to believe. These mentalities still extensively influence those of today. The effort to collate and interpret such mentalities created in the past may well constitute in the present and the future, therefore, a moral prophylactic” (Mangan, “Introduction” 20).

Anyone interested in these complex processes would therefore be well advised to heed the implied warning with which Said concludes his *Orientalism*: “systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions — mind-forg’d manacles — are all too easily made, applied, and guarded” (Said 328). If the discourse of popular imperialism cries out for demystification — and we think that it still does — then exploring fictions of empire from a postcolonial and narratological angle is surely a good place to start.¹

Note

1. This article is a revised and expanded version of A. Nünning and V. Nünning, “Fictions of Empire and the Making of Imperialist Mentalities: Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory as a Paradigm for Intercultural Studies.” We should like to thank Simon Cooke for his careful proof-reading and Mirjam Horn for formatting and proof-reading the text

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“World Literature” and Russia

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Abstract Russian literature challenges both Paris-centered accounts of “world literature” like Pascale Casanova’s and what Arjun Appadurai terms “Eurochronology.” It often does so by interrogating Russia’s supposed provinciality (*provintsiial* “*nost*”) — a word that carries especially complicated resonances in Russian. Russia’s unique situation — peripheral but not small, European but also Asian, Christian but perhaps not exactly “Christendom” — helps explain the importance of the *provintsiia* trope, in which Russia’s provincial places are characterized by an ambiguous, mixed-up temporality that reveals Russia itself to be neither “modern” nor straightforwardly “backward.” When writers like Gogol represent *provintsiia* as a mishmash of objects, styles, words, and times, they suggest that Russia may exist permanently outside of normative (European) chronology. By drawing a connection between chaotic simultaneity and creative potential, they contradict Casanova, who (drawing on Wallerstein) represents peripheries as fundamentally sterile and dependent. Thus Russia’s insistence on its own provinciality helps illuminate how its tradition resists assimilation into “world literature.”

Key words Russia; cosmopolitan; provincial; periphery; Casanova

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Pascale Casanova’s *World Republic of Letters* is one of the most influential accounts of what has come to be called world literature.¹ The book is certainly not

without its problems: since the study's initial publication (in French) in 1999, critics have taken Casanova to task for failing to address the many nuanced analyses of trans-national literary dynamics that have come out of postcolonial studies. But what has been less widely noted — in fact, what has gone virtually unnoted in western responses to the book — is that *The World Republic of Letters* utterly fails to account for Russian literature. Why is Russia absent from “world literature” as this phenomenon is described in a work of scholarship that has provoked a decade of conversation in Europe and North America? Or to put the question somewhat more provocatively, why *must* Russian literature be absent from the “system” that Casanova imagines?

One would of course expect any analysis of world literature to be able to deal with Russia: because really, who is more “world lit” than the Great Russian Writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a time period to which Casanova devotes much attention? In fact the baggy-monster Russian novelists can be seen as precursors of Rushdie and the other big, messy, hybrid — and mostly male — geniuses who perch at the top of the World Lit canon.² But with the exception of a few passing references, Russia is nowhere to be found in *The World Republic of Letters*. Rather than viewing this omission as a mere lapse — because truly, forgetting about Dostoevsky is too major an ellipsis to be incidental — might we identify a reason why any serious acknowledgement of Russia would, it seems, throw a wrench in the system?

One way to answer this question is to think about Russia's own symbolic geography, focusing particularly on the *stolitsa/provintsiia* binary that has long structured images of Russian space. Casanova sets up a system that leaves writers — and national literary traditions — two options: you can be cosmopolitan, or you can be provincial. But in Russian culture, I would argue, these categories do not carry precisely the same meaning that they do in other traditions. Casanova's provincial/cosmopolitan opposition *seems* to recapitulate Russia's *stolitsa/provintsiia* binary, but in fact *provintsiia* in the Russian tradition has a much more complicated and ambiguous resonance than does “la province” in French, or terms like “periphery” in English. This complexity can help explain not only why it is so difficult to assimilate Russian literature to Casanova's system, but also how Russian literature ends up mounting a kind of resistance (sometimes passive, sometimes less passive) to a Paris-centered map of the literary world.

In Russian, *provintsiia* designates the non-exotic, non-borderland, “native” spaces that are outside of and symbolically opposed to Petersburg and Moscow, all those nameless *Gorod N*'s that literature most often represents as devoid of life and

meaning. Yet despite the supposed meaningless of these no-place provincial places, authors return to them again and again: and this continuing focus on *provintsiia*, I would argue, reflects anxieties about the peripheralness and "provinciality" of Russia as a whole. The fear that motivates these writings is that the Russian capitals, always trying to catch up to and imitate the west, might be no less provincial than the provinces in comparison to the real center, that is, Europe. If this is true, then the provinces attract so much attention — and provoke so much horror and revulsion — not because they are different from the capitals, but because they might be the same: peripheral, backward, imitative, inauthentic. Writing about *provintsiia* becomes a way of interrogating Russian identity itself.

The noun *provintsiia* entered Russian from Polish with Peter the Great's reforms, when it was used to designate a large administrative and territorial unit of the empire. Under Catherine another round of reforms did away with the term, replacing it with *guberniia*.³ *Guberniia* and *provintsiia* coexisted and shared overlapping connotations throughout much of the nineteenth century, but it was *provintsiia* that eventually came to serve as a qualitative judgment: having lost its concrete administrative meaning, it became simply the not-capital, the embodiment of lack. The word persisted as a "phantom" category, taking on rich cultural meaning precisely because it was without any physical referent, living on and accumulating associations. It is this "semantic mobility" that distinguishes Russia's *provintsiia* from other traditions' provinces and peripheries.⁴

Provintsiia's symbolic import in literature can be traced to the early decades of the nineteenth century, when writers began to depict the provinces as a featureless void, a series of markedly anonymous places (*gorod N*). In many instances these places are not merely drab and philistine or behind the times, as are, say, Balzac's provinces in the French tradition; rather, they stand as a mysterious embodiment of cultural and psychic deficit. This vision of *provintsiia* was to remain strikingly constant from Gogol through Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Sologub and even beyond; a full three decades after *Dead Souls*, for example, Dostoevsky's *Demons* presents us with another nameless city, another place characterized by the same overdetermined anonymity signaling the meaninglessness and indistinguishability of all provincial places.⁵ In literature *provintsiial* "nost" became a kind of metaphysical attribute, albeit one that could be cast in geographic terms. Most importantly, I will argue, the Russian provinces as they are represented in literature are not simply "behind": rather, they exist in a strange and ambiguous temporality — a temporality that poses a challenge to totalizing systems like Casanova's.

Analyzing relationships between centers and peripheries requires us to think

about how these relationships condition ways of thinking about time, cultural hierarchies of “highness” and “lowness,” what counts as ahead and what counts as behind, and so on. This is often what Casanova is writing about: *The World Republic of Letters* identifies Paris both as the virtually undisputed center of the literary world and as the vanguard of a literary “progress” that is essentially linear. Casanova argues that France’s preeminence long served to divide the high-culture world into what was French, what was consecrated by the French, and what was neither of these.

She marshals a long list of quotations in which writers from the non-center bemoan their peripheralness and genuflect to the power wielded by Paris.⁶ Swiss artist Rodolphe Topffer wrote in the 1830s, for example, that if a man “values being illustrious,” “it is therefore wholly necessary ... that this man bring to the capital his bundle of talent, that he lay it out before the Parisian experts, and that a reputation is then made for him that from the capital is then dispatched to the provinces, where it is eagerly accepted” (Casanova 126). Serbian writer Danilo Kiš said virtually the same thing a century and a half later: “in order to exist it is necessary to pass through Paris” (qtd. in Casanova 129). One might also cite here Milan Kundera’s rather infamous *New Yorker* essay in which he claimed that a Polish writer needs to know French literature, but a French writer does not need to know Polish literature: simply because “[a French writer’s] own culture contains more or less all the aspects, all the possibilities and phases, of the world’s evolution” (Kundera 30).

With statements like this one, Kundera joins a group of deracinated cosmopolitan intellectuals — Nabokov, Brodsky, and T.S. Eliot all come to mind — who most long to be *universal*, to rise above the merely local and particular. In fact they often argue that real art is defined above all by its universalness. This plays well in Casanova’s version of France, which is entitled to transcend all *particularity* on the basis of its centrality. Kundera would love the quotes marshaled by Casanova — like Valéry Larbaud’s claim that “every French writer is international ... a writer for all Europe ... [and] All that which is ‘national’ is silly, archaic.” Or Harold Rosenberg’s: “Paris was the opposite of the national in art, [and thus] the art of every nation increased through Paris.”

Casanova’s focus, when not on France, is generally on what she calls “small countries,” or else on countries so disadvantaged by distance and colonial status that they might as well be small.⁷ Russia, of course, is anything but small. In fact, it is probably in part just because the country is so enormous (physically, culturally, historically) that Russians have not tended to see themselves as being simply on a

periphery, as might, say, a Serb like Kis. As one critic has written, "[Casanova's] scenario [is one] of underdog nations battling for a place in a literary sun blocked by the shadow of tyrant languages and literatures" (Prendergast 17): again, not a model that works very well for Russia, especially if you ask a Ukrainian.

Casanova describes the "decentering" and "disadvantaged remoteness" experienced by those on a cultural periphery who feel stranded in what she describes as "a place outside *real time* and *history*" (93, emphasis mine). She quotes Octavio Paz's account of his own coming of age in Mexico: "I felt dislodged from the present. ... The real present was somewhere else. ... For us Spanish Americans this present was not in our own countries: it was the time lived by others — by the English, the French, the Germans. It was the time of New York, Paris, London"(Casanova 92-93).

This belief, Paz explains, gave rise to his urgent need to find "the gateway to the *present*": "I wanted to belong to my time and to my century. ... My search for modernity had begun" (Casanova 93, emphasis mine). Paz's alienation is the result of a geographic localization of cultural authority so intense that it forces those on the periphery to judge their own reality by what Casanova dubs a "Greenwich meridian of literature," a point that is not only *spatial* ("the center of all centers") but also, and more importantly, *temporal* ("a basis for measuring the time that is peculiar to literature" [Casanova 87-88]). Once spatial decentering (being on the physical periphery) is experienced as temporal decentering (being outside of "modern," "real" time), the quest for modernity in literature can take on a desperate urgency. "To be decreed 'modern,'" Casanova writes, "is one of the most difficult forms of recognition for writers outside the center."

Casanova's focus is on those writers who, like Paz, cast the quest for modernness in straightforwardly geographic terms. As we've seen, Paz can confidently locate the present he seeks in real geographic space ("New York, Paris, London").

But this was generally not the case for Russians, who often felt themselves to be "divorced from *time*," in Chaadaev's words, no matter where they were in *space*. For Russians, getting modern could not be simply a matter of going to Paris to seek either edification or consecration. Nor was it a matter of going to Moscow or Petersburg, because thanks to Russia's particular relationship to the standard embodied by European culture, its own capital(s) played a far more ambiguous role in Russian high culture than Paris played in the French-administered empire of world literature.

Thus Russians found it more difficult to embrace wholeheartedly the belief that Petersburg or Moscow or Paris anyplace else might "save [them] from

provincialism,” as the Peruvian writer Vargas Llosa once expected Sartre — i.e., Paris — to do for him and his peers (Casanova 94). Gogol’s townspeople in *Dead Souls* and *The Inspector General*, Dostoevsky’s provincial revolutionaries in *Demons*, and Chekhov’s Prozorovsin *Three Sisters* all long for a distant center that represents *now*, wherever they may imagine that center to be — but the narratives in which these characters are embedded make it clear to us that their hopes of locating any geographic ground zero of meaningfulness and modernity are illusory. Rarely can Russians fully embrace the belief that if only they were able to *monter à Peterbourg*, Balzac-style, all of their semiotic problems would be solved.

This is due, I think, to the nature of Russia’s own capitals. Quite unlike Paris, that indisputable center of all centers, Russia’s elusive capital was, to adapt Luce Irigaray’s feminist formulation, “un centre qui n’est pas un.”⁸ Even as the Russian capital exerted authority over the provinces, it could not quite be pinned down, either geographically or semiotically; in Lotman’s terms, it “[did] not have its own point of view on itself” (Lotman 198). Never fully believing in their own center’s centrality, Russians continued to search the distance for what Rimbaud called “la vraie vie [qui] est absente.”⁹ Reading Rimbaud we recall both Lotman’s and Mikhail Epstein’s analyses of Russia’s spatial semiotics: in such a system, “what is yet to come into existence ... and is ‘someone else’s’ is highly valued” (Lotman); one longs for what is “not here, not at this place, but ‘there’” (Epstein).¹⁰

Russians certainly made pilgrimages to Paris, and they certainly recognized France’s cultural preeminence.¹¹ But what they sought in France was not, I think, an imprimatur that could be used to certify or hasten Russia’s own entry into a normative version of modernity.

And here I will turn to what I think is the other reason (besides “bigness,” that is) that Russia had to be omitted from Casanova’s system. Russia’s past does not fit comfortably into what Appadurai calls “Eurochronology”¹² in that it is not “modern,” but it is not simply and straightforwardly “backward,” either. Many Russian writers have both understood and made use of that uncomfortable fact. I would contend that Russian literature’s frequent focus on *provintsiia* and *provintsiial’nost’* is related to this understanding: as I said above, the provinces as they are generally represented in Russian literature are not exactly behind the times. Rather, they are not in *any* (single) time — in fact it is often not at all clear *when* the provinces are. And this, I think, is what makes the idea of provinciality both threatening and fruitful in Russian culture.

According to Casanova, Paris (or rather “Paris”) has successfully coerced more or less everyone into measuring their own modernity against the French

capital, the "Greenwich meantime of literature." Russian literature's rather obsessive focus on *provintsiial'nost'* suggests otherwise. Literature represents life in *provintsiia* as a mishmash of objects and styles and words and temporalities, all of it debris washed up on the provincial shore. Think of the estates in *Dead Souls*, or the *provintsiialka* Kukshina in *Fathers and Sons*' Town of N who goes on and on about everything from Bunsen burners and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Literary representations of *provintsiia* as hodge-podge — say, a provincial merchant's house where the décor includes a parrot, a bust of Voltaire, and the letter "Φ" cut out of paper, as in a Melnikov-Pechersky story¹³ — suggest that anything might appear at any moment. Because as *Dead Souls* tells us, "there [is] no way of knowing how or why" such artifacts have turned up in deepest *provintsiia*; *provintsiia* is a place where you might encounter virtually anything.¹⁴ And perhaps anything might *happen*, too: because in Gogol's words once again, "more events take place in Russia in ten years than occur in other states in half a century.

Provintsiia leaves us with the impression of an utterly disordered temporality — perhaps one that is permanently outside of the normative chronology implied by European history. Thus the *provintsiia* trope represents a way of thinking *not* about backwardness or behind-the-times-ness per se — not about trying to get in line, as Casanova implies everyone feels compelled to do — but about the relationship between cultural syncretism and Russian time. In Monika Greenleaf's analysis, Russian literature worked by ideas that were "sometimes up-to-the-minute but more often chronologically out of sync with European fashion," and having borrowed them, went on to "conflate and play off of [them] *simultaneously*."¹⁵ Literary representations of *provintsiia* as hodge-podge draw on precisely this sense of simultaneity and non-synchronicity, often (though not always) without even thinking of measuring themselves against any Greenwich Meantime of Literature.

For writers like Gogol and Dostoevsky, simultaneity seems to be linked — somehow, vaguely — to modernity. Both authors begin to imply that there is something about the strange, jumbled-up quality of Russian time that might prove fruitful and modern rather than sterile and behind. This, I think, is where we should look for the utility of the *provintsiia* trope, with its insistence on all that is ad hoc and syncretic in Russian culture. By asking whether the chronological and spatial disorder of *provintsiia*/Russia might not prove to be as barren as Chaadaev's "flat calm" diagnosis would have it, images of *provintsiia* can raise the possibility of a connection between chaotic simultaneity and creative potential. In other words, one might read Russian representations of *provintsiia* as a response to Casanova, who (drawing on Wallerstein) represents peripheries as fundamentally sterile and

dependent because they are *behind*.

If this is so, then perhaps Russian literature's persistent focus on provincial chaos points toward a fundamentally modern insight: *all* culture is syncretic, not just that of the provinces, or that of Russia; and no temporality can claim to be universally valid. In Edward Said's words, "all cultures are involved in one another; none is simple and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic" (Said xxv). When Gogol's contemporary Nikolai Nadezhdin describes his era's prose as "a confusion of all the European idioms having overgrown in successive layers the wild mass of the undeveloped Russian word," he is identifying precisely those phenomena from which Gogol's art would draw its greatest power (qtd. in Fanger 30). The *provintsiia* trope, then, signals not just the conflation and out-of-synchness that Greenleaf says are characteristic of Russian literature, but also Russians' *awareness* of these phenomena. This is what Andrei Sinyavsky alludes to when he says that all art "has the provinces in its blood" ("art is provincial in principle, preserving for itself a naïve, external, astonished and envious look"), and it is what Platonov hints at when he wonders whether maybe "genuine art and thought can in fact only appear in ... a backwater."¹⁶ This is the opposite of Casanova's thinking, and the opposite of Kundera's as well.

Maybe embracing a version of provinciality can be a way of refusing normative chronologies — including that of Casanova, who claims that only an *old* tradition can be "rich" enough to make the rules for everyone.¹⁷ And maybe embracing provinciality can be a way of resisting what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "imperialism of the universal."¹⁸ Casanova writes that only France was empowered to "manufacture a universal literature ... consecrating works produced in outlying territories — impressing the stamp of *litterarité* upon texts that came from far-flung lands, thereby *denationalizing and departicularizing* them" (Casanova 87, 31). Russians' insistence on their own *provintsial'nost'* might be read as a reassertion of the importance and dignity — or at least the inescapability — of the particular.

Naomi Schor writes that in theories of art and literature, "what is perhaps most threatening about the *detail* [is] its tendency to subvert an internal hierarchic ordering of the work of art which clearly subordinates the *periphery to the center*, the accessory to the principal, the foreground to the background" (20, emphasis mine). Schor's concern is with the gendered nature of the particular (the "subordinate detail," she writes, is repeatedly "singled out as distinctively feminine" in art and literature), but her point is useful for thinking about the mechanisms used to stigmatize cultural peripherality as well: "outdated" forms of writing are often accused of the inappropriate use of detail. It strikes me that writers on the periphery

are often warned that failing to “get a hold of” details, failing to keep them in line, is a sign of artistic backwardness: Brazilian novelists are reproached for “still” writing realist novels full of “irrelevant” detail, Indian writers who do not write in English are accused of “miniaturism.”¹⁹ One response to such charges might be to let the details run absolutely wild: you end up with Korobochka’s house, or with Dostoevsky’s uncontrollably garrulous narrators, or even with Tolstoy’s domestic minutiae and his detail-packed plots that baffled contemporary readers (as Konstantin Leontiev described *War and Peace*, “a redundancy, a ponderosity of petty details”).²⁰

The ambiguities of Russia’s situation — peripheral but not small, European but also Asian, behind but potentially ahead, Christian but perhaps not exactly Christendom in the sense of “the West,” etc. — help explain why the *provintsiia* trope came to play such a complicated and useful role in its literature, and ultimately why this tradition resists assimilation into “world literature.” Russians’ strange and often excruciating relationship to “Eurochronology” turned out to be productive in part because Russian thinkers who came after Chaadaev drew on the sense of being “out of sync” in order to find new ways of thinking about time, history, and modernity.²¹ Long before Trotsky elaborated his well-known ideas on “unevenness,” “the privilege of historic backwardness,” and “the law of combined development” (all of which, he claimed, would allow Russia to make “leaps,” “drawing together ... different stages of the [historical] journey”), Russians had begun to seek the advantages that might be inherent in their lateness.

But again, *provintsiia*s generally *not* represented as a place where you go back to get ahead; that is, the trope is not another way of developing the familiar (Trotskyan) idea that backwardness will allow Russia to line-jump in or into History. In fact rarely does *provintsiia*’s temporal mode imply the possibility of a “straight line” of historical progress: representations of provincial culture reveal no trajectory of development, no chronological *telos*. Nor is *provintsiial* “*nost*” an idea that locates value in an idealized version of some coherent past (any such ideal would be located in *derevnia*, not *provintsiia*).

Instead *provintsiia*, in all its shameful and shameless mixing of time periods and cultural categories, can serve not only to make visible Russia’s vexed relationship to European models, but also, ultimately, to hint at the irrelevance of these models — an irrelevance that might hold true not just for Russians themselves, but for all modern subjects. As Michael Holquist has argued, some Russians aimed to “universalize [the] dilemma” of being off of any heaven-ordained timeline, outside of any “transcendent system for ensuring order,” thereby

redefining what it meant for *everyone* to be modern.²² Thus we might read a text like *Dead Souls*, with all its focus on loathsome provincial detritus, both as a scandalous rebuke to the idea of cultural purity and as a sustained reflection on how modernity requires us to make art from adulterated materials. In the end, maybe *provintsii* represents a semi-horrified love song to our mongrel, modern selves.

Notes

1. Pascale Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999); English translation *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

2. See John Burt Foster, Jr., *Transnational Tolstoy: Between the West and the World* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), for an examination of Tolstoy's place in a "globalized" literary world.

3. For a more detailed history of this terminology, see Yevgenia Kirichenko and Yelena Shcheboleva, *Russkaii provintsii* (Moscow: Nash dom, 1997), 11, 46-48; L. O. Zaionts, "Istorii slova poiniatiia 'provintsii' v russkoikul'ture," *Russian Lit LIII* (North-Holland, 2003); Ia. E. Akhapkina, "Provintsii, periferii — problem nominatsii," *Provintsii kak real'nost' iob'ektosmysleniia*, eds. A.F. Belousov, M.V. Stroganov, A. Iu. Sorochan (Tver': Tverskoig osudarstvennyi universitet, 2001), 6-8 and 22; [no author], introduction, 9-14, *Russkaii provintsii: mif - tekst - real'nost'*, eds. A.F. Belousov, T.V. Tsivian, and V.N. Sazhin, (Moscow and Petersburg: Nauchnyi sovetskii istoriimiroyvoikul'tury Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk, 2000); E.N. Stroganova, "'Miniatiurnyimir': provintsii v russkoiproze 1830-kh-pervoi poloviny 1840-kh gg. Ekskiz," 196-9, *Russkaii provintsii: mif - tekst - real'nost'*; Zaionts, "'Provintsii' kak termin," *Russkaii provintsii: mif - tekst - real'nost'*.

4. Zaionts, "Istorii slova poiniatiia 'provintsii' v russkoikul'ture," 314, 315. By the turn of the twentieth century Stoian's dictionary, for example, defines *provintsii* first as what it is not ("all of the country except the capital and a few large cities," i.e., the not-capital), and second as "an area with little culture." Chudinov's dictionary of 1900 defines *provintsii* as "a separate part of the country ... in opposition to the capital." Akhapkina, "Provintsii, periferii — problem nominatsii," 6.

5. Two clarifications are in order here: First, this trope is bizarrely counterfactual. We have no evidence to prove that real life in the provinces was hellish, and nineteenth-century intellectuals outside the capitals tried over and over to defend their localities against metropolitan slurs (they did so especially in the local press beginning in the 1870s). But the *idea* of the provinces seemed to live its own life, virtually ignoring those who tried calling attention to obvious divergences between reality and literature. Second, the label "provincial" does not refer to rural life, and only sometimes does it refer to the life of the gentry estate. Rural life is the village (*derevnia, derevenskii*), whereas *provintsial'nyi* generally refers to provincial cities and towns, and sometimes to gentry estates failing to attain to *tsivilizovannost'*. Peasants, then, are never

provincials, and peasant culture is not provincial culture. Peasants are not trying and failing to follow the mode of the capital; they are simply not implicated in the semiotic system that has been described as “fashion, this great metropolitan idea ... this engine that never stops, and makes the provinces feel old and ugly and jealous — and seduces them forever and a day.” Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 65.

6. Note the selection bias here: Casanova is not quoting all the writers who simply did not care about Paris enough to mention it.

7. Nor does Casanova, for all her attention to translation’s impact on literature as a world system, acknowledge the massive work undertaken in this field by the Soviets. The American experience, too, is underplayed, since Casanova focuses almost exclusively on examples of U.S. writers for whom Parisian cultural authority played a key role in their canonization (Poe, Whitman, Faulkner).

8. Luce Irigaray, *Cesexes qui n’enest pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977).

9. Arthur Rimbaud, “Délires I: Viergefolle, l’Époux infernal,” 1873. <http://www.mag4.net/Rimbaud/poesies/Vierge.html>

10. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 192; Mikhail Epstein, “Provintsiiia,” *Bog detalei: Narodnaiadushaichastnaiazhizn’ v Rossiinaiskhodeimperii* (Moscow: Izdanie R. Elinina, 1998), 24-30.

11. As early as 1778 Fonvisin wrote that “Paris is not a city at all; it must in truth be called an entire world.” But Russian travelers also considered French belief in French preeminence to be a bit ludicrous, even once we correct for a good dose of *ressentiment*: as Glinka wrote in 1814, “the residents of Paris consider themselves their city to be the capital of the world and the world to be their provinces. They consider Burgundy, for example, a near province and Russia a far one. A Frenchman coming here from Bourdeaux and a Russian from Petersburg are both called foreigners.” Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 150.

12. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 30; qtd. in Prendergast, “The World Republic of Letters,” 6.

13. P. I. Mel’nikov (Andrei Pecherskii), “Krasil’nikov,” *Sobraniesochinenii v vos’mitomakh*, ed. M. P. Eremin (Moscow, 1976), 1: 56-57.

14. N. V. Gogol’, *Polnoesobraniesochinenii* (Moscow, 1952), 6: 95.

15. Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 15-16. Greenleaf is referring to the Romantic period, but her insights shed light on the tradition as a whole.

16. Abram Terts [pseud. of Andrei Sinyanvsky], *V teniGogolia* (Moscow: Agraf, 2003; orig. pub. 1981), 328. Platonovqtd in Thomas Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov: Uncertainties of Spirit* (Cambridge:

Cambridge U. P., 1992), 18. Here Thomas Seifrid's remarks on Platonov's relationship to modernism are suggestive for trying to understand how a provincial perspective might benefit an artist: Platonov, according to Seifrid, represents "a kind of de facto modernism developed, at a remove from the centers of Russian modernist culture, out of the satirical-grotesque tradition of Gogol, Leskov, and Saltykov-Shchedrin and emphatically preserving the 'crude' perspective of the semi-literate provincial masses."

17. "The age of a national literature testifies to its 'wealth' — in the sense of number of texts — but also, and above all, to its 'nobility,'" and therefore to its right to serve as arbiter in all comparisons and as embodied standard of literariness. (Casanova 14).

18. Pierre Bourdieu, "Deuximpérialismes de l'universel," in *L'Amérique des Français*, ed. Christine Fauré and Tom Bishop (Paris: Francois Bourin, 1992), 149-55.

19. Roberto Schwarz, "The Importing of the Novel to Brazil and its Contradictions in the Work of Alencar," in Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 41-77. Francesca Orsini, "India in the Mirror of World Fiction," Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, 319-333.

20. Leontiev cited in Gary Saul Morson, *Hidden in Plain View : Narrative and Creative Potentials in War and Peace* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 53.

21. See Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1986).

22. Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel*, 15-16, 30-31.

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Do “Minor Literatures” Still Exist?

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Abstract My paper addresses both Bulgarian (more widely, East-European) literature (especially in the first two parts) and developments that bear on the larger framework in which literary history operates today. I revisit the notion of “minor literatures” and show it to be an historical construct with a specific lifespan. I also examine the ambiguity of the project of “minor literatures,” poised as it has lately been between an understanding of “minor” as a potential social and political energy that originates in the writing of a minority within a dominant majority (“minoritäre Literatur”), and an evaluative notion that sees “minor literatures” as small (“kleine Literatur”), derivative, deprived of originality when measured by the yardstick of “mainstream literatures.” The first of these two perspectives is sustained in Deleuze and Guattari’s classic book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*; the second one has a longer pedigree that goes back to the intricate history of Eurocentrism since the 18th century.

Key words “minor literature”; world literature; Balkan literatures; literary canon; Eurocentrism; centre and periphery

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My paper addresses both Bulgarian (more widely, East-European) literature (especially in the first two parts) and developments that bear on the larger framework in which literary history operates today. I demonstrate the dependence of the idea of “minor literatures” on the broader dynamics of literary history, offering sufficient proof that the very concept of “minor literatures” is an historical construct with a specific (limited) life-span. What are the implications the reconsideration of the notion of “minor literatures” might in turn have for the changing conceptual apparatus of literary history is a question I should like to put on the agenda in another essay; here I address this issue only in a very provisional and rather inchoate manner.

I revisit the notion of “minor literatures” by examining the ambiguity of the project, poised as it has lately been between an understanding of “minor” as a potential for social and political energy that originates in the writing of a minority within a dominant majority (“minoritäre Literatur”), and an evaluative notion that sees “minor literatures” as small (“kleine Literatur”), derivative, deprived of originality when measured by the yardstick of “mainstream literatures.” The first of these two perspectives is sustained in Deleuze and Guattari’s classic book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* and amplified and radicalized in their later *A Thousand Plateaus*, where Deleuze and Guattari make it abundantly clear that the major and minor modes are two different treatments of the (same) language of the majority (e.g. German in Germany, Hungarian in Hungary). One of these treatments “consists in extracting constants from it, the other in placing it in continuous variation”; in other words, the “minor” is the force that questions and varies the major from within.¹ The second perspective — “minor” as “small” and “derivative” — has a longer pedigree that goes back to the intricate history of Eurocentrism since the 18th century.

1

Bulgarian literature does not seem to be particularly amenable to a study grounded in Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialisation of language as the hallmark of a “minor literature” produced at the margins of an established language. Deleuze and Guattari assume a linguistic framework that presupposes already institutionally stable national languages, and thus also a provisional canon to which a “minor”

writer relates his or her own writing. This approach, however, would end up bracketing out the arguably most interesting century of Bulgarian literary culture, the time from the 1760s to the 1860s when the literature of the so called “national revival” displayed the linguistically unregulated existence of a body of writing in becoming, without a firm canon and without prescriptive expectations of regularity and beauty. If anything, this is the time when it is still possible for writers to create works in other languages, which are then nonetheless adopted as part of the Bulgarian literary corpus: Liuben Karavelov and Grigor Purlichev spring to mind.

On the other hand, a Deleuzian approach *strictu senso* might nonetheless be applied in earnest to Bulgarian literature — but not just yet, it would seem on first glance. We simply lack the knowledge base that would allow us to do so. We know virtually nothing about writing in Bulgarian in traditional Bulgarian communities abroad, where Bulgarian is more than the language of isolated émigré intellectuals; nor do we know enough about the interaction of Bulgarian writers with the oral poetry tradition of the Ottoman Empire.

Yet if we heed Deleuze’s call that, as suggested above, “minor literatures” should be possible even where ethnic difference is not necessarily at stake, so long as language follows, in his words, the “lines of flight” made available by a deliberate strategy of self-exclusion on the writer’s part, then we would indeed be able to see Bulgarian literature, especially that of the two or three decades, in a different light. Two poems by Ani Ilkov, arguably the most powerful and sophisticated voice in Bulgarian poetry since the late 1980s, could furnish evidence for this process of intentional minoritisation of the major. Ilkov performs a gesture of voluntary exile from translatability by mobilizing archaic layers of Bulgarian right at the heart of his poetic language:

By what вершаш сине мой
ершаеши
слиза кой
мъртвите блуждаеши ...²

By what резон св
Сега надолу
Вдън

Or even more inventively, with a deliberate (and pseudo-macaronic) mixture of Cartesian Latin, English, and a pervasive host of obsolete forms imitating (as they also do in the lines above) the language of Bulgarian literature from the middle of the 19th century:

Играещиц в сияен зар

Подобно

малармето	Но лъсна голият му гъз
Под форма на дупе-то	
.....	
Ми летоска cogito дъж	Расте което
пръска	Дали и он така надлъж
Показва че присъства	Поради что? Ву
what premise?	& how it really happened? ³

Remarkably, and not unexpectedly, this subversively ironic linguistic audacity was taking place in the context, and in a sense as a supplement to, Ilkov's heightened social and political activism during the early and mid-1990s. Although this moment of his career as a poet and public intellectual merits a much more detailed consideration, I here wish to spell out only that which seems to me to be the most essential feature of this activism: Ilkov was perhaps the most talented representative of that brand of ferocious Eastern European anticommunism that was in favour of democracy and a multiparty system but, as turned out in time, against the rule of the market. The bifocal vision of these intellectuals was bound to perceive, in Bulgaria but also elsewhere, the rise of the market and its domination over public life as a vulgar byproduct — rather than a logical consequence — of the political transition they had otherwise welcomed and supported.

2

But let me now move to the other, better established and still widely resonant meaning of “minor literature” — that of “small, derivative, deprived of originality, benighted, lagging behind,” a literature that is worth reading only in order to corroborate or amplify already available superior examples of European civilization. The roots of this evaluative paradigm lie back in the Enlightenment philosophy of history. At the same time as the French *philosophes* discovered progress as the supposedly uncontested trajectory of humanity, they also discovered that different communities will arrive at that implied pinnacle of history at different times. Apparently the direction was only one, but the circumstances and the speed were calling for a more pluralistic picture. The very concept of civilization was invented as a tool of locating the provisional point occupied by all these different communities on the axis of progress. It is far from accidental that the Bulgarians made their first prominent appearance on the large stage of world literature precisely in the book of a French Enlightenment *philosophe*, in Voltaire's *Candide* (but then, again, only as a substitute designation of the Prussians); all this took

place in 1759,⁴ three years before Paissii of Khilendar professed his pride of belonging to the glorious tribe of the Bulgarians.

The anthropological curiosity that flourished during the Enlightenment was lifting entire ethnic communities from the obscurity of mere exoticism to that of benign cultural insignificance within the emerging framework of shared European values. If we trace the history of the entrance of Bulgarian culture into Europe, we notice that it begins with the translation of folklore. This is true of the Slavonic languages (the earliest example being an 1823 translation of a Bulgarian folksong into Czech), as well as of translations into English, French, and German.⁵ Folklore, however, is all about an *asynchronic* adoption, where cultural forms long gone are domesticated once again as a manifestation of anonymous (and thus already softened) exoticism; folklore reveals a previous archaic stage of cultural evolution that cannot be sustained, or indeed, recommended any longer in the West. Most of the time it remains an alien body in the discursive tissue of Western culture and serves as an awkward reminder — despite Herder’s and his Romantic followers’ noble ideas — that the universal powers of humans to create fictional worlds had not always been employed in the most sophisticated fashion.

The true history of “minor literatures,” in the sense of small and poor relatives of the mainstream European literatures commences only with the end of the “exotic phase” and the arrival of the more or less synchronized literary movements of the *fin-du-siècle* and later the *avant-garde*, the many *isms* (Symbolism being one of the most recognizable such phenomena) which begin to coordinate the map of literary Europe and entangle the smaller literatures of the Balkans (and of East-Central Europe) into a larger landscape of shared conventions and styles. Teodor Trayanov, Nikolai Liliev, and a whole string of other Bulgarian modernists, just as Khristo Smirnenski, Geo Milev, Chavdar Mutafov, and other representatives of the Bulgarian post-symbolism and *avant-garde*, are — from this somewhat narrower but epistemologically more rigorous perspective — the only conceivable exponents of “minor literature” Bulgarian culture had furnished before 1945. In a similar position, one could venture, were also dozens of writers after 1945, who were participants in the national version of a concomitant socialist-realist literature produced in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. In this regard (as in many others), socialist realism was only an extension of modernity and of its various coordinated *isms* which bound together the literary space of Europe (and the world beyond) through their mandatory conventions and through an experience of typological proximity even where the experience of simultaneity was not immediately available.

With the demise of the *isms* — these smaller contributory narratives that made up the great European narrative of literary succession and progression — the very foundation of the axiological juxtaposition between minor and major has become much more problematic. We live in a time when the only possible distinction that could still render such a juxtaposition meaningful is the distinction based on the mode of existence and functioning of language: the great languages that have spread across continents, nurturing their own diasporic writing, and the small, or ‘minor’ languages, whose literatures have largely remained trapped in the physical body of the respective nation state, or have — at best — inhabited, sometimes even legitimized, its (often hotly) disputed territorial extensions (e.g. Hungarian in Transylvania and Slovakia).

“Minor literatures” is thus a construct of literary history that experiences today significant difficulties conditioned by changes in the way we understand and write literary and cultural history. The first and most consequential among these is the arrival and consolidation of transnationalism, an epistemic paradigm that has always professed a value-neutral approach to the phenomena it seeks to analyse, thus relaxing palpably, indeed almost altogether dispensing with, the division between “minor” and “major” cultures and literatures. Transnationalism, in the modern and currently well established sense of the term, was first employed as a theoretical paradigm in the early 1970s, by political scientists who sought to understand the impact on American foreign policy of a new and previously under-conceptualised interaction between political agents who were not identical with the nation-states: various NGOs, international interest and pressure groups, etc. Later on, transnationalism drew on a twofold discontent: with the undifferentiated, blanket concept of globalisation and with what social scientists termed in the 1990s “methodological nationalism”. Although it was only in the 1990s that recognition of the importance of transnationalism became prominent in the social sciences, gradually making its way into the humanities as well, the impulses for a conceptualisation of literature beyond, above, or below the level of the nation state are historically much older. Before I proceed to examine the current situation of strong relativisation of the value-charged opposition between “minor” and “major” literatures and the factors that shape it, let me offer a brief historical excursus into the ambivalent self-positioning of the field of Slavic literary studies in the long process of methodological re-scaling beyond the constraints of the national. “Methodological nationalism” is not, of course, a panacea; it comes with its own limitations;⁶ but it is a powerful and much-needed antidote to the increasingly embarrassing — yet still vociferous — mantras of national literary historiography.

Slavic Philology, the disowned older relative of today’s “Russian and East European Studies,” seemed well-placed some two centuries ago, at the time of its first steps, to contribute to this celebration of cultural production beyond borders. Most of the literatures it wanted to explore were after all the literatures of societies without their own nation states. What is more, they were produced in the context of bi- or multi-lingual empires, an environment that today attracts the attention of anthropologists and sociologists embracing the transnational research paradigm. Yet Slavic Philology, like most other European branches of philology (but in the end for longer than most), followed a different course; it became a voluntary instrument of national revivals and rivalries, often working with entities and labels larger than the nation, only to reaffirm and enhance its — the nation’s — priority. The idea of Slavdom, for example, was employed by many of the Russian Slavophiles and *pochvenniki* as an imperial weapon of hegemony, or, in its Polish version, as a justification and embodiment of messianic dreams. Ironically, the first outlines of the idea of Slavdom were actually written in non-Slavic languages: the Dominican monk Vinko Priboevich published in Venice in 1532 his *De origine successibusque Slavorum*, followed by Mauro Urbini’s *Il regno de gli Slavi* (1601), a key-text for the first Bulgarian history written in 1762, which signaled the onset of Bulgarian nationalism.

The dynamics of this process is more complex than a brief survey could suggest. Towards the end of the 19th century, with the Slavic nation-states in the Balkans feeling more confident after successful completion of their long struggles for independence and unification, the paradigm of kinship and superiority fuelled by the notion of a Christian Slavdom began to compete with regional optics allowing for cultural and religious variety, and even conflict. A good example of this new perspective, insisting on diversity, was the growth of Balkan Studies. If Viktor Zhirmunskii is correct, Balkan Studies (“balkanistika,” “Balkanistik”) made its entrance as a discipline only in the late 1890s (more precisely, 1896-1898, in Vols. 13 and 15 of *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniia, nauka i knizhnina*, where Ivan Shishmanov’s well-known study on *The Song about the Dead Brother in the Poetry of the Balkan Peoples* was published).⁷ An adherent of the migration school in the study of Folklore, Shishmanov believed in a freely floating body of motifs that recognised no state borders. Although he never posed the crucial question of subjectivity and agency — in the primeval anonymity of folklore, the rupture, asymmetry, and estrangement accompanying the act of border-crossing was not an issue — Shishmanov and the many scholars who followed in his steps refused to assert the (by then customary) axiological distinction between “small” and “great

literatures.” Not by accident were these scholars more interested in folklore than in literature *per se*, understood in the modern sense produced and implied by the evaluative discriminations already in place by the late 19th century.

But this healthy preoccupation did not last. Local differences of intensity and pace aside, after World War One and throughout the Soviet age, to some extent even during the transition to the free market (in this respect, political caesurae did not necessarily amount to paradigmatic shifts) writing literary history under the umbrella of the nation state — even when this was done within the larger domain of a communist commonwealth — became once again, in Bulgaria and in most other Eastern European countries, a safe recipe for projecting one’s own literature as suspiciously unique — which, in fact, was little else than the other side of “minor,” “derivative,” “obscure,” “small.” Claiming a stake in European culture meant claiming a well-guarded corner, a little patch of exclusive, unmatched and unmatchable literary experience. The dislodgment of “minor” literature as an evaluative paradigm could thus not occur before the gradual downfall of literary history as a discourse sponsored by the nation state.

3

The receding significance of the nation state and the ensuing relativisation of the distinction between “small” and “large” literatures are today driven by modifications of the wider framework in which the practice of literary history takes place. Understanding these modifications seems to me an essential first step. In addition to the nation state (on which I dwell at more considerable length), below I concentrate on two more factors (the media and the evolution of society and of the idea and institutions of university education under the pressure of demographic changes), and seek to elucidate and weigh their importance for the gradual waning of the axiological matrix anchored in the opposition of “minor” and “major.”⁸

The Nation State

The origins of literary history as an institutionalized discourse are closely interwoven with the fortunes of nationalism and the nation state after the French Revolution. Although the first chairs of literature were conceived to teach and profess the letters without particular national restrictions, the post-Napoleonic period marked by the rise of nationalism in Europe saw a gradual transition towards a nationally focused research and teaching agenda. Literature itself was seen as an instrument of preserving and glorifying “those great national memories that are in the dim past of a national history” (Schlegel 15) — and so was literary history. As Cornis-Pope and Neubauer have recently argued,⁹ the study of literature and its

history was first institutionalized in societies that were concerned to cultivate a clear national identity and gain state sovereignty (Germany, Italy, Central and Eastern Europe) — although it would be true to say that in England, where statehood and national identity had been established very early on, literary historiography took off ahead of any such attempts in the countries mentioned above (Thomas Warton published between 1774 and 1781 three volumes of his unfinished literary history, only making it to the time of the Reformation).¹⁰ In Germany, the first literary history appeared long before the unification of the country under Bismarck in 1871: between 1835 and 1842, Georg Gervinus published a five-volume *Geschichte der poetischen Nationalliteratur der Deutschen* (the title was later changed to *Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung*); this was half a century earlier than the first great history of French literature by Gustave Lanson which appeared in 1895. In Italy, De Sanctis published a two-volume history of Italian literature in 1870–71, after the unification of the country, but still twenty years ahead of Lanson. Even though Gervinus did not agree with the politics by which Bismarck sought to achieve the unification of Germany, his history was a powerful instrument in constructing an awareness of German cultural homogeneity.

The future of this pattern that has enjoyed unquestioned domination for over a century is now highly uncertain. There are several reasons for this. To start with, Eurocentrism itself has been losing ground ever since World War I, and with it also the European model of nation-centred literary history. This process was exacerbated by the arrival of globalisation on the crest of revolutionary discoveries in information technology in the 1950s, which coincided with the swift dismantling of the colonial system. The ensuing growth of diasporic cultures, on the one hand, and the process of European integration in the context of a globalised economy, on the other, gave rise to occurrences best described as the gradual “hollowing-out” of the nation state in the West. A single unified canon, on which to base literary history, became increasingly untenable. Within the nation-state, there emerged a string of parallel canons called upon to rectify the social injustices of the past. For those willing to see it, there is at present a very strong signal heralding the move away from national (literary) histories: the talk now, especially in Germany, where Goethe had dreamt of a “world literature,” is of how to construct a representative European canon, which would stimulate and draw on the writing of regional histories or, ideally, of a history of European literature at large. A joint French-German history textbook, written with the intention of being used in schools in both countries was introduced to the public in 2007. Nor is this pastime of the rich alone. Concerned with security and determined to see an ever-

expanding market, the European Union and various NGOs compete in the Balkans in sponsoring textbooks that are meant to teach the younger generations that they all have a shared political and cultural history.¹¹ Thus we face two developments, none of which is hospitable to the traditional literary history commissioned by the nation state (itself further enfeebled today by the drive to surrender ever more power to enable Brussels to fire-fight the raging crisis of sovereign debt): either regional, and even “pan-European” histories, serving a different set of political goals from those so familiar from the recent past, or transnational, often also transcontinental, narratives heeding not the monolithic projects of the nation state but rather, as Stephen Greenblatt demands, the postcolonial processes of “exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unexpected consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for — Greenblatt continues — it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of languages, and not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy.¹² Needless to say, Greenblatt’s message also carries the connotation of skepticism toward, and critique of, the power aspects of conquest, mobility, and the hybrid proliferation of national languages. But it asserts in no uncertain terms the superior viability of cultural production based on such developments: moving beyond the straightjacket of the nation-state, freeing up the potential of language to change as it wanders across continents and social strata, letting language coin its own forms of existence in exile, transition, and miscegenation.¹³

As traditional national literary history takes pains to remain in business, it seeks to accommodate these new developments. A fresh example provides the new Oxford English Literary History in 13 volumes, which will dedicate two volumes to the post-World War II period, both designed to compete with, and qualify, each other in the way they interpret Englishness: the volume *1960-2000: The Last of England*, written by Randall Stevenson, described as a “Scotsman who believes that the idea of ‘English literature’ is no longer a possibility,” and another volume, *1948-2000: The Internationalisation of English Literature*, written by the Canadian Bruce King who celebrates multiculturalism not as the end but as a revival of this idea¹⁴ (Note also that these two volumes interpret differently the lower chronological boundary of the period they explore.) The new Oxford history is thus seeking to transpose — without canceling — the largely exhausted national narrative into the tonality of multicultural globalism.

With reference to Eastern Europe, it is only during the last twenty years that we came to witness the manifestations (still sometimes ruptured, as I noted earlier, by a resilient mentality of uniqueness and exclusivity) of a momentous

methodological superimposition, leading away from the postulates of a language-centred “methodological nationalism”: Slavic Philology began to share territory and prestige with “Russian and East European Studies,” the latter being essentially an area studies paradigm determined to reduce the specific weight of language variety — and thus of literature as well — in the way the cultural production of the post-Soviet era is studied and taught. Thus, historically, looking at Bulgarian literature in particular, we can identify the succession (at times also the overlap) of three particular optics: the Slavic (“slavistika”/“slavianska filologija;” “Slavistik”/“Slavische Philologie;” “Slavonic Studies”/ “Slavic Philology”), the Balkan (“balkanistika”/“balkanski filologii;” “Balkanologie;” “Balkan Studies”), and the East-European, or post-communist, paradigm (“Russian and East European Studies”/ “South-East European Studies”). As one can readily see, the philological element is on the wane; while the first, partly also the second, link of the chain accommodate the philological component as fully expressive of the whole, the third one no longer does. The trend observed in this succession is that of an ever more overt political interest that attends to the literary aspects of literature only to the extent to which they are representative of larger patterns of social and political evolution. Evaluative judgments are more often than not demobilised and suspended in the process.

The Media

Marshall McLuhan’s assertion according to which the medium is the message (23-36) regains resonance today as we try to chart the fortunes of literary history and the impact on the previously entrenched but currently ever more shaky distinction between “minor” and “major” literatures.

The business of literary history has changed dramatically over the last 60 years in large measure due to the changing media of its appropriation. There are several aspects to this change. First of all, the pattern of the consumption of literature underwent a significant alteration. Film adaptations of the national canons abound, making it easy to delude oneself that watching *Sense and Sensibility* exempts one from reading Jane Austin. The accessibility of the classics through low-budget television versions gradually came to bridge the gap between high and popular literature that the discipline of literary history has depended on all along. To be sure, it was literary history in the first place that instituted the division between “high” and “low,” and conjured works initially serialized in newspapers for the entertainment (also for the edification, needless to say) of the wider reading public into masterpieces of high culture. Many of the 19th century novels, including those of Dostoevsky and Balzac, among others, were subject to such metamorphic

refashioning at the hands of academic literary historians in the decades following their first publication. Now the table has been turned on the literary historian: the plethora of films, radio adaptations, comics etc. has plunged the profession into a world where the previous security furnished by the canon has all but vanished. The supposedly unique act of the silent reading has been brutally ousted by the mass consumption of visual surrogates perceived to be better at emphasizing the plot and the costumes rather than the supposedly great philosophical message of the literary work of art. Thus literary historians have been left wandering without a compass in the thicket of a culture that is neither high nor low but subsists instead on the reproducibility of the sacred in a myriad of everyday instances of overlapping performance, profanation, and epiphany.

The second aspect is induced by the all-too-powerful presence of the new electronic media. Ever since Baudrillard,¹⁵ we have learned to question the boundary between fact and fiction in the workings of the electronic press. Not only has literature ceased to be, in Hillis Miller's nostalgic words, the sole purveyor of virtual reality;¹⁶ moreover, modern media, in particular the interactive technologies, have brought about an unprecedented openness of the text to simultaneous modification by the recipient. Thus the status of the text has changed beyond the comfortable manageability on which traditional literary history rests. The disobedient text that emerges in the process of the electronic interaction is open-ended, mobile as never before, and truly boundless; not even the conceptual armament of intertextuality is any longer capable of domesticating it. An ever-fluid hypertext renders the customary articulation of semantic entities obsolete and unreliable. The result is an archive of semantically dynamic deposits, which can be added to or subtracted from at liberty at any time. The author/reader boundary is totally erased, and so are the foundations of reception theory and the traditional literary history with its rigid value distinctions.

Finally, the global network creates a vast electronic library, where national traditions and loyalties are quickly destabilized. Fragmentary in its foundations, the experience of the internet-driven reader contributes to a new paradigm of interpretation where reference and comparison no longer originate with compelling logic from a historically verifiable pool of national writing. To make sense of a story or a poem, both teachers and students of literature now often depend on support from the global bank of plots and images that feeds the mind without asking questions about the historical or national appropriateness of the material supplied. The electronic media and the Internet thus confront literary history with the challenges of simultaneity and deracination; they usher in a new age of a

global market of fragmented and repackaged cultural products that no longer come labeled as "minor" or "major," "great" or "inferior." In this market, the nation-state increasingly loses its power of canon-formation; moreover, the power of educating and molding its own citizens in a fashion and through means that are controlled by the nation-state also slips away.

Demographics

Habermas, among others, has recently asked the incommensurable (to put it mildly) question of "the future of human nature."¹⁷ He placed this question in the bedrock of modern genetics and the inevitable — and as yet unforeseeable — changes that are to follow from the arrival of cloning and the genetic modification of human material. From my standpoint, there are two interconnected issues at stake here: longevity and memory. Both plunge the commentator into previously unexplored depths. With an ever growing life expectancy and the corresponding attempts at managing it through various economic and administrative techniques, how is memory to be distributed socially? In the wake of the alterations dormant in the management of longevity, how will the perception change of what constitutes the formative experiences and segments of human life: childhood and adolescence? Three of the essential cornerstones of literary history — indeed of any history — will be heading for dramatic transformation. One is the concept of generation; the other one is the notion of period; and the last one — the notion of novelty (what constitutes novelty in the literary and ideological life of society), and thus also the notion of value. Traditional literary history has been reliant on these concepts to provide a meaningful centre of interpretation. It will not be enough to realize that periods in literary and intellectual history are discursive ideological constructs; so much is known even now. The real issue at stake is the changing lifespan of generations, and with this the changing rhythms of the production of meaning. Public consent over key events underlying the narrative of the historian is likely to be reached in an ever more complicated and mediated fashion, because the constitutive voices of the generational ensemble will each have a temporality, duration, and therefore force, different from those informing the practice of (literary) historiography at present. Whether microhistory or any other tools favoured by modern historiography will be able to respond to these challenges is far from certain. I do not wish to sound as the purveyor of mythology: it is the realities of progress in genetics and the impending growth in longevity on a previously unprecedented scale that urge us to rethink the foundations of (literary) history in the future.

It is apposite here — and of a more immediate relevance for our study of the

fading opposition between “large” and “small,” “major” and “minor” literatures — to stress that literary history has always been largely sustained by the generally secure, at least in Europe, market of university and school education; without this market, it is difficult to assume that literary history would be a viable enterprise today. But what we see in recent years, precisely as part of the economic and social techniques of demographic control, is the introduction of a totally new concept of education. The so-called “continuing education,” or “life-long education,” which is now part of the educational landscape throughout Europe and America, slowly but securely redefines the philosophy of education, leaving behind the dogma of clear-cut disciplinarity. The pick-and-mix approach of the Western-style educational supermarket is there to stay and to be employed in regular sequences throughout the life of the individual. Having to serve this ever growing market, as well as the modular system of undergraduate education, is already impacting on the scope of research undertaken in the modern university. Thus we are witnessing a new cycle of education and employment, which no longer separates the two, and a new social task for education to live up to. All this contributes to a new climate of learning and scholarship, in which authoritative knowledge and the guarding cult for particular subjects and their inherent hierarchies of values and quality look increasingly inadequate.¹⁸

4

Let me recapitulate my argument so far. The origins of literary history as an institutionalized discourse are closely interwoven with the fortunes of nationalism and the nation state after the French Revolution. However, Eurocentrism itself has been losing ground since World War I, and with it also the European model of nation-centred literary history. As the global economy undergoes today a painful readjustment and, more importantly, a slow but seemingly unstoppable rebalancing towards the new power-houses of growth in the Far East, on the Indian Sub-Continent, and in Latin America, the very idea of a binding Euro-North American literary canon, within which established notions of centre and periphery remain meaningful, grows weaker and less tenable. Today we witness a transition to either regional, and even “pan-European,” histories, serving a different set of political goals from those so familiar from the recent past, or transnational narratives heeding not the monolithic projects of the nation state, of which earlier literary histories across Europe were representative, but rather the processes of exile, emigration, creolisation, and the hybridization of languages.¹⁹ Regional literary history, in particular, is beginning to occupy an ever more prominent

place, as it endeavours to heed and reveal the “ambiguities and overlaps” (Gellner) in situations of plurilingualism and ethnic border-crossing concealed by the centralized nation-state.²⁰

The business of literary history has been transformed dramatically also by the changing media of appropriating and consuming literature. First of all, the pattern of the consumption of literature underwent a significant alteration, placing the texts of the canon within easy reach through numerous visual adaptations, thus destabilizing their very nature as canonic works of *literature* and erasing the boundary between “high” and “popular.” Moreover, modern media, in particular the interactive technologies, have brought about an unprecedented openness of the text to simultaneous modification by the recipient. The status of the text has changed beyond the comfortable manageability on which traditional literary history rests. The disobedient text that emerges from the process of electronic interaction is open-ended, mobile as never before, and truly boundless. Literature thus moves freely between centre and periphery, enfeebling the conceptual framework posited by these two notions. Not only from the point of view of transnational border-crossing, migration, and exile, but also from that of media theory has a clear distinction between centre and periphery, between “minor” and “major” literary texts become highly suspect. In the age of incessant transnational information flows literature no longer has fixed abode or audience (in Ottmar Ette’s words, literature has lost its “permanent address”²¹), nor does it any longer come with secure value markers attached to it.

Crucially, all the factors I have discussed in this article, including the dramatically changing ideas and practices of education, which put the sustainability of the old disciplinary knowledge under such enormous strain, along with the dwindling power of the nation-state to guard and inculcate the values of the traditional canons, or to form new ones, seem to be pointing in the same direction: the axiological discrimination between “small” and “great,” “minor” and “major” literatures becomes increasingly untenable. As a matter of fact, this very distinction, as I essayed to demonstrate, is itself a historical product with — as any other time-bound product — a limited life-span: the distinction between “major” and “minor” literatures was the outcome of an era of thriving national traditions and strong nation states, but also — equally important — of a complacent Eurocentric framework populated and propped by the contributory narratives of various artistic *isms*, which, in their totality, constituted the coordinated space of the “republic of letters,” apparently homogenous but below the surface built on cultural hierarchies and ridden by conflicts, revolts, and struggles for international domination and

significance.²² To describe its map, the categories of centre and periphery, canon and deviation, focus and margin were meaningfully employed. This conceptual apparatus now looks increasingly challenged and enfeebled by the encounter with a newly constituted transnational cultural process, in which evaluative discriminations are ever more difficult to uphold. Instead, we are entering the regime of a complex (and constant) marginocentricity,²³ in which centre and periphery become fluid, mobile, and provisional, prone to swapping their places and exchanging cultural valences.

This is not to say that inequalities disappear; as a matter of fact, globalization does create and reveal new sets of inequalities. But we need to begin to acknowledge that, in the same breath, it renders the opposition between centre and periphery less meaningful, as it moves away from the idea of a shared (Euro-North American) canon that underpins this distinction in the first place. Rather, we are witnessing a new regime of relevance where difference — drawn not least from what we used to call the zones of cultural marginality — is commodified and homogenized into a single, globally marketed cultural product;²⁴ the defiant spirit of marginality and “minor literatures” is processed away, leaving us with a new stock of goods that change hands smoothly — at airports and, virtually, in a myriad of chat-rooms.

Of course, it remains important to uncover the traces of that lost potentiality, of the activist marginality that globalization tends to obliterate so insidiously. At the same time we might be well-advised to admit that one of the most unpalatable effects of globalization has indeed been to confront us with the reality of the minor now functioning as a “fixed” feature, a reterritorialized appellation, a commodity label. Alas, this new, static condition of ready-to-consume “minority” has very little to do with the productive and challenging “becoming” that extracts “continuous variation,” to recall Deleuze and Guattari’s later imperative. Instead, we are in the grip of a regime of relevance that suspends the process of “becoming” and “installs a new constant,”²⁵ in which major and minor, canonical and marginal have only limited conceptual validity.²⁶

Notes

1. See Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and (1988: 106).
2. See Ani Ilkov’s poem “Edin zmei v Tsarigrad” (51).
3. See Ilkov’s poem “Otpad”tsi na edin zmei [(b) ‘Malarmeta’]” (54).
4. For earlier mentions of Bulgaria in the literatures of Western Europe, see Staitscheva.

5. Further details can be found in Traikov. For more on the dynamics and ideology of translating Bulgarian literature in the West see Tihanov.
6. See Robert Fine's critique in Fine (9-14).
7. See Aretov 65-7; on Shishmanov and the growth of Balkan Studies, see also Mishkova 67-70.
8. The following discussion draws partly on arguments developed in my article "The Future of Literary History: Three Challenges in the 21st Century." *Primerjalna književnost* 31.1 (2008): 65-72 (Romanian translation: "Viitorul istoriei literare: trei provocari pentru secolul XXI." *Analele Universitatii Bucuresti* 57 (2008): 89-96; Slovene translation: "Prihodnost literarne zgodovine: trije izzivi 21. stoletja." *Primerjalna književnost v 20. stoletju in Anton Ocvirk*. Ed. Darko Dolinar and Marko Juvan. Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2008. 325-32; Hungarian translation: "Az irodalomtörténet jövője: Három kihívás a 21. században." *Korunk* 23.2 (2012): 49-54.
9. See Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 12.
10. For a skeptical take, from a different perspective, on the argument in Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, see Biti (75-6).
11. See e.g. the project for a shared textbook of Balkan history supported by the Pact for Stability, as reported in Portalski.
12. See Greenblatt.
13. See also Greenblatt's later take on cultural mobility in the opening and concluding essays to Greenblatt.
14. Cf. Bate.
15. See above all Baudrillard's notorious pamphlet *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.
16. See Hillis Miller.
17. See Habermas.
18. For a wider picture of the methodological and civic anxieties of literary scholarship in the twenty-first century, see most recently Alber et al. and Olsen and Pettersson.
19. On various new forms of hybridity in literature, see, for example, Sturm-Trigonakis and Knauth.
20. Cf. Strutz (254), from whom I borrow some of the terminology here.
21. See the argument in Ette; the German original was published in 2001 under the title *Literatur in Bewegung. Raum und Dynamik grenzüberschreitenden Schreibens in Europa und Amerika*.
22. See Casanova .
23. I extend and radicalise here the notion of marginocentricity applied by Marcel Cornis-Pope to what he calls the 'marginocentric cities' of Eastern Europe; he defines 'marginocentric cities' as peripheral cities which display a "tendency to challenge the hegemony of the metropolitan centers, offering an alternative to their national pull" (Cornis-Pope 8).
24. On the process I term 'commodification of difference', see also Tihanov.
25. The quoted words in this and the previous sentence are from Deleuze and Guattari (104).

26. I am grateful to Vladimir Biti and Henrike Schmidt for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

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From Imitation to Construction: Steps towards Modernization in Nordic Literature

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Abstract In my article I deal with the modernization of Nordic literature in the 20th century and show the reasons why the aesthetic transition from imitation to construction produced completely new forms of literary expression. In order to illuminate the paradigmatic turn I have analysed five Nordic novels, which through the introduction of new literary techniques aim at transcending the visible world and finding access to the complex reality beyond the reach of human perception. As it proves impossible to imitate what you cannot see or hear, the author is dependent on showing the reality behind reality with the help of constructions and models, which serve as door-openers into hidden connections and all things “what link the world in its depths together” or in Goethe’s original text: “was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält.”

Key words imitation; construction; mirror; lamp; “behind”-concepts; cubism; circum-perspective; original; copy; cross references; ars combinatoria

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In his well-known book *The Mirror and the Lamp*¹ (1971), M. H. Abrams points out that the Aristotelian mimesis was the fundamental principle in art and literature up to the Romantic age. Due to his conception the function of literature consists in the imitation of nature through an act of verbal translation. The signification process is within one language group quite simple and depends on linguistic competence.

If an author wants to move a cow from the meadow to the written context of an artistic expression, he simply makes use of the three characters c-o-w, which is an arbitrary sign without any similarity with the signified animal, but still evokes the image of its appearance in the reader's mind. This is of course a very simple interrelation between sign and meaning, which through the increase of significative signs grows more complex and extends the spectrum of possible understandings.

The development of mimetic models of literature continues through the Middle Ages and reaches a culmination during the Renaissance and the times of French classicism and German classicism where mimesis means the imitation of the antique patterns of artistic presentation. Common to all forms of literary mimesis is that their topics are taken from the real world of the antique polis, interspersed with accounts about warfare, heroic deeds and antique mythology. The parallel to empirical philosophy is obvious: there is nothing in the mimetic text which has not been prior in the reality beyond the text. Accordingly the mimetic text has its roots in an extended reality, which includes both society and nature, the *res publica* and what Descartes called *res extensa*, the expanded "things" or nature. The artistic procedure presupposes that the author transfers an already existing "thing" or "res" into a new written medium, where it coexists with other "things" in a rearranged artistic landscape, where it can take on new significance.

The Romantic turn around 1800 triggers a complete conversion of the creating impulses, which from now on come from the inside world or from what Descartes calls *res cogitans*. Abram's symbol for this turn is the lamp, which is now throwing new light from the inside world on the "things" outside. According to this reversed stimulation of artistic creativity the "things" do not exist independently of the creator's state of mind. New forms of narrativity occur, influenced by the reinforced interest in "things" beyond rational reach. Parts of Romantic literature developed technics through which these unknown fields of human experience could be visited. It is a matter of illuminating the night and all "things" hidden behind the darkness and of discovering what is called the *terra incognita* or the unknown earth/land, which is very much the same as transcending the borders of empirical knowledge and come into touch with the occult.

Such projects force the author to leave behind all realistic concepts and to consider that the word art, Latin *ars*, is designing something that is not natural, but something artificial. In most of the Germanic languages the designation is Kunst/kunst, which is derived from the verb can/können/kunne and links literary activities to craftsmanship. It is symptomatic that during the Romantic age many authors had a predilection for writing about artificial human beings like Homunculus

in Goethe's *Faust* or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This turn from copy to construction paves the way for future literary conceptions which are occupied with finding the reality behind the reality; inspired by *the* inventions of scope-instruments like the telescope, the rectoscope and X-rays it is possible to prolong the reach of the human eye into inside and outside areas thus enabling insight into a hidden world inaccessible to natural perception.

In the following I want to draw attention to five Nordic novels, which in an original manner draft new conceptions of representing "things" hidden in darkness and concealed behind our perceptive accessibility.

1. Hagar Olsson: *På Kanaanexpressen* (In the Kanaan Express Train)

One year after the publication of André Breton's novel *Nadja* the Finnish author Hagar Olsson published her novel *In the Kanaan Express Train* (1929), a caleidoscopic composition, which "Knut Brynhildsvoll has called a photonovel." (Holmström 105) Both novels are remarkable because they include photos in the running text. In her novel Hagar Olsson describes a couple of young people's journey in the night train express between Åbo (Turku) and Helsingfors (Helsinki). The visual text consists of 14 photos, mainly of female faces and motifs from the technical acquisitions of modern life.² Among the photos there is a painting of the French cubist painter Marie Laurencin, visualizing a woman locked up in a bird cage. It is however striking that the photos are negatives. This may seem peculiar, but the author's idea is to establish a special interrelation between the verbal and the visual text. During the eastbound journey through the night the text serves as an instrument in the process of exposing the photos, releasing them from their imprisonment in a negative world of shadows and turning them into the bright light of a promising tomorrow. Thus the novel has clear political intentions. The group of young people travelling through the night want to leave behind them the negative experiences of the Western civilisation heading for a political dawn located in the eastern areas of communist renewal.

This emancipation idea was wide-spread in the 1920s. In Norway a group of left-wing intellectuals founded a society called *Mot dag* (Towards dawn), a branch of the world wide Clarté- movement that attracted many writers, among them the Swedish author Karin Boye, who in the last verse of her poem *I rörelse* (*In motion*) writes:

Bryt upp, bryt upp! Den nya dagen gryr,
Oändligt är vårt stora eventyr.

Set out, set out! The new day is coming up,
Endless is our great adventure.³ (Boye 27)

The idea of a long night's journey into day is old. In the old Norse poem *Bjarkamál* the first line is: "Dagr er upp kominn" (The day has come) and a very popular song by the Norwegian poet Alf Prøysen provides comfort to those who have wasted their time: "Du ska få en dag I mårå, som ny og ubrukt er" (You shall get a day tomorrow that new and untouched is). The idea of a red dawn is rooted in socialist and Marxist doctrines. Hagar Olsson's original idea of applying this communist vision through the cooperation of two genres is exceptional.

However optimistic her double-coded text may be, it belongs at any rate to a number of Nordic novels which on a high artistic level tests new possibilities of passing through the darkness in order to catch a glimpse of the upcoming day. One of the pioneers of the "behind"- conception of artistic writing is August Strindberg. In a significant scene of his drama *A Dream Play* the deans of the university faculties are sitting in front of a closed door discussing what may hide behind it. When finally the door is opened it turns out there is nothing behind it. However, this nihilistic approach doesn't discourage future writers and keep them away from further dealing with the problems of behind.

2. Svend Åge Madsen: *Dage med Diam eller livet om natten (Days with Diam or Night Life)*

In discussions about the relations between history and literature you occasionally find a reference to Aristotle who asserts that history is what has happened, literature what may happen. This statement leads further to a topical discussion about possible or parallel lives, some of which are taking place in dreams, in the imagination or under the influence of drugs. Albrecht Schöne, one of the leading experts in the field of German literary research, has dealt with this topic in a noteworthy article about Robert Musil's novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man Without Qualities*). In his essay he introduces the term "Möglichkeitssinn" (sense of possibility) and examines the verbal form *subjunctive potentialis* in Musil's novel⁴ (Schöne 1969). This is a modal category of the verb which helps the writer to keep the world open towards its not realised, alternative possibilities. Thus the *subjunctive potentialis* is a mode of expression that underlines the infinity of possibilities and the incomplete state of the world. The demand for supplementary access to the hidden worlds behind the visible ones makes the reader more attentive to the fact that "things" could have been realised in innumerable deviations of the

chosen possibilities.

In his novel Svend Åge Madsen draws the consequences of the subjunctive character of human life and arranges a fictional setting, in which real life is accompanied with the shadows of unrealised possibilities. The author's intention is to write a novel according to the principles of cubist art:

One knows the technic of painters who disagreed with depicting their models either from the *front* (en face) or the *aside* (in profile) perspective and instead of the conventional models of presentation preferred a model, which enabled them to integrate both of the perspectives in one and the same motif. This book makes use of a technic which can be considered to be the corresponding literary principle. (185)

In order to get a complete impression of his protagonist and his relations to Diam it is necessary not only to describe his chosen way through the model system, but also the omitted choices, which of course are infinite. The metatextual statement of the narrator himself expresses a conviction that life is much too complicated that it can be justified as being an additional string of events. He refuses the additive narration and states that "my life written continually is of no aesthetical value"(47). The contents of the consciousness are involved in a ceaseless process of transformations, and in keeping with this fact it is decisive to find a model which is able to represent the nature of the designated narrative object in a suitable way. Madsen explains his point of departure with the following observation, according to which the presentation of a human being on the plain page of paper and in the form of "a long line", which links together the figures and the events to a novel, is just as little satisfactory as a map that has no similarity with the globular form of the earth, which in a more proper way is representable in the shape of a globe.

In the eyes of the author the constantly ongoing accumulation of experience is the dominant manifestation of the human mind. Hence he recognizes that the mental structure is organized after the model of a pyramid. This triangular model takes the three-dimensional structure of cubist presentation into account, but it fails to visualize the multiperspective appearance in a simultaneous sketch. The application of the cubist idea requires a deconstruction of regular rectangular or acute-angled figures and a decomposition of linear models into twisted figures comparable to Pablo Picasso's painting *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which shows the five prostitutes in a circum-perspective.

In his novel Madsen simulates this technique through an action starting on

the top of the pyramid, where the main person's intention is to glide down the pyramid's sides at the same time, which of course is impossible. The idea of the novel is, however, to illustrate the invisible side of the pyramid through the art of generating the story. The main person Alian Sandme is involved in a self-exploring experiment which serves to enable him to find the alian (alien) part of himself, exposed in the anagrammatical form of his first name. Moving downstairs from one position to the next he is bound to descend according to a system of binary oppositions. He starts at point S on the top of the pyramid, from which he descends to point SA or ST and in continuation of the ramifying process to further points on the sides of the pyramidal construction. However, this binary locomotion through the system does not satisfy the ambitions of Alian Sandme. As a fictional figure he also wants to occupy the positions that he on his binary way through the system has left unoccupied. Thus the unrealised movements simply do not get lost, but are preserved and at any time at the protagonist's disposal as the subjects of dreams and imaginations. The space between the single choices is not empty, but full of undeveloped possibilities, which accompanies him as the shadows of unlived life. During Alian Sandme's night life these unlived possibilities take possession of him and expose him to his "hidden" life. This is part of the cubist intention to make the story of his life more complete.

In this complex texture the female figure of Diam plays an important role in Alian Sandme's world. The meetings with her takes place in his real and imagined life. Her anagrammatical name tells us that she is a constructed person; Diam read backwards spells "made", but at the same time she is also a young woman, a "maid", who is subject to Alian Sandme's voyeuristic curiosity, and that is why he completes her appearance with features extracted from a cubist circumspection of her appearance:

Have I only misused Diam? I have sucked impressions from her, I have drawn experiences out of her. I have placed her on a platform, have went around her in order to satisfy my sense of beauty (...), I have turned her face around in order to find the most beautiful positions, to see her from the most attractive perspectives. (151)

While he is collecting and combining single perceptions to a complete view on Diam, he projects himself into an equivalent number of piquant, poetical and amusing relations to her. In doing so all his mental energies participate in producing innumerable new embodiments of himself and of Diam:

It remains always strange to me that I am sitting here in the middle of a net, with copies of myself on all sides, ahead of me and behind me, all of which I didn't have the slightest notion of. (27)

According to this model the I is an unlimited, constantly expanding totality, which consists of partial entities with hidden capacities of establishing internal connections. The attempt to spatialize the stream of consciousness-concept according to the pyramid model challenges the author's ability to tie together the hidden dimensions of his substratum with those accessible to perception in a way that evokes a complete presentation. This requires the author to be able to rebuild the triangular spatial form of the model on the plain level of a book page, thus ensuring that the hidden sides of the pyramidal consciousness in its function as a reservoir of possibilities become recognizable.

The Danish poet Benny Andersen has expressed the inexhaustibility of the vertical descent in the following verse:

Målt på langs er livet kort
men lodret målt uendeligt. ⁵ (7)
Measured longitudinally life is short
but measured vertically infinite

This is evidently a lyrical adjustment of Roman Jakobson's theory of the poetical function of language, in which he distinguishes between two axes, the syntagmatic or the combination axis and the paradigmatic or the selection axis. In the poetical use of language materials the author selects from a repertory of kindred semantic, phonetic and rhythmic expressions and exchangable language elements, which he, according to the narrative intention, projects onto the combination axis in order to realize what is called the aesthetic difference. The theoretical inexhaustibility of the vertical paradigm is evident. In the case of Alian Sandme one recognizes how he through metaphoric transitions and mental movements places himself in constantly new configurations to Diam, comparable to P.D. A. Atterbom's Astolf, to whom his lover Felicia appears in innumerable personifications:

Men vart jag går, av stjärnor,blommor,droppar,
meg *hon*, blot *hon* i tusen bilder skänks. ⁶(250)
Wherever I walk, from the stars, the flowers, the drops

she *alone*, she *alone* in thousand pictures is reflected.

Diam's changeableness confirms that *la donna e mobile*. On the one hand she is Diam, on the other hand she is her dia-metrically opposed sisters (housewife or whore); she is further dia-lectically related to her absent roles and always connected with her dia-chronic appearances.

3. Jan Kjærstad: *Speil (Mirrors)*

Jan Kjærstad belongs to the top ten of contemporary Scandinavian authors. In his complex novels he responds to postmodern notions, due to which artistic originality is impossible. He opposes the idea that because everything is said the only choice is to say it in an other way, hereby using the traditional methods of writing in an ongoing process of rearrangements. The postmodern play with tradition cannot satisfy the ambitions of Kjærstad who declares that writing does not consist in copying postmodernity, but in finding new ways of transcending it. In Kjærstad's opinion there is no reason to resign and repeat the point zero situation of postwar literature. History has shown that literature had a future even after Samuel Becket's *Fin de partie*, and according to Kjærstad there is no reason to suppose that postmodernity marks the end of literary renewal. On the contrary, the fast growing information society demands new forms of aesthetical mediation.

In his novel *Speil (Mirrors)* Kjærstad refers to cubist art, which he in an essay from 1982 characterizes as one of the most stimulating forms of art expression in our time. If one considers the analytical form of cubist art as a style which aims at imagining all possible perspectives of an object or an action simultaneously in an act of visual penetration, it is obvious that in his novel Kjærstad is applying cubist principles, certainly without violating his presentation through linguistic deformation or distortion of syntactical connections. Rather, he attempts to retain traditional patterns of narration, and through the combining of conventional epic procedures he tries to achieve a versatile access to his motifs. In his narrative application of cubist art he connects heterogeneous epic genres, among them myth, legend, fairytale, diary, epistle, essay, interview, report, letter, historiography, documentation, autobiography, itinerary with changing narrative methods of representation like style indirecte libre, stream of consciousness, dialogue etc. Kjærstad's aspiration is to establish a cubist-analogous structure without destroying the intact morphological and syntactical system of the language, only through the combination of genres and change of perspectives.

The novel consists of 20 chapters, each of which tells the same story in

slightly varied forms. The general theme is the relation between war and peace, aggression and tranquility observed in the horizon of the 20th century. The title of the novel is not referring to pre-modern forms of mimetic representation. The plots of the single chapters on the contrary mirror each other reciprocally and reflect the main topic of the novel in multiple refractions which aim at mediating a complete impression of historical interrelations. The poetics of combination is a great challenge to the reader, who by entering into the mirror cabinet of the text risks losing his orientation, but by creative reading proceeds to the role of a co-creator of textual meaning. Consequently the primary task of a contemporary work of art is to unveil the hidden structures of individual and social history, and this is in Kjærstad's opinion only possible through the construction of the narrative plot, which is the only way "to discover and describe this structure which is abstract and invisible" (463). This invisible world becomes visible through the changing arrangement of mirrors in the single chapters of the novel, which afford insight into the complexity of the reflected "behind." This implies that the contemporary artist, if he wants to grasp reality and open a window to the "behind"-world, is dependent on constructions that visualize the invisible structures of the hidden, translinguistic world. This is quite in accordance with Hegel's notion that art is a product of the human mind, not a double or a copy of an already existing nature⁷ (16-58). In the post-Hegelian era the designation for such an object is an *artifact*, a word consisting of the Latin components *ars* (= art) and *facere* (=make), which underlines the fact that art is something made in an artificial way, a construction like Svend Åge Madsen's maid Diam or Jan Kjærstad's mirror model of the 20th century.

4. Jan Kjærstad: *Rand (Verge)*

Jan Kjærstad's novel *Rand (Verge)* appeared in 1990, one hundred years after the Nobel prize winner Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult (Hunger)*, and there are reasons to believe that it is an attempt to rewrite that novel, which is considered to be one of the most influential works of early modern writing. The titles, consisting of respectively four characters, refer semantically to extreme existential concerns, where the main characters move on the verge of ruin. The protagonists are in both of the novels driven by "hunger", where the hunger functions as a stimulus in a creative struggle for meaning. While Hamsun's protagonist in vain fights the hunger with writing projects which again and again collapse and leave him in a state of unsatisfied and unsatisfying hunger, one hundred years after that Kjærstad's protagonist suffers from a situation where meaning to a certain degree is blocked by an abundance of information or narrow specialized knowledge. Whereas

Hamsun's protagonist during the exhaustive semantic process is brought to the verge of self-abandonment, Kjærstad's protagonist is always in search of extreme verge-experiences in the course of universal semantic expansion processes. When he, as a PC-expert of the criminal investigation police in Oslo, walks through the streets in Oslo and apparently unmotivated kills six accidental people, he perceives the murders as stimuli in a process of cognitive accumulation.

The experienced Kjærstad-reader recognizes the structural pattern in other of his novels. He hereby simulates the narration structure of specific genres, in *Verge* the technique and the thrill-packed contents of the criminal novel, while he at the same time deconstructs the underlying genre conventions, which not primarily serve to discover a perpetrator, but to test new connections and open the world towards the unknown or what he calls "the other" or the "totally other." This textual transformation procedure is akin to Hamsun's in *Hunger*, where a realistic depiction of the misery of hunger is derailed and changed into an allegorical story about exhaustion and lack of meaning during the narrative.

It is symptomatic of Kjærstad's authorship that he wants to extend the borders of perception and develop poetical techniques which serve to expand the world and get insight into a behind-scenery not directly perceptible to the senses. For this purpose he develops a poetics of combination or an *ars combinatoria*. In this poetical system the main person is not a real murderer, but a sort of master constructor, who displays his actions in computer animations. That means he is in one and the same person the inventor and executer of the criminal cases and the one who investigates them. Through annexing his victim's biographies Kjærstad's protagonist is able to dispose of their posthumous lives and put them into superior connections, whereby the excellent abilities of the single persons are combined among one another in a way that the victims permanently rise from the dead in new mixtures.

The novel consists of six linear partial-texts, all of which are dealing with the victims biographies with focus on their professions, hobbies, attitudes, taste preferences, preferred ways of communication etc. All the information is readable in vertical or diagonal combinations, which constitutes a textual field or a spatial room, within which hide a nearly inexhaustible number of receptive readings. This montage of ingenious neighbourhoods is a literary counterpart to the cubist collage which integrates heterogenous materials in a complex linguistic construction. From a structural point of view text montages belong to the paradigmatic axis of language expression, where single verbal elements coexist in various permutations and consequently trigger replacements and substitutions

The six criminal stories in Kjærstad's novel constitute with regard to the aesthetics of production complete syntagmatic series, which receptionally remain open for innumerable paradigmatic relations. In such an open system the narrative elements have no prescribed position in the epic entirety. They are mobile elements in a spatial epic web where it is up to the reader to contextualize them according to his best understanding. Considering the complexity of literary constructions like Kjærstad's, Peter Bürger underlines that regroupings of epic elements is not only imaginable, but rather a necessary part of the reception process. It is inherent in the paradigmatic model that it refuses a final solution and shrinks from all forms of synthetic reconciliation. Bürger states: "Whereas the syntagmatic structural model, the sentence, however long it may be, has an end, the series are on principle infinite" ⁸ (107).

Kjærstad founds this overlapping epic system on a matrix theory. He reminds the reader that matrix means mother and womb as well. At the bottom of this subtly constructed system there is the idea that the reader under the guidance of the narrator will be able to liberate the single human being from his imprisonment in isolated existential parcels and hereby discover a creature who bears the feature of man, in his dimensions a greater human being, who is able to operate the whole register of possibilities in a creative way. It is striking that Kjærstad introduces a main person who investigates the murders he himself has committed while he at the same time combines the solutions of the criminal cases with a revival of the victims. Each of the killed persons are in civil life leading experts in their respective professions, well known among people of the same occupation, but less known by the public. It is the investigator's idea to change this situation. Through killing them and connecting their lives with those of the other victims he wants to remove them from their daily anonymity and give them eternal life in the literary text where they according to the readers skill in constructing interpersonal webs grow into more complete human beings.

5. Torgny Lindgren: *Till sanningens lov (Praising the Truth/To the Honor of Truth)*

Torgny Lindgren belongs to the leading authors of contemporary Swedish literature. Due to his status among Swedish writers he was elected member of *de aderton* in 1991, a group of 18 intellectuals, who as members of The Swedish Academy decide on the awarding of the Nobel price of literature. The title of his satiric novel alludes to Johan Sebastian Bach's cantata of the same name. In his novel he deals in a very amusing way with problems concerning the relation between original and

copy, linking up to Walter Benjamin's discussion regarding the question what an original work of art is in times of its technical reproduction.⁹ (1980) According to the Aristotelian concept mimesis is the imitation of nature and the outside world perceived with the human senses. In Lindgren's novel the relation between "thing" and "copy" has changed. The subject of art is not "things" or "nature", but art itself. Lindgren illustrates this fundamental change through a series of portrait-stories, in which the decline of an original work of art is the main topic. The protagonist of his novel is a framemaker and art salesman in the Swedish provinces, who by accident at a public auction buys an oil-painting, which later on is considered to be an unknown work by the Swedish painter Nils Dardel and identified as a masterpiece of contemporary Swedish art.

The original claim of this painting is however questioned when a second version of it turns up. After the theft of the aquired painting the protagonist accepts an invitation to visit a friend of his in Stockholm, who promises to indemnify him from his loss. At his arrival he is surprised to find masterpieces of modern European art on all walls of the flat. It turns out that he has not entered the flat of an unknown collector, but the studio of an ingenious falsifier, who maintains that all his paintings are originals. The inversion of the relation between original/copy, genuine/ false, true/wrong is explainable in the following syllogism, which I made in order to visualize the peculiar logic of the satiric discourse:

- A: All my paintings are falsifications
- B: The genuine expression of our time is the false
- C: Ergo – all my paintings are originals

The falsifier's version of the original painting is perfect and is not distinguishable from the original version. It is merely a doubling or a repetition. According to the faking intention the result is achieved when the adjustment of the two art objects has reached the level of absolute similarity. Under this condition only a spectral analysis of the colors can solve the problem of the temporal succession of the two "originals."

In the course of the narrative the status of the original painting is doubted. The alleged painting of the *Madonna* is not registered in the list of Dardel's works. Consequently it is either an unknown work or a work attributed to him because of certain style criteria. There are, however, reasons to suspect that Dardel's *Madonna* is not an original painting, but a work by an unknown artist, who has faked his way of painting and thus given rise to the supposition that it is a genuine work by

Dardel. And so the reader from the very beginning calls in question whether an original exists at all or not. This is part of Lindgren's satiric intention. In his satiric discourse about the decline of truth and originality he gives the reader reason to question if there on the whole exists an original or rather merely faked originals.

Lindgren lets the reader remain in the dark about the real status of the aquired painting. It belongs to the concept of his novel that it sheds light on questions concerning the Platonic distinction between prototype (Urbild) and copy (Abbild) as well. If Lindgren had been in need of an undoubted original of a *Madonna*, he easily could have used one of Edvard Munch's five *Madonna*-paintings, all of which may be considered originals because they are variations of the same motif with trifling deflexions. Apparently Lindgren wants to leave the question of originality open in order to keep the reader in uncertainty about the origin of the aquired painting.

The only thing we know for sure is that the falsifier's *Madonna*, *Madonna number 2*, is inspired by an already existing painting. Art no longer means imitating what God has created, but what the painter as the second creator has produced. The relation between art/literature and reality/nature has been inverted owing to the fact that the artist observes nature/reality not directly, but through the spectacles of art. As the art historian E. H. Gombrich once stated nobody has "an innocent eye"; the eyes are infected with everything they have ever seen, and in our time art experiences tend to overshadow reality and blur the border between real and artistic perception. The most famous expression of this shifting perspective in modern Swedish poetry one find in Göran Palm's poem *The sea*, in which art experience amount to the world constituting principle:

Jag står framför havet.	I stand in front of the sea.
Där är det.	There it is.
Där är havet.	There is the sea.
Jag tittar på det.	I look at it.
Havet. Jaha.	The sea. Indeed.
Det är som på Louvren.	It is like in Louvre. ¹⁰ (1964)

Because of the transformation of the image into reality, reality not only disappears; reality also turns into an image through a process of reversal. As a result of this inversion the ontological status of image and reality is rattled. On the one hand, the loss of reality is lamented; on the other hand, there is a sadness in the world because images and illusions have replaced reality and given rise to a situation

where art does not imitate reality, but reality imitates art. The following sequence from Lindgren's novel may illuminate this reversal: The framemaker, looking out of his window on the last snow of the year comments on this visual act with the words: "The snow looked like it used to look on paintings in the price-level between 400-600 crowns. It could have been a painting of Ström." (123) This is the name of the most selling trivial painter in Sweden, whose works include landscape motifs and the widespread decorative motif *Deer at Sunset*.

The painted *Madonnas* share a common destiny. They are locked up in frames behind glasses, which expose them to the glance of voyeurs, who enjoy what Walter Benjamin calls their exhibition value (*Ausstellungswert*). In the course of narration the *Madonna* escapes her frame existence and with the help of a promotor succeed in establishing a career in show business, where she proceeds from a juvenile pop-singer to a local copy of the American popstar Madonna. This marks a low-level in the decline of a genuine Madonna.

As a star in show business the Madonna is omnipresent in the public media, where she appears in innumerable copies or doubles of herself. Compared to Edvard Munch's *Madonna* it is evident what Lindgren's *Pop-Madonna* has lost. She has no *aura* any more, and according to Benjamin the *aura* is the coronal veil around the painted figure, which links it to the matrix of the image and gives it the authenticity of an original painting.

When the framemaker and the *Pop-Madonna* finally try to escape the inauthentic world of post-modern reproductions and the spiritual atmosphere of cultural resignation, they fail to enter into a copyfree zone and to find a place uninfluenced by the lack of originality. The novel's last picture seems in this respect to be informative. By their relocation they settle down in a landscape equal to those of the previously mentioned trivial artist Ström, who through his art understanding connects to the doubling techniques of realistic painting most popular a century before of Ström's time. Thus, at the end of the novel the two protagonists are ironically in the picture again, framed by the same Swedish nature they have grown up in, far away from the cultural expressions of modern urban life. The satiric concept of Lindgren's novel shows that it is impossible to fight semantic stagnation through postmodern recycling of artistic patterns and paradigms, not to mention through withdrawal into the trashy surroundings of a world lost and gone forever.

Lindgren's novel is important because it shows the desperate need for the reappearance of a world behind the copies. The other novels dealt with in this article focus on the "hidden" reality beyond the reach of sensual perception. In

order to realize their intentions the authors are forced to give up all imitation concepts of writing in preference of constructions and models through which the writer is able to transcend reality and make the world “behind” accessible to himself and the reader.

Notes

1. Abrams, M. A. *The Mirror and the Lamp. Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*(Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1971).
2. “Fotoroman har Knut Brynhildsvoll träffande kallet den kalejdoskopiska kompositionen” (Knut Brynhildsvoll has called this calejdoscopical composition a photonovel), Roger Holmström “Modernisternas prosa”, in: Clas Zilliacus (ed.) *Finlands svenska litteraturhistoria* (andra delen: 1900-talet, Atlantis förlag, Stockholm 2000): 105.
3. Refer to Karin Boye’s “I rörelse” in *Härdarne* (Stockholm, 1927). All translations from the Nordic languages are the author’s own.
4. Albrecht Schöne’s “Zum Gebrauch des Konjunktivs bei Robert Musil” in *Euphorion, Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, 79, vol.55, Stuttgart 1961.
5. Benny Andersen’s *Personlige papirer. Digte* (Copenhagen: Borgen Forlag Gyldendal forlag, 1974) 7.
6. Atterbom, P.D.A., *Lycksalighetens ö. Valda skrifter*, vol.1, Ed. Fredrik Böök(Stockholm: Albert Bonniers förlag, 1927) 250.
7. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, Werkausgabe vol.13(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970) 16-58.
8. Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*(Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974) 107.
9. Walter Benjamin’s “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980).
10. Göran Palm, “Havet” *Världen ser dig* (Stockholm: Norstedts Förlag, 1964).

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- . *Rand*, Oslo: Aschehoug Forlag, 1990.
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Ethical Contours of the (Sub)urban Space-Time Relationship in the Early Postwar American Drama

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Abstract This paper analyzes the (sub)urban time-space relationship in the early postwar American drama. In so doing, special attention is given to how various dramatic forms give rise to different conceptions and experiences of (sub)urban time as it is manifested in dream and illusion and in memory and nostalgia. It also argues that the various dramatic canvasses on which time is materially embodied, in their totality, point to a multi-layered experience of time which in turn opens up, to different degrees, an ethical space of reading. In the immediate postwar American drama, we can observe an interesting relationship between dramatic form and time. Despite this interesting array of temporal conceptions, what is missing in all these plays is the acutely self-conscious sense of the theatricality of social life that is deeply embedded in the modern(ist) drama. The fundamentally conservative nature of the early post-war American drama and its general confidence in the representational validity of the realistic-naturalistic form reflects the overall socio-cultural confidence in the American conception of the post-war world and itself.

Keywords American suburbia; dramatic form; Miller; post-war American drama; Williams

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I. Introduction

“Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisible suburbs! skeleton treasures!

blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible mad houses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!” — thus howled Allen Ginsberg in 1955, a full decade after the end of the Second World War that ushered in a new era in which America emerged as the superpower of the postwar world. *Howl* was an act of total moral-political aggression, as was much of the work of the Beats, which aimed at criticizing the sterility and conformity of American life, the meaninglessness of American politics, and the banality of popular culture. Moloch is a modern evil or even modernity itself, encompassing everything from “the economic system, urban-industrial milieu, government, police, war, atom bomb” to “everyone’s mentality, America and Time (as opposed to Eternity)” (Perkins 550). For the Beats, the sense of security and belonging that the middle-class (sub)urban life supposedly offers is nothing but an Ozzie-and-Harriet complacency, a temporary stasis waiting impatiently to degenerate into decay. Consequently, apartments are a site of dehumanizing and dehumanized urban settlement, suburban houses a site of dull monotonous life in an amorphous, homogenized and uniform collectivity. Instead, life’s meaning should be sought in constant movement, or “on the road,” as the exuberantly anarchic Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac’s famous 1951 novel shows. Moriarty would only drop in an apartment house for a day or two before he begins to feel suffocated and get ready ever to move on. He would pass by suburbs unnoticed and unnoticed because they are not only often literally invisible when viewed from interstate highways or even local roads, but more significantly because the suburban paranoia does not allow for the encroachment of beatniks like him into the life-world of American suburbia.

In the brief period between 1945 and 1949, four plays which have since been firmly inscribed in the canon of American drama graced the American stage. The year 1945 saw Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*, both Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* and Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* saw the light in 1947 at either end of the year, and Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* was premiered in 1949. More than sixty years after the premier of the last on the list, these four plays are among the most frequently staged and critically discussed of all American plays.

Arthur Miller’s plays dramatize the turbulent process of economic and cultural change that early postwar American society was undergoing, during which the countryside was giving way to suburbia and suburbia to the city and the myth-ideal of the American Dream was metamorphosing itself without ever descending into the realm of materiality. In the dramatic world of Tennessee Williams, however, suburbia is conspicuous for its absence as is the American Dream. His work, based on what Esther Merle Jackson calls the “synthetic myth” (67), derives from a region

of America which has been fraught with a self-conscious romantic mythology. As a Southerner trapped in between the rich yet almost pre-modern tradition of the “Southern agrarian” art of language and the mainstream of the American society with its overpowering modern-universal culture, Williams was a stranger at home. It is not for nothing that suburbia, which might have worked as the fender for those Southerners who had been going through such a drastic social and economic collapse, is almost completely missing in Williams’s plays. Also, the metaphysical anxiety of the ravage of time, only intimated in Miller’s work, is foregrounded in Williams’s. As he writes in his essay “The Catastrophe of Success,” “time is short and it doesn’t return again. It is slipping away while I write this and while you read it, and the monosyllable of the clock is Loss, loss, loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition” (1048).

Both *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* have a suburban setting whereas Williams locates his two plays in the urban tenement. While Miller makes “invisible suburbs” visible, Williams humanizes “robot apartments.” Using these four plays as paradigmatic works, this paper analyzes the (sub)urban time-space relationship in the early postwar American drama. In so doing, special attention is given to how various dramatic forms Miller and Williams adopt for each of these plays give rise to different conceptions and experiences of (sub)urban time as it is manifested in dream and illusion and in memory and nostalgia. Furthermore, I argue, the four dramatic canvasses on which time is materially embodied point in their totality to a multi-layered experience of time which in turn opens up, to different degrees, an ethical space of reading. However, although these plays display an excitingly stratified picture in their conceptions of time and mirror and reflect the preoccupations and anxieties of the age just as their contemporaneous European counterpart often grouped together under the name of “the Theatre of the Absurd” do, they nonetheless exude certain artistic confidence and assuredness in their belief in the representational congruence and correspondence between art and the world as America, as the superpower, conceives and perceives the world and itself. Ultimately, this sense of post-war American empowerment puts artistic burden on the post-war American drama and is reflected in the relatively conservative nature of its formal experimentation and the ethical limits of its temporal conception.

II. Realism and the Un-Ethics of the Totality of Time: *All My Sons* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Three years after his initial failure to attract Broadway audiences with *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), Arthur Miller had another go at the postwar public

with a play that drew on memories of the war-time heroism and pivoted on the moral responsibility of those who remained in the safety net of their neatly groomed suburban homes. Inspired by the Truman Committee's investigation of a scandal involving the manufacture of faulty airplane parts in Ohio, *All My Sons* plays upon the old-themed yet powerful irony of moral war and immoral peace. The play centers on Joe Keller, an owner of a wartime manufacturing plant, who acquiesces in sending cracked airplane cylinders to the military — an act that results in the deaths of some twenty-one pilots — and then implicates his partner in the crime in order to slip through the dragnet of culpability.

Set in the suburban backyard of a middle-class family in a Norman Rockwell-like small town in Ohio, *All My Sons* shows the Kellers and their neighbors easily sliding back into the naïvely complacent domestic routine as wartime fear and memories gradually subside and future hopes and expectations set in. This recognizable domesticity is highlighted by the broad daylight under which the first act takes place. However, the very ordinariness of the setting and lighting makes “the deepening threat of the remainder more frightening” (Miller, *Timebends* 134), for Larry who has been missing in action for nearly four years has not yet fossilized into a mournful memorial in the mind of his mother, Kate. Kate's stubborn belief and/or hope that her son is still alive is eventually smashed by the letter Larry sent to Ann, his girlfriend, which confirms not only Larry's death but reveals an unbearable truth for everyone concerned: it was Larry's realization that Joe was responsible for the distribution of the cracked cylinders which forced Larry to commit suicide in a kamikaze flight. As the truth is finally revealed, the conscientious acknowledgement of the son is placed in stark contrast to the hypocritical denial of the father, the son's death to the father's living. The play culminates in Joe's suicide which seems the only option available for the irreparably dishonored man who finally admits his culpability and recognizes that “They were all my sons” (83).

Taking place in less than twenty-four hours, the entire action of the play pivots on the revelation of one single truth, that Keller is guilty of inculcating his partner for what he himself did. However, it turns out that the truth has been a secret hidden only from Keller's wife and younger son. In the initial stage directions, the Keller home is described as “*hedged ... by tall, closely planted poplars which lend the yard a secluded atmosphere*” (5). A typical suburban home in which privacy and self-sufficiency are prime selling points, the Keller home nonetheless seems morally isolated for, as the play unfolds, the intimation translates into a revelation and we learn from Sue, a neighbor, that “Everybody knows Joe pulled a fast one

to get out of jail” and “There’s not a person on the block who doesn’t know the truth” (45). The Keller’s moral isolation, however, does not mirror their neighbors’ moral integrity. Joe is guilty, but the whole community is also morally tainted in its knowing silence.

Called “a classically well-made play” (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 172), *All My Sons* clearly exhibits what is called “Ibsen’s retrospective method” with its “device of the ‘fatal secret’” and “thematic forcing of past into present” (R. Williams 268). The past is a continuing presence, and the exposition renews itself at intervals, as each critical piece of information is revealed. Miller turned to Ibsen and *The Wild Duck* in particular not only because he felt strong affinity with Ibsen in their commitment to realism, but also because “dramatic characters, and the drama itself, can never hope to attain a maximum degree of consciousness unless they contain a viable unveiling of the contrast between past and present, and an awareness of the process by which the present has become what it is.” Miller adds on that “What is precious in the Ibsen method is its insistence upon valid causation” (“Ibsen” 227). In short, what Miller found inspiring in Ibsen is the latter’s strict adherence to the dramatic affirmation of clearly verifiable causational relations between past and present actions.

I don’t think we need to refer to Paul Ricoeur, for example, to recognize that the compartmentalization and reconstitution of our experience of time in terms of past, present and future is available only in the narrative form. That is, what Miller calls “the contrast between past and present” is made possible only in the context of storytelling. In realistic plays, dramatic time is articulated by the linearity and causality set between the actions of past and present and linking them in one continuous flow. What is often ignored or suppressed in “the process by which the present has become what it is” is the fact that there exist — as against the objective time if there is ever such a thing — often incommensurate pluralities of personal-subjective time with their differing modes of memory, illusion and dream as well as everyday life-experiences. What is called the denouement in drama is nothing more or less than the meeting point at which various subjective temporalities converge into a unified and homogeneous time. The prosaic language employed by Miller achieves its semantic effects too comfortably and it often tends to signify either truth or lie. As a result, it is blind to the need for (as well as being incapable of) articulating multiple realities that may lurk behind the ostensibly sensible façade, or more precisely backyard, of this mid-western suburban home.

What is at issue in *All My Sons* is clearly moral in nature: indeed, moral concerns such as lies, guilt, shame and responsibility are not just foregrounded

but omnipresent throughout the whole play. However, because it is framed in a single uninterrupted time flow, the play tends to show certain flatness in moral perspectives. By placing Joe Keller in a moral spectrum in which only a finite sense of dramatic progression is allowed, Miller keeps the flow of time in a linear continuum (rather than a circular or spiral one or a disjunctively polyphonic multi-directionality) where Keller's death is allegorized in an absolute and irreversible sense of the history's ending. The revelation of Keller's culpability functions as the centripetal force that draws into itself the actions as well as thoughts and desires of all the major characters: Kate's stubborn denial, Ann's fearful desire, George's filial anger, Chris's feigned idealism, the neighbors' complicitous quietism all melt into the air once Larry's letter to Ann is put on the table and Keller's subsequent suicide takes place within a couple of minutes. Everything tightly organized, there is little that does not make sense here, nothing is absurd, nothing is left to blind chances, and the vicissitudes of remembering and forgetting the past, let alone of living the present, can find no nest to dwell in. "Cling[ing] always to the marvelous spectacle of life forcing one event out of the jaws of the preceding one and to reveal its elemental consistencies with surprise" ("Ibsen" 228), Miller keeps on tightening the screw, as if to prove to the American public that it is the literati who set a definite precedent for William H. Whyte's "Organization Man." The relentless strive toward the resolution we witness in *All My Sons* ironically flattens our perspective toward the multi-layered and heterogeneous nature of the suburban life. It misses out those fluctuating and often amorphous pluralities of subjective time instead of giving them a proper shape, however unsure, precarious or fleeting that shape may seem. No undecidability, no indeterminacy, no ambiguity is allowed in the monolithic totality of the play's moral canvass that any possibility of ethical consideration is precluded from the beginning. When faced with such a forceful moral conviction as is found in the play, the reader is stripped of his or her ethical status. Either you decide to sing along the play's moral hymn or you take umbrage at its preachyness.

This poses an intractable problem for Miller in that *All My Sons*, in Bigsby's words, "implies a critique of society and yet in effect identifies no way in which that society can be transformed" (*Critical Introduction* 171). To place Bigsby's criticism in the context of my argument, when American society is conceived as a single-layered homogeneous reality, its criticism can only aim at a total transformation of it. When Miller presses home a judgment, it has to be a total one. This totalizing tendency in Miller's social criticism is closely connected to the utopian impulse which has always striven for the realization of complete homogenization and unity, whether on the socio-economic or personal-cultural plane, or both. Thus, when the

convergence of different personal times is enforced by the linearity of an artful and artificial narrative, as by the suicide of Keller in the case of *All My Sons*, the end result is the utopian (or dystopian) reduction of multiple personal times to a single historical time and the historical time to natural time, the latter either erasing the present or infinitizing it. Whether it is viewed as utopian or dystopian is external to the narrative, or more to the point, the dramatic action itself. Utopia is a society whose temporal category is naturalized and whose spatial category essentialized.

Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* seems at first to exhibit the same linear temporal totality we have witnessed in Miller's *All My Sons*, this time centering on the tragic heroine named Blanche DuBois. However, when combined with the narrative with an ambiguously open ending, the poetic language floating over the prosaic naturalistic setting points to a different kind of the totality of time. Blended into this temporal totality are four heterogeneous elements: historical, theatrical, personal and natural. The ingenious unity in heterogeneity is then artificially and artfully pushed into high relief by the insistent presence of desire, a desire for magic, that is, a desire to stand outside time. Time is no more the Other, a body-snatching stranger: Time is the Self that peregrinates Life which offers itself up to it. As we can see from the epigraphic line from Blanche, it is the magical "kindness of strangers" that is pitted against the all-consuming ravage of time.

Premiered in December 1947 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway, *A Streetcar Named Desire* enacts the story of a faded Southern belle, Blanche DuBois, who, living with illusions of past elegances, comes to visit her sister, Stella, and brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski in their shabby apartment in the French Quarter of New Orleans. The visit becomes more permanent when it is revealed that Blanche lost the family home and has no money or job. Tensions between Stanley and Blanche mount, but Stella, who is pregnant and expecting to deliver any day, loves them both and tries to keep peace. Blanche starts dating Stanley's lonely, kindly coworker Harold "Mitch" Mitchell, but Stanley breaks up the relationship when he tells Mitch about what he has found out about Blanche's past: she was no better than a whore back in her hometown and was fired from her teaching job for trying to seduce one of her students. As Stella goes to the hospital to have the baby, the rivalry between Stanley and Blanche reaches its climax when he rapes her. Blanche suffers a nervous breakdown and is sent to an asylum. To the doctor who comes for her, she remarks, "Whoever you are — I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" (563).

Apart from the ironic symbolism of the street name, the opening stage directions of *A Streetcar Named Desire* are essentially functional, having little of a

poetic delicacy and inventiveness that those of *Death of a Salesman*, for example, exude:

The exterior of a two-story corner building on a street in New Orleans which is named Elysian Fields and runs between the L&N tracks and the river. The section is poor but, unlike corresponding sections in other American cities, it has a raffish charm. The houses are mostly white frame, weathered grey, with rickety outside stairs and galleries and quaintly ornamented gables. The building contains two flats, upstairs and down. Faded white stairs ascend to the entrances of both. (469)

The “raffish charm” that this poor urban neighborhood possesses comes from its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population, getting along well with one another and apparently without the racial tensions that have plagued practically everywhere in America. Into this arrives a Southern belle who, having lost her plantation home in Laurel, Mississippi, has come to live with her sister. Even when the lies of the old South are no longer able to sustain the individual in a world whose pragmatics have no place for the fragile spirit, Blanche keeps attempting, in vain, to protect that fragile spirit of hers while seeing through the need for survival. Her first conversation with her sister on the latter’s boorish Polish-American husband is indicative of this: “He’s just not the sort that goes for jasmine perfume! But maybe he’s what we need to mix with our blood now that we’ve lost Belle Reve and have to go on without Belle Reve to protect us” (492). When the paradise of the Old South is lost, no buffer zone is spared and ready to save a Southern belle like Blanche from falling into disgrace. The absence of suburbia as one such buffer zone maximizes the dramatic force of Williams’s plays of the South.

The detailed stage directions, also prosaic, given at the first appearance of Blanche on the stage intimate that she is an outsider drifted into an alien environment which will eventually destroy her already fragile self:

Her appearance is incongruous to this setting. She is daintily dressed in a white suit with a fluffy bodice, necklace and earrings of pearl, white gloves and hat, looking as if she were arriving at a summer tea or cocktail party in the garden district. She is about five years older than Stella. Her delicate beauty must avoid a strong light. There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth. (471)

Probably the most famous use of moth as literary symbol can be found in Virginia Woolf's essay, "The Death of the Moth." In it, Woolf endows the all too brief life of the moth with a strange mixture of doomed desperation and serene dignity which would perfectly capture the life and character of Blanche. Just as the moth, calm and serene in the dark, expends its life-force by flapping its wings hard around the light, so Blanche loses her fragile hold on life when the light reveals her aged, worn-out face and strips her of those magical touches that draw people like Mitch near her:

MITCH: Let's turn the light on here.

BLANCHE (*fearfully*): Light? Which light? What for?

MITCH: This one with the paper thing on it. (*He tears the paper lantern off the light bulb. She utters a frightened gasp.*)

BLANCHE: What did you do that for?

MITCH: So I can take a look at you good and plain!

BLANCHE: Of course you don't really mean to be insulting!

MITCH: No, just realistic.

BLANCHE: I don't want realism.

MITCH: Naw, I guess not.

BLANCHE: I'll tell you what I want. Magic! (*Mitch laughs*) Yes, yes, magic!

I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell the truth,

I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!

— *Don't turn the light on!* (544-45)

It is the genius of Williams that he sets up the realism/reality that Blanche so detests at four different levels of time - historical, theatrical, personal and natural — and is still able to alchemize them into one powerful yet coherent symbol: the old mythology of the South has historically died out; realism is a theatrical convention that has outstayed its welcome; Blanche has lost her innocence and purity through her abandonment of her young homosexual husband, her immoral conduct with one of her students, and her prostitution; adding to all these is the ravage of time that nature brings upon her. In Williams's plays, and especially in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, these different temporalities coalesce into the "timeless world of a play." When Blanche mumbles her last words before fading away to an asylum, she is urging us to remember her out of time, in the timeless world: "Whoever you are — I have always depended on the kindness of strangers."

Blanche's tragic journey from Cemeteries to the Elysian Fields on a streetcar

named *Desire* is not necessarily ironic. However contrasted in their symbolic meanings, both *Cemeteries* and the *Elysian Fields* are just signifiers emptied of their signified, and New Orleans is as deadly as Laurel, Mississippi. The final death-blow dealt to Blanche by Stanley's rape forces her to finally give up on her defiant struggle against the schism or schizophrenic suffering between her aging and tainted body of realism and her relentless yet fragile spirit dwelling in the time-suspending world of magic. Whether she has completely lost her mind as she is taken to a psychiatric ward is a moot point. If she indeed has, her hypocritical pretense in the "real" world will give way to the ritual of pure fantasy freed from everyday banality. An existential need to create an illusion in which time is arrested will vanish as her everyday ritual in the ward will not be touched by the vicissitudes of changing life situations. Also her everyday ritual of living a magical life and telling about it will lose its suffocating subjectivity not only because everybody in the ward is a stranger to each other but also because she is not an agent of time in its heterogeneous totality anymore. Ultimately, Blanche DuBois's magical existence stands outside time and becomes eternalized, for she exists only in the eyes and mind of the penultimate stranger, the audience-reader.

All My Sons and *A Streetcar Named Desire* can be seen as two American plays that are classic examples of "Ibsen's false tragedy" (Abel 180), for, in both of them, we find "the new realistic vision of life" and "the necessitarian structure of fated events" (Abel 178) tightly yet uncomfortably etched against the poetic impulse to break up the linear continuity of finite time. Herein lies in the fundamental limit of realistic-naturalistic drama: the realistic-naturalistic drama leaves too little and too much for the audience-reader. It closes down, with its forced-on identification process, any possibility of opening up an ethical space in which the audience-reader weighs different options and choices (s)he draws out of fundamentally non-ethical situations created in the theatrical space. At the same time, however, it leaves too much for the audience-reader in the sense that the reception of its dramatic meaning is absolutely contingent upon its representational responsiveness to the audience-reader's lived experiences. In order to escape from this conundrum of the dramatic either-or/do-or-die, memory, that temporally ambiguous property created in the present out of the past, is not just to be expounded or intimated as in *All My Sons* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*: it needs to be spatialized and seen in and alongside the always already present dramatic space.

III. Memory Play and the Ethics of Temporal Heterogeneity: *The Glass Menagerie* and *Death of a Salesman*

Often regarded as postwar American theatre's "signature play" (Krasner 29), *The Glass Menagerie* initially opened in Chicago at the Civic Theatre in December 1944. Poorly attended, the play was saved from falling into oblivion by critics and moved to Broadway the next year where its immediate success launched the career of one of the most brilliant playwrights in the history of American theatre. The play is firmly rooted in the playwright's own life and is thus autobiographical, with the narrator, Tom Wingfield (Who shares the same first name with Williams), as a "likely stand-in for the author himself" (Krasner 31). It is set in the year of 1936 and is therefore sprinkled here and there with nostalgic reminders of the Depression era, evoked most atmospherically by musical means. In fact, memory for Williams is so fragile, so ephemeral and impermanent that it tends to escape the concrete confinement of visual images and language that conventional drama offers. As Tom says at the beginning of the play, "In memory everything seems to happen to music" (400).

According to the opening stage directions of *The Glass Menagerie*,

The Wingfield apartment is in the rear of the building, one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in overcrowded urban centers of lower middle-class population and are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslaved section of American society to avoid fluidity and differentiation and to exist and function as one interfused mass of automatism. (399)

Williams's description of the Wingfields' shoddy St. Louis tenement as "one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular-units" that operate as "one interfused mass of automatism" sounds exactly like a prosaic version of Ginsberg's poetic diction. The playwright infuses this "robot apartment" with such delicate poetry that the whole play indeed feels like Laura's glass unicorn. In the play, Tom is acutely aware of the gap between what he remembers now and what happened then. Furthermore, he realizes, as we do, that we can go back to a place again but we can't go back in time. The distance between the past and present, unlike that between different places, cannot be traversed: thus, "I didn't go to the moon, I went much further — for time is the longest distance between two places" (464). The closest thing we can do to traveling in time is to recollect bits and pieces of our memory of the past and tell a story, and tell it to others. Thus, Tom assumes a dual role of narrator and character — one in the present and the other in the past — switching back and forth between them.

Williams sets up this “metatheatrical” device so he can create an illusion of “arresting time” which is, for him, the essence of all arts. In “The Timeless World of a Play” which he originally published in the *New York Times*, Williams writes:

It is this continual rush of time, so violent that it appears to be screaming, that deprives our actual lives of so much dignity and meaning, and it is, perhaps more than anything else, the *arrest of time* which has taken place in a complete work of art that gives to certain plays their feeling of depth and significance. (647)

In his production notes to *The Glass Menagerie*, Williams elaborates on realism’s incapability of dramatizing memory. He chooses the occasion to reject the “straight realistic play with its genuine Frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes, its characters who speak exactly as its audience speaks.” Everyone, he maintains, “should know nowadays the unimportance of the photographic in art” because “truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which merely present in appearance” (395). Also, being a memory play, *The Glass Menagerie* consists of (seven) scenes instead of usual acts because memory is necessarily “fragmentary rather than architectural” (396).

Looking back, Tom Wingfield recalls his life during the Depression with his mother, Amanda, who lives in dreams of a probably imaginary past, and his crippled sister, Laura, who seems to live only for a collection of glass animals. At Amanda’s insistence, Tom invites his friend Jim from the warehouse where he works to the Wingfield apartment for dinner. It turns out Jim went to high school with Laura, who has long been quietly in love with his memory, and the two hit it off quite well until Jim mentions that he is engaged to be married. After Jim has gone, Amanda scolds Tom, who runs off to join the merchant marine.

Although there is a social dimension in the problems that inflict Amanda and Laura - Amanda’s husband left her a long time ago, a “telephone man who — fell in love with long distance!” (442) and the subsequent heavy-handedness with which she handles her daughter makes Laura shy away from the outer world further — they are, at a more fundamental level, victims of nature: Amanda tries desperately to protect herself from the ravage of time by wrapping herself with a private mythology of once being a Southern belle who attracted hundreds of gentleman callers; Laura, being a cripple, withdraws herself into the inanimate world of a glass menagerie. Stuck in this family, Tom has to make a painful choice: staying

with them, he will never have a chance to fulfill his dream as a poet; leaving them, he will never be able to free himself from feeling bitter remorse. Williams tells in his production notes that “nostalgia” is “the first condition of the play” (397). If so, nostalgia is an object of both evocation and suffocation. The voice that narrates *The Glass Menagerie* is not a confident one, for Tom is “as lost in the supposed present as he had been in the recalled past” (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 47-48). The combination of past regrets and present losses in Tom’s character binds him firmly with Amanda and Laura, a group of individuals who are left helpless “behind the rush of history” (Bigsby, *Critical Introduction* 46). Williams’s memory play is then a search for the ways of retrieving those individuals who are displaced and obliterated in history and remembering them “outside of time” (Williams, “Timeless World” 647).

The Glass Menagerie, as memory play, offers a different conception of time from that we find in the realistic-naturalistic drama of *All My Sons* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* in that instead of the teleological progression of time from the past to the present toward the future of dramatic finality, a radical break-up of time is foregrounded by allocating the present to narration and the past to action. Furthermore, this break-up of time draws on the distinction that Martin Puchner finds in classical Greek drama between Platonic diegesis and Aristotelian mimesis. That is, in *The Glass Menagerie*, the present is a diegetic temporality in which “the indirect, descriptive or narrative representation of objects, persons, spaces, and events through language” takes place whereas the past is a mimetic one in which the direct representation of such objects, persons, speeches, spaces, and events on a stage” happens (Puchner 24). In the opening narration, Tom Wingfield tells us that “I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion” (400). However, this radical separation and opposition between the truthful narrator and the illusory actor does not hold true because Tom Wingfield is a character who is both the diegetic narrator and the mimetic actor, moving between the past and the present freely with no constraint upon him. Furthermore, since he is played by one and the same actor and not played by two actors as, for example, in the case of Garr O’Donnell in Brian Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, Tom in the present cannot see himself in the past and thus remember himself in the past. The epistemological status of Tom’s narration is severely contested by his own involvement in the mimetic action on the stage. Therefore, an essential problem with memory play as Williams envisions it in *The Glass Menagerie* is that it contains a disturbing sense of easiness in compartmentalizing and differentiating the past from the present

at the same time the distinction between the past and the present is eroded by the diegetic and mimetic confusion. However much its fragility and fleetingness may have been stressed, the narrator's memory as dramatized onstage has little intimation or connection to his present status as narrator, and vice versa. His epistemological status (his looking back on the past) has no connection whatsoever with his ontological status (his present act of narrating). Furthermore, *The Glass Menagerie* exhibits little of the difficulties involving our ability to distinguish between illusion and reality. Tom is split into the truth-teller in the present and the stage magician in the past, with the truth-teller-narrator belonging to the present with a sure grip of reality, on the one hand, and with the stage magician-actor belonging to the past full of illusions.

In *All My Sons*, Joe Keller's guilt lies in his mendacity: he has lived by his lies and has no illusion about them. As a matter of fact, Keller even feels morally justified in his dishonorable acts as they are in the nature of business, in idealistic wartime or in pragmatic peacetime: "Who worked for nothin' in that war? When they work for nothin', I'll work for nothin'. Did they ship a gun or a truck outa Detroit before they got their price? Is that clean? It's dollars and cents, nickels and dimes; war and peace, it's nickels and dimes, what's clean? Half the Goddam country is gotta go if I go!" (82). Money and success, of course, are also a central concern in Miller's next play, *Death of a Salesman*. Universally acclaimed as a "suburban tragedy" (Styan 143), the play immediately struck a deep chord with American audiences, and within a year of its premier, the play was performing in every major city in America. The American Dream Willy Loman pursues so desperately and the American values he tries so hard to hang onto have been perceived by the American public as the postwar resuscitation of American cultural poetics that is directly linked to the myth of the American Dream as propounded by the Founding Fathers. Matthew C. Roudane aptly captures the stature of Miller's play when he writes that "In an era when many scholars question precisely what constitutes American essentialism, most theatregoers still regard *Death of a Salesman* as the quintessential American play" (62-3).

"Years of Hope. Days of Rage," the subtitle of a standard history book on the 60s' America by Todd Gitlin, may well have been chosen for the epitaph on Willy Loman's tomb. Willy is a salesman who constantly defers his hope for the future and eventually devolves his deferred hope upon his failed sons. Realizing that "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive" (98), Willy drives his car to death, hoping that the \$20,000 insurance policy will give his boys another chance to start afresh. At his

funeral a neighbor gives a sadly truthful account of Willy as “a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine. And when they start not smiling back — that’s an earthquake” (138). Linda, Willy’s long-suffering widow, informing her dead husband that the mortgage has finally been paid, can only sob, “We’re free and clear ... We’re free” (139).

In his distinguished introduction to his *Collected Plays* of 1958, Miller gives a fascinating account of his different approaches to *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*:

The first image that occurred to me which was to result in *Death of a Salesman* was of an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man’s head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title. It was conceived half in laughter, for the inside of his head was a mass of contradictions. The image was in direct opposition to the method of *All My Sons* — a method one might call linear or eventual in that one fact or incident creates the necessity for the next. *The Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes “next” but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be “brought forward” in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to. (155-56)

Still resting squarely on the dogged American pursuit of realism, *Death of a Salesman* is nevertheless a product of the playwright’s assiduous experimentation with dramatic form and language, resulting from his radical re-conception of the time-space relationship. Furthermore, what is perhaps most striking (in contrast to his previous play) is the dramatization of the interiority of the central character and of the temporal chasm that exists between the interior mind and the exterior action in the same dramatic space. Instead of imposing a strict causality on the sequence of events, as he did in *All My Sons*, Miller now uses the dramatic space to the effect that not only do the past and the present coexist and flow into each other seamlessly but, more ingenuously, different forms of remembering and reconstituting the past are enacted in the way they are registered in our consciousness. Therefore, Miller introduces a novel temporal structure which, far from being kept in a linear continuum, takes a circular form moving from the present to the real and false memories of the past and further to the downright dreams, fantasies and illusions

of uncertain points in time, and then back to the present. As Miller writes, “If I had wanted, then, to put the audience reaction into words, it would not have been ‘What happens next and why?’ so much as ‘Oh, God, of course!’” (“Introduction” 157).

Interestingly, a principal factor that triggered the change in Miller’s dramatic conception was Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* which Elia Kazan (who directed the first performances of all but one play under consideration here, the exception being *The Glass Menagerie*) took him to see. Equally interesting is the fact that when Williams was elaborating on the possibility of “a complete work of art” in which “the arrest of time” has consummately materialized, he referred to *Death of a Salesman* as the supreme example. Miller was “struck by the language, poetic, full-throated. It came as a revelation ... and seemed to validate his own desire to charge daily life with tragic significance, to use language as something more than an agent of character or plot” (Bigsby, *Arthur Miller* 98). Indeed, the influence the poetic realism of Williams’s language and his expressionistic set and setting have on *Death of a Salesman* can be easily recognized in Miller’s own wonderfully multivalent set and setting as described in the famous opening stage directions:

A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.

Before us is the Salesman’s house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides. Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage; the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming house. An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality. The kitchen at the center seems actual enough, for there is a kitchen table with three chairs, and a refrigerator. But no other fixtures are seen. At the back of the kitchen there is a draped entrance, which leads to the living room. To the right of the kitchen, on a level raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair. On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy stands. A window opens onto the apartment house at the side.

Behind the kitchen, on a level raised six and a half feet, is the boys’ bedroom, at present barely visible. Two beds are dimly seen, and at the back of the room a dormer window. (This bedroom is above the unseen living-room.) At the left a stairway curves up to it from the kitchen.

The entire setting is wholly or, in some places, partially transparent.

The roof-line of the house is one-dimensional; under and over it we see the apartment buildings. Before the house lies an apron, curving beyond the forestage into the orchestra. This forward area serves as the back yard as well as the locale of all Willy's imaginings and of his city scenes. Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping "through" a wall onto the forestage. (11-2)

As if to show the ultimate limits of language to capture the essence of atmosphere and mood, kinesic devices such as music and lighting take on a central role. It is not the words or bodily movement, not even the physical presence of the set that first greets and impresses the audience. Before the curtain rises, a melody of the flute drifts in out of darkness, an instrument best suited to express evanescence and ephemera. The flute is gradually replaced by its visual counterpart in the salesman's skeletal and semi-transparent house on which is fallen "the blue light of the sky." The surrounding urban architecture from which emanates "an angry glow of orange" first takes on "towering, angular shapes" and then reveals itself more concretely as "a solid vault of apartment houses," a vault symbolizing the confinement and domination the salesman's dwindling social and moral status is to suffer. The pastoral suburbia seems trapped in the jungle of urban settlements. However, the modern subjection and subjugation of everything that is solid to fluid liquidity is an all-encompassing reality. Nostalgia for the non-existent or falsified past in the guise of dreaming ahead seems the only available means with which to resist or protect oneself from the harsh reality, so "*An air of the dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality.*"

The bare-bone structure of the salesman's house also helps facilitate its transmutation into cityscapes such as Howard's office, Charley's office, a hotel in Boston as well as his own half-remembered, half-imagined suburban landscape of those good old days. In a play in which memory plays a central role, the imaginary walls make it possible for the characters to move in and out of different temporal zones with little of seeming awkwardness and much of liquid fluidity so as to embody the directionless stream of consciousness: "Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping 'through' a wall onto the forestage." Miller's dramaturgy makes for temporal fluidity as well as spatial

one, and in it thematic, spatial and temporal concerns are all merged into forming an excitingly novel and yet coherent picture. According to Bigsby, therefore, “the environment — the trees and open spaces of the real or remembered past, the oppressive constrictions of an urban environment — is a principal character in the play and a primary achievement of Miller, his director Elia Kazan, and his designer Jo Mielziner” (*Critical Introduction* 182).

Beneath the seeming calm of the 1950s lay radical changes in the American population that would have profound effects on all aspects of society. Between 1945 and 1960 the general population increased by 40.1 million to 180 million or by nearly 29 percent. The overwhelming majority of this increase was in the suburbs, where 11 million new houses were built between 1948-58 (out of 13 million overall). The large middle class that had lived in New York and other urban centers, the societal segment that had anchored the residential neighborhoods and fueled urban mercantilism, began moving out to the suburbs as the postwar economic boom bestowed its benefits upon them. Willy’s failure to join in this massive emigration to the flatlands of the American suburb — where “daily life was delivered from the cramp of the city, lifted out to the half-wide, half-open spaces, where the long-sought and long-feared American wilderness could be trimmed back and made habitable” (Gitlin 14) — is betrayed, at the beginning of the play, by his angry denial of the reality of social change that is pressing on around him and his family:

WILLY: The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks.

LINDA: We should’ve bought the land next door.

WILLY: The street is lined with cars. There’s not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don’t grow any more, you can’t raise a carrot in the back yard. They should’ve had a law against apartment houses. Remember those two beautiful elm trees out there? When I and Biff hung the swing between them?

LINDA: Yeah, like being a million miles from the city.

WILLY: They should’ve arrested the builder for cutting those down. They massacred the neighborhood. *Lost*: More and more I think of those days, Linda. This time of year it was lilac and wisteria. And then the peonies would come out, and the daffodils. What fragrance in this room!

Linda: Well, after all, people had to move somewhere.

WILLY: No, there’s more people now.

LINDA: I don't think there's more people. I Think —

WILLY: There's more people! That's what's ruining this country! Population is getting out of control. The competition is maddening! Smell the stink from that apartment house! (17-18)

We can easily sense in the mind of Willy a powerful yet frustrating sense of nostalgia which arises from the irreparable gap between longing and belonging: he longs for the beautified past but belongs in the brute present. As Svetlana Boym points out, “nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress.” The nostalgic,” such as Willy, “desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition” (xv). The metaphysical anxiety for the rush of time that Boym talks about is perhaps a theme more appropriate for Tennessee Williams. Still, *Death of a Salesman* is a play about and of nostalgia since nostalgia “charts space on time and time on space” (Boym xviii). The tragedy for Willy is that neither his longing for the past nor his belonging in the present has a modicum of self-assurance, let alone cultural collectivity. When he recalls the time of two elm trees and lilac, wisteria, peonies and daffodils, he is definitely falsifying his memories, for the America of Willy and Biff on the swing was hard-hit by the Great Depression and its devastating effects on every walk of life. Willy's present is a space of nowhere, only a series of increasingly exhausting movements on the road. Once again, according to Boym, “Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways” (xiv). The only nostalgic sideways available for Willy is his transvaluation of the American Dream in terms of his death, or how much his death is worth.

As Joe Keller shoots himself to death in *All My Sons*, so Willy Loman takes his own life by speeding away. However, unlike Keller who kills himself in atonement for his misdeeds, Willy sees his death as an extension and best available realization of his pursuit of the American Dream. As the worth of one's life is evaluated in monetary terms in this soon to be called “Affluent Society,” so is that of one's death. In their final confrontation, Biff snaps at Willy, “Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!” (132). The salesman's tragedy is that being compelled to prove otherwise, he has no other way to do it except by bequeathing his son the insurance money (\$20,000) that will be collected after his death. Willy's memories of the pastoral suburb that his family once lived in are not sanitized or

romanticized ones, and cutting into his dreamy consciousness is the irrevocable sense of guilt for his negligence and immoral conduct as father and husband and for his incompetence as salesman. However, it is not the guilt that drives him, as it does Keller, to death. The present is not a consequence of the past in *Death of a Salesman*. The present and the past coexist in Willy's consciousness, albeit in incongruous juxtaposition. The memories evoked do not freeze him in time - past or present - because both the American Dream that propels him and the memories that arrest him are all, in the end, out of his reach and in an ever-deferred hope for the future. The authenticity of his memories is always in question, his dreams, fantasies, illusions or wishful thinking not rooted in any concrete time zone. Willy Loman chooses death less out of his guilt or disappointment and more in hope and expectation, however pathetic or delusive that may seem. When he bids farewell to his "only friend" Charley with these words - "After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive" (98) - he is not just being self-deprecatingly rhetorical: he is always already looking ahead, without going anywhere. The past, present and future in Willy's disintegrating mind is all interchangeable, whether these different time zones are embodied in dreams, memories or fantasies and illusions.

IV. Conclusion

In the immediate postwar American drama, we can observe an interesting relationship between dramatic form and time: the monolithic totality of time in *All My Sons*; the artful and artificial unity of heterogeneous time(s) in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; a radical disjunction of the past and present in *The Glass Menagerie*; the simultaneity of different modes of time in *Death of a Salesman*. Despite this interesting array of temporal conceptions, what is missing in all these plays is the acutely self-conscious sense of the theatricality of social life that is deeply embedded in the modernist drama under the rubric of the "theatre of the absurd" or "metatheatre." "In the Theatre of the Absurd," Martin Esslin argues, "the audience is confronted with actions that lack apparent motivation, characters that are in constant flux, and often happenings that are clearly outside the realm of rational experience" (416). It is precisely the ambiguity, undecidability and indeterminacy of our lived experiences that are found wanting in the post-war American drama. When moral concerns are foregrounded, especially in Miller's plays, when right and wrong are already determined within the dramatic action and characterization, the reader-audience becomes a passive receptacle of moral messages through the identification process. However, a genuine ethical practice of

reading can be exercised when one is confronted with fundamentally non-ethical situations, when possibilities rise from and out of making difficult ethical choices between right and right and of knowing when to delay or reserve moral judgment.

The fundamentally conservative nature of the early post-war American drama and its general confidence in the representational validity of the realistic-naturalistic form reflects the overall socio-cultural confidence in the American conception of the post-war world and itself. Despite or because of the absence of a rich native dramatic tradition, the postwar American drama generally offers less challenging ethical perspectives which tend to narrow down ethical possibilities instead of opening them up. The utopian totality of Miller's social world and the poetic individuality of Williams's private world are, in the end, two sides of the same coin which is American theater's naive confidence in the theater's representational power and validity. There is little we find in them of "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (Kermode 177) which modernist writers have tried hard to control, order, give a shape and significance to.¹ Instead, what we see is the representability, warts and all, of modern society in its totality, or what Lehmann calls "the ideal of surveyability" (40). Nonetheless, As Williams has argued, reading drama is an ethical experience in the sense that we would sit and listen to what a Willy Loman or a Blanche DuBois in real life has to say only if we were not inflicted with the rush of time. The very fact that we read and watch Laura Wingfield or Joe Keller in books and on the stage testifies to "the timeless world of a play."

Note

1. The quotes are originally from T. S. Eliot's appreciative estimation of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

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Is Shakespeare Unethical?: A Critical Review of Shakespearean Ethics

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Abstract William Shakespeare's popularity as a poet and a playwright deserves scrutiny when we come to the question of his morality and justice represented in his works. His popularity is often considered as the effect of his condescension to the crude taste of his audience wanting some raw and bloody sensationalism. The purpose of this paper is to critically review some of the major ethical criticism of Shakespeare from Samuel Johnson to Ludwig Wittgenstein, and to suggest an alternative idea of imaginative ethics in Shakespeare as a man of imagination. Jonson, Tolstoy, and Wittgenstein, in their respective differences, all together find fault with Shakespeare's lack of morality and high seriousness. However, as Wilson Knight's defense of Shakespeare as a visionary poet demonstrates well, Shakespeare's moral judgments are placed in his poetry which demands a detached observation on various human dispositions. The Shakespearean principle of 'poetic' justice is more than the Johnsonian poetic justice in that the former puts a moral judgment in the design of artistic threads: Shakespeare's "mingled yarn" is more than a melodramatic and bipolar black and white. Shakespeare's music of forgiveness is touched by his creative mercy beyond the earthly idea of morality. Shakespearean living ethics is the ethics of sympathetic imagination and tolerance oriented towards the realization of transcendental co-presence and musical harmony, as is represented in his final plays of romantic reconciliation and forgiveness.

Key words Shakespeare; poetic justice; Tolstoy; religiosity; Wittgenstein; Johnson; morality

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Structure (2012).

William Shakespeare was, from the very beginning of his career as a playwright and poet, both applauded and denounced as a popular writer. His popularity with his audience was his honour and liability at once. When Robert Green found fault with Shakespeare as an “up-start crow, shaking scenes,” he was pointing a finger at Shakespeare’s so-called job ethics. Shakespeare’s sudden success on the London stage allegedly went, in his contemporary university wits’ view, in tandem with his uncompromising ambition of success and appeal to the audience’s taste and indulgence in pleasure and entertainment. The notorious Jonsonian epithet of “small Latin, and less Greek” with his tongue in his sleeve, was to rather denounce Shakespeare for his lack of self-consciousness as a writer and his sense of morality than his lack of classical education proper. The purpose of this paper is to critically review major Shakespearean ethical criticism from Samuel Johnson to Ludwig Wittgenstein, and to suggest an alternative living principle of ethics in Shakespeare in terms of sympathy and imagination.

This tendency to characterize Shakespeare in terms of morality and moral or poetic justice was epitomized in Samuel Johnson. Johnson held consistently that enduring popularity was the final test of greatness of a literary work, and the public was the final arbiter of it. He always paid great homage to the 18th century bourgeois aesthetic and appreciation. In this vein, he went so far as to assure that “the popular preference, exhibited over a long period, for the happy ending to *King Lear* established the superiority of that ending” (Krutch 250). Johnson supposed that the death of Cordelia at the end of the tragedy went against the grain of general human nature, finding a cathartic satisfaction and happiness in the working of poetic justice of a melodrama. Cordelia’s undeserved tragic death and innocent suffering was shocking and terrible to his sense of morality and justice: “I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia’s death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor” (Raleigh 161-62). It is evident from this quotation that Johnson was reading “Shakespeare as a poet rather than a writer for the stage.” Johnson represented his contemporary common readers’ desire of pleasure, and in the case of Cordelia’s undeserved death, that desire was not satisfied. Sudden wonders, Johnson assures, can bring out small and short delights; however, the stability of truth and just representation of general nature can repose the audience in long-enduring pleasures. In Johnson this pleasure is irretrievably interwoven with his sense of moral justice. Delight is much enhanced by instruction, and intellectual delight is greater than sensual

delight. Johnson's general complaint on and dissatisfaction with Shakespeare rather foreground the function of pleasure as the final arbiter of literary value and greatness:

He [Shakespeare] sacrifices virtue to convenience, is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This is a fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place. (Raleigh 20-21)

Here Johnson argues that satisfaction of moral justice is the very source of an everlasting pleasure, and that Shakespeare fails in this, if not always. As Joseph Wood Krutch rightly says, with Johnson, "pleasure which runs counter to morality was obviously vicious, and even pleasure which was no more than innocent seemed too trivial an end to justify the feeling that poetry is, next to virtue, the noblest achievement of man" (Krutch 280). Again, if among Shakespeare's defects is found the failure to enforce moral lessons and thereby to achieve our sense of just pleasure, this Johnsonian complaint of Shakespeare for his lack of moral justice is contradictory to his acclaim of Shakespeare as a poet of nature. This nature is the common human nature, as it is not the Aristotelian *physis* proceeding toward a *telos* of what it ought to be. Johnson highly praises Shakespeare as the poet in whom the real world of life and experience is faithfully and truly represented, as in a mirror held up to nature.

Shakespeare is the touchstone to test the truth of our own experiences, and in his mirror of life are reflected all human sentiments in human language, all the transactions of the world, and in fine, just representations of our general human nature. For Johnson, Shakespeare is the acknowledged legislator and painter of the world. However, his acclaim of Shakespeare's works as the mirror of life is extenuated in order to put more emphasis on the desired end of writings, which is to instruct by pleasing. In his general remarks on *King Lear* he admits of a possible conflict between a just representation of the common events of human life and our

sense of moral justice:

A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life; but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or that, if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue. (Raleigh 161)

Here Johnson reveals his self-consciousness over the conflict between his aesthetic value judgment of a literary work and his sense of justice as a moralist. However, he resolves this conflict again in yielding the priority to pleasure over verisimilitude. Poetic Justice is defended by him not because it is instructive but rather because it meets our more fundamental and essential sense of pleasure: “[T]he irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, with that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth” (Raleigh 11). Johnson’s high estimation of Shakespeare as the poet of nature is given place to his sense of nature as it ought to be.

Johnson the moralist gets over Johnson the aesthetic critic, and Shakespeare’s power to hold a mirror up to life as it is, gets sacrificed in order to satisfy his artificial sense of moral justice as it should be. The Johnsonian sense of pleasure as the final judge was based on the common sense and reason of his reading public and gives no just place to creative imagination as a faculty of human mind in judiciously selecting and combining various elements and events of life in order to achieve dramatic effects on the stage. Hence the supernatural and mysterious are passionately denigrated as absurd and incredible. Though Johnson contributed a lot in making Shakespeare as a national poet and a modern classic, his criticism on Shakespeare was limited by his sense of moral purposes in literature. Shakespeare was criticized as immoral and purposeless, even at the cost of his true and just representation of life which is the great source of eternal pleasure, since the satisfaction of Poetic Justice is supposed by Johnson to be the source of more lasting pleasure of man.

Samuel Johnson’s estimation of Shakespeare as immoral was done as a reader in his private study, blind to the stage effects as a whole. His position was faithfully followed by the Russian Johnsonian, Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy’s hatred of Shakespeare was life-long, mingled with his passionate envy of Beethoven and Raphael. Later

in his life Tolstoy assumed it his evangelical duty to save the poor bardolaters from the illusion that Shakespeare was a great writer. In his diary of October 28, 1900, Tolstoy wrote thus: "I reflected that if I am to serve people by writing, then the one thing which I have the right to do, which I must do, is to unmark the truth of the rich and to reveal to the poor the deception in which the rich are keeping them" (Gibian 22). For Tolstoy, Shakespeare is the aristocratic writer looking down on the clowns and the poor. This prejudice against Shakespeare as the enemy of the people is quite in contrast to the Johnsonian establishment and estimation of a people's Shakespeare.

However, Johnson and Tolstoy agree with each other in that, in their views, Shakespeare is immoral, sacrificing virtue to convenience. According to La Zurskii, a diarist and professor of world literature at the University of Odessa who recorded his interviews and conversations with Count Tolstoy, "Tolstoy complained that everything that happened, good or bad, moral or immoral, concerned Shakespeare only insofar as it made an interesting picture, fitted into a good spectacle" (Gibian 20). Here Zurskii points out Tolstoy's dissatisfaction with Shakespeare, especially with the latter's engrossment in the pursuit of entertainment at the cost of morality. However, Tolstoy's disapproval of Shakespeare was more fundamental in the light of his view of literature. To Tolstoy, literature is religious in its essence. Here he uses the word "religious" in its etymological meaning of "to bind, to combine together," and in that sense of infected combination with another's feelings lies the very essence of true art. Tolstoy's ideal art form is the folk songs, ballads, and heroic songs that enhance the sense of community and alleviate the pains of labor in primitive society. In this sense, Shakespeare's tragedies, Tolstoy thinks, have no moral basis, which thereby uncovers Shakespeare's fatalism.

Tolstoy's life-long hatred of Shakespeare was crystallized in his essay, "Shakespeare and the Drama," which was intended as the preface to Ernest Crosby's essay, "Shakespeare's Attitude to the Working Class." The Tolstoy essay was written in October, 1903-January, 1904, and was published in 1906. In this essay, "with the full-blown exaggeration of a polemicist" (Gibian 31), Tolstoy debunks Shakespeare's popularity as a deception, item by item. Of course his attack on Shakespeare is mainly focused on a perceived want of religious essence in the plays and thereof mutual affection in and by moral sense and affinity. Tolstoy strongly puts in question Shakespeare's sincerity as a writer over all, not only as a popular entertainer. I think nobody could better sum up Tolstoy's wholesale diatribe against Shakespeare than George Orwell, who regards the essay as "one of the greatest pieces of moral, non-aesthetic criticism, — *anti* — aesthetic criticism"

(Orwell 127).

Tolstoy's main contention is that Shakespeare is a trivial, shallow writer, with no coherent philosophy, no thoughts or ideas worth bothering about, no interest in social or religious problems, no grasp of character or probability, and, in so far as he could be said to have a definable attitude at all, with a cynical, immoral, worldly outlook on life. He accuses him of patching his plays together without caring twopence for credibility, of dealing in fantastic fables and impossible situations, of making all his characters talk in an artificial flowery language completely unlike that of real life. He also accuses him of thrusting anything and everything into his plays — soliloquies, scraps of ballads, discussions, vulgar jokes and so forth — without stopping to think whether they had anything to do with the plot, and also of taking for granted the immoral power politics and unjust social distinctions of the times he lived in. Briefly, he accuses him of being a hasty, slovenly writer, a man of doubtful morals, and, above all, of not being a thinker. (Orwell 128)

Orwell considers what Tolstoy says is true on the whole and that he is “unanswerable” to Tolstoy, though he admits that Shakespeare’s moral code might be different from Tolstoy’s. Orwell agrees without any hesitation with Tolstoy in that Shakespeare is not a thinker. Orwell easily acquiesces in the Tolstoy criticism on the condition that “Tolstoy criticizes Shakespeare not as a poet, but as a thinker and a teacher” (Orwell 130). Orwell’s “unanswerability” seems to miss the bull’s eye of the Tolstoy criticism in emphasizing Shakespeare’s immaturity and confusion as a thinker.

The pillar of the Tolstoy essay is built upon Shakespeare’s immorality, justifying his worldly outlook of “the end justifies the means.” The beams of criticism are laid on unnatural characterization, pompous and embellished language, incredibility and improbability of characterization and plot, and lack of clarity, simplicity, and explicitness. Admittedly these defects are, Orwell thinks, all the offshoots of his immorality. In Tolstoy’s view of art, aesthetic architecture and characterization of a work must be considered given the writer’s morality and world-view. His criticism of Shakespeare’s characterization demands our deeper probing into Tolstoy’s definition of what a drama is.

It demands that the persons represented in the play should be, in consequence of actions proper to their characters, and owing to a natural course of events,

placed in positions requiring them to struggle with the surrounding world to which they find themselves in opposition, and in this struggle should display their inherent qualities. (Gibian 35)

In this definition of drama Tolstoy opposes the self to the world, and this is truer of Greek drama of a Sophoclean type than of Shakespearean tragedy, completely disregarding a Shakespearean tragic hero's mental agony undergoing double or split consciousness. However, against this definition Tolstoy severely accuses Lear of his sudden and whimsical division of the kingdom at the very beginning of the play without any preparatory explanations of his motives, and he also charges Cordelia for her ungente language unlike that of an obedient daughter, whom she is assumed to be throughout the whole play.

To Tolstoy's eyes all the kings of Shakespeare's plays are the same, characterless characters speaking the same undifferentiated bombastic language. Tolstoy also found fault with the vulgarity of Gloucester's language at the opening scene of the play, and this demonstrates that Tolstoy was under the shadow of the neo-classical idea of decorum, both literary and ethical. Beyond his understanding and appreciation were the Fool's jests in *King Lear* and the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*: they are digressions and indecorous distractions introduced to amuse Shakespeare's audience regardless of the plot development. In his calculating reason and cool rationalism, Tolstoy was unperceptive of metaphoric languages and puns, the supernatural wonders and silence, all contributing to the invention of dramatic effects. In his over seventy marginal notes in his text of *Hamlet* [volume six of the Tauchnitz (Leipzig) seven volume edition, with the Collier text] Tolstoy put the question mark on the first entrance of the ghost. As Gibian argues, "the very presence of the ghost of course offended Tolstoy's exaggeratedly rationalistic views" (Gibian 43). Tolstoy wrote in an unpublished draft passage of his essay on Shakespeare that "coarse embellishments mark the tragic quality of Shakespeare: the trumpets before a king enters, the storm in *Lear*, the grass he puts on his head, the disguise of Edgar as a knight, Desdemona's songs, ghosts in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*" (Gibian 43). Tolstoy was quite ignorant of the conventions of a poetic drama and he seemed to read Shakespeare's plays as a kind of realistic novel of the cause-and-effect development. He preferred simple and lucid prose language to the poetic one of nuances, ambiguities, suggestions, metaphors and hyperboles. The linguistic medium conveying infective feelings must be a prose of simplicity, modesty and plainness.

Against this simplified language of feelings, Ludwig Wittgenstein points out

that the problem lies rather elsewhere than in language itself.

Tolstoy: the meaning of something lies in its being something everyone can understand. That is both true and false. What makes the object hard to understand — if it is significant, important, is not that you have to be instructed in abstruse matters in order to understand it, but the antithesis between understanding the object and what most people *want* to see. Because of this precisely what is most obvious may be what is most difficult to understand. It is not a difficulty for the intellect but one for the will that has to be overcome. (Wittgenstein 25e)

Here Wittgenstein makes it clear that what makes understanding and communication difficult and even impossible is the intentional blindness to what is obvious. He, on the whole, denies Tolstoy's argument that a simple language guarantees lucid understanding. In addition, Wittgenstein categorically disregards Tolstoy's criticism that Shakespeare was not concerned about his characters and events, insincerely fitting them into a picture. Wittgenstein admits of an inevitable gap between a poet's feeling and a reader's feeling of it:

There is *much* that can be learned from Tolstoy's false theorizing that the work of art conveys 'a feeling.' ...but what he (the author) may have felt in writing it (a poem), that doesn't concern me *at all*. (Wittgenstein 67e)

If Tolstoy accused Shakespeare of his insincerity as an author, Wittgenstein defends Shakespeare against Tolstoy as a reader. Wittgenstein's criticism of Tolstoy in terms of language and feeling is evidently done while keeping in mind his understanding of Shakespeare's poetic language:

Shakespeare, one might say, displays the dance of human passions. For this reason he has to be objective, otherwise he would not so much display the dance of human passions — as perhaps talk about it. But he shows us them in a dance, not naturalistically. (Wittgenstein 42e)

While Tolstoy did not like a play written in verse, blind to the beautiful poetry of Shakespeare's pun and world-play, Wittgenstein was more perceptive of his metaphoric, dance-like language. However, his understanding of an author's 'feeling' cannot be said to be just and fair to Tolstoy. When Tolstoy criticized

Shakespeare for his insincere feelings, he blamed his superficial characterization and improper impersonation. When Hamlet speaks of social and legal injustice, Tolstoy thinks that Shakespeare himself speaks in Hamlet's mouth, and that is the significance of his 'feeling.' In fact Hamlet is in the play too much talkative and verbose and when he stops talking, literally "the rest is silence" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.363). T.S. Eliot is right to some extent in arguing that Shakespeare fails in finding out an objective correlative that can impersonalize Hamlet's overflowing subjective emotions. As Samuel Johnson pointed out earlier, formal and rhetorical embellishment of language and technical quibbles were a fatal attraction for Shakespeare, enough to make him lose his world of plot and unity of a drama: "In narration he[Shakespeare] affects a disproportionate pomp of diction" (Krutch 278). Tolstoy is not alone in his denunciation of Shakespeare's language and feeling: he stands in between Johnson and Eliot.

Nevertheless, we cannot deny Tolstoy's simplistic partiality and prejudice in his understanding of Shakespeare, especially of his poetic language and atmosphere. As Gibian puts it properly, Tolstoy wanted drama to be simple, plain, morally hortatory, logically consistent, and rationally lucid: "its atmosphere as well as linguistic medium was to be prose" (Gibian 44). The influence of Tolstoy is expressed in Wittgenstein's preference of Beethoven to Shakespeare, since Wittgenstein's propensity was toward the classical unity and lucidity. However, as Peter Lewis points out, "Wittgenstein goes over Tolstoy into the minds of men who are impressed by Shakespeare when he emphasizes the importance of a cultural code in understanding a poet" (Lewis 7). Though he doesn't personally like it, Wittgenstein acknowledges, unlike Tolstoy's denunciation of self-deception, some genuine response to Shakespeare.

Wittgenstein's defense of Shakespeare in terms of his poetic language and feelings was preceded by Wilson Knight in his English Association address, "Shakespeare and Tolstoy" (April 1934). In his reply to the Tolstoy essay, Knight finds out an astonishing similarity between Tolstoy and Robert Bridges in their responses to Shakespeare. Like Tolstoy, Bridges says in his essay, "The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama" (1907) that "he[Shakespeare] was making concession to the most vulgar stratum of his audience, and had acquired a habit of so doing" (Bridges 2). In such scenes of "sheer brutality" as the murder of Macduff's child and the blinding of Gloucester, Shakespeare, Bridges continues, sacrificed his artistic ideals for the sake of gratifying his audience (15). This is very alike to Tolstoy's argument that Shakespeare's popularity was mainly due to mass suggestion and hypnotism of the audience.

In Knight's words, both Tolstoy and Bridges "bring forward precisely the objections: poor characterization, impossible events, exaggeration, vulgarity" (8). However, there is no clear evidence that "two great minds have directed their hostility" (Knight 3). The main tenet of Knight's counter-attack on Tolstoy is that the latter misread Shakespeare as a novelist, not as a poet, committing "indeed a devastating neglect of Shakespeare's poetic symbolism" (4). The "unnaturalness" Tolstoy found as a fault in *King Lear* is, Knight argues, rather "essential to the Shakespearean vision" (9). Knight repeats on and again that Shakespeare is a visionary poet, not a great novelist: "Tolstoy and Bridges suffered from clear thinking" (11). In order to understand Shakespeare as a poet, it is crucial to "grasp the vitalizing idea behind the phenomena of the plays" (11). Knight answers to Shakespeare's "unnatural" characterization mainly attacked by both Tolstoy and Bridges, saying that "art always discloses the inner flame of reality" (17). Against Tolstoy's Hamlet, who is a characterless character, Knight's Hamlet is universal: "In him we recognize ourselves, not our acquaintances. Possessing all characters, he possesses none" (19). Knight finds in Hamlet a typical Renaissance man and the prototype of a modern man. Here Knight's response highlights Shakespeare the poet at the cost of his novelistic naturalism.

However, Tolstoy does not deny the inner vision of art. When he says that a tragic hero reveals his inherent qualities in his struggles against the surrounding opposing world, he underlined a tragic character's logical and consistent development and individuation thereof. He is actually antipathetic to the "given" characters of dramatic conventions. Sometimes in his overwhelming passion of patriotic defense, Knight ignores Shakespeare's singularity and puts him in the air of generalization and abstraction: "But Shakespeare's persons make utterance from a height where all men speak alike: the height of universal experience, refracted often in human terms, voiceless save by poetry" (19). Do they? Is Ulysses wrong when he says that the upper-rung people kick back the following climbers? While Tolstoy emphasized the religious essence of drama in mutual infection in real life, Knight seems to say that Shakespeare's drama realizes religiosity in the height of universality. Can the groundlings reach that height, or otherwise does the height emanate its holy light on the earthly common people? Knight denies the "aristocratic" Shakespeare by his universality and myriad-mindedness. The general humanity is revealed in a type of religious vision, relating man to the Absolute. Knight argues that "Shakespeare presents us very definitely with just such a variable religion-philosophy compound as Tolstoy seems to require" (25). He characterizes Shakespeare's religious vision as "his imaginative qualities" and

intense symbolism: “the ‘disorder’ philosophy of the Histories, the death-force in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* embattled against life, the Christian ethic of *Measure for Measure*, the purgatorial vision of *Lear*, the accomplished paradise of *Anthony and Cleopatra*. ...the Birth and Resurrection dramas of Final Play” (26). Here we come back to the starting point of Knight’s address saying that Shakespeare is a poet and a visionary. Beyond Tolstoy’s cold reason and realism was Shakespeare’s poetic vision of intense symbolism and universal and highly serious religious concerns. Knight’s argument was corroborated by Wittgenstein’s retort to Tolstoy that lucid simplicity is not all that matters in understanding a language. Meanwhile, Knight’s definition of Shakespeare as a religious and philosophical poet in the mode of Tolstoy is brusquely denied by George Orwell when the latter says that “Shakespeare is not a thinker, and the critics who claimed that he was one of the great philosophers of the world were talking nonsense” (Orwell 128). For Orwell, Knight is one of the nonsense-talking critics, sliding into misty and abstract generalizations. Now we return to Ludwig Wittgenstein. We saw that he stood on Knight’s side in opposition to Tolstoy, concerning Shakespeare’s poetic language. However, Wittgenstein goes over to Tolstoy when he says that the admiration for Shakespeare is a matter of convention:

It is remarkable how hard we find it to believe something the truth of which we do not see for ourselves. If e.g. I hear expressions of admiration for Shakespeare made by the distinguished men of several centuries, I can never rid myself of a suspicion that praising him has been a matter of convention, even though I have to tell myself that this is not the case. I need the authority of a Milton to be really convinced. In his case I take it for granted that he was incorruptible. — But of course I don’t mean to deny by this that an enormous amount of praise has been and still is lavished on Shakespeare without understanding and for specious reasons by a thousand professors of literature. (Wittgenstein 55e)

In these passages we are likely to have a hallucination that we are reading Tolstoy, not Wittgenstein. Why do we experience this kind of continuity of dissent? What is remarkable here about Wittgenstein’s observation on Shakespeare is his suggestion of deceptiveness within the Shakespeare cult, similar to Tolstoy’s in its wording. Interestingly, in his preface to *Samson Agonistes*, Milton states that the classical plays of the antique tragedians are still “unequalled yet by any” (qtd. in Stein 3). Milton assists Wittgenstein in his non-commitment in the Shakespeare admiration.

Just as Tolstoy criticizes Shakespeare of his embellished and rhetorical verbal pictures that induce the poor to easy hypnotism, so Wittgenstein implicitly accuses Shakespeare of his magical and spectacular skills of language generating only a phenomenal significance:

It is not as though Shakespeare portrayed human types well and were in that respect *true to life*. He is not true to life. But he has such a supple hand and such individual *brush strokes* that each one of his characters looks *significant*, worth looking at. (Wittgenstein 96e)

Shakespeare's technical skills as a language painter seem to Wittgenstein's eyes, to intimate some kind of unrecognizable and unknown visual deception. And that great picture of Shakespeare's is worth just looking at, as at natural scenery. And this picture is not a mimetic representation of real life. His whole works are akin to a dream only complete and significant in itself. When Wittgenstein characterizes Shakespeare's plays as a dream-like corpus autonomous and significant in its own possible world, he distances Shakespeare from ethical and philosophical depth: "So he is completely unrealistic" (89e). As George Steiner astutely points out, "[T]he very nonchalance of Shakespeare's pictorial, histrionic means induces in both Tolstoy and Wittgenstein the intimation of a confidence trick" (10). Wittgenstein cannot favor the creator of language, nor even a poet, because he thinks the latter only paints a picture of an apparently significant phenomenon like a splendid piece of scenery: "I do not think Shakespeare could have reflected on the 'lot of the poet.'" Neither could he regard himself as a prophet or teacher of humanity" (96e). Here Wittgenstein uses the word "poet" (Dichter) in its German sense as one who knows ethically, whose knowledge is organized by ethical perception. (Steiner 11) Wittgenstein makes this sense clear when he says: "The reason I cannot understand Shakespeare is that I want to find symmetry in all this asymmetry" (98e). Wittgenstein is following the Platonic tradition of epistemology as moral action. Maybe he is imposing too heavy a burden of moral responsibility as a teacher of life upon the shoulders of Shakespeare the playwright. However, when Shakespeare is acclaimed as a visionary poet par excellence, can we disregard Wittgenstein's observations as the misunderstanding of a strict logician and epistemologist?

The question of whether Shakespeare is ethical or immoral is still unresolved. Perhaps it stands somewhere between Tolstoy and Knight. Nowadays the question has deviated into sense, or more properly, nonsense of whether Shakespeare is authentic or a fake, borrowing from somebody else's feathers and plumes. Perhaps

the question was put in the wrong direction from the very beginning when we applied the term “ethics” to Shakespeare’s works, since Shakespeare puts in question the whole being and experiences of man. As Wittgenstein said before, Shakespeare’s works compose a dream-like corpus of its own autonomy with its own living principles. That means that we have to apply the ethics of imagination to his works, not to Shakespeare the man. The corpus of his own has its rule of consistency and contradictions, and in itself it is not the actual living life and world as we experience in everyday life, though it has a strong relevance to it. If it is for the real life, we do not go to the theater and want some relaxation and entertainment therein. Shakespeare’s play is a configuration of a possible world, similar to life but not the same to it, to which we have to apply its own logic and ethical measures. That is the ethics of imagination and sympathy. If the sense of ethics still has the etymological significance of “ethos” meaning subjective value judgment of a character, ethics is the effect of a character. And a literary character has a meaning only when he is ‘placed’ in relation with his surrounding characters and circumstances. Literary characters play and act in a network, sometimes enmeshed in it cast by an Iago. Shakespeare’s plays convey the feeling of being inter-related and in the presence of the supernatural and the mysterious, and the marvelous that cannot be understood in a Horatio’s competent reason or aplomb. That Shakespearean imagination casts all the people in his plays in tempest and music. No man is an island in Shakespeare’s imagination and imaginative understanding. Shakespearean tragedies enact the failure of that sympathetic imagination, while his comedies and romances play out the trial and restoration of it. It is time that we must apply the rule of imagination to life, not vice versa. Only then can Shakespeare be set free from the bondage of applause or scold of his critical audiences. As Hamlet tells Horatio, our reason, there are more things in life than can be understood in our philosophy, and we need imagination to explore that mysterious region, which reveals intermittently to the eyes of sympathetic imagination and forgiveness.¹

Note

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Politics, History and Aesthetics as Tropes: An Introduction

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The studies of trope and literature have been closely connected on both theoretical and textual levels ever since antiquity, and many great literary works were written by writers who were well versed in tropes. It is therefore worthwhile to examine thoroughly what these writers know about tropes and how literary creation and literary criticism have been enriched through rhetorical knowledge. As early as 16th century, Richard Sherry has already come to the realization of the relations between trope and literature. In his ground breaking monograph *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), Richard suggests that trope is the tool for “achieving ornateness” in both secular and religious writing and speaking (Hildebrandt 2). In this mode of thought, the tropes like metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche are basic human tools of understanding, and they are both mentally and physically anchored in literature.

The meaning of trope goes through a long process of transformation from figure of speech to discourse. From the perspective of rhetorical tradition, the value of trope to literature lies in its feature of deviation (Harland 4). In standard rhetorical terminology, a trope is a deviation from the normal use of an individual word; But with the development of literary criticism, trope is endowed with broader and more complicated meanings. Recently many literary debates hinge on competing definitions of “trope” between motif and rhetorical turn (Dvora & New), leading to rhetorical studies of politics, economics, space, history and aesthetics across cultural divides in literary works. Therefore in order to understand these exchanges between literature and other various dimensions of the world, it is productive to take different tropes into consideration in our critical readings and writings.

The three essays presented below address the aforementioned relations between trope and literature in very different ways. They are diverse in terms of themes, subjects and theoretical approaches, which, at first glance, bear no relation to one another. Anne-Marie Mai, professor of Nordic Literature at the University

of Southern Denmark and a Fellow of the Danish Academy of Arts and Sciences, begins this special cluster of articles with her study of welfare metaphors and welfare critique in works by Danish writers Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen. She looks closely at how these Danish novelists' works interact with the development of the Danish welfare state. The second contribution to this special cluster comes from Agnieszka Łobodziec, of the University of Zielona Gora in Poland. She focuses on Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, examining how Morrison elucidates the emotional dynamics between white subjects and black objects and their individual feelings at the genesis of racial and social bifurcation of mainstream American society that subsequently evolved into systemic racialized slavery. Another contribution to this cluster comes from Jørgen Veisland, of the University of Gdansk in Poland. He explores the issue of the aesthetics of loss in American writer Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*. Based on Kristeva's analysis of abjection, Jørgen Veisland examines how Paul Auster combines realism and abstract form in an attempt to capture pure thingness and the in-betweenness of things.

Although the three articles are varied in many ways, however, on a deeper level, they do have one thing in common. The tropes of politics, history and aesthetics are the unifying metaphors among the three essays and trope as the key word runs through the three essays. In Anne-Marie Mai's essay, welfare is a metaphor which, as a "dreamwork of language," establishes a metaphorical house to accommodate rich political and social meanings (Davison 435). Mai holds that the house metaphor is not substantial, but it forms a clear metonymic basis in the imagery used, and it has a reference back to the biblical metaphoric of the house and the temple building that was used in the labour movement songs from the end of the 19th century, where for example Ulrich Peter Overby made use of biblical expression when writing about the new society as "a strong house we build to protect us in need." In terms of cognitive pattern, house is a spatial pattern and a part-whole pattern which can be used in the study of the deep framing of the welfare state and its objectives.

Mai's house metaphor explores the abstract welfare issue in two different ways. First of all, to concretize and visualise the abstract object. The metaphor is the "main mechanism" through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning. Therefore the idea of the welfare state becomes "spatial and concrete" when it is visualised as a home for the people and a societal family to the public. Secondly, to fill in the gap between writer and reader. The productivity of metaphor results from the fact that the interpretations of metaphor reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator. So to understand a metaphor is as

much a creative endeavour as to make a metaphor (Davidson 435). Based on this cognitive feature of metaphor, Anne-Marie Mai sets up a bridge across the readers and writers, through which the linguistic framing of the welfare state and its metaphorical patterns created by the writers are transmitted to the readers and are transformed to a social and political sphere of experience of the readers.

In Agnieszka Łobodziec's essay, Toni Morrison's emotional trope in *A Mercy* is viewed as a literary representation of historical truth. It is interesting to note that Agnieszka Łobodziec starts her analysis from "the etiology of the American Dream." To women, and especially to black women in the U.S., the realization of American Dream is a process of "Housing" or "Unhousing" the "gendered self" (Kalfopoulou1). In some sense, Agnieszka Łobodziec continues and extends the house metaphor initiated by Mai in her article, but Łobodziec's house metaphor targets to a completely different point. To African American woman writer in the U.S., their American dream is a struggling out of the father's house, the slavery house and the interiorized slaverized house. And therefore their fulfillment of self is a process of "coming home" (Kalfopoulou173).

However Agnieszka Łobodziec's American dream metaphor and interiorized metaphor are only parts of the story. It is obvious that Agnieszka Łobodziec is taking good use of the concept that the black tradition is double-voiced utterance, or as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. put, possesses "two mouths" (341). This spirit of the double-voiced utterance is in the same vein with the nature of metaphor in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another in order to suggest similarity or difference between them. Via these two mouths, Agnieszka Łobodziec hopes to enhance the reader's experience of black texts by identifying levels of meaning and expression that might otherwise remain buried beneath the surface.

Jørgen Veisland explores Paul Auster's experiment in trying to dissolve and then reconstruct the relation between thing and sign, *res* and *signum* in *Sunset Park*. It is obvious that Jørgen Veisland adopts a Lacanian perspective. German scholar Heiko Jakubzik in his dissertation proposes that there are two central influences in Paul Auster's writing, one is Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis and the other the American transcendentalism of the early to middle nineteenth century. This Lacanian psychoanalytical approach to the relations between world and language, between thing and sign is metaphorical in the sense that Lacan's key concept symptom is first described as a metaphor, then as an ego: the subject of literature, the writing and written subject will ultimately become a myth for culture (Rabate19). Auster's text reverses the history of semiotics in trying to

capture existence prior to the sign, which in some sense explains the reason why we need a metaphor. The sense of being outside language, and thus outside of the world is exactly the reason why we need a metaphor, and why we need art. Just as Jørgen Veisland put in his analysis that access to “the world of others” is “through the work of art *only*.” It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that Jørgen Veisland’s study in some sense provides a theoretical framework for the other two articles in terms of linguistics, psychology and language philosophy, or in other words, it is an aesthetic trope for the other two essays in this special cluster.

It is somewhat surprising how differently and extensively tropes play the roles in literary expression. The three critics identify politics, history and aesthetic as epistemological tropes that offer different and effective ways to rethink identity, otherness, society and art. In other words, politics, society and aesthetics are exciting and useful tropes for the epistemological shift from reading the word to reading the world so as to detect the truth deep beneath the surface.

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“A Strong House We Build to Protect Us in Need...” : On Welfare Metaphors and Welfare Critique in Works by Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen

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Abstract The Danish novelists Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt had their breakthrough as storytellers in the 1970s and today they are some of the most celebrated contemporary Danish authors. The article looks more closely at how some of some of their works interact with the development of the Danish welfare state that emerges in the writers' youths. The welfare home and the welfare family are core metaphors in their narratives and thereby show how their novels interact with the political welfare rhetoric of the period.

Key words Danish literature; welfare narratives; novels on the welfare family

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For generations, Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt have been yardsticks for Danish critics, writers and readers. They had their breakthrough as storytellers in the 1970s: Jette Drewsen in 1972 with her debut book, *Hvad tænkte*

egentlig Arendse [*What was Arendse really thinking of*], which scored a bullseye in the heated sex-role discussion of the time; Kirsten Thorup in 1977 with *Lille Jonna* [*Little Jonna*], the first volume of the major series of novels about the gravitation of a young girl from country to town; and Vibeke Grønfeldt in 1978, with *Sommerens døde* [*The summer's dead*], which is a searching, psychological portrait of two young women in a rural environment that is on the decline.

The three writers have often been read separately and described on the basis of their separate contributions to the renewal of a narrative prose, as for example in the anthology *Danske digtere i det 20. århundrede* [*Danish 20th century writers*], Vol. III, 2001, in which Kirsten Thorup and Vibeke Grønfeldt are portrayed by analysis of how they have discovered new paths for prose. Here the emphasis is on their experiments with the novel form in existential narratives about changes to women's lives and the gradual extinction of the peasant culture. Monographs and PhD theses have been published as well as many university dissertations written in which the three authors feature.¹

It is typical for the various analysis to call attention to the social thematic in the works. Seen from a literary criticism point of view, we are clearly dealing with writers who in various ways make societal problems the subject of debate. But the characteristic of how this takes place is extremely generalised. Accounts often describe how the writers deal with the migration of the 1960s from country to town, the disintegration of the old village community, the emancipation of women and the psychological price paid for the liberation of the individual. But if one wishes to concretise the social thematic and make it more than just a broad context and look more closely at how some of the works interact with the development of the welfare state that emerges in the writers' youths, it can prove necessary to find a more precise approach.

In this connection, it is an advantage partly to focus on individual works, and partly to choose a system of concepts that can place the political language of the welfare state and artistic language in relation to each other.

In the following, I take a closer look at three novels: Kirsten Thorup's *Baby*, 1973 (translated into English 1979), Jette Drewsen's *Tid og sted* [*Time and Place*], 1978, and Vibeke Grønfeldt's *Det rigtige* [*The Right Thing*], 1999. These three works have been chosen because they make the home and the family core metaphors in their narratives and thereby show themselves interacting critically with the political welfare rhetoric of the period.

One gains a closer understanding of the actual welfare rhetoric by including ideas from linguistic and sociological research about 'framing' and about

the metaphors and patterns of metaphors in everyday language as well as a contemporary idea from political philosophy about politics and art as parts of a constantly on-going creation of, and struggle for, the ways in which the sensual and the sayable, words and things, are connected with each other.

The Framing of Welfare

In the establishment period of the welfare state a special welfare rhetoric emerges in one of the largest Danish political parties, the Social Democrats — a rhetoric that gradually spreads to other political parties, either as variations on the welfare metaphors or a critique of the same. The welfare rhetoric acquires its own set of expressions, core metaphors and stylistic figures that one can still hear echoes of in present-day political rhetoric. Certain critics of Social Democratic welfare rhetoric actually believe that political language in Denmark is saturated with Social Democratic welfare rhetoric.²

The concept of framing has been used in sociological and linguistic research, among other things in investigations of how ideas and values crop up and are formulated in the political debate. The American sociologist John L. Campbell mentions how sociology studies the politicians' framing of their policy in order to maximise its impact. Frames function as normative and cognitive ideas and language patterns that are placed in the foreground of political debates. For example, the concept "economic globalisation" is used in the 1990s as framing for the American shift to a neoliberal economic policy.

According to the American cognitive language philosopher George Lakoff, framing is not mainly a question of politics or of creating political messages:

"Framing" is not primarily about politics or political messaging, or communication. It is far more fundamental than that: Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. But the discovery and use of frame does have an enormous bearing on politics. Given our media-obsessed, fast-paced, talking-points political culture, it is critical that we understand the nature of framing and how it can be used. (Lakoff 25)

The idea of deep "frames" is related to Lakoff's and his partner Mark Johnson's concepts of the metaphors and conceptual patterns of everyday language, the so-called "image schemata" that enable us to comprehend the world around us. In this mode of thought, the metaphor is a basic human tool of understanding, one that is

both mentally and physically anchored. According to Lakoff, the metaphor is ‘the main mechanism through which we comprehend abstract concepts and perform abstract reasoning’ (Lakoff). When it comes to the study by cognitive semantics of particular patterns of metaphors, a spatial pattern (the fact that we understand reality via a spatial metaphoric) and a part-whole pattern can be used in the study of the deep framing of the welfare state and its objectives.

The idea of the welfare state becomes spatial and concrete when it is visualised as a home for the people and a societal family, or appears as a transferred epithet as warm, helping hands and friendly voices that speak to the citizen. It is the thesis of this article that Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen and Vibeke Grønfeldt have a special outstanding account with the welfare state, since in their works and texts they react to some of the political frames and metaphorical structures and in various ways adopt a critical attitude to them via a honed linguistic awareness.

But in order to understand this exchange between literature and society it is productive to include ideas of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who in a number of publications has dealt in depth with modern and postmodern literature and art. He is interested in both poetry and prose, and in general one can assert that Rancière utilises a concept of politics that means he regards politics and literature as parts of a constantly on-going creation of and struggle concerning the ways in which the sensual and the sayable, words and things, are connected with each other — politics and literature take part in a struggle concerning the entire social picture.

Politics is first of all a way of framing, among sensory data, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking. The politics of literature thus means that literature as literature is involved in this partition of the visible and the sayable, in this intertwining of being, doing and saying that frames a polemical common world. (Rancière10)

Rancière conceives art and literature as possible contributions to the break with consensus and with the regulation by those in power of the material world. It is the combination of art’s possibility to appear detached from other social interests and its use of language in a broad sense that makes it important in emancipatory processes. Writers and artists have the possibility to change the frames through which we perceive the material world. Writing fiction is reframing the real, building

up new relations between individual and collective, but, it should be noted, from a non-dominant societal position, where art can free itself from links to other social interests than itself as art. Thereby, modern literature has a special possibility to create dissension.

So it is not the manufacturing of images of reality by literature that makes it involved in politics; it is on the contrary the possibility it has via language to introduce phenomena into a common social space that creates the relation between politics and literature. Politics is a process of upsets, one in which interests and phenomena are brought out into the light. Literature is part of this process, because it has to do with anything at all that can be said and shown.

Political Welfare Rhetoric

The actual term welfare state emerges in Social Democratic language when the prime minister, Hans Hedtoft, uses the concept “the governed-by-the-people welfare state” in the debate book *Mennesket i Centrum* [The Human Being in Focus] (Hedtoft 7).³ Here, inspired by the British political discussion of welfare ideas, he combines the Old Norse word welfare with a concept of the state. The word welfare has a long literary history in such writers as Holberg, Brorson, Ewald, Hans Christian Andersen and Grundtvig, who, in accordance with common language usage at the time, used the word in connection with the well-being, happiness, progress and good conditions of the individual both while in earthly life and beyond. Now the concept is linked to the state in a way already prepared for by the philosopher Harald Høffding in his critical discussion in 1889 of Brandes’ Nietzsche-inspired thoughts concerning so-called aristocratic radicalism, in which individualists seeking freedom and intellectuals were to ensure the future for the many. Harald Høffding here formulates his ‘democratic radicalism’ as a diametrical opposite to Brandes’ ideas. Democratic radicalism is to ensure the welfare and good life of all. But Hedtoft goes all the way that lies just in front of Høffding. Hedtoft links the welfare concept — or the welfare principle, as Høffding calls it — by adding state organisation.⁴

The political framing of the concept welfare and welfare state that Hans Hedtoft introduced means that the concept of welfare today most often refers to something people have in common. If the politicians talk about “welfare,” “more welfare” or “lasting welfare,” they do not mean the possibility of well-being and security for the individual in his or her personal life but the share of the individual in the common welfare — or common welfare pure and simple. Thereby, the welfare concept comes to form what George Lakoff calls a deep frame

in the Danish political debate,⁵ even though the political ideas about the paths to welfare often go in highly different directions and the actual concept of the welfare state can also change meaning and character depending on its context (Petersen, “Velfærdsstaten i dansk politisk retorik” 23).

In the mid 1950s, the concept of the welfare state was on the way to becoming a negative framing in the political debate. The Conservative opponents of the welfare policy used the concept “guardian state” (≈ nanny state), the term first being used in 1956 by the Conservative Poul Møller as a criticism of the consequences of Social Democratic policy regarding the welfare state.⁶

The guardian concept was thematised in literature by Villy Sørensen in his *Formynderfortællinger* (*Tutelary Tales*, 1964). He deals with the guardian principle from psychological, religious, existential, social and political angles. His tales deal, among other things, with states and societies that assume the role of guardian of their citizens, since the citizens are either deprived of or themselves renounce their personal and social freedom and responsibility, after which a dreary conformity and orthodoxy is victorious. Villy Sørensen himself claimed that he definitely had not depicted present-day society (Clausen 30) but to a greater extent had shown that social development acquires its own negative logic unless people personally develop.

The point of the tales, in this optic, is that the dawning welfare state could end up as being a guardian-like control system if people are unable to develop psychologically. The negative political framing of the welfare state by the Conservatives lost ground during the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s, but it is still occasionally used, for example by several politicians from Venstre, the right-wing liberal party in Denmark.⁷ In the mid 1960s, the deep framing of the welfare state starts to work, with certain core metaphors becoming distinct and influencing the political rhetoric of the other parties.

On the threshold of the 1970s, when the development of the welfare state culminates, the welfare state in Social Democratic rhetoric starts to appear as an architectural construction, a “folkhem” (home for the people) as the welfare state is called in Sweden. This home is without “class barriers,” and where “reforms” and “security” can be implemented.

So we are dealing here with a spatial pattern of metaphors, where the welfare space is opposed to the “society of lack” that many Danes knew from the post-war period.⁸ In its 1973 working plan, the Social Democrats thoroughly described the “safety net” that was to be constructed under citizens in “the modern welfare society.”⁹ The house metaphor is not substantial, but it forms a clear metonymic

basis in the imagery used, and it has a reference back to the biblical metaphoric of the house and the temple building that was used in the labour movement songs from the end of the 19th century, where for example Ulrich Peter Overby made use of biblical expression when writing about the new society as “a strong house we build to protect us in need” (Overby 1871).

The right-wing liberal party, Venstre, had also started to adopt the welfare concept. In 1969, Venstre talked about replacing “the cold society” by a “human society of well-being,” and it quickly transpired that the welfare idea was linked to the idea of new building in the form of modern villages or single-family residential areas that ought to be spread out around the country, cf. the party programme *Frem mod år 2000* [*On towards the year 2000*]. For Venstre, the core metaphor of the welfare state is not a functionalistic rented dwelling but a single-family house by the village pond.

In 1973, a crucial general election took place, with the old established parties and their welfare ideas being challenged by various new parties. The so-called “Single-Family Party,” Centrum Demokraterne, along with the Progress Party, Fremskridtspartiet, got into the Danish parliament. The Centre Democrat Erhard Jacobsen, left the Social Democrats in protest against the party’s policy towards the growing middle stratum of car and single-family-house owners, and the Progress Party rode on a wave of protest against the burden of taxation and the growing public sector of the welfare state.

“The landslide election” quickly became the popular term for the dramatic election which meant that the old parties lost many seats, while the Progress Party at one swoop became the second-largest political party in Denmark.

The “landslide” metaphoric relates to a number of linguistic images that the old parties had liked to use, with such expressions as basis, foundation, reorganisation and expansion had implied the coming into existence of a societal architecture, a building that was safe and secure.

With the “landslide election,” the very basis for the welfare architecture and its cultural landscape seemed to be in danger. The chairman of the Social Democrats, Anker Jørgensen, had to hand over the premiership to Venstre’s Poul Hartling, who in his first New Year Speech in 1974 spoke of a need for a *sanering* (renovation) of the welfare state, which as he interpreted as expressing the will of the people. The Danish word used had definitely been chosen with care: something had to be changed and modernised, but the welfare building was to endure.

The building and space pattern also unfolds in the rhetoric of many of the new right-wing politicians. In the first programme of the Progress Party in 1973 the

concept of “sanering”(renovation) is very central. The Social Democratic society is seen in terms of imagery as being a dilapidated house that needs renovating, and Mogens Glistrup emphasises in a party-political letter to Poul Møller in 1973 that the Progress Party wishes to strengthen “Denmark as a business” and deliver the welfare state and its social “safety net” from the “plethora of paperwork” and “jungle of laws.”¹⁰ We have Glistrup painting on the one hand a horror scenario of an antediluvian despotism of paperwork, and on the other hand a dangerous Social Democratic jungle, an untamed world of nature that threatens the welfare state — a concept that Glistrup in this context completely appropriates to himself.

Even though Glistrup and his Progress Party did not have any major influence on policy, he had captured a political platform in the Danish parliament, and he made use of a political rhetoric that re-echoed in the whole of Danish society, challenging the prevalent, somewhat cautious architectural welfare metaphor, though with a clear reference to precisely core concepts in this metaphoric: the house, path, plot, growth, health and security net.¹¹ Mogens Glistrup thus supplied an almost performative linguistic turn in the political life of the time that had far greater importance than his many political proposals (cf. Kuur Sørensen 104).

Welfare Metaphors at Work

An important feature of the establishment of the welfare state was a dramatic change of the old patriarchal family. A new family structure with two breadwinners out at work, consisting of father, mother and children, rapidly gained ground in Denmark in the period from the 1960s and into the 1970s, and it was supported by legislation and government resolutions concerning maternity leave, family planning, the expansion of day-care centres and care of the elderly (cf. Borchorst 189 ff.). So already in its developmental phase the welfare state is on its way into a societal situation where nothing is given in advance as regards father, mother, grandparents or children. The family becomes a temporary community, loosely connected by sex roles that are also rapidly being reformulated as the state assumes the role of the framework around a security societal family that lives in a “home of the people.”¹²

On the front pages of the Social Democratic programmes one can notice the changes. The picture on an election programme from 1951 shows a mother with two sons and a daughter standing outside their small non-detached, waving goodbye to the father who is off to work. The caption beneath is the word “Security.”

The mother and children belong to the home, but the entire family is in fact on its way out of the terrace house, and the younger girl would clearly like to be off

with her father. The picture looks like an omen that in the generation of the younger girl women too will be part of the labour market, and that the state will come to take over many of the tasks previously taken care of by the patriarchal family. The members of the family are on their way away from each other in various directions: work, school and institution, and the welfare state are to be the secure framework, the pleasant non-detached house that encloses the life of the family.

Sixty years later, the Social Democrats choose a different metaphoric to express their welfare ideals. In their programme of principles from 2011 we see a little girl sitting on a jetty, her face turned away from us, out towards the open sea. She is hugging a doll. She is alone, and the caption just says “hånden på hjertet” (= hand on the heart = in all good conscience, honestly and truly). Here the welfare state is presented as a kind of invisible lifeguard-parent that has taken over responsibility for the individual’s life. The family relations have lost their significance, but the child’s biological parents can rest assured — the welfare state takes care of and watches over every single member of society, like a lifeguard over the little girl on the great jetty of life. The welfare state is not there for families; it is there for each and every citizen. It is no longer presented as a secure single-family house and a cosy societal family but as a surrounding world with opportunities and dangers and as an invisible being that is always there for individuals — the hand that touches the heart.

The changes to family relations were supported by the fact that Denmark, after a municipal reform in 1971, experiences a centralisation of the administrative system of the public authorities and of such welfare institutions as hospitals and schools. The economic crisis, which really accelerates after the major energy crisis that starts in 1974, leaves long-lasting traces through the 1970s and has a profound influence on the development of society up to the turn of the millennium. There are geographical areas and occupations that never recover after the crisis and are gradually phased out. The welfare developments thus also become geographically out of synch with each other. Developments take place more quickly in the major towns than in local areas in the country, but everywhere they are promoted by the idea of growth and development.

The programmes of the political parties around the mid 1970s are full of plus-words relating to well-being, growth and security. *Venstre*’s programme from 1975 has the title “We want to make society warmer” — which could, more or less, also have been said by the *Social Democrats*, if there had not been certain old core metaphors to cultivate, such as “solidarity.” *The Social Liberal Party* [Det Radikale Venstre] stands united under the headline “A step on the way to a better

society.” *The Social Democrats* invite social debate with their motto “Solidarity, equality and well-being”; *The Socialist People’s Party* expresses the wish for “A new development — a new society” (1976), while *The Conservative People’s Party*, also in the mid 1970s, repeats its headline from 1972 “Security in one’s own home.”

Under the influence of the crisis, the *Social Democrats* state that they have recognised “that there are boundaries for growth in quantity. For growth in quality there are no boundaries.” It is here a question of creating “enhanced quality of life.” “security for all” and “a feeling of belonging to society,” also via economic democracy.¹³

The way to growth and well-being takes a different direction with *Venstre*, where the emphasis is on “co-responsibility” and “co-influence” and a strengthening of “the local community” if well-being and growth are to be promoted. It is stressed that the rationalisation of schools, hospitals, transport and police has jeopardised many values. “Did one think of the children’s well-being in the school? Did one think of the increased distance between the patients and their relations? What became of the individual in all this? What became of the joy in working?”¹⁴

The idea of the local community and the values which women’s care of children and the old once represented are eagerly advanced in several of the party programmes. But the point is that the traditional tasks and skills of women as regards the family are now best taken care of by society. Growth and well-being are within all areas conditioned by the development of a close, warm society that may well resemble the old nuclear family, but with the key point that the state has taken the place of the reigning head of the family.

What gender, though, is the welfare state? Is it a father or a mother? As a parent it resembles a *bricolage* of cultural values that relate to both the patriarchal family’s male and female sex roles. It is a commanding and caring construction that can manifest itself both as warm, helping hands, as the far-reaching arm of the law, as the voices of teachers or as an electronic GPS, sewn into one’s clothes, that is to prevent the senile from getting lost from the nursing home.

The relation between citizen and state often has a physical dimension in the form of treatment, care and attention. The individual citizen meets changing representatives of the state, but the welfare state finds it difficult to manifest itself as a unified entity or figure — it is a space or a metonymic pattern: it is hands, voices, text, aids, teaching, treatment and flow of money. The metaphor of the house and the family therefore becomes important for politicians in their

concretisation of the idea of the welfare state. The welfare house and the family of society gather together the metonymy and make the idea visible to citizens.

Kirsten Thorup, Vibeke Grønfeldt and Jette Drewsen work quite deliberately with the special possibility modern literature offers to, on the one hand, imitate all discourses (political, religious, scientific, personal) and, on the other hand, to interpret them in different ways and inscribe them into a special, subjective discourse (cf. Dines 100). In their literary publications there are involved in the many changes to society and culture that take place in the period in which they make their debuts, but the welfare thematic is often not obvious and programmed, as it is in such an older prose writer as Martha Christensen (1926–95), whose debut novel from 1962 *Vær god ved Remond* [*Be nice to Remond*], relates in a simple, somewhat naive realism the story of a mentally retarded boy who is placed in a children's home.

The welfare themes in the three writers and their generation weave in and out of linguistic and aesthetic challenges of contemporary ideas and values, also including the political welfare rhetoric, both the deep framing of the welfare state and the strong patterns of metaphors that emerge to do with house, home, family and growth.

Family, House and Home

Shortly before the important general election of 4 December 1973, which turned the political situation in Denmark upside-down, Kirsten Thorup's debut novel *Baby* was published, which can be read as a linguistic-aesthetic challenging of the welfare metaphoric. The novel did not mark Kirsten Thorup's popular breakthrough, but it is one of the works that has subsequently been the subject of both other writers' interest and intense analysis. Kirsten Thorup says about *Baby*: "The world that the language in *Baby* paints is very fluid and lacks cohesion. It is quite deliberate that there is no difference between whether the book describes a table or a thought, but links all the clauses and sentences with 'and'" (Juhl 102).

Baby is based on the young writer's and young mother's own experience of the Copenhagen precinct of Vesterbro, full of old-fashioned prostitutes and pickpockets, but also typified by slums, crime and hard drugs. It is a social field undergoing a transformation from an almost cosy old-fashioned criminal and slum precinct to a tough urban district populated by the losers and outsiders of the welfare state. The action centres on a circle of people living in this environment. It is a gallery of big-city existences in a social and psychological conflict with themselves and each other. Thorup's novel deals with single parents, petty

criminals, unemployed, abortion-seekers and drug-addicts who are precisely the types who ought to be included in the socialising safety net of welfare legislation, but who apparently fall through the loose mesh, and where at last they are “caught up with,” the help offered seems a parody and frightening.

Thorup emphasises that the description of the characters has almost been stripped of stories about childhood or geographical past. The characters only exist in their now and present habitats; they are without psychological depth and function as mirror for each other.

The focusing of the novel on the present time results in the reader having difficult in following a temporal progression: it seems as if the time-span of the novel is about a year, around 1971–72. The narrative starts in February, and one can follow a progression up to September and into the winter months, but the sequence is interrupted by illogical jumps between seasons in several chapters,¹⁵ and one soon discovers that place and space are more important for the characters than time. Time is stationary, while place and space bind and hold the characters in a vacuum and interspace between life and death. Place and space are precisely not secure places to stay, but are some sort of non-places the characters move around between without either dwelling or existing there. While the contemporary political rhetoric is overflowing with concepts of a welfare future that is being created and shaped here and now via reforms, time does not make any impact on the universe of the novel. While the political rhetoric implies that ‘in time’ advance and progress comes, time flows without direction and amorphously in Thorup’s novel.

The novel centres on the middle chapter “I Am a Soft Ice, I Am a Tough Guy,” which deals with the antique dealer and money lender Eddy, who the other characters are dependent on. The car salesman Marc owes Eddy money; Marc’s wife — with the car-name Cadett, sleeps with him for money; the gay couple Ivan and Ric are his henchmen and gorillas; Leni, who earns money from translating porno, is his former wife; the single mother Karla with the boyfriend, the upper-class boy David, rent one of his slum properties; the transvestite Jolly Daisy appears in the club milieu that Eddy frequents and meets a number of the other characters: the young girl, Nova, who has run away from home; and the dishwasher, Susi, who is in love with David and becomes a “gay-mother” for Ric and Ivan.

Eddy is a kind of criminal “spider” who holds the others caught in his web of power, violence and money. He is the patriarch in a criminal parallel society beyond the law and order of the welfare state. The paradox, however, is that the welfare state makes use even so of Eddy’s power and his unscrupulous property speculation.

The welfare institutions make their appearance in the universe of the novel when Marc, hopelessly in debt after having lost his job, and his wife decide to move into The Men's Home (an institution where men with problems can spend the night free of charge), an organisation to help drug addicts, and then Nova and Sonja murder a random car-driver and end up at a rural borstal, the human climate of which proves to be as cold as ice, despite the beautiful farming idyll with animals and fields. The welfare institutions that ought to help to bring people back into secure frameworks actually keep their clients on the periphery of society, and with a view of an abyss.

The flat that the state eventually offers the single mother Karla is a parody of a dwelling — it is unhealthy, dilapidated, a pure slum dwelling that ends up causing the death of Karla's daughter — it also happens to be owned by the villain Eddy.

The novel does not apportion guilt or responsibility — it blames neither society nor individuals, but shows the welfare society to be an ambiguous structure in which people try to survive by establishing, for better or for worse, human relations and a "family." The welfare institutions, however, undermine precisely these relations, since they strive to take over the role of the family and place themselves in its stead. So the institutions take measures against the makeshift families that the characters attempt to form. The characters are admittedly included in the country's laws and welfare, but it is precisely these laws and welfare that isolate them from each other and banish them to the periphery of society. The welfare architecture is neither secure nor healthy as either a symbolical or physical place to live.

The novel thus assimilates and processes political and socio-analytical discourses in such a way that they are at the same time both used and rejected.

On the basis of Rancière's ideas about literature and politics, one can claim that the novel at the level of form and aesthetics underlines the importance of artistic language as a discourse that can critically interpret the language and concepts of politics and thematise how staple societal metaphors can artistically be challenged.

When the romantic all-mother/all-father/all-baby, the transvestite Jolly Daisy, finally invites the porno translator Leni in to a nativity-play-like scene with night-stars and heavenly peace, Kirsten Thorup attempts in a way to reformulate a biblical metaphoric of the holy family and the child that was born in a manger. One can view this final scene as an allegorical comment on the secure societal family of the political rhetoric, a comment that points out that one has to start right from square one with the biblical metaphoric of the labour movement and also think in

new gender constructions if the societal house is to be built out of closeness and humanity.

Time Creates New Wounds

While Thorup's characters fight to establish alternatives to both the patriarchal family and the new state welfare's father-and-mother, Jette Drewsen's novel *Tid og sted* (*Time and Place*, 1978) tells of a characteristic tendency to drain the family of its functions and tasks in the establishment phase of the welfare state. The novel portrays a group of people — school friends, relations, acquaintances — dipping into various points in time from March 1961 to October 1976.

The family appears as a social relation that is becoming increasingly unstable. It is no longer a rock-solid 'father house' that the women fight to break free of.¹⁶

Like Kirsten Thorup, Jette Drewsen challenges a conception of time that moves forwards and brings progress with it, as she breaks down the traditional chronology of the novel: she starts with an account of the characters in April 1974 and then moves back to March 1961, followed by March 1966 and October 1968. The final chapter can be dated to October 1976. In the course of the almost fifteen years a number of the characters have become parents, but the family structure that they themselves have experienced as children is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Their own parents have become old age pensioners who arrange their lives and speak in a way that the family's grandchildren simply cannot comprehend. The social and cultural development creates a language gaps that kept people apart from each other.

Jette Drewsen portrays various variations of the new family relations in the novel: a middle-class married couple (the doctor Ejvind and the doctor's secretary Elise) with half-adult children, on their way towards infidelity and divorce; a working-class family (the checkout assistant Ingrid and the taxi chauffeur Niels), who stay together despite the man's infidelity; a lesbian university teacher (Helle), who lives on her own; a young unemployed academic woman (Birgitte), who moves into a commune with her child and deselects her child's father; a woman journalist (Laila), who when very young had an abortion without her parents knowing about it, but who as an adult decides to have her child when she becomes pregnant after a one-night stand (with Ejvind) and to find a social father for the child. This she finds in an elderly man who functions as both father, grandfather and child in the family — for as long as it lasts. He is shunted out of the makeshift family rather fortuitously after a somewhat scary "evening at home."

When Helle and Ejvind's mother dies, death is not felt to be a striking

or important event by those left behind — it is got over quickly, quietly and anonymously. Helle uses the death as an excuse to visit a female friend she is interested in as a sex partner, while Ejvind takes a sleeping powder. Later, the two intellectual siblings start to ‘theorise’ about the mother’s death, since the actual emotional relation seems to have disintegrated. The daughter-in-law, Elise, feels herself hard-pressed and “deprived of the right to grieve for someone who had been close to her” (Drewsen 173).

In the course of the 15 years covered by the novel, the single, divorced parent becomes a characteristic figure, and those who do not get divorced during those 15 years weigh up their situation and think about a possible way out of the “decorative family” (Drewsen 177).

Emotionally, however, the characters have come to a standstill: they are caught in the childhood they never managed to round off, because the development of welfare got rid of childhood’s form of the family “overnight,” so to speak, before they were ready to take over control of their lives themselves, and they still miss their parents as parents. Their hold a field of possibility open, rather than assume the role of responsible participants in close human relationships.

Nothing is sure any longer except the need of the individual for a closeness and intimacy that no longer has a social space. It is a difficult project to constantly have to balance the family relationship and one’s own role.

The individual breaks free of the family ties that have limited people morally and socially, but the emancipated life is full of emotional costs and restlessness. And at such a time of upheaval, it is not really acceptable to be content with one’s life, one’s husband and one’s children. The checkout assistant Ingrid is almost ashamed about still being in love with her husband. She feels it is problematic that she has no desire to liberate herself, and that she tolerates his relationship with other women.

As a counter-image to the imploding family there is the depiction in the middle of the novel of women’s lives in a high-rise block of flats where some of the characters live for a while. The women meet in the wash house in the basement where they exchange their experiences with and of children, marriage and work. They are on maternity leave, are housewives or have half-day jobs, and in that way are neither submerged in family life or work. There is a kind of “ritual intimacy” (ibid 107) between the women of an almost mythical nature. “The women at the well” is the archaic title of the chapter about the wash house.

One can draw a parallel between this scene and the image of the holy family at the end of Kirsten Thorup’s novel *Baby*, although the conception of the alternative

to the imploded family in Drewsen has a form closer to reality and links up with ideas in contemporary housing.

The high-rise block becomes a small welfare idyll where, even if one does not “matter to each other,” one is at least able to behave humanely, considerately and empathetically. The actual form of housing with flats makes it possible for the women to pop into each other’s homes and share washing machines in the basement. This social mixing promotes conversations, and on the day in 1966 that the chapter describes there is a TV transmission of the wedding of the Dutch crown princess to a German. Here the state even displays a human face, with the pictures of a young successor and her husband to be!

The women use the TV broadcast as an occasion to talk about their own weddings, their married lives and their children. The newly married Elise does not join them in the TV room to begin with, but manages even so to ask the more experienced women about “additions to the family” during their time together in the basement wash house. “Yes, but when it’s suddenly there like that, a child you’ve not known before at all, can you actually find time for it and afford it? — Tell me, have you got into trouble or something, Ingrid said and laughed. — Well, not trouble exactly, I’m married after all, but. — Are you quite sure? — Not completely. And it wasn’t precisely the idea. — It’s very rarely precisely the idea, Margit said” (Ibid 100). The description of the child as a stranger who disturbs the relationship between man and woman displays the challenges brought about by the new aspects of married life.

The intimacy between the women is greater than between spouses, even bosom friends will not share everything. Margit declares that she stays with her husband because she can’t be alone; Ingrid recalls her first boyfriend and would like to meet him again, but enjoys her husband, Niels, also sexually, and thinks that he resembles the bridegroom in the TV wedding. The chapter about the women at “the well” sketches a small welfare idyll where the women are neither condemned to loneliness, the twosomeness of marriage or the patriarchal family. But the idyll is only a “breather” between the many changes taking place in society and the family.

When Laila becomes pregnant, she manages without her family’s knowledge or help from her boyfriend to get an abortion based on her mental condition — the novel takes place long before the introduction of free abortion. The meeting with the hospital is as cold as ice — and the staff is full of hypocrisy. Everyone knows why Laila has been admitted — because she wants an abortion — but officially it is classified as pelvic infection. She is referred to a male psychiatrist, a consultant doctor who interrogates her in an insulting way about her sexual habits while

putting on a smiling face and suggesting they use first names. He finally speeds up the conversation; after interesting details about condoms and pubic hair all he wants to do is get the “case” over and recommend an abortion:

The consultant doctor asked, more quickly now, the patient answered also quickly, he asked what she felt when she saw a pram, she answered insecurity and despair, he asked what she had thought in her darkest hours, she answered abortionists and suicide, he asked what she thought when she saw a handicapped child, she answered fright. (Ibid: 69)

Hospital communication demonstrates the incapacity of the professional helpers and their curious looks into a situation in which the family of the young girl is completely absent and is to be kept in the dark about a pregnancy that is regarded as shameful. Later in the novel we see another hospital situation, where the doctor shows a lack of consideration: Gert studies the X-rays of one of his patients, somewhat absent-mindedly, while talking to his mistress.

He leant back slightly and read the name on the case record. Then he looked up at the photos again and said it was a good thing it wasn't someone one knew and was fond of who looked like that inside. There couldn't be long to go now. (Ibid 169)

The welfare institutions, in the optic of the novel, simply lack human qualities and become untrustworthy as replacements for the family in relation to children, the elderly and the sick. In Drewsen, the welfare institutions are male, in the form of doctors who believe they have the power of life and death, although also the women who work in the institutions lack the capacity to care.

The characters do not mature and their welfare lives have to be told piece by piece and divided into short situations and intermezzos. Neither a happy outcome nor a complete tragedy are possible. Life, the changes and difficulties, simply continue year in and year out — strangely endlessly.

The Cost of Growth

While Kirsten Thorup and Jette Drewsen show the schism between disintegrating forms of the family and the emergence of new welfare-institutionised parents, we find the growth metaphoric of the welfare state dealt with, among other things, in Vibeke Grønfeldt's novel *Det rigtige* (*The Right Thing*, 1999), which is a

contemporary novel, written on the threshold of the new millennium. The novel looks both backwards and forwards in time, while telling the story of Ena Jakobsen, who is delivery woman for a laundry in a small peripheral community that is dominated by old people and odd-balls. Ena spends all her spare time maintaining her family's nursery, which was ruined when the convenience shops started to import vegetables from all over the world on a large scale. Now Ena takes care of the nursery, showing it to people as a kind of museum and cultivating magnificent specimens of vegetables and flowers which she, like some self-appointed welfare worker gives away to the local elderly, weak and various specially selected groups.

Ena has always striven to do things rightly and properly. She was brought up to live up to an ideal of “a nice girl.” “The right thing” represents the good, useful and well-carried-out piece of work; “the right thing” is the moral norms, virtues and rules of rural society in relation to the family, the social community and the female sex. “The right thing” is to contribute actively to the well-being of the family, the maintenance of the community and mastering one's sex role.”

As a child and teenager, Ena was a competent girl who also managed to keep the nursery afloat economically when her father fell ill and her maternal grandfather had to give up. Now most of Ena's projects fail, except the nursery museum: here she always keeps abreast of the slightest sign of any decline. Everything is scrupulously ordered and maintained. Ena gets one step ahead of the inevitable wear and tear of materials: “It became almost better than when it was in use. The wear and tear was less. She could expand. [...] It was all ready for use. All that had to be done was to press a button, her mother said proudly.” (Grønfeldt 23) Ena has become a female inheritor of her ancestors' dreams of a nursery, but the dreams have been transformed into a museum extravaganza after the changes to social and working life that modernisation and the development of the welfare state have entailed.

The story of Ena ends badly, and it is her anger that takes her over the edge to which she clings.

Ena is angry that the growth which is part of the development of the welfare state has led to the very basis of the family's existence withering away; she is angry that her proficiency and industry, her loyalty to the “well-mannered school” is not rewarded by the development of society, but instead is punished — even mocked — and her loyalty leads socially to her becoming increasingly isolated. She is angry at being angry, and her anger is hard to place. It is admittedly Ena who shouts and scolds, but the replies and conduct that come from the representatives of the welfare institutions and her work colleagues actually contain an aggression

and anger that hit Ena hard and are felt to be physical violence. Ena is the one who expresses the anger, but she is not the sole cause of it.

Vibeke Grønfeldt develops the anger issue of the novel by introducing some of the core metaphors of the welfare state that deal with growth, development well-being into her universe and by showing them in a critical light.

In the optic of the novel, the welfare system works and yet does not work, for example in relation to Ena's younger brother, Oscar. He is a drug-addict, formerly convicted and mentally ill, and as such has been installed in his own flat and has got a light job at a library. But the welfare system and the male figures of authority lack the human understanding, solicitude and patience that the women exercised in the patriarchal family of the former society. The policeman who comes at the request of the neighbours to make Ena see reason and calm her down does not discover just how bad things are.

The welfare state knows best, but it does not see things particularly clearly when it comes to providing care and security, and refuses to recognise Ena's earnest struggle to retain the values and world of her family. She ought to abandon the nursery, send her mother to a nursing home, get herself a job or apply for social security benefit!

Ena manages to procure a financial help for her nursery by becoming a chauffeur for a laundry that, among other things, serves social clients, and she feels that she is now at last on her way towards what is 'right'. The clean laundry helps to get both the social clients, children, drug-addicts and formerly punished back onto an even keel. "Ena Jakobsen believed in the result of common efforts. Those of the local authorities, police, doctors, school. It is possible, what's right" (Ibid 13). Ena uses her eyes and tells of mishandled children in the homes round about that she gets to see, but the social workers and council workers say they know everything in advance. Her observations are ignored, and she gets the impression that social workers, educationalists and doctors consider her a naive person who is a nuisance. She stops noticing what takes place around her. Only the bitter feelings inside her grow at the same rate as the well-formed apples in her garden.

One can view the two "activities" in Ena's life: the nursery of her childhood and the laundry of her adult life as societal metaphors: the nursery represents the old, patriarchal local community, where time and place, working life and family life were in balance. The nursery is an enterprise with meaningful work assignments and a solid basis of existence for the men, women and children of the family. Furthermore, the nursery contributes to a local division of labour, since it provides the local area with the vegetables, the fruit and the flowers that the more specialised

farms and workmen of the local area do not have time to cultivate themselves. The family works at the nursery in harmony with the seasons and uses nature without exploiting it, even though the use of toxic pesticides starts to increase in the course of Ena's childhood and adolescence. The father's illness is also taken care of within the framework of the family, since Ena — as if she was his son — simply takes over his work. This shift in the traditional division of labour between the sexes is marked symbolically by the fact that Ena steps outside the moral order of the local community, becomes sexually active while unmarried — even pregnant. She manages discreetly to get a half-illegal abortion carried out by the local doctor. The change in the sex roles gives her a certain power over her own body, but also increases the possibility of her inflicting pain and suffering on herself. The increased use of toxic pesticides in the nursery, the protracted illness of the father and Ena's sexuality and abortion are thus signs that neither the old sex roles nor the old order of society can be maintained.

The warm, close, responsible and solitary growth society, where the female caring assignments are to be society's responsibility and that politicians spoke of in the early 1970s when Ena was young, wither with the increasing centralisation and the economic interventions that comes with the expansion of the welfare state. The productive 'greenhouse' is replaced by the servicing and universalistic welfare laundry, whose rationalised services can be accessed by both the doctor's family and the social clients — their economic capacity being duly taken into account, it should be noted. But the laundry only provides “surface treatment.”

When Ena's anger finally overpowers her, she burns the nursery down to the ground. She is given a suspended sentence, and the welfare state steps in, as Ena and her mother are placed in sheltered housing. “Now she is safeguarded and only needs to choose the right thing and do the right thing” (Ibid 307). But “the stillness fills up with meaninglessness. Or the meaning is emptied and echoes in the late afternoon when the postman has driven past” (Ibid 311).

In the concluding chapters of the novel, Ena takes to the bottle, is raped and ends up being pumped out with a broken arm and in the course of her confused downward spiral she passes a large boulder in the breakers. She embraces the stone and suddenly feels understood, believed in and remembered.

The image does not imply any redemption or release, but if Ena has not got solid ground under her feet, she has at least a very hard stone in her embrace. The story of Ena has comprised the elements: earth (the nursery), water and air (the laundry) and fire (the burning down of the nursery). The stone, as an old, volcanic material, unites all the elements, and the concluding images give the

novel a symbolic touch that underlines the fact that it is not exclusively a realistic analysis of society but a complex artistic image of the uncertain feelings that are also connected to life and sex when placed under pressure by the development of a modern society.

The novel does not idealise the old local society with the nursery as a lost paradise, a societal Garden of Eden; it captures Ena in a number of strong glimpses in which we perceive both the hard toil of the old world and the just as hard emancipation of the individual in the new world.

In the novel, Vibe Grønfeldt rejects an idealisation of the past or a mythologizing of an evil and ramshackle present, where it is a shame for the peripheral areas, for women and the elderly; but she *is* interested in how anger comes into being and is fuelled when Ena is unable to find her rightful place in life, and when her self-observations cause her both to grow to giant size and to shrink to absolutely nothing. Grønfeldt gives this imbalance and this anger a voice, showing it to be a force that grows out of what, unstated, has disappeared during the development of the welfare society and its adaptation to economic crises.

In Vibeke Grønfeldt, the explanations cannot be pushed on the back burner, and the language of the novel becomes as restless and anxious as the characters themselves: Ena's life cannot be reduced to an effect, but not be summed up in other ways either. The descriptions both conceal and reveal other meanings all the time.

Two different types of art are mentioned in the novel: the recent arrival Edel Borg's complete failure of a performance of sections of West Side Story and La Traviata and Schubert lieder, and the virtuoso performance by the singer Marianne Berg of extracts of Verdi in the church. The two types of singing complement each other as an image of the fact that art may stretch from *bel canto* to shrieking and squalling if it is to approach the human and be open for interpretation. And it is quite characteristic that the two types of art are executed by women — it is the female sex that is placed under the severest pressure by the new welfare life, and that therefore calls for artistic interpretation.

The women end up by carrying out a self-annihilating gesture in maintaining a social order that, with far too little success, took over their responsibility and tasks in the family, in the name of progress, emancipation and welfare.

The welfare state itself appears at the end of the novel as steps, voices, friendly hospital orderlies and friendly helpers with nice, shiny trays with food in the sheltered housing. The welfare state is anonymous metonymic remains of something has gradually become rather indefinably human.

The helping hand, which is one of the welfare state's strongest metonymies and which has been used both in connection with health campaigns and protests against reductions of social benefits, is here shown in its anonymity and its difficulty in trying to be caring and considerate.¹⁷ From her sheltered housing, Ena has a view of a field where in time more social housing is going to be built: she is quite literally becoming hemmed in by welfare.

But then she nevertheless finds the great fairytale stone at the end of the work, and this is perhaps precisely what she is in need of. To embrace something large and incomprehensible, the cold stone from the beginning of time brings a peace to her body that Ena has not known before. The semantic universe of the novel thus opens out towards what is uninterested, untold and uncertain from a human and social point of view. The art of novel writing continues.

The novels *Baby*, *Tid og sted* and *Det rigtige* are examples of how the linguistic framing of the welfare state and its metaphorical patterns are investigated and challenged in some of the most important oeuvres of the welfare period. As an extension of the ideas of Jacques Rancière about literature and society, one can claim that the three novels bring phenomena to do with the change of the family and the cost of growth into a common social space and help to make a critique of the core metaphors of political language sayable and audible.

Notes

1. Cf. Hjordt-Vetlesen (2002), Zeuthen (2008), *Passages* special issue on Kirsten Thorup, no. 56, 2006. Various dissertations were also written which dealt with the authorship of Jette Drewsen, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, e.g. Munch-Hansen (1999)
2. The linguistic framing of the welfare state is discussed in the political debate book *Velfærd tur-retur. Efter socialdemokratismens sammenbrud* (*Welfare here and back. After the collapse of Social Democracy*, 2005), in which Niels Lillelund in the article “Social Democratic language” proposes that the whole Danish language has been influenced by the Social Democratic framing of the welfare state. Social Democratic language has removed the welfare state from reality and made the word “social” an absolute password that all parties have adopted” (Lillelund 2005: 24).
3. For a more detailed account of the history of the welfare concept see Petersen 2002: 15 ff.
4. Cf. Anders Thyrring Andersen, who in the article “The dialogic-religious welfare principle in Harald Høffding, Ole Sarvig, Martin A. Hansen, Peter Seeberg and Svend Åge Madsen,” Andersen 2011, has provided a detailed analysis of the discussion between Brandes and Høffding as well as of the importance of the welfare concept in Høffding.
5. “These (deep frames) are the most basic frames that constitute a moral worldview or a political

philosophy. Deep frames define one's overall "common sense." Without deep frames, there is nothing for surface frames to hang on to. Slogans do not make sense without the appropriate deep frames." (Lakoff 2006: 29)

6. Cf. *ibid.* and cf. Madsen 2006: 107, who bases himself on Klaus Petersen's studies.

7. The politicians Karsten Lauritzen and Kristian Pihl Lorentzen have both used the concept on their websites.

8. Cf. The Social Democrats' party programme. *Det nye samfund – 70'ernes politik vedtaget af den 30. kongres* [The new society – policy for the 1970s, approved by the 30th congress] 1969.

9. Cf. The Social Democrats: *Work programme 1973*.

10. The letter has been published at the website of The Royal Danish Library: http://www.kb.dk/image_client_static/default/viewer/?viewerPagesUrl=online_master_arkiv_2/nonarchival/PLG/Partiprogrammer/fremskridtpartiet/fre19731/&viewerPgNumber=0&viewerR2L=false#

11. In connection with the research project Velfærdsstatens sprog og begreber [The language and concepts of the welfare state], led by Klaus Petersen, SDU (2010-2014), Lasse Horne Kjældgaard has discussed the house and the path as basic welfare state metaphors; I have contributed to the further analysis of these metaphors and would underline that they have roots in the Social Democratic biblically coloured metaphors from the end of the 19th century. The political rhetoric revolves round these metaphors, also when such concepts as basis, structure, common property, expansion, health, well-being and care are included.

12. For a more detailed account of changes to the family structure during the development of the welfare state, see: Christoffersen 2004. Here it states: "The censuses and the later occupational statistics combined with the statistical umbrella surveys have made it possible to follow developments within this area. By the nature of things, one will be inclined to underestimate the extent of the housewife role in such surveys because a large number of women can have been housewives for shorter or longer periods without that being the case on precisely the day they were interviewed. From 1940 to 1965, almost half the women between 15 and 74 were full-time housewives on the day of the survey. This share then dropped sharply. In 1990, housewives only made up 5% of the same group of women on the day of the interview.

In 1960, one can observe a very clear tendency for large numbers of women to stop being engaged in active employment at about 25, i.e. when they start to have children [...]. While two thirds of the 20-year-olds were in active employment, only one third of the 30-years-olds were back in 1960. This pattern has changed completely 25 years later. Firstly, the 25-30 year-olds have a very high level of active employment, almost 90%. In the age groups where the women have young children, they maintain a high level of active employment in 1985. 15 years later, the picture has changed, since a considerably larger percentage of the young women under 30 are still in education or training. So the figure for 2000 is considerably lower for the extremely young

women than was the case around 1985.” (Christoffersen 2004: 130).

13. Cf. The Social Democrats, *Solidarity, equality and well-being*, 1975: 9.

14. Cf. Venstre, *We want to make society warmer*, 1975: 2

15. Susanne Pedersen emphasises these chronological breaks in her analysis of *Baby*. (Pedersen 1997: 37 ff.).

16. The concept refers to the depiction by female writers of marriage and the family in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century; the expression comes from the Swedish writer Fredrika Bremer and is the title of Vol. II of *Nordisk kvinde litteratur historie*, [*The History of Nordic Female Literature*] 1993, <http://nordicwomensliterature.net/>, 2010.

17. See for example the use by Tønder Municipality of the hand as a metonym in its approach to elderly citizens who are in need of personal help and care: <http://www.toender.dk/Borger/Aeldre-/Personlig-og-praktisk-hjaelp.aspx>

In connection with protests against welfare cuts in 2007, social and health workers used the hand as a poster with the text ‘L <http://www.foa.dk/Global/News/Forbundsnyheder/Forbundsnyheder/2012/Oktober/Sosu-ere-er-ikke-de-eneste%20varme>

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The Artist's Hand: The Aesthetics of Loss in Paul Auster's *Sunset Park*

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Abstract Paul Auster's novel *Sunset Park* is an experiment in realism. The experiment consists in trying to dissolve and then reconstruct the relation between thing and sign, *res* and *signum*. In order to accomplish this reconstruction the narrative focuses on characters, most of whom are artists and intellectuals, who in one way or another have become victims of the economic crisis that set in in the year 2008. Four of these characters squat in an abandoned house in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, where they attempt to create an alternative life style and, in the case of one of them, a young woman painter, Ellen, carry the experiment into a series of nude sketches that combine realism and abstract form in an attempt to capture pure thingness and the in-betweenness of things. Pain and loss, and the remembrance thereof, are transmuted into a new existence emanating from Ellen's unfinished portraits.

Key words Hand as object; creativity and negativity; the margin; fragment; fetish; *res* and *signum*; economic crisis

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See how the sleeping outflung hand, touching the bedside candle, remembers pain, springs back and free while mind and brain sleep on and only make of this adjacent heat some trashy myth of reality's escape: or that same sleeping hand, in sensuous marriage with some dulcet surface, is transformed by that same sleeping brain and mind into that same figment-stuff warped out of all experience.

— William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*

Some shadow's hands moved with my hands
and everything I touched was turned to darkness
and everything I could not touch was light.

— John Glenday, "Etching of a Line of Trees."

In his novel *Sunset Park* (2010) Paul Auster once again focuses on characters that are marginalized in society; the author, or rather the narrator's examination of marginalization strikes me as being radical and unique in several ways. The narrator's voice, speaking consistently in the third person, is disseminated across the field of narration, recording the experience of several characters one by one, mostly employing the present tense, alternating somewhat with the past tense, thus achieving the effect of direct, simultaneous *reportage*, getting close to the characters and at the same time being distanced from them. The result is a *de facto* approach to character and situation where the act of creation does not reside in the narrator but in the character-artists of whom there are several. Subjective experience, deepened by an acute sense of loss and marginality, is presented as a specific mode of creativity in negativity, and the artist's hand is singled out as the subjective *and* objective instrument that presses the button of the camera to take a snapshot, seizes the marker or brush to draw and paint, and holds the pen to write. As the mind sleeps, the hand "springs back and free", recalling pain (Faulkner 115); the hand of the artist is liberated into a negativity not recorded by the brain but existing in its own right as autonomous creative activity in a space where the relations between sign and thing are dissolved and where the hand is severed from the body, picturing, sketching, writing as the subject of art as well as the object of art. Here the hand of the artist is imbued with knowledge of itself as moving with some "shadow" that turns everything touched to "darkness" while also indicating the presence of a "light" — a presence in negativity (Glenday 8). Creating in negativity, the artist's hand attempts to name the unnamable, the discarded; and

it also tries to name itself as an unnamable, discarded object, i.e. as an object participating in the dissolution and (experimental, temporary) reconstitution of the relation between sign and thing.

Presence means existence at the level of the unnamable, and the line “everything I could not touch was light” undergoes subtle changes in meaning according to where the emphasis is put: “*I* could not touch” would mean “the ‘I’ could not touch”; “*I could not touch*” would probably mean “*unable* to touch” as well as “*beyond* touch”; and finally, “*I could not touch*” — most likely the intended meaning — emphasizes the impalpability of *light*. But does “impalpable” signify *unknowable* or may the “light” be approached in the artwork by applying a different method, aesthetically and epistemologically? In what follows I will suggest that the *senses* — sight, hearing, feeling (touch) — provide a more direct form of access to “light” than do mind and thought, at least as they persist, still today, in customary, common psychology and epistemology. The artwork emerges, then, as a form of sensual refinement and as an *object*-ification of subjectivity, combining realistic technique and abstract form. Abstraction involves a radical separation of sign, *signum*, from thing, *res*. *Sunset Park* is a bold attempt to convey the artwork as pure, yet *not absolute thing*, and so the novel manifests itself as a non-Platonic as well as a non-semiotic approach to art in Modernity. Auster’s text reverses the history of semiotics in trying to capture existence prior to the sign.

The narrative process itself, the *reportage*, emulates Faulkner’s “sleeping outflung hand” that remembers pain; but recollection is turned into “some trashy myth of reality’s escape” by the sleeping mind. In the post-Civil War South of Faulkner’s novel real pain is the loss and the disintegration of an entire civilization, a culture perished in a universal conflagration remembered by the multiple narrators whose hands and voices constantly weave their own individual “trashy” myths of “reality’s escape,” and, while doing so, transform the narrative, or narratives into “figment-stuff warped out of all experience”; thus the narrative assumes a tenuous and experimental quality. Still, in Faulkner the dual negativity, *trashy myth* as fatefully conditioned escape; and *figment-stuff*, elevated, perhaps, to an imaginative, poetic reconstruction, the artistic reconstruction of the South one might say, posits a constructive, *supplementary and sublimating* creativity in response to loss. The poetic image springs to life in a modern and Modernist creative process, remembering pain and inserting it into the textual fabric, thereby absolving it from “the sleeping brain and mind”. History is sublimated as recollection dispenses with knowledge of the absolute and the ideal and discards the “remembrance of things past.” Likewise, in Auster’s novel the artist’s hand “remembers pain,” a pain

caused by its own destructive actions — numerous incidents record punching hands and fists — and disseminates that pain throughout the narrative, turning it into an experimental text in the mode of *realism* that blends subjective experience, the voices of the character-artists, with the narrator's recording voice. The result is a weaving of "trashy myths" and "figment-stuff," both of which participate in a dual negativity as in Faulkner. This dual negativity is the effect of a social condition: economic crisis and cultural disintegration in contemporary America. We may trace signs of and parallels to the loss of the South in the contemporary loss. As in *Absalom, Absalom!* loss and dissolution have produced a narrative, *Sunset Park*, that is a *simulation* of realism; however, simulation undergoes a dialectical transformation whereby it turns into a negativity *positing a new creativity* and a new subjective experience forged by *the artist's hand severed from the body and the mind*. The hand of the artist may create figment-stuff warped out of all experience, but it is precisely this warping that signifies the dialectics of negativity forming innovative creative activities in Auster's artists. The narrative voice in itself is not poetic as are the voices in *Absalom, Absalom!*. However, the narrative voice in *Sunset Park* indicates, in a subdued manner, the radical supplementariness of the artwork, suspended in time and space as the negative, or rather, negating pole of a reality where everything is lost. The negativity of shadow and darkness becomes light as the artist's hand touches and does not touch at the same time.

Sunset Park presents a number of marginal persons, male and female, who for one reason or another have decided or been forced to drop out of society. Miles Heller is a 28 year old college drop-out, presently working in Florida as member of a crew of four that go through abandoned houses, i.e. houses people have lost due to the economic crisis, gathering up discarded objects, cleaning the houses and then turning them over to the bank; Miles is the son of Morris Heller, owner and manager of an alternative publishing firm in New York City, himself out on the margins since he belongs to a small and decreasing number of literary publishers still printing and selling fiction that is different, mostly literary works that are not on the popular hitlist. Miles' mother, the actress Mary-Lee Swann, divorced her husband a few months after giving birth to Miles in order to pursue a career in acting, on stage and in film. Morris remarried, to Willa Parks, English Professor, who had a son, Bobby, from a previous marriage. He is Miles' stepbrother, then, and the two of them are so different that they appear as opposites in the narrative, and the opposition never develops into a productive complementarity but remains a stark opposition — Miles being studious, introverted yet physically strong and active, and Bobby being lazy in school, extroverted, temperamental. The difference

in character culminates into a physical confrontation one day they are out walking on a serpentine country road after the car has broken down. They argue, Miles shoves Bobby into the middle of the road, a car approaches unseen from around a bend, runs Bobby over and kills him on the spot. Miles does not tell his parents about his pushing Bobby into the road; he is guilttridden, of course, and this guilt finally leads to his leaving home, dropping out of college and embarking upon the life of the eternal drifter, so abundantly present in American fiction. In Florida he falls in love with a young girl, 17 years old, that is, 11 years his junior, a girl not of age yet with whom he nevertheless shares an apartment. Pilar Sanchez is her name, her parents were killed in a car accident but she has three older sisters the oldest of whom, Angela, “looks after her,” or rather, attempts to control her. Pilar’s sexual relationship to the older man is accepted by Angela but she exploits the fact that her sister is a minor by law, pressuring Miles into giving her discarded objects from the abandoned houses, expensive electronic equipment that has been left behind. He finally refuses and is forced by Angela’s bullies, two thugs, to hand over the objects required or get out. Miles gets out, takes the bus to New York where he moves into another abandoned house in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, occupied by four squatters, including himself: His friend Bing Nathan, drummer in a band called Mob Rule and owner of The Hospital for Broken Things where he repairs broken or outdated electronic equipment, restoring it to life, so to speak; Ellen Brice, painter and sketcher; and Alice Bergstrom, a PhD student working on a thesis about male-female relations as portrayed in post World War II film and fiction. None of them have any money, barely enough for groceries and utilities. They live in the house illegally and are finally evicted forcefully after four eviction notices have been served. During the eviction — which is fairly violent — Miles punches a police officer in the jaw thus breaking the law in a serious way and losing his chance of getting married to Pilar who is waiting for him in Florida.

Miles, Bing, Ellen and Alice have something in common: an interest in, perhaps even an obsession with broken things, or fragments of things, and, particularly in the case of Ellen, the painter, individual body parts, internal and external, that are almost fetishized.

Miles takes photos of abandoned objects in the houses he “trashes out,” as it is called:

Then, always, there are the objects, the forgotten possessions, *the abandoned things*. By now, his photographs number in the thousands, and among his

burgeoning archive can be found pictures of books, shoes, and oil paintings, pianos and toasters, dolls, tea sets, and dirty socks, televisions and board games, party dresses and tennis racquets, sofas, silk lingerie ... (Auster 4).

After moving from Florida to New York Miles starts taking pictures in Green-Wood Cemetery, a seemingly useless project:

He has embarked on another useless project, employing his camera as an instrument to record his stray, useless thoughts, but at least it is something to do, a way to pass the time until his life starts again, and where else but in Green-Wood Cemetery could he have learned that the real name of Frank Morgan, the actor who played the Wizard of Oz, was Wuppermann? (102)

Thus the nameless gain names in his photography; a photo-graphic *mimesis* temporarily discloses the real identity of "Frank Morgan." Dissimulation and the mimetic function merge in an uncanny assembly of shadow and light, death and life, or death reconstructed.

Miles has no idea why he feels compelled to take these photos. The objects possess a curious fascination — an aura emanates from them; it is the uncanny aura of the fetish which Julia Kristeva explores in *Revolution in Poetic Language*:

In order to keep the process signifying, to avoid foundering in an "unsayable" without limits, and thus posit the subject of a practice, the subject of poetic language clings to the help fetishism offers. And so, according to psychoanalysis, poets as individuals fall under the category of fetishism; the very practice of art necessitates the reinvesting the maternal *chora* so that it transgresses the symbolic order; and, as a result, this practice easily lends itself to so-called perverse subjective structures. (65)

While employed in trashing-out in Florida Miles had noticed signs indicative of how the former owners — who during the last few months of their residence occupied their houses like ghosts — abandoned their houses in haste but often not without breaking the furniture, smearing the walls with paint, dumping garbage on the floors in a fit of rage, reacting to bankruptcy and default. These abandoned houses and Miles' photos of the objects in them recall his own autobiographical work *Portrait of an Invisible Man*, a portrait of his father who after the death of his wife lived in his house like a ghost, never really present, piling up dirty dishes

in the kitchen and leaving used razor blades in the bathroom and worn shirts in the bedroom; and Miles' pictures recall the professor, or ex-professor in Part One of *The New York Trilogy*, *City of Glass*, who picks up broken objects in the streets of New York City and proceeds to re-name them, dissolving and recreating the relation between sign and thing. The photos taken by Miles participate in a renaming, or rather, in a process leading to the unnamable, the pre-verbal, analyzed by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*:

In that anteriority to language, the outside is elaborated by means of a projection from within, of which the only experience we have is one of pleasure and pain. An outside in the image of the inside, made of pleasure and pain. The non-distinctiveness of inside and outside would thus be unnamable, a border passable in both directions by pleasure and pain. (61)

In the same work Kristeva talks about “the drive-quality attached to archaic objects” and how that “drive-quality” must be introjected in the individual consciousness; without that introjection, Kristeva says, “pre-objects and objects threaten from without as impurity, defilement, abomination, and eventually they trigger the persecutive apparatus” (116).

Kristeva's analysis is a complex, Freudian interpretation focusing on anthropology and on certain “primitive” practices and rituals resembling poetic practice. Miles is a kind of poet, practising the kind of photography that records objects as the signs of the object, of *abjection*, at this point in history a collective abjection. The 21st century economics and history have determined abjection in the New World; economic collapse has become conducive to a fatal prevention of the usual introjection Kristeva talks about; therefore we have abomination and, in the end the unleashing of the “persecutive powers” in Auster's text — the fist punching the officer and the police forcefully evicting the squatters.

Moreover, the narrator's presentation of the decaying urban environment is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Baroque allegory and its resemblance to modern fragmentation in the *Passagen-Werk*, the Arcades Project. In her work on Benjamin, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, Susan Buck-Morss notes:

The allegorists heaped emblematic images one on top of another, as if the sheer quantity of meanings could compensate for their arbitrariness and lack of coherence. The result is that nature, far from an organic whole, appears in

arbitrary arrangement, as a lifeless, fragmentary, untidy clutter of emblems.
(173)

Not only in view of the proclivity in Auster's text towards the fragmentary and the emblematic but also in view of his well-known interest in French poetry and his year-long residence in Paris it is tempting to see an influence, or parallel to the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, particularly *Les Fleurs du Mal*, *The Flowers of Evil*. Baudelaire's poem "The Swan" is especially interesting in this respect; in it the poet traverses the newly rebuilt Place du Carrousel when, as Buck-Morss writes, "his memory is suddenly flooded with the image of Andromache, wife of Hector, who was left a widow with the destruction of Troy" (178-179). In Baudelaire's poem the figure of Andromache is superimposed on images of modern Paris:

Andromache, I think of you!

...

The old paris is gone (the face of a city
Changes more quickly, alas! Than the mortal heart)

...

Paris changes, but nothing of my melancholy
Gives way. New palaces, scaffolding, blocks,
Old suburbs, everything for me becomes allegory,
While my dear memories are heavier than rocks. (329-30)

Recalling that Miles Heller's mother is Mary-Lee Swann it becomes tempting to view her as a contemporary Andromache; however, in this case it is a "swan" reconciled to the loss of her first husband through divorce; an Andromache who has built an impressive career in the theater, integrating heaps of broken images in her role as Winnie in Samuel Beckett's play *Happy Days*. Of course, it is ironic but also profoundly meaningful that art, theater and literature become a way out in *Sunset Park*. Auster's "swan" does not evoke melancholy reflection as does Andromache in Baudelaire's poem. However, it is important to note that the arts, theater and literature as expressive vehicles focus exactly on decay and fragmentation, Beckett's play being one of the primary examples in modern drama. F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* is another. The supreme and subtle irony is, naturally, that artistic careers may be planned and carried out around fragmentation, in the midst of the ruins of history. The modern artist — and "artist" includes, here, not only Mary-Lee Swann and a number of novelists appearing

in the text; it also includes the main characters, Miles, Bing, Ellen and Alice — is his own impressario, displaying herself or himself in various identities like Baudelaire: the flâneur is one of them, the ragpicker is another. Miles and the other young people occupying the abandoned house in Brooklyn are the contemporary versions of this character, and Miles' father, Morris, is a version of Baudelaire's ragpicker, appearing as what he himself calls the Can Man, disguising himself, as do numerous other characters in Auster's works, in order to secretly follow his son around, observing him from a distance, worried but at the same time fascinated by his son's vagrancy, by the adventure of it.

In the *Passagen-Werk* Benjamin comments that the debasement and decay of nature and the city in the 19th century find their source in the production process itself: "The devaluation of the world of objects within allegory is outdone within the world of objects itself by the commodity" (660). And so in *Sunset Park*: the devaluation of objects in modern 20th century literature, e.g. Beckett and Fitzgerald, is "outdone" by the decay and fragmentation, the mass of broken things collected not only by Miles in his photos but also by Bing in his Hospital for Broken Things, by Alice in her PhD thesis on broken down male-female relationships in post World War II film, and by Ellen in her sketches of body parts, including the hand, that are initially fetishized then turned into abstract objects. If "fetishism" involves an emotional or libidinal attachment then this attachment is glossed over and aesthetically sublimated in Ellen's sketches. Erasing attachment constitutes the beginning of an artistic endeavor designed to *reconstruct*.

Bing Nathan is characterized by the narrator as "the champion of discontent, the militant debunker of contemporary life who dreams of forging a new reality from the ruins of a failed world. Unlike most contrarians of his ilk, he does not believe in political action"(55). The ruins of a failed world, Benjamin's "ruins of history," can only be reassembled or restored through focusing on "the local, the particular, the nearly invisible details of quotidian affairs"(locus citatus: same page; loc.cit.). Bing is right in a sense, of course. But he invests too much emotional energy even in his particular and highly individualized approach, believing till the end that it is safe to ignore the eviction notices served by US marshalls, and the result is disastrous: forceful eviction.

In her work on William Wyler's film *The Best Years of Our Lives* Alice Bergstrom notes how:

The men no longer know how to act with their wives and girlfriends. They have lost their appetite for domesticity, their feel for home. After years of

living apart from women, years of combat and slaughter, years of grappling to survive the horrors and dangers of war, they have been cut off from their civilian pasts, crippled, trapped in nightmare repetitions of their experiences, and the women they left behind have become strangers to them. (75)

In his work *The Philosophy of Literary Form* Kenneth Burke comments as follows in Proposition 11 (from “Twelve Propositions”):

11. Human *relations should be analyzed with respect to the leads discovered by a study of drama.*

Men enact rôles. They change rôles. They participate. They develop modes of social appeal. Even a “star” is but a function of the total cast. Politics above all is drama. Anyone who would turn from politics to some other emphasis, or vice versa, must undergo some change of identity, which is dramatic (involving “style” and “ritual”). People are neither animals nor machines (to be analyzed by the migration of metaphors from biology or mechanics), but actors and actors. (310-311)

Burke's comment applies directly to the “actors” appearing in the theater, film and literature as well as to the “real life” actors in *Sunset Park*. The deepest plunge into a dramatic change of identity involving “style” and “ritual” and, as I shall argue, tending towards abstraction, is Ellen Brice's sketches of the naked human body. Her sketches are inspired by walks on Seventh Avenue during which her mind is flooded — like Baudelaire's mind in the poem “The Swan” — with images, here images of the genitals of both sexes, of young and old, and of ... “luxuriant thighs, skinny thighs, vast, quivering buttocks, chest hair, recessed navels, inverted nipples, bellies scarred by appendix operations and cesarean births ...”(83). Using in part her imagination, in part Bing as model she proceeds to work on dozens of sketches portraying body parts, fascinated as she is by the body in its total form as well as by its separate parts:

The human body can be apprehended, but it cannot be comprehended. The human body has shoulders. The human body has knees. The human body is an object and a subject, the outside of an inside that cannot be seen. The human body grows from the small of infancy to the large of adulthood, and then it begins to die. The human body has hips. The human body has elbows. The human body lives in the mind of one who possesses a human body, and to live

inside the human body possessed of the mind that perceives another human body is to live in a world of others. (163)

Access to “the world of others” is through the work of art *only*. The drama of *Sunset Park* consists in the narrator’s presenting the painful, crisis-ridden lives of the characters and then providing close-ups where inside and outside both are transformed by the creative process. Naturally this approach inaugurates a shift in realism. Ellen’s decision to start drawing and to ask Bing to pose for her in the nude is logically prompted by a significant change in her mind as regards realism in drawing; the new realism emerging in the nude sketches parallels the realistic mode of the narrative, or narrative voice which becomes increasingly abstract while at the same time assuming a fuller note, sometimes approximating a musical *crescendo* — a crescendo heard from a distance, though, and the distancing effect is that of minimalization: a minimal intensity signifying the reduced function of the sign. Ellen’s early paintings were photography-like pictures of buildings and urban scenes that in her own words did not “speak to anyone”. Now she embarks upon an entirely different project, inspired in part by Morandi:

She thought the delicacy of her touch could lead her to the sublime and austere realm that Morandi had once inhabited. She wanted to make pictures that would evoke the mute wonder of pure thingness, the holy ether breathing in the spaces between things, a translation of human existence into a minute rendering of all that is *out there* beyond us, around us, in the same way she knows the invisible graveyard is standing there in front of her, even if she cannot see it. (87)

Ellen realizes that “all she has ever wanted is to draw and paint representations of her own feelings”(88). Ellen’s drawing hand that “remembers pain” refuses to make a “trashy myth of reality’s escape”; rather, she is bold enough to risk losing reality in an approach to representation that evokes Faulkner’s “figment-stuff”: representations of her own feelings. I see the toning down of the narrative voice to a minimalistic recording of intensity as a prelude to and implicit anticipation of Ellen’s drawings. These drawings fuse subject and object as much as this is possible; it is possible because it is facilitated by the transformation, a genuine metamorphosis, that occurs when the subject projects itself into an objectivized image *that contains the subject immanently* to a greater extent than the subject can be said to contain itself. The figment of feelings and dreams leap into immediate,

unmediated portraits of body parts, drawn in anatomic verisimilitude and yet, paradoxically, showing the artist's and the artwork's *interest* in "the spaces between things": the artwork as an *inter-esse* and the human body as an abstract form. Indeed, abstraction in *Sunset Park* is as refined as the poetic voices in *Absalom, Absalom!* From a dialectical perspective, abstraction as artistic method, here in drawing, is a response to the sociocultural condition determined by the economic crisis, as were the poetic voices in *Absalom, Absalom!*; the drawing hand of the artist sublimates the pain of crisis and loss, personal and collective, societal. Paradoxically, in the process of abstraction the drawing hand salvages the subjective, disclosing its unique existence in the "spaces between things"; these "spaces" somehow emanate "pure thingness" as well as "all that is *out there* beyond us." The artwork as *inter-esse*, then, becomes a refined coalescence of "thingness," *res* divorced from *signum*, and a subjectivity that is almost erased through being fused with a "beyond" that includes the cemetery.

In Augustine's *De doctrina christiana I* we learn that "All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learnt by means of signs/*Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur*"(9). However, Ellen's drawings illuminate *res* in its pure form, even discarding what Augustine calls *verbum interius*, mental concepts, the "internal word," in her "representations of her own feelings." The Paradise Lost of the Sunset Park community in New York City, bordering Green-Wood Cemetery, is a fallen world where signs have lost their meaning so that things are not learned "by means of signs," but in the process of this loss *Sunset Park* restores *res*. Restoration and reconstruction are enhanced by abstract form in drawing and painting, and abstraction absolves the subject from itself through letting it merge with the world: *inside* is turned into an *outside* and this *outside* is the artwork. This process is initiated at the moment when Ellen starts drawing her own hand:

She takes her drawing pad and a Faber-Castell pencil off the top of the bureau, then sits down on the bed and opens the pad to the first empty page. Holding the pencil in her right hand, she raises her left hand in the air, tilts it at a forty-five-degree angle, and keeps it suspended about twelve inches from her face, studying it until it no longer seems attached to her body. It is an alien hand now, a hand that belongs to someone else, to no one, a woman's hand with its slender fingers and rounded nails, the half-moons above the cuticles, the narrow wrist with its small bump of bone sticking out on the left side. (88)

As in *Absalom, Absalom!* the substance of remembering is:

sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel – not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream. (115)

For Ellen, getting it right as a painter means getting close to the world of objects by letting her muscles “grope for” them; in this act there is an absence of personal involvement and “memory”; the world becomes alien as does the artist’s own “alien hand.” The alien-ness of the artist is the pre-condition for really *seeing, feeling and hearing* the world and without this pre-condition there can be no artwork. Therefore Ellen must begin by drawing her own hand, thus turning it into an “alien hand”. The drawing hand is the method; the artistic method must participate in the very alien-ness immanent in the world.

The artwork follows as the *form* of everything the artist could not touch: everything is “light” when the artist’s “mind and thought” are called by “the name of dream.” Paradoxically, the senses provide immediate access to the physical as well as the metaphysical, or: *objects as the in-betweenness of things*. When method and medium merge with the alien, i.e. other world, the creative process erases *mimesis*; the process of artistic creation is one with the process of the world itself. *Res* is presented without the mediation of *signum*. In the simple act of drawing her own hand Ellen abolishes the borderline between subject and object. This is accomplished spontaneously, without theoretical or philosophical preparations. Spontaneity, intuition and sensation facilitate the coming into existence of the artwork *as any other object in the world*. In Comment 12 of *39 Comments on the Creative Process* John Glenday says: “The creative process begins with the need to exist, not to express” (2014).

This is precisely the meaning of Ellen’s new method as it is described in the following passage:

For the first hour after setting to work, she warms up by concentrating on details, isolated areas of a body culled from her collection of images or found in one of the two mirrors. A page of hands. A page of eyes. A page of buttocks. A page of arms. Then she moves on to whole bodies, portraits of single figures in various poses: a naked woman standing with her back to the viewer, a naked man sitting on the floor, a naked man stretched out on a bed, a naked

girl squatting on the ground and urinating, a naked woman sitting in a chair with her head thrown back as she cups her right breast in her right hand and squeezes the nipple of her left breast with her left hand. These are intimate portraits, she tells herself, not erotic drawings, human bodies doing what human bodies do when no one is watching them. (164)

The drawings evoke stimulating, arousing “pictures bubbling in her head”, but she concludes that sexual arousal is only a “minor bi-product of the effort”; what she really wants is to get it right. The drawings are usually left unfinished because she wants “her human bodies to convey the miraculous strangeness of being alive — no more than that, as much as all that” (165). It is precisely the unfinished image that points to the in-betweenness of the artwork; the drawings are as real as representations can be and yet they are endowed with a strangeness, another reality, a submerged world of human bodies surfacing in a disintegrating culture and coming to life only in the work of art. The biography of Ellen, her private life, is a record of pain and loss; but it is this experience that precipitates the act of creativity on the canvas where she attempts to attain the sublime. This endeavor must go on, must be infinitely prolonged since, as John Glenday puts it: “Because each poem ultimately is a failure, we write on” (38). The attainment of the sublime cannot be finished; for it it were to be finished it would cease to be sublime. It would also cease to *exist* as a real image of the in-betweenness of things. Existing in this reality is Ellen’s interest as an artist, her *inter-esse*.

In addition, Ellen’s artwork represents the culmination of what we may call a displacement of identity involving all the other characters as well. This displacement occurs as part of an artistic endeavor; it is compelled by what Slavoj Žižek in *The Ticklish Subject* refers to as “the threat of nonexistence”; under this threat subjects are “emotionally blackmailed into identifying with the imposed symbolic identity (‘nigger’, ‘bitch’, etc.)” but it is, nevertheless, possible for them “to displace this identity, to recontextualize it, to make it work for other purposes, to turn it against its hegemonic mode of functioning ...” (265-266)

The “symbolic identity” in Auster’s novel is that of the contemporary rebel, drifter, vagabond and artist, the marginalized individual who has given up belonging to a center because that center does not exist. *Sunset Park* moves the margin into the center, or rather, turns everything and everyone into a margin. How and where do you represent a margin while simultaneously displacing oneself from it and, ultimately, also displacing the margin and, with it, representation? In carrying out a work of art; and in the work of art, subject and object become

“figment-stuff warped out of all experience” since the artwork engages what John Glenday calls “averted vision” so that it “looks to one side of its subject matter”. Like stars, “abstractions are so dim they are all but unknown to us” (34). — Even the group of four’s modest existence as squatters does not work as an alternative social experiment since they are evicted; and their resistance does not work since they themselves, at least the two men, Miles in particular, use force when confronted with force. Miles’ fist hitting the police officer is a powerful and subtle reminder of the fact that fragmentation as applied to the human body may have tragic results. And yet, Miles’ punching fist stands in a subtle dialectical relationship to Ellen’s drawn and drawing hand; the hand as an aggressive tool is at the negative pole of an opposition whose positive pole is the creative hand. But the opposition is not binary: the punching fist and the drawing hand constitute *supplementary positions of exchange* whereby one metamorphoses into the other. The punching fist is a primal force whose manifestation as violence is an inherent rebellion against “hegemony”; thus the hand as an instrument of physical revolt contains the drawing hand immanently within itself. The drawing hand becomes the fist transformed into a creative instrument but “fist” and “hand” are *akin* in their being poised to “strike at” existence as *inter-esse*.

The closing incident of the novel makes Miles think of “the missing buildings, the collapsed and burning buildings that no longer exist, the missing buildings and the missing hands”, and the incident makes him wonder “if it is worth hoping for a future when there is no future”; he tells himself that from now on “he will stop hoping for anything and live only for now, this moment, this passing moment, the now that is here and then not here, the now that is gone forever” (227-228).

The final passage is reminiscent of Baudelaire. It is, in a way, Baudelaire in a new vein. The new mode, the 21st century mode of existing, experiencing and creating, takes place in a passing moment. Since time itself is unfinished how can the artwork ever be finished? The very structure, or unstructuredness of time is “figment-stuff warped out of all experience,” and the artist’s hand, when best applied, moves along an axis propelled by “averted vision.”

In another one of his 39 *Comments* John Glenday says: “The self must be expunged from the poem” (9). Expanding the statement to cover the work of art in general and *Sunset Park* in particular, the expunging of the self is the ultimate loss generating a (skewed) artistic vision. Auster’s novel and his character-artists practice an aesthetics of loss. But the loss of self and the collapse of the social order make for *existence*, make for “the strangeness of being alive.”

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Toni Morrison's Emotional Tropes in *A Mercy* as a Literary Representation of Historical Truth

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Abstract The etiology of the American Dream reaches back to the historical period of massive migration from the Old Continent to the New World. Wellbeing, freedom, and prosperity were the major constituents of the dream. Its fulfillment required identity redefinition. Conceptualizations of Euro-American superiority and African-American inferiority resulted there from. In Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, the author reconstructs the interior lives of subjects and objects affected by racial stratification within mainstream American society. In doing so, Morrison contemplates the possible emotions that more than likely accompanied Euro-American pursuance of patriarchal capitalism, which prefaced the mindset that engendered racialized slavery and, subsequently, systemically subjugated the majority of the black population.

Key words emotions; internal life; capitalism; white supremacy; racialized slavery

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Emotions and Their Historical Representation

The discussion of any historical representation involves questions relating to objectivity and subjectivity. The conceptualization of historical reflection precludes

complete objectivity because certain historical periods are always introduced and discussed from a particular perspective that serves the interests and purposes of the historians and their audiences, whose views are shaped by the socio-political ideologies which permeated a particular time and place. Nevertheless, so-called documented history, or historiography, with its recorded dates, names, events, and statistics is considered to be objective because it is least likely to formulate or express individual viewpoints. At a certain point in the evolution of post-modernist theory, attempts were made to ascertain intersections between historiography and historical fiction. For instance, Hayden White states, "There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal [...] terms" (qtd. in Mazur 14). However, when it comes to content, some theorists hold that "novels are written and read according to a different set of conventions, historiography is controlled and the historian is not really allowed to speculate and provide what is missing, he has to adhere to documents and facts while the novelist is allowed to make them up" (Mazur 15). Again, such conceptualization of difference between documented history and its fictitious representation imply belief in the former's higher level of objectivity. Advocates of objective history sometimes seek to avoid not only formulations or expressions of the writer's individual view on history and but also any references to or attempts to express and evoke emotions. Not only is the presence of personal emotion in documented history seen as a violation of objectivity, but also fictitious literary historical representations that encompass limited emotional import are seen as more objective. In general, the question of objective literature has occupied the minds of literary theorists since modernism, whose representatives, to a large extent, focused on the proper context allowing for emotional expression in literature. The most influential concept in this regard was, and still is, T. S. Elliot's "objective correlative" — "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion" ("Hamlet" and qtd. in Bertens 12). Therefore, according to Elliot, objective and proper art — for instance poetry, which is Elliot's primary focus — excludes expression of an artist's personal emotions. If an artistic piece is intended to convey or evoke emotion, certain linguistic tools should be utilized instead of mere reflection of the artists' personal emotions.

Toni Morrison's Approach to Literary Representations of Slavery

In the American context, the modernist, therefore western, emphasis on emotionless historical representation and advocacy of non-autobiographical artistic emotional reconstruction fuse into a shared critical analytical approach towards slave

narratives. Toni Morrison cites a critic Paul Edward, who vouched for the historical and literary validity of the renowned slave narrative by Olaudah Equiano, entitled *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. This work, according to Edward, attained recognition in part because of the absence of emotional traits within it. He states, “As a rule [...] [Equiano] puts no emotional pressure on the reader other than that which the situation itself contains — his language does not strain after our sympathy, but expects it to be given naturally and at the proper time. This quiet avoidance of emotional display produces many of the best passages in the book” (qtd. in Morrison, *What Moves* 67). Morrison notes the emotionless representation of brutality in slave narratives. She reasons that the narratives’ authors sought to produce works “as objective as possible [...] not to offend the reader by being too angry, or by showing too much outrage, or by calling the reader names” (67). This approach is understandable when consideration is given to the fact that the most popular slave narratives were written during slavery, when literacy and articulateness among enslaved black people was viewed as threatening. The authors sought not to alienate white readers, a considerable part of whom were slaveholders. By cautiously avoiding emotionally intense descriptive narrations, the authors garnered more white appeal for their texts.

In order to supplement and bring to surface the repressed emotional content submerged in slave narratives, Toni Morrison seeks to reveal in her representations deeper dimensions of historical truth related to slavery by incorporating documented history and reconstructing the interior lives of people living in that particular historical period. Otherwise, the truth is not complete as Morrison writes, “memories and recollections won’t give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me” (*What Moves* 71). Employing her artistic imagination, Toni Morrison endeavors to envision the “‘picture’ and the feelings that accompany the picture” (*What Moves* 71).

In *A Mercy*, Morrison incorporates vivid images in conjunction with powerful emotions in order to reconstruct the emergence of racialized slavery in America. By this incorporation, the novelist’s objective of supplementing existing slave narratives is realized. Morrison also ponders the circumstances prior to the emergence of vast, systemic slave plantations, while slave narratives recount enslaved life. In her account, Morrison expresses the emotional interior life of plantation inhabitants, ranging from avaricious Euro-American planters to confused and bewildered African-American slaves. She further considers these factors along with others that led to the formation of a racialized mindset, which fomented racial bifurcation within American society. The gaps in documented history concerning

the rise of racialized America, that Morrison seeks to fill in, refer to the apparently pre-racial 1676 Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, during which "an army of blacks, natives, whites, mulattoes – freedmen, slaves and indentured — had waged war against local gentry led by members of that very class" (*A Mercy* 11) and the racial repercussions which followed that systematically disfranchised black people. "By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms of black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave's maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever" (11-12).

Interior Life during the Emergence of Slavery

Morrison focuses upon the unbridled growth of Euro-American avariciousness and possessiveness as points of departure harbingering racialized slavery in America. The emotions accompanying the New World sojourns of three characters, a Portuguese slaveholder, Senhor D'Ortega, a Dutch planter, Jacob Vaark, and his English wife, Rebekka Vaark, together reflect the formulation of the ethos of Euro-American slavocracy.

Senhor D'Ortega embodies gross inhuman opportunism. He expresses very negative emotions at the loss of his human chattel. He exhibits no human compassion regarding the plight and sufferings of enslaved black people held in bondage aboard a slave ship. His is, however, emotionally concerned about the financial loss he will incur as a result of one third of the ship's human "cargo" dying of fever. Additionally, to his chagrin, he incurred a fine for throwing the dead bodies overboard too close to the bay. Another manifestation of this slaveholder's heartless possessiveness and commodification of black people is the manner in which he trades his slaves as if they were emotionless, soulless objects. Without hesitation, he offers his obligee, Jacob Vaark, an enslaved woman as reimbursement for a debt. When Vaark selects apparently D'Ortega's favorite female slave, the Portuguese slaveholder hopes to convince Vaark that another woman would be of greater value because she is a nursing slave at reproductive age that would breed more offspring thereby multiplying his free labor force. He emphasizes, "You don't seem to comprehend my offer [...] The value of a seasoned slave is beyond adequate" (28). Furthermore, D'Ortega has no regard for emotional bonds between slaves. The outcome of the transaction between Vaark and D'Ortega is the separation of a daughter, Florens, from her mother, which, historically speaking, was quite common. "Planters were frequently in debt. Their slaves would be sold, often with the children separated from their parents" (Nichols 10). On the whole,

D'Ortega's possessiveness that he fulfills through chattel slavery resurfaces in two recurring emotions, anger at property loss and total lack of compassion as he trades and exhibits human beings for material gain.

Morrison not only presents the avariciousness of an established planter, but also the evolving greed of Euro-American settlers. Through the sojourn of the character Jacob Vaark, Morrison reveals the emotional changes that the promising realm of the New World engenders. Initially, Vaark experiences a sense of uncertainty in the midst of unfamiliar territory. The different fog he confronts, "sun fired, turning the world into thick, hot gold" (10) is blurring, confusing, and even blinding. He can "see his boots sloshing but not his satchel nor his hands" (10). However, he grows in confidence as the vast territory with its promising ambience embraces him.

Penetrating it was like struggling through a dream. As mud became swamp grass, he turned left, stepping gingerly until he stumbled against wooden planks leading up beach toward the village. Other than his own breath and tread, the world was soundless. It was only after he reached the live oak trees that the fog wavered and split. He moved faster then, more in control but missing, too, the blinding gold he had come through. (10-11)

His bolstered confidence fuses with hope and happiness as he luckily obtains "one hundred and twenty acres of a dormant patroonship" (13) that he had inherited from his uncle before coming to America. The intoxication with the freshness of the New World evokes further hopefulness for more property. "Breathing the air of a world so new, almost alarming in rawness and temptation, never failed to invigorate him [...] Now here he was, a ratty orphan become landowner, making a place out of no place, a temperate living from raw life" (13). Two breakthroughs whet Vaark's greed. One is the luxurious mansion on D'Ortega's Jubilo plantation, which greatly impresses him, and the fertile land that surrounds it. The house is made of honey-colored stone and servants welcome visitors. There is also the "comfortable smell of tobacco leaves" (16) roundabout. Initially, Vaark's emotions are mixed. He resents the arrogance and vanity displayed by the Portuguese planter, but at the same time he is taken by "the estate honestly" (24). Upon one of his subsequent visits, he aspires to equally acquire such wealth. He ruminates, "So mighten it be nice to have such a fence to enclose the headstones in his own meadow? And one day, not too far away, to build a house that size on his own property?" (31). The second breakthrough occurs during the conversation with an experienced

adventurer, Peter Downs, whom Vaark meets on his way from D'Ortega's plantation. Downs informs Vaark about the profitability of rum production, which requires much less effort and risk than other production endeavors, which involve strenuous fertilization, harvesting, and processing. Eventually, an epigraphic narrative statement recapitulates Jacob Vaark's overall route towards affluent planter: "When Jacob, a small-scale trader for the Company with a side line in fur and lumber, found himself an heir of sorts, he relished the thought of becoming a landowning, independent farmer [...] He did what was necessary: secured a wife, someone to help her, planted, built, fathered He had simply added the trading life" (39).

Toni Morrison also reimagines the emotional life of an ascending Anglo-American plantation mistress through the character Rebekka Vaark, who underwent fear and humiliation in the Old World as a result of patriarchal oppression and religiosity. Had she stayed in England, she would have been destined to be a "servant, prostitute, wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest" (91). Patriarchal oppression is even evidenced by the circumstances under which she treks to the New World. Her parents, regarding her as hopeless and resentful, sell her to a wealthy unknown man, who simply seeks an obedient and resourceful wife. As she approaches the beckoning fresh, vast, and intact land, Rebekka feels assured and released from the oppression she had experienced in England. For a while, she enjoys serving her husband and seeing to everyday chores. Unfortunately, in the long run, her hopes fade after her husband and children die prematurely. After her loss, she is further beset by smallpox, but she ruggedly endures. In the process, Rebekka's sense of self-confidence rises to the point that she assumes the posture of a dominant widowed plantation mistress. Religiously, she finds solace and self-affirmation in apologetic Christianity, which leads her to humiliate non-Christian, non-white slaves — a black woman named Florens and a Native American woman named Lina. Florens observes Rebekka's growing negative emotions, "Mistress has cure but she is not well. Her heart is infidel. All smiles are gone. Each time she returns from the meetinghouse her eyes are nowhere and have no inside [...] She makes us all [...] sleep either in the cowshed or the storeroom where bricks rope tools all manner of building waste are. Outside sleeping is for savages she says" (186). Racially, Rebekka privileges only white male serfs, with whom she begins to feel a certain racial solidarity. She remunerates them for services rendered; and paternalistically sees to their future prospects. Respectively, non-white female slaves were totally under her subjection. Morrison revisits the rise of the American

dream and the images and feelings that accompanied it. She writes, "In the New World there was the vision of a limitless future, made more gleaming by the constraint, dissatisfaction, and turmoil left behind" (*Playing* 34).

In *A Mercy*, the Euro-American characters' hope for advancement and liberation from loss, isolation, poverty, and humiliation is infected by increasing avariciousness and white supremacy. Their acquisitiveness leads to territorial usurpation for expansive plantations and the merciless degradation of human beings to chattel in pursuit of wealth.

Internal Lives of the Enslaved

Toni Morrison not only engages in reimagining the emotions of emerging Euro-American slaveholders, but concomitantly also delves into the internal lives of the oppressed. The most poignant and touching emotions are expressed by the enslaved in response to oppression and social degradation.

During slavery, the threat of forced family separation by sale was always menacingly present. Such sales were intensely emotional. Forceful separation of family members by slavers was extremely painful. Toni Morrison reconstructs an emotionally complex circumstance whereby a black enslaved mother chooses to give one of her children, a daughter, to another slave master. The girl grows up away from her mother on Jacob Vaark's plantation, and has conflicting emotions about her mother's decision until her true motive is revealed. The black mother, Minha Mae, out of love for her daughter, pleaded with Jacob Vaark to take her daughter, Florens, instead of her son because she knew what would have befallen the girl if she had remained on the plantation with her mother. Like herself, her daughter would have been raped, an act the whites on her plantation regarded as mating. For the enslaved woman, this is equivalent of bestial breeding to multiply a labor force. She relates the brutal nature of her own sexual assault: "first the mating, the taking of me and Bess and one other to the curing shed. Afterwards, the men who were told to break we in apologized. Later an overseer gave each of us an orange. And it would have been all right. It would have been good both times, because the results were you and your brother" (194). The fusion of motherly love and traumatic memory evoke fear and resolve to save her child from a similar fate. The woman considers sending her daughter away to be the lesser tragedy.

The character Florens expresses her own emotions to racialized oppression. Her birth on one plantation and being transported to another makes her feel at times like a motherless child. Moreover, Florens is perplexed that others associate her with demonic forces. As formerly stated, her mistress Rebekka adheres to an

apologetic Christianity that deems non-believers to be soulless heathens. On the way to Blacksmith, the craftsman and healer, for whom diseased Rebekka has sent Florens, the black girl accidentally comes across the house of Widow Ealing where she is openly regarded as an incarnation of evil. A mysterious religious grouping compare Florens, a female, to a devilish figure called the Black Man. Florens is confounded that her blackness represents an ill omen for them. "One woman speaks saying I have never seen any human this black [...] Afric and much more, says another. Just look at this child says the first woman. She points to the little girl shaking and moaning by her side. Hear her. Hear her. It is true then says another. The Black Man is among us. This is his minion" (131). The Christian sect examines her physical makeup in order to determine the extent of her devilishness. Florens is shamed by their treatment of her,

Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place if my knees bend backward like the forelegs of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. Inside I am shrinking. (135)

When she states that the penetrating eyes do not recognize her individual self, she reveals awareness of her humanity that the religious grouping denies. The shame Florens experiences under their examination is precursor to the shame most enslaved black people would later feel, when they underwent nude inspection on auction blocks. bell hooks informs that "'Naked on auction blocks in a world so different from their familiar understandings, joined with other darker-skinned folks who did not necessarily speak the same language, enslaved black people were vulnerable to shaming" (37).

Florens is also bewildered by the Puritan's conceptualization of a sinister, demonic figure called the Black Man. At this point, Toni Morrison projects black intellectual response to Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* wherein is found the most recognized classic literary reference to the menacing "Black Man." Notes to Hawthorne's novel refer to this concept as "A common euphemism for the Christian devil, whom the Puritans associated with the forested wilderness that surrounded their settlements and with the Native Americans who dwelled within it" (250). In Morrison's novel, the black female character Florens finds her demonization fueled by reference to the Black Man to be particularly confusing

because her experience of the black man had been that of the loving and beautiful Blacksmith, who was in no way demonic.

Florens' affection for the blacksmith represents another aspect of black enslaved interior life. The difference between Florens' and Blacksmith's social status makes their intimate relationship complex. She is a slave, he is a free man employed by her master. Feeling abandoned by her mother, suffering isolation on the new plantation, and years of reclusion, Florens develops affection for Blacksmith, which, in turn, evolves into passionate love. Florens' love gradually becomes more and more possessive in form. The extremity of her feeling is given added impetus by the overall yearnings of an enslaved person. First, as a demeaned and rejected object of commercial transaction, Florens seeks recognition. Therefore, she misleadingly persuades herself that she is central to Blacksmith's life, contending, "I am his tree" (71). Secondly, she discovers the significance of ancestral connectedness in that blacksmith's craftsmanship is a continuing generational practice. She ponders the spiritual dimension of Blacksmith's closeness to his forefathers: "And you know the ancestors approve when two owls appear at the very instant you say their names so you understand they are showing themselves to bless you. See, you say, see how they swivel their heads. They approve you also, you tell me" (80). Florence is uplifted when he goes on to plead that his ancestors recognize her.

Blacksmith's firing of her passionate love for him engenders greater discernment that indeed black is beautiful. Florens testifies,

You probably don't know anything at all about what your back looks like whatever the sky holds: sunlight, moonrise. I rest there. My hand, my eyes, my mouth. The first time I see it you are shaping fire with bellows. The shine of water runs down your spine and I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there. I run away into the cowshed to stop this thing from happening inside me. Nothing stops it. There is only you. Nothing outside of you. My eyes not my stomach are the hungry parts of me. There will never be enough time to look how you move. Your arm goes up to strike iron. You drop to one knee. You bend. You stop to pour water first on the iron then down your throat. Before you know I am in the world I am already kill by you. My mouth is open, my legs go softly and the heart is stretching to break. (43-44)

Although this new sense of uncontrolled passion is overwhelming and inexplicable to her, Florens becomes fully alive. She longs for Blacksmith's invigorating

presence: "I think if you wake and see me seeing you I will die. I run away not knowing then you are seeing me seeing you. And when at last our eyes hit I am not dead. For the first time I am live" (44). Further on in the novel, Florens compares the empowering love ignited within her by the black man, who becomes a "worship" (74) object, with the desecration of black male beauty by white Christian. Morrison presents this as an indication that a love relationship between an enslaved black woman and a free black man could provide mutual affirmation of the beauty and humanity of both.

Nevertheless, at the same time, Morrison considers the enslaved woman's devastatingly powerful over possessive love, whose emotions and reasoning have been warped by slavery. Her possessiveness transforms into morbid jealousy; resulting in her lost of a chance to share her life with a "free" black man. When he returns after curing Rebekka Vaark, he is outraged at the injury Florens allegedly had inflicted upon Malaik, the boy he had adopted. Without seeking explanation for Malaik's condition — "still and limp on the floor with that trickle of red from his mouth" (165) — he accuses Florens of irresponsibility. His partiality is most striking and disappointing to her. She muses, "No question. You choose the boy. You call his name first. You take him to lie down with the doll and return to me your broken face, eyes without glee, rope pumps in your neck. I am lost. No word of sorrow for knocking me off my feet. No tender fingers to touch where you hurt me. I cower. I hold down the feathers lifting" (165). Blacksmith reproaches her for exhibiting, through submissiveness and possessiveness, a slave mentality. He orders her to return to her mistress. Actually, Blacksmith was aware of Florens' inability to make independent, constructive, reasonable decisions and behave like a truly free person. Such freedom of choice was a real challenge to Florens, whose understanding of freedom was other. Morrison incorporates a poetic image that evidences the confusion and uncertainty Florence underwent when she had to choose on her own. On the way back to the plantation, trying to choose either flowers or a stag, she felt discomfort, looseness, and fear: "I am a little scare of this looseness. Is that how free feels? I don't like it. I don't want to be free of you because I am live only with you. When I choose and say good morning, the stag bounds away" (82). Unfortunately, she is not the self-loving, resourceful, autonomous woman that Blacksmith seeks. Florens' emotions manifest a paralyzing slave mentality, which blocks her from fully understanding freedom. Her overall emotional condition can be treated as the allegory relative to the attitudes many manumitted black slaves held after the Emancipation Proclamation. Although they formally obtained freedom, they were befuddled by it and often even their most

basic needs were difficult to meet. As a result, many ex-slaves found themselves lonely, hungry, homeless, and helpless in a virtual wilderness. "Freedom" evoked conflicting emotions.

Morrison also portrays the feelings of white servants on the plantation. Historically, some of the first slave plantations were somewhat pre-racial in that the masters owned slaves and serfs of varied races and descent. Later, slavery would become a racial affair. In *A Mercy*, the white serfs' feelings towards black people manifest the mindset that set the foundation for systemic racial slavery. Even though they are seemingly at the same level on the social ladder, they project a sense of white supremacy relative to blacks. White serfs' interior feelings about black people have significant bearing here.

One of the ways by which white serfs demean black people is through a bestial notion of black love. A white serf, Sorrow, sees Florens and Blacksmith's relationship as uncontrollable lust.

The blacksmith and Florens were rocking and, unlike female farm animals in heat, she was not standing quietly under the weight and thrust of the male. What Sorrow saw yonder in the grass under a hickory tree was not the silent submission to the slow goings behind a pile of wood or a hurried one in a church pew that Sorrow knew. This here female stretched, kicked her heels and whipped her head left, right, to, fro. It was a dancing. Florens rolled and twisted from her back to his. He hoisted her up against the hickory; she bent her head into his shoulder. A dancing. Horizontal one minute, another minute vertical. Sorrow watched until it was over; until, stumbling like tired old people, they dressed themselves. It all ended when the blacksmith grabbed Florens' hair, yanked her head back to put his mouth on hers. Then they went off in different directions. (151)

Such discourse discloses a widely held stereotypical perspective among whites about black sexuality, a sexually seen as excessive and perverse. Sorrow's voyeuristic gazing at the black couple's intimacy reveals a kind of morbid curiosity, not to mention violation of privacy. Moreover, her morbidity is facilitated by envy and her traumatic past. She yearns for a passionate relationship that she fantasizes all black people enjoy. Earlier sex abuse had robbed her of that joy. In sorrow, she regrets that "no one had ever kissed her mouth. Ever" (151), the way Blacksmith kissed Florens.

Not only does a white woman but also white male serfs, Willard and Scully,

consider Florens and Blacksmith's passion astonishing. Willard expresses his wonderment, stating, "In all my born days [...] I never saw anything like it. He takes her when and where he wants and she hunts him like a she-wolf if he's not in her eye. If he's off at his bloomery for a day or two, she sulks till he comes back hauling the blooms of ore" (177). He also makes fun of the black man's sexual prowess. "Chuckling to himself, Willard understood why the girl, Florens, was struck silly by the man" (177). The white males' attitudes towards the black woman are equally licentious. Scully lusts after Florens, "if he had been interested in rape, Florens would have been his prey. It was easy to spot that combination of defenselessness, eagerness to please and, most of all, a willingness to blame herself for the meanness of others" (178-179). Both, white women and a Native American woman, think that black women are sexually wanton. The white male character Scully's feelings regarding Florens reflect the fetishization of the black woman's body, which was a mindset that conjured up the stereotypical notion of black female sexual promiscuity, which, in turn, fostered prejudicial gender racial politics, opening the door to "racial and sexual oppression and class discrimination" (Hine 35) of black women reflected by the sexual assault upon Florens' mother.

White envy leads to belittlement of black people through discriminatory and insulting sexual references. White supremacist envy also has an imprint on the formation of mindsets that lead to racial social stratification. In *A Mercy*, the white male serfs cannot abide the privileges a free black man receives. Before Blacksmith arrives to do some work for Jacob Vaark, the white male indentured servants, Willard and Scully, develop a family-like relationship with their master.

For years the neighboring farm population made up the closest either man would know of family. A goodhearted couple (parents), and three female servants (sisters, say) and them helpful sons. Each member dependent on them, none cruel, all kind. Especially the master who, unlike their more-or-less absent owner, never cursed or threatened them. He even gave them gifts of rum during Christmastide and once he and Willard shared a tipples straight from the bottle. (169)

Upon observing the conclusion of a business partnership between their master and a free black man, the white serfs seek to assert superiority over the black man. Willard encouraged Scully not to cooperate with Blacksmith and "refused any request the black man made. Refused to chop chestnut, haul charcoal or work bellows and 'forgot' to shield green lumber from rain" (176). Although systemic

racial slavery has not commenced, the tow white serfs sense of white supremacy is presented as a continuation of old Europe, which the Native American female slave, Lina, acknowledges by the poignant statement, “Both were Europes, after all” (67). Also the fact that Willy refuses to call Blacksmith “mister,” as he does to him, evidences white supremacist thinking. To do otherwise, he would affirm an inferior status relative to Blacksmith. Willard’s and Scully’s dream to reach the level of slave master surfaces after Rebekka Vaark begins to remunerate them after her husband’s demise. Scully, for instance, meticulously calculates the income that would buy his freedom. Not wanting “to spend his life just searching for something to eat and love” (181), he temporarily assumes the posture of an obedient servant to Rebekka to save as much money as possible. Willard and Scully represent the lower class whites who felt superior to blacks, even if a black person has higher social status.

Conclusions

In conclusion, in *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison offers in-depth insight into the interior lives of people who were either subject or objects in the formation and pursuit of the American Dream. She reconstructs the feelings and attitudes that gave rise to white patriarchal capitalism, and its roots in racialized slavery. Although history references black slaveholders, they were very few in number; “the peculiar institution” was dominated and supported by whites. Moreover, as Morrison brings up in her novel, certain racially specific laws were implemented, which granted privilege to white males. Black people became a referent from which whites calculated their own status. Morrison states in an interview that, “Every immigrant knew he would not come as the very bottom. He had to come above at least one group — and that was [black people]” (Taylor-Guthrie 255). In *A Mercy*, the characters who aspire to be recognized as citizens at least one level above black people are Euro-American immigrants, most overtly, the religiously apologetic Rebekka Vaark, Widow Ealing, and her religious sect, the English indentured servants Willard and Scully, and the Portuguese planter, D’Ortega. Additionally, Morrison highlights the transformation of hope into avariciousness and the merciless, capitalist abuse of people and land that followed. It may be fittingly stated that the novelist elaborates on the import of the final paragraph of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, which reads

the old island [...] that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes — a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way

for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (115)

In her work, Morrison imagines the emotions that accompany the sojourns of Dutch immigrant, Jacob Vaark, towards planter status, who in the process develops self-confidence, hope, and, finally, descends into avariciousness whetted by the promising, vast, intact landscape. The Portuguese slaveholder and white indentured servants are analogously acquisitive. The realization of their dreams comes through, to a large extent, through the commodification and subjugation of other human beings, mostly black slaves, whose inferiority is religiously, ontologically, and socially rationalized. The melancholic feelings, precursor to the blues, that black people express upon facing their newly defined identity and function are shame, confusion, and pain, as exemplified by the characters Florens and her mother.

Therefore, Morrison elucidates the emotional dynamics between white subjects and black objects and their individual feelings at the genesis of racial and social bifurcation of mainstream American society that subsequently evolved into systemic racialized slavery. In doing so, the novelist realizes her objective to complement the discourse of slave narratives. Not only does she express the repressed emotionally intense environment of slavery, but Morrison also reconstructs the feelings and approaches that fostered the racialized mindset, which was the harbinger of chattel slavery.

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