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# **Forum for World Literature Studies**

Vol.8, No.1, March 2016

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# 世界文学研究论坛

2016 年第 1 期

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**Forum for  
World Literature Studies**

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**Transnational Ethical  
Literary Criticism Studies**

Edited by Yang Gexin

**Transnational Literary Text Studies**

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杨革新（栏目主持）

超越国界的文学文本研究

郑 杰（栏目主持）



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# Contents

## Transnational Ethical Literary Criticism Studies

- 1-18 Ethical Criticism and the Challenges Posed by Innovative Poetry  
Hank Lazer
- 19-27 The Ethical Discourse of Tragedy and (Pseudo-)Historiography  
Péter Hajdu
- 28-40 Tom Stoppard's *The Hard Problem*: A Consideration  
William Baker
- 41-58 A Journey through the Realms of Good and Evil: Ethics in Philosophy  
and Literature  
Wolfgang G. Müller
- 59-74 Reading and Writing Ethically for Young Australians  
Margot Hillel
- 75-86 Dystopian Nightmare in Contemporary Adolescent Fiction and Its Ethical  
Value  
Wang Xiaolan

## Transnational Literary Text Studies

- 87-101 The "Substantivization" of Modern in Late Victorian Literature and  
Victorian Liberalism  
Olga Polovinkina
- 102-116 The Transference of War-induced Trauma and the Collective Memory of  
Trauma in *Another World*  
Liu Humin
- 117-127 Politics of Existence in Beckett's *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*:  
"Yesterday" as the Only Timeframe, and Egocentric Characters  
Önder Çakırtaş
- 128-142 Borromean (De)Knot in Jorge Luis Borges's "Funes, the Memoriosus"

Tohid Teymouri

Seyedeh Sara Foroozani

143-160 Defining the New Woman: With Special Reference to the Major Works of  
Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur

Babita Kar

Urvashi Kaushal

161-176 *Chado* in Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart*: Asymmetry, Boundaries and  
Chanced Meetings

Sheba D.Mani

Ravichandran Vengadasamy

Shahizah Ismail Hamdan

177-177 FWLS Was Indexed in ESCI of Web of Science

# 目 录

## 超越国界的文学伦理学批评研究

- 1-18 伦理批评与创新诗歌带来的挑战  
    汉克·雷泽尔
- 19-27 悲剧与（虚假）历史编撰的伦理话语  
    彼得·海伊度
- 28-40 浅议汤姆·斯托帕德的《困难问题》  
    威廉·贝克
- 41-58 跨越善恶的旅程：哲学与文学中的伦理  
    沃夫冈·穆勒
- 59-74 为澳大利亚少年读者进行伦理写作与伦理阐释  
    玛格特·希利尔
- 75-86 当代成长小说中的反乌托邦式梦魇及其伦理价值  
    王晓兰

## 超越国界的文学文本研究

- 87-101 晚期维多利亚文学和自由主义思想中关于“现代”概念的名词化  
    奥尔加·波罗维克那
- 102-116 《另一个世界》中战争创伤的转移和关于创伤的集体记忆  
    刘胡敏
- 117-127 贝克特的《终局》和《等待戈多》中的生存政治：“昨天”的时间  
    框架和自我中心的角色  
    奥德·卡特塔斯
- 128-142 博尔赫斯《博闻强记的富内斯》中的博洛米“结”与“解”  
    托西德·泰穆里  
    赛耶德·萨拉·夫汝扎尼
- 143-160 关于新女性的定义：以莎西·德什潘德和满舒·卡布尔的作品为例  
    巴比塔·卡尔  
    乌尔瓦希·卡莎
- 161-176 村上春树小说《斯普特尼克恋人》的茶道：非对称，边界与偶遇  
    沙巴·曼尼

拉威尚德兰·封嘉德萨米  
萨希扎·伊斯梅尔·哈姆丹

177-177 《世界文学研究论坛》被科学网核心数据库 ESCI 收录

# Ethical Criticism and the Challenges Posed by Innovative Poetry

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**Abstract** Professor Nie has led the way in developing the field known as ethical criticism. Much of the writing in this newly emerging field has focused on modern works of fiction and on the ethical dimensions and decisions of fictional characters. A reading of innovative American poetry poses a range of interesting questions and challenges for the development of ethical criticism. In this essay, I offer a range of questions that might enlarge and critique the methods and scope of ethical criticism. As one example, I cite the challenges presented by the work (and life) of George Oppen. More fundamentally, I will problematize or re-locate the ethical dimension — following upon Emerson’s language about spiritual experience — from the second-hand reading of fictional works to a sense of the reader/critic engaged in first-hand ethical experience, choices, and action through a multi-dimensional engagement with innovative poetry. I also present an example of how such ethical criticism might work through the reading of a poem by Larry Eigner. In addition, I trace some parallels (of the particular ethical epistemology involved in reading and engaging innovative poetry) to the considerable ethical and epistemological differences in the contemporaneous writings of Confucius and Lao Tzu (thus briefly contrasting Confucianism and Daoism and pointing toward the imprecise and enigmatic nature of knowing found in Daoism).

**Key words** ethical criticism; innovative poetry; Lao Tzu; Larry Eigner; George Oppen; limitations of understanding

**Author** **Hank Lazer** has published twenty-two books of poetry, including *Poems Hidden in Plain View* (2016, in English and in French), *N24* (2014) and *N18* (2012), *Portions* (2009), *The New Spirit* (2005), *Elegies & Vacations* (2004), and *Days* (2002). *Selected Poems and Essays of Hank Lazer*, completed by a group of translators and with a Preface by Nie Zhenzao, was published by Central China Normal University Press in 2015. Lazer’s *Selected Poems* have also been published in Italy and will be appearing shortly in Cuba. In 2015, Lazer was selected to

receive Alabama's most prestigious literary prize, the Harper Lee Award, for lifetime achievement in literature. His books of criticism include *Opposing Poetries* (two volumes, 1996) and *Lyric & Spirit: Selected Essays 1996-2008* (2008). With Charles Bernstein, he edits the Modern and Contemporary Poetics Series for the University of Alabama Press. Lazer retired from the University of Alabama in January 2014 from his positions as Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Executive Director of Creative Campus, and Professor of English.

### **Ethical Criticism and the Challenges Posed by Innovative Poetry**

When good is near you, when you have life in yourself, it is not by any known or accustomed way; you shall not discern the footprints of any other; you shall not see the face of man; you shall not hear any name; — the way, the thought, the good, shall be wholly strange and new. — Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (158)

Thus far, ethical criticism has applied perspectives, questions, concepts, and historical and cultural contexts primarily to the study of works of fiction and drama. I wish to begin by saluting Professor Nie for his internationally noteworthy and celebrated development of this field of study!<sup>1</sup> (And I am honored that he has written a Preface for the Chinese translation of my *Selected Poems*.<sup>2</sup>) I wish to expand the range of consideration in ethical criticism, principally through an investigation of some ways that such criticism might proceed with regard to modern and contemporary poetry, and most especially with regard to innovative contemporary poetry.

If we begin by setting the groundwork for an ethical criticism, we must do so by attending to the nature of the activity as established by Professor Nie. As noted in a recent article in *The Times Literary Supplement* ("Fruitful Collaborations: ethical literary criticism in Chinese academe," by William Baker and Shang Biwu, 29 July 2015) — which in and of itself is an indication of the international importance of Professor Nie's work — ethical criticism refers to

an approach that reads, analyzes and interprets literature from an ethical perspective. It takes literary texts as its very object of analysis, and aims to shed a new light on a variety of relationships depicted by literature such as

man/woman and him/herself, humans and others, humans and nature, and humans and society, from an ethical perspective. (14)

Baker and Shang in the *TLS* article go on to summarize:

Specifically, ethical literary criticism embraces the following five aspects: (1) it investigates the moral values of writers and their historical backgrounds and the connections between writers' own moral values and those ethical values projected in their creative output; (2) it investigates the relations between moral phenomena existing in a writer's work and in reality, the moral inclinations, and the social and moral values of that work; (3) it examines the effects of that work's moral values as exerted on readers and society, and readers' evaluations of the moral thoughts of writers and their works; (4) it evaluates the influence of writers' and their works' moral inclinations on other contemporary writers and literature; and (5) it uncovers the moral features of writers and their works and aims to explore various issues concerning the relations between literature and society or literature and writer from an ethical perspective. (14)

My talk today really represents a development and expansion of that fifth area of ethical criticism. And my remarks may be seen as a continuation of those made by my good friend Charles Bernstein in his talk at the 3<sup>rd</sup> CAAP conference, "Pitch of Poetry" (which appears in *Forum for World Literature Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3 September 2015 426-438), specifically Charles' sense of poetics and poetic practice as dialogical and his contrasting of ethics with morality wherein "poetics cannot claim the high ground of morality or systematic theory" (427). As Charles develops his perspective in "Pitch of Poetry," poetry involves an ethics of non-utility and is participatory in art-making without ulterior purpose. Most interesting of all, since Charles is rarely thought of as a "spiritual" poet, his perspective in "Pitch of Poetry" is remarkably consonant with Lao Tzu's ethics in the *Dao de jing* (an ethics that I will return to later and contrast somewhat with the ethics of Lao Tzu's contemporary, Confucius):

Poetry makes *nothing* happen . . . , manifest in the cracks (delays, blanks) between words and the frictions of gift. A gift (this gift) is a present made present; as for reciprocity: nothing is given in return.

Mine is a homely poetics, both odd-looking (unattractive, disagreeable,

low) and intimate (even private). (435)

Ethical criticism is important for (at least) two reasons: (1) it is a *Chinese* theory of literary criticism, and thus it alters, challenges, and enlivens (from a very particular cultural and historical perspective) the range of international conversations and writings about literature and the value of literary study (at a time, perhaps, when the practicality of literary study is being treated by the public and by university planners and administrators somewhat skeptically); and (2) it inevitably returns us to a fundamental set of questions (often bypassed as our critical considerations become more “sophisticated” and specialized and professionalized?) about *why we read*, and about the value of studying literature and reading literature (particularly so-called difficult literature) intensely and carefully.

When I gave a keynote address at the 2<sup>nd</sup> CAAP conference, in Wuhan, I advocated the study of two 20<sup>th</sup> century American poets who were, I felt, under-represented in Chinese considerations of American poetry: George Oppen and Larry Eigner. That address — subsequently published in *Foreign Literature Studies* (Wuhan, China), Vol. 35, No. 5 (October 2013): 9-22 as “The Peculiarities of the Making of Cross-Cultural Literary History: Poetry of George Oppen and Larry Eigner,” — might also, retrospectively, be considered as a type of ethical criticism, asking the question what else needs to be included in an emerging Chinese version of American Literary History, particularly in the domain of modern and contemporary poetry. For there is an ethics that pertains to which poetry is, through textbooks, anthologies, translations, official literary histories, and syllabi, allowed or likely to be read. I am pleased to report that in the past couple of years, the situation with regard to Oppen in China is changing somewhat, as Xiaosheng Yang’s translation of Oppen’s most important long poem, “Of Being Numerous,” has been published in China.<sup>3</sup>

Oppen’s poetry still does provide an extremely interesting and provocative instance of how ethical criticism might establish its relationship to modern American poetry. One might begin by considering Oppen’s work from a biographical perspective — just as one engages the choices made by characters in works of fiction and drama, thinking about the historical circumstances of choices that Oppen made as poet and person, most especially his affiliation with the Communist Party — an affiliation that obviously has a radically different meaning in America than in China! — which necessitated his leaving America to live for a substantial period of time in Mexico. Oppen was only able to return to the US once the McCarthy Era persecution of Communists ceased in the late 1950s. One might

also reflect on Oppen's decision to remain silent as a poet for twenty-five years. Or, one might think about a less well known refusal that Oppen made. Once he returned to writing and publishing poetry, Oppen's work eventually did receive recognition. In 1969 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Of Being Numerous*. While most poets choose to cash in on such success — developing reading tours and speaking engagements (with significantly enhanced fees due to the receipt of this prestigious national prize) — Oppen chose to cancel a developing reading tour, preferring to work on his writing.

If we turn to Oppen's poetry itself, while there are many locations for contemplation of the ethical dimensions raised by the poems, I would simply point to two particular instances. First, in "Of Being Numerous" one of Oppen's central considerations is the dialectical and complex relationship between singular and collective identity. After noting the shipwreck and subsequent "rescue" of Robinson Crusoe, Oppen writes,

Obsessed, bewildered  
By the shipwreck  
Of the singular  
We have chosen the meaning  
Of being numerous. (Section 7, OBN)

And just as Mao in China gave ongoing consideration to the ideal relationship of intellectuals and artists to the people, Oppen too wonders and faces the distinct possibility that "Whether, as the intensity of seeing increases, one's distance from Them, the people, does not also increase" (section 9, OBN),<sup>4</sup> causing Oppen to wonder as well "if to know is noble" (section 31, OBN). It is this complex and unflinchingly honest consideration of how to honor simultaneously one's singularity and one's commitment to a human collective that runs throughout Oppen's poetry.

Second, in "Till Other Voices Wake Us," the last poem in *Primitive* (1978), Oppen's last published book, the concluding lines are a small but crucial revision of some very famous lines from T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," a revision which is absolutely essential to understanding how Oppen's ethics differs radically from modernists such as Pound and Eliot. In Oppen's poem, Eliot's alienation and fear of engagement with humanity — "Till human voices wake us, and we drown" — becomes "till other voices wake/ us or we drown" (p. 286, *New Collected Poems*). For Oppen, the voices of other human beings, far from being something threatening that might drown us, are precisely that which rescues and

awakens us. One other noteworthy revision by Oppen is of Shelley's classically romantic and fabulously grandiose notion that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world," which, in Oppen's hands becomes, in the poem "Disasters," "legislators// of the unacknowledged// world" (267). It is that unacknowledged world that I will return to later in this talk, particularly as I consider the *Daodejing*.

In Eigner's poetry, as with Oppen's, the biographical aspect is crucial. Eigner was born with a severe case of cerebral palsy. His mobility was profoundly restricted (he was wheel-chair bound his entire life), and he had only the use of one finger and a thumb for the writing and spatial arrangement of his poetry (which has been published in a superb 4-volume edition by Stanford University [2010], with a Selected Poems forthcoming in 2016 from the University of Alabama Press's Modern and Contemporary Poetics Series, which I co-edit with Charles Bernstein). The introduction of a biographical perspective places the reading of Eigner's work within the realm of disability studies. It also asks us to consider what we mean by "the body" and its relationship to poetry, and to human consciousness. We might also think about — and attempt to embody ourselves — the heroism and persistence involved in Eigner's production of an astonishing body of poetry — over 75 books and broadsides! — and a very extensive correspondence. (In fact, in a graduate seminar I taught a few years ago, Jenifer Park, a fine poet and student, did embody Eigner's physical mode of composition, typing her research presentation as Eigner did, with limited use of one finger and a thumb, while using an old manual typewriter. It proved to be a superb learning experience, for her, and for us! Perhaps such work might be thought of as a very precise embodiment of ethical criticism?)

But often the considerations brought to bear on our reading and critical writing activities are, as Emerson would say about how we approach spiritual experience, at second-hand. Emerson's repeated call for spiritual experience at first-hand begins rather dramatically in his introduction to "Nature":

Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? (21)

In "The Divinity School Address," he insists that our fundamental insights and

intuitions “cannot be perceived at second hand” (104). Interestingly, in that same essay, Emerson suggests that “Europe has always owed to oriental genius its divine impulses” (104).

The shift in emphasis that I will be proposing in the remainder of my talk is from studying and analyzing the ethical decisions and actions of *others* to thinking of *oneself as already in the process of being an ethically engaged subject/agent*. (Perhaps the fictional or dramatic character of greatest interest is the reader/critic?)

Innovative poetry changes radically the nature of the reader’s (and teacher’s) authority in relation to the text. In the uncertainty, indeterminacy, and necessarily heuristic nature of such reading, there is a profound epistemological and ethical shift that takes place. (I would also argue that this kind of knowing not-knowing is, as presented in Lao Tzu’s *Daodejing*, an essentially Daoist mode of thinking.)

When I begin to think about ethical criticism, and how it might be practiced in the territory of innovative American poetry, I begin to take a few steps back so that I’m not immediately engaged in a series of ethical questions, observations, and decisions that already plunge me into the text itself and the ethical positions of the words, characters, and voices of the text. In other words, there are a variety of *ethical moments*, many of which occur and exist *prior* to the acts of reading and interpretation. Nonetheless, these too *are critical ethical moments*. And at this point I must note that my talk is addressed simultaneously to two different audiences, an American audience and a Chinese audience, each working under very different institutional and pedagogical circumstances.

For example, ethical decision-making with regard to poetry might be said to begin with a professor who is constructing a course and a syllabus. Many readers of poetry — particularly students who are not and will never be poets or specialists in the field of contemporary poetry — have a naïve assumption that poems somehow exist principally in anthologies and textbooks. (I believe it was David Antin who said “anthologies are to poems what zoos are to animals...”) Even before we are thinking about the ethical positions taken within a particular poem, we need to consider the (small, or miniscule) economic domain of poetry. If the teacher has students encountering poems only in textbook-anthologies, then an ethical decision has been made that deprives readers of the knowledge and feel of what an actual *book* of contemporary poetry is. And if such books rarely make any money — for the publisher and the poet — the reader-student is also deprived of an important if baffling set of economic and ethical questions, such as, why would anyone devote a substantial portion of his/her life to poetry (writing and publishing) when the economics of it is not viable, or at least not given to profit? (As my poet-publisher-

business-man-friend James Sherry puts it, “what’s the quickest way to reduce the value of a blank sheet of paper? Begin to write a poem on it...” In the micro-economic ecosphere of contemporary poetry, a few classroom adoptions of a book published by a small or independent press can have a substantial impact. The same is not true of anthology adoptions or book adoptions for volumes published by huge mainstream corporate entities (such as Norton, or Macmillan, or Knopf...). Such classroom choices also have an impact on the poet’s visibility (and ability to arrange paid readings, and campus visits).

Even within an anthology-textbook, the teacher faces a range of ethical decisions, nearly all of which might be deemed to fall under the heading of the ethics of diversity. Although in American political-ethical rhetoric, *diversity* usually means identity-centered difference — numbers of poets of color, poetry by women, poetry by LGBTQ authors, perhaps some regional considerations, some class considerations — rarely do we foreground the equally important ethical consideration of the otherness of aesthetic difference.<sup>5</sup> (The anthology-textbooks themselves over the past forty years have shown increasing sensitivity to the former, more prevalent dimension of diversity, though only a small amount of consideration to aesthetic diversity.)

The teaching of new poetries also places the professor in a radically different position of authority, or non-authority, as the consideration of such poems is often profoundly collaborative, heuristic, and improvisationally exploratory.

Many years ago, in fact, when I was still an undergraduate student in the late 1960s, I ran into a statement that has stayed with me: *the student is educated by what the teacher is, not by his (or her) talk*. Such a statement, I believe it comes from Carl Jung, as it has resonated for me over many years, in my work as a teacher, a poet, and a critic, reminds me that it is not the postures we strike, not the didacticisms that we espouse, it is what we do in action — in the case of the classroom, in full view of the students — that is most pedagogical. For me, that ethical dimension of my conduct (as that fused identity of teacher, poet, and critic) takes on a particular urgency in relationship to what, especially in poetry, but also in music and the visual arts, is contemporary, i.e., of the present. Thus, what a teacher might manifest amounts to an ethics of attention and choice? There is an important ethics of engagement with the present that is crucial to the decisions and choices of a teacher-poet-reader-critic.

If we return for a moment to the *TLS* article about ethical criticism, we will find another important set of considerations, particularly as ethical criticism asks us to re-think the very nature of being human:

Ethical literary critics argue that, in the history of human civilization, human beings have undergone a two-step selection procedure: natural selection and ethical selection. ... But what truly distinguishes humans from other animals is the second selection: ethical selection, which helps to endow human beings with reason and ethical consciousness. This eventually turns them into ethical beings. (14-15)

I would like to make the argument that it is ethical to seek to understand better — through poetry — consciousness itself. Or, to put it more broadly, ethics amounts to a sincere and dedicated effort toward a deeper and better understanding of being.

An emphasis of ethical criticism that merits some consideration, if ethical criticism is to have a life within the full range of poetic practice, is the place of reason. In the *TLS* article the authors discuss what is referred to as “the Sphinx factor”:

The Sphinx’s combination of a human head and an animal body suggests, first of all, that the most important feature of a human image lies in its head, which stands for reason as a result of the evolutionary process, and reason is a decisive factor that enables human beings to be human beings. (15)

While *homo sapiens* is one common definition of human being, one might also (by way of Johan Huizinga’s book, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, from 1950) choose to call us *homo ludens*, emphasizing the ludic or complex elements of playfulness that are equally characteristic of human beings. While in no way am I denying the value and importance of reason, there is also a compelling case to be made for an ethics which acknowledges and honors the limitations of reason, the humility and necessity of not-knowing, and the inherently incomplete nature of human knowing. (As I have been hinting, such a paradoxical affirmation lies at the heart of Daoist thinking, of Lao Tzu’s *Dao de jing*, as opposed to the societal and behavioral pronouncements of Confucius.)

Drawing on Biwu Shang’s “Ethical Criticism and Literary Studies: A Book Review Article about Nie’s Work” (*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 15.7; 2013]), the perspective that I am eager to critique is the professed opposition or seeming incompatibility of ethical and aesthetic considerations:

...against the prevailing argument which sees literature as “an art of

language” or as “an ideology of aesthetics,” Nie considers literature as “an art of texts” and “a unique expression of ethics and morality within a certain historical period” (Ethical Literary Criticism and Other Issues 5). Further, according to Nie the primary function of literature is not aesthetics, but ethical enlightenment and education. These seemingly radical conceptions are now beginning to affect some traditional arguments about literature. Significantly, some college textbooks on literature and literary history in China have been compiled from an ethical perspective. (4)

But I don't think literature (and our relationship to it) presents us with a binary choice between ethics OR aesthetics. Of course, ethics matters. But “aesthetics” is not simply a matter of superficial (and changing) stylistic fads and adornments (like clothing accessories that go with each cultural era). At heart, aesthetics — how we go about our writing *now* — is epistemological and ontological. It involves (or ought to) the most serious of temporal (and ethical) matters: an attempt to engage reality as human consciousness *at a particular time* experiences it! (Again, this is why I much prefer Lao Tzu's *Daodejing* to Confucius' *Analects*, for the former is much less prescriptive, less moralistic, more of an epistemological and ontological investigation which acknowledges its own limitations to speak with finality and clarity.)

As one of America's great (and I suspect little known in China) poet-philosophers David Antin has stressed throughout his many years of talk-poems: the present is difficult to locate, and it is most especially difficult to locate the artistic present. In “how long is the present,” Antin says,

i have a taste  
for the present ...  
its a strong and peculiar  
taste and the present is a difficult thing to have a taste for  
its very difficult because in satisfying it the question  
i always have to ask myself is what is the present and  
how long is it? how long is the present?  
thats a question  
i take very seriously as a poet i have a very strong commitment  
to the idea of the present (158)

One might argue that at the heart of ontology, and of Zen practice, and of the *Dao*

*de jing*, is finding and developing a feeling for and a partial understanding of the present, of the moment, of our specific residence in *this* moment in time. Yet, most literary activity — teaching, anthologies, textbooks, review-writing — is nostalgic and directed toward a seemingly more understandable *past*, a reading of and in texts where the conventions of expression and meaning-making have a comfortable (even if complex) manner of signification. One might call such an approach incomplete, or perhaps even unethical.

Among American critics, the most important and best at elucidating noteworthy contemporary writing is Marjorie Perloff (whose activity in developing the CAAP conferences has been crucial!). In preparing this talk, I returned to Marjorie's ground-breaking 1981 book, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Marjorie understood then, in noting that "Rimbaud was probably the first to write what I shall call here the poetry of indeterminacy" (4), that to write about innovative poetry would necessarily involve considering the very nature of signification itself (which, I would contend, is also fundamental to the *Daodejing*). Thus Perloff comes to write about works that are "endlessly frustrating our longing for certainty" and writing and art projects that "derive their force from their refusal to 'mean' in conventional ways" (34). (As you will see when I turn to the *Daodejing*, it is perhaps a profoundly Chinese epistemology or ontology to engage what is enigmatic and indeterminate and paradoxical in its nature — a cosmos and an experience of being that evades final pronouncements, and is thus best suited to the flexible modes of saying that are essential to poetry?) Perloff, one of the first to recognize the importance of Antin's work, notes that Antin declares " ' the one thing I believe a poet ought to do is respect what he doesn't understand, respect its unintelligibility' " (302). The profoundly heuristic nature of the truly new, the truly present-engaged poetry, will always seem and feel to us, initially, to be baffling. And it will also compel us to re-investigate what we mean by "meaning" itself.

Perhaps the best writing ever on the difficulties of locating the artistic/aesthetic present occurs in Gertrude Stein's lecture "Composition as Explanation" (1926). Though Stein's concern is principally with beauty, the reception and rejection of new works in new modes of artistic composition (due to the allegedly irritating nature of the new), and the subsequent strangely rapid transition in the perception and appreciation of the work from outlaw to classic, her remarks, like Antin's and Perloff's, also point to an ethics of locating or searching for the artistic present. First and foremost, such activity — trying to find the artistic present — matters for reasons that are ontological: "The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing

everything. This makes the thing we are looking at very different and this makes what those who describe it make of it, it makes a composition” (Selected Writings, 513). Both the work of art and *how we conduct our lives* are called by Stein *compositions*: “Each period of living differs from any other period of living not in the way life is but in the way life is conducted and that authentically speaking is composition” (517). Thus, to know the *present* modes of composition would give us insight into what we see, the nature of our present life in time, and how we are conducting (or composing) our lives. Why does this *not* happen? Laziness: “and as every one is naturally indolent why naturally they don’t see” (515). As I have been suggesting, this lack of awareness of present modes of new composition is a serious pedagogical matter, and thus an ethical matter. It might also be argued that how we respond to the otherness — the strangeness — of innovative art mirrors or rhymes with our treatment of human beings (and cultures) whose otherness and difference challenge our compassion and acceptance. Our response to textual difference — to the new composition — is no doubt every bit an occasion steeped in ethics as it is a merely cognitive or interpretive moment.

Another way to think about the composing of our lives takes us into the murky terrain of that elusive term *consciousness*. I would suggest — at the risk of being unfashionably sincere and naked — that ultimately poetry is “about” consciousness — really, a manifestation of consciousness. Which is also why poetry must and does continue to change (and why, as Stein, Antin, Perloff, and Bernstein advocate, we ought to pay plenty of attention to newly emerging modes of composition). Because the nature of human consciousness — perhaps at no time in human history as today — is changing. And poetry is, at heart, part of our effort to understand, explore, and manifest that (changing) consciousness. Poetry allows us to develop a *feel* for consciousness, which is inextricable from a deepened awareness of being and time, and deepened awareness and knowledge of the ongoing composition which we call perception.

While I have been advocating attention to such manifestations in the present — to innovative poetry of this moment — the roots, particularly in Chinese literature, for such a function for poetry and for writing generally go very deep. While Lao Tzu’s *Dao de jing* includes plenty of advice about how to govern effectively, the enduring strength of this work (which other than the Bible may be the most translated work on earth?) is in its simply stated and infinitely complex engagement with the nature of being. As David Hinton suggests in his introduction to Lao Tzu’s work,

Although its inexplicable nature is a central motif in the *Tao Te Ching*, we might approach Lao Tzu's Way by speaking of it at its deep ontological level, where the distinction between Presence (Being) and Absence (Nonbeing) arises. ... The ontological structure of Way is replicated in the structure of human consciousness, thoughts arising from the same generative emptiness as the ten thousand things. ... It is here in the depths of consciousness that Way can be experienced directly through the practice of meditation. You can watch the process of Way as thought burgeons forth from the emptiness and disappears back into it, or you can simply dwell in that undifferentiated emptiness, that generative realm of Absence. (18-19)

Lao Tzu's consideration of the Way (*Dao*) contrasts sharply with the more practical, behavioral engagement with Way found in his contemporary Confucius' *Analects*. Raymond Dawson, in his introduction to the *Analects*, suggests that Confucius uses the Way "to refer either to the ideal course of conduct for an individual or to an ideal political organization" (xxiv-xxv). In the *Dao de jing*, we study the Way for its own sake, and to engage a generative emptiness that may help us to understand better our own nature.

Throughout Lao Tzu's *Dao de jing*, we find advocacy of an ongoing engagement with the nature of consciousness, a deepening awareness of being, which is a mirroring of *wu wei* (and which *does* carry with it ethical and behavioral and even governmental implications, though that is not his primary focus): "If you're nothing doing what you do/ all things will be governed well" (3.12-13; 35) From Lao Tzu's perspective, nothing else can "compare to sitting still in Way's company" (62.10; 100). He could also be describing the often vexing experience of encountering a new mode of contemporary art, an innovative poetry that defies our expectations and habits. He asks, "Who's murky enough to settle slowly into pure clarity,/ and who still enough to awaken slowly into life?" (15.13-14; 47).

What we encounter in the *Dao de jing* is analogous to the reading experience of innovative poetry — an enigmatic encounter that requires patience, open-mindedness (in Zen terminology, beginner's mind), and the development of an ability (negative capability?) to live in uncertainty and with an ethical humility that suggests the incompleteness of our understandings. Thus the *Dao de jing* begins, "A Way called *Way* isn't the perennial Way./ A name that names isn't the perennial name" (1.1-2; 33). And yet, "Way remains hidden and nameless,/ but it alone nourishes and brings to completion" (41.21-22; 79). Lao Tzu's great poem is a cautionary tale regarding the perils of success, power, and will, and thus it

carries with it serious ecological and political implications, which, of course, are thus also pedagogical and ethical implications. It is poetry — much like the best of contemporary innovative poetry — that both asks us to give it our fullest effort, intellect, and attention, all the while realizing, “The further you explore, the less you know.// So it is that a sage knows by going nowhere,/ names by seeing nothing,/ perfects by doing nothing” (47.5-8; 85).

Thus I am proposing an additional dimension to what we think of as ethical criticism, and it involves a reading process that, by necessity, is inconclusive, not confined to what is reasonable, and knows quite certainly that certainty will not be the outcome. If it yields conclusions, they will not be Confucian nuggets of wisdom; they will be conclusions that undo themselves. It is an ethical not-knowing, which, nonetheless, is what ethical learning amounts to: an ongoing conversation, ever leading to more questions and more comments. To conclude, let me illustrate what such ethical criticism might look like by reading a poem by Larry Eigner.

May 29 71      # 5 0 7

paper  
 a cut map  
 beautiful  
 land  
 beds  
 tree  
 the air  
 to dance in  
 time  
 what ground  
 stretches out  
 dancing, you feel like  
 dancing

so many winds blowing

forest the mind  
 flight

the sun  
 on the open  
 then the earth  
 wall

*(The Collected Poems of Larry Eigner, Volume III 1966-1978, 1012)*

Larry Eigner's poetry presents us with a perpetual changing of direction, often a swerving from word to word, from line to line. The page becomes a highly malleable (seemingly infinitely so) locale for an instance of grace of mind, a turning about that is highly particular, idiosyncratic (and a perhaps simultaneously universal?) movement of consciousness in a complex relationship with language.

At nearly every moment of Eigner's #507 we have the possibility, and often the actuality, of a change in direction. Perhaps our own engaged questioning allows us to move with the movement of his poem. "paper" — is it this paper, that is, the one where the poem is being written? Or perhaps the paper that is, as the next line suggests, "a cut map," and is a poem, this poem, then a kind of "cut map"? cut out or from what? And the poem calls it "beautiful" — is the beauty what we are seeing emerge as the poem delineates itself, or is it something else that is more generally beautiful? What follows is a discrete series of things, a brief descending catalog — "land/ beds/ tree/ the air" — are they, each, what is beautiful, or perhaps they are beautiful, as the next line suggests, "to dance in." But how does one dance in (or with) a series of descending general nouns? Perhaps the poem is the moment of our dancing, a poem that swerves, that delights in its own possibilities of movement, "to dance in/ time," the dance, then, being a moving in space and time. The dance takes place at least two times: in the time of the poem's composition, and in the time of our reading of it (as we dance with and in its movement, its turning).

Our being, then, takes place here, in space and time, in a place of "land" and "beds" and "tree" and "the air," and we dance and we are upon "what ground" — the place that "stretches out," and which calls to us to consider "dancing, you feel like/dancing." That ground — as in Heidegger's thinking — is defined by our relationship to being and time. The ground, then, is a mixture of something we think through and about, at once familiar, present, and profoundly strange and enigmatic. A known place, but equally an ignored and unknowable thing, inextricably part of our own enigmatic nature. A ground that we may glimpse or sense in some poems.

These lines then are perhaps a kind of consecutive descent — a cascade, a waterfall — of an ongoing line of thinking, an initial direction of movement that

does not swerve or sway too far from its initial impulse and its initial direction. But then there is that last line of this section: “so many winds blowing.” What winds? That general “western wind” of an ongoing poetic tradition? A wind that might be upon and across “land” and “beds” and in a “tree” and essential and resident of “the air”? Or perhaps the “so many winds blowing” is true for any instant of consciousness, especially one manifesting itself on “paper/ a cut map”?

After a considerable open space — the largest of the poem, this “cut map” cut from an instance of awareness in space and time — we encounter the most remarkable turn of the poem: “forest the mind.” It is an apposition, which, in retrospect — the shift in direction allows us to look back — has been mildly implicit earlier in the poem, so that we now might consider another understanding of “what ground”: a support or space or entity that allows us to hold in awareness “land” “beds” “tree” and “the air,” and to dance with these seen and named locales. That forest/mind, wherein we find “so many winds blowing” — and this goes to the heart of much of Eigner’s poetry which can be read as an ongoing phenomenology, a mapping or engaging of the rapidity of perception and the complexity and grace of seeing’s dance with language and naming. It is an exhilarating sense of mind, which moves us upward perceptually, to “flight” and “the sun,” a dancing “on the open,” which, ultimately, comes back down to “then the earth/ wall.”

Perhaps it is the lack of connectives from word to word and even more so from line to line, perhaps it is the lack of a typical authorial pronoun that makes the poem on the page feel like a mobile, like a suspension of words and phrases of varying weight, in charged and multiple relationships to one another. Thus from almost every line to the next, we are either shifting or re-directing our attention or taking a leap, learning as we read the poem — and tutored precisely by the painstaking arrangement of the words on the page — how to travel a similar perceptual path.

Quite amazing, inspiring, and pertinent, then, to consider that Eigner, in spite of his severe case (from birth) of cerebral palsy, composed over 3,000 poems, “producing his typescripts on his 1940 Royal manual typewriter using only his right index finger and thumb to create shifting constellations of words in space whose musical and visual designs are realized in a language at once immediate and highly abstract” (editors’ jacket note, Vol. III).

As we take this second major turn in our reading — an exploration and recognition of the poet’s physical state, and a shift toward an embodied sense of the poem’s composition — perhaps our reading of the poem changes somewhat. In light of Eigner’s cerebral palsy and the difficult process of typing his poems, do we

read lines like “dancing, you feel like/ dancing” differently? Do we read differently knowing he could not dance, or does the poem itself become that dancing (which, perhaps, is how we would read the poem all along without the re-consideration brought about by our knowledge of the poet’s physical circumstance)? Do we return early in the poem to the cascade of general nouns and see now that “beds” is quite different than “land,” “tree,” and “the air,” and may indicate, obliquely, the poet’s physical location?

As Emmanuel Levinas has suggested, “we exist in a circuit of intelligence with the real” (*Entre Nous* 4). Innovative and somewhat baffling contemporary poetry offers us a place, in language, to experience and respond to —*without mastery* — the complexity of the real. Or, as Lao Tzu writes,

Honoring Way and treasuring Integrity  
isn’t obedience to command,  
it’s occurrence perennially appearing of itself. (51. ll. 7-9, 89)

In reading this one poem by Larry Eigner, I am sketching an ethical reading practice based on humility and limitation, as we come up against our not-knowing (try as we might to know). Such reading places us within an ethics of paradox and doubleness — of profound curiosity and delving, along with the recognition of the partial and indeterminate nature of the activity. That ongoing conversation where we collaborate in articulating our observations and questions, our tentative expressions of signification and meaning, *is knowing*, and its generative questions and limitations are a respectful and ethical way of being in the world.

## Notes

1. This essay is an expanded version of the keynote address that I presented in Jinan on November 29, 2015, for the 4<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Chinese/American Association for Poetry and Poetics.
2. *Selected Poems and Essays of Hank Lazer*, Central China Normal University Press: 2015. For Professor Nie’s Preface, see pp, 1-7.
3. “Zui Wei Qun Ti.” *Poetry Monthly* (October 2013): 39-47. Hefei: Poetry Monthly Press, 2013.
4. Oppen is quoting from a letter sent to him by Rachel Blau DuPlessis.
5. At the 4<sup>th</sup> CAAP conference, I note with great pleasure the contributions of participants Dr. Maryemma Graham and Dr. Lauri Ramey, each of whom in their presentations, pedagogy, and publishing have done noteworthy work to promote *both* elements of diversity. The two

anthologies —*Every Goodbye Ain't Gone: An Anthology of Innovative Poetry by African Americans* (2006) and *What I Say: Innovative Poetry by Black Writers in America* (2015), edited by Lauri Ramey and Aldon Nielsen — provide tremendous resources for and evidence of the great variety and excellence of innovative poetry by African American poets.

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# The Ethical Discourse of Tragedy and (Pseudo-)Historiography

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**Abstract** The concept of ethical criticism has always had its roots in ancient Greek tragedy and its Aristotelian interpretation. The tragic plot reveals the ethical choices of the characters and provokes an ethical response on behalf of a listener. The idea that literature is a medium where readers can safely fulfill experiments of thought with human behavior and the consequences of various ethical choices can be reduced from the analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which is an analysis of Greek tragedy. The ethical cosmos of a tragedy, however, is obviously different from that of historiography. The paper analyses the pseudo-historiographical rewriting of the Trojan war by the so-called Dictys Cretensis (which became the source of knowledge about the Trojan war for the European tradition for centuries, until the Renaissance). That text elaborates many events for which the main sources are tragedies by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and mostly Euripides. Characters in a tragedy make very difficult decisions and take them seriously. In the *Ephemeris*, they do not seem to realize moral dilemmas or that they have to choose, but act spontaneously in accordance with their direct interests or desires. Their motives become increasingly mean as the war develops a demoralizing effect on them.

**Key words** ancient Greek tragedy; pseudo-historiography; Aristotle, Euripides; Sophocles; Dictys Cretensis; ethical choice.

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The concept of ethical criticism has its roots in ancient Greek tragedy and its Aristotelian interpretation. This is rather logical, given that Aristotle can be regarded as the founder of the philosophical subdiscipline of ethics. Although Plato did discuss ethical problems too, it was Aristotle who coined the name and wrote the first completely discursive books on the topic: the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Magna Moralia*. At the same time, he is also the founder of western literary criticism with his *Poetics*, which discussed tragedy almost exclusively, and approached it essentially from the viewpoint of ethics. Tragedy for him is the imitation of human action, which is always already an ethical issue, processed by ethical choices of the dramatic agents, interpreted and evaluated by the audience on ethical grounds. This original link between the philosophical and literary fields of research made ancient Greek tragedy an experimental site of ethics and ethical criticism.

In her search for the ethical-philosophical that appears in literature, on the basis of the presupposition that literature offers plenty of experimental answers to the Aristotelian key question of ethics, namely “How shall we live?” Martha Nussbaum focused exclusively on narrative, and mostly on novels (Nussbaum 1987). Many have criticized this approach, partly because it uses a very narrow notion of literature, leaving large areas undiscussed, partly because the focus on plot simply misses the literariness of literature, which was for a long time and maybe still is the object of literary criticism since its foundation as modern academic discipline by the Russian formalists. What I would like to do in this paper is plot-centered ethical criticism, which, however, does justice to the literariness in so far it investigates the consequences of transposition from one literary genre to another in the creation of a rather different ethical cosmos.

The transposition I discuss happened in a strange literary work usually referred to as *Dictys Cretensis*, although it is not a title, but the name of the fictitious author. The name of the real author or forger is unknown. The well-developed narrative frame makes it the most successful and probably most interesting ancient literary forgery (Speyer, Eisenhut 15). It is a prose narrative, a memoir of a (fictitious) eyewitness of the Trojan war. Dictys of Crete is said to have been a Greek soldier in that war. The Greek text was written in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, but we only have two

papyrus fragments from it (Grendell, Hunt & Goodspeed, Nr. 268; Barns, Parson, Rea & Turner, Nr. 1539). However, a Latin translation was made in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, which has survived. On the basis of the Greek fragments we know that the Latin was written in a much more elevated style, which can be seen in many places to be imitating Sallust, the most popular Roman historian in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. The Sallust quotations usually appear as moralizing or psychological additions to the Greek original (Noack 451-3). However, according to the translator's introductory note, the second half of the narrative (on the return of the Greeks) was severely abridged. We can describe the genre of this text as novelistic pseudo-historiography. The Greek-Latin title is *Ephemeris belli Troiani*, which can be translated as the journal of the Trojan war. *Ephemeris* is also the name of an ancient genre, called *commentarius* in Latin, a collection of notes that a prominent historical figure can publish as raw material for future historiographers without much rhetorical elaboration (Bomer 210-11). The work thus has historical or historiographic interest and attitude.

We should keep in mind how Aristotle highlighted the difference between historiography and poetry: “the former relates things that have happened, the latter things that may happen,” “i.e. that are possible in accordance with probability or necessity” (Aristotle 1451b4-5 and 1451a39-b1). In antiquity nobody doubted the historicity of the Trojan war and its prominent characters, but since the 5<sup>th</sup> century (or even earlier) intelligent people have been puzzled by the fact that all the accounts were written by poets (Merkle, *Die Ephemeris...* 36) and contain many obviously impossible, marvelous elements. The Dictys account offered a seemingly reliable narrative (with the claim of being written by an eyewitness, the type of source regarded as having the highest authority in antiquity), containing exclusively the kind of events that could appear in historiography too. The previously accessible sources (epic poems and tragedies) may have told what may have happen, but Dictys finally claimed to tell what had really happened around Troy.

The Dictys account is in reality first and foremost a rewriting of belletristic texts, the Homeric and cyclic epics (cf. Merkle *Die Ephemeris...*, passim). Homer's two epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* tell only a fraction of the stories of the Trojan war. The former covers the events of some days from the ninth year of the war, the latter the return of Ulysses with retrospective accounts of the sack of Troy (with the wooden horse), the adventures of Ulysses after the war, the return of Menelaus, and the death of Agamemnon. There were about a dozen other epic poems on the Trojan war and other mythical topics (the epic cycle), which have

been lost, but were available in antiquity. They were regarded as having much less poetic value than Homer. And for many events the best-known and most highly evaluated source of information was tragedy, about a dozen pieces by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The Dictys account transposes those events from the life world (and ethical world) of poetry to that of historiography, but since it is in fact pseudo-historiography, it shows the latter world in an extreme, slightly belletristic, even more characteristic form.

The most detailed narrative which takes its plot from a tragedy is that of Iphigenia in Aulis. In Euripides' tragedy both Menelaus and Agamemnon had to make very difficult ethical choices before the tragedy, and both change their minds in the first scene to choose differently in the same dilemma. In fact, Agamemnon changed his very first decision already before the tragedy. The Greek army is ready to sail to Troy, but there is no wind. They are told (by the gods through prophets) that for the departure and the successful campaign in Asia, Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. The elected commander has to choose between loyalties to the male community and to his own family, between the values of the society and his more limited life circle. Since both loyalties are valid and of utmost importance, both possible choices are equally legitimate and equally wrong. Dismissing the army and canceling the war means the denial of his duties and values as a king and a hero, while if he kills his own child, he betrays his role as a father and the head of a family. The gods do not offer an easy choice, which makes it a real ethical dilemma. First Menelaus and Agamemnon agreed to sacrifice Iphigenia, sending a letter to Agamemnon's wife asking her to send the girl to Aulis. Then Agamemnon changed his mind, trying to send another message to his wife withdrawing the first request. In the first scene of the drama, Menelaus and Agamemnon have an argument about that second decision. Menelaus still wants to sacrifice his niece. For him the decision is, however, quite different. He is the beneficiary of the campaign, which has the purpose to get his wife back. Due to the argument, however, he changes his mind and accepts that he should not let his niece, a blood related member of his family, be killed in order to regain an unfaithful wife and punish an adulterer. He is willing to call off the war. During their fight, however, Agamemnon also changes his mind and accepts (again) the viewpoint of male society. From that point on he wants to make the sacrifice.

Achilles, the greatest hero of the Greeks, a demigod, learns that Iphigenia has been tricked into coming to the camp under the pretense that she is supposed to marry him. He is so upset about his name being used for such a mean and undignified purpose that he decides to prevent the sacrifice by all available means.

However, he comes to realize that all the Greeks, including his own soldiers, are determined to perform it. His final decision is to fight against the Greeks till death, even if it is futile, but he will not endorse their action. He renounces the loyalty towards his community when he finds their ethical decision unacceptable. But at this point, on the verge of a catastrophe, Iphigenia realizes that she also has a choice. Instead of being a passive victim and waiting for men to decide her fate she decides to willingly sacrifice herself for the good of the Greek male society.

We can see that characters in a tragedy make very difficult decisions and take them seriously. They invest immense energy in pondering the values they want to represent in the world and suffer profoundly because of those value conflicts. They are willing to die if it is the price they have to pay for the values they have chosen.

Very little of these ethical dilemmas has been kept in the Dictys account. One of the basic differences is that it is not the wind and the campaign that are at stake, but the lives of the Greek soldiers who are being killed by an epidemic. An inspired seer informs the leaders that Iphigenia's sacrifice is the only possible cure. In this dilemma Agamemnon has to choose not between values but between killing one person and letting thousands die. However, for him this is not a dilemma here: from the first minute he consequently refuses to sacrifice his daughter. Therefore the Greeks depose him as general-in-chief and create a four men corps to run the army. Ulysses secretly goes to Mycenae with a false letter about the wedding of Achilles and Iphigenia and brings the girl to the camp. Menelaus, without any moral hesitation, starts performing the sacrifice, when a voice from the woods prevents it. In the meantime Achilles has received a letter and gifts from Iphigenia's mother revealing the trick his name had been used for. He runs to the place of the sacrifice to stop it, but since it has already been called off, no conflict develops. What we can see from this summary is that the characters do not realize the moral dilemmas or that they have to choose. They respond to any situation instantly and without any kind of deliberation. The choices they make, however, can be interpreted as good, more or less. What is completely missing, however, is any interaction between Achilles and Iphigenia, and consequently any self-sacrificing deliberation on their behalf. Achilles tries to intervene here violently, but since he has not checked the Greeks' mode in advance, this does not mean willing death for him. He does not confront the whole army, but only a fraction of it in a sudden flare of anger, which is his basic characteristic. And there is no word about Iphigenia making any decision on her own. Those decisions that are visible here are represented as morally good. Agamemnon's stubborn refusal to sacrifice his daughter makes him appear a better father than anywhere else in the mythological tradition, while

Menelaus and Ulysses are lauded by the narrator for saving the army. But all this is in the first book and at the beginning of the war. The whole narrative explains the decline of the Greeks as a result of the demoralizing effect of the war itself (cf. Merkle *Artless...*, and in more detail *Die Ephemeris...*).

We can see this in the story about Ajax' death, best known from a tragedy by Sophocles. Before the stage action started, Achilles' weaponry has been awarded to Ulysses, which upsets Ajax so much that he decides to kill the Greek leaders. Pallas Athena prevents this by tricking him into believing that some sheep and cattle are Menelaus, Agamemnon and Ulysses. At the beginning of the tragedy Ajax realizes what he has done in his madness, and that he has become ridiculous in the eyes of the Greek community, so he decides to commit suicide. His concubine, Tecmessa, tries to dissuade him in vain. In the last phase of the tragedy, Agamemnon and Menelaus deny any funeral rites to Ajax, but Ulysses convinces them to allow the burial of the corpse, since one should respect a noble enemy in his death.

Before comparing this plot to the transformations of the Dictys narrative, let us reconsider what Aristotle wrote about the decisions. In the *Poetics* the notion appears in his analysis of character. Character is a word of Greek origin, and the usual translation of the one Aristotle uses here, namely *ethos*, from which the word ethics comes. The Greek word character was to become a notion of philosophy one generation later, with the work *Characters* by Aristotle's disciple Theophrastus. The Aristotelian *ethos* has a rather different meaning from its modern English translation, since it is not the whole personality, but as it is defined, "according to which we say that the people in action are of a certain sort" (1450a6-7). A little bit later a more detailed definition is offered: "Character is which reveals decision, of whatever sort; this is why those speeches in which the speaker decides or avoids nothing at all do not have character" (1450b9-11). In the main analysis, however, Aristotle declares that characters in a tragedy should not be of "whatever sort." From one of the preliminary definitions of tragedy we know that "comedy prefers to represent people who are worse than those who exist, tragedy people who are better" (1448a17-19). And it must be an ethical quality he is speaking about, since "everyone differs in character because of vice and virtue" (1448a3-4). Therefore we expect people represented in tragedy be good, better than those who exist. And this is exactly what Aristotle requires: "the characters should be good. The tragedy will have character if, as we said, the speech or the action makes obvious a decision of whatever sort; it will have a good character, if it makes a good decision" (1454a16-19). It goes without saying that a decision influences the evolution of the plot, therefore morally good decisions also can result in a tragic catastrophe. Since

characters in the tragedy should be good, they should choose virtue and never vice. In the case of Iphigenia we have already seen that sometimes one has to choose between too virtuous options, both of which may have terrible consequences.

What can we say about the decisions in Sophocles' Ajax? The story started with the decision to award Achilles' armor to Ulysses, but since that happened before the tragedy and the motives are not clarified, there is no character in this decision. Then Ajax decides to massacre all the Greek leaders. This may seem a bit harsh. But the "most obvious quality of tragic conflict is its extremity: it does not ordinarily admit of compromise or mediation" (Burian 181). The archaic heroes do everything for *timê*, to be respected by society; if they sacrifice their life, they do it not so much for the survival, success or well-being of the society, but for the respect they achieve through that. Therefore if Ajax had simply accepted humiliation, which means deprivation of respect on behalf of the society, it would not be a virtuous decision. To take his revenge may be virtuous, but destroying the society whose respect he wants to gain is problematic both logically and morally, and the latter dilemma was very probably understood in all its dimensions by the contemporary audience of the democratic Athens.

His second decision, to commit suicide because he cannot face ridicule and humiliation once again without any chance of vengeance, is characteristic of the old Greek values (the so-called shame culture), and shows some tragic grandeur. The leaders' final decision to provide an appropriate funeral for Ajax, who had been the second greatest Greek warrior during the war, is obviously a morally good decision, and what is surprising that Menelaus and Agamemnon can be convinced only with some difficulty. The idea comes from Ulysses, who admits that Ajax was his enemy, nevertheless he is able to show real generosity.

In the Dictys account it is not Achilles' armor but a very holy statue of Athena that is awarded to Ulysses instead of Ajax, which is a minor difference. However, Ulysses has good reasons to claim the statue, since it was him who furtively brought it from Troy before the capture. But it is not the reason why he is rewarded. After the sack of Troy, Ajax wanted Helena to be executed, because she had caused so much pain to the Greeks, but Menelaus was still in love with his wife. Ulysses played a key role in giving her back to Menelaus safely. The narrator and a part of the army interprets this decision as putting personal desire before the community's interests. Some soldiers, however, try to flatter Ulysses by scolding Ajax, who declares he will take bloody vengeance on those who insult him. From his perspective we cannot see any moral problem: he does not want to kill everybody, and does not want to take revenge on the whole army because of a decision he

cannot accept. He only declares that he will protect his dignity. Then something unexpected happens: “At daybreak we found Ajax, out in the open, dead; upon closer investigation we discovered that he had been killed with a sword” (5.15, Dictys, *A Journal...*, 115). Nothing is said about divine intervention, madness, shame or suicide. The latter cannot be completely excluded. It will never be clear how Ajax died, but public opinion is summarized as follows: Both leaders and privates were extremely upset, which soon resulted in revolt, because everybody was frustrated about Ajax having been assassinated furtively by Agamemnon’s circle. Political assassination, petty crimes with low intentions: that is characteristic of the Greek leaders after the war, without any residue of tragic grandeur.

The characters of tragedy have time to speak about their decisions. In Dictys’ political-historiographical cosmos they act immediately, without hesitation, and the readers are given only the narrator’s speculations about the motives, which tend to be presented as mean. Even if the choice is factually the same as in a tragedy, the decision is morally wrong here because of the lack of deliberation, because the “heroes” do not realize that they have to choose between values, but act spontaneously in accordance with their direct interests or desires.

We may deduce even from Aristotle’s insights that different literary genres imply different ethical worlds, if we combine his idea that tragedy represents people better than us, while comedy those worse than us, with his definition of character as the manifestation of good or bad ethical choices. In tragedy good people make good choices, while in the comedy bad people make bad choice, which are tautological descriptions, since people are good or bad exactly because of their good or bad choices. In the transposition of the story of the Trojan war from the tragic to the historiographic discourse we see remarkable changes in the ethical value of the same decisions of the very same people. To choose the same for a different reason is not the same decision to be sure. The different genre, however, hardly seems to represent different kinds of choices, but rather different decision making processes, different attitudes towards the challenges of ethical choice.

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# Tom Stoppard's *The Hard Problem*: A Consideration

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**Abstract** Tom Stoppard's thirty-first theatrical play, *The Hard Problem* received its world premiere at the Dorfman Theatre, The National Theatre, on London's South Bank on 28 January 2015. This is Stoppard's first play for the theatre since his excursion into what might have been had his family had survived the Second World War and remained in what is now the Czech Republic, *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006). Receiving a hostile critical reception, *The Hard Problem* has much in common with Stoppard's concerns in his previous dramatic work: with choice and chance. Alistair Macaulay, writing about Stoppard's *The Invention of Love* (1997), astutely observes that "most or all Stoppard plays are about epistemology — about the various ways in which our brains apprehend and address the world, the range of possibilities whereby experience and thought become knowledge.... And the nature of knowledge — what has been lost, forgotten, mistaken? — is an abiding theme." Probably the first to appear in print in an academic journal, my account examines the eleven scenes of *The Hard Problem*, follows closely the evolution of its plot from an ethical critical perspective: the issues of why and how the characters in the play are in the situation in which they find themselves are amongst the elements that are emphasized.

**Key words** Stoppard; *The Hard Problem*; Ethical Criticism

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Tom Stoppard's latest theatrical play *The Hard Problem* received its world premiere at the Dorfman Theatre, The National Theatre, on London's South Bank on 28 January 2015. Running without an interval for about an hour and forty minutes it was Stoppard's first play for the theatre since his excursion in *Rock 'n' Roll* (2006) into what might have been had his parents remained in what is now the Czech Republic and survived the Second World War. He also used, as he does in *Rock 'n' Roll*, the music of Pink Floyd for his play for radio *Darkside* broadcast on BBC radio 26 August 2013.

*The Hard Problem* is Stoppard's thirty-first theatrical play and has much in common with its creator's concerns since his first play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967): chance, "choice," the roll of the dice determining what happens in life. His latest play received an overwhelmingly hostile critical response. One of the elements the critics objected to being far too many cultural, scientific, and literary references past and present, but those who know several of his plays realize that *The Hard Problem* is no different from other Stoppard plays in its intertextuality. This one works on different levels depending upon the audience's inter-textual awareness. Alistair Macaulay has written that most or all Stoppard plays are about epistemology — about the various ways in which our brains apprehend and address the world, the range of possibilities whereby experience and thought become knowledge.... And the nature of knowledge — what has been lost, forgotten, mistaken? — is an abiding theme.<sup>1</sup> In "First Person," his programme note to the National Theatre run, Stoppard writes that "*The Hard Problem* is what the Australian philosopher David Chalmers, called the mystery of consciousness; that is, the problem of explaining the phenomenon that we have subjective First Person experiences."<sup>2</sup> Or to express this differently is there anything that transcends the material in the sense of mind as brain?

In the opening scene of *The Hard Problem*, Spike the University lecturer who is having an affair with Hilary his younger student tells her "The game is not about you ... it's about a statistical tendency. It's about survival strategies hardwired into our brains millions of years ago"(4).<sup>3</sup> The play explores dramatically this and other observations, assertions that for instance, to quote Spike again that "culture, empathy, faith, hope and charity, all the flip sides of egoism come back to biology" (7), do they? Hilary tells Spike that "Virtue"-whatever that is -"is not science. You can't get an *ought* out of an *is*. Morality is not science. So there must be something else, which isn't science. Which science isn't. What is it?" (15). Questions of this nature are Stoppard's preoccupation in *The Hard Problem*.

In *The Hard Problem* Stoppard grapples with fundamental human and

scientific questions. To cite the description of the play found on the back cover of the paperback edition: “Hilary, a young psychology researcher at a brain-science Institute, is nursing a private sorrow and a troubling question at work, where psychology and biology meet. If there is nothing but matter, what is consciousness?”

I am assuming that most of my readers will not be familiar with the play. So it seems appropriate to describe first in some detail the “plot” such as it is, “characters” such as they are, dramatic conflicts, if any, ideas that are presented, and ethical positions asserted.

At its beginning the designer Bob Crowley’s representation of the brain dominates the stage and Bach’s cerebral fugal music is heard. The lights then come up on “Twenty-two” year old Hilary, an undergraduate student, and her tutor Spike “about thirty” (3) — soon they will be lovers — who are arguing about game theory and rationality. Hilary is being prepared, coached for an interview at a prestigious Brain Institute. Hilary’s major is psychology, and her tutor/lover Spike a scientific materialist. While she believes in God and “the good,” Spike is engaged in a dualistic activity: at the same time as intellectually debating with her and coaching her, he is trying to get her into bed. Spike tells her — using unlikely words for a seduction- that “culture, empathy, faith, hope and charity, all the flip sides of egoism, come back to biology, because there just ain’t anywhere else to come from except three pounds of grey matter wired up in your head like a map of the London Underground with eighty-six billion stations connected thirty trillion ways, hard wired for me first” (7). This first scene, in common with the remainder of the play, is replete with ethical issues such as sleeping with a student, the nature of altruism, the nature of the rational. At the conclusion of this first scene Hilary “starts getting undressed” alone (7).

The second of eleven scenes opens with the opposite of ideas of the rational: “Hilary ...kneeling silently at the side of her bed, saying her prayers.” Spike enters “barefoot, wearing a girly wrap-over negligee too small for him, showing bare calves” (8). Clearly the two come together physically but their minds are far apart. The rest of the scene consists of their intellectual squabbling in some of the longest speeches or rather declarations of positions in the play: over “Forgiveness”; the techniques to be used to get accepted by the prestigious Kroll Institute for Brain Science, the research centre financed by a billionaire who has made his money in hedge-funds. Subjects discussed include “consciousness,” and what it is, “pain,” “sorrow,” what the brain is, intentions, survival reflexes, amongst other concerns. The scene concludes with Hilary crying and needing “a miracle” (8-16).

Scene three is set in “The Kroll Institute for Brain Science” (16) at which Hilary and Amal, a Cambridge educated Indian with a maths degree and working on a Master’s degree in biophysics, are being interviewed for it appears the same position. We learn that Hilary studied Psychology at Loughborough University—the name evoked laughter amongst the status conscious, clearly educated audience when I saw the play on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015 at London’s National Theatre. This wasn’t the only “in” reference and allusion to receive laughter or murmurs of recognition. Indeed a criticism of the play amongst the reviewers in the British “intellectual” newspapers, and journals such as *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and the *Times Literary Supplement* to name but three reviews,<sup>4</sup> is that there is too much of this kind of name-dropping in the play and that “what’s presented is less drama than diagram” (*TLS*; February 6, 2015: 17). In this third scene between Hilary and her competitor Amal competition between them seems non-existent. There is little dramatic conflict between the two speakers: both are more representatives of ideas and status: she’s from Loughborough, perceived as third rate; he’s from the top of the academic pecking order — Cambridge; she is more unsettled about the ethics of the institute; he is a dedicated materialist. Information about them, their backgrounds is conveyed rather than their character traits.

This third scene includes as one of the interviewers, Julia, who was at school with Hilary. Coincidence is a dramatic device frequently found in Stoppard’s drama in addition to the collision of opposites which pervades his drama, from *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), to *Jumpers* (1972 and beyond. To take three instances: in *Jumpers* musical comedy and moral philosophy are juxtaposed with acrobats and academic philosophers. There is the collision of the opposites of the surrealistic and the notions of realism in *Travesties* (1974). In the magnificent *Arcadia* (1993), probably the play of Stoppard’s that will last the longest, ideas of art and science shift between the early nineteenth century and the late twentieth century, and Newtonian physics is a bed fellow with Chaos theory. In *The Hard Problem* Julia reveals that Hilary whilst at school became pregnant, had a baby girl that she gave up for adoption. In such a decision—an ethical as well as pragmatic one— there is the pathos and sadness of *The Hard Problem*. Towards the conclusion of this third scene Jerry appears: the last lines of the scene revealing that his name is on the Institute for Brain Science building.

Via a stage direction, the audience learns in the fourth scene, that five years have gone by: Jerry enters, laughing into his cell phone. He is eating breakfast with his daughter Cathy whom the audience subsequently learns in the scene is adopted. The other character who actually appears in the scene as distinct from

being talked to on the phone is Amal. He nervously reminds his boss, who has told him that he pays him to keep quiet, that, in words reminiscent of Stoppard's personal sentiments on the stock market "the market is a belief system with a short memory, and it's averaged on highly correlated billion-dollar bets and trillions on side bets which are going to go wrong together. I mean to *zero*. You pay me for my research." Jerry confesses that his success depends upon "Confidence. Belief. " He doesn't pay Amal "to post it like a fridge magnet on the reception desk." Amal responds "but I wasn't wrong." Jerry's response is "you were early, which is the same thing." Amal replies [rather shocked], "you're going short the market?" His boss's reaction is peremptory and contemptuous typical of his attitude to Amal, his employee whom he dismisses: "use the service stairs" (33-34). Stoppard distrusts the market and invested in property and art and other investment opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

This encounter at the end of the fourth scene between Amal and Jerry must strike a note to readers aware of for instance the 2015 dramatic swings and instability in the Chinese and other stock markets. Indeed one of the strengths of *The Hard Problem* is one the one hand Stoppard's ability to describe and to discuss pertinent ethical issues such as the challenge presented to us facing machines that are capable of wit, charm and resourcefulness and on the other hand Stoppard's uncanny ability to anticipate, to act as an old-fashioned seer or prophet. Indeed Jerry the highly successful capitalist of the play, in his reactions to his research assistant displays feeling and emotion. He doesn't totally act as a market manipulator but as a human with feelings, with sensibilities.

The fifth scene takes place in the working environment of the Institute with its employees staring at screens and "On a screen, Elaine, a young woman, is visibly and audibly reacting to receiving a series of [simulated] electric shocks." New characters are introduced: Leo an employee and another employee Bo described as "a young Chinese-American woman"(34) whom the audience learns towards the end of the scene graduated from Shanghai — the text doesn't indicate which University in that huge city — Caltech and also has a Master's degree from Cambridge in the UK. Bo is one of the few co-workers whom Hilary appears to communicate with and she exhibits sympathy to her point of view. Hilary for instance tells Bo that they are not "testing for empathy" but for "Motivation. Egoist motives and altruistic motives. Selfish and unselfish. There's a commonsense view that we're selfish by nature, and unselfish when we override our nature, basically by culture. What do you think?" Bo's response refers to "it's good to be good, I don't see that it matters what makes you good" to which Hilary replies "it might matter if people who are out for themselves think they're justified by biology" (39-

40).

In the meantime Jerry is on a tour of the building with his adopted daughter. Hilary is describing a child custody experiment she used to do at Loughborough involving parents from different backgrounds. This experiment led to the surprising result that the less well-off parents should be granted their custody. At the conclusion of the scene Hilary reasserts her belief that “It was a miracle” (43) that she gained employment at the Institute.

The sixth scene takes place “in an empty space”: Hilary and her old school friend Julia talk during a Pilates session. Julia tells Hilary that Jerry has an adopted daughter named Catherine of a similar age as the daughter Hilary had given up for adoption. She asks Hilary whether she misses her daughter. Hilary has not thought of her daughter for a long time and in any case “swapped her for a doctorate” (44), and tells Julia of her (Hilary’s) *need* to believe in God.

This sixth scene provides an illustration of the kind of aesthetical and ethical concerns that arise in coming to terms with this Stoppard drama. There is what may be perceived to be a pretentious reference to “Gödel’s Proof.” Ursula, a lesbian co-worker, appears at the scenes end and tells Hilary “You wouldn’t know Gödel’s Proof if it had suspender’s in Selfridge’s window” an apparent joke that fell flat at the matinee I attended. Ursula is responding to Hilary’s question to her: “Will you show me how Gödel’s Proof means a brain can’t be modelled on a computer?” (46).

In a newspaper interview with Camilla Turner published in the *Daily Telegraph* Tom Stoppard has expressed frustration with his current audiences and their sense of humour. He has had “to dumb down his jokes so that the audience understands them.” In a question and answer session with the director of *The Hard Problem*, Sir Nicholas Hytner, Stoppard observed that “It’s very rare to connect an audience except on a level which is lower than you would want to connect them on.” Additionally he commented “You could raise it a notch and you might lose an eighth of them. It’s to do with reference and allusion.” He changed a scene in *The Hard Problem* three times during its preview performances in order to make a specific allusion more and more evident on each occasion.<sup>6</sup>

Probably Stoppard hadn’t in mind the reference to the fashionable store Selfridges in London’s Regent Street. Whether Stoppard is specifically referring in his comments to the references to “Gödel’s Proof” is unclear. For those who don’t know, to put it very simply “Gödel’s ontological proof is a formal argument for God’s existence by the mathematician Kurt Gödel (1906–1978)” (Wikipedia). Do we accept Stoppard’s position that he needs to dumb down his allusions, his

intertextuality or is he making “egotistical” assumptions that his previous audiences for instance got it when they watched his work and audiences watching his new play do not? The aesthetic/critical issue is that such references may appear pretentious, inserted and lack dramatic appeal: the ethical issues are that such references to fundamental concerns in ethics and the branch of philosophy dealing with ethics remain undeveloped in his drama and especially in *The Hard Problem*.

In *The Hard Problem* the setting is again changed. Scene seven is back to Hilary and Spike. This time they are together in Venice and in various states of dressing or undress. The scene opens with Hilary “saying her prayers” (47) and concludes with her weeping in the shower. She asks for Spike’s observations on a paper she has written. There are the usual Stoppard witticisms, rhetorical questions and topical allusions: is sex better at one University rather than another? Spike has moved from Loughborough to University College London. There is a prescient reference to a University College London Nobel prize winner and a celebration in his honour.<sup>7</sup> Hilary restates her position in her explanation of her paper. Firstly that “materialism is in trouble”; secondly that “there is no science that says beauty is truth or truth beauty”; thirdly Hilary asks “what is to be done with the sublime if you’re proud to be materialist?”; fourthly “what does materialism remind you of? It’s a faith.” Spike’s reply is that “it’s pathetic to rely on a supreme being to underwrite what you call your values”(49). It emerges that Hilary is crying for the loss of her daughter now aged thirteen whom she conceived at the very immature age of fifteen. Hilary asks Spike to pray for Catherine, her daughter: Hilary hopes and wants the adoptive parents to be kind to her. Spike’s clearly selfish reaction is that prayer would be pointless. He is entrapped within his ego, as, to a lesser extent Hilary is in hers but she shows at least awareness for the welfare of another, Catherine.

The next scene, eight returns to the Institute and its computer screens. Hilary spells out the significance of the title of the play in the context of a discussion with Leo, who it subsequently emerges is her immediate boss, on the paper she presented in Venice. For Leo her paper was “about God.” For Hilary her paper was “about the hard problem. It says every theory proposed for the problem of consciousness has the same degree of demonstrability as divine intervention. So- psychologically- they’re equivalent.” Hilary’s attitude, she is informed by Leo, has cost her a promotion: “If you hadn’t outed yourself as a Cartesian dualist [a position that the mind and the body are not the same, are not identical] you could’ve ended up as a head of department” (55-56).

As Stoppard explains in his programme note “Hilary ... Is not even convinced

that the brain ‘causes’ consciousness. In the eyes of almost all scientists ... she is one of those sad cases known as a Naïve Sceptic-she can’t entirely let go of dualism, the idea that the mind, far from being able to be reduced to functions of the brain, is something standing alone, something to be put to one side from physical brain science.” Stoppard continues that “Hilary ... is not much exercised by the consciousness of sensation (the five senses): her ‘problem’ is the foundation of morality, of ethics, of aesthetics, of ‘the good’; in short, of value.” As Stoppard reminds his readers, and audience, the concern, the question “what is so *good* about Good?” is too an essential one preoccupying George the professor of moral philosophy in his earlier play *Jumpers* (1972). So for Stoppard the issue is far from being a new one.

Reaction to Stoppard’s new play has focused on the ideas and explanation of Galen Strawson who discusses the issue of what he describes as the “consciousness myth” and its history in a lengthy commentary in the *TLS*, February 27, 2015. Naturally his explanation led to subsequent letters and responses<sup>8</sup> which steered far away from the actual text of Stoppard’s play. For Strawson, “Tom Stoppard’s ‘hard problem’ may be the hardest there is — but it certainly is not new.” In his concluding paragraph Strawson writes that Hilary “challenges her amorous tutor Spike to explain consciousness and insists that ‘when you come right down to it, the body is made of things’ — she means physical *things* — ‘and things don’t have thoughts.’ There is, however, no good reason to think that this last thing is true, and overwhelming reason to think it’s false” (*TLS* February 27, 2015: 14-15).

Yet there are other “hard problems” presented in Stoppard’s play apart from the problem of consciousness and its explanation. Scene eight concludes with Leo’s explanation of “a trader’s appetite for risk” as if he is defending the risk taking upon which his boss’ Empire was founded and which sustains his livelihood. A threnody reverberating through Stoppard’s play is indeed the question of the ethical nature of capitalist adventurism and risk taking “in a roller-coaster market” (57).

Such a concern spills into scene nine which takes place at Hilary’s flat where she is holding a dinner party. The scene is divided into two sections. In the first Amal, Julia, Bo and Spike respond to Ursula’s question concerning “what a hedge fund does.” For Spike it’s a gamble in which the only winner can be Jerry if the money is invested in Kroll Capital Management. For Bo “the ultimate motivation is that banking regulations don’t apply to hedge-funds.” With Hilary’s entrance the subject moves to the reason for the dinner party which is to celebrate Bo’s initial publication that appeared in the “Journal of Cognitive Studies.” There is actually a *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* but it appears not a “Journal of Cognitive

Studies” — providing another example of Stoppard’s inventions.<sup>9</sup> Bo is one of three authors on the subject of “Ultimate Goods.”

In the ensuing discussion Ursula observes that “Hilary makes altruism sound as if it has something to do with morality” which leads to observations on the meaning of “altruism” that include Amal’s comment that the word “just means increasing someone else’s fitness at the expense of your own.” Discussion then turns to the various experiments described in the journal article that purport to show that for instance “six-year-olds are nicer than eight-year-olds” (63-64) and so on. In the second half of the scene there is a rare moment of physical engagement in the play when Ursula punches in the face a very drunk Spike (65). Almost as a reaction to such overt emotional behavior, Bo goes outside the room to smoke. Her self-confidence having been thoroughly undermined, she talks to Hilary who realizes that Bo, has rigged or skewed the data in her published paper. Hilary takes responsibility for the deceptive “error” that is [really] not hers. Inside Hilary’s flat/apartment, at the end of the scene, a drunken Amal is holding forth “on the computer models which are supposed to manage risk.” He confesses that “every now and then, the markets behavior becomes irrational, as though it’s gone mad, or fallen in love. It doesn’t compute. It’s only computers compute” (69).

So the concerns of *The Hard Problem* include human responsibility for error, altruism and egoism, emotion, the limitations of the computer, financial speculation. All may be viewed as differing sides of the coin-to use a metaphor from the opening of Stoppard’s early great play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*- of the “consciousness” debate-*the* hard problem! Following the relatively lengthy ninth scene the remaining two scenes are brief and both set in Hilary’s office.

In the first, scene ten, Leo enters and presents Hilary with the evidence that the test data in the published paper have been falsified. To repeat, Hilary takes responsibility for what has occurred although she is not the initial first author. Her reasons for taking responsibility may be perceived as due to her empathy towards Bo who is in love with her. According to Hilary, if Bo is fired she will be unable to secure another position, another job: “she was milking the family buffalo when she was eight, and is the best mathematician in the house.” Hilary tells Leo that she is “retracting” the paper not adding a “correction” or “an addendum.” Furthermore she is resigning from the Institute to pursue a Philosophy degree. Leo tells Hilary that Jerry has read the paper and “said the paper was wrong” in part because “it pissed him off that his daughter’s group scored low on nice, and high on not so nice”(71-72). This results in the revelation that Jerry’s daughter Cathy is adopted

and that she is thirteen. This penultimate scene concludes with Hilary searching through the filled-in questionnaires for Cathy's questionnaire and once she has found it staring at it.

In the final scene Hilary is packing to leave as she hopes to go to New York University for three years, Jerry, talking in less than sentences to her and to someone on the cell-phone named Charlie. Both Hilary and Jerry are now aware that Hilary *is* Cathy's natural mother and Jerry half-heartedly tries to get Hilary to stay; he offers her money too. "Cathy barges in," now adolescent, putting on what is described in Stoppard's direction as a teenage "boredom performance" and says little to Hilary her natural Mother. Meanwhile on the cell phone Jerry is oblivious to Hilary's emotions, engaging in his trading, and wheeler dealing. Hilary gathers her things and "leaves" apparently "happy" (76-77).

It would be incorrect to say that nothing is resolved by the end of Stoppard's play. Hilary has discovered what has happened to her daughter she gave up for adoption. She tells Jerry that "the very last thing I imagined was that Catherine was a rich kid" (76). Hilary is leaving the employment she sought at the beginning of the play and Jerry continues to speculate. There is no resolution whatsoever to the "hard" problems presented in Stoppard's play: to speculation, to "consciousness"—whatever that may mean — to the "altruism" versus "egoism" debate, between what "nice" and being "not so nice" mean and the archetypal question of the nature of goodness. Such concerns are nothing new and will continue to remain subjects of debate. The strength of Stoppard's play in common with his other plays is that in various dramatic ways he continues to raise these irresolvable questions and issues.

Stoppard's *The Hard Problem* in some important ways is no different from his other dramatic work: his has been a continuous exploration of ethical issues and concerns. In his programme note to *The Hard Problem*, Stoppard writes: "ever since computers became part of our lives, the 'computational mind' has stirred strong passions from adherents, stronger ... than from adherents of the religious doctrines of the soul."

Now others may in their analysis of Stoppard's *The Hard Problem* focus more on the mind-brain dualism that they perceive to be at the core of the play, with the central question being can the human mind examine itself in such a way as to prove (or disprove) how it really works? Stoppard seems to be saying that knowledge of the machine will not (cannot) reveal everything about the human beings mind as Amal thinks, but (a weakness in the play), Stoppard palms off that issue to Hilary's subplot with her daughter, although they are meant to be connected. Others may see the reference to Godel's theory as far from pretentious and as an echo of a central

concern of the play: it is math-speak that says simply that rigorous formal systems, because they are human made and so actually inconsistent (as are human beings) at the core, cannot really prove their own consistency.<sup>10</sup>

It may be thought that drama is not the appropriate form to debate an ancient (and still unresolved) problem of the mind and body issue. In *The Hard Problem* Jerry is a capitalist who mouths the good fight but may be perceived as an amateur who dabbles in the ethical issue because he has the money, the dollars to do so. Jerry may be perceived as an illustration of a plot and thematic dead-end, as one more of those whom Hilary at first thinks has a solution, the answer. The underdeveloped mother-daughter issue feels, and seems to be to some members of the audience watching the play, to be the *emotional* heart of the play. However where the conclusion of Stoppard's *Arcadia* blends the intellectual — emotional beautifully, the ending of *The Hard Problem* feels unsatisfying — perhaps duplicating the unresolved mind-body issues that the play is also about.

To conclude, clearly Stoppard's work including his latest play *The Hard Problem* is fertile terrain, for critics engaged in ethical criticism: for critics who engage in two principal areas of thinking. In criticism regarded as an “interpretive paradigm that explores the nature of ethical issues from their considerable roles in the creation and interpretation of literary works.” And secondly “as a philosophical matrix that ‘refers to the inclusion of ethical components in the interpretation and evaluation of art’.”<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

1. Alastair Macaulay, “Tom Stoppard, A.E. Housman, and the Classics,” in “*The Real Thing*”: *Essays on Tom Stoppard in Celebration of his 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013):150.

2. The unpaginated National Theatre programme/ booklet to *The Hard Problem a new play by Tom Stoppard*, in addition to advertisements, sponsors listings and performance illustrations, contains: “For Nicholas Hytner’s last months as Director of the National Theatre, one of his closest collaborators, Alan Bennett, gives a personal reminiscence” (6), “René Descartes” (25), Tom Stoppard “First Person” (26-30), accompanied by illustrations of “The Phrenological Organs” [p,26] and “Brain scan@Pete Saloutus/CORBIS” (31), a response to Stoppard from Armand Marie Leroi (30,32), “An exchange of letters with Richard Dawkins (2006)” and Stoppard (34-37), “Biographies” and photographers of the performers etc. (38-51).

3. My references are to Tom Stoppard, *The Hard Problem* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015), paperback edition.

4. See for instance Dominic Cavendish <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/11370017/The-Hard-Problem-Dorfman-review-a-major-disappointment.html>>; Michael Billington <<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/jan/28/the-hard-problem-review-tom-stoppard>>; and Peter Kemp, "Tom Stoppard's new play on the problems of consciousness : All in the mind." *TLS* February 6 (2015):17.
5. Personal conversation with William Baker, April 9, 2015.
6. *Camilla Turner* (Daily Telegraph February 7, 2015): <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-news/11398015/Tom-Stoppard-I-have-to-dumb-down-jokes-so-the-audience-can-understand.html>
7. The news item <<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jun/11/nobel-laureate-sir-tim-hunt-resigns-trouble-with-girls-comments>> came after Stoppard wrote *The Hard Problem*. Hunt was awarded the 2001 Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine.
8. See "Letters to the Editor" *TLS* March 13:6; March 20, 2015: 6, March 27, 2015:6; and April 6, 2015. All questioned Strawson's article on the "Consciousness myth." *TLS* February 27 (2015): 14-15.
9. For examples of Stoppard's inventions in his work see Morgen Calderwood's on line article <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3122751/Sir-Tom-Stoppard-admits-inventing-quote-fake-professor-programme-one-famous-plays.html#ixzz3d4B5WeT2>>
10. See Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach, An Eternal Golden Braid*. New York: Basic Books, 1999. I owe this reference and other helpful observations to my colleague and friend Professor John V. Knapp.
11. See Ken Womack and William Baker, "Reading Levinasian Notions of Alterity and the Ethics of Place in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* ," *Forum for World Literature Studies* 7:1 (2015): 88.

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# A Journey through the Realms of Good and Evil: Ethics in Philosophy and Literature

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**Abstract** This article starts with a distinction between ethics in philosophy and ethics in literature. There is an opposition between the theoretical discussion of ethical principles in philosophy and a non-propositional representation of ethical issues and problems arising in life. In the central part of the article texts from world literature are discussed which illustrate various ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature: violence (Homer, *Iliad*; Shakespeare, *Hamlet*), loyalty (Homer, *Odyssey*; Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*), friendship (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*; Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*), and love (Jane Austen, *Persuasion*). These texts furnish ample proof of the capacity of literature for presenting ethical issues. In all the texts discussed the ethical impact is the result of literary or esthetical devices. In the last part of the article an interesting recent development will be referred to: The extraordinary power of literature to represent ethical situations, problems and dilemmas has attracted the interest of philosophers. Some philosophers have directed their scholarly attention to literature, for instance to a philosophically-minded novelists like J. M. Coetzee. Hampe (2014) recommends philosophers to put narration in the service of their philosophical work. Gabriel (2015) accords cognitive capacity both to philosophy and literature. He speaks of complementarity of cognition in the two areas of writing. There is a rapprochement of philosophy and literature to be observed, particularly in the field of ethics.

**Key words** ethics; propositional discourse; non-propositional discourse; soliloquy; monologue; point-of-view

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### **Introduction**

Of all branches of philosophy ethics is perhaps most clearly related to the life of humans. Generally ethics investigates the question of what makes, in Aristotle's definition, a happy or good life. This definition occurs in Aristotle's treatise on ethics, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, which has retained its importance and significance throughout history. Since it is highly relevant for scholars who engage in ethical criticism, some of the essential ideas of Aristotle will be referred to. The philosopher insists that the goodness he is dealing with is "human goodness", "the good *for man* or happiness *for man*" (Aristotle 2004, 28; 1102a). The good for man "is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (Aristotle 2004, 16; 1098a), which is to be dissociated from mere usefulness: "Let us, then, separate the things that are good in themselves from those that are merely useful" (Aristotle 2004, 11; 1096b). The idea that "the perfect good is self-sufficient" is specified by Aristotle so as to include relatives and fellow-citizens:

By self-sufficient we mean not what is sufficient for oneself alone living a solitary life, but something that includes parents, wife and children and fellow-citizens in general; for man is by nature a social being. (Aristotle 2004, 14; 1097b)

So happiness (*eudaimonia*) is an individual's successful way of living, but it also has a social component. Martha Nussbaum (1990) has taken up Aristotle's definition of ethics as being concerned with a good life in her interpretation of literary texts. To define ethics a little more concretely for our purposes, it can be said that it is concerned with right and wrong conduct in certain circumstances and it examines concepts such as virtue, good and evil, justice, friendship and so on. As such ethics is part of all cultures. When we speak of ethics the whole world, Eastern or Western, knows what we are talking about, even though we may not all share the same assumptions. One reason for differences of ethical concepts in various cultures is that ethics is frequently related to religion and that many religions have

an inbuilt ethical component. Therefore it is difficult to formulate a universal ethics, although there is, regardless of cultural differences, a considerable number of universal concepts and values to be examined in ethics. Participating in an international conference on ethics and literature in Korea, cross-cultural encounters are facilitated, which may open new perspectives and may help us to overcome our inherited positions. Most important is in my opinion open-mindedness and respect and tolerance towards concepts of living one's life which differ from one's own inherited traditions.

The starting-point of my argument is that there is a necessity to expand the meaning of the philosophical term cognition or insight — German “Erkenntnis” — to include literature as a provider of insight or cognition. I argue that philosophy and literature represent two differing, but equally acceptable forms of cognition, propositional cognition in philosophy referring to matters of the world of facts and non-propositional cognition emerging in literary-fictional representations of the reality of life. Applied to ethics, there is an opposition between the theoretical discussion of ethical principles in philosophy and a non-propositional representation of ethical issues and problems arising in life. Now I would not say that statements or assertions or propositions formulated in philosophy are superior to non-propositional insights emerging in literature. Following the philosopher Gottfried Gabriel (2015), I would like to argue that there is a complementary relation between two types of cognition, philosophical and literary cognition. We know, of course, what philosophical cognition is. It is the result of logical argument and deduction; it appears in the form of propositions that are proved by logical operations. By way of contrast literary cognition is non-propositional. It is the result of specifically literary devices, i.e. meaning-generating elements of the text's form such as plot, perspective, foregrounding and more basic textual features like syntax, diction and style. I will not expand these reflections on the differences between literature and philosophy, since this would require a monograph.<sup>1</sup> I will rather look at a number of examples from literary texts to demonstrate different ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature. I will, in other words, take a journey through ethically significant episodes in world literature beginning with Homer's *Iiad*. Homer's works are included because a comparison with later European texts has a heuristic value, revealing continuities and discrepancies. After my analytic work I will come back to the relation of philosophy and literature.

### **The Moral Status of the Hero: Homer's Achilles and Shakespeare's Hamlet**

As Aristotle points out in his *Poetics*, Homer's *Iliad* does not cover the whole

story of the Trojan War chronologically, from its beginning to its end, but the epic centers the action round one single theme, namely the anger of Achilles, its origin, its process, and its end. The reason for the anger of Achilles, who is the chief war hero of the Greeks, is his quarrel with Agamemnon, the ruler of Mycenae, who is their most important prince. Achilles takes exception to the way Agamemnon handles the issue of the booty the Greeks have made in raids on local towns and to the arrogant way in which he disregards his, Achilles', own claim. Now there is one crucial point in the epic's initial episode on which I would like to focus. When Agamemnon threatens to rob Achilles of his own prize, the girl Briseis, Achilles is infuriated and his heart is torn "whether to draw the sharp sword from his side [...] and disembowel Agamemnon, or control himself and check his angry impulse" (Homer 2003, 9; 190-192). When Achilles, as a result of this inner conflict, is drawing his sword from its sheath, something significant happens. Athene, goddess of war, wisdom and the arts and crafts, comes down from heaven and stands behind him, without anybody else's being aware of her presence:

Athene stood behind Achilles and seized him by his auburn hair. No one but Achilles was aware of her; the rest saw nothing. Achilles was amazed. He swung round, recognized Pallas Athene at once —so wonderful was the light from her eyes — [...] (Homer 2003, 9; 198-201)

This is a wonderful moment of physical action. Athene holds Achilles back by his blond hair and he turns round and perceives the goddess. In the ensuing dialogue Athene convinces Achilles to take his hand from the sword and to insult Agamemnon "with words instead." And Achilles does indeed drive "the long sword back into its scabbard" (220-221) and he admits that a hero has to respect what the gods say. The intervention of the goddess shows, of course, the influence of the gods who are an essential part of the world of Homer's epics, but it is also a narrative device to stress the ethical quality of the hero. Athene would not intervene in Achilles' life, if he as a character had not a moral potential. The appearance of the goddess in the *Iliad* is a regular epiphany. The light from her eyes is awe-inspiring to Achilles. She holds the hero back from committing a violent deed, by physical intervention at first and then by verbal persuasion. This early scene in the epic characterizes its protagonist ethically. It constitutes his ethical identity. He is not a ruthless, bloodthirsty fighting machine, but a complex person, who has his violent impulses under control. The fact that Achilles' turning away from seeking his enemy's blood is the result of divine intervention, does not really call

in doubt the autonomy of his will. He is involved in the decision-making. It is his choice whether to follow Athene's request or not. Also it is important that the goddess Athene is Achilles' constant companion all through the epic, just as she is associated with Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. It is not possible to separate her from the protagonists of the two epics. It is deeply significant and a cultural testimony that at the beginning of the first larger literary work in Europe there is a war hero who restrains himself from using violence.<sup>2</sup>

It is indeed momentous that in the first European epic we find a central hero, an outstanding war hero who possesses ethical complexity and shies away from killing a man who has insulted him. The same holds true for the protagonist of an English tragedy, which was written more than 2000 years later and is sometimes called the epitome of European drama, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. I do not want to deny the enormous cultural difference between the Greek epic and the Early New English drama, but there is a certain affinity of the two heroes, as far as their dealing with violence is concerned. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy, which was a popular dramatic genre in Early Modern literature. The Danish prince Hamlet feels it his duty to avenge the murder of his father by his uncle Claudius, who immediately after the murder ascended the throne of his dead brother and married his sister-in-law Gertrude, i.e. young Hamlet's mother, a deed which was considered incest at the time. A problem is that Hamlet is quite, but not entirely sure, if Claudius is the murderer. So he stages a play whose plot is very similar to the events that happened at the court of Denmark, to test the reaction of his uncle. As he perceives the consternation of his uncle, who breaks off the performance of the play, he has the evidence he needs and is "hot" to kill him. In this situation a perfect opportunity offers itself to him to perform his revenge. Rushing to his mother's closet, Hamlet suddenly encounters his uncle at prayer, an excellent opportunity to kill him, as he realises himself. Drawing his sword he says, "Now I might do it pat, now a is a-praying. /And now I'll do't. [*Draws his sword.*]"

Now at a moment which all proper avengers hanker after, a moment which could not be better suited for the performance of revenge, Hamlet refrains from killing his uncle, and delivers a passionate soliloquy:<sup>3</sup>

Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying.  
 And now I'll do't. And so a goes to heaven;  
 And so am I reveng'd. That would be scann'd:  
 A villain kills my father, and for that  
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.  
 Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.  
 A took my father grossly, full of bread,  
 With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;  
 And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?  
 But in our circumstance and course of thought  
 'Tis heavy with him. And am I then reveng'd,  
 To take him in the purging of his soul,  
 When he is fit and season'd for his passage? No!  
 Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent:  
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,  
 Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,  
 At game a-swearing, or about some act  
 That has no relish of salvation in't,  
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
 And that his soul may be as damn'd and black  
 As hell, whereto it goes.  
 (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1982, 316-318; II.3.73-95)

He justifies his lack of action by arguments which have been discussed controversially by critics. He argues that killing Claudius during prayer would mean that his uncle's soul would be saved. This would not be proper revenge. Thus he will postpone the killing until he finds Claudius in an irreligious posture, committing a vile action. He will then trip him, so "that his heels may kick heaven" and his soul may go to hell. There is an interesting contrast in Hamlet in this scene between the violence of his language and his shrinking from action. In whatever way we may judge Hamlet's verbal radicalism, the central fact of the scene is that he does not kill Claudius. Like the infuriated Achilles he puts down his sword. And how many reasons he may put forward to justify his restraint, the simple dramatic truth is that he refrains from assassinating his enemy when he is in the most violently revengeful mood and when he has the best opportunity for doing so. This is a truth about Hamlet's character: He is not capable to commit premeditated murder. That is why he is disqualified as an avenger, whose business it is in revenge tragedy to plan and ruthlessly execute murder. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is actually a revenge tragedy without an avenger as a central character. Hamlet is definitely capable of acting when he is nettled and when he feels himself cornered. Examples are his killing of Polonius and sending to death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

In the prayer-scene he says that he would kill Claudius if he caught him in a sinful act, in flagranti, so to speak. His final killing of Claudius then occurs in flagranti. Having realised the extent of Claudius' murder plot, the victims of which are Hamlet's mother, Laertes and Hamlet himself, he retaliates unhesitatingly, stabbing him with the poisoned foil and forcing him to drink the poisoned wine. His last words to Claudius — “Here, thou incestuous, murd'rous, damned Dane, / Drink off this potion. “ (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 414; V.2.330-331) — are decidedly not the words of a man incapable of action. But he is — and this is a mark of his moral personality — not capable of deliberately planning and performing revenge. The idea of premeditated murder is alien to him. Just as in the case of Achilles it is the mark of a great hero that in addition to strength and prowess he possesses an extraordinary degree of moral awareness and that he allows his actions to be guided by moral criteria. Although Hamlet with his predilection for soliloquy and his subjectivity is essentially a modern character, he and Achilles are kindred spirits as far as the ethical foundation of some of their acting is concerned.

### **The Representation of Loyalty in Literature: Homer's Eumaios and Dickens's Sam Weller**

When Odysseus returns to Ithaca after his adventurous travels, he disguises as an old beggar in a tattered cloak. He is forced to conceal his identity, because he does not want to alert his enemies, the suitors who have occupied the palace of his wife, Penelope. As instructed by Athene, he first seeks out his favourite servant, the faithful swineherd Eumaios. This is a deeply moving scene. Eumaios does not recognize him, but treats him with warm hospitality. In their conversation the swineherd laments the loss of his master Odysseus. He tells how well he was treated by him and speaks of him in high terms. For Odysseus it is painful that he cannot speak the truth and has to dish up a false story. In this touching scene something extraordinary happens in narrative terms. The *Odyssey* is except for the interpolated I-narratives, an authorial narrative, or, to put it another way, it is third-person narration with an omniscient narrator. Now in the scene under discussion the narrator refers to Eumaios in the third person and at the same time he addresses him with the second-person “you” and his name. Here is a longer passage:

And you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, said in reply, ‘Stranger, it is not right for me to turn away any stranger, even one in a worse state than you are, for strangers and beggars all come in Zeus’ name, and a gift from folk like us is none the less welcome for being small. Servants cannot make large gifts when

they are always in fear of their overbearing masters. I mean these new ones; as for my old master, the gods have set their faces against his return. *He* would have looked after me properly and given me possessions, and a cottage and a bit of land, and a wife that any man would be glad to have, as a kind master does for a servant who has worked hard for him and whose work heaven has prospered, as it prospers the job I toil for. Yes, the King would have rewarded me well for this, had he grown old in Ithaca.’ (Homer, *Odyssey*, 182-183; Book 14)

The passage quoted is a self-presentation of the speaker. He presents his ethos as a host, who, in spite of his poverty and under untoward circumstances, welcomes a strange beggar as a guest and praises his lost master, Odysseus, who would have, as he declares, taken care of him and rewarded him for his hard work, had he grown old in Ithaca. The poignant effect of this speech is, of course, caused by the fact that Odysseus is, unbeknownst to the swineherd, present in the scene as a disguised old man. Classical philologists are usually not interested in the narrative intricacies of the texts they study. But in this instance the fact that the narrator steps out of his role as a distanced teller of the story and directly addresses the swineherd, is an expression of sympathy and, perhaps, even love for this character. It is the narrative peculiarity of the scene — the paradoxical conjunction of the second and third person pronoun in the reference to the swineherd — in which the moral caliber of the character and loyalty as a value are emphasized, which is actively demonstrated later when he helps his master to clear Helena’s house of the evil suitors.

Now I will again take a leap over two thousand years, this time to adduce an instance of a servant’s loyalty in a Victorian work, Charles Dickens’s comic novel *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837). The master-servant relation between the corpulent Mr. Pickwick and the lean Samuel Weller is a transformation of Cervantes’ constellation of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, which inverts the physical build. The master’s rounded body structure fits the warm-hearted, cheerful disposition which characterizes Mr. Pickwick, who is averse to physical activity. By way of contrast, Sam Weller is tall and gaunt. He is dressed in a dandyish way with a striped waistcoat with black sleeves and glass buttons, a bright handkerchief wound round his neck and a hat thrown carelessly on one side of his head. He is extremely astute, witty, agile and absolutely loyal to his master, with his sharp mind and sense of reality the opposite of the idealistic Pickwick.

In the relation between Pickwick and Weller Dickens highlights the tension between idealism and realism. It is Weller who realizes his master’s inability to

deal with the wiles and deceits of the world and infallibly helps him out of difficult situations. With his witty comments and invented proverbs Sam Weller is the soul of *The Pickwick Papers* as a comic novel. In a conversation with another servant figure, Job Trotter, Sam Weller characterizes the relationship between himself and his master:

‘Mr. Weller,’ said Job, with real tears in his eyes, for once, ‘I could serve that gentleman till I fell down dead at his feet.’

‘I say!’ said Sam, ‘I’ll trouble you, my friend! None o’ that!’

Job Trotter looked amazed.

‘None o’ that, I say, young feller,’ repeated Sam, firmly. ‘No man serves him but me. And now we’re upon it, I’ll let you into another secret besides that,’ said Sam as he paid for the beer. ‘I never heerd, mind you, nor read of in story-books, nor seen in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters — not even in spectacles, as I remember, though that may ha’ been done for anythin’ I know to the contrairey — but mark my vords, Job Trotter, he’s a reg’lar thourough-bred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun.’ (Dickens 1988, 734; Chapter 45)

The narrative technique Dickens applies in this passage has to be taken into account. This is not a regular eulogy. Sam’s avowal of loyalty to his master and his praise of him is given in a dialogue between two servants and the pathos of his words is mitigated by the use of Cockney dialect and the humour of the scene. Sam’s praise of his master in the context of the Victorian servant milieu is worlds apart from the sentiments expressed by Eumaios in the *Odyssey*, but the absoluteness of loyalty is what the two figures have in common. Loyalty is obviously an ethical value which is universal, and I believe it is appreciated all over the world, Western or Eastern. To give at least one example of the comic nature of Sam Weller’s conduct, the lawsuit in the centre of the novel’s plot will serve. Mr. Pickwick is falsely sued for breach of marriage promise to his landlady Mrs. Bardell, who is incited by the vicious lawyers Dodson and Fogg to take legal action and thus get money out of Pickwick. When Weller is called to the bar as a witness, he comically exposes the corrupt lawyers. As sergeant Buzfuz wants to get evidence out of Weller, he asks him, “You were in the passage, and yet saw nothing of what was going forward [on the upper floor]. Have you a pair of eyes, Mr Weller?” Weller answers with the ‘most equanimity and simplicity of manner’:

‘Yes, I have a pair of eyes,’ replied Sam, ‘and that’s just it. If they was a pair o’ patent double million magnifyin’ gas microscopes of hextra power, p’rhaps I imight be able to see through a flight o’ stairs and a deal door; but bein’ only eyes, you see, my wision’s limited.’ (Dickens 1988, 573; Chapter 34)

This answer dumbfounds the interrogator and amuses the spectators and, of course, the readers. It is Sam’s intention to do “Messrs Dodson and Fogg’s case as much harm as he conveniently could, and saying just as little respecting Pickwick as might be” (575).

### **The Representation of Friendship in Literature: Hamlet and Horatio, Huck Finn and Jim**

Friendship is an important topic in ethics, for, as all theorists and commentators agree, there is no good or happy life without friendship. In Shakespeare, who dealt with practically all the problems and emotions humans are faced with, friendship is a great topic. There is, for instance, the relationship between Romeo and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* or the relationship of Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*. And there are instances of female friendship, notably that of Rosalind and Celia in *As You Like It*, a fact which is noteworthy, because since classical times friendship tended to be exclusively a male affair. I will choose the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio, because Hamlet’s attitude towards friendship seems to be much steeped in Aristotle’s discussion of the topic in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Hamlet it is of essential importance to have a friend. He is isolated at the Danish court and subjected to a system of espionage operated by King Claudius and his councillor Polonius, so that he cannot trust anybody. It is a great disappointment to him to see that his school-mates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern allow themselves to be used as tools in the control system of the state. And he is shocked that his love Ophelia seems to be used by her father Polonius to sound him out, which explains his misogynic attack against her in the so-called Nunnery Scene. Even when he delivers his great soliloquy “To be or not to be,” he is eavesdropped by Polonius, without the prince being aware that he is spied on.

An intriguing document of Hamlet’s appreciation of his friend and of friendship in general is to be found in Act III, 2 where the dialogue of Hamlet and Horatio passes into a monologue of praise, a eulogy in fact. Hamlet praises his friend as the best interlocutor he has ever had, just a man / As e’er my conversation cop’d withal” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982, 290; III.2.54-55) and, denying that he is flattering, he makes a great speech in praise of his friend:

Nay, do not think I flatter,  
 For what advancement may I hope from thee  
 That no revenue hast but thy good spirits  
 To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor by flatter'd?  
 No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,  
 And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee  
 Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?  
 Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,  
 And could of men distinguish her election,  
 Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been  
 As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,  
 A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards  
 Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those  
 Whose blood and judgment are so well commedled  
 That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger  
 To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
 That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
 In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
 As I do thee. [...] (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982, 290-292; III.2.56-74)

The main points in this monologue are the denial of flattery in friendship, friendship as the result of free choice, the necessity of moral excellence in a friend, and the spiritualization of friendship indicated in the references to the "soul" and "the heart's core." All these criteria are discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the section dealing with friendship. It seems as if Hamlet had got acquainted with Aristotle's ethics during his studies at Wittenberg. The moral qualities mentioned in Hamlet's monologue are absent at the court of Denmark in the play, at which lying, simulation, dissimulation and deceit are the rule. Once aspect, which Aristotle investigates in his ethics is the question, if friendship is possible between people of different social status, especially between master and slave. Hamlet and Horatio are completely aware of the difference between them as to rank and wealth, but nevertheless their relation is founded on attachment and mutual respect. This state of things ties in with Aristotle's conceding that in spite of social difference friendship can be possible. This seems to be the case in the relationship between Hamlet and Horatio. Yet one linguistic feature in the dialogue has still to be commented. Hamlet constantly addresses Horatio with the pronoun "thou," which

in Early New English suggests intimacy or lower status, while Horatio uses the pronoun “you” and the formula “my lord”, when he addresses Hamlet. This may be difficult to understand for Asian readers in whose languages personal pronouns are, as far as I know, not so important. According to my knowledge, which is extremely limited, the Chinese language has a difference between the usual second person pronoun “ni” and the polite pronoun “nin”. As far as Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is concerned, the use of the different pronouns has an indexical function. Only at the play’s end does Horatio address Hamlet with the intimate second person pronoun “thou/thy”:

Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.  
(Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1982; V.2.364-365)

In these lines, which are perhaps the shortest apotheosis in all literature, the friendship of Hamlet and Horatio finds its fulfilment.

I will now come to my second example of friendship, taken from Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), set in the region along the Mississippi in the United States at the time before the Civil War. It is a friendship between two boys who have run away from their home town in Missouri, Huckleberry Finn, who is a kind of good-hearted social misfit, and Jim, Miss Watson’s black slave, who plans to flee from his mistress who wants to sell him to other owners. Jim plans to make his way to the town of Cairo in Illinois, a free state. As the friendship between the two boys is growing, Huck decides to support the runaway slave, which brings him into a conflict with the values of society. Huckleberry Finn thinks a good action, i.e. setting a slave free, to be a crime. In the novel the vision of the protagonist-narrator is subjective and specifically limited, in so far as he does not on an intellectual level recognize the dilemma which he has to cope with. Mark Twain makes his protagonist’s soul the battle-ground of conflicting forces. His placing the *psychomachia*, a battle fought between the forces of evil and the forces of good, within the soul of a boy is an innovative achievement. Huck’s problem emerges already on a linguistic level. Although he is an outsider, he has internalized social norms, which are mirrored in his language. Thus his intention to set free his friend, the slave Jim, appears to him as a crime, a “low-down thing,” “nigger stealing,” in fact, and in religious terms, a “sin,” on account of which his conscience torments him: “The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling” (Twain 1960, 262;

Chapter 31). His attempt to pray fails — “the words wouldn’t come”:

Why wouldn’t they [the words]? It warn’t no use to try and hide it from Him. Nor from *me*, neither. [...] It was because my heart warn’t right; it was because I warn’t square; it was because I was playing double. I was letting *on* to give up sin, but away inside of me I was holding on to the biggest one of all. I was trying to make my mouth *say* I would do the right thing and the clean thing, and go and write to that nigger’s owner and tell where he was; but deep down in me I knowed it was a lie, and He knowed it. You can’t pray a lie — I found that out. (Twain 1960, 262; Chapter 31).

Huck Finn believes his conduct to be morally bad, when it is actually good. His inner turmoil is the result of a conflict of two value systems which co-exist in his consciousness, a conflict which pains him, but which is not intelligible to him. What happens in the child’s consciousness is, to use Habermas’ terms, a battle between official morality and individual ethics. On the one hand, there is Huck’s true heart “deep down” which prompts him to save Jim, while, on the other hand, the norms of society and religion — under the name of “conscience” — put pressure on him, so that his intuitively good moral decision is called in doubt and he is made to feel guilty. In a much-quoted monograph Henry Nash Smith speaks of an opposition in Huck between “a sound heart” and “a deformed conscience” (Nash Smith 1972, 113-117). In this mental crisis, in which the categories of good and bad are jumbled and in which Huck seems to lose the sense of his identity, he believes that his heart is not “right” and that he is “playing double” (262), but he ultimately relies on a moral substance “deep down” in him which remains intact in spite of all his doubts and self-incriminations. He does the right thing, believing that he is “wicked” (262) and that through his conduct he is going to “hell” (264). The depiction of Huck’s mental crisis and moral confusion derives its authenticity from the voice of the narrator. It is first-person narration which makes possible the credible presentation of the situation of a character who, without anybody else’s help, goes through the experience of a moral crisis.

### **Love — The Representation of Kind Acts in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion***

When we deal with the literary treatment of ethical issues, a chapter on Jane Austen is required, a writer who is considered to be one of the outstanding moralists in the history of the novel. Since she hardly ever expresses her moral attitudes in propositional statements, it is necessary to examine her narrative art. That is

why she is an exemplary case for ethical criticism. Placing her art in the tradition of Anglo-Scottish moral philosophy — Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) — may yield some affinities, but this does not lead into the heart of her art. For an ethical appreciation of her art it is absolutely necessary to take into account the specific point-of-view narration which she invented. Point-of-view narration — as it emerges in her novels — usually has a more or less covert narrator. Action is presented as seen through the eyes of a character, who is a reflector or internal focalizer, but *not* a narrator. As far as the depiction of moral issues is concerned, the explicit presence of the narrator and his/her authority as a dispenser of moral attitudes and values is reduced. In Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), for instance, the moral quality of Captain Wentworth's actions is perceived only by the protagonist, Anne Elliot, and the reader, who gets hardly any information outside her point of view. Similarly, the hypocrisy of Mr. Elliot is only transparent to the protagonist, who, to use Henry James's term, is an "intense perceiver." As a typical example of the presentation of action in the novel, I would like to turn to a passage from Chapter 9 of *Persuasion*, in which the protagonist, Anne Elliot, is in an uncomfortable situation, being busy about her ill nephew and at the same time troubled by his little brother, who clings to her neck. Remonstrance of other persons present in the room is of no avail, but suddenly she is relieved:

In another moment, however, she found herself in the state of being relieved; some one was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it. (Austen 1990, 79; Chapter 9)

The action is presented entirely from the subjective point of view of the protagonist. She feels that something is happening to her, as the passive construction "she found herself in the state of being relieved" indicates. With her limited vision, which is caused by her kneeling position by the sick child, she cannot perceive the author of the action, as is shown in the use of the indefinite pronoun — "*some one* was taking him from her." Maria Edgeworth recognized the point-of-view technique *avant la lettre* in this passage, writing to a friend: "Don't you see Captain Wentworth, don't you in her place feel him, taking the boisterous child off her back as she kneels by the sick boy on the sofa" (quoted in Austen 1990, 235). Only at the very end of

the passage does Anne come to realize that it was Captain Wentworth who helped her. The point-of-view technique is here emphasized by a syntax of suspense (Fill 2003). The resolution of the relatively long sentence coincides with the moment of recognition in what is a remarkable instance of iconic structuring. After this incident she has to mentally digest the incident, which is represented in a passage of internal focalization, beginning with a narrative description of her inner life: “Her sensation on the discovery made her perfectly speechless. She could not even thank him. She could only hang over little Charles, with most disordered feelings” (79). Then the form of narrative report changes over to free indirect style, as she tries to interpret the incident: “His kindness in stepping forward to her relief — the manner — the silence in which it had passed — the little particulars of the circumstances [...]” (79). Later the narrator takes over again, referring to “such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from” (79). The poignancy in the representation of the incident derives from the special situation in which Anne Elliot finds herself. She regrets having, under the pressure of her family and her mentor Lady Russell, rejected her fiancé, Captain Wentworth, seven years earlier and now encounters him again. Thus a little act of kindness on his side throws her into a tumult of conflicting emotions. The passage is an example of the representation of an action from a character’s limited point of view. The technique of limiting the angle of vision to one character’s perception and focusing on this character’s inner life results in an intensified expression of moral action and the reaction it stimulates.

The incident from *Persuasion* evinces a remarkable shift from the representation of physical action to the depiction of inner life. The emphasis is on the mental reaction which an action causes. With this innovation Austen proves to be one of the founders of the psychological novel. Another example of Austen’s shift from externality to interiority is the episode in which Captain Wentworth secures a seat in the carriage of Admiral Croft for Anne, who is fatigued after a long walk in the country (Chapter 10). Her reaction to Captain Wentworth’s kindness is represented in a long passage predominantly written in free indirect style, the beginning of which runs as follows:

Yes, — he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her which all these things made apparent. This little circumstance seemed the completion of all that had gone

before. She understood him. He could not forgive her, — but he could not be unfeeling. (Austen 1990, 89; Chapter 10)

Anne Elliot understands Wentworth's action as a sign of his moral sensitivity. The whole passage is an attempt to interpret his conduct as a mixture of his resentment at her having "jilted" him and of his genuine kindness. In the course of her reflection on Wentworth's motives, phrases such as "pure, though unacknowledged friendship" and "his own warm and amiable heart" emerge, and Anne's emotions are referred to as "so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed" (89). Though Anne is never shown to own it to herself, the reader realizes that she is still — or again — in love with Wentworth and that she loves him for his moral excellence and the warmth of his heart. The passage achieves psychological analysis not from the superior position of an omniscient narrator, but from a focus within the character. The two examples from Austen reveal deep ethical cognition of a kind, which is not accessible in philosophical treatises.

### **Results, Perspectives**

Although all texts (or rather excerpts of texts) adduced in this article are as ethical in substance as may be they differ most strongly from philosophical treatises in the field of ethics. This alone provides proof of the contention put forward at the beginning of this study, namely that philosophy and literature realize two different kinds of cognition. While in philosophy cognition is produced by way of logical argument and deduction and formulated in the form of propositions, cognition is in literature achieved in the form of fictional texts which deal with human issues and problems that are presented in an esthetical form. In all the texts discussed in this article the ethical impact is the result of literary or esthetical devices. In the passage from the *Iliad* it is the use of the goddess Athene soaring down from heaven in order to prevent Achilles from killing his enemy and to ask him to convert his intended angry action into vituperation. In a similar situation Hamlet puts back his sword into the scabbard, in this case without divine intervention. The dramatist employs soliloquy to show his protagonist venting his anger and his hatred against his enemy in violent language. Again action is converted into words. — The example of loyalty from the *Odyssey* shows Eumaios revealing his loyalty to Odysseus by delivering a eulogy on his apparently lost master. The narrator uses the change of the pronoun "he" to "you" in order to express his sympathy for the loyal servant. Sam Weller in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* also makes a speech in praise of his master, but in the cockney dialect and addressed to another servant.

He supports Pickwick in the court-room, when his master is falsely accused, and ridicules the proceedings by his wit, which produces comic effects. — In the first example dealing with friendship, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the dialogue between Hamlet and Horatio changes into a monologue, a speech, in which the prince celebrates his friend Horatio, summoning up arguments occurring in Aristotle's theory of friendship. In the second example, *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain uses monologue within I-narration in order to present the contradictions in a boy's mind whose humanity makes him perform the right action of saving a black boy, when he actually believes that he is committing a sin. — The final example deals with little chivalrous actions in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, whose ethical impact is engendered by the novelist's masterly use of point-of-view.

The panorama of texts — or rather parts of texts — discussed in this article illustrates various ways of dealing with ethical issues in literature. They furnish, I hope, substantial proof of the capacity of literature for presenting ethical issues. Now the extraordinary power of literature to represent ethical situations, problems and dilemmas has recently attracted the interest of philosophers. In a situation felt as a crisis of mainstream philosophy, some philosophers have directed their attention to literature. In a monograph, which is a fierce indictment of traditional philosophy and its assertiveness, Michael Hampe has turned to philosophically-minded novelists like J. M. Coetzee as an antidote to what he believes to be the stagnation of academic philosophy. He recommends philosophers to put narration in the service of their philosophical work. Another philosopher is the above-mentioned Gottfried Gabriel (2015), who accords cognitive capacity both to philosophy and literature. His argument is commendable in that, as far as cognition is concerned, he concedes equal right of existence to philosophy and literature. He speaks of a complementarity of cognition in the two areas of writing. His monograph has a chapter entitled "The Truth of Literature?" ("Wahrheit der Dichtung?") and another chapter with the title "Literature and Morality" ("Dichtung und Moral"). He investigates individual literary texts with regard to the kind of cognition realized in them. Conversely, he also looks at literary forms of representation in philosophical texts. What is to be perceived here is a rapprochement of philosophy and literature, particularly in the field of ethics. A cooperation of the two forms of discourse — philosophical and literary-critical discourse — is certainly to be welcomed. At any rate, ethical literary criticism is a fruitful new departure in literary studies. Its field of investigation is inexhaustible and it attracts other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, political sciences and sociology.

## Notes

1. For a more theoretically-oriented article see Müller (2015), for a morally-oriented contribution Zhemzhao (2015).
2. There are, of course, other sides to Achilles in war. But a further moving scene occurs, when after Hector has been killed by Achilles, Achilles and Priamos, Hector's father, have a conversation, in which the former weeps for his father's death and the latter for the death of his son.
3. For reasons I cannot specify here I quote the Arden Edition of Harold Jenkins (1982) and not the edition replacing it by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (2006).

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# Reading and Writing Ethically for Young Australians

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**Abstract** Mitzi Myers, commenting on the pedagogical philosophy of Maria Edgeworth, writes that Edgeworth wanted to empower the child, using adult authority to teach children to think for themselves and to reflect on issues. (Myers 133). This philosophy is implied in many of the books discussed in this chapter, where the “adult authority” is the author (as well as, on some occasions, adult authority figures within the book), whose story, with the ideology contained therein, is designed to enable and encourage the readers to think for themselves. Perhaps paradoxically, however, the role of the child is also, as Robert Pattison points out, constructed in such a way as to reveal faults in the surrounding world. (Pattison 110), a construction of the child which is not new, echoing as it does Dickens’s use of the child as a moral and social way of judging adult actions (Hollindale 100). This article will discuss a range of writing for young Australians which deals with ethical and moral issues as well as consider how we can bring an ethical perspective in our examination of such books.

**Key words** ethical literary criticism; Australian literature for young people; Indigenous Australians; poetry

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*England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915*. Hillel, M.(2013) “Iconic Australia in Alison Lester’s Are We There Yet?” in A.M. Ommundsen (ed) *Looking Out and Looking In: National identity in Picturebooks of the New Millennium*. Hillel, M. (2012) “She faded and drooped as a flower”: Constructing the Child in the Child-rescue Literature of Late Victorian England in A. Gavin (ed) *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood Medieval to Contemporary*.

Speaking at the Sydney Writers’ Festival in 2015, author Kathryn Heyman claimed that “the act of fiction is an intrinsically ethical act because it requires me to question my own beliefs and to engage deeply with the world” (“How Novelists Engage with the World’ Sydney Writers’ Festival”)<sup>1</sup>. In a similar vein, children’s author Brian Caswell has said that he feels books “can help provide a pointer to the sorts of coping strategies which young people need to develop if they are to deal successfully with the complex and daunting society we have bequeathed to them” (qtd. in Nieuwenhuizen 276). Part of developing these strategies is to think about issues, and to formulate a moral and ethical code of their own. In an article in the major newspaper in Melbourne, Australia, the *Age*, revealed that the Humanist Society of Victoria was arguing for an innovative approach to studying ethics in primary schools, claiming that: “It’s never too early to tackle life’s big questions” and lobbying for children “to be given the opportunity to unpick moral and ethical dilemmas in a way which encourages deeper thinking” (Evans 15). However, it is important to realise that, in the context of discussions about literature and ethics, that children’s literature has, across its history, given young readers the stimulation to consider ethical and moral dilemmas.<sup>2</sup>

What Maureen Whitebrook has claimed for adult novels is also applicable to children’s literature: “many modern novels pose basic questions about human existence, including its political aspects, and depict the dilemmas which make moral and political demands on human beings ... novels are particularly good at showing the necessity of making choices, the psychological pressures on the individuals who face them, the moral dilemmas involved and the consequences, the political effects of reactions to those problems”(47). This article will consider how a range of writing for young readers in Australia deals with a number of ethical issues. In particular, I want to focus on a number of areas which might appear to challenge what has traditionally been seen to be suitable for books for young reader — refugees and family violence, leading to homelessness and the Aboriginal “stolen generations” in Australia. It should be pointed out, however, that social issues — including family violence and homelessness — were common topics in children’s

literature in the nineteenth century, so the books I want to consider here can be seen as part of a continuum.

This article comes at a time when the reading matter for young people — the ethics of such writing and the public's ethical response to it — is under scrutiny in New Zealand and elsewhere following the banning of Ted Dawe's *Into the River* in that country. The book was banned following a protest from a conservative lobby group called Family First who objected to some of the language and the depictions of drug use and sexual activity. The reactions of many writers around the world to this ban was interesting and revealing of attitudes to what is regarded as acceptable in writing for young readers: Scot Gardner, an Australian writer, said: "Books, especially those for adolescents, need to be true to the world. With due diligence, anything present in the world we inhabit is fair game for an author." Paula Boock, and award-winning New Zealand writer wrote: "When my daughter was young we guided her choices at the library. Now she's older, we trust her to make her own. If she reads something that confuses or even shocks her, well, that's like a scraped knee. That's how we grow. Family First don't trust parents like me. They don't trust the writers, the libraries or the schools, and most of all, they don't trust the children" and a final quote from Man Booker prize winner Eleanor Catton: "When I was a young adult I cherished those books that took me seriously, that acknowledged the world was a complicated and often troubled place."<sup>3</sup>

All these responses embrace the idea that literature can — and should — both challenge and support young people in their interaction with the world around them and the development of their own social and ethical stance on the issues confronting them.

One of the ethical issues for us as critics and reviewers of books is to consider how well such books present the ethical dilemma to their readers so that the readers can question the issues around them. The works I want to consider in this paper have all had a widespread readership and a number have been winners in a variety of awards. As T.A. Faunce has argued, "Most would agree that great literature provides problematic and engaging situations in which people can vicariously experience their ethical views being tested"(881). Furthermore, as Faunce also points out, there is a long tradition of "the literary author as social critic and reformer" (882). Faunce is considering what he calls canonical literature for adults. I would argue that literature for young readers can pose similar ethical dilemmas, asking the reader to test their views on these matters. Indeed as a web resource for teachers dealing with the issue of refugees puts it: "Sometimes, the media misrepresents refugees and asylum seekers, creating stereotypes and fuelling

myths and misunderstandings. Education is incredibly important in combating this. At a time where one in every 100 people in the world has been forced to flee persecution, violence or war, it is crucial for students to understand the contemporary issues affecting refugees.”<sup>4</sup>

Books and other forms of literature for young readers can play a vital part in this education, developing understanding and empathy. Morris Gleitzman, an award-winning Australian writer for young people, has said of his work that he’s “always reminded, no matter how different one of my characters is from me on the surface, how we’re all pretty much the same underneath. It’s a way of pointing out that even when a character seems to be totally different to us that we’re sharing the same feelings. And that’s what we do when we read, we share the emotions that the characters have. That reminds us how similar we are. As well as being very entertaining, it’s also very useful when there’s a lot of fear and suspicion around about people who appear to be different.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, he has written, his stories “are always told through the eyes and heart of my main characters.”<sup>6</sup> In his *Boy Overboard*, this means that we read through the point-of-view of Jamal, an Afghan boy forced to flee his country with his family to try to reach safety in Australia. They have to leave all they know because Jamal’s mother has, with the support of her husband, been running a school in their house, a school which educates girls, something that is forbidden by the government. The danger of this occupation is highlighted when their house is blown up. Gleitzman is thus raising an ethical question very early on in the book — that of gender equality and the importance of education for all. Jamal and his family face many dangers in their bid for safety using all the money they have to buy tickets from people smugglers on boats which are overcrowded and far from seaworthy. Jamal and his younger sister Bibi are separated from their parents and their plight is exacerbated when, in the middle of the ocean, the smugglers refuse to travel any further until each person on the boat gives them more money or valuables equivalent to the sum they are demanding. Their journey is a perilous one altogether and even when they arrive at the safety of land, the freedom they longed for is not as they imagined.<sup>7</sup>

David Findlay in his review of *Boy Overboard*, picking up Gleitzman’s own point about stories and other forms of writing allowing us to see that people are essentially the same, remarked about this book: “it raises questions of gender discrimination, human rights, cultural difference — concluding that we are basically the same. Jamal and Bibi may eat different food, speak a different language, wear different clothes, but in the end, like us, they want a happy, unhassled life... in

other words to use a term much abused by politicians and commentators ‘a fair go’.<sup>8</sup> Australians have always prided themselves on allowing everyone a “fair go” but Gleitzman is asking us if this is now more myth than reality.<sup>9</sup>

Gleitzman also considers the moral responsibility of the writer. In the same interview I quoted from earlier, he says that he always makes sure his young characters are equipped with things which help them to cope with the problems with which they are confronted — personality traits such as optimism, for example — otherwise it wouldn’t be fair to put them in that position.

At one stage in the boat journey, Jamal notes that “this area here under the deck is awash with water. It’s up to our knees. I hope the boat isn’t leaking. I’ve asked the sailors, but they don’t seem to know what I mean. I don’t think I’ll say anything to Bibi [his little sister] and the others. I don’t want to make them anxious” (Gleitzman 128). Even in this brief section we see Jamal’s essential compassion and goodness — an implied contrast to the people smugglers manning the boat. It also reveals something of his naivety too, though — his expectation of receiving an answer from the sailors is child-like and reminds us that he is actually a child. He and his sister are children who are entitled to protection and even this short extract encodes the lack of ethics of the adults who exploit them.

Jacob Buganza, in his work on education, ethics and literature, reminds us that in literature, “the reader is invited to imagine him/herself in the place of the characters in the novel. Empathy has a clear ethical function ... an interpretative, passionate-intellective exercise, based on which one tries to comprehend the situation of another human being” (130).

This is precisely what world-renowned Australian illustrator Shaun Tan is doing in his wordless picture book, *The Arrival*. One of the essentials for all humans in a quest for happiness is the need for a sense of belonging. Sometimes, as Tan points out, this has to be reinvented. For migrants and refugees, this reimagining may be required across a broad range of experiences in their lives. Not only do they have to leave their homeland and reinvent themselves in the culture of the new homeland, but in order to do so, they need to reinvent themselves in terms of a new school, a new job, a new house and new relationships with those around them. Thinking about the way he conceived of this book, Tan reflects on the essential humanity of us all and indicates his thoughtful and ethical approach to a subject which has often engaged him, that of a “stranger in a strange land” and how that affects a person’s sense of self when even the most ordinary, everyday action becomes strange (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 38). The full discussion of Tan’s research for this book and his own family background on which he drew,

makes fascinating reading and can be found at “Strangers in Strange Lands” in *Storylines: the Inside Story*.

This strangeness and uncertainty which Tan discusses in *Storylines*, is reflected in the illustrations of the book. Furthermore, Tan describes how he rejected the idea of a conventional picture book, instead deciding “that a longer, more fragmented visual sequence without any words would best capture a certain feeling of uncertainty and discovery” that is so much part of the migrant experience (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 39). One large illustration provides a striking example of how this can be achieved pictorially. With its towering and threatening imagery, dwarfing the two refugees, encodes the fear and uncertainty very strongly and the vectors formed by the towering, windowless blocks, enclose and threaten the two tiny figures cowering in the middle.

Helping us to understand the uncertainty further, is the sepia tone of the illustrations and the mysterious creatures which appear in some. These encode both fear and anxiety — and at the same time how a child can sometimes be more adaptable than adults, as a child sometimes appears in the illustrations, apparently quite accepting of these creatures. Furthermore, there is, as Tan himself has said, no real “guidance as to how the images might be interpreted” (Tan, “Strangers in Strange Lands” 40). We, like the migrants depicted, have to try to make sense of the unfamiliar and search for meaning where this is not clear. This book deals with every migrant/refugee who is a stranger in a strange land. No-one is named so the experience Tan is depicting could be that of anyone who has had to leave their homeland. The endpapers give us images of many different people of all nationalities, often denoted by items of dress. Anyone, it is saying, might be displaced from their home at some stage.

Why are these people fleeing? We are given no definite answer, but there are depictions of escape, of the devastation of war, of forced labour in factories among other things, all of which highlight the multitude of reasons why there are so many displaced people in the world today.

Homelessness of a different kind is another ethical issue tackled in a number of Australian books for young people. Both Steven Herrick’s *The Simple Gift* and Libby Hathorn and Greg Rogers’s *Way Home* deal with the issue of youth homelessness; Herrick’s book is a verse novel, an interesting medium to choose. Poetry can transform and shape people’s thinking and understanding and help the reader to stand in the shoes of another. Herrick’s poetic novel is told from the point-of-view of three characters, Billy a sixteen year-old escaping from family violence. Caitlin, a middle-class girl who befriends him and Old Bill, an alcoholic grieving

the death of his beloved wife and daughter. The focalising of the book moves between the three and we learn that Billy is homeless as a result of his father's violence 10 year-old Billy is knocked to the ground by a punch from his father, a violation of the protective relationship which should have existed between the two; the violence escalates and Billy spends days in his bedroom avoiding his father. The starkness of the analogy which comes to Billy's mind signifies how impossible his home life had become:

The wind and rain  
Hits you in the face  
With the force of a father's punch. (10)

In a few, well-chosen words, Herrick makes us understand the violence of Billy's home life and that the violence undercuts any real notion of home as a place of safety and warmth. Unlike his father, however, Billy is an essentially good young man who helps Old Bill drink less, who allows him to share his bitter memories and who makes sure he eats properly. In other words, he offers Old Bill the simple gift of friendship, caring for and about him when society doesn't, seeing beyond the dirty, drunken exterior to the real man beneath and refusing to label Old Bill as a no-hoper as he himself had been labelled.

Herrick has described what he regards as heroism and how his characters display that trait — “within the story they do something of great value, that is a *little* thing - give friendship and hope to an old hobo [as in *The Simple Gift* ] or bring a father and grandfather together (in *Tom Jones*) ... These simple little things ... are done by ordinary people, in a quiet unobtrusive way, and ... requires[s] compassion and love and respect ... they are far more heroic and necessary than any world-record sporting achievement. And ... cannot be measured in dollars and cents.” On his imagery he writes: “Maybe the secret to writing an effective and striking image is empathy — putting yourself in the place of each character.”<sup>10</sup>

Once again we have an author emphasising that both the writer and reader need to respond in an empathetic and ethical way to the characters using literature to understand ethical issues not, as Brynhildsvoll points out, “in the light of rational arguments, but in the light of narrative and stories”(249), which, as he further argues, is a very effective medium.

Another book which deals with youth homelessness, this time a picturebook for older readers, is *Way Home* by the award-winning combination of Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers, first published in 1994 but reprinted several times,

including in a paperback edition in 2003. In writing this work, Hathorn said she undertook a lot of research about homeless young people and was distressed by the stories. She “wanted to create a work ... which might go towards changing things for some of those kids at least. This book is not for street kids so much as it is for the middle class kids who know all the comforts of home” (Roberts and Nicoll *Teacher’s notes* No pagination ). So once again, we have a book designed as a consciousness-raising document, almost a protest document. The book follows Shane and his cat through the streets — menacing and dark — to the place he calls home. Not surprisingly, interviews with homeless young people suggest they often feel unsafe. The menace for Shane is exacerbated by another group of street boys who chase him past piles of rubbish and whose shadows loom large and sinister on the wall behind him. Home is a kind of cave constructed in the middle of a rubbish-strewn gap between derelict buildings. The book is thus challenging readers to consider what constitutes a “home.” The child clearly has no adults in his life, so has none of the nurturing and warmth which are usually associated with notions of “home” but he has tried to decorate his space, a concept which is both admirable and pathetic. The pathos is emphasised by the boy in his turn giving comfort and shelter to the stray cat he has found. Why, we must consider, is society not offering the same to him?

The illustrations in this book are crucial to the construction of the story. The illustrator, Gregory Rogers, had something of an ethical dilemma in deciding how to illustrate this book. In a conference presentation he remarked:

Can an illustrator make the story of a young street kid acceptable to an audience that probably hasn’t and may never have any experience of homelessness — an audience that can afford to buy the book? I had to consider that if I softened the visual impact it could misrepresent the intentions of both author and illustrator. But if I was totally uncompromising I could risk alienating and outraging the audience, therefore destroying any hope of communication and empathy for them. (Rogers 204)

In fact his illustrations form a major part of eliciting our response to the homeless hero of the book and our questioning of a society which allows a child to live in these conditions. The jagged edges which cross each page are reminiscent of torn paper and of the litter which surrounds the boy. Furthermore, the tearing signifies a metaphoric tearing away of the cover with which society likes to shield itself from the unpleasant truth of youth homelessness. In addition, the frequent depictions

of rubbish encode society's willingness to abandon such a child, to throw him on the metaphorical scrapheap. In a way which reflects nineteenth-century waif novels, *Way Home* is also about class. There is a marked contrast between the affluence denoted by the high-rise buildings, clean streets and restaurants Shane runs past and the area of slums, rubbish and makeshift shelters in which he lives. We know nothing of Shane's background or why he has become homeless, but his homelessness reduces him to the class of the poor and socially disadvantaged. On occasion, like the children in nineteenth-century waif novels, the boy looks through brightly-lit windows which denote the wealth and social interaction from which he is excluded.

Exclusion is a word also applicable to the "Stolen Generations," a term used to describe the many, many Aboriginal children excluded from their families, indeed often forcibly removed from their families

and placed in institutions and foster homes, often not knowing their parents were alive or searching for them. They were taught to reject their Aboriginality, and often experienced abuse and deprivation. In 1997 the Commonwealth Government undertook an inquiry into the Stolen Generations as these children had come to be known. Hundreds of Survivors gave evidence of their experiences and a report of the extent of these practices was made public.<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, in 2008, in a highly symbolic and moving gesture, the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, apologised to the Stolen Generations, an apology which reads, in part:

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry. (1)

The Prime Minister's apology makes clear that the practice of child removal was unethical, even though it was lawful under Australian law at the time.

Somewhat earlier than this, children were given the opportunity to reflect on the ethics of the issue through their literature. The Australian Screen website describes the film adaptation of Doris Pilkington Garimara's *Rabbit-Proof*

*Fence*, as being, for “many white Australians, this popular film was the first direct emotional experience of what it meant to be one of the ‘stolen generations’.”<sup>12</sup>

However, readers of *The Burnt Stick* by Anthony Hill, first published in 1995, were being asked to reflect on the pain of separation and to consider what a child would feel in the circumstances when he was taken from his family. The book is a fictional account of one such incident of a child being removed from his mother and the heartache and devastation felt by both. John Jagamarra, the child in the story, is taken from his mother and brought up in a Mission, a place, which the reader is told, is “very beautiful” (Hill 1). Beauty does not, however, compensate for the fact that this place is not home. The phrase “it was not like home” (Hill 3) is repeated several times throughout the book. At the Mission, John and the other children are not taught the song, dance and traditions of their people; they are not told of their Dreaming stories and they did not learn how to find yams and other edible plants or how to hunt a kangaroo. Their culture was lost as was their language as the people in the Mission did not know the Aboriginal languages and the children were not allowed to speak them. And perhaps, most devastatingly for the children kept at the Mission station, they do not have their families there — their mothers, grandmothers, siblings, cousins. They are not on their own country, the land they know and love.

In a scene particularly designed to make the reader consider the ethical issues of taking the children and the ethical issue of the law that allowed this to happen, we are told of two policeman and the “Big Man from Welfare” arriving at the Aboriginal camp with a truck which “had a kind of wire cage on the back, with a gate that padlocked and canvas blinds that rolled down if the sun got too hot, or if they didn’t want you to see if anyone were locked inside” (Hill 29). The choice of words is important here. The description of the truck is reminiscent of that of a dog-catcher, rounding up unwanted strays. The truck is also prison-like with a padlock, suggesting that the authorities knew that the children taken would try to get out and return to their mothers, despite the stated belief that “they would soon forget” (Hill 9).

When John is taken he “struggled and wept for his mother, but the Big Man held him tight and would not let go”(Hill 49). Like any child he cried “I want my mother” (Hill 49). The loss is as devastating as a death and John and his mother grieve for each other and, as an adult, having not seen his mother again, John vows to try to find her “no matter how many years it took” (Hill 53). Hill’s depiction of the dictatorial way the children were taken is corroborated by first-hand accounts from the people who were taken both in recorded interviews and

in books such as *Jinangga* by Monty Walgar, a book published by Aboriginal publishing company, Magabala Books. In this book Walgar writes: “When I was brought out there [to the Mission school], in 1954, it was definitely against my will, and against my mother’s will. ... Native Welfare ruled our lives. ... They ruled and ruined our lives ... when they came to get me they came with a policeman ...” (29).

The impact of Hill’s book is strengthened by the black and white illustrations by Mark Sofilas. There is a full-page illustration, for example, when John is taken of sinister and menacing booted feet approaching across the dry earth of the Aboriginal camp and the prison aspect of the truck is heightened by another full-page illustration which emphasises the ominous looming cage.

Other writers have used poetry to bring the matter of the Stolen Generations to young readers. Speaking at a celebration in honour of American poet Robert Frost, President John F. Kennedy said: “When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truth which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment” (qtd in Wolfe 8). Poetry can thus be seen as a powerful medium of social comment and for questioning those in power and the laws they make.

Lorraine Mafi-Williams, compiler of a collection of Aboriginal poetry for young readers entitled *Spirit Song*, wrote in her introduction: “Written words have enabled us to lay bare the truth, to reveal the anger, the frustration and the determination of our people” (Mafi-Williams xiv). The poems deal with a range of subjects such as celebrating an Aboriginal person’s closeness to the land, culture, Aboriginal identity and the Stolen Generations. Rex Marshall’s poem called “Defining Colour” asks us all to recognise the essential humanity of each other in a poem which is somewhat reminiscent of Shylock’s speech in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* when, as a Jew, he asks:

Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?  
fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject  
to the same diseases, healed by the same means,  
warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as  
a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?<sup>13</sup>

Expressing some of the same sentiments, Marshall’s short poem reads:

Colour is only skin deep  
 Cut the flesh and the blood will seep  
 From black, white, brown and yellow  
 Or even some ordinary kind of fellow  
 Whose blood may be shed  
 With the end results being red. (Marshall 49)

There are a number of powerful poems reflecting on the issue of the Stolen Generations in this book such as Eva Johnson's "Protection" "Gone were our children to missionary/Gone was our land and the power to be free" (Johnson 29). Seamus Heaney has described the way that people can recognise "that some part of the meaning of their lives is lodged in the words and cadences of cherished passages of verse" (Heaney xiii). Aboriginal poets, in the Mafi-Williams collection, have written poems which give meaning and provide understanding for readers on the issue of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families.

Bob Randall, an elder of the Yankunytjatjara people and therefore one of the traditional owners of Uluru is himself a member of the Stolen Generations. He has written a song called "My Brown Skin Baby They Takem Away" which has been described as "an anthem for the Aboriginal people,"<sup>14</sup> becoming what Heaney has described as a cherished piece of verse.

The lyrics of the song are reproduced as one of the poems in Mafi-Williams book. The story is narrated by a "young preacher" who recounts his encounter with "A young black mother/Her cheeks all wet" (Randall 30). The anguish of the woman and the powerlessness of women in her situation are strikingly depicted in a stanza which reads:

Between her sobs  
 I heard her say  
 Police bin takem  
 My baby away  
 From white man boss  
 That baby I have  
 Why he lettum  
 Take baby away. (Randall 30)

This verse perfectly captures the woman's feelings and debunks the idea that

women whose babies were taken would “get over it.” She has been exploited by her boss who, when it comes to the removal of the child, does nothing to protect her.

The poem goes on to tell how the child was taken to a children’s home and given a new name but would cry each night “Mummy – Mummy/Why they take me away” (Randall 31). Given that Randall was taken from his mother in just the way this poem describes, one can imagine that writing this was very emotional. For the reader it raises many ethical questions on belonging, the right of a government to remove children, the ethics of changing a child’s name and therefore his identity and inflicting loss and devastation on the child and his family. Another question which arises from these narratives about the Stolen Generations is whether the promised “better life,” bringing up the “children as white as could be” (Johnson 29) was in fact a reality. If we consider it important for contemporary Australian young people to be aware of this aspect of our history, the literature written for them can play an important part in developing that understanding.

Looking at a library catalogue after one puts in “literature and ethics” as a research term, reveals a multitude of entries on a range of topics including literature, ethics and the law, ethics and business through literature, cultural identity, literature and ethics and using literature to teach ethics. The books and poetry which I have considered in this paper all deal with ethical issues which we, as readers, are required to respond to. Martha Nussbaum has said that “storytelling in childhood teaches us to ... ask questions about the life behind the mask” (qtd. in Kingwell 26). All of these books contribute to that broader understanding of their readers. All of the authors have displayed what Hitoshi Oshima gives as his definition of an ethical author “one who cares for the ethical dimension in life, and who expresses it in one way or another” (192). His definition of an ethical critic is “one who takes care to find such value which makes a literary work ethical, the one who appreciates it in a way that allows readers to share it”(192). I have discussed a range of books and poetry written for young Australians in the last thirty years that deal with topical, ethical issues — refugees homelessness Stolen Generations — and deal with these through prose, verse and illustration. I hope I have done so in a way which lived up to Oshima’s definition and which has given the readers of this paper insights into the way the creators of the books and poetry have dealt with the ethical issues they chose to tackle.

## Notes

1. See <https://www.themonthly.com.au/video/2014/july/24/1406172243/christos-tsiolkas-alexis-wright-kathryn-heyman-how-do-novelists-engage?>
2. I considered the way selected books for children could do this in *Unlocking Ideas: Thinking with Picture Books*.
3. See <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/books/71989528/into-the-river-eleanor-catton-john-boyne-john-marsden-and-more-speak-out> where all of these authors, and others, expressed their views.
4. See [http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012\\_RW\\_ResourceKit\\_Ch5.pdf](http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012_RW_ResourceKit_Ch5.pdf).
5. See <http://www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/therap/interviews/s1451055.htm>.
6. See <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=morris+gleitzman+boy+overboard+interview>.
7. I have discussed the image of the sea in Australian books including the image of a dangerous sea journey for a refugee family in “Befriending Sea Creatures and Journeying Through Life: Images of the Ocean in Australian Children’s Literature”.
8. See <http://www.startts.org.au/media/Refugee-Transitions/Refugee-Transitions-Issue-13-book-review.pdf>.
9. I have written elsewhere on the representation of refugees in Australian picturebooks in “Welcoming strangers: the Politics of Othering in Three Australian Picturebooks.”
10. See <http://www.stevenherrick.com.au/notes.htm>.
11. See [http://stolengenerationstestimonies.com/index.php/about\\_stolen\\_generations.html](http://stolengenerationstestimonies.com/index.php/about_stolen_generations.html).
12. See <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/rabbit-proof-fence>.
13. This can be found in any edition of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*. I used the New Penguin Shakespeare edition (1967). The quotation in this edition can be found on p.111.
14. See <http://www.globalonenessproject.org/library/interviews/song-brown-skin-baby-they-took-me-away>.

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# Dystopian Nightmare in Contemporary Adolescent Fiction and Its Ethical Value

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**Abstract** During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there appeared a dystopian boom in English adolescent literature market, where a series of dystopian fiction were published and approvingly accepted by both readers and critics. The dystopian boom conveys a common anxiety over the status quo of contemporary society and a pessimistic prospect of science application in the future. The original purpose of science is to meet the survival and development needs of human beings, but it is now improperly applied and becoming a threat to human civilization. The nightmare caused by severe environment pollution, destructive nuclear war and technological autocracy is the inevitable offspring of technology abuse, which is the major theme of contemporary dystopian fiction intended for the young adults. With great panic and alarming power the dystopian fiction expresses the anxiety over the ever increasingly pessimistic prospect of science development, and thus warns readers of the social, environmental, ethical or technological crisis ahead of them. The dystopian nightmare in contemporary adolescent fiction is rich in ethical value in that it helps its reader socialization, telling them what the world is like and how they should behave in it. The ethical value of adolescent dystopian fiction lies in its didactic message that helps to promote readers' level of social cognition and capability of making ethical choice.

**Key words** dystopian fiction; adolescent readers; ethical value

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During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there appeared a dystopian boom in English adolescent literature market, where a series of dystopian fiction were published and approvingly accepted by both readers and critics. The fact that the sales volume of Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* (2008-10) is overtaking that of *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) and *The Divergent* (2011-13) trilogy by Veronica Roth gained a global adolescent audience indicates that dystopian fiction is a popular genre in contemporary literary field. The dystopian boom conveys a common anxiety over the status quo of contemporary society and a pessimistic prospect of science development in the future. The original purpose of science and technology is to meet the survival and development needs of human beings, but it is now improperly applied and becoming a threat to human beings. The nightmare caused by severe environment pollution, destructive nuclear war and technological autocracy is the inevitable offspring of technology abuse, which is the major theme of contemporary dystopian fiction published in English speaking countries. With great panic and alarming power the dystopian fiction expresses the anxiety over the ever increasingly pessimistic prospect of science development, and thus warns readers of the negative effect of science application.

### **The Dystopian Turn in Adolescent Fiction**

The term "dystopia" derives from the word utopia, which was originally coined by Thomas More in 1516 in his well known work entitled *Utopia*. The word "utopia" has generally two implications: it is usually used to refer to the ideal society that is spatially or temporarily set in a distant world; meanwhile, it is also employed to refer to the kind of literary genre that represents an ideal or desirable social blueprint. Similarly, the word "dystopia", which was first used by John Stuart Mill in his speech delivered to the British House of Commons in 1868, also has two opposite implications. That is, dystopia can be used to refer to either an imagined dark society or a literary genre representing nightmarish social vision. Dystopian world generally appears in science fiction and are often used to warn readers of the social, environmental, ethical or technological crisis, which could potentially develop toward a dystopian situation in the future if they are left unaddressed. What the dystopian fiction describes is not a future world in which we would like to live, but one we are trying to escape from, and the main factor leading to the nightmarish prospect is science and its improper application.

There are both scientific and fantastic elements in dystopian writings, but dystopian fiction differs from science fiction or fantasy in that dystopian fiction

attaches far more importance to social and political critique. Instead of constructing a bright blueprint, the dystopian fiction describes a gloomy future for the human beings, with anti-scientism being the dominant theme. By focusing on the critique of society that is set in a future world, dystopian fiction provides readers with fresh perspectives on problematic social practices that might otherwise be taken for granted. In this paper, I work on the assumption that the contemporary turn to dystopian writing is largely due to the contemporary problems, and that dystopian fiction is kind of projection of social and ethical crisis in real world.

As a literature genre, dystopian fiction is closely related to the social ethos in a special society. The shift from utopias to dystopias in literature reflects the shift of social thinking and people's attitude toward science and its application. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, people generally held a relatively optimistic attitude toward future. Their optimistic view of the world is largely based on two social theories: rationalism and evolutionism. The rationalists believe that the human being could create a marvelous future with their rationality or reason. As Elliott argues, "To believe in utopia one must believe that through the exercise of their reason man can control and in major ways alter for the better their social environment" (87). The evolutionists hold that not only the human themselves, but also the social organization and moral order could evolve to a perfect state, so there will be an admirable prospect awaiting the human. This kind of optimistic mood was projected in literature, and spawned a new genre, utopia, which presents the reader with a desirable vision. However, there appeared a pessimistic "dystopian turn" during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the heavy casualties of the wars, political totalitarianism and technology abuse led to widespread skepticism and question of utopia, which gave rise to dystopian narratives. The dystopian fiction conveys a common anxiety over the pessimistic prospect of the future. Booker observes that "The modern turn to literary vision of future as nightmare is one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age" (16).

Some writers during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were doubtful about utopia. In such dystopian works as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), people "have been suspicious not only of the possibility of utopia, but its very desirability, equating conventional utopias with paralysis and stagnation" (Booker 16-17). The hint that the utopian fulfillment of all desires will necessarily bring about a dehumanizing stagnation is a common motif that runs throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century dystopian literature. In the fictional world constructed by Huxley or Orwell, for example, the utopian dream has been realized, but it only turns out to be a

nightmare. Powered by the horrors of two world wars, the Nazi-like totalitarian regimes, and the nuclear holocaust, the 20<sup>th</sup> century literature has generally envisioned utopia as undesirable, for the fulfilling of utopian dream always brews dystopian nightmare. The dystopian texts like *Brave New World* have been far more influential than the utopian texts of the earlier centuries. Even such genres as science fiction, which is largely optimistic with the technological advancement, have taken a dystopian turn in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is the dark and nightmarish vision rather than ideal and desirable vision of future that provides modern writers with rich source materials and writing motivation. In a climate of widespread pessimism, recent decades have seen a rise of dystopian mood in popular literature as a whole. The commonest motifs in the dystopian texts include representing war sufferings, criticizing totalitarian regimes and warning against technology abuse.

As an important branch of literature, the juvenile fiction is undoubtedly influenced by the particular social context and ethical climate. The novels written for young readers before the 20<sup>th</sup> century are generally optimistic with happy endings. Especially in science fiction for young adults, technology is generally employed to support the utopian vision. However, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when people came to doubt and question the technology progress and its effect on human society, witnesses the birth of dystopian fiction for the young adults. Susan Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), which describes the problematic polarization between the rich and the poor in the cities and its effect on the young boys, is generally accepted as the first adolescent dystopian fiction. During the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some excellent dystopias intended for the young adults such as *Out There*(1971), *Brother in the Land*(1984) and *The Giver*(1993) were published.

If the writing and publishing of dystopian fiction intended for the young adults is sporadic during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, then it has become a dystopian boom during the past decade in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. John Green, an American novelist and literary critic, comments the phenomenon in his essay "Scary New World" published on *New York Times* in 2008. Green points out that "[t]he past year has seen the publication of more than a dozen post-apocalyptic young adult novels that explore what the future could look like once our unsustainable lifestyles cease to be sustained" (1). Such works as *Feed* (2002), *Exodus* (2002), *How I Live Now* (2004), *Uglies* (2005), *Little Brother* (2008), *Delirium*(2011), *Maggot Moon*(2012) are on the list of excellent dystopian fiction for young adults published in recent years. Amid this rising sea of dystopias, two trilogies stand apart as the "best-loved"

works: *The Hunger Game* trilogy (2008-2010) and *Divergent* trilogy (2011-2013). They are particularly popular among the youngsters and have been adapted for movies.

### **Dystopian Nightmare in Contemporary Adolescent Fiction**

Literature works, as the mirror or the lamp that reflects social reality, are deeply rooted in the historical and social content in which they are produced. The dystopian texts seem to transcend the time and space, but in fact they are still subject to the circumstance in which they are produced. In Booker's words, "imaginary societies in the best dystopian fiction is always highly relevant more or less directly to real world societies and issues" (19). The recent phenomenon of dystopian boom is undoubtedly relevant to the destructive application of science, which is supposed to serve human beings rather than threaten or even destroy them. Despite the fact that there are some obvious surrealistic elements in it, the dystopian fiction for young adults is essentially realistic, for it deals with the real life issues like political issues, environmental pollution and nuclear wars fuelled by science and technology. Actually, the contemporary anxiety over science and its application is projected through the social and ethical nightmare that the young protagonists are facing in dystopian fiction. In this sense, the dystopian writing is kind of artistic response to contemporary social problems. The issues explored by contemporary adolescent dystopian fiction can be roughly classified into three categories: response to the ethics concerning science and its application, anxiety over contemporary environmental catastrophe, and reflection of war and its destructive effect.

Firstly, the moral failing associated with science and its improper application to politics is a common motif in the totalitarian dystopian fiction. In the imagined dystopian world, the rulers suppress individual will or personal wish in the name of public welfare. The political dystopian writers manage to achieve a dramatic effect by presenting the totalitarian practice in an exaggerated way. In such fiction as *The Giver* (1993) by Lois Lowry, the protagonist Jonas, a twelve-year-old boy, gains epiphany or insight into the dark quality of a seemingly utopian society. The totalitarian rulers in *The Giver* manage to eradicate the citizens' emotion and memory with the help of advanced technology so that the citizens are free from any sufferings, pains, or pleasure. As a result, the citizens in this dystopian world are living "a life without color, pain or past" (Lowry 165). The dystopian narrative suggests that the eradication of human memory or difference would not naturally lead to social equality, but lead to "a catastrophic narrowing of the imaginative

spectrum” (Wend-Walker 139). The improper ethics or beliefs in terms of governing the society tend to diminish the social diversity and vitality with the technological devices. As a result, the whole society is controlled by advanced technology and rigid mechanism, and the citizens as a whole are degenerated into a being without any emotion, passion, memory, or imagination. The scientific and technological achievement is meant to bring about convenience and comfort to the people, but it eventually provides the rulers with convenient tools for mental surveillance and psychic control. In the same manner, what Ally Condie represents in his dystopian text *Matched* (2011) is the problem resulting from technology advancement which is employed by the rulers as the means of social manipulation. In the dystopian world constructed by *Matched*, computer is the right tool used by the rulers to control everything, including the citizens’ study and work. Even such issues as love or marriage are determined by computer system. In this computer-dominated society, the social or ethical relationship among the society members is not based on blood bond or emotional attachment, but configured by a “fail proof” program. The heroine Kasia, for instance, is matched to a boy when she is 17 according to the personal data stored in the database. Similarly, Westfield’s *Uglies* and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* present us with a similar technology-controlled world as *Matched* does. In the world constructed by *Uglies* trilogy, all the young people aged 16 have to accept a plastic surgery which not only beautifies all the young adults, but also tampers with their brain structure, so much so that the young citizens can be better mentally surveilled. The plastic surgery based on biological technology, is intended to remove the difference and inequality between people. As a result, the programmed life that the citizens live in this technology-controlled society is universal and uniform rather than diverse and harmonious. In this “beautiful new world”, the “Sameness” or the so-called “social harmony” is bought at the price of free choice and social diversity. The autocratic practice is unethical, for human’s complicated emotion and free will make it impossible to live a programmed life. We always find the protagonists struggling to destabilize sameness and redeem the ethical failings of his society toward the end of the dystopian fiction. Free choice is valued and ethical order is reconstructed. As Carter F. Hanson puts it, the dystopian fiction articulates “a radical reshaping of the future” (54-55).

Secondly, the improper ethical values concerning the relationship between environment and human are mirrored in the environmental dystopian fiction. The environmental or ecological crisis is a common theme in contemporary dystopian fiction for the young adults. As Jenkins notes, “many books for children and young teenagers have made modern ecological concerns the focus of the plots” (58). The

environmental catastrophe is the inevitable consequence of modern environmental ethics which misinterprets the earth as the inexhaustible resource or boundless trash bin. Environmental destruction is the severest consequence that the modern human beings are to endure. Faced with the deteriorating environment, many intellectuals express their concern about the social prospect. The dystopian boom is the artistic response to the global deteriorating ecological situation. The gloomy ecological prospect is reflected in such environmental dystopian fiction as Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2009) and *The Carbon Diaries 2017* (2011), which has its plot set in the near future, namely, in 2015 and 2017. *The Carbon Diaries* represents contemporary environmental ethics and its consequence: the increasingly warm climate, the alternative occurrence of flood and drought, the frequent earthquake and volcanic eruption, etc. Only after the irreversible disaster had occurred did the government realize the severity of the consequence. As a kind of remedial measure, the governments rigidly restrict each citizen's emission of CO<sub>2</sub> through monthly carbon ration, which brings horrific inconvenience to the public. The climatic and ecological problems depicted in *The Carbon Diaries* are much more alarming than what the officials and scientist currently believe, which serves as a warning to the decision makers. The movie entitled *2012* is kind of movie edition of Julie Bertagna's *Exodus* (2002) and Susan Beth Pfeffer's *The Last Survivors* (2008-2010), which present similarly post-apocalyptic vision: stormy tsunami, flooding calamity, burning drought, and the natural catastrophe like earthquake and volcanic eruption, which instantly turn our beautiful homestead into horrible inferno. The most alarming and severe consequence of environmental catastrophe is that the human civilization thoroughly collapses overnight. What the human are losing is not only the beautiful and comfortable living environment, but also the environmental ethics that the human and the environment should coexist harmoniously, which is what the writers' are appealing through their writings. The boom of the ecological dystopian fiction is the result of the writers' reflection of the increasingly severe environmental problems, and the artistic expression of environmental ethical dilemma, which provoke readers to examine our living style and arouse their awareness of responsibility.

Lastly, the destruction caused by technology-armed modern warfare is also the great concern of the dystopian fiction for the young adults. During the cold war, there appeared some novels that represent the nuclear war and its destructive consequence. Robert C. O'Brien's *Z for Zachariah* (1973) and Jean Ure's *Plague 99* (1989) are the case in point. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the local wars broke out in many parts of the world, especially in the Arabian countries. The

dystopian fiction representing nuclear war mirrors the intense and complicated political situation in recent years. For instance, Roseff's *How I Live Now* (2004) is a war novel, in which the battlefield is set in England. The novel describes the tragic war and its physical injury and mental trauma on a young American girl Daisy and her British cousins. Through Daisy's eyes, readers can vividly perceive what is happening on the battle field and what kind of calamity the common people are suffering. The writers attempt to make the young readers, who are growing up in the false propaganda of warfare, come to comprehend the truth of the war. Through Daisy's refugee experience and the soldiers' casualties, the writer manages to convey such message to readers: the war is not a "great and justified" cause as it is propagated, but a brutal game played by the politicians so as to "make you lose everything you own and cherish" (Roseff 121). In similar manner, a critical attitude toward the war is clearly expressed in Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* (2001). *Mortal Engines* describes the destructive consequence of a "Sixty Minute War", a nuclear war lasts only sixty minutes but it turns the whole continent into a wasteland. The nuclear war deprives most people of their living resources. To survive the nuclear disaster, a Nomad leader named Nikola Quercus designs a system known as "Municipal Darwinism." in which all the cities became immense vehicles named as Traction Cities, and must consume one another so as to survive. The ethical principle "survival of the strongest" is practiced in this post apocalyptic world, so "the great Traction City lumbers after a small town, eager to strip it of all assets and move on" (Reeve 10). The war-related dystopian fiction conveys to the young readers that the artfully propagated war is nothing but a cruel practice of the jungle law in human society.

The people in different historical context have different attitude toward utopia. The dystopian society depicted in the above mentioned works might be regarded as the utopian society by readers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The developing history of human civilization indicates that it is impossible for the human to realize the utopian dream, for the standardized happiness in utopian society is achieved at the expense of individual choice, which is against the free will of human being. In the contemporary technology-dominant society, people rely so much on the convenience and comfort brought about by technological advancement that they ignore the negative effect science brings. The adolescent dystopian writers are sensitively aware of the conspiracy between technology and politics and respond to it through their artistic writing. Different from the works intended for the little kids, which aim to construct a fantastic fairy world for readers, the novels intended for the young adults aim to provide its readers with "various useful knowledge to

comprehend the society and life correctly” (Nie, “Fundamental Function and Core Value of Literature” 9), so that the young readers have chances to insight different social phenomena. With its alarming and warning power, the contemporary adolescent dystopian fiction serves to lead the young adults, who are standing before the threshold of the adulthood, to become rationally mature.

### **The Ethical Value of Dystopian Narratives**

Reading plays an important role in the process of a child’s initiation, for the reading experience during childhood and adolescence is profoundly influential. As Neil Sinyard observes, “The influence of early books is profound so much of the future lies on the shelves: early reading has more influence on adult than any religious teaching” (23). The literary works intended for different age groups have different style and content, and would undoubtedly exert quite different effects on readers. The works designed for the little children are comparatively pure and simple, with few dark elements. The adolescent readers, by contrast, may have much more chances to encounter the less agreeable experience such as pornography, violence, family breakdown, war, and death in their reading. Entering the stage of adolescence, teenage readers may discover that the simple literary works they used to read do not match the complexity of their new experience. As a result they demand that stories not only embody their wish and fantasy, but also help them adapt to their future life. The literature for the young adults has ethical value in that it helps its reader socialization, telling them what the world is like and how they should behave in it. Cedric Cullingford argues that “popular novels reflect something about the nature of the audience” (2), so the popularity of the dystopian fiction reflects the nature of adolescent readers, who are standing at the threshold of the adulthood and are eager to gain necessary knowledge about the adult world and their future life. The ethical value of adolescent dystopian fiction lies in its didactic message that functions to help the adolescent’s socialization. To be specific, dystopian fiction helps to promote readers’ level of social cognition and capability of ethical choice, which I would like to illustrate in the following paragraphs.

First of all, the message embedded in adolescent dystopian fiction helps to promote readers’ social cognition. When examining the transformative effect of dystopian fiction on adolescent readers, Carrie Hintz holds that it can “help adolescent readers cope with difficult political and social ideas within a context they can understand” (263). Since adolescent readers have very limited real life experience, reading could be an effective compensation to their lack of experience. Readers tend to interpret the fictional text according to their life experience and

level of understanding. Entering the scary new world sketched in dystopian fiction helps readers better comprehend the complexity and versatility of their future life. Dystopian fiction for young adults is the literary genre “with an adolescent hero or heroine seen coming to terms with the world and self” (Hunt 147). Through reading dystopian fiction, the young readers gain the indirect experience of life, which helps them grow from naivety to maturity. In this sense, dystopian fiction is the socialization textbook for the young adults before their entering the adult world, for these texts provide them with some useful experiences with which they have few opportunities to encounter in their daily life. For the young readers, the process of reading novel is a journey in which they detach themselves from their daily life and enter the protagonist’s world, sharing the protagonist’s sadness and happiness. The extreme environmental catastrophe, severe political struggle and serious ethical problem described in dystopian fiction are the experience that the teenagers can hardly encounter but are sure to help them become rationally mature. These post-apocalyptic novels are didactic in that they meet the reader’s mental needs to understand the adult society.

Then it is safe to argue that the message conveyed through dystopian fiction helps to promote adolescents’ capability of making ethical choice. Maria Nicolajeva notes that the literature for the novice reader has the potential to “convey ethical knowledge ..., evoke readers cognitive and affective responses to the ethical issues raised in the texts” (177). The experience gained from reading is one of the sources that help readers to develop their capability of rational judgment. Reading in childhood and adolescence, to some extent, helps a child develop into a rational, competent and socialized being. The social experience and life wisdom conveyed through literature are concrete and perceptible, which lays a solid foundation for the teenagers to reach the state of mental maturity, and make rational choice at the critical moment of life.

The adolescent dystopian fiction share the characteristics of bildungsroman, which narrates how a child undergoes the journey of awakening from innocence and ignorance, and becoming psychologically mature through trials and tribulations. In dystopian fiction, “political and social awakening is almost always combined with a depiction of the personal problems of adolescence” (Hintz 255). These adolescent heroes or heroines always find themselves in harsh environments or in some unfriendly social situations where they must make ethical choices. Generally speaking, the adolescent heroes or heroines are usually faced with two kinds of choices at the critical moment of their adolescence. One is to rebel and fight against the existing social or political order, and go toward maturity in the

process of struggling against the social evils as the protagonists do in *Hunger Game* or *Magot Moon*. Another is to learn to live in a world of resources deprivation and become mature while coming to terms with the world and self as the protagonists do in *How I Live Now*. In this sense, the adolescent dystopias are following the tradition of bildungsroman, which represents how a young protagonist awakens from naivety or innocence, has to shoulder the social or familial responsibility imposed on him or her, and grows mature in the hardest test of life. No matter presenting struggle for rights in a totalitarian society or struggle for survival in a post apocalyptic world, these novels provide readers with an opportunity to comprehend different social roles and behavior modes, and opportunity to observe the society from a transitional zone, so that they may learn to deal with some social problems and make ethical choice in a more rational way.

For the young readers who are quickly growing up, reading is much more than an activity of amusement or enjoyment. Reading is subtly influencing readers, who acquire the didactic message that there might be storm as well as sunshine in the society they are going to enter. What the young readers learn from the dystopian texts is that we cannot enjoy a happy and peaceful life until we undergo the kind of Phoenix Nirvana as the protagonist does in the dystopian fiction. They may find out through reading that there is both happy life as the fairy tales depicts and nightmarish one as the dystopias narrates awaiting them, which can mentally or psychologically prepare readers well for their future life in adulthood.

## Conclusion

The phenomenon of dystopian boom results from many factors. The publishers, writers and readers contribute together to the dystopian boom in the past decade. Firstly, the joint effort made by contemporary writers and publishers to market the novels helps to enhance the sales volume of this genre, which determines the market and economic value of these novels. Secondly, this genre presents environmental deterioration, political totalitarianism and warfare disaster, which are the fundamental concern and anxiety of contemporary society. Consequently, they not only provide writers with writing motivation, but also arouse the reader's echo. Last but not least, the dystopias tally with young readers' cognition requirement and psychic needs, providing the youngsters who are to enter adult society with a window to see the society. Shen Shixi, a well-known Chinese animal novel writer, holds that the novel written for the teenagers should be different from that for small children in that adolescent literature is expected to help readers comprehend the adult society in which they are going to be a member soon. Shen argues that

“Youthhood is a threshold in our life. That one leaps over the threshold means he or she has to walk out of the aseptic area and enter the normal atmospheric environment filled with all kinds of virus and bacteria” (22). For the adolescent readers, the popular dystopian fiction is the kind of atmosphere with floating virus or bacteria, which helps them to improve their mental immunity and prepare them well for the future life in adulthood.

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# The “Substantivization” of Modern in Late Victorian Literature and Victorian Liberalism

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**Abstract** The article concentrates on the problem of legitimization of the modern age in the late Victorian literature. The evolution of the idea of modern in the late Victorian time was stimulated by liberal thinking, namely Social Darwinism, new ideas of religion and Mill’s idea of the liberty of thought and discussion. This revolution in the ways of thinking emphasized the value of transient moments and produced a new type of writing accentuating the “true present.” On the other side, the new value of modern was seen as a characteristic feature of the national life, as a result modern acquired great significance, and a new feeling arose — of dynamic and rootless way of being.

**Key words** modernity; modernization; liberalism; Victorian era; G. Gissing; G.B. Shaw; O. Wilde; B. Stoker; Englishness

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The modern philosophers, while postulating the main traits of modernity as an epoch, concentrate their attention on the legitimization of the modern age. As H. Blumenberg observes, “the problem of legitimacy is latent in the modern age’s claim to carry out a radical break with tradition, and in the incongruity between this claim and the reality of history, which can never begin entirely anew” (116). Jürgen Habermas points out that self-grounding of modernity is a consequence of this claim: “*it has to create its normativity out of itself*” (7). This factor came to consciousness in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the modern gradually acquired its own significance without looking back to the past and its norms. It’s essential to have it in mind while discussing the evolution of the idea of modern in the Victorian era.

Habermas says, “In the European languages of the modern age the adjective ‘modern’ only came to be used in a substantive form in the middle of the nineteenth century” (8). He means the name of the epoch. The substantive form of the adjective *modern* equal to German *Moderne* (the modern time) did not appear in the English language. *Moderne* is translated by the noun *modernity*. Nevertheless, a sort of “substantivization” of modern happened in the late-Victorian literature. The English word *substantive* as the French *substantif* and the German *Substantiv* means “noun,” but as an adjective it means “being a totally independent entity,” “real rather than apparent,” “belonging to the substance of a thing.” Otto Espersen cites the following definition from the preface to the *New and Improved Grammar* by William Hazlitt (1810): “a substantive is ... the name of a thing ... *considered* as subsisting by itself” (qtd. in Jespersen 134). In the British mind the modern was not considered as “subsisting by itself” for a long time. As an adjective or as a noun, mostly used in plural form (*modernes*), the word *modern* was a part of the antithesis “modern – ancient” or “the *modernes* – the ancients”. Only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *modern* began to be perceived as something independent, something like Delos, an island which had floated freely in the seas before Zeus attached it with a chain to the sea floor.

William Gladstone used this metaphor while talking of *modern* thought. He said in the address delivered in the Liverpool Collegiate Institute (1872): “...free thought, of which we now hear so much, seems too often to mean thought roving and vagrant more than free; like Delos ... drifting in the seas of Greece, without a root, a direction, or a home” (qtd. in Stoddart 1). Walter Pater opened his notorious “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* with a similar statement: “To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought” (186). Gladstone took a classical image appealing to the old idea that the authority of ancients should be a home of thought, and dismissing modern thought as drifting without any support; Pater in his turn treated the modern as it is, free from any correlations with the past, and even more – like mutable by nature.

### **Delos**

The “substantivization” of modern in the Victorian mind was facilitated by the evolution of liberal thought, with Social Darwinism and new ideas of religion included. The Reform Act of 1867 resulted in the Liberal Party win of the 1868 general election and in the spread of liberal ideas in the future decades. “The radical spirit” of the new epoch made nervous many contemporaries. Benjamin

Disraeli wrote in the preface to his collected works: “It cannot be denied that the aspect of the world and this country, to those who have faith in the spiritual nature of man, is at this time dark and distressful” (qtd. in Stoddart 1). He believed that the main threat were those factors, which put forward the turbulent modernization of the national life beginning with the 1870s: the ideas of natural science, textological approach to the Bible, liberalization of all areas, from religious to political life, prosperity of Great Britain attended by “materialism” as they named it, and we’d rather call it “consumerism.”

As J. Stoddart comments, “Disraeli’s dark predictions might ... have been seen as the broodings of an ousted politician, forecasting anarchy under the new Liberal regime.” But the same way of thinking was demonstrated by the leader of the Liberal Party. In the named Address Gladstone said: “I doubt whether any such noxious crop has been gathered in such rank abundance from the press of England in any former year of our literary history.” According to Stoddart, he had in mind such works as H. Spenser’s *The Principles of Psychology* (1855), describing human mind as submitted to the biological laws, D. F. Strauss’s *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (1872; English translation by M. Blind, 1873), advancing materialism of modern science, and W. Reade’s *The Martyrdom of Man* (1872) with its accent on political liberalism and Social Darwinism. As Gladstone summarized them, the works “boldly proclaimed to deal with root” and cultivated the “delight of following the free thought” (qtd. in Stoddart 1).

The idea of free thought, which captivated minds in the 1870s, was largely framed by statements formulated in J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859). Chapter II was devoted to “the liberty of thought and discussion.” Mathew Arnold in *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1865) treated the notion of free thought from the aesthetic point of view. Arnold interprets criticism as any topical statement, any “fresh and true idea,” “*a disinterested endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world*” (81). According to Arnold, “in modern times” literature represents this kind of discourse; since “life and the world being in modern times very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it” (14). This effort aims at recapitulating modern ideas, for “the creative power” involves the ideas, “*current at the time*,” “not merely accessible at the time” (11). Arnold specifies: such idea may be “not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces” (13).

Speaking of the modern, Arnold often uses the adjective *current*, which means “happening or existing now: belonging to or existing in the present time.” George Gissing used the word “current” to name a fictional magazine in his novel *New*

*Grub-street* (1891); he depicts as an unprecedented up-to-date edition, “current Current.”

*New Grub-street* is an important part of the late-Victorian discourse of the modern. Structurally it is founded on the opposition “ancient” — “modern” serving a reference point of the reflection on modernity in the novel. Gissing tells the story of two friends, both of them are writers. Jasper Milvain represents different aspects of the modern world; “unpractical artist” Edmund Reardon is absorbed in the world of classical literature. He is a connoisseur of classical writers; he spends all his royalties on the tour to Greece and Italy, being delighted by the opportunity to study the ancients. While reading from Homer a scene “where Odysseus speaks to Nausicaa” he thinks: “THAT was not written at so many pages a day, with a workhouse clock clanging its admonition at the poet’s ear” (229). It is impossible for Reardon to turn writing into “trade” as Milvain calls it; he can’t bear the pressures of the modern era, and he is ruined. As for Milvain, he is doomed to success. Gissing introduces him to the reader as “an alarmingly modern young man” (30). He does writing “to earn money,” that’s why he puts aside novels and chooses journalism, producing “marketable stuff” — smart essays, which can make him a popular and influential author. Milvain builds his career and eventually becomes the editor of *The Current*.

Highlighting the modern nature of Jasper Milvain, Gissing depicts him standing on the bridge over the railway line and watching in ecstasy the train below, bursting “with dread force and speed.” He confesses to Marian: “It enspirits me. It makes me feel eager to go back [to London] and plunge into the fight again” (55). “Dread force and speed,” “a blinding rush” are Milvain’s in his desire to win and in the destructive effect of his actions. As M. Beaumont and M. J. Freeman observe, “in the cultural imagination of the Western world the railway has figured historically both as a celebration of modernity and as a critique of it” (13). The author obviously enjoys the power of train appearing in the sunlit steam, and Milvain’s optimism and energy, but the picture of modern urbanized England indubitably loses to the enchanting illusion of Homer’s Greece.

Gissing believes it important to date Milvain’s epoch with precision: he is a “man of 1882” (8). The early 1880s was turning point in the history of mass-media. In 1860 there were 31 daily newspapers in Great Britain, by 1890 there were 150 of them. For a long time newspapers were read aloud in the coffee-houses. In the late 1890s the newspapers became much cheaper, and with the help of the new mass readership turned one of life essentials. W. T. Stead memorably said of press: “...the only true throne in England, the editor’s chair” (qtd. in Saab

88). But the influence of newspapers was not only political, it changed the reading audience. With the Liberal Party coming to power Forster’s Education Act (1870) and other Elementary Education Acts were introduced, aiming at the spread of mass education. Eventually much more people were literate, and the Victorian phenomenon of family reading for entertainment and instruction disappeared. In 1900 The Daily Chronicle observed that the majority of Englishmen read nothing but newspapers. The career of “an alarmingly modern young man” in Gissing’s novel is connected with the growing influence of press; journalism, being oriented on the transitory, is represented as the very embodiment of the modern.

In *New Grub-street* modernity with its non-stop renewal is constantly and ruthlessly displacing the authority of the past with its high ideal of beauty. Milvain’s marriage to Reardon’s widow Amy at the end of the novel has symbolic meaning. Milvains displacing Reardons — this is Gissing’s idea of modernization of culture, attended with the process of commercialization of literature. The triumph of modernization in the novel is absolute because of the way of writing Gissing chooses; his ideal is “honest reporting.” One of the characters, Harold Biffen, considers even Zolaistic way of writing insufficient: “Zola writes deliberate tragedies; his vilest figures become heroic from the place they fill in a strongly imagined drama”. To be really modern a novel should “deal with the essentially unheroic, with the day-to-day life of that vast majority of people...” (264).

### **“Crystallization” of the Present**

In the 1890s Bernard Shaw used journalism as a metaphor of the modern, “ephemeral half” (Ch. Baudelaire) of creative writing. In the preface to his review of Nordau’s *Entartung* (1892) named *The Sanity of Art* (1895) he developed Arnold’s thought on connection between literature and topical issues. “Journalism is the highest literature for all the highest literature is journalism”, since “what the journalist writes about is what everybody is thinking about” (4, 3).

All prominent writers, Shaw states, from Plato and Aristophanes to Shakespeare and Ibsen, were topical, and they “are still alive and at home everywhere among the dust and ashes of thousands of academic punctilious, archeologically correct men of letters and art who spent their lives haughtily avoiding the journalist vulgar obsession with the ephemeral” (*The Sanity of Art* 4-5). Actuality lies at the core of Bernard Shaw drama theory, discussion being its chief element.

Discussion was presented as an ideal form for a periodical by the founder and secretary of the liberal Metaphysical Society (1869-1880) and the editor of

the *Nineteenth Century* James Thomas Knowles. In his letter to Gladstone he saw editor as an “*utterly impartial*” coordinator, recapitulating ideas, akin to Mathew Arnold’s critic, on the ground that “full and free discussion is the best way for arriving at and disseminating Truth” (qtd. in Stoddart 3).

The spirit of discussion was transposed to the British variant of new drama. In the reworked edition of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1913) Shaw spoke of discussion as of the most important innovation by Ibsen, which changed drama profoundly: “The technical novelties of Ibsen and post-Ibsen plays are, then: first, the introduction of the discussion and its development until it so overspreads and interpenetrates the action that it finally assimilates it, making play and discussion practically identical...” (233-234).

But Shaw is quite different from Mathew Arnold, speaking of ideas, “*current at the time.*” Arnold implies modern philosophical ideas of the world; he speaks of different kinds of epochs: there are “great creative epochs” of national intellectual flowering, as Shakespeare’s time was; and there are epochs with very few ideas and no opportunity for the individual talent, “because, for the creation of a masterpiece of literature two powers must concur, the power of a man and the power of the moment” (11,12). Shaw implies topical social issues, “human concern.” In the preface to the first edition of *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* he says: “...I have spared no pains to make known that my plays are built to induce, not voluptuous reverie but intellectual interest, not romantic rhapsody but human concern” (196). Shaw’s dramas are based on the conflict of ideas, which are related to his role as a prominent member of the Fabian Society, a participant of political discussions; his dramas discuss the possibility of financial independence for women (*Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, 1893), Victorian passion to idealization (*Candida*, 1894), economics as a source of morality (*Major Barbara*, 1905), social hierarchy and its actual basis (*Pygmalion*, 1913) etc. For some time Shaw thought of Ibsen as of a social prophet, akin to the Fabians (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 221).

In the essay “The Technical Novelty in Ibsen’s Plays” Shaw underlined, that “in the new plays, the drama arises through a conflict of unsettled ideals” (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism* 221). The new plays are all about current and actual, about issues, topical for the audience, its ordinary day-to-day life: “Now an interesting play cannot in the nature of things mean anything but a play in which problems of conduct and character of personal importance to the audience are raised and suggestively discussed” (217). The topical issues not merely attract attention of the audience, they involve it into discussion, and thus a new type of theatrical illusion emerges.

Shaw tells the story of staging *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* in the preface to the play. It happened eight years after the play was finished in 1902, because of its scandalous assumption that prostitution is a part of economic issues, and not an evidence of wickedness. The review published in the *St. James Gazett* said: “The second act contains one of the boldest and most specious defenses of an immoral life for poor women that has ever been written” (Wansley). Shaw describes the press response as “moral panic,” as a result, “the power of distinguishing between the work of art on the stage and real life of the spectator is confused” (Wansley). One critic left the theatre at the midst of the performance, damning Sir George Crofts, the drama’s character. “What a triumph for the actor, Shaw exclaims, thus to reduce the jaded London journalist to the condition of the simple sailor in the Wapping gallery, who shouts execrations at Jago and warnings to Othello not to believe him!” (*Mrs. Warren’s Profession* 183). Virtually this is the very effect Shaw’s dramas should have, but it’s the exchange of opinions, that makes the dividing line between the auditorium and the stage disappear.

Discussion, assimilating the action, ruins the usual temporal characteristics of the play. Capturing the audience, conflict of ideas replaces the history, which develops in chronological sequence, from one event to another. Thus “crystallization” of the present takes place: not those events, that have already happened or those, that lie ahead, matter, now the most important element of the play is opinion, which spectators acquire with the action going on, “a free play of the mind” by both sides of the footlights. On the other hand, the time being that is *represented* in the drama obtains great importance; as Javier Ortiz says, it points towards the future: “...while Ibsen is highly sensitive to the pressure that the past has on the present; Shaw sees the present in relation to what kind of future it is leading towards. In other words, Ibsen’s plays are sequels; Shaw’s prologues” (qtd. in Ortiz 156). “Crystallization” of the present shifts the focus, leads the author away from the realistic representation, typical for the plays of Arthur Pinero, for example. The characters in Shaw’s plays are not realistic; they are not even the embodiments of different ideas, but just those who talk. The function of speeches in Shaw’s plays is akin to the function of arias in the opera; Thomas Mann compared Shaw’s dramas to operas (qtd. in Obratsova 258). As J. Gassner observes, Shaw “drew close to the freedom of presentational as against the stringencies of representational art ... he turned to ‘musical form’ in discussion drama, composing plays in the manner of a theme and variations...” (521).

Oscar Wilde in his dramas also “turned the British drawing room into a forum” (Gassner 521). But in these plays discussion is outweighed by “the

free play of mind;” this time it implies intellectual wordplay. In Wilde’s plays “disinterestedness,” as Mathew Arnold understood it, is a kind of Hellenism; this notion continues Arnold’s reflection on the importance of the ancients for the modern culture. Arnold considers British adherence to duty as one of the two main tendencies of human existence; he names it Hebraism in his essay “Hebraism and Hellenism” (*Culture and Anarchy*, 1869). Arnold defines Hebraism as striving for action, strict submission to moral duty, self-control, and seriousness — the typical qualities of the Victorians. He thinks that it’s time to balance Hebraism with Hellenism; Hellenism is “the thinking side in man” (135), it implies capability “to see the things as they are” (127). Hellenism is “an unclouded clearness of mind” (128) (Arnold associates it with the Greek idea of human nature); it suggests the modern freedom of thought. At the same time Hellenism means “seeing things in their essence and beauty,” “going back upon the actual instincts and forces which rule our life” (140); that’s why Hellenism became the slogan of British decadence. Arnold admits that some “moral weakness,” “relaxation or insensitivity of the moral fiber” is a part and parcel of Hellenism (135). Witticisms in Oscar Wilde’s plays involve the game with moral norms of the late-Victorian time; they are vital for his dramas. Their paradoxical nature provokes the audience to share the ways the author’s mind works. His dramas are full of the drawing-room conversations, exhibiting play of the mind. They stop the action, producing the retardation effect, as a witty talk of Sir Robert Chiltern and Mrs. Cheveley in the first act of *An Ideal Husband* (1895). Mrs. Cheveley’s responses to Sir Robert Chiltern sound as if the only purpose of his remarks is to provide her with an excellent opportunity to display capability to create witticisms:

**Sir Robert Chiltern:** ...But may I ask, at heart, are you an optimist or a pessimist? Those seem to be the only two fashionable religions left to us nowadays.

**Mrs. Cheveley:** Oh, I’m neither. Optimism begins in a broad grin, and Pessimism ends with blue spectacles. Besides, they are both of them merely poses.

**Sir Robert Chiltern:** You prefer to be natural?

**Mrs. Cheveley:** Sometimes. But it is such a very difficult pose to keep up.

**Sir Robert Chiltern:** What would those modern psychological novelists, of whom we hear so much, say to such a theory as that?

**Mrs. Cheveley:** Ah! the strength of women comes from the fact that

psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analysed, women . . . merely adored.

**Sir Robert Chiltern:** You think science cannot grapple with the problem of women?

**Mrs. Cheveley:** Science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it, in this world.

**Sir Robert Chiltern:** And women represent the irrational.

**Mrs. Cheveley:** Well-dressed women do. (115-116)

Jeff Nunokawa compares Wilde’s characters, speaking paradoxes, to the ventriloquist’s dolls (55). Their author, highly estimating the art of conversation, virtually stands behind them. As discussion in Shaw’s dramas, witty remarks with their brilliant theatricality provide “crystallization” of the present, provoking the shift of accents and dismissing the impression of illusory realism — the optics, denied by John Ruskin’s “innocence of the eye.”

### “Modern” Means “English”

Nevertheless Wilde was not inclined to treat his works as modern. For him “modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter” were inseparable from 19<sup>th</sup> century realia. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) contemporary life is described as utilitarian, “thoroughly well-informed”, depressing with hopeless seriousness, dullness, and passion to moral instructions. His essay “The Decay of Lying” (1891) announces, that everyday life and all its constituents lie out of the horizon of the beautiful; it is a subject-matter for speculations of “a common pamphleteer or a sensational journalist”, not for the art of literature (19). Modernity cannot be regenerated with purely artistic effort; when it breaks into the art, it vulgarizes it. But condemning “foolish attempts to be modern”, Wilde is eager to be ahead of his time, since “it is only the modern that ever becomes old-fashioned” (19). This witticism shows a new way of understanding the modern as “separating itself from itself” (H. R. Jauss), in other words as containing within itself the potential past.

The modern thought was described as open to the future by John Morley, a journalist and then a Liberal statesman, in *On Compromise* (1874):

The right of thinking freely and acting independently, of using our minds without excessive awe of authority, and shaping our lives without unquestioning obedience to custom, is now a finally accepted principle in some sense or other with every school of thought that has the smallest chance

of commanding the future. (1)

British liberals were enchanted with the image of drifting thought not so long. Free thought soon was intertwined with the idea of progress, suggesting permanent movement from the present to the future. Journalist and writer Walter Bagehot connected this openness to the future with discussion in *Physics and Politics* (1872). He considers “constant disposition to change,” “improvement” to be the main feature of the modernized world, opposing the British culture to the traditionalist (Indian) culture, “regulated by ancient usage” (156). Discussion is proclaimed a basis of the modern civilization: “...the mere putting up of a subject to discussion, with the object of being guided by that discussion, is a clear admission that that subject is in no degree settled by established rule, and that men are free to choose in it” (161). Bagehot motivates the necessity of freedom of thought and opinion for the social and political life by Darwinist conceptions. As Stoddart recapitulates this point: “The ‘peculiarity of arrested civilization is to kill our varieties at birth ... before they can develop’, only when ‘the chain of custom’ was broken by a ‘government of discussion’ could societies develop and improve” (2).

The tendency to equal modern and English became stronger to the end of the century. In the 1880s Englishness was already associated with the modern era, modernization, not with the archaic “childhood.” The main characteristic of the English national character now is the capability to change instead of preservation of certain traits for long ages. The idea of one nation was put ahead by the Liberal Party since the struggle around the first Reform Act. Then the English national character was attributed to the Anglo-Saxon heritage: their striving to freedom, self-government and communities. In 1841 Thomas Arnold in his inaugural lecture in Oxford said:

We, this great English nation, whose race and language are now overrunning the earth from one end of it to the other, — we were born when the white horse of the Saxons had established his dominion from the Tweed to the Tamar. So far we can trace our blood, our language, the name and actual divisions of our country, the beginnings of some of our institutions. So far our national identity extends; so far history is modern, for it treats of a life which was then, and is not yet extinguished. (32)

This idea was also formulated by John M. Kemble in his *History of the Saxons in England* (1849, new ed. 1876); he stated that Anglo-Saxon social and political

principles were the original source of the modern social and political principles. The partisans of this conception (among them was John Richard Green, whose *A Short History of the English People* (1874) was authoritative for almost 50 years) considered that all basic elements of the Englishness were formed by 1066. Mathew Arnold called them “teutonomania.” In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century “teutonomania” was seriously challenged. In *The Expansion of England* (1883) J. R. Seely proved that the English national character was to a great extent the consequence of such events as the first settlements in the New World and colonization, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Civil War, supremacy in the seas, the industrial revolution. Nonconformist liberals, S. T. Gardiner among them, considered Puritan virtues, influential in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, to be the crucial factor in the formation of the English national character. Even later period was chosen by the New Liberals, who believed the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century’s economical process to be the most important.

In 1890s the Britishness and Great Britons are on the agenda. The nation is widely thought to be based on the ethical and social principles, and not on the ethnicity. The supreme position of the Englishman (Briton) is explained by his ability to rule, and also by his moral and intellectual superiority, his self-sufficiency, self-reliance, spirit of enterprise, education — the qualities, acquired in the process of modernization.

The Englishness (Britishness) is equaled to the modern in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), being widely examined today as an “imperial gothic.” Stephen D. Arata characterized Dracula’s striving to England as “reverse colonization” (119). He understands “reverse colonization” as an expression of “geopolitical fears”, the late-Victorian anxiety about the Empire and its future (623). But it should be noted, that there is at least one more reason, for “the archaic Dracula” (Johnson 76) strives to get to England in vampire need of constant renewal, modernization with its cult of novelty implies such a possibility. Dracula himself resumes the situation: “I long to go through the crowded streets of your mighty London, to be in the midst of the whirl and rush of humanity, to share its life, its change, its death, and all that makes it what it is”(32). England is represented in the novel as a dynamic country (most of the journal entries are made in the trains), urbanized, humane, with modern ways of economic and social life, in other words, as the essentially *modern* country. The Count tries to appropriate its modes of life, but fails — in the same way as he fails to master the contemporary English. The Count’s real being is the same for several centuries. It is a fixed life (or rather death) circle, related to some strict hierarchal order. Dracula practices “reverse colonization” of a sort while involving his pursuers into this circle, placing them low in the hierarchy. The

symbol of this type of being is Harker and Dracula night trip: the calèche rushes at full speed, but Harker notices that they pass the same places again and again. Such is fruitless rapidity of the dead — attached to the past — world. At the beginning of the novel as the action moves eastward trains begin to be late, the time stops. As for England, here trains function to a high degree of accuracy. The railway timetable — Bradshaw's Guide — is a highly important symbol of this novel, for speed of the modern world, being embodied in trains, the underground, steamboats, telegrams, allows the heroes coordinate their activities and thus resist the Count. And otherwise — the only late telegram obviously becomes the cause of Lucy Westenra's death. Newspaper cuttings play an important role in the reconstruction of events. Newspaper is one more symbol of the modern world and its constant renewal, since the news instantly appears to outdate the next day.

At first sight, Dracula's pursuers are indistinguishable from one another in their modernity. But close reading shows that the American adventurer Morris has only one feature: he is an action man. While others continue talking in Dr. Stewart study, he has already shot at the bat on the window-sill. The pursuit is headed by Van Helsing, moving swiftly between Amsterdam and London. Though Seward calls him "one of the most advanced scientists of his day," this "philosopher and a metaphysician" prefers magical actions. Van Helsing speaks of "sterilization" while consecrating the earth with a wafer; transfusion of blood with his help reminds of some magical manipulation of sexual character; hypnotizing resembles spiritualistic practice. He is ignorant of stenography; all his knowledge has ancient treatises as its source. His most efficient tools are a crucifix, the Host and decadent garlic flowers. Van Helsing's Holland is the same land of Jesuits it was, for example, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; you can get the Host or an Indulgence there.

Speaking of Englishmen, Doctor Seward plays a role of an observer, a usual figure in the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature with its adherence to "cases." He puts down his observations in the most unusual way: he makes his entries on a phonograph. As Jennifer Wicke claims, "Seward's diary constitutes immaterialization of a voice, a technological zone in the novel, inserted into a historical point where phonography was not widespread ... but indicative of thing to come" (470). Lord Godalming shows some features, with which English nobles are associated in the national myth, but rowing and sailing are replaced with a little steamboat. But on the whole he is pushed aside. The real antipode of "the archaic" Count is a democratic hero, the quiet, "business-like gentleman" Jonathan Harker.

On the first pages of the novel Harker, travelling in Transylvania, is called "Englishmen," "English," "the English Herr." Indeed, he is represented as an

ideal Englishmen from the point of view of the 1890s. Bishop Creighton in *The English National Character* (1896) enumerated “the characteristics of the modern Englishman”: “An adventurous spirit, practical sagacity, a resolve to succeed, a willingness to seek his fortune in any way, courage to face dangers, cheerfulness under disaster, perseverance in the sphere which he has chosen...” (qtd. in Mandler 127).

Speaking of Jonathan Harker, we have nothing to add to this portrait, except, perhaps, his tendency to keep going. He is literally a modern businessman: he makes the entries into his journal in the train, easily deals with documents etc. He can stenograph brilliantly, and stenography is another symbol of modernization: it means speed and cryptography, which “the archaic Dracula” cannot decipher, and it is a way to put everything in order. Memorably, the Count takes only one step against his pursuers: he burns the cylinders of Seward’s phonograph and documents, typewritten by Mina and put in order by her and Harker. “The archaic Dracula” knows nothing about the possibility of copying! Mina proudly reports to Doctor Seward, that her typewriter has this function.

Johnson remarks: “...one can see the insistence throughout the text of the fundamental value of recorded, empirical knowledge in the fight against the mysterious unknown” (74-75). This kind of knowledge is represented in the first place by the figure of Harker, whose entries help to clarify the events. At the beginning his aim is to improve his education; Harker writes down every detail of his journey, as one should do while writing in the genre of travel. He is well-read in history (history of Transylvania, in particular), physiognomics, he even speaks German.

Trying hard “to keep up with Jonathan’s studies,” the young teacher Mina Murray also improves her skills, and her education makes quite an impact into defeating of Dracula. It is Mina who constantly systematizes the entries, making “words” — the dispassionate testimony against Dracula — out of “the anguish of Seward’s heart,” that was fixed in the modulations of his voice on the phonograph. It is Mina who gathers newspaper cuttings and classifies the Count according to Lombroso’s and Nordau’s ideas of criminals. And Mina, like Harker, is an exemplar of the English woman: hardly awoken from the hypnotic trance, she already asks if anybody would like some tea. Making tea was one of the most important social functions of a woman in the British society. Her perseverance, moral strength plus her skills of a “new woman” (at this period “new woman” was a symbol of everything modern in the British society) predetermine the victory of the modern over the “archaic” Count. Though at one moment Harker says bitterly: “the old

centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere ‘modernity’ cannot kill” (55), “modernity” and the associated Englishness is represented as having great potential. Author takes the side of modernization, which is consecrated with the Christian ethics (as John Stuart Mill understood it), and suggests such liberal values as sensibility, goodness, education, democratic thinking.

The development of liberalism is admitted to be the crucial factor in the process of modernization. Political and ethical ideas, religious attitudes of the British liberalism had a direct effect on this process. But the revolution in the ways of thinking, which was provoked by the liberal ideas, is also of great importance; it emphasized the value of transient moments. This revolution produced a new type of art: discussion plays are much closer to *Ulysses*, than it may seem. On the other side, the new value of modern was seen as a feature of the national life, as a result, the modern acquired great significance, and a new feeling arose — of dynamic and rootless way of being.

## Note

1. For details see Ortiz, Javier. *Bernard Shaw's Ibsenisms*. Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses 7 (1994):152-153.

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# The Transference of War-induced Trauma and the Collective Memory of Trauma in *Another World*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** Pat Barker, one of the most important contemporary British novelists, has been dedicating herself to the depiction of various kinds of trauma throughout her oeuvre. In her novel *Another World*, she explores how war-induced trauma is transferred from the older generation Geordie to the younger generation Nick. Through Barker's narration of the transference of war-induced trauma from one generation to the next, it can be seen that WWI has brought great sufferings to the British people who have been involved with the Great War and personal trauma engendered by it could lead to communal or collective memory of trauma of the whole nation.

**Key words** transference; war-induced trauma; collective memory of trauma

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Pat Barker is the author of 11 novels written within a span of 29 years. Although she is not a prolific writer, her oeuvre has earned her a high literary reputation and she "is situated among the most important novelists of the twentieth century

and into the twenty-first century in Britain” (Brannigan 2). By means of her pithy narration, Barker probes into the damage that individuals, communities, and, indeed, the British nation have suffered, showing her concern with the postwar British society. In spite of various settings of her stories — whether in the late-twentieth-century urban centers or in the trenches, war hospitals, or sanatoriums of the First World War, Barker concentrates her attention on the delineation of trauma invariably across her writing, which is summed up by Brannigan as, “one of the themes which runs throughout Barker’s oeuvre is the vulnerability of human society, and the vulnerability of human life” (9).

### **The Transference of War-induced Trauma in *Another World***

In her novel *Another World*, Barker explores her frequently-dwelt-on topic, war-induced trauma, and how such trauma is successfully transferred from the older generation Geordie, a WWI veteran, to the his grandson Nick who has never been to the battlefield.

Trauma, as Allan Young has remarked, “is a disease of time” (7). As time passes by, many things can be forgotten. However, trauma induced by wars can last forever even after those who have been to the battlefield pass away. War-induced trauma can be transferred from the older generation to the next through words, emotions and experience: “Transference of traumatic responses can continue for generations. Family relationships and the children of survivors are deeply affected by their parents’ experience, as manifested in depression, mistrust, and emotional constriction brought on by excessive parental suffering and attempts to control their children” (Vickroy 19). In *Another World*, the transmissibility of trauma from the older generation to the younger is well exemplified in the case of Geordie and Nick. Geordie, a 101-year-old veteran, goes to the First World War together with his own brother Harry, but returns alone. Upon his return to his home country, he has always been molested by the recurrent nightmares of seeing the horrifying and screaming mouth of his own severely-wounded brother Harry, into whose heart he stabs a knife to stop his pain. He repeats the nightmare even decades after the end of the war, especially on the verge of his death. To him, the effect of the Great War shows no sign of being laid to rest, especially when the screaming mouth of his dead brother keeps recurring to trouble him in his nightmare: “Harry disappears, bit by bit, like the Cheshire cat, until only the screaming mouth is left. Night after night he feels himself falling towards that mouth” (*Another World* 146). War-induced trauma is like the screaming mouth of Harry that is big enough to swallow him. The pain and torture engendered after killing his own brother with his own

hand and bearing witness to so many brutalities on the battlefield have become the murder-induced haunting in the present and an ever-lasting trauma in his memory that can never be erased.

The striking images of “mouths” have been adopted by Barker in her later novels to symbolize trauma and horror at least three times. In *Regeneration*, she depicts for the first time the image of the mouth of a severely traumatized soldier Callan as he is being given the treatment of electroshock to be restored to speech. Callan has lost the ability to speak after being shell-shocked on the battlefield. When he is sent to the hospital to be cured of his aphasia, Dr. Yealland applies electroshock on him so as to force him to articulate a sound. The tortured “mouth” of the speechless Callan being treated by Dr. Yealland with the use of electroshock therapy lingers in Dr. Rivers’ nightmare and is referred to “an oral rape” by him (208): “He was in the electrical room, a pharyngeal electrode in his hand, a man’s open mouth in front of him ... For a second the dream was so real that he went on seeing the chair, the battery, the tortured mouth” (207). The image of Harry’s screaming mouth in *Another World* again becomes the symbol of trauma as it represents pain and sufferings of a dying man Harry after being severely wounded on the battlefield. For the rest of his life since his return, Geordie has been having the same nightmare and he always wakes up screaming. Worse than that, he used to wet himself in bed before he wakes up. His guilt of killing Harry seizes him and never makes him feel alleviated. Only before he dies does he manage to muster his courage to tell Nick, “I killed Harry” (*Regeneration* Trilogy 164). In her presentation of trauma in *Double Vision*, Barker uses for the third time the singularly disturbing images of mouths in Goya’s paintings to represent the carnage of war and an outraged conscience in the face of death and destruction. “Goya is depicted to be exemplary of an artist committed to the ethical representation of war and terror...The mouths in his paintings cry out to be heard, and produce a roar which cannot be ignored” (Brannigan 159). By choosing the paintings of Goya which have become testimonies of the horrors of wars, she wants to form a contrast between the terror of the carnage represented in Goya’s paintings and the terror of the wars the war reporter Stephen covers. The images of the mouths depicted in three novels, which symbolize man’s pain and trauma when confronted with wars, have become one arresting feature in Barker’s later fiction that cannot be ignored or forgotten. When people are in pain, they will cry out by instinct. By creating different “mouths” that have become the equivalents or synonyms of trauma, she successfully conveys both the physical and mental sufferings of her characters.

Barker not only employs the images of mouths to represent trauma, but also

applies the image of a mirror in *Another World* to symbolize the transference of trauma from one generation to the next. The transference of Geordie's trauma onto Nick is testified in the discovery of Geordie's shaving mirror in Nick's bathroom after the funeral. The mirror, which accompanies Geordie throughout the war and is subsequently used for shaving by him every morning, becomes part of Nick's inheritance from his grandfather. As a legacy of Geordie's object from the war that has been inherited by Nick after his grandfather's death, the mirror symbolizes the passing of war-induced trauma from the old to the young, as expressed by Whitehead in his book, "In the subtle movement of the mirror from Geordie's bathroom to Nick's, Barker symbolizes the transmission of Geordie's trauma to the next generation, so that his terrible secret continues to haunt and disturb the family line" (20).

The mirror, small as it is, serves as an indispensable object in conveying the trans-generational trauma among two generations. Throughout the novel, there have been quite a few descriptions of the mirror at three different stages. As a child, when Nick asks his grandfather to take down the mirror so that he can look into it, only to find that "the reflection that peered back at him was blurry, swollen, distorted by the irregularities in the metal, never the clear reflection you got in glass" (*Another World* 57). When his grandfather is lying in bed on the verge of death, Nick looks into the steel mirror and finds that "it doesn't reflect his face" (*Another World* 164). And immediately after the death of his grandfather, he walks slowly along to the bathroom and looks again into the mirror, finding himself estranged from the reflection: "the face that stares back at him is nothing like his own" (*Another World* 257). The description of the steel mirror at three vital periods is intended by Barker to reflect the ubiquity of trauma in both Geordie and Nick's life. When Nick is young, what he sees in the mirror is something blurry, swollen and distorted, which bespeaks that he cannot truly understand his grandfather's trauma as a child. He is not old enough to perceive the pain of coming back from the war. Even before and after his grandfather's death, Nick is still unable to see clearly his own reflection in the mirror, which symbolizes that he does not want to experience the same trauma as experienced by his grandfather. Nick's inability to see clearly his own reflection in the mirror and his failure to recognize his own image in the mirror suggest that the younger generation refuses to take over the burden of the traumatic past of the older generation as it is so hard and painful to shoulder.

To Geordie, the mirror is quite significant as it accompanies him from the war until his death, "The mirror had gone with him through France, but it couldn't have

been sentiment that bound him to it, for he avoided everything else to do with the war” (*Another World* 57). It is a riddle why Geordie keeps only the mirror with him while avoids everything else to do with the war. He remains silent about his war experiences, especially about his extremely gut-wrenching memories of how he stabs to death his severely wounded brother: “As a young man just back from France, Geordie refused to talk about the war, and avoided all reminders of it... refused all questions. When obliged to speak stammered so badly he could barely make himself understood” (*Another World* 82). Geordie’s silence about his past reveals his agony of touching upon the topic of fighting in the war, and when he cannot avoid speaking about it, he chooses to stammer, which makes his words hard to be comprehended. It is clear that he does not want to be understood as he deliberately keeps his past a secret from others. He keeps silent about the war and even when he walks, he would walk a long way just to avoid the war monument. However, despite his attempt to forget about the war, he keeps the mirror with him until he dies. Here Barker deliberately employs the mirror to serve as a connection and junction between the traumas of two generations. As the mirror enters into the life of Nick after his grandfather’s death as a legacy from the latter, the trauma of the old is successfully grafted onto the young despite his refusal and resistance to perceive his grandfather’s trauma. He has never been prepared to accept what has been implanted into his memory by force, just as “he failed to prepare him for the annihilating abstractions of Thiepval” (*Another World* 72). It is interesting to learn that Barker, by writing about the solidity of the mirror, intends to imply the impossibility of trauma to be laid to rest: “it (the mirror) didn’t break. Granddad dropped it on the floor once, to show that it didn’t break” (*Another World* 72). Usually mirrors are easy to be broken. However, in the novel, the mirror cannot be broken even when it is deliberately dropped on the floor. The unbreakable mirror symbolizes the long-lasting power of trauma that refuses to be elided from the memories of the traumatized.

Through the image of the mirror being inherited by Nick after his grandfather’s death, Barker explores the significance of trans-generational war-induced trauma from the older generation to the younger, which has become a reality in the post-war British society. The transmission of trauma among generations is not only shown in her adoption of images, but also explicitly related by Barker in the novel. Before Nick feels his grandfather’s trauma, Nick finds it hard to communicate with him about the First World War. His main access to the war is through his visit to the war cemeteries in France with his grandfather, after which he is greatly affected by his grandfather’s shocking experiences at Thiepval. This very visit serves as a

direct vehicle for the transference of his grandfather's past trauma to him, where the traumatic memories are transplanted into him, "Geordie was attempting to graft his memories on to Nick — that's what the visit was about — and perhaps, in spite of Nick's resistance, he'd come close to succeeding" (*Another World* 74).

Although Nick has resisted keeping his grandfather company to France for many years, he has no reason to refuse it this time for if he doesn't go with his grandfather to the cemetery in France, probably there won't be any more chances as his grandfather is already 101 and is becoming older and weaker, "No time for a man of Geordie's age to be travelling, but they both knew this would be his last time, and that if they didn't seize the chance to go together then, they would never go at all. Granddad's last, Nick's first, visit" (*Another World* 72). Geordie's visit to the war cemeteries digs out something painful in him and it seems never possible for his trauma to be resolved, especially when he stands there looking up at his brother Harry's name, "his lips moved, causing Nick to wonder what could be left to say after so many years" (*Another World* 72). His seeing of his brother's name becomes the return of the repressed to his once traumatized mind. The past traumatic memories and haunting intrude into his present life like flood again, unstoppable, despite his unwillingness to relive it.

Geordie's reaction to the discovery of his brother's name on the cemetery monument is painful, similar to what Barker has expressed on her visit to the First World War grave sites in France, "Once you find and identify a name that is known to you, it opens the past in a different kind of way" (*On the Ghost Road*). The experience of seeing a familiar name on the cemetery monument is like peeling the scar off a newly-recovered wound. As the third generation of his grandfather, Nick's visit to France seems to be a continuation of the war-induced trauma of his grandfather. As he follows his grandfather, it seems that the trauma of his grandfather has been transferred to him, "Following in Geordie's footsteps, he walked across the grass and up the steps to the stone of sacrifice, feeling the weight of that experience heavy on the back of his neck" (*Another World* 73). Through the lines, it is easy to detect how Nick gradually perceives and understands his grandfather's trauma after his visit to the cemetery in France. His being forced to accept his grandfather's trauma is a heavy burden for him to shoulder. After Geordie dies, Nick continues to relive his grandfather's trauma for the rest of his life.

What's more, Barker skillfully represents the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next through the depiction of three cases of fratricide in *Another World*. The murder of his brother Harry by Geordie on the battlefield is

doubled in the later discovery of the murder in the Fanshawe family that takes place in the house, which Nick newly moves into. The uncovering of the painting of the Fanshawe family on the wall leads to the revelation of the murder of one toddler James by his half siblings Robert and Muriel who once live in the same house almost eighty years ago. The fratricide in the Fanshawe family parallels the subsequent one to befall Nick's youngest son Jasper by his half siblings Gareth and Miranda. Luckily enough, the fratricide in Nick's family is interrupted at the right moment and prevented from happening. The "coincidence" of similar fratricide that occurs in three families is by no means a coincidence in her novel. By relating on the three cases of fratricide that take place within a gap of eight decades apart, she implies the concomitance of trauma in the society and the possibility of trauma being transferred from the old to the young. The surfacing of Geordie's murder of Harry and the revelation of the Fanshawe murder together with the subsequent intended fratricide in Nick's family project that "Geordie's wartime legacy troublingly and painfully plays itself out in the present" (Whitehead 22). By drawing on the discourse of trauma, Barker reconfigures history as a site of traumatic haunting and suggests the pervasive influence of the unresolved effects of the past. As Whitehead holds, "Trans-generational haunting offers a powerful figure for writers who wish to explore the impact of traumatic events on those who were born after" (27). Barker's ingenious blending of three cases of fratricide in one novel powerfully dramatizes the notion of trans-generational haunting and trauma, and successfully represents the lasting effects of traumatic events that clearly do have a significant effect on those born later. The family secrets of the three families that are hidden or unresolved are passed later to the next generation and remain buried within them.

*Another World* is not the only novel in Barker's later fiction that dwells on the theme of the transference of war-induced trauma, there are quite a few that also touch upon the same theme and the theme is common in many other war novels, including some memoirs or novels on American Vietnam War or the Holocaust.

In the history of the First World War, it was common for trauma to be transferred among the combatants, "... shell shock was clustered in groups and fostered by weak command...trauma is once more marked by the now familiar mystery of transpersonal affective transmission" (Luckhurst 54). The transference of war-induced trauma can be also found in many soldiers and military doctors who appear in Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, of whom the case of the military psychiatrist Rivers is the most typical. In treating his patients who suffer from shell shock, Rivers finds himself unable to dismiss the reality of their ghosts.

At the end of the trilogy, he also sees the ghost of the witch doctor Njiru in his hallucinations whom he meets in Melanesia, and it seems that he is marching on the “ghost road” like his patients as well. His contraction of the same traumatic symptom of having hallucinations can be demonstrated by MaCann’s theory on the transference of trauma: “Trauma is contagious. In the role of witness to disaster or atrocity, the therapist at times is emotionally overwhelmed. She experiences, to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient. The phenomenon is known as “traumatic countertransference” or “vicarious “traumatization” (McCann 131). And Herman’s statement also explains why Rivers is infected by the same traumatic symptoms as his patients do: “Hearing the patient’s trauma story is bound to revive any personal traumatic experiences that the therapist may have suffered in the past. She may also notice imagery associated with the patient’s story intruding into her own waking fantasies or dreams” (140). Another typical example of contracting war-induced trauma is Paul in *Life Class*, an art student who shows great enthusiasm as the other British civilians and joins in the war as a volunteer for the Belgian Red Cross, tending on the mutilated, dying soldiers from the front line. He has become an eyewitness of many disturbing scenes: “He went to one hospital where there were five hundred men lying on the straw, covered in piss and shit — some of them hadn’t had their wounds dressed in a fortnight. No anesthetics, no disinfectant, nothing. Whole place stank of gangrene” (*Life Glass* 119). Watching the severely wounded soldiers left to survive for themselves due to lack of drugs or medical services makes him feel grieved. His heart aches a lot whenever being exposed to scenes of bloody deaths. His trauma derives not only from bearing witness to the sufferings of the wounded men, but also from his reluctance and even resentment of watching the soldiers return to the front to be killed again after their recovery, “The staff resented having to nurse somebody back to health in order for him to be shot. Obviously, this might be the fate of many of the patients, but only on the battlefield” (*Life Glass* 158). The trauma of the soldiers is then transferred to Paul simply through his experience of bearing witness to their pain as he takes care of them as a volunteer.

Across Barker’s later fiction, there is a doubling of characters and the theme of transference of war-induced trauma. The iconoclastic First World War combatant Billy Prior in the trilogy transforms into the 101-year-old veteran Geordie in *Another World*, then changes into the war reporter Stephen in *Double Vision* and finally evolves into Paul in *Life Class*. On these figures, war-related trauma continues from one person to the next, from one generation to the next, and from the First World War to the modern wars. The theme of war-induced trauma has

been repeated across the six novels, and many similar symptoms concomitant with trauma have been duplicated repeatedly. From the depiction of war-induced trauma across her later fiction, it is not difficult to see that trauma can be transferred among soldiers, from patients to doctors, from soldiers to volunteers, from those who have been to wars to those who stay at home and at last from generation to generation. Thus, it is possible that personal trauma engendered by wars could lead to communal or collective memory of trauma of the whole nation.

In the history of American Vietnam War, the transmission of trauma from the fathers to their children has been recorded in many memoirs. In Danielle Trussoni's memoir *Falling Through the Earth*, one of the *New York Times*' Ten Best Books of 2006, she provides a real picture of her father's unresolved trauma from Vietnam which results in his eccentric and abusive behavior. After the divorce of her parents in her early adolescence, she chooses to live with her unloving, unlovable, thoroughly unsympathetic father who always brings her to a local bar and drinks a lot to numb his traumatic mind. Young as she is, she shows understanding and perception of her father's inner pain after his terrible experience of being a volunteer tunnel rat in Vietnam: "I believed that the war had taken him from us. It was an amorphous monster that would grab hold and pull us into it, kicking and screaming. Vietnam claimed Dad's past, his future, his health, his dreams" (Trussoni 170). Danielle's father, like many other young American volunteers as tunnel rats, armed with little more than a pistol and a flashlight, has to crawl through booby traps and utter darkness, without knowing what will happen to them around the next corner as they try to clean out the systems they have discovered. Being constantly threatened with the imminent death that will come at any moment makes her father return with mental scars that never really heal.

As a devoted and considerate daughter, Danielle is able to perceive the inner trauma of her father which in turn is transferred to her as well. At last, with the help of a guide, her trip to Vietnam to experience what her father has gone through in the tunnels of Vietnam enables her to see through the enormous impact of trauma on all veterans and their children as well: "Although twenty thousand American children were orphaned by the war, it was only when I looked at my own life that I saw the hole that Vietnam created for all of us" (Trussoni 239-40). Through Danielle's own unspeakable experience as a child of a veteran who has been completely ruined by his disturbing experience in Vietnam, it is easy to discover that her father's trauma has been transmitted to her unconsciously. The trans-generational trauma between the two generations, holds Ryan, suggests that "many of the emotionally and psychologically damaged Vietnam veterans inflicted upon their progeny a

childhood at least as painful and empty as that endured by the children of the soldiers who never came home” (Ryan 73). The pain brought to the later generation by their returned veteran-fathers equals that by the dead ones. In a word, so long as the fathers join in the war, they will bring about almost the same sufferings to their children, whether they survive or die in the war.

The transference of war-induced trauma is not an exclusive experience to the families related to the First World War or the Vietnam War. Any family that has been involved in the wars cannot escape from such influence. In the research symposium on “Transmission of Trans-generational Trauma”, the study result reveals how Holocaust experiences may be unwittingly transmitted across generations: “Children’s minds can be unwittingly imprinted by the Holocaust experiences of prior generations ... Children’s own physiologies, sensations, feelings, behaviours and attitudes alternate between imbibing and rebelling against parents’ over-silent or over-loud responses. In either case they are drawn into their parents’ traumas, and are secondarily traumatized by them.”<sup>2</sup>

These researches concerned with Holocaust experiences also point out that massive traumas are often so unbearable that they are pushed out of awareness. “Traumas became untellable, unspeakable dark black holes. Yet no matter how hidden, physiological, emotional, behavioural, and attitudinal fragments, especially if triggered by circumstances reminiscent of the trauma, flooded into the visible world”.<sup>3</sup> All these traumatic nightmares related to either World War I, the Vietnam War or Holocaust will inevitably lead to the tragic outcome of the transference of war-engendered trauma, although in different forms or symptoms.

In the case of Barker, she is definitely also a victim of trans-generational trauma. Her step-grandfather and stepfather’s war-induced trauma has been unwittingly transmitted to her and has left such a far-reaching influence on her that she has been showing consistent interest in the Great War and the trauma arising out of it. From her first war novel *Regeneration* published in 1991 to her latest one *Life Class* launched in 2007, she has obtained a strong enthusiasm in the First World War. Through her novels, it can be detected that she has never escaped from the shadow of being brought up in a veteran’s family. The portraiture of the traumatic characters in her works is the very representation of her step-grandfather and stepfather, and the elaboration of the unspeakable trauma of her characters is indeed the real projection of that of her kinsmen. For her, war-induced trauma has been transferred from her father and grandfather’s generation to her and has left an inerasable scar on her, just as what she depicts in *Another World* the war-induced trauma has been transferred from Geordie to his grandson Nick.

### **Collective Memory of Trauma**

If trauma is transmitted from individuals to the whole community and even the whole people, from one generation to the next, it constitutes the communal or collective memory of trauma for the whole nation. Neal has once argued, “A collective trauma grows out of the shared experience of a deplorable event that falls outside the range of ordinary human experiences...An extraordinary event becomes a national trauma under circumstances in which the social system is disrupted to such a magnitude that it commands the attention of all major subgroups of the population” (Neal 10). Veterans who come back from the trenches of two world wars, soldiers of the Vietnam War, survivors of the atomic bomb and the Holocaust all share a kind of visceral and often untranslatable and indecipherable memories of horror. Such traumatic experiences are not individual experiences, instead they are shared by a large number of people who are of a nation, or even of different nations and races. Although the experiences they share cannot be truly shared with others (at least not at the same level of understanding, and not with the same sense of recognition), trauma engendered by the wars cuts across ethnic lines and will never cease to surface so long as victims of the wars exist. Therefore, this kind of war-induced trauma becomes universal to all people who have been involved with them. Since trauma can be transmitted from one generation to the next through speech, behavior or emotions, from one historical era to the next through historical textbooks, literary works and records of various kinds, it becomes a communal trauma that remains in the collective memory of a people, a nation or even of the whole world.

The Great War is the first large-scale war that has claimed the lives of millions of people and has for the first time rendered such a disastrous impact not only physically but also mentally upon the people of that time and their later generation. As Michail remarks, “The popularity projected scale of the sacrifices experienced by the British during the Great War was reflected by the features attributed to the Western front: great numbers, great losses, extreme sacrifices in futile battles, and extreme material and psychological pressures in the trenches” (Meyer 244). After the end of it, the conflict of the Great War has taken shape in the collective memory of many European or Western people. Thus the war-engendered trauma of many individuals, including veterans or civilians whose relatives have died in the war, has been turned into that of a community, becoming a collective memory of trauma for the whole nation. Just as Luckhurst holds, “The Great War brought mass conscript armies into vast, static environments of near perpetual bombardment. Shell shock

therefore ‘defines for the first time...mass trauma’” (51).

Winter has expressed his own opinion on the power of trauma to generate a communal memory of trauma, “If traumas pose a special challenge to remembrance –and create special bonds among those who were there — they are definitely not unique in their power to generate a community of memory” (52). For some veterans, their traumatic experiences are just nightmares that return repeatedly to haunt them, so they are keen to leave them behind. As they feel unable to “react to the overwhelming pressure of public discourse”, they “chose to retreat to their private memories, accepting their exclusion from the collective memory of the war that was building up without their consent”. However, for others who want to “counteract that feeling of exclusion”, they chose to engage in “actions to incorporate their private memories into the broader collective memory” (Meyer 250).

In Barker’s later fiction on wars, she writes of the trauma sustained by many soldiers, military doctors, war journalists, volunteers and even civilians whose kinsmen die in the wars, and the building up of their trauma is turned into the collective memory of trauma of the whole British people during and after the war. In the *Regeneration* trilogy and *Life Class*, she elaborates on the wartime individual trauma of volunteers and soldiers who are serving and fighting for the national honor in the Great War, while in *Another World* and *Double Vision*, she dwells on the post-war individual trauma of the veteran Geordie and the war journalist Stephen. By taking two major characters Geordie and Stephen in the two novels as representatives, she alludes to the trauma of many other veterans and war journalists whose images and voices are excluded from her fiction, and implies that the combination of many individuals’ traumatic memories will eventually be turned into the collective memory of trauma. Just as Neal says, “The traumas of the past become ingrained in collective memories and provide reference points to draw upon when the need arises” (Neal 7). Through the creation of these characters and the depiction of their trauma, she successfully incorporates their private traumatic memories into the broader collective memory of trauma and universalizes the trauma of the whole nation.

The experiences of the First World War lead to a collective trauma shared by many from all participating countries. For many subsequent years, people mourn over the deceased, the missing, and the many disabled. Many combatants return with severe mental trauma. Many more return with few after-effects. The First World War has a lasting impact on social memory. Many British people consider the First World War to be a signaling of the end of Victorian England, and across

Europe many regard it as a significant turning point in history. When the war broke out, a generation of hot-blooded young men in Britain enlisted themselves in it, displaying a kind of unprecedented enthusiasm to fight for the glory of their nation, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory and England. In *Another World*, Geordie also expresses the same feeling, “There was men fought in that war who were struggling to keep a roof over their family’s heads. If you must know, I used to think some people remembered the dead so they could forget the living with a clear conscience” (*Another World* 155). However, their dreams and ideals were battered and smashed to pieces as they witnessed a vast number of innocent comrades-in-arms killed in stupid battles planned by impotent generals. Those who survived the bloody slaughter became shell-shocked, disillusioned and agonized by their war experiences. As a result, they started to reject the values of the society that had sent them to war and those old men at home who had lied to them and had preached to them about fighting to make the world safe for democracy. When they woke up from the nightmares of the war, they found themselves unable to make a smooth reentry into civilian life and continued to suffer from trauma, thus the wartime experiences were turned into collective trauma shared by almost all the veterans who had survived the war. Such feelings and emotion are shared by Geordie as well when he returns from the war: “That and the hypocrisy... I thought we’d been conned, love. (Laughs.) I knew we’d been conned” (*Another World* 155). For most people, the legacy of the First World War is still lingering, as Dan Todman writes at the beginning lines in his paper “Remembrance”, “The guns fell silent on 11 November 1918, but the minds and voices of those who had lived through the Great War did not. The scale of the war, and the damage it caused, demanded that it should be remembered”. Even for those who have lost their lives in the war, their voices should not be forgotten, “So too did the imagined voices of the dead, who, it seemed vital, must be rescued from the anonymity of total war by an effort of memory” (Howard 209).

Todman once remarks, “Remembrance is an issue for all post-war societies” (qtd. in Howard 209). The First World War has been over for nearly a century, and most of its veterans have all died out at the turn of the new century, thus few are left who can remember the war. However, remembrance persists in the minds of the people whose nations have been involved in the war. There is still a long way for them to go before time can heal their pains, for wars have posed problems of recollection and remembrance for those who have participated in or been to the war (like characters Geordie, Paul and Rivers in Barker’s works) or those who have not experienced it (like Nick). Like many veterans who return from the wars

remember their traumatic experiences until they die, Geordie has been haunted by his war experiences all his life. As the veterans influence their progeny and transfer their trauma to them consciously or unconsciously, which makes their personal experience a communal one, Geordie is “remembering a communal myth rather than a personal experience” (*Another World* 153).

The transference of war-induced trauma among generations makes it possible to turn many individuals’ personal trauma into the communal or collective trauma of a people or a nation, as has been explored by Barker in her later works. The collective remembrance will never fail to exist beyond the boundary of lived memory. Pages on the history books on the wars can be turned over to avoid remembrance of historical trauma, however, the communal or collective memory of trauma will, never, fail to exert its influence on the minds of the people ever involved with the wars and scarred by the lingering legacy.

## Notes

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2. “Transmission of Trans-generational Trauma”, Part of Symposium “Intergenerational communication- working with Holocaust trauma’s legacy across three generations”. Web. 27th June 2006.
3. Ibid.

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# Politics of Existence in Beckett's *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*: "Yesterday" as the Only Timeframe, and Egocentric Characters<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The aesthetic and epistemological implications of time consciousness have been profoundly treated by Samuel Beckett throughout his writing for forty-five years. Time, in Beckett's two masterpieces *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, functions not as an escape from the present by means of the fullness of memory, but as a sad reminder of the past cut off from the present experience. As a reminder of the past, "yesterday" is the only time process observed to reveal the fullness of the characters' memory and existence. In *Endgame*, "yesterday" is a melancholy which evokes the break-up of a relationship of Nagg and Nell, Hamm and his parents, and Clov and Hamm and their tragic memories they put behind; while in *Waiting for Godot* "yesterday" is the merciless and insidious flux of time which uncovers the metamorphosis throughout the limited lifespan of Vladimir and Estragon. On the other hand, though Beckett projects the existence of the characters within the frame of "yesterday," he puts a few characters to the center, both metaphorically and realistically. Characters' egocentric depiction is interrelated to the modernity and what the two world wars introduced: the individuality and alienation of the characters in the modern community. This paper aims to reveal Beckett's narration of "yesterday" as a history narrative and the depiction of egocentric characters to show the challenge for existence in his two *magna opera*: *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*.

**Key words** Samuel Beckett; *Endgame*; *Waiting for Godot*; existence; yesterday; egocentrism

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There is no escape from the hours and the days. Neither from tomorrow nor from yesterday, because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. [...] We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. (Beckett *Proust 2*)

As it is clear from the statements above, Samuel Beckett categorizes time zone into three as yesterday, today and tomorrow in which human beings are physiologically evoked in the aim of a guarantee of gaining recognition for the physical presence of their own. As a defender of existentialist philosophy, Beckett exemplifies the view that man's existence is certified through the physical and concrete presence of space and time; there are hours and days, there is yesterday and tomorrow, there is now and then within the limited lifespan of human beings; the man is presented as a man directing time or directed by time on the life stage.

Beckett often stresses "yesterday" as a period of time. He queries the interaction between the decomposing body/the essence of man and the phenomenon of "yesterday." Within each period of time left behind, man is metamorphosed into somebody else: the essence of man is also deformed or transformed. Man reveals his existence through a new transformation. This transformation is a result of the calamity of yesterday; in other words, the calamity of the two world wars that introduced the project of modern men. Here and now, yesterday introduced a newly-proven being: an egocentric modern man. Beckett portrays the modern man who points himself just to the center; a man who mirrors the so-called individualistic and humanist perspectives of harsh, old and rotten World Wars. Being the only timeframe revealed in both plays, yesterday is analytically conjured with the depiction of egocentric characterization through which Beckett toughens the politics of existence. Man lives in a single timeframe to which he strongly clings; life revolves around a specific time: yesterday and the dialogues come out to be monologues or soliloquies (words spoken by egocentric characters). Each character has his own duty: to challenge the dichotomies of outside world to establish the truth that he is in the center, for that reason he exists. There is no any

other timeframe upon which to base his idea of existence other than “yesterday.” There is no any other place/space in which to root the politics of his existence other than “the center.” Man exists in “yesterday,” and he existed in “yesterday.” Man exists in “the center”, and he existed in “the center.”

Considering these points of views, this paper intends to reveal Samuel Beckett's portrayal of “yesterday” as a reminder of the (perhaps) long-awaited past experiences of Nagg and Nell, Clov and Hamm, Vladimir and Estragon and their egocentric affairs to emphasize men's thirst for existence. In this context, the paper will try to evaluate the merciless and insidious flux of time, its impact on the bodily putrefaction of man within man's survival through his lifespan from childhood (though Beckett is inclined to use an indefinite “beginning”) to senility. The paper will firstly pay attention to the time phenomenon and its representation within Beckett's existentialist perspective: first, a physical body composed of flesh and bones; second, a spiritual body that takes form of an essence and spirit. In the second phase of the paper, I will exemplify Beckett's stereotypical characters in terms of their representation of bodily putrefaction and spiritual loss within the limits of “yesterday” in which time is revealed to have no circulation, and we will show how characters are centered to the point. That will take us to the individualization of each man in modern society.

### **Beckett's Time Dilemma: Yesterday as Melancholy and Flux of Time**

The interrelations between time/existence and past/present are focal issues that Samuel Beckett stresses. *Oxford English Dictionary* defines time as “the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole.” Considering the continuity and wholeness of the unique elements of time as expressed in this dictionary definition, Beckett's perception of the time as a whole and in a continued progress reveals not only his philosophical inquiries such as “who are we?” and “why are we chosen?” but also his obsession with human and “being.” Stressing Jean-Paul Sartre's often-repeated dictum, “Existence precedes essence” (qtd. in Walkey 105) within his works, Beckett predominantly focuses on the latter: essence. In *Endgame*, Nagg and Nell are staged as moribund characters stuffed into dustbins and unconscious of time phenomenon. They are characterized as the samples of “existence;” two physical bodies composed of flesh and bones, having mortal defects, nibbling biscuits baby-like, having no teeth, mourning indifferently, and thirst for familial interest. The metamorphoses in their physical appearances are directly associated with “yesterday” in which the measure of durations of events and the intervals between these events reflect spiritual

putrefaction: the corruption and corrosion of the essence. The dialogue between the two characters represents this joint putrefaction:

**NAGG:** I've lost me tooth.

**NELL:** When?

**NAGG:** I had it yesterday.

**NELL** (*elegiac*): Ah yesterday.

(*They turn painfully towards each other.*)

(*The Complete Dramatic Works 79*)

The physical corruption (losing tooth) is automatically linked with time (yesterday) and time is, though indirectly, associated with spiritual agony (elegiac manners). Nagg's and Nell's reciprocal and painful looking at one another represents their longing for their own nostalgic past. They yearn for the past and the past (which is thoroughly squeezed into yesterday timeframe) reminds their spiritual loss.

Another thing to be emphasized is the "indefiniteness" of timeframe. The very starting point of "yesterday" is not clearly indicated. This "indefiniteness" echoes an unspecified sign of past experiences of Beckett's characters. The characters are portrayed to have an unknown past; there is no clear background information related to their former identity. The only timeframe to question their previous identity is "yesterday." Beckett constantly uses this time image to portray backs and forths between yesterday and now to represent the (un)limited period of time. There seems a flux of time, and as expressed by Anthony Uhlmann "The time-image, [...], presents the flow of time (which is not simply monodirectional from past to present but involves flux)" (12). Yesterday as a time image is noticeably revealed in *Waiting for Godot* as well. Estragon's unconsciously-uttered statements have a close connection with their previous social life and identity:

**ESTRAGON:** We came here yesterday.

**VLADIMIR:** Ah no, there you're mistaken.

**ESTRAGON:** What did we do yesterday?

**VLADIMIR:** What did we do yesterday?

**ESTRAGON:** Yes.

**VLADIMIR:** Why . . . (Angrily.) Nothing is certain when you're about.

**ESTRAGON:** In my opinion we were here.

(*The Complete Dramatic Works 13*)

When they question their past, or interrogate their “yesterday,” they seem to be unaware of what really happened the day before. Beckett links this mental dimness or loss of consciousness in close connection with “indefiniteness” of timeframe in which “Nothing is certain...” (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 13, 40). The beginning of yesterday is indefinite; as a matter of fact, there is an ambiguity about the existence of “yesterday.” Estragon searches for what they did yesterday, while it is replied with the same question by Vladimir. Though they forward the same questions (What did we do yesterday?), their mimicry is also different from each other in that they both are really unaware of what they did yesterday; however Estragon is worried about what happened while Vladimir is worried about not being able to answer to the question related.

But Vladimir and Estragon, like all human beings, exist in other sets of circles: living organisms subject to the cycles of time, on a round planet, orbiting the sun. Within the cage of that circle their possibilities are limited. They have been born, they will live for a term and then die; but at the same time that they acknowledge these facts they resist them by recreating and asserting meaning in the face of the fundamental negative constraints that define their condition. (Graver 25)

Touching on Aristotelian terms and emphasizing the dramatic links, Richard Schechner, in his article “There’s Lots of Time in *Godot*,” underlines the breakage of these Aristotelian links in *Waiting for Godot* and focuses on “discontinuity of time” (193). This discontinuity of time has something to do with a fixed circulation of daily activities in which Estragon and Vladimir are not at one with. Though they do not remember what they did yesterday, Vladimir’s confident statements (that Estragon is mistaken, or the uncertainty when Estragon’s about) reveal his fear of time loss (is there time actually?). This unintentional forgetting “represents time in that we arrive at an understanding of time not by being shown time directly but by being shown a line of action which necessarily involves the passage of time in its unfolding (an empirical progression)” (Uhlmann 12).

The question whether there is something called time, apart from the discontinuity just mentioned, is dealt in accordance with the tragicomic appearances of Beckett’s characters on the stage. The existence of something called time is revealed through the dialogues between the characters and “The pairing of characters — those duets — links time and space, presents them as discontinuous coordinates” (Schechner 192).

In *Endgame*, “yesterday” is addressed as a reminder of tragic memories and melancholic history which evokes the break-up of a relationship of Clov and Hamm they put behind. Touching on the same issue, and taking into attention Mircea Eliade’s categorization of time phenomenon referred as time for religious men and for secular men, Katherine H. Burkman puts forth that in *Waiting for Godot* all time becomes “the same day” (38), which seems to be the same in *Endgame* as well. The vast distance between the time during which dialogues are held and the previous time before the dialogues is very evident.

**HAMM:** Yesterday! What does that mean? Yesterday!

**CLOV** (violently): That means that bloody awful day, long ago, before this bloody awful day. I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

(Pause.) (*The Complete Dramatic Works*, 90)

Clov’s description of “yesterday” as “long ago, before this bloody awful day” evokes the longevity of the same day: yesterday. The description given within the meaning of yesterday recalls some bad reminiscences of the past (bloody and awful). Clov’s remark that “I use the words you taught me. If they don’t mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent” reflects some ambiguities within their approaches. If they mean nothing, then, it may be put forth that yesterday is nothing: there is nothing called yesterday. However, “[...], the only thing that seems to retain its solidity is the present” (Graver 36).

### **Egocentrism: I am in the Center, Therefore I Exist**

Since Rene Descartes’ famous dictum “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I exist), many differing points on the ontological reflection of existence and the meaning of life have been reformulated by different scholars worldwide. Terry Eagleton, in *The Meaning of Life*, refers to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Nietzsche’s *The Will to Power*, Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will* to emphasize some philosophical views on the notion of existence and the meaning of life (1-32). As for literature, the reflection of reality and unreality has been a matter of debate since the classical period. That to what extent the relationship between the characters and the textual events to real life events is have been explained through different theories and orientations. In ancient Greeks, Aristotle regarded the representation of nature as *mimesis* — “imitative representation of

the real world in art and literature” (*Oxford Dictionary*) — while Plato argued the opposite opinion through *diegesis* — “the (fictional) world in which the situations and events narrated occur” (Prince 1964). Building their ideas on these two opposite opinions, modern authors have mostly tried to reflect the un/reality through the “individual(s),” and they have gone towards the texts questioning the individual’s status in life.

Depicting man as a stand-alone Self in nearly all his works, Samuel Beckett, as a “postmodern modernist” (Abbott 25), questions the physical presence and ontological existence of man’s authenticity on a piece of land which is revealed to be “the world” itself. Besides emphasizing man’s individuality, Beckett stresses on man’s Self and degrades man into “a ball of emotion and thought” entrapped in his body — entrapped in the horns of a dilemma: the mind and the heart. As expressed by Thomas Postlewait, in *Self-Performing Voices: Mind, Memory, and Time in Beckett’s Drama*, “The mind and its words attempt to take the measure of the body’s existence, trying to tell how it is and was and will be, now and forevermore” (473) in Beckett’s works. It is precisely at this point to cite Eagleton: “Meaning is no longer a spiritual essence buried beneath the surface of things. But it still needs to be dug out, since the world does not spontaneously disclose it” (17). Paraphrasing Eagleton, it becomes clearer that what Beckett would like to show is to “dug out and unravel those that are buried beneath the surface of things.” Beckett’s depiction of the characters, the stage, and the vehicles are observed to be close reminders of “real life” though they are revealed to be far away from real-life characters. Beckett represents every character to stand for a universal quality of human being. For Hamm, who is “Center[ed], in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet” (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 74), life is composed of his own interests: the orders, insults, self-centered activities. Hamm’s anthropocentric tendency is not just an exaggerated depiction of a typical character; Beckett’s anthropocentric depiction of him signifies a typical position of the modern man. This anthropocentricity is also a humanistic and modernistic perspective of Beckett’s own view. Beckett portrays a stage on which the centered individual is sublimed: Beckett echoes the dictum Protagoras once uttered: “Man is the measure of all things” (qtd. in Nuyen 211).

The reality of life is addressed by Beckett through an exact depiction of individual man. Beckett emphasizes man’s existence and his Self via a portrayal of his body’s unity: not a fragmented self, but a self that is integrated with the body. Considering the stage as a silhouette of human being, Hamm, who stands in the middle of the scene, represents three central parts of the human body: the mind,

heart, and reproduction organs. A man's life is directed through these three parts of body, each directs differently and accordingly; however, the coordination of the two parts is sometimes applied. Beckett often uses this mind-heart coordination to exemplify man's existence, his superiority to the other living creatures. Within the depiction of an analytical and emotional man, Beckett figuratively reveals the reality of life in human evolution. Real life is the life that is performed on the stage (remember Shakespeare's motto: All world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players...). Whether it is a life like that of Clov's who is in search of a more meaningful one that is invisible without a telescope, or it is a life like that of Nagg's and Nell's who are stuffed in trash bins, living a "trash life," the reality is the thing that we are in the actual moment and the thing that we try to direct by means of our thoughts (mind) and emotions (heart) at that exact moment: this is what Beckett portrays. Considering Hamm's and Clov's following dialogue:

**HAMM:** Why do you stay with me? (Question 1)  
**CLOV:** Why do you keep me? (Question 2)  
**HAMM:** There's no one else. (Answer to Question 1)  
**CLOV:** There's nowhere else. (Answer to Question 2)  
(Pause.) (*The Complete Works* 76)

The author does not only put forth a logical inference, but he also exhibits an emotional result. The answer "There's no one else" to the question "Why do you stay with me?" and "There's nowhere else" to the question "Why do you keep me?" complete each other in close connection with mind and heart (logic and emotion). What Beckett addresses is the reality of man's insistence on unity of mind and heart, the reality of human's desperation, the reality of his need of someone with such feelings and ideas, the reality of his thirst for someone who can share his loneliness and desolation in the modern world. These depictions are addressed by Beckett to reveal the reality of man's existence, his being in need of help from infancy to senility: Beckett emphasizes the search for the meaning of life of human being who is ruled by his heart and mind. The other character, Clov, portrayed as a caretaker, has also some idiosyncrasies with universal features. This character symbolizes the desperateness of the modern man, the reminiscences of the past days, and the inability of the human body. Representing today's monotonous human life and human relationships, Clov manifests this feature via his repetitive and intimidating statement addressed to Hamm: "I'll leave you" (*The Complete Dramatic Works*, respectively 71,78,81,88, 89, 92, 96, 99, 104).

This statement is not only an expression of threat but also a representation of weak human relationships which echo the people who look after their own interests. It is also a metaphorical statement mirroring the idea of Clov's anthropocentric or egocentric status. Depicting Hamm and Clov as modern men who continue to live on their own in one room, Beckett exhibits the mutual relations of Hamm and Clov, and emphasizes the fact that they both need each other; in fact, Beckett depicts the fact that people cannot tolerate loneliness. Clov's asking Hamm "Do you believe in the life to come?" (*The Complete Works* 92) reveals a "double entendre" which takes us to both Aristotle's *mimesis* and Plato's *diegesis*. This sentence is uttered by a fictional character in a fictional world; however, identification with this character through a close connection with his utterances makes us lose ourselves in the world hereafter. Beckett's subtle diction and his philosophical views are echoed within each of his sentences. Though the two figures believe that "Life goes on" (*The Complete Dramatic Works* 99), their desperately questioning the reality of life exemplifies a contradictory standpoint. He [Beckett] attempts to show in his drama internal consciousness as external event, thus adapting his self-reflective language-concerned as it is with the limits of knowledge, the body as prison, the mind as prisoner, and life as an unfulfilled quest for meaning to a mimetic mode. In other words, he is holding a mirror up to the act of reflection (Postlewait 479). Hamm is dissatisfied with Clov's previous description of the world as "Zero" because Hamm's search for existence and meaning appears to be denied by the word "Zero."

The egocentric characterization is all over again revealed in Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*. The two characters reveal some dialogues which cover contrasting points. Estragon and Vladimir, each with an individualist perspective, take their words to the center. They merely speak to each other, whether meaningful or not. This may be considered within Piagetian interpretation of cognitive developmental stage of human being. This developmental stage is titled as "collective monologue" by Piage, though he verifies this developmental stage for the preschool children; collective monologue is the stage "so long as the child talks about himself without collaborating with his audience or without evoking a dialogue" (qtd. in Junefelt 30); that is, children are chatting to each other in sequence, but each child is entirely unaware of what the other is saying. This is an egocentric approach. This is also true for Estragon and Vladimir. In the play, both characters recurrently speak to each other; however, many dialogues disclose a meaningless, empty, inconclusive result. Here an example:

**VLADIMIR:** Let's wait till we know exactly how we stand.

**ESTRAGON:** On the other hand it might be better to strike the iron before it freezes.

**VLADIMIR:** I'm curious to hear what he has to offer. Then we'll take it or leave it.

**ESTRAGON:** What exactly did we ask him for?

**VLADIMIR:** Were you not there?

**ESTRAGON:** I can't have been listening.

**VLADIMIR:** Oh ... nothing very definite.

**ESTRAGON:** A kind of prayer.

**VLADIMIR:** Precisely. (*The Complete Works* 15)

It is not of any significance to create an evocative speech, but to enhance the evidence that "I speak, therefore I am." Both Estragon and Vladimir do stress their turn to speak. Who speaks is to the front. Who speaks is to the center. This is just what Postlewait concludes: "Caught in time and space, Beckett's characters use language and number, however inadequately, to define the basic stuff of empirical reality: who, what, where, when, and how" (477).

As it is noticeably seen, Samuel Barclay Beckett conceives "yesterday" as the merciless and insidious flux of time, the indefiniteness, the reminder of past, and the metamorphosis. On the other hand, he confirms that "yesterday" is the discontinuity of time, the guarantee of background identity and social life, the proof of the present, and the basic verification of existence. Through the depiction of Clov and Hamm and Vladimir and Estragon, Beckett establishes that modern man, as a result of the harsh consequences that the new world order brought, is the lonesome person on the planet who aspires to guarantee his existence. Modern man strives to put himself to the center. To establish man's position, Beckett brings the only timeframe — yesterday — together with the central stature of man's being. Yesterday is not only an emblematic agenda that foregrounds the revelation of man's politics to survive, but, it is, at the same time, a central time concept which is conceptualized to announce the unique existence of an egocentric or anthropocentric creature: man. To be to the center is to root the notion that "I am." Beckett creates highly challenging characters to make them speak the modern man, and they say "I speak, therefore I exist; I am in the center, therefore I exist."

## Note

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# **Borromean (De)Knot in Jorge Luis Borges's “Funes, the Memorious”**

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**Abstract** In Lacanian theory, the Borromean knot is formed by the three linked rings of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real such that each ring controls and blocks the other two from drifting apart. Later, Lacan introduces the Sinthome as the fourth ring for subject analysis. This paper concentrates on a condition in which the rings fall apart. Terms of the orders (RSI), together with the Sinthome, are discussed exemplifying Borges's “Funes, the Memorious,” seeing it a literary representation of the Borromean de-knot. The article also considers itself with a discussion about postmodernism as a social and cultural condition for the Borromean knot unmade, unfolded, and unwrapped.

**Key words** Lacan; Borges; Borromean knot; the Imaginary; the Symbolic; the Real; the Sinthome; subject

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## **Introduction**

Jorge Luis Borges is considered, first and foremost, in relation to Magical Realism and postmodernism. Fantasy, mystery, and philosophical contemplation are inseparable elements of his fiction. His works blur the lines between reality and fantasy, text and literary work, writer and reader, literature and philosophy. He has

novel ideas on imagination, fictionality, truth, reality, translation, and criticism. His works delve into issues that have never been under the direct focus of literature. Most of them take the issues of time, labyrinth, infinitude, possible worlds, etc. as their subject matter and not only give them a literary sense but also develop them further. His fictions both enter these issues into the domain of literature and represent the capacity of literature to go beyond limits of their former fields of study. Thus, these approaches in his works give his writing a special style and character: philosophical in dealing with different worlds; fantastic in referring to dreams and imagination; mysterious when concerning with mirrors and labyrinths; and blended in taking into account distinctive genres and issues. His *Ficciones* (1944) which includes some of his notable and anthologized fictions such as "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," "The Library of Babel," etc. represent above-mentioned characteristics in his literary works.

This study focuses on "Funes, the Memorios." It is the tale of Ireneo Funes who becomes capable of remembering every image, word, memory, or better to say, everything after he falls from a horse and injures his head. This study is a Lacanian analysis of 'Borromean knot' in the story. The idea has always been that Borges posits his stories on philosophical theories. In this article, the argument is not whether Borges posits "Funes, the Memorios" on Lacan's philosophy and Psychoanalysis, but rather to analyze the story in regard to Lacanian theory. It has two objectives: firstly to study orders (the imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real) introduced by Jacques Lacan and their interlocked relationship in his theory 'Borromean knot'; and secondly, to cast light on the idea that the postmodern is a condition when the interrelation between orders is undone. Thus, this study is mapped firstly by introducing Lacanian psychoanalysis and reviewing Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary order, the Symbolic order, the Real, and the Borromean knot. Later, the article seeks to examine Borges's fiction "Funes, the Memorios" following structure of subject in terms of the three orders. And lastly, it attempts to explore the postmodern as a condition when the knots come undone.

### **The Three Orders and the Sinthome**

Lacanian reasoning and ideology flourished in mid-twentieth century to cover vast areas of study as a critical theory. Scholars often categorize the Lacanian non-traditional psychoanalysis theory as generally consisting of three phases of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary order, as a pre-verbal stage, is the "world of images," the "world of perception" (Tyson 27). As the title speaks for itself, the Imaginary order provides the child with an illusory sense

of supervision and master power as a result of an unbreakable bond with his/her mother; “a union of mutual satisfaction” (ibid), or what Lacan labels as the desire for mother. The importance of the Imaginary stages lies in two interesting factors, the first of which focuses on the way the child’s senses, although highly illusive, do emerge as independent of Lingual supports, and later points to the child’s experience, as his/her very first and initial version of a social experience. Next comes the Verbal stage, which concerns itself with Lacanian Symbolic and Real orders. Symbolic order can be regarded as a socio-culturally pre-structured world of intended symbolism, in which the child’s primary experiences of break from the previous illusive world of images occur through “the experience of loss” (Tyson 28). Interestingly enough, according to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the “use of language in general, in fact implies a loss, a lack, because I wouldn’t need words as stand-ins for things if I still felt that I was an inseparable part of those things” (ibid 29), since one needs words to reflect up on concepts. It worth noting that language primarily suggests a sense of separation to the child through the subject of “I,” as an independent entity and not united with anyone else which then tends to intensify its domain by associating and attributing socio-cultural codes of gender, nationality, religion, etc. In line with his notion of Repression, Lacan proposes his famous theory of language acquisition, through assimilating it with the unconscious in construction process. He asserts that both notions operate under the service of the primary lost object. Lacan also, benefits from the symbolic and metaphorical nature of language as a proof to reflect up on the notion of absence or the loss. In a broader scope, Symbolic order functions as the phase which “dominates human culture” (Tyson 31), by having indulged the social values and ideological systems, to which an individual’s emersion happens. And finally the third and the last phase is the Real order. As another sub-category of the Verbal stage, the Real order lives as a highly complex concept. The Real is what exists beyond our comprehension, hence, fluctuating our previous sense of environmental mastery and supervision. The Real is the “uninterpretable dimension of existence; it is existence without the filters and buffers of our signifying, or meaning-making system” (ibid). In other words, the Real is the pure sense of an individual’s experience, independent of socio-cultural boundaries or the man-made system of meaning making and definable logic.

Following Lacan’s model of developmental psychic, he showed opulent interest in the discussion of the three interrelated phases of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. He proposed a three-dimensional model of the spheres in which each phase is drew as a ring. However, the rings represent rims, or holes in

a “body,” around which desire flows. Lacan’s idea here is that the psyche is itself a “body” or space whose boundaries are defined by its rims. The figure that these rims form, the navel of Lacan’s psyche, is known technically as a Borromean knot” (Wertheim 1). Wertheim also refers to the psychoanalytical definition of the Lacanian Borromean Knot as:

[K]nots are objects composed of a single “closed curve in space that does not intersect itself anywhere.” Objects like the Borromean which are composed of more than one interlinked element are thus not technically knots but rather, they are “links.” However, the longevity of the Borromean figure’s designation as a knot means that it is interchangeably known as the Borromean knot, the Borromean link, and even the Borromean rings . . . We may also add a fourth ring to the configuration, to derive a figure known as the Borromean lock. (Wertheim 2)

Hypothesized after Lacan’s encounter with James Joyce, the existence of the fourth ring seemed inevitable to Lacan, however, it is paradoxically interesting to mention that the fourth link added as lock, rather than an interrelated link. Lacan calls the fourth link the Sinthome, to further define it as the complex which must be unlocked and resolved in order for a human psyche to operate based on its normal psychological bases. As a surrealist, he believed in psychoanalysis, mostly as a practice of “philosophy and the arts, and later to mathematics” (Homer 6), rather than a medical practice. In this way, analysis for Lacan is “the operation of this unlocking — the separation of the Sinthome from the body of the psychic link” (Wertheim 4).

### **Borromean (De)Knot in “Funes, the Memorious”**

In his later seminars, Lacan uses the Borromean knot to picture and clarify the interconnections between the three orders of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Each ring represents one of the three orders such that they are interjoined and tied, while each has its specific and exclusive elements, property, and condition at the same time. The Borromean knot is a union of three rings in such a way that a single ring intersects and interferes in the domain of other rings. They are structured in a way that each ring holds the other two from falling apart. The structure of the Borromean knot is such that by undoing or unchaining of any one ring will release all the others. The Borromean knot is developed and explained in different seminars by Lacan and is provided by distinctive theoretical points of

view. However, as Luke Thurston maintains, “a certain structure is seen to repeat itself: in the knot, three terms are bound together by a fourth, which is at once a part of the knot and paradoxically beyond it” (“Ineluctable Nodalities” 140). This fourth knot or ring is the Sinthome that holds other three knots together. As the three orders of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary constitute the structure of subject, the Sinthome prevents the subject from drifting apart by separation of/from each order. Thus, the Sinthome’s function is beyond meaning. The idea is that each order in the development of subject may become disrupted or unbalanced (as each knot is in continuous threat to be undone) and the Sinthome here functions as safety knot that keeps knots together.

Lacan does not mention anything about a condition where the fourth ring or knot is undone and unchained or he does not prospect explicitly what may happen under this condition. Nevertheless, it is not a far-fetched possibility and can be demonstrated and justified through his ideas on subject and the three orders. The possibility of such a condition is expressed in “Funes, the Memorious” by Jorge Luis Borges. In the story, everything starts with falling from a horse and head injury. Falling from a horse is important as far as it is the event that all consequences should be seen through. Falling from the horse is parallel to falling of the Sinthome apart from other knots. The idea is that there may be events or conditions in which the ring that holds human subjectivity in proper order and appropriate condition becomes unchained. By drifting the Sinthome’s apart, there is the condition of Borromean de-knot in which the three orders of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary fall apart. Borges in “Funes, the Memorious” demonstrates Borromean de-knot and the state of subject for in the three orders after getting undone from each other.

The Sinthome designates lack, trouble, gap, departure, inconsistency, digression, inhibition, and restriction. They are permanent on experiences of subject that are connected in one way or another with the three orders. They are necessities of existence and life of subject. The Sinthome holds the orders in knot through these experiences. Thus, with the unchaining of the Sinthome, every lack, departure, deviation, and constraint is removed. After the incident in “Funes, the Memorious”, Funes is free of these experiences. He is able to remember everything in detail and he is not in restrictions of forgetting. He is competent in system-making and he has no boundary in language. He is encircled with information in a way that he is surrounded with everything that influences perception and understanding. His life is consummated, indiscrete, inseparate, and connected in a way that seems he is in union with the Other. The main fact in his problematic

subjectivity is that he feels no impossibility, incompleteness, or inconsistency (Solano-Suarez in *The Later Lacan* 99-103). These features are an integral part of a subject who is in perpetual endeavor to reach the Other. The Sinthome is identical with lack in a way that it is involved in a never-ending process of replacement and substitution in order to fulfill lack. As far as there is lack which is part of the three orders of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, the Sinthome is unavoidable, and in so doing there is no subject without the Sinthome (Soler in *Cambridge companion* 90). In the story, Funes is a person who does not feel any lack either in his memories or in his relationship with language. The idea is that the Sinthome always replaces lack with something else which is followed by jouissance. The Sinthome is the knot of bringing satisfaction although it is partial and temporary. This is the reason Funes is in continuous suffering. As he does not have any lack in his perceptions and understanding, he cannot replace something for it in order to feel jouissance. He is in pain as he stays in dark smokes and is not able to sleep, to focus, to generalize. Another point is that jouissance has different conditions that are related to three orders of Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary. As Soler in "The Paradoxes of the Symptom in Psychoanalysis" adds:

If the symptom designates whatever participates in jouissance, it may or may not be in conformity with the norms of discourse; jouissance has more than one modality. We have to distinguish along with the jouissance of the pure letter (something symbolic transformed into something real) and the jouissance of meaning (a mixture between symbolic and imaginary elements), that which is neither of the letter nor of meaning. A jouissance that remains alien to any form of symbolization, that in no way reaches the unconscious but may haunt the imaginary form of the body, is what we may call the Real. There are thus not just one but three modes of jouissance, which leads to another question: are they linked or not? In fact, the Borromean knot provides an answer. (93)

In fact, the Borromean knot gives answer to Funes' problem in a way that this condition does not provide him with normal and regular subjectivity. He is not able to experience any kind or modality of jouissance relevant to the three orders. Funes has problems with letters, meaning, and symbolizing due to the fact that the Sinthome linking the orders together is separated.

The Sinthome gives means to subject to create identity. Funes is not able to define a self-identity after falling from horseback due to the fact that he becomes

all other. He comes to be mere reflection and projection in a way that he is not able to individuate himself. He is a state that everything flows into him, fill him up, and make an image into him without the possibility of conception. He is suffering from mass of thoughts, senses, and perceptions that burden on him. In a normal way, these burdens are circulating in mind but in him, they occupy a space and make property. In so doing, he is encumbered with non-essential inputs. The mass of thought and senses inflame him and he gradually feels losing self-unity. In other words, where the procedure should be from inputs to deciphering to meaning, and there to making identity, in Funes it is interrupted because of the Sinthome separated. Thus, there cannot be subject or self in Funes and his mind and body become just a storage and burden of images and senses.

### **The RSI in Borromean De(knot) in “Funes, the Memorious”**

Now the question is what happens to the orders of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary when the Sinthome is drifted away? It is obvious that with separation of the Sinthome that knots together the three orders, the other knots relevant to orders will become disconnected. There, each order works independently that in one way or another influences the subject, as Funes reveals “that before that rainy afternoon when the blue-grey horse threw him, he had been what all” subjects “are: blind, deaf, addlebrained, absent-minded” (Borges 72). In this condition, the released orders function in retrospect and irregular as Borges represents about Funes in the story.

It is possible to say that Lacanian Real is the most remote imagination of the human being to attain what is inaccessible. There can be some attempts and some achievements in fulfilling it, but the Real is untaken and cannot be occupied. Funes enlists some of these prodigious accomplishments regarding memory “recorded in the *Naturalis historia*: Cyrus, king of the Persians, who could call every soldier in his armies by name; Mithridates Eupator, who administered the law in the twenty-two languages of his empire; Simonides, inventor of the science of mnemonics; Metrodorus, who practiced the art of faithfully repeating what he had heard only once” (72). Even these memories are not that much amazing to Funes. With history and time passing, it seems the reality demands something to go beyond limits of time and place for the reason that the Real is somewhere beyond limitations (of time, place, etc.). With the assumption of the Real knot separated from other knots, the argument is not that the subject can have access to the Real. In this case, the subject becomes the target of more limitations of the reality, although seemingly Funes is limitless in memory and perception. Little by little, Funes is prisoned in

details, forms, images, shapes, numbers, signs, and ciphers. It is implied in Lacan's ideas that the Real functions a gradual development and progress for the reality. With its absence, subject of the reality becomes confused, perplexed, purposeless, and useless. Where the Real is "an absolute fullness, a pure plenum devoid of the negatives of absences, antagonism, gaps, lacks, splits" (Web: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy) with Funes' own statements "I alone have more memories than all mankind has probably had since the world has been the world." And: "My dreams are like you people's waking hours." And again, toward dawn: "My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap."

It can be concluded that he is in pseudo-Real or stimulated-Real in a way that it seems there is no absence, hole, break, discontinuity, deficiency. This condition brings about "indefatigable" reality for him which is "a multiform, instantaneous and almost intolerably precise world" (73). In Lacan's idea, the Real is resistant to recognition, experience, and perception that urges and pressures the subject to attain unknown and impossible. It drives the subject to think and achieve with effort. However in the case of losing the Real knot and its replacement with stimulated-real, the subject feels superiority and dominance and stops him from development as it is the similar in Funes who With no effort, he had learned English, French, Portuguese and Latin. I suspect, however, that he was not very capable of thought. To think is to forget differences, generalize, make abstractions. In the teeming world of Funes, there were only details, almost immediate in their presence. In other words, one of the main implications regarding the order of Real is competency and capacity of forgetting. The Real of Lacan is a state forgotten; it is inaccessible due to the fact that it is forgotten. The balance between memory (part of the process in the Imaginary order) and forgetting is the necessity of a proper subjectivity. Funes suffers from disproportion between memory and forgetting which can be projected to disproportion between the Imaginary and the Real (Bell 123-9). The proper subjectivity and mentality is guaranteed with proper relationship between the Imaginary and the Real and their interconnection in the Borromean knot as Soler sates "The disease of "mentality" is another conceptual innovation generated from the Borromean knot; it designates an emancipation of the Imaginary unburdened of the Real" (95).

The Symbolic is the order related to language and speech. One of Lacan's main contributions to psychoanalysis is probably his idea on the state of language and unconscious. He believes "*the unconscious is language*, meaning that language is that which makes up the unconscious" (Fink 8). In the story, "when he [Funes] fell, he became unconscious," it seems his unconscious state is not momentary

because of accident, yet becomes permanent due to the fact that “when he came to, the present was almost intolerable in its richness and sharpness” (72). Thus, Funes is all in unconscious. Unconscious is characterized by repression. No repression is seen in Funes’ new state after falling from horse. He is never conscious to himself and surrounding; the boundary which is upon the subject by dependence of the orders to each other through the Sinthome. Another reason for saying that Funes is in his ultimate unconscious is that “The unconscious cannot forget, composed of “letters” working, as they do, in an autonomous, automatic way; it preserves in the present what has affected it in the past, eternally holding onto each and every element, remaining forever marked by all of them” (Fink 20). Funes’ attempt to define his memories by ciphers indicates the same function unconscious does in working through past and letters. When it is said that Funes is a subject in his unconscious, the implication is not that normal subjects are separated from their unconscious. But what is meant is that unconscious is not present to normal subjects all the time as it is for Funes. Funes is incapable of forgetting and detaching from unconscious. In other words, Lacan believes in human being as a split subject between conscious and unconscious. Yet, Funes is the total subject of unconscious. What Funes’ plan and accomplishment, in regard to language, tells reader that Funes’ ability of language is paralyzed as:

Locke, in the seventeenth century, postulated (and rejected) an impossible language in which each individual thing, each stone, each bird and each branch, would have its own name; Funes once projected an analogous language, but discarded it because it seemed too general to him, too ambiguous. (74)

The Symbolic is an order signifying the importance and function of language to the human subject. Language is prefigured in absence as a system in chain of signifying in which every signifier refers to another signifier. But Funes makes a system of language where every signifier is independent and autonomic, and the chain of signifying is abandoned. Another important fact about the Symbolic order is that it emphasizes on lack as the main element in language in a way no signifier has a lasting existence since it is the subject of other which is the object of perpetual change. Where human being is subject to lack with language (or any other system of symbolization) through his delivery to habits, practices, rules, laws, connections, norms, orders, and structures, Funes is resistant as he makes a specific kind of enumeration and a language which is as private as possible. His lack is

fulfilled through signifiers that he creates; they are signifiers that signify everything to him and nothing to collective order. He attempts to be resistant to lack by the way of causing clash to systems of signification. In this way, language loses its collective and conventional feature and is expanded to particulars resulting from many images and perceptions. So, with a private language, communication fails due to the fact that there are many signifiers unfamiliar to others. This is the way with a nominalist, as Stewart mentions:

the most real things are the particulars which he [Funes] perceives with his sensory apparatus and which he stores in his memory. The fundamental characteristic of knowledge according to nominalism is, of course, particularity since it is concrete particular images or representations which are given in perception and memory. (78)

The Imaginary order is even more crucial for subjectivity as it is the order that binds the Symbolic and the Real to each other due to the fact that it is the register that shapes reality for a subject in a way that Libbrecht says "one thing is certain: without the imaginary there can be no human reality as such" (*Lacanian Terms* 91); a reality based on the mistakes of the Symbolic and the Real to one another. In other words, mistakes bring about misrecognitions and miscognitions (they are typified as distorted and transivised) that configure reality for subject. Regarding nonexistence of mistake in Funes because of fault and dysfunction in his orders of the Symbolic and the Real, the question is what happens to his reality? Simply, his knowledge of reality becomes paranoiac due to fact that there is no consistency of image for him. Funes is trapped in inconsistency of images such as "the forms of southern clouds," "mottled streaks on a book," "outlines of the foam raised by an oar," "in dreams," "a circle drawn on a blackboard, a right triangle, a lozenge," "changing fire and its innumerable ashes," "many faces of a dead man" (72-3) that frames before his eyes quickly and nonstop.

The Imaginary is accompanied by the premise of the unitary image, legacy of mirror stage, prepare for real mastery in the subject. Thus, the real mastery becomes an everlasting illusion in subject that anticipates recognition and access to that totality. This illusion is replaced by objects of other in real and is signified through signifiers through language. In other words, the effect of the Imaginary order is the possibility of reaching and having the original image. Funes feels having the experience of the original image and total unity. He recognizes of his self as unified and integrated. Thereby, it can be concluded that Funes is in the

state of an infant before the experience of mirror stage. He is not able to obviously separate his I from other. It is the reason his state seems like an ideal state. Funes is not able to distinguish himself from the world, to recognize the lines of his body from other forms in surrounding, to see the self separate from other things.

This process of retrospect (of course mentally and imaginatively, not biologically) in the orders to the mirror stage of Funes can be justified as a reduction of subjectivity to mere I. His I “is a (false) unity consisting of” image “in which various (ideal) images are overlaid and amalgamated” (Chiesa 16) such that Funes confuses them with himself. The shortcut from Funes’ life and his memory can be abridged to Roudinesco’s article on the mirror stage “The Mirror Stage: An Obliterated Archive,” where he is able to remember everything. This experience is not just limited to imaginary story narrated by Borges. There have been many reports from near-death experiences from different people in different spots of the world in which they see frames of their life and memories that passed before their eyes. Or in religious ideas, there is an understanding and insight that people are asleep or in dream but wake up upon death. Funes’ near-death experience (falling from horse) and at last death are literary reading of Borges to these reports and insights. But Funes’ story is an example for falling in Borromean knot at an individual level. Can falling in Borromean knot be a collective condition?

### **Borromean (De)Knot and Postmodern Condition**

Samuel Beckett’s writings resist to world making which is fundamentally linguistic. His writings reduce human being and his relations to bareness where there cannot be a stable system for identification that language is one of them. His characters are not able to detach themselves from the burden of self in order to enter into the realm of society. Therefore, they become estrange to history, time, and space as what happens and they sense is just existence of Now. Robert Coover, a postmodern author, blurs the boundaries of image, fiction, and real with proposing alternative narratives in order to represent the gap between events and their interpretations which is significant to identity and identification. Coover, in other words, depicts unrepresentability. His fictions are like language games played on real and fictional characters that they find themselves in disordered and disorganized world. William H. Gass concerns in his novels with the relationships of language, body, and mind. His fiction *Emma Enters a Sentence of Elizabeth Bishop’s* is about a girl who hates her body and becomes the object of language in a way that she leaves her self and becomes an absolute alterity; or better to say an utter signifier. Most of the postmodern literary works concerning traumatic effects of events such as war and

colonialism also prefigures experience of Borromean de-knot. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* represents the traumatic effect of war on memory and consequent time cracks. The linguistic and spacial problems embedded to Friday's identity are the direct effect of colonialism that Coetzee points in his novel *Foe*. The hyperreality of the worlds of images and language calls to mind Borromean de-knot in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* as these worlds seem to be loosed and separated from each other. What is significant to these postmodern works is the presence of events that result in Borromean de-knot in which time and identity shatter.

From the viewpoints of theoreticians on postmodern condition, it is possible to say that it is a condition in which Borromean knot is fallen, and it vehemently influences and dominates human subjects. Terms of unmaking, unwrapping, unfolding, and unrepresentability entailed with terms such as decentering, dissemination, destabilizing, and deconstructing can justify de-knot in postmodern condition. Unrepresentability is one of the main features of postmodern condition that undermines every attempt for representation, modes of following, and mimesis. The subject is trapped in manifold plays and interplays which promise attainment of the Real which are in fact pseudo-Reals. It takes place by the fact that the signifier is released from its commitment to signified which has been the principle of representation. Postmodern condition "extends the reign of the signifier into culture in general and poses a more radical 'loss' of the signified; it casts doubt on the function and ability of language to organize and control meanings in socio-cultural domain; it recasts the role of the social mass as held within the reason of ideology; and it emphasizes consumption, seeing it as a play which constantly eludes the rational explanation of theory" (*Postmodern Literary Theory* 260). Subsequently, the assumption that there is the Real preceding to signification and resisting to symbolization is abandoned, and the world is filled with many simulated-Reals that substitute the Real. For this, "first the referent (the world outside the text) disappears. Then the signified and we are left in a world of radically 'empty' signifiers. No meaning. No classes. No History. Just a ceaseless procession of simulacra" (Hebdige 164).

Ways of world making, which in Lacanian point of view is prefigured in language, is not possible anymore. In other words, postmodern condition with Borromean de-knot is against prefigurativism, against forms, models, and modes that influence and prolong human relations, practices, hypothesis, intentions, decisions, and actions. In so doing, all conventions, customs, usages, laws, orders, authorities, and rules are abandoned and delegitimized. In other words, it is a

condition in which there is resistance to codes of ciphering and frameworks that have been defined as modes of classification and categories through which the acts of naming, theorizing, including, and excluding are played. As a result, there cannot be a stable system.

It can be said with Borromean de-knot, the inner space of the subject becomes a whole, unbroken and undivided, while the outer space of subject is characterized as fragmented, partial, and plural. Subject, thus, is in generalized immanence dominated by unconscious. He is not able to detach himself from what is within his self to go beyond. In other words, self becomes a whole with no divisions, partitions, distinctions, hierarchies, and classes. The boundaries and lines between self and things disappear and the subject sees himself part of an image which is in appearance unified but made up of many other images. Where the subject is supposed to create a relationship between his I and the world, he is absorbed in the identificatory process of dissolving into images and things. “Thus the ‘I’ is nothing more than a fictive entity, an optical illusion, a hologram hanging in the air, created at the flickering point where the lazer beams of memory and desire intersect. The subject simply ceases...this is the Postmodern Condition” and this is “the ‘death of subject’” (Hebdige 164).

This condition is the realm with autonomy of images. The reality is not available through signifiers (this phase is not reachable at all) but the images constitutes a reality which is two-dimensional and flat. The dimension of symbolization is not feasible because detachment and separation from the world of image is not possible. Thus “no larger unities are possible beyond the single image, the isolated statement, the individual body, the individual ‘trend’” (Hebdige 264). Because of the fact that the distinction between I and other is not possible, the subjects in this condition are all others as Sardar believes “everything is a mirror-image of the other” (*Postmodernism and the Other* 4). The others are by no means the memory of what Lacan calls unconscious. In other words, in this condition, the only language-oid is the language of particulars derived from images which undermines communication, the main function of language.

In Lacanian theory, the assumption is that history comes forth with the subject’s registry to the Symbolic with language and speech. As this process is impaired or becomes impaired with Borromean de-knot in postmodern condition, the subject is unfamiliar with time and space. So in terms of Hebdige, the subject is in the “Renewal of the Now” (159). The past is the memories combined by chance with no value for sequence and synchrony. Myers believes, relying on Lacanian theory, that “it is only with the disappearance of the subject, in the object, that the

subject can emerge at all, just as it is only with the disappearance of history, in the present, that history too can finally emerge" (95). However and interestingly, with Borromean de-knot, the object disappears in the subject, time and space into the body where finally the subject is filled with memories, images, and objects.

## Notes

1. The Other refers to two additional types of otherness corresponding to the registers of the Symbolic and the Real. The first type of Other is Lacan's "big Other" *qua* symbolic order, namely, the overarching "objective spirit" of trans-individual socio-linguistic structures configuring the fields of inter-subjective interactions. Relatedly, the Symbolic big Other also can refer to (often fantasmatic/fictional) ideas of anonymous authoritative power and/or knowledge (whether that of God, Nature, History, Society, State, Party, Science, or the analyst as the "subject supposed to know" [sujetsupposé savoir] as per Lacan's distinctive account of analytic transference). But, as already becomes evident in Lacan's first few annual seminars of the early 1950s, there also is a Real dimension to Otherness. This particular incarnation of the Real, about which Lacan goes into greatest detail when addressing both love and psychosis, is the provocative, perturbing enigma of the Other as an unknowable "x," an unfathomable abyss of withdrawn-yet-proximate alterity." (qtd. from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan.>)
2. In Lacanian term, *jouissance* is a pleasure followed by pain "As such, it refers to a fulfillment that is necessarily merely temporary, and that must therefore always be sought anew" (Wolfreys 59).
3. Libbrecht states in *Lacanian Terms* that "the imaginary is the only 'consistency' man has" (91) that Lacan points to in his later seminars.

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# Defining the New Woman: With Special Reference to the Major Works of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur

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**Abstract** The change in the status of Indian woman has been the topic of much analysis and research. The Indian women writers' endeavour to bring out the changed Indian woman has also been studied at length, however only few incidents of revolt cannot be the basis on which a new avatar of the Indian woman can be endorsed. This paper aims to define the new woman who has emerged in the Indian society. On the basis of in-depth analysis of the major works of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur this paper brings out the qualities of the new woman. It argues that certain traits clearly differentiate the new woman from the traditional Indian woman who was the epitome of silence, self abnegation, and subjugation. The protagonists of Deshpande and Kapur clearly walk a different path as they are not the self effacing, submissive women who follow the patriarchy. They are aware of their needs and are thus self realized and they do not conform to the norms yet they aim to actualize their dreams and aspirations. Hence, the new woman according to our analysis is one who is self realized, is a non conformist and who aims for self actualization.

**Key words** New woman; self- actualization; self-realization; non-conformity; tradition; freedom

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Woman in the Indian society upholds a paradoxical position which can be understood by her deep physical degradation in actual life along with a high idealization of her in the form of abstract thoughts. This is clearly understood by the fact that, at times, she is referred to as reincarnation of goddess Laxmi, Saraswati, Durga etc, and on the other hand she has to undergo continuous subjugation and oppression. In the Indian society wife has been addressed as “*Ardhangini*” and woman’s motherhood has been eulogized. This dual position was to some extent the outcome of external factors such as the Aryan invasion, the impact of Muslim culture and the British Empire, but the real perpetrator was the own deep rooted tradition and thinking which became stringent with the passage of time. As stated by Jawaharlal Nehru, the status of women in any civilization reflects the standard of the society of any nation, A.S. Altekar agrees when he opines, “One of the best way to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate its excellences and realize its limitations is to study the history of the position and status of women in it” (1).

Saraswati Mishra in her book *Status of Women*, refers to The National Committee’s report on the status of women in India submitted in 1974 as, “Status refers to a position in a social system or sub-system which is distinguishable from and at the same time related to other positions through its designated rights and obligations. The knowledge about the status of any section of the society may be obtained through its ‘roles’ patterns and their importance as well as the consequently achieved privileges and symbols of specific respect” (15).

Indian Woman was denied equal rights in marital, familial, social, educational, economic and political fields; therefore, her subordinate status prevailed.

Fortunately, the initiatives taken by the Christian missionaries to propagate their religion and Macaulay's advocacy of education turned out to be a boon in disguise. It also turned out to be a revolutionary period in the history of women's liberation. The factors like patriarchal joint family system, polygamy, *Sati*, widow re-marriage, child marriage, *Purdah* system, denial of education to the girl child, attracted attention of the British government as well as Indian reformers. Eminent reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dayanand Saraswati, Keshub Chandra Sen, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda and others tried to bring about unprecedented awakening among women. For the upliftment of women in India, certain laws like Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in 1929, which raised the age for marriage of girls to 14 years. Besides removing the evils of child marriage they also concentrated on encouraging girl's education, which helped them in understanding and comprehending their own freedom and independent personality. The *Sati* system was declared a crime on 14<sup>th</sup> December 1829 and the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 removed all the legal barriers in the path of widow remarriage. In 1937, Hindu Women's Right to Property Act was passed to safeguard financial security of Hindu women. Apart from these reformatory measures, Mrs. Annie Besant's efforts to promote women's education resulted in the establishment of the Federation of University of Women in 1920. Although these initiatives were not able to bring the intended results but they did succeed in creating resurgence among the Indian women. The Indian woman experienced an air of freedom and the beginning of a new life. On the call of Mahatma Gandhi it became easier for women to leave their homes; they became aware of their capacity to work and it provided them a platform to articulate themselves.

However, in the last 60 years after freedom, some revolutionary changes were observed in the status of woman in India. Within three years of Independence, The Constitution of India was formulated which materialized Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi's conviction in giving an equal status to the Indian woman. According to the Indian Constitution a woman shares the same freedom of speech, protection of life and fundamental rights as an Indian man. Since independence, Indian woman has traveled a long way, conquered several barriers but there are still many unconquered frontiers, especially, issues related to women. The process of change initiated during the British regime, gathered momentum after India's independence and influenced the society and the Indian woman to a great extent. Industrialization led to the establishment of numerous industries which resulted in the migration of people from villages to industrial areas. This process of migration

became one of the reasons behind the disintegration of joint families. The breaking of the joint families and growing urbanization had another significant reverberation in the social practice of the traditional Indian society. But as an outcome of the process of industrialization parents soon realized the importance of education and training which automatically helped increasing the age of marriage for boys and girls. Education brought a significant change in woman's attitude and practices. As Girija Khanna notes,

The Indian women though conditioned by tradition, custom, public opinion and religious belief is showing a remarkable change as a result of education. Whether a typical housewife or a working women or a combination of both, women today have acquired a multitude of new functions while retaining quite a few old ones. The change in women has been remarkable though not revolutionary. (196)

In the 1980s Industrialization allured people to migrate in large numbers from rural areas to industrial cities in search of livelihood and better amenities. In order to provide better facilities, the middle-class educated women of these displaced families opted to work and this paved the way for economic emancipation in which women became as important as men in contributing to the family income. This changed situation urged women to play different roles their life as a result of which their behavior deviated significantly from that of the pre-independence women.

Thus, the image of the present-day middle class Indian woman is one who is proficient in every sphere of life. Educated and skilled is what has become the expected image of today's woman in India. She is not a liability or a slave but an equally responsible member of her family. Sudhir Kakar in his essay "Liberalisation has Challenged our Ossified Traditional Identity" opines,

Another driving force behind changes taking place in many areas of social life is the middle-class Indian women. The women's role as the prime mover of social change was made possible by two developments-one, an accelerated revision of the traditional view on the education of a daughter which encouraged higher education for girls and thus made their participation in work life possible, and; two, the growing financial needs of families, partly due to their higher consumption aspirations which welcomed the woman's contribution to the family income, even when her work went beyond such traditional occupations as that of a teacher or nurse. (48)

Hence, it is observed that education, industrialization and modernization played a vital role in improving the status of the Indian woman. Literature too, depicts the significant changes in the image of Indian woman in the various texts written by the Indian writers. The conventional image of a silent and submissive follower is transformed and is replaced by a more confident and intelligent woman. She is not the silent subordinate of her male relative, nor is she a blind self abnegating wife. Modern woman is portrayed as a sensitive and thinking being capable of walking shoulder to shoulder along with her male counter part. She is capable of articulating her opinion on issues, and is well aware of her surroundings, her limitations if any, and is confident enough to assert her individuality. The transformed image of Indian woman has become a frequent recurring phenomenon in a number of novels written by Indian writers. Bai aptly details the change as,

Women as an individual with throbbing pulse, feelings, and aspirations, involved in the vortex of life that is complicated, demanding and exhausting makes her appearance in the novels by women writers. The appearance of the fully awakened woman, prepared to accept the challenges in order to live a meaningful life is a recent phenomenon in Indian-English literature. (20)

Today, a woman wants to be treated as an individual and refuses to carry the burden of traditional bondages which have shackled her freedom since time immemorial. She readily confronts the traditional obligations bestowed upon her. Her individuality has given her new perspective towards life. She believes in having a career and financial independence rather than depending upon the institution of marriage as the ultimate settlement. Literature reflects life that is lived around us. These real life observations become inspiration for our novelists too, for their creativity, and therefore we observe the same chronological shift in the image of woman depicted in the writings of the Indian women novelists. This shift is further established by Meena Shrivadkar in the following words, “Woman’s emergence in society from the house and from ignorance by education was a phenomenon that could not long be disregarded and the writers did show an awareness of this phenomenon” (149).

### **Image of Indian Woman in Indian English Fiction**

Education came to be realized not only as a vital instrument for general amelioration of the Indian society, but it also acted as a very powerful medium

in improving the status of Indian woman. Indian woman came in contact with the western ideas and culture which imbibed in her the urge to achieve economic stability along with educational enlightenment. Her hitherto dormant thirst for knowledge and recognition found a new expression through education. Her covert capabilities were tapped that lay dormant because of disuse. This new spirit inspired Indian woman to experiment in different fields and establish her talents which included writing literature in English language as well. Indian society with a history of more than 3000 years, has undergone many vigorous changes and these changes have created their own relative significance, and the one segment of Indian society that has perhaps been most affected is Indian woman. The traditional image of Indian woman is, one who is an epitome of sacrifice and suffering. She is considered a monument of patience and devotion, a self-less bestower of love and affection. In India, "...with its strong bend for tradition, woman was expected mainly to live for others than for herself because 'others' controlled and moulded the social structure" (Shriwadkar 153).

Indian English Fiction produced by the early Indian Women Novelists portray complex and multifaceted image of Indian woman. She is shown to be enacting various roles — of a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister; woman as *Shakti*, protecting good and destroying evil, and so on. However, the image of "...traditional woman, the *Sita Savitri* type, was at once, easy and popular, particularly because the male dominated society was always willing to applaud and appreciate. It has, therefore, naturally pervaded more and lingered longer in Indian literature..." (Shriwadkar 153). These presentations by the earlier male novelists fail to bring the real women with her strength and weakness, and even influenced the creativity of early women novelists. It was only with the appearance of the female novelists after 1980's that the real Indian woman is said to have come alive. As observed by eminent scholar and critic Prof. R. S. Pathak,

Indian fiction in English has been enriched by several highly talented women novelists including Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Attia Hosain, Santha Rama Rau and Shashi Deshpande. They have written of Indian women, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India. While doing so, they have analysed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given Indian women their image and role towards themselves and the society. The changing contexts have placed these women writers in an unenviable position. Their chief contribution consists of their exploring the moral and psychic dilemmas and repercussions of their women

characters along with their efforts to cope with the challenges and achieve a new harmony of relationship with themselves and their surroundings. (11)

Indian women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai gave a distinct dimension to the image of woman in Indian English Fiction. In their works the modern woman is seen struggling to shed the burden of inhibitions imposed on her since ages. Though the much honored “*Sita Savitri*” image still upholds the scepter, it is to the credit of these women novelists that we come across a life size picture of the contemporary woman with all her longings and aspirations, hopes and frustrations. They explored the areas of woman’s plight, raised issues related to the emancipation of their spirit, depicted their transformation from traditional to modern as well as analyzed the silent corners of their psyche. Bai remarks woman as an “individual with throbbing pulse, feelings and aspirations, involved in the whirlwind of life” (20) that is complicated, demanding and exhausting manifests in the novels of Indian Women Novelists. It is in their writings that we come across woman who aspires, attempts and strives to be her true self.

In the novels written by the Big Three, we find the stereotype or the traditional image of woman, who accepts fulfillment only through sacrifice and suffering. That women are “... mysterious, women are fascinating, women are strange, women are whimsical, women are irrational” (“Deshpande interview with Dickman” 129) was the general depiction by the male novelists. Of course, exceptional deviations from the accepted norms were seen (Rosie in R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide* and Gauri in Mulk R. Anand’s *Gauri*) in a few novels written by the male novelists. But often the repeated image that was depicted was where women were not given individual identity. Their existence was seen in relation to either their men or to the society. They were considered as the silent observer of the happenings. Their existence went unnoticed and they remained the silent sufferers for no fault of theirs. They remained the subservient followers as the men and the society outlined and fabricated their orchestration. But with the passage of time, the age old image of woman seems to be slowly blurring and gradually transforming into the new image. Pathak elaborates on the distinct portrayal of women characters by Indian women novelists by stating,

The earlier novels by Indian women novelists project the traditional image of woman. But as times changed, the portrayal became realistic with a thrust on her sense of frustration and alienation. The characters created by them,

like their creators, were torn apart by the conflicting forces of tradition and modernity. Their crisis of value adaptation and attachment with family and home pulled them asunder. The plight of the working woman was still worse, aggravated by her problems of marital adjustment and quest for and assertion of her. (12)

Kamala Markandaya is the earliest of the top-ranking women novelists, who attracted the spot light with her very first novel *Nectar in the Sieve* (1954), which deals with the theme of rural poverty and a woman's constant struggle to survive. She projects traditional women characters, belonging to various strata of society and they occupy the central stage in most of her works. Bai throws light upon Kamala Markandaya's portrayal of female characters as, "Her women are well-drilled in the tenets of Indian ethos. Hence they accept the prevalent social norms and moral codes to a large measure. They possess an admirable strength to face the calamities of life and are adept at the wisdom of compromise and adjustment" (44).

Ruth Praver Jhabwala is considered an outsider insider as she came to India at the age of 24 after her marriage with a Parsi architect. In her works *To Whom She Will* (1955) and *Esmond in India* (1958) she exposes the follies and foibles of the young girl with a mild touch of satire. Her works show her awareness of the changing position of woman and her attitude in accordance to the cultural changes in the society. Jasbir Jain in her essay on Nayantara Sahgal commends the strength of Sahgal's female characters by adding that,

Placed within domesticity her early heroines gradually move on to wider spaces, areas of competition and face problems of survival and this movement blurs the boundaries between the home and the world, rather than submit to the separation between them. The self is always in question as the individual struggles with the imposition of roles which tradition and convention thrust on her. (116)

Anita Desai is undoubtedly one of the major stalwarts among Indian English novelists. Her works like *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting Feasting* (1999) and *The Zig Zag Way* (2004) after 1980, give us a clear understanding of her broadened oeuvre. In her earlier novels, she experimented with varied themes like domestic disharmony, psyche of a working male, trauma and suffering of Indians settled abroad, self-exile and spirituality, gender discrimination etc.

Anita Desai provided a unique distinction to Indian English Fiction through her stream-of-consciousness technique and interior monologues. Through this technique Desai examines the working of inner and outer thought process of a human mind. She pioneered the trend of exploring the psychological state/condition of Indian woman which was till then an undiscovered realm. Her writings present a kaleidoscopic image of the inner turmoil within the psyche of her protagonists. Her women characters are introspective, hypersensitive, occasionally eccentric, who live in the world of fantasy. Desai probes deep into the dark interiors of the human psyche and successfully portrays the problem of isolation and alienation in modern society. To some extent her female protagonists are unable to connect to the society, and therefore, feel tormented by their own consciousness that lead them to the problem of hyper sensitivity. D. Maya in her essay on Anita Desai writes, “She may not be called a pioneer in fictionalizing the Indian woman’s cause. But can claim the unique distinction of giving a new dimension to Indian English fiction ... which shifted the focus to the unexplored realm of the female psyche” (135).

Meena Shirwadkar in her book *Image of Woman in Indo-English Novel* comments, “Writers appear not to have paid much attention to the recent phenomenon of the educated earning wife and her adjustment or maladjustment in the family” (32). Shashi Deshpande completely revolutionized this unexplored realm with her writings as she examined the anguish and conflict of modern educated Indian woman caught in the conflict between tradition and modernity. Deshpande is the most confident voice exploring individual and universal precedents through her female protagonists. In treating woman as an individual, she highlights subtleties of human behavior based on the subconscious and conscious mind. Her protagonists are in search of self-fulfillment and they negotiate their identities within the family and society. Deshpande’s female protagonists are depicted as human beings able to think and raise questions which women had never dared to ask. In spite of being born in the traditional families, these women protagonists wish to move out of the limited space of their marital homes and have a career and an individual identity of their own.

The new generation of novelists whose works appeared after 1980’s like Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Namita Gokhale, and Shobha De have concentrated on the plight and problems of women in diverse section of the Indian society. They present female characters as educated aspiring individuals caged within the confines of a male dominated society. They successfully expose the challenges through which Indian women passes in their attempt to attain self-fulfillment. Their canvas for portrayal of women characters is widespread as it includes women from

Indian traditional backgrounds to those who have migrated to foreign countries.

Hence, while analyzing the changing status of woman in India we find that the traditionally imposed image of woman better known as “*Sita-Savitri*” image has undergone a major change. Indian woman today cannot be defined as silent, subservient and sacrificing being. She is an individual with her own voice, aspiration and identity. Even Indian English Fiction celebrates the new Indian woman by unraveling various aspects of her personality. Whether it is her open quest for self or her uninhibited acceptance of her sexuality, the new Indian woman has become the favorite of Indian English fiction written by women. The contemporary women writers are not only writing about the new woman, but are voicing the feelings and aspirations along with the burden and frustration of today’s modern educated, middle-class woman. Thus, this whole process of change in the image from traditional to modern has culminated into a new image of woman which the Indian English Fiction has helped to define.

### **New Woman**

The idea of New Woman has its genesis in centuries old feminist struggle. The break from the traditional image time and again led to the creation of New Woman. In the Indian context New Woman can be understood by the words of Usha Bande and Atma Ram. In *Woman in Indian Short Stories-Feministic Perspective*, they uphold,

...the “New Woman” is one who, shorn of her ‘feminine mystique’, is aware of herself as an individual, she is free from her traditional, social and moral constrictions and is able to live with a heightened sense of dignity, and individuality. The “New Woman, then, is the product of a new economic order in which woman casts aside her ‘invisibility’, comes out of the metaphorical *pardah* and avails of the opportunities provided by education, enfranchisement and employment. She, with her male counterpart, struggles for achievements in the professional and economical spheres, and deconstructs the image of a submissive, repressed and self-effacing being, the picture that emerges is of a self-reliant, emancipated and happy individual, a person, sexually uninhibited intelligent, confident and assertive. (14)

Questioning is the first step towards resistance and it is essential for the growth of an individual. The New Woman with her awareness of self and the world has learnt to voice her dissent and has recognized her unique potential. She is a self-

realized confident and assertive woman who is fully aware of her strengths and weaknesses, her dreams and aspirations, and most importantly her feelings and desires. The New Woman has gradually established that she too has wishes, likes and dislikes and that these are as important for her as they are for a man. Her awareness of her secondary position and the extent of oppression within the family and society make her introspect and understand her individuality. Being well aware of her inner strength, the new woman tries to actualize her true self, and does not endorse the archaic thinking which defines a woman's existence in the following words, "Like a slave while working/serving; a minister when counseling/advising; Goddess Lakshmi in her looks/personality; the earth in forbearance/endurance; a mother while feeding; Rambha, the celestial prostitute, in bed; these six are the true characteristics of an ideal wife (qtd. in Uma 2-3).

Focused on discovering an autonomous identity she recognizes the futility in being an acquiescent, self-abnegating daughter, sister, wife or mother. She does not feel insecure of the privileged position enjoyed by her brother rather her underprivileged position in the family strengthens her resolve and determines her to strive for her own individual goal. Two distinct strands that worked in this process of image (re) construction are education and economic independence. In spite of social and cultural limitations the new woman is focused on re- instating the self that would withstand the impact of gender discrimination. Her awareness of her mental and physical capabilities helps her ascertain her expectation from marriage, family and her own life, which were until now decided by the male members of family. Hence, she has started accepting herself as an indispensable member of the family and not as the "other."

On the basis of the above changes witnessed in the Indian woman, the New Woman in the Indian society can be defined as a woman who possesses three main qualities. First, she is self-realized, second, she is a non-conformist questioning tradition and third, she is self-reliant, an independent individual.

### **Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur as the Pioneers of Change**

The aforementioned traits clearly emerge in the female lead characters of Shashi Deshpande's and Manju Kapur's work. Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur are two eminent contemporary novelists of India. Their writing celebrates the essence of being an Indian woman and have persistently voiced the process of their evolution. While Deshpande is the daughter of a renowned regional dramatist, Sri Ranga and was fortunate to grow in an environment suffused with literary discussions, Manju Kapur's job of English Professor at Miranda House College,

a prestigious college of Delhi University, kept her connected with literature. What brings them together is their pre-occupation with paradigm shift in the attitude of woman in the Indian society.

Disillusioned with the condition of the archetype women around them, the heroines of Shashi Dehapande and Manju Kapur vehemently pursue self-realization. In the words of Deshpande, “What is self-realization but an understanding of the restrictions and regulations you live under” (“Interview with Romita Chaudhary” 24)? By confronting and accepting their individual self, these female characters become more determined and display courage to decide for “self” which eventually leads them towards gratification in life. According to Shashi Deshpande, “the solution cannot be ‘given’, because it is ‘self-bound’, in other words, it depends on the individuals concerned- it depends on the fiber of their self. A deeper awareness of the self leads to the understanding of its true nature” (qtd. in Mala 76). “No education and money, nothing can help you to live a better life. I think it’s more important to know what you are. Without that knowledge you cannot survive. You cannot live at all. You are just surviving. Once you have knowledge the possibilities are endless” (“Deshpande interview with Pallavi” 257). By knowing their real self these protagonists temporarily withdraw themselves to their interior resources which ultimately provide them the necessary sustenance and strength to face their problems in life. The discovery brings about a positive change in their attitude which guides them to perceive the unresolved crisis in their life in a different way. Lise Ee Jia Lau in her article summarizes the growth of Deshpande’s protagonists as, “By the end of the novels, most of Deshpande’s protagonists who have been brought up on maxims like “A husband is a sheltering tree”. Have found enough strength and confidence within themselves...the female protagonists becomes self-aware, undergoes the process of self-development/self-improvement, and eventually achieves self-fulfillment” (165).

Shashi Deshpande’s most celebrated character, Jaya of *That Long Silence* transforms into a mature person when she realizes that her life is her own and she is responsible for her troubles in her life. It was due to her weakness of resolve that she failed to articulate and assert her own desires. She realized her lack of commitment to her own dreams and aspirations and led a life defined by her husband. After this realization Jaya starts analyzing her circumstances from a different perspective. She becomes free from all inhibitions and decides to reconstruct her devastated and tattered life once again. Deshpande’s other heroine, Manjari or Jiji from *Moving On* is an assertive individual from early adolescence. She rebels against her parents by marrying Shyam and giving up her medical career.

Though Jiji's rebellious nature helps her to fulfill her passionate needs and desires to some extent but, it was only after her realization as an individual that she truly anticipates her responsibilities. Thus, self-realized Jiji decides to control and take charge of the happenings in her life. She fights to become independent emotionally and financially, in order to build a better future for herself and her children. Most of the heroines of Deshpande like Urmi, Indu, Sumi, Aru show an inclination towards independence which comes due to self realization or awareness of their individual needs. Her writings seem to portray the evolution of the protagonists from the state of confusion and bewilderment to the level of fully realized individuals, who display courage and confidence in accepting their life with all the strengths and shortcomings. Devi, the epitome of this process of continuous evolution, is a fully realized individual from the very beginning of her life. The strength of her personality, her individuality and her undaunted attitude to achieve happiness marks her as a new woman. Devi unabashedly transgresses every social dogma by her liaison with a married man.

Manju Kapur's protagonists display a mixed yet a much emancipated attitude towards their individuality. Her first protagonist Virmati of *Difficult Daughters* encapsulates an important trait of a new woman. Her fiercely independent nature and obsessive love for her Professor, a married man entails her to transgress the set norms of the society. Throughout the novel, Virmati never retreats from her dreams and desires, and ultimately when she achieves it, she accepts the relationship with all its challenges. Virmati truly establishes herself as one of the most emancipated spirits in Indian English Fiction. Astha in *A Married Woman* starts realizing a void in her mundane life as she was often made to realize her limited space, by words like, "Please keep to what you know best, the home, children, teaching" (67). Her road to selfhood leads her through the unconventional relationship with a woman. Even though this act of Astha uproots the traditional dictates, Kapur justifies it as,

What she is trying to do is to juggle her own needs and desires with those of her family. She does this by having an affair with a woman, and it only works temporarily. It is not as though she has a very happy relationship with her lover or that she uses this relationship in order to leave her family. Her children are her primary obligation. She is trying to get some personal happiness out of that space. ("Manju Kapur interview with Vandana Pathak" 113)

However, from the open end of the novel we can conclude that Astha's return to her family is only a temporary retreat, as her search for real meaning of life or the

attainment of ultimate happiness remains an unfulfilled dream for her. Kapur's next protagonist, Nina of *The Immigrant* is a self-realized person from the beginning of the novel. She is an independent individual who marries a dentist Ananda, and migrates to Canada with a heart full of dreams. However, after a short span of isolated and discontented living, Nina forays toward rediscovery of self.

Living side by side of these new women, there are few minor characters like Sulu, Ajji, Vimala, Kusum, Virmati's mother, Professor's first wife, who provide a striking contrast to the degree of change observed between them and our enlightened "New Woman." Their traditional mindset significantly sets them apart from the new woman.

Hence as projected by these two novelists, self-realization or awareness of true self is integral for changing the attitude of women towards oppressive customs. The years of subordination and a confined life has created a limited space for women. Therefore, unless there is self-realization, any transgression from the circumscribing conditions would lead to only temporary fulfillment.

Awakened from the slumbering state of subjugation and peripheral existence perpetuated by the society and the lawmakers, Indian woman shows significant signs of transformation in her attitude. Equipped with education, enlightenment and self-discovery these revolutionary women protagonists of Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur confront the restricting forces which arbitrate their path of self-growth. The protagonists like Indu, Jaya, Astha and Nina try hard to conform to the existing traditional structure but are compelled to revolt when their existence as an individual is reduced to a mere object. The other protagonists like Urmi, Aru, Jiji, Devi and Virmati, disseminate the spirit of non-conformity from their early days. They are the embodiment of individuals who think and question every single rigid imposition that constricts them from achieving their goal in life.

The New Woman is awakened to the futility of the various long-preserved notions and taboos and has started opposing them. Her educated, speculative mind compels her to question the traditions and customs which are responsible for her subjugation. Gender bias which starts right from the cradle and the stultifying life of a girl compels her to raise a voice of dissent against such traditions that make her the custodian of family honor. She questions the dual morality of patriarchal system which grants freedom for boys and restriction for girls. She is intolerant towards woman's subjugation in marriage which makes her completely subservient to her husband who in turn is allotted a position equivalent to God. She refuses to toe the line of the ideal Indian woman who is submissive, sacrificing and self-effacing. Hence she raises her voice wherever she is suppressed in the name of

tradition or patriarchy. Thus the new woman “is standing up, asking discomfoting, unconventional, unnerving questions, she is exploding the myth of motherhood, subverting the myth of purity and virginity.”<sup>34</sup> She speaks to break the silence which since time immemorial has been misinterpreted as her behavioral quality. It is important to state over here that the new woman is not against all traditions but refuses to adhere to those traditions which constrict and suffocate her existence.

However, it is also very prominent that none of these protagonists rebel or resist patriarchy simply because of their aggressive and intolerant behavior. Nor do they rebel just to be simply pronounced as whistleblowers. These women of substance use their thinking power to analyze the present situation and when certain norms become an obstacle in their growth they break the norms without hesitation. They are simple and ordinary individuals and look for a happy life, but the conventions of the society creates inconvenience in their lives. As mentioned earlier, they are self-sufficient and confident about their capabilities, and believe in relying on their innate abilities; therefore, they resist the dominating doctrines which try to limit their future. Manjari, Devi, Virmati, Astha, and Nina reject the traditional concept of purity of woman and look for sexual gratification. These protagonists display the ability to make their decisions and live to fulfill these dreams, because they believe in themselves and their decision.

In their pursuit to strive for their self-fulfillment these non-conformists undergo several challenges both in the home and society. The process becomes even more painful as their refusal to abide by the customized framework does not assure happiness for them.

All the female characters of the two novelists can be broadly classified into four groups. The first section belongs to the innumerable minor female characters in the six novels who present a striking contrast to the female protagonists of the novel. By accepting their dependence on the male members of their family, as their destiny, they propagate themselves as the custodians of tradition. The archetypical women live their life as ordained by the society and accept it as their destiny. Hence, the question of resentment or articulation never arises. A number of such prototypes are found in the novel *That Long Silence*, *Moving On*, *Difficult Daughter's* and *A Married Woman*. Characters like Jaya's Aunts, Mohan's mother, Kusum, Malu, Kasturi and Astha's mother represent the common fate of a number of such females. They believe in the existing structure of the society where the question of a woman's personal identity does not exist and “the husband is like a sheltering tree...” (*That Long Silence* 144).

The second category of female protagonists accepts their fate without

questioning the impositions levied on them. It is only in few instances that they assert their individuality. They are not very different from their submissive predecessors but once in a while they do assert themselves. Protagonists like Jaya and Astha accept the conventional relationship with its limitations but feel dissatisfied in a number of situations where their own wishes clash with the desire of their family members. This conflict creates some imbalance in their traditionally structured family and, therefore, they are unable to revolt. It also arises as a consequence of their inability or the lack of courage to voice their dissent. However, their growing unhappiness and restlessness with their situation compels them to assert their will. Although, they cannot be categorized as independent individuals but they can be acknowledged as those who are on the road to emancipation.

The third group comprises of those enlightened women who Deshpande describes as, “The women who go to work, the women who take decisions, the women who take charge of their lives” (“Deshpande interview with Romita Choudhary” 178). For them, the superiority of the patriarchal norms does not carry any importance at all. What interests them is their freedom of choice, opinion, thought and action. They want to be allowed to live their life on their own terms. Self-fulfillment and happiness are what they seek in life. Protagonists like Devayani and Jiji (Manjari) believe in self-reliance and do not want to be maneuvered by the dos and don'ts but make their own rules. Their individual happiness is their ultimate longing. They willingly accept the consequence of their decision and want to be left with their own peace.

Whereas, the fourth section of protagonists truly exudes high self-esteem. Their high self-esteem and fiercely independent nature empowers them to keep looking for greater goals. They do wish to have a healthy family life, but their assertive nature never allows them to be satisfied by the traditional expectations of their family. The protagonists like Virmati and Nina try to fit in an ordinary married life but discontented they look for happiness elsewhere.

In our conventional society the identity of woman often gets diffused, shadowed and even merged as they are referred not by their names but by their relation to men in their lives i.e. “daughter, sister, wife and mother of so and so.” The New Woman is an individual with capacity to reflect on her position and speak for herself. Economic independence furnishes the New Woman with heightened confidence which provides her the courage to stand on her own and demand independence in terms of decision making. As Manjari of *Moving On* poignantly states, “Once having tasted freedom, I cannot get back into the harness

again” (307). The new woman frames her own opinion based on her observations and wishes to take decision regarding her career, marriage, sexuality and life. As compared to the traditional image of woman, new woman is a conscious human being and believes in independent identity. She asserts her individuality and resists being treated as an “object” or “property” by the patriarchal society. Thus, the new woman equipped with education, intelligence and determination is willing to take her own responsibility and understands the importance of economic independence. Supporting this thought Deshpande once stated, “Today, I believe that a woman should have her own source of income. Society never gives a woman her due unless she has money to call her own. It’s unfortunate, but it’s also a hard fact of life” (“My Money” 84).

Indian Women novelists mainly, Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapur have added a new dimension to Indian English Fiction by highlighting the change in the Indian woman. Their protagonists break their silence and articulate their thoughts which signify assertion of self and liberation. Breaking the silence, asserting the individual self, questioning the patriarchal order and searching for self-fulfillment occupies the centre of focus in the literary works of these novelists Their writing highlights the place and position of the contemporary women in the Indian society. They authentically portray the feeling of frustration and alienation faced by women. Their portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction is a shift from the silent sufferer and up holder of the traditional values of family. They have successfully conveyed the process of change and the attitudinal transformation of woman from a mere “object” to a “thinking person.” In doing so, they have clearly given a definitive mould to the Indian woman, with her three distinct qualities of self- realization, non-conformity and self- reliance.

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# ***Chado* in Murakami's *Sputnik Sweetheart*: Asymmetry, Boundaries and Chanced Meetings**

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**Abstract** The Japanese tea ceremony, also known as *chado*, embodies the values of impermanence, imperfection and incompleteness. These values are translated into the practices of the tea ceremony in a regulated manner, through the concepts of *sukiya*, *roji* and *ichigo ichie*. *Sukiya* which represents asymmetric characteristics is seen in the structure of the tea house and utensils, *roji* is expressed through boundaries for the purpose of signifying differences or creating intimacy and, *ichigo ichie* encapsulates the entirety of the experience as a single chance in a single meeting to receive a lesson about life. This article aims to show how the Japanese worldview, interpreted through the principles of the tea ceremony is appropriated in Haruki Murakami's novel *Sputnik Sweetheart* (2002). Through a symbolic encounter with the tea ceremony, the concepts of *sukiya*, *roji* and *ichigo ichie* are employed to analyse the characters in *Sputnik Sweetheart*. These concepts are appropriated to character study by examining their idiosyncrasies, relationships and the unique experiences they encounter. By this way, the novel transfers the Japanese tea ceremony and its underlying worldview to literature.

**Key words** tea ceremony; Haruki Murakami; *Sputnik Sweetheart*; Japanese

culture; Japanese worldview

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## Introduction

The Japanese tea ceremony, known as *chado* in Japan, which began as a traditional practice amongst Japanese monks in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, has evolved over time and place to conform to the purposes of man. Reports capture the various reasons for engaging in the tea ceremony, which include, to symbolise peace between Japan and the United States of America in remembrance of the Pearl Harbour attack of 1941 and as a form of therapy to help the survivors of the Fukushima tsunami and earthquake tragedy bond with each other.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, the tea ceremony holds within it meaningful properties which bring about reconciliation and healing in people, as its underlying principles are to create an awareness of the impermanence, imperfection and incompleteness of the world we live in. Japan manifests these tenets in its culture through various forms ranging from architecture, garden designs, flower arrangement, culinary and the cultural arts such as theatre and paintings. Each of these cultural activities has adapted the Japanese worldview in its own manner. Our focus is on the tea ceremony and we intend to discuss how its basic concepts are articulated through literature. To enable this, we will analyse the characters in Haruki Murakami's novel, *Sputnik Sweetheart* (2002), for the ways in which they express the Japanese worldview. The references to the Japanese cultural worldview in *Sputnik Sweetheart* is symbolically presented through the tea ceremony and will be traced through the principles of *sukiya* (asymmetry), *roji* (boundaries) and *ichigo iche* (chanced meeting).

Murakami, an outstanding contributor to the world of story-telling, is read in almost every continent, as his stories have been translated into 43 different languages (Rubin 6). Contemporary critics have assigned Murakami a global

status, and refer to him as a cosmopolitan cultural writer. His works appeal to the masses because they remain accessible, eluding the confines of time and place (Auestad 23). Murakami, moved by two major catastrophes in Japan; the Kobe earthquake and Sarin gas attack in 1995, realised that there were complexities within his society that he needed to understand. He then determined that his works would be more culturally and socially committed to Japan, and was prepared to do extensive research to “learn more about the Japanese as a “form of consciousness” (Murakami, 2001: 205). The resolution to engage with his society saw him shift the focus of his narratives from passive introspection to re-connecting with meaningful engagements in his culture. As a result, he ventured into writing *Underground* (2001), a journalistic essay about the Japanese psyche. Murakami's commitment to his cultural roots extended to his fictional work, as soon after, he wrote *Sputnik Sweetheart*, which Rubin comments carries within it “that sense of imperfection, the incompleteness of self-knowledge” (252). Arguably, the essence of the Japanese worldview permeates the novel and warrants an analysis.

In the following section, we will elaborate on the history of the tea ceremony, its fundamental principles and the adaptation of these principles to other disciplines.

### **The Japanese Tea Ceremony**

Jennifer Anderson in her book *An Introduction to Japanese Tea Ritual* traces the history of tea to A.D. 805-815 when Buddhist priests on their return from China introduced tea to the Japanese monasteries.<sup>2</sup> The monks served tea to each other as a form of spiritual renewal, joining in worship of purity and refinement. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the tea ceremony became a lavish event organised by the aristocrats and included a contest to find the best tea. Expensive Chinese utensils were utilised and rituals that complemented the Chinese culture were practised. Thereafter the tea ceremony spread to the courts and military and became a ritual infused with materialistic values. The elite warriors of Japan used the tea ceremony to enhance their status and power.

To establish a clear distinction between the tea rituals practised in the monasteries with that practised in the courts, Dogen Zenji (A.D. 1200-1253) a Buddhist priest dictated regulations to administer the preparation of tea in the temples. Murata Shuko (A.D. 1421?-1502) further enhanced these rules and was instrumental in imbibing the Japanese culture into the tea ritual by adding elements of Zen and aesthetics. By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sen no Rikyu (A.D. 1521-1591), noted as Japan's eminent tea master, revolutionised the tea ceremony by making it a simple ritual that required attention to detail. He too was inspired by the aesthetics

which celebrated the beauty and natural forces of nature. Anderson further explains that after World War II, the tea ceremony became a way of preserving and teaching cultural practices and values and continues to be embedded into the social fabric of Japan, evidenced through schools established by Rikyu's grandsons that teach the tea ritual dictated by his philosophy.

The tea ceremony is practiced continuously to master its rituals which fulfils a greater cause in mastering life itself. In present day Japan, most families seldom hold tea ceremonies in their houses. Instead, both men and women attend various tea persuasions which teach the practices of the tea ceremony and eventually perform the ceremony with members of these schools. The education consists of the preparation of tea including lighting the charcoal fire and caring for the utensils used. Students also learn the traditional art of poetry and drawing, wood craftsmanship, pottery and gardening.

In the book *The Japanese Tea Ceremony: Cha-No-Yu*, Arthur Sadler describes the elaborate preparations and steps involved in the tea ceremony.<sup>3</sup> The tea ceremony takes place in an area that consists of a garden with a teahouse. The area is divided into three sections. The ritual begins with the guest gathering in the waiting room where they are served hot water. They then move to the middle section in the garden and wait in an arbour where the host will greet them. Following this, they proceed to wash their hands and mouth at a stone wash basin before entering the third section which is the teahouse. To enter the teahouse, they will have to stoop at the low entrance which is structured in such a manner to evoke humility and equality. They then kneel on the floor, greet their host and have a simple meal after which they return to the arbour. When the tea is ready to be served, they enter the tearoom again and observe the preparation of the tea after which they drink the tea. The guests then engage in conversations on the quality and beauty of the utensils and decorations.

The tea ceremony was established as a culture in appreciation of beauty through the Zen master Rikyu. Guided by the Japanese practice of transferring philosophical lessons to one another through feelings and action, rather than words, Rikyu endeavoured to create a deliberate and meticulous practice that ensured the time, place, exterior and interior paraphernalia as well as the steps in preparing tea captured the essence of Japanese aesthetics. In this study, only three aesthetic concepts will be discussed: *sukiya*, *roji* and *ichigo ichie*. The embodiment of the aesthetics in the tea ceremony is reflected through the architecture of the teahouse and the various utensils used in preparing tea, in the *sukiya* style. Okakura defines *sukiya* as “the abode of the asymmetrical” (74), elaborating that the

arrangement and construction of the imperfect room caused one to contemplate on its characteristics and imagine what it would look like if it were perfect. This experience strengthens the appreciation for the beauty of nature. The garden path which leads to the teahouse is known as *roji*. The aesthetics of *roji* is incorporated through the spatial arrangement of the garden which is carefully structured to create boundaries. Okakura explains that the *roji* “was intended to break connection with the outside world, and to produce a fresh sensation conducive to the full enjoyment of aestheticism in the tea-room itself” (82). The boundaries distinguish what lay outside their lines with what is inside. It creates a need to differentiate between these two entities. Boundaries also signal an awareness of moving closer to the tea house and drawing into the intimacy of its experience. The third aesthetic concept is *ichigo ichie*. The entire experience of participating in the tea ceremony incorporates this concept which means one chance, one meeting. Each ceremony is treated as a single unique experience as the time spent during the occasion is considered impermanent. Every ritual and movement is unhurried as it is steeped in etiquette and require observation and sensory prowess.

The tea ceremony encapsulates the reality of the Japanese worldview revealed through the appreciation of the ephemeral nature of time, and the contemplation of the imperfect and incomplete, making the ceremony a valuable experience for life.<sup>4</sup> Due to its intricate association with the Japanese culture, the tea ceremony has been explored by various disciplines and has been found to be closely associated with psychological and spiritual growth as it requires quiet contemplation away from the busyness of life. Fling suggests that the tea ceremony which is an elaborate event requires repeated actions that are associated with mind and body coordination.<sup>5</sup> Mastery of these rituals eventually creates a sense of calmness and is a form of stress-management.

Anthropological studies have discussed the religious aspects of *chado*, by analysing its symbolic rituals and connecting it to the larger framework of existence of human life. Anderson asserts that the practice of tea is a mediator between the cosmos and man, and that its rituals transcend religious beliefs, reiterating the grandmaster Sen Soshitsu XV's statement that “Tea is the practice or realization of religious faith, no matter what you believe in” (495). Kondo further points out that the rituals which include repetitions, sequences, sensory media and boundaries are imbibed for the sake of creating an experience apart from the regular routine of the world.<sup>6</sup> In modern day Japan, weekly classes on the tea ceremony cater to a large proportion of the Japanese population. Both men and women take meticulous care in studying the rituals for the attainment of self-actualization. Mori who did a focus

study on women and their purpose for studying *chado* reveals that the tea ceremony fulfils the plan for self-development.<sup>7</sup> It helps to prepare women for marriage, use time productively and develop creative skills.

The tea ceremony has also impacted architectural studies as the specific requirements for the tea setting which include its physical environment and the way it interacts with the environment, alludes to sustainable elements in designing. Isozaki, et al. argue that architects have used these principles in designing space by incorporating engagement with the five senses and the use of building materials which embody the aesthetics of the tea ceremony.<sup>8</sup> Tschirky and Ikawa developed a framework incorporating the values of the tea ceremony for the service industry.<sup>9</sup> They introduced concepts on the mental attitude required while serving tea and the idea of equality of status between host and guest as accorded by the ceremony, to improve the quality of service in hotels.

During the medieval period, Japanese literature was greatly influenced by Zen Buddhism and themes were dedicated to the philosophy of impermanence captured through the creative works.<sup>10</sup> The classical literature, mostly written as poems were dedicated to enhancing the beauty of nature. The power of the language and sounds in the poems worked on the principles of suggestion, irregularity, simplicity and perishability.<sup>11</sup> These ideals were transferred to other artistic forms such as paintings and theatre. The tea ceremony which was one of the symbols of culture imbibed some constructs of the Japanese aesthetics found in literature.

### ***Sputnik Sweetheart***

In this article, we aim to show how the tea ceremony shifts from a tangible setting to a fictional setting in the form of a narrative. The study of *chado* from the perspective of various disciplines have sought to explain the meaning of the ceremony, the reasons for engaging in it, and the aesthetic principles, which can be adopted and assimilated through behaviour or creative production. These elements also appear to be replicated in fiction, which is another form of communication within culture. Following Geertz's suggestion that culture is a "historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (89), the literary text, can also be taken as one of these symbolic forms. Analysing a literary text for the concepts of the tea ceremony suggests a new way of appreciating the culture. It provides a new encounter of participating in the tea ceremony by reading a novel.

In *Sputnik Sweetheart*, Murakami interweaves three concepts of the tea

ceremony: *sukiya*, *roji* and *ichigo ichie*. At the outset, Murakami creates the setting for the tea ceremony by demarcating the inner world and outer world through the narrator K. Similar to the *roji* that signals one is entering a different world, *Sputnik Sweetheart* begins with a young man stepping out of his present thoughts to enter into an altered premise filled with memories. In his recollection, K details the story of Sumire, a girl he secretly loves, and the events that lead to her disappearance. The narrative begins with a description of Sumire feeling “a love of truly monumental proportions” for Miu (Murakami, 2002: 3), a woman 17 years older than her and the eventual rejection by Miu, when this love is expressed. K, through his observations, highlights the *sukiya* or unsymmetrical attributes within himself and that of Sumire and Miu. He also describes experiences of crossing boundaries or *roji* to initiate intimacy, and *ichigo ichie* moments which reveal a new understanding of the self for each of them.

The novel *Sputnik Sweetheart*, will be discussed by examining the three main characters, Sumire, K and Miu. The characters will be analysed for their inner and outer attributes which reflect asymmetrical qualities in relation to the aesthetics of *sukiya*. When the characters engage in a relationship with each other, the boundaries that are demarcated in the relationship will be compared to the concept of *roji*. And finally, selected experiences similar to *ichigo ichie* that have impacted the characters will be analysed. On the whole, all these concepts personify a tea ceremony ritual through fiction.

### ***Sukiya*: The Asymmetrical Attributes of Sumire, Miu and K**

Murakami creates characters that complement the tone and mood of the tea ceremony through the qualities of *sukiya* which embody the essence of asymmetry. *Sukiya* commands the ability to draw one's attention to participate in understanding the beauty and harmony of asymmetry. *Sukiya* appears as physical or abstract embodiments in the characters and are described through their appearance and behaviour.

Sumire, the main character is described by K as not “exactly a beauty” (Murakami, 2002: 6). Her mouth was too wide and her nose too small and she was “as thin as one of those war orphans” (4). She dressed up awkwardly, like a male character in Kerouac's novel, with oversized coat, rough boots and unmatched socks. The description of her outward appearance exemplifies the quality of *sukiya* that Sumire possesses. Her facial features are alluded to asymmetric qualities as her mouth and nose do not appear to be proportionate on her face. Her body weight is below normal although she is from a working-class family living in the city.

Comparing her to a war orphan creates a distorted image. And, although a woman, she opts to cross dress and in addition, selects clothes that do not compliment her body. Here, the appearance of Sumire is exaggerated to show her jagged traits.

Additionally, Sumire's internal characteristics further strengthen the idea of *sukiya* as seen through the fragmented perception that she has of herself. K explains that Sumire's mother, mesmerised by Mozart, named her after the title of his piece, which means violet in Japanese. When Sumire discovered that the lyrics spoke of "a callous shepherd's daughter trampling down a hapless little violet in a field" (ibid. 19), she detested her name. Her name represents a delicate flower and is connected to her mother's love. However, when she chooses to associate it with violence, the hatred for something which she owns, inadvertently creates an irregular identity. This further transfers into her inability to stay focused, as she quits college to become a writer, but, lacks the discipline to produce substantial work. Her asymmetrical perception of herself also leads her to develop sexual desires for the same sex as seen in her attraction towards Miu, "Here I am in love for the first time in my life, aged 22. And the other person just happens to be a woman" (ibid. 37).

The quality of *sukiya* is further enhanced through the other female character, Miu. When Sumire unabashedly tells Miu that she wants to be like her, Miu startles her by responding "Fourteen years ago I became half the person I used to be. I wish I could have met you when I was whole" (ibid. 51). Miu narrates how an encounter she had in her past has caused her to become the asymmetrical person that she is with the inability to reveal her true self:

I was still on this side, here. But another me, maybe half of me, had gone over to the other side. Taking with it my black hair, my sexual desire, my periods, my ovulation, perhaps even the will to live. (172)

Although sexually desirable, her sexual desires were abated and caused an imbalance in her life. She says "I haven't been able to give myself to anyone in this world" (128). She marries to live up to the norms of society but is unable to live a fulfilling married life. Her innate talent for music is suppressed to build a career in business. A few months after Sumire's disappearance, K happens to catch a glimpse of Miu in Tokyo and sees in her "an empty shell" (224). Once again Miu evokes a sense of asymmetry as the void in her personality creates a sense of intrigue, even as she continues to exist.

The sense of asymmetry is represented by the final character K, a school teacher, whose professional behaviour is questionably wanting. K reveals his

instinctive sexual desire for the opposite sex and explains that he gratifies his needs when the opportunity arises, having many partners whom he has sexual relationships with, including a student's mother whom he meets twice a month. K confesses "If people discovered I was sleeping with the mother of one of the kids in my class, I could lose my job" (197). K is conflicted as he realises that what he is doing is unethical yet he resigns to it.

The central idea of *sukiya* is to facilitate inspection into what is conceived as beautiful and is only revealed when one comes to terms with its uniqueness. Like the tea-room that is built from rough material or the tea bowl that is uneven and flawed, beauty can only be found when these qualities are appreciated. This essence of *sukiya* is represented through Sumire's irregular physical features and her conflicted self, making her intriguing and endearing. When K chooses to describe these asymmetrical features in her, in actual fact he has learnt to value her beauty on a personal level. Through Miu, attention is drawn to her asymmetrical existence as she continues to live through the routine of life. Through this observation, the beauty of life amidst its harshness is learnt to be appreciated. And finally, K personifies the asymmetrical values that society lives by. Having this distorted ethical conduct causes K to inspect himself. He reasons that in order to understand the self, he has to decide "How important the world outside is to me, how I maintain a sense of equilibrium by coming to terms with it. That's how I'd grasp a clearer sense of who I am" (60).

The three characters individually represent a distinctive quality of *sukiya*, which when placed together fortify and create an atmosphere similar to the tea ceremony. The following section discusses the concept of *roji* in *Sputnik Sweetheart*.

### ***Roji*: Crossing Boundaries, Building Boundaries**

As mentioned, the tea ceremony takes place in a setting that is demarcated by symbolic boundaries. The boundaries in the garden path signal leaving the outside world to enter into an inner world. The boundaries systematically create a need to segregate what is on either side of the line as it sets limits on the behaviour and emotions. As the participant approaches the tea house, the boundary between the garden and an intimate place is created by the tea house. The tea-room in the house, has low ceilings, small entrances and subdued lighting, making it a secluded physical vacuum, designed for intense contemplation. Here, intimacy is contained and preserved. When the host and the guest engage in drinking tea, intimacy is also created as they exchange conversations and discuss the entire experience.

The relationships that are formed in *Sputnik Sweetheart* centre on Sumire who is the common person with whom K and Miu share a bond. The triangular relationship in which K is attracted to Sumire and Sumire to Miu signifies boundaries in the relationships which create an intimate and dynamic exchange, resulting in a new way of understanding life.

K and Sumire are first acquainted at college. K is immediately drawn to her and becomes her confidante. The relationship crosses the first boundary, moving from being casual friends to close friends when Sumire chooses to sleep over at his apartment occasionally. Within the confines of this friendship, their conversations become broader and deeper as they spend hours talking about various topics and intimate details. However, K laments that Sumire does not cross the sexual boundary as she has no hint of “romantic feelings [for him] let alone sexual interest” (64). K’s attraction to Sumire however, does not disrupt the harmony in the relationship, even when he “is seized by a violent desire” (72) to make love to her. Indeed, he admires her from afar, saying that there is “something special about her” (6). He even longs for the oddly timed phone calls he receives from her, as conversations with Sumire enables him to find answers about himself. The relationship suggests the interdependent motives that point to the fact that Sumire enables K to understand that these boundaries are inevitable and yet hold within them the potential to change K’s perspectives and respect himself.

K is realistic in his views, noting that when you “remove everything pointless from an imperfect life...it’d lose even its imperfection” (4). As such, his relationship with Sumire and the boundaries created, defines his being. As mentioned earlier, Sumire had the ability to make K change his perspective on his future plans. When he realises that she had decided to forgo the past and not be entrenched in despair, he resolves to do the same.

On his return to Tokyo, his student’s mother who is also his lover asks him to accompany her to a supermarket where her son Carrot, had been caught shoplifting. After the incident, K spends some time talking to Carrot privately, but admits that he is actually using Carrot as a decoy, to “think aloud” (211). As he examines the boundaries in his life, he begins to differentiate between what is right and wrong. By doing so, he symbolically creates boundaries to understand himself better by getting into the core of his being and evaluating his values. Through his encounter with Carrot, he realises that “unless you find the fundamental cause and treat that, the same problem will surface later on in a different form” (206). When he meets Carrot’s mother again, he resolves to end the affair, and learns to segregate and respect his profession by erecting boundaries in his sexual pursuits,

as he realised the consequences it may have on Carrot and himself. K says, "I don't think it's right that I'm part of the problem. I can't be part of the solution if I'm part of the problem" (217).

K moves on to recall Miu, whom Sumire was attracted to. Sumire encountered Miu for the first time at a wedding reception and "in the instant Miu touched her hair, Sumire fell in love" (9). Despite Sumire's declaration that she "isn't much to look at" (21) Miu who is drawn to Sumire's alluring irregular features, pulls her chin, gazes at her face and assures her that she is very attractive. When asked to describe her practical skills, Sumire lists all her negative traits. Despite this, Miu offers her a job and when the intrigued Sumire queries, Miu explains "I like your face, the way you look" (26). When they meet again, Miu holds Sumire's hand and persuades her to work for her.

Miu initiates the boundary for the purpose of creating an atmosphere of closeness that empowers Sumire to explore her inner self. When Miu gazes at Sumire, Sumire sees her reflection in Miu's eyes and feels "her soul being sucked into the other side of the mirror" (42). Though exciting, she is intimidated by it. Miu has the capability of drawing Sumire into an empty space that creates the impetus for quiet, inward-inspection. In this vacuum, Sumire attempts to change herself, explore her sexual desires, and eventually disappears into another space in the world to continue her journey of endless opportunities.

The intimate space created by Miu firstly, enables Sumire's entire outward appearance to change. Miu hands down some used but fashionable clothes, shoes and cosmetics for Sumire to wear to work. Sumire also begins to overcome her smoking addiction. All these prove to be a struggle for her as when she meets K again, who remarks that she is hardly recognisable, she expresses her fear of losing herself and of not knowing what the future may hold. This fear is repeated in a letter she writes to K while on tour in Europe with Miu. She says, "I have this strange feeling that I am not myself anymore" (77). Forced into a place of intimacy, every action, thought and feeling that Sumire has, magnifies and her desire for sexual intimacy escalates as she increasingly becomes attracted to Miu. She observes Miu "coming out of the bath with a towel wrapped around her... of her changing her clothes" (80) and her body on the beach, where they spend time swimming and sun-bathing in the nude, and this leads her to have sexual fantasies.

The relationships that the characters develop with each other once again reveals the crossing of boundaries to create intimacy or the need to build boundaries to demarcate differences that result in a change of perspective. Confronted with reality, the characters learn to embrace the challenges, decide on what the

boundaries signify in the relationships that they have and seek to understand the values each holds and through them, develop a deeper understanding of the self. The final section is on the *ichigo ichie* experience described in the novel that support the idea of one chance, one meeting for a revelation of the impermanence of life.

### ***Ichigo Ichie: A Chanced Meeting for Self-reflection***

Murakami narrates an *ichigo ichie* experience for all three characters in the novel for various reasons that ultimately support the concept of the transient nature of time. The tea ceremony is valued as an *ichigo ichie* experience as the encounter may never be repeated, at another time or place, or with another person, making it a meaningful, reflective experience.

Miu the oldest of the three characters, experienced an *ichigo ichie* moment when she was studying piano in France. She took leave for a business trip in a small town in Switzerland where she met an elderly Latin man and felt sexually threatened by him. The feeling overpowered her to the extent that she felt delusional and sensed the whole town turning against her. Late one night, she rides the Ferris wheel at the amusement park and is abandoned by the attendant. The experience of being stuck in a Ferris wheel forced Miu to encounter a defining moment in her life. The space she was caught in was high in the air away from the ground. The time was after midnight, surrounded in darkness.

From high up, she was able to view her apartment through a pair of binoculars and was horrified to see herself in her apartment, having sex with the Latin man she detested. “I was right here, and another me was over there. And that man — Ferdinando — was doing all kinds of things to me over there” (Murakami, 2002: 170). The experience was so mortifying to the degree that a permanent record of this encounter was imbedded in her; she explains “it was meaningless and obscene, with only one goal in mind — to make me thoroughly polluted” (170). When she is found the next morning, she is taken to the hospital and treated for shock. Upon seeing herself in the mirror, she faints as she realizes that “the white-haired woman staring back at her was herself” (172). At that point, Miu ‘vanished’. She though was uncertain “which me, on which side of the mirror, is the real me?” Miu accepted the fact that “something was missing from [her]. Something absolutely critical, though [she] didn’t know what” (173).

The incident caused her to delve into herself and she realizes that what she lacked was “human warmth” (174). In her pursuit of excellence, she had no sympathy for those who were under achievers. The *ichigo ichie* experience was a

revelation of the impermanence of life for Miu, the reality that physical appearance and capabilities are temporary and can vanish without warning. As such, Miu had to learn to appreciate each day of her life.

Sumire's *ichigo ichie* experience occurred when her suppressed sexual desires for Miu were finally revealed. Late one night, on the Greek island they were vacationing on, Sumire enters Miu's room after encountering a nightmare. Miu allows Sumire to share her bed in order to comfort her, but Sumire overcome by her sexual desires, begins to caress Miu. Although Miu allows this momentarily, she eventually resists Sumire. Sumire apologises saying, "It's just that I like you. I've worried about it for so long, and I had to try"... [Sumire, then] "sobbed into her pillow for the longest time" (129) after which she left the room to be alone. That night, Sumire disappears. Sumire's confrontation with her own self about her desires towards Miu, is revealed in this experience. She dares to express her feelings for Miu and acts on them. Unable to face the outcome, she disappears. After reading her documents, K concludes that Sumire expressed "the will to move forward, the struggle to make a new start" (180). She had found an "exit ... from this side to the other" (182). This scene signifies the essence of impermanent feelings and the ability and opportunity to begin something new when these feelings are not reciprocated. Miu further concurs by stating that:

in the end [we are] no more than lonely lumps of metal on their own separate orbits...when the orbits of these two satellites of ours happened to cross paths, we could be together. Maybe even open our hearts to each other. But that was only for the briefest moment.in the next instance we'd be in absolute solitude. Until we burned up and became nothing. (129)

The description by Miu of them being satellites, reinforces the nature of a chanced meeting between strangers who for that brief moment are required to value the experience as it may never recur.

After K is informed that Sumire had disappeared, he travels to the Greek island to search for her. Late one night, he hears music coming from a mountain and decides to investigate. As he approaches the source of the music, he encounters a strange *ichigo ichie* experience of losing himself, "my real life had fallen asleep somewhere..." (Murakami 186). He is sucked into the deep ocean surrounded by sharp images which he refuses to look at to understand as he says "meaning is fixed to the temporal, and the temporal was trying to force me to rise to the surface" (186). K did not want to accept the meaning of the moment at that point.

K returns home dejected. Late one night, he receives a mysterious phone call from Sumire, weeks after her disappearance. She asks him to fetch her from the phone booth that she used to frequent. Seconds later, the call disconnects. At that moment of *ihcigo ichie*, one chance, one meeting, he realises that even though he had not seen her for some time and was worried that she had been missing, he had not actually lost her because they were still attached in many other ways. The memories that he had were prominent reminders of her. He comes to realise that nothing is permanent, that “a feeling of immeasurable emptiness” (225) is all that is left behind. People will not be permanent in our life, but memories of them will live on. In the last few paragraphs of his narrative he concludes:

Maybe, in some distant place, everything is already, quietly, lost. Or at least there exists a silent place where everything can disappear, melding together in a single, overlapping figure. And as we live our lives we discover – drawing towards us the thin threads attached to each other – what has been lost. (226)

Finally, he says, “I’m in no hurry. There’s no need to rush. I’m ready. I can go anywhere” (228). The appreciation for the transience of existence and the fact that Sumire is cherished because she is evanescent, brings the tea ceremony to an end as K has come to understand that this is the reality of life.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Clearly, a reading of Murakami’s work which appropriates the concepts of the tea ceremony, reveals a deeper understanding of the way of life from a Japanese perspective. The novel illustrates the interdependent relationship between the characters and how they represent the principles of the tea ceremony. In its essence the beauty of life can be found in imperfection which Murakami identifies through Sumire. When the oddity of Sumire’s looks and behaviour are prized, she becomes exceptionally endearing and special. Miu represents the resilience of imperfect characters that strive to be a part of this world, and that warrant appreciation. And K personifies the imperfect behaviour of humans, a reality which needs to be acknowledged and duly addressed.

All three characters bond intimately through the relationships they forge. Sumire’s filial relationship with K empowers him to understand the impermanence of life and the need to be accountable. Sumire made an impact on K’s life because she was within reach yet impossible to possess. The thoughts that she leaves him with make him realise that he should change to be a better person and a role

model to his students. Miu invites Sumire into the confines of a small and empty space which offers opportunities for her to achieve self-realisation in privacy. The experience though is not the sum of life and creates a sense of incompleteness as she realises that life must continue and the experience must be used as an impetus for the next step in the discovery of life. The *ichigo ichie* moment that the characters experienced serves to reveal a deeper understanding of the impermanent nature of life. As nothing could be held onto, be they personal attributes, emotions or people, the one message that is consistent is the need to trudge forward and embrace life. *Sputnik Sweetheart* which first appears as a love story with sexual desires gone awry offers a deeper and subtle understanding of the Japanese worldview. Not only does the novel bring to life the qualities of the tea ceremony, it also gives a new perspective to this cultural ritual, in this respect reflected through the characters.

Finally, a close inspection of the title of the novel alluding to the Sputnik space shuttle further strengthens the ideals of the Japanese worldview. The title creates an imagery of an object orbiting in the dark void, rotating in an infinite vacuum, to signify the very essence of impermanence that the Japanese culture embraces, similarly embodied by the bowl in the tea ceremony that represents the cycle of life. The Sputnik space shuttle also represents the teahouse, as similarly, it is located in a space isolated from the “outside” world. The shuttle also is a cramped and confined space which creates an intimate ambience for reflection and contemplation on the imperfection and incompleteness of life. Murakami has subtly infused *Sputnik Sweetheart* with the Japanese culture and engaged the reader in viewing life through the Japanese lens. As a result, a broadened frame of reference to the Japanese worldview is constructed. What is revealed in the end is that the tea ceremony influences every action and behaviour, and continues to be reconstructed through various ways to fortify the Japanese way of life.

## Notes

1. See Francis Markus, “Two years on, new psychological stresses emerge amongst survivors of Japan’s triple disaster,” The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 9 March 2013, 30 May 2015. (<<http://www.ifrc.org/fr/nouvelles/nouvelles/asia-pacific/japan/two-years-on-new-psychological-stresses-emerge-amongst-survivors-of-japans-triple-disaster-61021/>>); Dan Nakaso, “With tea ceremony, hope rises to heal wounds of war,” *Star-Advertiser*, 20 July 2011, 2 August 2015 (<<https://www.staradvertiser.com/hawaii-news/with-tea-ceremony-hope-rises-to-heal-wounds-of-war/>>).

2. See Jennifer L. Anderson, *An Introduction to Japanese Tea Ritual* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1991) 21.
3. See Arthur L. Sadler, *The Japanese Tea Ceremony: Cha-No-Yu* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2002) 92.
4. See Yuriko Saito, "Everyday Aesthetics", *Philosophy and Literature* 25.1 (2001) 87.
5. See Sheila Fling, "Psychological Aspects of the Way of Tea," *Japan Studies Association Journal* 2 (1998) 32.
6. See Dorinne Kondo, "The Way of Tea: A Symbolic Analysis," *Man London* 20:2 (1985) 302.
7. See Barbara L.R. Mori, "The Tea Ceremony: A Transformed Japanese Ritual," *Gender & Society* 5:1 (1991) 89.
8. See Arata Isozaki, et al., *The Contemporary Tea House: Japan's Top Architects Redefine a Tradition* (Japan: Kodansha International. 2007) 29.
9. See Kotara Nakamura, Hugo Tschirky and Yasuo Ikawa, "Dynamic Service Framework Approach to Sustainable Service Value Shift Applied to Traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony," *Management of Engineering & Technology. PICMET 2008 (Portland International Conference, 2008)* 2439.
10. See Graham Parkes, "Japanese Aesthetics" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2011, 14 June. 2015 (<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2011/entries/japanese-aesthetics/>>).
11. See Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics. Philosophy East and West," *Symposium on Aesthetics East and West* 19:3 (1969) 294.

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