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The strategies of seeing differently in Kathleen Jamie's travel writing: *Findings* and *Sightlines*

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Abstract

This article looks at the narrative techniques employed in two collections of creative non-fiction essays by the Scottish writer and poet, Kathleen Jamie. In *Findings* (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012) the narrator uses the theme of travel as a platform for expressing the liminality of natural and cultural zones. At the same time, the concept of motion and the boundless travel experience are often turned into their diminutive forms. In order to transgress the dual notions of outside/inside, human/nonhuman and the visible/unseen, Jamie employs a number of visual strategies. She introduces experimental methods of observation to free perception from the constraints of the dogmatic predictions which emerge from the automatization of sight. Jamie exposes our own illusions of what "natural" is or where exactly "nature" resides, prompting us to rethink our own position in the system. In this she often demonstrates the ethical environmental agenda of contemporary Scottish writers and exposes the intrusion of globalism into parochial zones.

Keywords

Jamie, Kathleen, travel book, Scottish nature writing, ways of looking, defamiliarization, ecocriticism

Inne sposoby patrzenia: Narracje z podróży w *Findings* i *Sightlines* Kathleen Jamie

Abstrakt

W artykule podjęto kwestię realizacji technik narracyjnych w dwóch zbiorach eseistyki podróżniczej szkockiej poetki i pisarki, Kathleen Jamie. W cyklach reportaży podróżniczych *Findings* (2005) i *Sightlines* (2012) autorka używa tematyki podróży dla przedstawienia takich wątków jak liminalność i integralność sfer natury i kultury, przy czym nierzadko redukuje ona sam ideał podróżniczy do jego własnej miniatury. W przekraczaniu dogmatycznie pojmowanych binarnych koncepcji, Jamie często odwołuje się do sposobów widzenia i eksperymentuje z różnorodnymi technikami wizualnej reprezentacji przyrody. Sama "natura" wreszcie staje się spoiwem łączącym cykle podróżnicze, które wpisują się w etycznie zaangażowany nurt szkockiego przyrodopisarstwa.

Słowa kluczowe

Jamie, Kathleen, reportaż podróżniczy, szkockie przyrodopisarstwo, sposoby widzenia, defamiliaryzacja, ekokrytyka

> That's what the keen-eyed naturalists say. Keep looking. Keep looking, even if there's nothing much to see. That way your eye learns what's common, so when the uncommon appears, your eye will tell you.
>
> Kathleen Jamie

1. Introduction

This article looks at the narrative techniques employed in the creative non-fiction essays by Scottish writer and poet, Kathleen Jamie. The author, who is well-known for her poetic project, has published two collections of short travel narratives,

Findings (2005) and *Sightlines* (2012), which describe Jamie's journeys over the years to both local, parochial zones, as well as the distant, less accessible regions of Greenland or the Outer Hebrides. The essays, which vary in length, can be read and analysed independently, but together they are compiled into a record of goings and home-comings, privileging the motifs of home, femininity, nature, human life and history. Additionally, given the concision and stylistic density of Jamie's techniques, the form of the essay itself seems to suit the fleeting experience of the place she wishes to explore.

Jan Borm, a researcher in travel writing studies, asserts that while generically the modern travel book belongs to nonfiction writing, it often operates through fiction practices, such as the use of extended dialogue, free indirect style, present-tense narration, or prolepsis. (Borm 2012: 3).This use of cross-generic devices testifies to the widely acknowledged hybridity of the travel genre. In her factual travel essays, Jamie also employs fictional techniques. In order to transgress the dual notions of outside/inside, human/nonhuman and the visible/unseen, she uses, for instance, such narrative strategies as synaesthetic metaphors, language which is intended to free perception from the constraints of the dogmatic. Furthermore, her experimental methods of observation frequently utilize the poetic device of defamiliarization. This allows her to escape the automatization of sight. Relying heavily on the sensory, especially on the dominant visual, Jamie proposes techniques which give us the intensity of looking with a "looser mind" at our interrelation with the environment. In doing so, she mediates between certain fallacious ideas of wilderness and the validity of scientific environmental knowledge. Therefore, it is not being elsewhere that is the main direction in *Findings* and *Sightlines*, but rather it is seeing differently.

Both collections reveal human entanglement with the world of the outside and the inside, and Jamie's narrative strategies are used to mobilize the reader's attention towards the place in which human nature and that of the bird, fish, or spider con-

tinue the same spectacle of life. This realizes the concept of "attentiveness" which, according to Louisa Gairn (2008: 156-160), Jamie has placed at the core of her writing project. In her ecocritical presentation of modern Scottish literature, Gairn sees Jamie's work as an attempt to redefine the human relationship with nature and a way of strengthening that connection through literature. And, finally, it is a tool for getting closer to the ever-shifting and elusive "truth". Gairn observes how in post-war modernity certain "rural" or "pastoral" themes in Scottish literature and poetry came to assume a pejorative meaning. At present, however, far from being "escapist" in their reaction to contemporary modern life, a number of Scottish writers have addressed the most recent anxieties connected with human disconnection from the environment, a sense of imaginative crisis and psychological displacement. Jamie's writing is placed among those Scottish writers and poets who are preoccupied with literal "mapping" of the place. But while Scottish literature has traditionally carried this "green" element, literary criticism or theory has not. Only recently, in the wake of environmental degradation, has ecocritical thought inquired into the role the natural world plays in shaping the human creation of culture and literature. Post-millennial writers and critics place this human involvement with the non-human at the centre of their literary projects (Dunnigan and McCulloch 2011: vi).

Kathleen Jamie effectively draws on a synthesis between ecocriticism and travel writing. The theme of travel itself is consistently used as a platform for expressing the liminality of natural and cultural zones. And the concept of motion, as for instance part of the narrative strategy of estrangement, is at times minimized to turn the boundless travel experience into its diminutive form. Without reducing the innate travel book dogmas of the vast outdoors, movement, and adventure, Kathleen Jamie endows her non-fiction sketches with what Urbain refers to as the "irony of claustrophilia". She "gulliverises" motion to "around-the-corner" spatially bounded settings – or lim-

its travel to the space within the narrative. But the concept of "claustrophilia" is not exactly the direct opposite of vastness. Instead, it rather concentrates on the journey's aim, which is practising "experimental methods of discovery" (Urbain 2012: 34-36). Through these estranging narrative devices, Jamie seems to find the possibility of self-discovery. She is the one who crosses the border, who loses the world and re-discovers it again, who goes, to use Urbain's metaphor, through the eye of a needle to ask fundamental questions about the nature of being.

2. Observation interrupted and synaesthetic discovery

If immersed in the broad context of the British travel book, the very title of the 2012 essay collection *Sightlines* is reminiscent of the famous travelogue by Bruce Chatwin *The Songlines* (1987). In the book that presents a quest along the routes of the Australian Outback in search of original, and lost, harmony with nature, Chatwin uses the idea of songlines, the founding concept of Aboriginal cosmology, to track the "primitive" human connection with the Earth and discover the "prelapsarian innocence of Man" (Głębocki 2010: 175). For Chatwin, one must travel light along the Dreamings sung across the country, and the geographical terrain itself "must remain unscarred". This is his "earthbound philosophy", which guides people and situates them in the place of their Ancestors (Chatwin 1988: 11). In the same way as Chatwin's classic reads the land as a musical score, Jamie's "sightlines" engage visual perception as a mode of comprehending human connection with our environs. The changed perspectives, unconventional angles, passing glimpses, and accidental sightings, all create the intricate cobweb of our interaction with the earth.

The text entitled "Aurora" describes the narrator's journey to Greenland. In landscape descriptions Jamie's gaze always manufactures a certain "maybe". The meditative stance is constantly confronted with physical contact or sensory perception.

This refusal to rely on strongly conceptualized ideas of the outside always emanates with a surprising discovery. The observation yields new findings because perception frees itself from the constraints of the dogmatic. This is illustrated, for instance, by how the narrator's remarks on the tundra and the threatened existence of polar bears suddenly give way to a diagnosis: against the white pinnacles of the glacier "the ship [though white] looks dirty, too, the way sheep suddenly look dirty when it snows" (Jamie 2012: 4). The meditative observational mode is unexpectedly interrupted by the unwitting eye that captures variations in the shades of white. The aesthetic power of the concepts secured in readers' imaginations, here concerning whiteness, are lost and turned into an illusion, succumbing to relativity. Jamie's discoveries seem to aim at eradicating the excessive knowledge which burdens the traveller's mind. This knowledge indeed can never come to its full understanding on a journey, and in the course of the narrative is always doomed to be disrupted by benign observations. Longer descriptive passages are fragmented by instantaneous and fleeting sense-related visions. In this way the axiomatic converses with a sudden awareness of the outside. For instance, the silence of the icebergs, which has for a long time been part of the artistic and literary topoi, serves here as a vehicle for self-observation.

> Slowly we enter the most extraordinary silence, a radiant silence. It radiates from the mountains, and the ice and the sky, a mineral silence which presses powerfully on our bodies, coming from very far off. It's deep and quite frightening, and makes my mind seem clamorous as a goose. I want to quell my mind, but I think it would take years. I glance at the others. Some people are looking out at the distant land and sea; others have their heads bowed, as if in church. (Jamie 2012: 4)

The above passage operates on the unquestioned binarities of silence – noise, calmness, agitation. The sound references are augmented by the sense of sight ("radiant") and touch

(pressure against the physical body). And the "mineral" quality of icebergs evokes yet another dual concept: the mobility of inanimate objects. Finally, the scene depicts the common practice among Westerners to turn Arctic icebergs into objects of veneration.

Jamie's descriptions of Greenland are full of liminality and fluctuations, which are achieved through literary synaesthesia[1]. This is the poetic method of sense-related representation. The author creates semantic sequences which bring together concepts from the various senses: sight, touch, hearing, smell. In his analysis of synaesthetic metaphors, Sean Day explains that in synaesthesia one sense is represented in terms of another. And interestingly, he demonstrates that, in the English language, metaphors employing touch and sound predominate (Day 1996). As a literary method synaesthesia creates a new representation of perception, which is extended beyond the working of a single sense. The description does not belong then to one primary sense but to a synaesthetic sense. In this way synaesthesia halts comprehension. Its effect can be illustrated by how Jamie evokes taste, colour and sound: "Right now I'm thinking if we could taste the green aurora, it would fizz on the tongue and taste like crème de menthe" (Jamie 2012: 14). Consequently, owing to the use of sound words like "whoosh", "whistle", or "fizz", the aurora borealis turns into a mutable phenomenon: "Another iceberg, and another. Some people say you can smell icebergs, that they smell like cucumbers. You can smell icebergs and hear your own nervous system. I don't know. Although they pass slowly and very close, I smell nothing but colossal, witless indifference" (Jamie 2012: 10). The unresolved "I don't know" is a refusal to ascertain or to assume intellectual authority. While Jamie demonstrates her acute sensual awareness of the presence of the icebergs,

[1] On the phenomenon of synaesthesia and various fields of research on the subject, visit, for example: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/synesthe/>.

she denies them the status of "organic" beings. Instead their "deadening" presence is referred to as "utterly meaningless". They "suggest nothing but a white nihilism" (Jamie 2012: 6-7). The travelling self is unable to escape her own anxiety or free herself from the projections of human culture and imagery upon the outside world. But as a writer Jamie, by intertwining sensual perception and utilizing synaesthesia, manages to escape, if only temporarily, the dominant function of sight and the pitfalls of objectification.

Needless to say, the icebound landscape invites postponement of movement, so contrary to the hurried and fleeting experience of modern travel. The meditation of the place necessitates a non-Western way of looking, which calls for reorientating traditional concepts of the dimensionality of objects. The Arctic zone in travel literature is frequently turned into a sphere of liminality. This is constructed on three premises: halted movement, attentive observation, and self-discovery made possible through meditation. The Arctic is elusive both physically as landscape and metaphysically as an idea (Holland and Huggan 2000: 100-101). Through the narrative strategy of synaesthesia Jamie's writing demonstrates frequent shifts of meanings anchored in the human imagery of the region. But the mapping of the place allows also the recognition of liminality in her feminine self: "There's something in the lights I recognize – a restlessness, a dissatisfaction with their own arrangements", says Jamie and identifies the fluorescence not with "a finished work but a redrafting, recalculating" (Jamie 2012: 12-13). The fluidity of the aurora borealis corresponds with the fluidity of the human mind, of the feminine shifting self, and of her writerly quest for reinvention.

Reading "Aurora" brings connotations with Peter Matthiessen's *Snow Leopard*. The transience and elusive perception, the sudden dissolving of images, the shifts of vision between sharpness and not-seeing reflect Matthiessen's Zen practice of insight. His well-known travel classic abounds in synaesthetic

effects in which the auditory and the visual unite to represent the constant interaction of elements. The tactile sounds are endowed with agency. Here the "unearthly" sounds of the Himalaya Mountains radiate through the landscape and the narrator's body to illuminate the world like light (Matthiessen 1980: 36). But while Matthiessen seeks the prolonged awareness of a Buddhist, a kind of universal continuity of the observing "I", and uninterrupted union with the elements, Jamie only notices a flickering moment. The momentary and sudden recognitions and the short-lived shallowness apparently subvert the depth of the insight. Without the pretence of seeking permanence, she only finds human transience.

The text succumbs to its own rhythm in which knowledge, especially facts about climate, loom methodically to summon the attention and "attentiveness" of readers. The floating procession of icebergs goes beyond the realizations of the aesthetic or metaphysical and serves an ethically engaged purpose.

> I float on the surface of knowledge, too. Of climate science, for example. The ice cap is miles deep. In 2003, a team who'd spent seven years drilling through the Greenland ice to fetch up core samples at last hit bedrock. The ice bottom of the core is 20,000 years old. They were bringing the deep past out of its silence. Here are people who crawl about on glaciers, measuring speeds and surges, and the calving of the icebergs. Together they bring worrisome news from the farthest remotes. I sail on the surface of understanding, a flicker here, a silence there. (Jamie 2012: 17)

The icebergs seem "sinister" now and the narrator feels a sudden goose-like "urge to be away, to head south". As the ship is sailing away the bergs are disappearing in its wake, to be finally reduced to a vanishing "Cheshire Cat" gleam. The disconcerting knowledge of climatic change lingers on, though, even if the image which summoned it inevitably degenerates and can only remain protected in the space of the imagination.

The author's travel in search of nature, affirms the philosophical arguments of Elisabeth Grosz. She sees nature, not

as a direct opposition of human culture but rather as a force that incites and enables the human system of culture. Instead of exclusion and distinction, Grosz calls for replacing the binary relationship between nature and culture with that of elaboration and emergence.

> It may be inaccurate to regard nature and culture as two mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive categories, that is, as binarized or oppositional terms in which one takes on the right to define the other as its negation or deprivation; this is to regard them as contained categories, each of which has given boundaries and no space of overlap. Instead, it may prove fruitful to understand them as terms whose relation is defined by emergence. Nature is the ground, the condition or field in which culture erupts or emerges as a supervening quality not contained in nature but derived from it. (Grosz 2005: 44)

The separation of culture from nature owes its intensity to the structuralist and post-structuralist theories that dominated twentieth-century thought, "the era of constructionisms", and secured the priority of man-made systems. Little that existed beyond the cultural system was recognized. Culture had a limiting and diminishing effect on natural forces in that it selectively presented those features of the natural world which were of interest to the human constructed system. In this sense it reduced the complexity of the natural to what could be rendered controllable. Culture, or literature for that matter, argues Grosz, is the human response to the problems the natural world poses. It attempts to filter and interpret unpredictable and uncontrollable nature, whose resistance to control is immanent (Grosz 2005: 47-52). Jamie's ways of looking at the environs are a method in which our culture, Western culture, responds to the changes within nature – and a way of admitting how simplistic our understanding of it has always been.

3. Defamiliarizing the familiar, defragmenting the consistent

Urbain observes that it is not traversing physically from "here" to "there" that turns one into a traveller, but it is the capacity of turning "here" into "there". It is not to respond to the call of the outside but rather to the call of the inside. One such practice is "exoticising the everyday". This is the method of representing the familiar so that it emerges as strange. It is "creating the feeling of elsewhere in the here and now" (Urbain 2012: 30-38). This technique of defamiliarization, which by the Russian Formalists was referred to as *ostranenje*, uses the destabilizing method and changes commonly accepted parameters into unfamiliar ones. This change requires some pause in the mechanical perception of the world. The purpose of altering perception is to escape the automatization and habituation of knowing. This makes observation more difficult but, at the same time, prolongs its effect (Shklovsky 1917: 2).

In "Surgeon's Hall", a narrative that wavers between the theme of nature and the human body, Jamie uses the strategy of defamiliarization. When visiting the Surgeon's Hall Museum in Edinburgh she kneels and stoops to view parts of the human body preserved in jars. They resemble fruit or "the bands in polished agate". Slices of kidney with mercury shots evoke the image of bracket fungus. In observing, in this "bending and looking" she "suspends" her judgment (Jamie 2005: 129-135):

> Unless you have a professional interest, it's possible that the only bodies you've been intimate with, have scrutinised have been the bodies of lovers or children. The act of unhurried, unmediated examination has hitherto been an act of love. (…) [These bodies] all call for the same plain tenderness. (Jamie 2005: 131)

In her slow progression among the exhibits, specimens of human life, she remains soundless and respectful, but never fails to ask questions that startle: "Where, I wonder does one acquire the corpse of a toddler?" (Jamie 2005: 136) When she

scrutinizes a row of skeleton foetuses arranged by size and age, questions about life, disease, and suffering bring the sudden recognition that nature is not "out there" but inside. The intimacy of her gaze evokes the concept of elsewhere or rather another world, a different time, another life.

In the essay "Pathologies", the narrator uses the theme of a journey through the world diminished to a tissular cancerous growth. Here Jamie forsakes the pre-conceived binary categories of "here" and "there", "natural" and "human", "expanse" and "diminutiveness" without exterior obsessions or absolute claims about the concept of travel. She brings to our attention questions of scale and perspective (Alexander 2015: 10), and reduces the topographical to the minuscule. Here, defamiliarization is a way of comprehending. The author refuses to accept an abridged understanding of the word "nature": "it's not primroses and otters" (Jamie 2012: 24). Obscured by the abstract concepts used by environmental academics or by metaphysical attempts to re-connect with nature, the word is often lost to misunderstanding, and we are doomed to an infinite search for what "nature" is. Its primary meaning, though, lies in our own body, the animal body, and in its intimate beauty as well as diseased deformations. In a histology lab, examining liver cells, Jamie uses a hawk's-eye view to scrutinize the ordered healthy liver tissue. She draws "a map of the familiar". The healthy and "ordered" liver tissue is a countryside with riverbanks and an estuary at low tide (Jamie 2012: 30). Without changing the object of her observation, she proposes to employ a different way of observing. Geographical metaphors relativise the prescriptive points of reference. In "Pathologies" the inside of the human body is being examined out of this body while its "owner" is waiting out there at the pathology ward for the results of the examination. Through this disorienting arrangement, the inside and outside are reversed and finally integrated. They coalesce to form a universal image of nature.

Apart from adopting geographical discourse to refer to parts of the human body, the effect of estrangement is achieved through the illusion of movement in which the geographical references of north and south indicate the transfer between healthy and deadly cancerous cells. This is "mapping" the cellular landscape through a microscope:

> Then we were swinging north, crossing the river, which was a vein rising into the liver from the intestine. On the river's north bank, we stopped and hovered over a different kind of place, densely-packed, hugger-mugger, all dark dots that seemed too busy for comfort. Frank [the doctor] didn't have to tell me that this was the tumour. (Jamie 2012: 31)

As Ashcroft explains, the defamiliarizing strategy constructs a place anew, redefining it for the observer. This reconstructing of the familiar stretches the limit of interpretative paths and brings new layers of meaning. But because the resulting description verges on the ultimate strangeness, it constructs a place whose representation is hardly possible because it evades definition. This, in turn, reveals the "epistemological powerlessness" of a travel writer, the narrator's own inability to explain the nature of being (Ashcroft 2009: 237). Readers witness this ineffectiveness at reaching for the truth. At the same time, observation seems the only accessible strategy in the infinite quest for answers.

When she examines the *Helicobacter pylori* infection, language and landscape conspire to provide the topography of the stomach lining. Jamie depicts a mock pastoral scene, in which the bacteria are "grazing". It is "the country beneath" filtered through "a gorgeous sapphire blue" (Jamie 2012: 33). Aesthetic perception, or rather the aesthetics of infection, occupies the central place in the passage. Seeing becomes a form of artistic expression. This is the art of looking. As in Shklovsky, perception which derives from estrangement, separated from automatization, becomes the source of experience (Crawford 1984: 210).

> An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it, its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it. (Shklovsky 1917: 5)

In the narrative Jamie uses the metaphor of movement to journey to "strange new shores. The nature within. Nature we'd rather do without" (Jamie 2012: 36). The defamiliarizing device offers a new vision of the human body which is reflected upon so intensely that it becomes a foreign strange shore. But later, out of the pathology lab, she drives home and engages with the outer world of the real river and tide. It makes us realize that what we customarily take for nature and landscape are only totemic versions of reality.

This motif of "inside" and "outside" nature recurs in *Sightlines* again in the essay "La Cueva", in which the narrator describes her visit to Cueva de los Murciélagos in Spanish Andalusia. The place is famous for its Palaeolithic drawings of animals, Neolithic artefacts and one of the largest bat colonies in the region. In the narrative Jamie explores our lost kinship with the animal world and our perennial human propensity to think in metaphors about the surrounding world. The technique of estrangement is again employed to expose our illusionary concepts of "nature".

In the course of the narrative, she follows the guide and "can pick up certain words: aqua, water, murcielagos, bats – a clutter of whom, like a scrunch of black pubic hair, hang from the roof above" (Jamie 2012: 165). This illustrates that early in the essay she uses the imagery of the inside of the human body. She moves through "the gallery of uncanny forms" and attempts to "map them onto things we know in the world outside". Again the meanings of "outside" and "inside" seem to collide and overlap:

> Now we're looking at stalagmites, by the soft lamplight. Some are seven or eight feet high, clotted, fatty shades, but hard and damp.

> They're like huge pathological specimens, the kind preserved in jars in anatomy museums, leached of colour. Perhaps that's what gives the cave its solemnity: it feels like we're doing something intimate, transgressive, which we can speak only about in whispers. We have entered a body, and are moving through its ducts and channels and sites of processes. The very chamber we stand in is streaked with iron-red; it's like the inside of a cranium, a mind-space, as though the cave were thinking us. (Jamie 2012: 166)

By estranging the description of the cave, Jamie delays our understanding of what the place is and offers new possibilities of creating meaning. The practice, therefore, mobilizes the reader's attention towards our pre-conceived ideas, evoking again the "the nature within" rather than without. The implied assertion is that the concept of "nature" might be just as well the construct of our culture in the same way as the concept of "wilderness" was inspired and nurtured by the Romantics. This argument, which casts suspicion on modern environmentalist movements that see "wilderness" as a measure of civilization and place man outside that wilderness, has been frequently repeated by literary critics, and retains its currency at present. The resulting dualistic vision of the binary opposition man/nature fails to recognize the human place in it (Cronon 1995: 11).

4. Conclusion

Drawing on Peter Hulme's concept of "deep mapping",[2] Jamie's narratives succeed in evoking a sense of place, and representing "what lies beneath as well as above" (Hulme 2009: 133). Jamie borrows from the layers of geology, topography, history, and memory, which all emanate with what oftentimes remains

[2] Hulme uses the subtitle of the 1991 *Prairy Erth (a deep map)* by American writer William Least Heat-Moon, who in his halted journey through Chase County, Kansas, successfully mingles self-discovery with a sense of place.

unspoken or unseen: the persisting stories of the past, the hidden tangible artefacts,the presence of ancestors, and the continuity of time, space, culture, and nature. The discovery of place is invariably tangled with inward-looking narratives to produce a "thickness" of description, to invoke Clifford Geertz's term. In her "deep mapping", travel is a mode of coexisting with the outer world, and mobility never reduces her writing to the theme of the journey alone. Nor does the attentiveness to place determine the narratives completely or eradicate the self. On the contrary, it emerges frequently to form an ethically involved observer who wonders at the multitude of questions the human race faces and the inadequacy of "only two possible answers: True or False" (Jamie 2005: 135).

Her narrative techniques, such as experimenting with literary synaesthesia or defamiliarization, develop what Neal Alexander (2015: 10) calls "an ethics of noticing". Its desired effect is to make "unseen landscapes" visible, and Jamie reaches it by halting and prolonging readers' comprehensions of what the described place and the natural world are or, at least seem to be. This strategy results in seeing us as part of nature and situating us within, not outside, the environment.

Finally, in *Findings* and *Sightlines* the scope of her engagement includes such themes as globalization, national identity and gender. In Jamie's writing they constitute the cobweb that links us to place and the writer herself is known to have made attempts to redraft and redefine her own work, refusing to be categorized or labeled as a "woman writer" or "Scottish writer". She is also among those contemporary Scottish writers who explore the possible meaning of "home" beyond questions of "Scottishness" or national loyalty. "Home" comes to indicate "good neighborhood", the coexistence of humans and their natural environment (Gairn 2008: 158-167).

Terry Gifford, too, indicates the power of the hybrid quality in Jamie's narratives, which cross the limiting label of "bioregional literature". Here "environment is culture, just as culture is the constructor of ecology". To illustrate the strata of mean-

ings inscribed by Scottish nature writers and poets onto the environment, Gifford explains:

> The image of a Sitka spruce, for example, represents a fine tree, a thick forest, an overgrowth of historic buildings, a loss of native speakers, an English colonization, a capitalist erasure of the short-eared owl, or new habitat for the crested tit—all emotionally charged representations that are deeply felt by different readers. (Gifford 2009: 871)

Emotive narratives are written by situated writers and for situated readers, who share a similar concern both regionally and globally. Frequently Jamie exposes our own illusions of what "natural" is or where exactly "nature" resides, prompting us to rethink our own position in the system. She indicates the points of intersection between our human projections and nonhuman world and exposes the moments in which we switch on an automatic mode of perception, a Romantic legacy. "Nature" is not to be treated as an escape from civilization, which, as the author notices in her observations, permeates even the most remote and inaccessible parts of the landscape. In *Findings*, facing plastic artefacts found on the shore of a small Outer Hebrides Island, she nullifies the virtues of durability. What keepsake will better preserve the trip to CeannIar, she asks, "a bleached whale scapula" or "a doll's head"? – both delivered by the ocean (Jamie 2005: 67).

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The demotic tongue of mateship in Australian Great War literature: The vernacular humourist

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Abstract

This paper looks at the demotic tongue of mateship in Australian Great War Literature as a theme of cognition and understanding in the literary texts and texts of culture. The language, like the Australian, was filled with character and a sense of the larrikin. It seemed irreverent at times, even rude in some circles, but it was much more than its immediate sound or inference; it was the natural verbal essence of the Australian mind – honest, loyal, dutiful and humorous. These characteristics are cornerstones of Australian mateship, a type of friendship that would be there beyond the bitter end, rival the love of a woman and even the protection of one's own life. For some Australians, poetry was merely an extension of this language, as language was merely an extension of friendship.

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the Australian use of humour and language in the setting of Great War poetry. It looks at the demotic tongue of mateship, specifically what is known as the Great Australian Adjective (bloody), along with several other examples of vernacular language, in Australian Great War Literature, and considers this by referring to the common language of the Australian poet from the time. It will consider the notion that Australian writers of the Great War era may have been misunderstood as a result of their language, leading to critical mistakes about a poem's literary worth, a poet's seriousness as a poet and a nation's literary value.

Keywords

demotic, vernacular, bloody, mateship, tmesis

Język potoczny w australijskiej literaturze I wojny światowej: humor i przyjaźń

Abstrakt

W niniejszym artykule poruszany jest aspekt języka potocznego australijskiej literatury I wojny światowej. W niektórych kręgach język potoczny w tym okresie sprawiał wrażenie braku taktu i uprzejmości, a jednak był przy tym naturalną ekspresją istoty australijskiego umysłu – była to mowa szczera i pełna humoru. Te szlachetne cechy, do których dołożyć należy jeszcze lojalność, są najważniejszymi elementami australijskiego „mateship", tego rodzaju przyjaźni, która istnieje ponad wszystko, rywalizuje z miłością kobiety, a nawet żąda poświęcenia własnego życia. Dla Australijczyków poezja była emanacją tego języka, i co się z tym wiąże, tak rozumianej przyjaźni.

Celem tego artykułu jest ukazanie kolorytu mowy potocznej australijskiej poezji I Wojny Światowej. Jednym z przykładów jest tutaj użycie „wielkiego australijskiego przymiotnika „bloody", który do czasów obecnych jest powszechnie nadużywanym przymiotnikiem w Australii. Brak zrozumienia dla sensu użycia języka potocznego w poezji tamtego okresu, prowadziło nierzadko do krytycznych błędów dotyczących oceny wartości literackiej wiersza, powagi twórcy jako poety i wartości społecznej utworu.

Słowa kluczowe

język potoczny, wernakularny, bloody, mateship, tmesis

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the Australian use of humour and language in the setting of Great War poetry, and in so doing, identify how misunderstandings about a culture

can arise. For this reason it will be important to look briefly at such notions as intended meaning and biographical criticism. The paper looks at the demotic tongue of mateship, specifically what is known as the Great Australian Adjective (*bloody*), along with several other examples of vernacular language, in Australian Great War Literature, and considers this by referring to the common language of the Australian poet from the time. Importantly, mateship may be defined as a type of friendship that would be there beyond the bitter end, rival the love of a woman and even override the protection of one's own life. While the so called Great Australian Adjective, bloody, is a word known in other countries, it was only known under the aforementioned title by Australians. This paper will consider the notion that Australian writers of the Great War era may have been misunderstood as a result of their language, leading to critical mistakes by the average reader about a poem's literary worth, a poet's seriousness as a poet and a nation's literary value. By including the poetry which appears here, it should become easier for the reader to recognise the poet's intended meaning as opposed to the average reader's assumed meaning. The close reading of these poems will provide the reader with a sense of the poet's cultural background and thus, in the context of the war and Australia at the time, it will become easier to recognise the poem's literary worth and the poet's seriousness as a poet. To this end, it will become easier to recognise the literary value of Australian Great War poetry.

This paper will track the following line of reasoning which demonstrates how an understanding of Australian Great War poetry brings the reader to recognise how Australian poets equated personal identity through the language they used. Language and humour are prone to misunderstandings when there is no access to the writer's cultural background. Further, humour has a place in serious literature, and for the Australian, it characterised him as the "subject" being spoken about. This subject, while humorous and irreverent, transcended the vulgar. But it requires broader understanding. The use of what

appears as non-sophisticated language was not specifically Australian, but it was how the Australian found personal identification. And finally, as is seen in much of the Australian Great War poetry canon, the demotic tongue is indicative of the Australian mateship of the time.

2. The misunderstanding: Language and humour

It may be an obvious statement to make that the words we use do not fully capture the meaning we wish to convey, and that the average reader should consider more than the word itself in order to understand the intended meaning of the text, and it is the intended meaning here which is important. If this knowledge is of no account, then once the poet has finished the writing process, the reader will have all they need to know, thus obtaining an assumed meaning. However, this gives rise to a grave misunderstanding for the readers of many Australian Great War poems. Without some knowledge of the poet's cultural baggage, the average reader will not understand the intended meaning, but rather obtain an assumed meaning. The assumed meaning, as opposed to the intended, may thus generate critical mistakes about a poem's literary worth, a poet's seriousness as a poet and a nation's literary value.

The problem may be similar to the juxtaposition between historical experience and historical intuition, where the past informs the historian as opposed to the historian shaping the past respectively. On one hand we have literary experience, where the poem is understood in its context (both historically and biographically), and on the other hand we have literary intuition, where the average reader imposes their own abstractions onto the text. But this intuition is unreliable at best and damaging at worst. It is unreliable in as much as it fails to convey the intended meaning, and damaging in as much as it helps form misconceptions about national identity.

What is needed is not an approach to this poetry which negates the relevance of the writer, but rather a biographical crit-

icism approach. The average reader will have a better appreciation of such poets as the Australian Oliver Hogue's or the Englishman Wilfred Owen's war poetry, for example, through biographical criticism as opposed to any form of criticism which lacks at least some knowledge of the poet's background.[1] However, the damage to national literary value may be somewhat more endemic to a misunderstanding of Australian vernacular wartime poetry than it is with the poetry of the Englishman, Wilfred Owen. Australian Great War poetry requires more than a mere understanding of words; it requires, at the very least, a cultural understanding which is sympathetic and an openness to look beyond the mere word.

The language, like the Australian, is filled with character and a sense of the larrikin.[2] It seems irreverent at times, even rude in some circles, but it is much more than its immediate sound or inference; it is the natural verbal essence of the Australian mind - honest, loyal, dutiful and humorous. These characteristics are cornerstones of Australian mateship as defined earlier. The egalitarianism of the Australian notion of calling a spade a spade was instinctively blind to the frail social conventions of "polite society". The larrikin poet, who sailed from Australia to Egypt and then marched to Gallipoli, through the Sinai Desert and the Western Front, saw nothing wrong in using his native vernacular language to convey his poetic thoughts about the war.

For some Australians, poetry is merely an extension of this language, as language is itself an extension of friendship, because we all recognise that actions speak louder than words. Actions, we might say, are in essence the true and universally readable literature of friendship – discernible by any nationali-

[1] Wilfred Owen is included here because, while he is English, he will be more readily recognisable to non-Australian readers than the Australian, Oliver Hogue.

[2] A larrikin may be commonly understood as a mischievous, uncultivated, rowdy but good hearted person, who acts with an apparent disregard for social or political conventions. However, the Australian larrikin is most essentially a good natured egalitarian who possesses a desire for a fair go and a laugh.

ty or language group. It was this action which cemented the bonds of mateship throughout the war for soldiers of all nationalities. Yet, even actions may be interpreted without proper access to context. Actions, like war poetry, are bound in the context of the intended meaning and historical experience, not assumed meaning and historical intuition. By recognising this distinction, the average reader will make more accurate assessments of the literature and reduce any misunderstandings of its language and humour.

3. Humour

Australian Great War poetry has many faces – faces not unlike those found in British or American war poetry, such as patriotism, sarcasm, anger, sorrow, regret, humour and so on. However, Australian Great War poetry is also filled with the demotic tongue. It often times speaks in a way that can only be described as the earthy language of the everyday bloke on the street; the egalitarian who knows that his freedom of mind is not limited by his freedom of speech. That is to say, that his words are not the whole part of him. Words paint only a small picture when removed from context. This language is in many ways an enigma, because it is in one sense basic and coarse, while in another sense it is highly refined and elevated. This, of course, is the crux of the problem, for the Australian demotic poet may be considered as basic and coarse because of his word choice, but his intended meaning gives the average reader of discernment a glance into the highly refined and elevated nature of his human character. While this may also apply to other nationalities, it is only the Australian experience we are concerned with here, especially when we consider the relatively short literary history of Australia as opposed to England.

The Australian poet and scholar, Christopher Brennan (1870-1932), writing during the Great War, claimed that a poem is not a way of saying something, but a mode of that something's being (Gray and Lehmann 1991: 3). For many Australi-

an poets, the "thing" here is mateship, and for the Australian, this is often presented in a way natural to the way average Australians speak to each other. The most prominent way is through humour. Mateship is a common theme in Australian demotic poetry, whether that theme is overt or underlying. Yet, Brennan's observation seems to identify that the intended meaning (the something's being) and not the assumed meaning (the way of saying something), is the important component to any poem and thus gives the poem its value and literary worth.

Professor David Daiches (1912-2005) states in his critical history of English literature: "The reintroduction of wit into serious poetry not only meant the revival of the pun as a serious poetic device, after its banishment from all but comic poetry for over two centuries, but also the realization that truly serious art transcends the vulgar and the everyday by including it, not by rejecting it" (Daiches 1994: 1126). The acknowledgement and use of vocabulary which was not considered intellectual, was part of the Australian approach to humour. Daiches held that this demotic language had re-emerged in literature at the beginning of the 20th century and that the true value of the poem transcended the base nature of the language the poet might use. To this end, Australian war-time poetry was to give the Australian a coping mechanism which was already bound up with his

Figure 1

For Gor'sake, stop laughing - this is serious

sense of self. We might call this the vernacular-humourist. The humour, which was bound in the language, vulgar and unintellectual as it may seem, gave the Australian a sense of home, safety and freedom from life's worries.

The cartoonist, Stan Cross (1888-1977), captured the Australian sense of laughing in the face of danger in his 1933 cartoon, "For gorsake! Stop laughing – this is serious." We see two Australian workmen hanging from the framework of a skyscraper, about to fall to their deaths. One is holding the steel beam and the other is holding onto his co-worker's pants, which have slid down his legs prompting them both to laugh at the stupidity of the situation. The one holding the beam says the famous line: "For gorsake! Stop laughing – this is serious." The irreverent usage of "gorsake", being indicative of the natural way of speaking in Australia, just as the way Australians would refer to the national anthem of England as the "gorsave", was all too common. While inherited from working class England, it was the way Australians spoke. However, the vernacular-humour was for the most part the driving force of the Australian's words.

The much loved Australian comic poet, C. J. Dennis (1876-1938), once said of his own verse that "slang is the illegitimate sister of poetry, and if an illegitimate relationship is the nearest I can get I am content". (McLaren 1981) Average Australians felt comfortable speaking in slang and abbreviation, for this was the common language of the street. As the term "demotic" implies, the common language is the language of the common people, and nothing more. For Dennis, language was everything. His use of the demotic tongue, with his particular Australian flavour, was so popular in Australia, that it was immortalised in the numerous comical books and poems he wrote. Such books as *The Sentimental Bloke* and its sequel *The*

Figure 2
C. J. Dennis

Moods of Ginger Mick, *Doreen*, *Digger Smith* and others, and the most wonderful and descriptive poem *The battle of the Wazzir*, were all overflowing with Dennis' prolific demotic tongue. One might call Dennis a genius of the Australian character. He was most certainly an Australian vernacular wordsmith of far-reaching humoristic virtuosity.

4. The great Australian adjective

In 1908, a national song competition was held to write the words for a new national anthem, and when C. J. Dennis submitted his text, the organisers thought they were getting something like the Marseillaise with its tremendous sense of patriotic fervour and zeal, but what they got instead was something called the *Austral-aise*. At first glance it may not seem so patriotic, at least, not in the same ways as the Marseillaise, but looking deeper into the context and the intended meaning, it is every bit as patriotic as the Marseillaise. The average reader, who may obtain an assumed meaning rather than understand the intended meaning, may consider Dennis' poem as nothing more than a joke; not to be taken as serious poetry because of the fact that in almost every line there appears the word *bloody*. Daiches would consider this word as nothing more than a literary device used by Dennis to arouse the natural humour of the average Australian; a linking device between the poet and the poet's cultural background which made the intended meaning more accessible to the Australian on the street. The only requirement here was that the reader understand that the use of the word bloody was not intended as a vulgarity, like some schoolchild who writes such words on the lavatory wall, but was intended rather to evoke the common man's intellect by use of the demotic tongue. To this end, Dennis merely made the high culture of poetry more accessible to the average man who would not usually have access to, or inclination to read the musings of the sometimes esoteric concerns of fine literature. Dennis' *The Austral-aise* must stand as

the quintessential example of this demotic tongue and its usage. The following is the first stanza and verse of the seven stanza poem (Dennis 1918: 84-86).

Fellers of Australier,
Blokes an' coves an' coots,
Shift yer ---- carcases,
Move yer ---- boots.
Gird yer ---- loins up,
Get yer ---- gun,
Set the ---- enermy
An' watch the ----[3] run.
Chorus:
Get a ---- move on,
Have some ---- sense.
Learn the ---- art of
Self de- ---- -fence.

Though Dennis wrote it as a joke, it became incredibly popular and was used as a recruitment song for the 1914-1918 war. It is filled with dutiful humour. Dennis' use in almost every line of the Great Australian Adjective, that is to say *bloody*, was to strike a common chord with Australians. It was the most common of words in Australia, and could be used for almost anything adjectival – even adverbial at times. It had both positive and negative uses; something could be *bloody bonza* or *bloody bleak*. Australians then and now would say of any inclement weather – *bloody weather*. It was then and is now a case of *bloody this and bloody that*. Nothing was or is sacrosanct when it came to the use of the Great Australian Adjective, and Dennis was able to let it flow from his pen as though the word was somehow part of the ink itself. As noted earlier, the word bloody was used in other English-speaking countries, but it may benefit us here to realise that it was only in Australia that this word was given some form of grammatical, or terminological status.

[3] *buggers* – the last gap here is the noun *bugger*, not the adjective *bloody*.

We may also observe the use of tmesis in this poem. That is to say, the separating of a word with another word. Used only informally, it provides poetic colour and rhythm that could give the Australian poet a certain flavour unobtainable by the conventional poet. The Australian writer John O'Grady (1907-1981) provides some good examples of tmesis in his 1959 poem on the subject; *The Integrated Adjective*. We can see some examples from O'Grady's poem here: *forty-bloody-seven*, *good e-bloody-nough*, *kanga-bloody-roos*, *Tumba-bloody-rumba*[4] and *me-bloody-self*. In Dennis' poem earlier, we saw several examples: *Australi-bloody-ar*, *Ad-bloody-vance*, *Spifler-bloody-cate*, *Enthusi-bloody-asm*, *kingdom-bloody-come*, *Pos-bloody-terity* and *Self de-bloody-fence*.

The use of tmesis is a very common thing in the demotic tongue of the Australian vernacular-humourist. Most Australians have the natural tendency to call a spade a bloody shovel as it is simply the average Australian's way. However, it will invariably lead the listener to obtain an assumed meaning rather than understand the intended meaning. This, we might recognise as the cultural inflective which may not be translated without some understanding of the speaker's background. However, for the purposes of this paper, we might restrict our study to the poem in its written form.

Figure 3
W. T. Goodge

Interestingly, W. T. Goodge *The Colonel* (1862-1909) wrote a poem in 1898 called "——!" (*The Great Australian Adjective!*), and it shone the first literary light on the use of this word. Its printed use certainly indicates its common verbal use in the street by the average Australian, but it may be considered as the literary inspiration for C. J. Dennis' *Australaise*, even though Dennis would have heard it used regularly in the streets of Auburn (where

[4] Tumbarumba is a town in New South Wales, south-west of Sydney, Australia.

he was born), Adelaide, Broken Hill, Melbourne and Sydney among others (where he worked). Yet Goodge's poem gave Australian literature one of its first glimpses of a growing national identity; an identity that could easily be misunderstood by those who assumed meaning rather than understood the intended meaning. The first stanza of four goes as follows (Goodge 1972: 115):

> The sunburnt —— stockman stood
> And, in a dismal —— mood,
> Apostrophised his —— cuddy;
> The —— nag's no —— good,
> He couldn't earn his —— food——
> A regular —— brumby,
> ——!"

We might also recognise the use of this Great Australian Adjective in another very popular song from the time: *The Ragtime Army*. There are several versions of this song. It was originally an English song and the Australians decided to make their own version. The first stanza is the most famous. While it has an element of patriotism about it, the song also has a strong element of boredom, which was often the daily fare of the soldier in the trench. This boredom led to an Australian trench-song which goes as follows: "We're here because we're here, because we're here because we're here".[5] (Nicholas 47) However, *The Ragtime Army* also demonstrated the humorous mateship of the Australians in both life and respectful remembrance after death. What follows is this anonymous song, sung by most Australians at one time or another during the war (Graham 2004: 52-53).

> We are the Ragtime Army
> The A-N-Z-A-C,
> We cannot shoot, we won't salute,

[5] A marching song to the tune of Auld Lang Syne. This monotonous ditty aptly expressed the frustration and frequent futility of the war.

What bloody good are we?
And when we get to Berlin,
The Kaiser he will say,
'Hoch! Hoch! Mein Gott!'
What a bloody rotten lot
To get six bob a day.[6]

We are the only heroes
Who stormed the Dardanelles,
And when we get to Berlin
They'll say, 'What bloody sells'.
You boast and skite from morn to night
And think you're very brave,
But the men who really did the job
Are dead and in their graves.

Another word often used in place of bloody was blooming. In a poem by Tom Skeyhill (1895-1932), the blind Australian soldier poet who briefly lost his sight while serving at Gallipoli and went on to write a famous book called *Sergeant York and The Great War* (later made into a 1941 film starring Gary Cooper), we see this word used in place of bloody. Skeyhill's poetry is filled with the demotic tongue, as he wanted to capture the mood of the average Australian in the trench.

Figure 4
Tom Skeyhill

The poem is called "Me Brother what Stayed at 'ome", and it is written in the way many Australians spoke at the time. Dropping the "g" was only one of the common spoken forms, while dropping the first letter was indicative of the Australian's natural fondness of the Cockney way of speaking which Austral-

[6] Of note, the term ANZAC was the designated acronym for Australian New Zealand Army Corps, and six bob was about 60 cents, which was good money during the war.

ians inherited in some ways – even developing an Australian form of Cockney slang.

Most commonly, Australians used the pronoun *me* in place of *my*, as is seen in the title, as well as *what* in place of *that* or *who*. *Off* became *orf* and *Australia* became *Stralia*. Skeyhill's use of these forms identify his written attachment to the spoken word. He wrote as the average Australian spoke, and in so doing, he demonstrated the musicality of the Australian phrase as it was spoken, albeit inherited from the English working-class. The language then lent itself to the lyricism of the Australian way of speaking. The first stanza of Skeyhill's poem, written in May of 1915 at Cape Helles, Gallipoli, shows that Australians considered their fellow countrymen as brothers, and the fact that some had not come to fight alongside their brothers at war was unnatural and frustrating (Skeyhill 1915: 20-24).

I'm pullin' orf me colours
And slingin' me Webb away.
I'm goin' back to Cairo,
To draw me bloomin' pay.
I'm fed up with bein' a soldier,
So 'elp me bob, I am—
Of chewin' mouldy biscuits
And eatin' bread an' jam.
I'm sick of fightin' Turkeys
Out on me bloomin' own,
When I thinks of 'im in 'Stralia—
Me Brother Wot Stayed at 'Ome.

To see this style of writing at its best, I highly recommend reading C.J. Dennis' *The Songs of the Sentimental Bloke* and *The Moods of Ginger Mick*, however, this comes with a warning, because it is quite a difficult read and no dictionary will help, even though Dennis included a valuable glossary at the end of the *Sentimental Bloke*. It is pure slanguage from arguably Australia's greatest vernacular-humourist.

5. A general use of the demotic – mateship

However, Skeyhill's *Brother what stayed at 'ome* was outweighed by the value of mateship. The much loved Australian poet, Henry Lawson (1867-1922), said in a poem he wrote in 1914 that "No matter what a mate may do, / A mate can do no wrong!" (Lawson 1916: 111-112) which was the prevailing attitude in Australia. Mateship was the consensual locus of the interlocutor exchange. It was the place where anything was acceptable and everything was safe. As Lawson had said, "A mate can do no wrong". The demotic tongue was naturally understood by the mate, who understood the intended meaning, looking past the mere words being used. For the stranger, that is to say, someone who did not know the speaking mates, or did not know something about their vernacular background, the best they could hope for was to obtain an assumed meaning. Without some knowledge of the interlocutory mates, the stranger will struggle with intended meaning.

In a poem by Australian-born Edward Dyson (1865–1931), called "Billjim", we observe that Lawson's "mateship" was the driving force behind all Australians at war. But we also see the use of the demotic tongue in Dyson's poem. Certain grammatical anomalies, which we may ascribe to the wonderful poetic tool, poet's privilege, may be observed throughout. The poem's title was the name given to all Australians during the Great War. It was the most normal thing in the world; where there was one Australian, there was his mate beside him, so, where there was Bill, there was Jim, hence Billjim. All Australian soldiers during the Great War were referred to as Billjim, and where there were two or more together, they were Billjims. The following is the first and last stanzas of the eight stanza poem: (Dyson 1919: 21-22).

Figure 5
Edward Dyson

Down to it is Plugger Bill,
Lyin' crumpled, white 'n' still.
Me 'n' him
Chips in when the scrap begins,
Carin' nothin' for our skins,
Chi-iked as the 'Eavenly Twins—
Bill 'n' Jim.

Mate o' mine, yiv stayed it through.
Hard luck, Bill—for me 'n' you
Hard 'n' grim.
They have got me Cobber true,
But I'm stickin' tight ez glue. . . .
Bill, there's one who'll plug for two—
It is Jim!

Dyson's "Billjim" serves as a classic example of the demotic tongue of mateship. The two soldiers Bill and Jim were forever by each other's side, and this was the most natural of things. Dyson's Billjim stands in stark contrast to Skeyhill's "Me Brother What Stayed at 'ome". While Skeyhill's brother was a shirker, Skeyhill demonstrated the unnaturalness by becoming fed up with the war. Because his brother was not there with him, the war was intolerable and unacceptable. The true loss was the loss of his brother; an end of mateship. But Dyson's Billjim identifies a rather different loss. Dyson recognises that loss of life is not loss of mateship, as he ends his poem with "there's one who'll plug for two", ensuring that Jim will go on living and striving for the both of them. Again, we may see that Jim's actions speak louder than his mere words. Dyson's intended meaning shows the true essence of mateship here. The mateship never dies, even though the interlocutory mateship, in a purely physical way, does. Dyson's Billjim and Skeyhill's Brother, through the demotic tongue, demonstrate the characteristics of mateship in their individual types of loss.

6. Conclusion

We may note then, that many Australian poets of the Great War wrote in a language style which was commonly heard on the lips of their fellow countrymen. They wrote as they spoke. It was as natural as breathing. In many cases, this demotic language gave the impression of an illiterate caveman, yet, when we look deeper at the poetry of these men, we see that the poetry captures perfectly the essence of the average man in the street, who had thoughts and dreams, valued mateship above all and spoke in a vernacular-humour.

The poet's intended meaning is sometimes misunderstood by the average reader's assumed meaning, and because of this, the reader may generate critical mistakes about the poem's literary worth and the poet's seriousness as a poet. Of course, this will not necessarily apply to formal and rigorous analysis, but rather to the average reader. However, the main danger is that the average reader may make incorrect assumptions about a nation's literary value. As Daiches asserted, serious poetry transcends the vulgar by including it, not by rejecting it, and to this end, the demotic tongue of Australian mateship must be understood through a biographical criticism approach as opposed to any approach which does not take into account the author's background.

So it may seem that the understanding of the deeper poem may be hidden to some extent by the misunderstanding of the cultural language. In many ways, we might see this way of speech as a language in itself; a language, like the people, which is inspired by good humour and mateship, and a people who may sometimes be misunderstood as less serious than others.

It does not matter so much that the Australian vernacular had its origins from working-class England to a large degree, but it does matter that Australians found self-identification in their use of it, and that through this usage, Australian vernacular poets may seem less serious than their English coun-

terparts. This, as is demonstrated by the poetry included in this paper, gives good reason to recognise the importance of intended meaning and biographical criticism.

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Figure 1: Gamble, Brett (2006, December 31). *For Gor'sake, stop laughing – this is serious: A look into Australian comic art.* Available at <http://forgorsake.blogspot.com/>. Accessed 10.07.2017.

Figure 2: Middlemiss, Perry (2011, December 24*). Great Australian Author #57 – C. J. Dennis*. Available at <http://www.middlemiss.org/matilda/2011/12/>. Accessed 10.07.2017.

Figure 3: Joanne (NA). *William Thomas Goodge Bio*. Available at <https://mypoeticside.com/poets/william-thomas-goodge-poems#block-bio>. Accessed 10.07.2017.

Figure 4: *National Archives of Australia – Discovering Anzacs* (2014). Tom Skeyhill. Available at <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/gallery/23180>. Accessed 10.07.2017.

Figure 5: High Beach (2017). *A Dyson Bibliography*. Available at <http://www.hibeach.net/dysonbks.html>. Accessed 10.07.2017.

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The strange case of Francis Dolarhyde and the Dragon: Alternating narrative points of view and the source of knowledge in Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the narrative voice employed by Thomas Harris in *Red Dragon* as a source of knowledge about the fictional universe, more particularly about the main villain, Francis Dolarhyde. Confronting important epistemological notions (knowledge, justification and their sources) with literary theoretical concepts (narrative voice and points of view), I analyse alternating modes of representation. Harris' narrator shifts between three modes: the quasi-perceptual one – sense-based, rich in descriptive elements; the quasi-introspective narration carried out from a close subjective angle, using free indirect speech or stream of consciousness; and the testimonial mode – telling (rather than showing) the story through exposition resting on the principle of cause and effect. Employing a vast array of inter-textual pragmatics, the narrative remains ambiguous. In consequence, any proposition about Dolarhyde can be empirically and rationally challenged and all propositional knowledge regarding the character is merely fragmentary.

Keywords

narrative voice and point of view, Thomas Harris, epistemology, empiricism, rationalism, cognition

Francis Dolarhyde i Smok: zmienny punkt narracji a źródło wiedzy w powieści Thomasa Harrisa *Czerwony smok*

Abstrakt

Artykuł ten poświęcony jest analizie sposobu narracji zastosowanej przez Thomasa Harrisa w *Czerwonym smoku* przy założeniu, że stanowi ona źródło wiedzy o świecie przedstawionym, a w szczególności dostarcza informacji o jednym z głównych bohaterów – Francisie Dollarhyde. Analiza zmiennego punktu prezentacji świata przedstawionego prowadzona jest poprzez nałożenie na siebie kluczowych pojęć epistemologicznych (wiedza, jej uzasadnienie czy ich źródła) oraz terminów literackich (perspektywy i głos narracji). Narrator Harrisa oscyluje pomiędzy trzema trybami: pseudo-percepcyjnym – bogatym w elementy opisowe pokazywaniem wydarzeń poprzez odniesienia do poznania zmysłowego; pseudo-introspekcyjnym – ukazującym świat przedstawiony z bliskiej subiektywnej perspektywy, wykorzystującym mowę pozornie zależną i strumień świadomości; oraz w trybie oświadczenia – wspartego na zasadzie skutku i przyczyny opowiadania o wydarzeniach (a nie ich pokazywania). Używając szerokiego wachlarza wewnątrztekstowych środków językowych narracja ta buduje bardzo wieloznaczny obraz rzeczywistości przedstawionej. W konsekwencji zastosowanego sposobu narracji jakikolwiek sąd logiczny będący konkluzją czytelniczą można podważyć a, co za tym idzie, główny bohater wymyka się poznaniu w epistemologicznym tego słowa znaczeniu.

Słowa kluczowe

narracja, Thomas Harris, epistemologia, empiryzm, racjonalizm, poznanie

> There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience? […] But although all our cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience.
>
> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998: 136)

1. Introduction

The credibility of narration is considered in literary studies even if one brackets the existence of the presented world: How does the reader gain a warranted belief as to what is true in a wholly invented reality? Can the author make the reader base his/her judgment on, for instance, perception if there is nothing to sight? I hold that the key role in resolving these epistemological dilemmas is taken by narration: it is the question of what is represented (if at all representable) as well as how it is represented. My inquiry is into the latter.

For the purpose of this analysis, I have selected a few epistemological issues, namely knowledge, justification, and their sources. I intend to confront them with the theory of narrative modes. These two pillars – one stemming from philosophy and one from literary theory – form the ground for my analysis of the narration developed by Thomas Harris in *Red Dragon*. Reading Harris, I argue that any conclusion regarding his main protagonist, Francis Dolarhyde, remains open to doubt for at least two reasons. First, the ambiguous nature of Harris' representation – at times sense, at times reason-based, and the shifting point of view – leads his reader to conflicting, yet warranted, propositions that can be challenged either rational-

ly or empirically. Second, as the complexity of human nature is impossible to express in full, any representation of Dolarhyde's character can be only fragmentary. Consequently, the propositional knowledge of Harris' protagonist is scarce, leaving room mainly for assumptions.

2. The epistemic concepts of knowledge and justification

Epistemology is the study of necessary and sufficient conditions of propositional knowledge – the knowledge of facts – illustrated by the schema "*S* knows that *p*" (Steup 1998: 2-3). As such, epistemology conceives of knowledge as justified true belief, with justification as one of its defining conditions: "*S* knows that i only if (i) *p* is true; (ii) *S* believes that *p*; and (iii) *S* is justified in believing that *p*" (Steup 1998: 2).[1] Different epistemological schools, however, diverge in their view of how to understand the concept and how justification is to perform its epistemic role.

In a traditional approach, justification rests on the subject's reason: a belief is justified when it is rational or reasonable. As a traditionalist theory, evidentialism argues that "a belief is justified to the degree it fits *S*'s [subject's] evidence" (Steup 2014: §1.1). Both claims outline justification as subjective: in the former, the rational analysis of the belief in question is carried out from the subject's point of view (Steup 2014: §1.1); the latter defines the possession of evidence as the subject's mental state representing a proposition as true (Steup 2014: §2.2). By contrast, in the non-traditional view called reliabilism, a belief is justified when it "has a high objective probability of truth and therefore, if true, is not true merely because of luck" (Steup 2014: §1.1). As such, reliabilism holds that a justified belief originates in a cognitive process that is reliable by virtue of being objective (Steup 2014: §1.1, 2.5).

[1] *S* stands here for the *subject* that has the knowledge, and *p* for the *proposition* in question. Steup gives the following example of *p*: "The opossum is a nocturnal animal" (1998: 2).

The first contention between evidentialism and reliabilism is thus underlined by the binary subjective/objective. In the epistemological context, which is more specialized than that of everyday use, these notions refer to the subject that has the knowledge and the object of the knowledge respectively. As such, subjective signifies: based on internal processes justifying the knowledge in question and taking place in the subject's mind (Steup 2014: §1.1, 2.2, 2.3), while objective means: directed towards the object of knowledge and based on external factors (Steup 2014: §2.3, 2.5). Interestingly, narrative voices are methodized along the same objectivity/subjectivity axis.

With all the differences between evidentialism and reliabilism, there is one significant matter both camps agree on – the cognitive processes recognized as sources of evidence. Some of the processes are of empirical origin – perception, introspection, memory, and intuition; others are non-empirical – testimony (or authority) and reason (Steup 1998: 10-11). However, while evidentialism typically argues that evidence is recognized internally as a justification factor, that is, on reflection, reliabilism poses that justification rests on the external reliability of the cognitive processes in which a belief originates. These processes are reliable because they properly probabilify a belief (Steup 2014: §2.1, 2.2). To link the issue with narration, its modes are methodized along two axes – of objectivity and limitation – producing such categories as subjective, objective, omniscient or limited narrator. The system serves to determine the narrator's reliability or, using epistemological jargon, whether the narrator's account properly probabilifies the reader's belief regarding the represented reality.

3. Is narration a testimonial or perceptual source of knowledge?

Narration, the telling of a story, is the substance of literature. The rules of literary communication, narrative strategies, and ways of shaping a fictional universe have attracted theorists'

attention since Plato and Aristotle; more recently narrative tools have been explored by structuralism and narratology. The narrator, "a linguistically indicated, textually projected and readerly constructed function, slot or category whose occupant need not be thought of in any terms but those of a communicative role" (Margolin 2014: §2), holds the central place in the inquiry into the production of narrative discourse.
If one takes narration to be evidence on the basis of which one comes to know the fictional reality, what kind of source does is qualify as? Literary theory frequently utilizes the vocabulary used by empiricists alluding to the use of the senses, prevailingly to sight. Cognitively-oriented narratologists, for instance, hold that the narrated world and narrator stem from the junction of the reader's cognitive processes and individual textual data rather than being inherent to the text.[2] Their scholarly focus is on the mental faculties and dispositions that provide readers with grounds for narrative experience. In consequence, cognitive narratology sees a literary text as "capable of creating in the reader's mind the *representational illusion of observing* an ongoing process of narrative communication in which a more or less personalized narrator plays a key role" (Margolin 2014: §3, emphasis mine). In a similar vein, in literary theory the act of reading is often considered in terms of experiencing a text. Wolfgang Iser (1974) argues that in the process of reading one ideates the space represented in the text, that is, creates a mental image from what is outlined by the words (given elements surrounded by numerous blanks). Inspired by the work of Roman Ingarden, he perceives reading as a process of concretization. Moreover, Percy Lubbock (1960) uses the terms "reader" and "spectator" interchangeably.

As such, a work of fiction can become an object of the reader's experience. Its reception may rest on cognitive processes. Yet reading it does not qualify as an empirical source of knowledge about fictional reality, since it simply lacks the directness of experience: one is always outside of the fictional

[2] See Fludernik (2003).

universe, becoming familiar not with the reality, but with its representation – an account of an invented universe. Therefore it can be said that the reader acquires knowledge about the fictional world through a kind of testimony called narration. As a source of knowledge, testimony differs from perception, inception, memory or reason as having no cognitive faculty of its own (Steup 2014: §4.5). In other words, if a belief rests on the testimony of another, it is based on this person's direct experience: "[T]o acquire knowledge of *p* through testimony is to come to know that *p* on the basis of someone's saying that *p*" (Steup 2014: §4.5). Thomas Reid suggests that one accepts testimonial sources as reliable unless one has any special contrary reasons not to do so (qtd. in Steup 2014: §4.5). Applying this logic, I hold that a story conveyed by a narrator qualifies as "saying that *p*", that is, as a testimony – a very reliable source of knowledge about the fictional universe, unless one has reason to believe otherwise. Yet, by the means of showing rather than telling, the narrator is capable of deluding the reader into thinking that he/she is quasi-experiencing the fictional world, making imagination another kind of perception.

To sum up, as a source of knowledge, narration equates with testimony, even when it comes in an empirical disguise; it provides the reader with justification for what I would call a deluded belief, a true belief about a world that, by its very nature, is an illusion. Showing the fictional reality through the characters' senses gives this testimony the air of an indirect empirical source. To illustrate my assumption, I continue to analyse the narration mode employed by Harris.

4. Harris' narrative voice: General overview

Harris' narrator is a rather puzzling meaning-creation strategy. Straightforward at first sight, a single highest-level voice produces the whole third-person past-tense narrative, mingling the modes of showing and telling, mediating and reporting. Its point of view constantly changes: from presenting one charac-

ter's thoughts the narrator moves to look over another protagonist's shoulder. Proving the voice limited rather than omniscient, each perspective is marked by a different degree of intimacy: the narrator is privy to both the perceptions and the introspections of the three main characters – Francis Dolarhyde (the serial killer); his girlfriend, Reba McClane; Will Graham (an ex-FBI agent invited to participate in the manhunt). The remaining protagonists are sketchier, which is no surprise, as every narrative is necessarily a selection. Also the distance at which one "observes" the events changes violently from a close perspective to what Lubbock calls a "scenic" or "panoramic" presentation (1960: 67).

Harris' novel provides no linguistic pragmatics to individuate the narrator: there is no deictics that would embed the voice in the fictional time-space, no indication of any particular beliefs or communicative agenda; subjective semantics pointing to a concrete mindset and narratorial comments are lacking. Additionally, the third-person past-tense mode impersonalizes the voice even further, since, as Uri Margolin writes, "the past tense is not related to any particular speech situation, but is more aspectual, merely indicative of the narrated events already having taken place" (2014: §3.2.2). All things considered, the voice seems neutral initially; however, having read the whole novel, one cannot unequivocally point to either narratorial neutrality or its lack. Also, it is not until he/she reaches the last passage that the reader realizes the extent of the limitations to the manner of presentation. To illustrate the above-mentioned features of Harris' narrative, I move on to a close reading of selected excerpts from *Red Dragon*.

5. Quasi-perceptional narrative mode

A comparison of two passages describing a fire provides an insight into Harris' technique of showing the fictional universe through varied perceptions. The first fragment is delivered

from Reba's perspective with the sensual limitations distinctive of a blind person:

> She heard a match struck, smelled sulfur, heard a whoosh. Heat in the room. Smoke. Fire. […] Smoke now and the crackle of flames. […] She felt heat on her arms and face. Out. She stepped on legs, stumbled choking into the foot of the bed. (2002: 420)

The claustrophobic atmosphere and close perspective serve to convey a blind person's perception. Reba cannot spot objects at a distance; she can only recognize the presence of things at close range when they affect her sense of smell or when she comes into contact with them. Hence Harris shows the scene through: (1) olfactory data – sulfur and smoke; (2) auditory information conveyed through onomatopoeic expressions – a whoosh, the crackle; (3) the choice of appropriate state verbs – hear, smell, feel – or of verbs expressing movement from the angle of Reba's bodily-kinesthetic awareness – step, stumble; and finally (4) the change in temperature – she feels heat on her skin.

One more characteristic can be observed in all the passages representing Reba's perspective – a radical reduction of visually descriptive elements affecting the linguistic balance. Verbs in these excerpts outnumber other parts of speech. Interestingly, when attempting to define the descriptive mode in fiction, Janusz Sławiński points to what he sees as the only common function of descriptive elements: including the spatial parameter in the semantics of the message (1978: 17). Consequently, as he poses, descriptiveness is a semantic tendency rather than a form of communication (1978: 17). Considering the corpus of examples Sławiński analyses in another article, "O opisie" ["Of Description"], it is obvious that his understanding of the term spatial agrees with western ocularcentrism; spatial is, in his view, dominated by the visual (1981).[3] Howev-

[3] In "O opisie", Sławiński defines description by its contrast with storytelling. While the latter serves to develop a plot, the former is a pause in the account of events. Sławiński's examples contain predominantly graphic ele-

er, Harris' technique challenges Sławiński's claim of the primarily optic quality of description. Reduced as they are, descriptive elements nevertheless appear, stripped of visual references to convey Reba's spatial awareness, which is limited by her impairment, as in the following excerpt:

> She felt the van rock as [Dolarhyde] got out. Her door opened. It was a long step down from the van. She bumped into him lightly. It was like bumping into a tree. *He was much heavier, more solid than she would have judged from his voice and his footfalls. Solid and light on his feet.* (2001: 303, emphasis mine)

The last two sentences are purely descriptive: they give an account of Dolarhyde's physique but through senses other than sight. Nevertheless there is a three-dimensional (spatial, physical) image of Dolarhyde emerging from this passage that the reader can visualize. In consequence, Harris' narrative demonstrates how the spatial consists equally in the non-visual and the visual, broadening the meaning of this term established earlier by Sławiński.

Let us now return to the comparison of the two excerpts which present a fire. At the beginning of the next chapter (merely two pages after the first passage quoted), the same fire is described as follows:

> They saw the woman then, silhouetted black against the fire, saw her as she heard them and raised her arms to them.

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ments: observable details rich in adjectives (or even verbs) referring to the reader's visual experience, such as drops of sweat glistening on a protagonist' forehead (1981: 123-124). Furthermore, when expounding on one of the semantic models of lexical configurations typical for the descriptive function, Sławiński identifies the model as utilizing vocabulary with meaning that relates the craft of writing to the ability to perceive or spot (*spostrzeganie*), to recognize or discern (*rozpoznawanie*), to interpret the visible (*interpretowanie widzianego*), and to order the perceptual data (*porządkowanie danych percepcyjnych*) (1981: 130). His meaning in this is obviously metaphorical, and grows out of the inspiration of Jauss and Iser; yet the intersection of writing/reading (the literary communication) and visual perception is made explicit, connecting his findings, again, with ocularcentric attitudes.

> And then the great fire blasted upward, outward, burning beams and window frames describing slow high arcs into the night sky, the blazing van rocked over on its side, orange tracery of the burning trees suddenly blown out and dark. […]
> The woman was facedown in the road. Crawford and Graham and the deputies out, running past her as the fire rained in the road, some running past her with their weapons drawn.
> Crawford took Reba from a deputy batting sparks from her hair.
> He held her arms, face close to hers, red in the firelight. (2002: 423)

In this passage Harris conveys the simultaneousness of events by frequent reference to the sense of sight. Thus, one can derive the image of the scene from: (1) dramatic visual contrast – black against the fire, beams of fire shooting into the night sky; (2) a change of light – orange tracery of the burning trees suddenly blown out and dark; (3) observed movement – Reba raises her arms, people run past her, the fire rains; (4) vocabulary with strong visual connotations – colors (black, orange, red), dark, silhouetted, fire, beams, blazing, arcs, sparks, firelight. All the mentioned linguistic means constitute descriptive elements as defined by Sławiński. First, their purpose is to complement the unfolding drama (1981: 119). Second, owing to their distinctively pictorial quality the fire is made manifest; it emerges within the represented reality because it has been described, not merely reported on (1981: 121). Furthermore, the semantic mode appeals to the reader's visual experience (1981: 123-124). Interwoven with the account of the plot developments, these elements form neither distinguishable uniform passages, nor independent descriptive sentences; they are scattered across a storytelling excerpt. Sławiński terms such elements "the germs of descriptive mode" (zawiązki wypowiedzi deskryptywnej) (1981: 123) or "germinal description" (opis zawiązkowy) (1981: 124). Due to the shift in narrative point of view between two varying perceptions observed in *Red Dragon*, it becomes evident that in Harris' narrative these germs of descriptive mode acquire an additional function.

Apart from complementing the plot and stimulating the process of ideation, they serve to give the reader a quasi-perceptual experience of the text, an illusion of direct absorption of the represented universe through varied sensibilities (of a blind and a non-blind person).

To further stimulate the experience, Harris's narrator also changes the distance at which the scene is shown. Explaining the differing effects of close and scenic perspectives, Lubbock seems to compare the reader in the former situation to a witness or onlooker, while in the latter instance reading equates to a bird's-eye view observation:

> Are we placed before a particular scene, an occasion, at a certain selected hour in the lives of these people whose fortunes are to be followed? Or are we surveying their lives from a height [...] – sweeping their history with a wide range of vision and absorbing a general effect? (1960: 66)

Contrasting the two passages on fire discussed in this paragraph, one instantly grasps the radical change in both narrative voice and the point of view: from a close-up, the narration zooms out; it shifts from a subjective to an objective voice; from a personal, almost intimate perspective to that of a non-personal observer; or, as Lubbock notes, from close-range participation the narration moves to observing the scene in detachment from a safe height. However, the contrast in Harris' novel is not always that stark. Most frequently, it is a perceptual change from one character to another, occurring on the chapter basis or from line to line, as in the following excerpt:

> The street was empty. Most of the houses were dark. He carried her to the van. Ralph Mandy's feet stuck out of the shrubbery into the yard. Dolarhyde didn't bother with him anymore.
> She woke on the ride. She was on her side, her cheek in the dusty carpet of the van, transmission whine loud in her ear. (2002: 408-9)

The first part presents Francis Dolarhyde's point of view, rich in visuals, only to shift to Reba with the next cut. That is immediately seen in the choice of details referring exclusively to the senses of touch and hearing, and to her bodily awareness.

To sum up this section, Harris's narrator uses a variety of means to maintain a textually projected illusion of participation in or perception of the unfolding events in the reader's mind. This technique serves to epistemize (justify and make non-accidental) the reader's beliefs about the fictional world formed in the process of reading.

6. Perceptual seemings and quasi-introspective mode in narration

Discussing crime fiction, particularly the case of *Red Dragon*, Wendy Lasser (1995) examines the varying impact the genre exerts on the reader through narrative discourse. She contrasts two narrative modes: the "perspective of the 'eye'", closely resembling the quasi-perceptual narrative technique I discuss above, and the "perspective of the 'I'" – a narration style that "forces us, lures us, invites us to identify with the murderer" (1995: 55). In Lesser's view the (implied) reader accepts such an invitation without hesitation (1995: 55). Moreover, his/her readiness to form a bond with the villain in the story is presupposed by the text: "Sometimes this identification is deplored or disguised or unwilled or unconscious; sometimes it is brazenly signaled by having the murderer be the work's narrator. But whatever the technique, the presumption of identification is crucial to the story, and to its effect on us" (Lesser 1995: 51).

In *Red Dragon* the identification with the murderer is unwilled and disguised. The way to it is paved by the illusion of experiencing the fictional reality directly; yet it is not until the reader becomes privy to Dolarhyde's introspection – examination of his own thoughts and emotions – that the bond is formed. This section of my discussion is devoted to a consider-

ation of the narrative instances employing the quasi-introspective style and their epistemic impact on the reader. However, before moving to the analysis, it is necessary to explain the main protagonist, in particular the discrepancies between his different personas: *Dolarhyde* and the *Dragon*. Except for one instance, Harris always refers to his main protagonists by his surname – Dolarhyde – which echoes, also in the spelling, the character from Stevenson's novella. Yet here, Dolarhyde seems to represent the humane side: neither all good nor entirely bad, he falls in love, hopes for a normal life, has doubts, makes efforts to free himself from the Dragon. Dolarhyde inspires the reader's sympathy: born with a cleft palate, rejected by his mother soon afterwards, raised by his abusive grandmother, he has lived the life of an outsider – full of humiliation, deprived of affection.

By contrast, Harris uses the label the Dragon sporadically. The Dragon represents the homicidal alter ego of the main protagonist. Talked about rather than a participant in the events, he is featured as a physical character only in one scene, which is conveyed from the perspective of a blindfolded victim. The fictional reality is never presented through the Dragon's senses or thoughts and consequently, he remains a puzzle. Even mentions of the details of his appearance are scarce. In the majority of scenes which include him, he is only audible, not visible. His intimidating, often offensive words addressed to Dolarhyde and written in block letters signify his otherness and controlling nature, as in the following passage:

> Dolarhyde was lifting, straining, pumping more weight than he had ever lifted.
> […]
> Up. Two hundred and eighty pounds from the floor to his chest in one heave. Now over his head.
> "WHOM ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?"
> Startled by the voice he nearly dropped the weight, swayed beneath it. (2002: 356)

Dolarhyde is surprised by the Dragon's presence. It is clear, then, he takes the Dragon's persona to be a separate entity whose coming he cannot predict. On the other hand, the reader can assume that both voices are projected by Dolarhyde, for the Dragon's voice affects Dolarhyde's throat: "It seemed to come from behind the sweatshirt, but its rasp and volume hurt his throat" (2002: 356). The passage reveals Dolarhyde's perceptual seeming – an instance in which the world appears to him for what it is not, a perceptual false experience (Steup 2014: §4.1). The fact that Dolarhyde cannot introspectively recognize auditory hallucinations leads the reader to the conclusion (a "justified belief") that he probably suffers from a mental disorder.

The scene of his visit to the Brooklyn Museum under the false name of Crane seems crucial for understanding Dolarhyde's psyche:

> Paula Harper realized he wasn't following and turned around.
> He was rigid before a niche in the wall of portraits.
> She came back to him and saw what he was staring at.
> "That's a Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington," she said.
> No, it wasn't. (2002: 380-1)

The passage starts with neutral/objective third-person observation but ends in a subjective mode. The reader turns to Dolarhyde's point of view only to realize that he/she is reading the account of yet another perceptual seeming. The narration continues to present Dolarhyde's distorted perception and ends with elements of his stream of consciousness:

> Washington with his hooded eyes and bad false teeth stared out of the frame. My God he looked like Grandmother. Dolarhyde felt like a child with a rubber knife.
> "Mr. Crane, are you okay?"
> Answer or blow it all. Get past this. *My God, man, that's so sweeeet.* YOU ARE THE DIRTIEST . . . No. (2002: 381)

The last elements – Reba's words in italics and the Dragon's in block letters, both without quotation marks – are frequently repeated in Dolarhyde's thoughts, making these haunting instances come close to a stream of consciousness. From this point on, the narrative voice takes on certain features of a first-person mode:

> "No. Go ahead. I'm coming."
> And you are not going to cut me, Grandmother. God damn you, I'd kill you if you weren't already dead. Already dead. Already dead. Grandmother was already dead! Dead now, dead for always. My God, man that's so sweeeet. (2002: 381)

One can instantly recognize Reba's words and notice that this time the font is regular: it is an instance of internal monologue breaking into a stream of consciousness that further proves the main protagonist's troubled mental state. The narrator frequently adopts Dolarhyde's perspective, mingling the quasi-perceptual mode with quasi-introspection. Hence, the narration delivered from his point of view frequently breaks into free indirect speech:

> In six days, if he could wait that long, he would kill Reba McCane. He made a sudden high sound through his nose.
> Maybe the Dragon would be willing to take the Shermans first and wait another moon.
> No he wouldn't. (2002: 363)

Dolarhyde's thoughts run to Reba and the night they spent together in almost every following scene. The instances conveying his growing attachment to her through free indirect speech become what seems to be reliable evidence of Dolarhyde's humanness – introspective recognition of falling in love. In epistemology, introspection enjoys a special epistemic status:

> Compared with perception, [it] seems to be privileged by the virtue of being error-prone. […] [W]hen it comes to introspection, there is no difference between appearance and reality; therefore introspec-

> tive seemings are necessarily successful introspection. […] Hence, there is an idea that introspective experience of *p* eliminates all possible doubt as to whether p is true. (Steup 2014: §4.2)

Moreover, introspection possesses "an epistemic kind of directness that cannot be found in perception" and thus provides the subject with a firm foundation for his/her beliefs about external reality (2014: §4.2). As there is nothing to imagine (it is all appearances, no reality), the reader can take quasi-introspective narration at face value.

Coming back to Dolarhyde, he can fail to recognize that what he sees or hears is, in fact, a case of perceptual seeming, but how can he be wrong about his emotions? It seems impossible. If Dolarhyde cannot be wrong, neither can the reader when he/she makes a crucial assumption: Dolarhyde is not a cold-blooded psychopath, but a mentally disturbed individual struggling to break free from his evil self. The bond formed in quasi-introspective instances allows the reader to conclude: Dolarhyde is the equivalent of Stevenson's Jekyll, while the Dragon must his diabolical alter ego.

7. Testimonial narrative mode

When Sławiński defines the descriptive mode of narration, he does so by contrasting description with storytelling. In his view, the former is unpredictable because purely summative and logic-less. Consequently, its composition can be changed without harming the whole. The latter, on the other hand, has a logic, as Sławiński refers to it, an algorithm–the elements already revealed implicate those yet to come. Linear in its nature, storytelling is a construction necessarily fixed by the chain of cause and effect (1981: 122). In this way Sławiński points to the convention once valued in literary realism, and still influential in narration – the plausibility of represented developments achieved through maintaining the reciprocal relationship between cause and effect.

Thinking in terms of motive or deliberation in the criminal justice system bears a close affinity to this convention. It is no accident, then, that cause and effect play a significant role in *Red Dragon*: their interconnection becomes the foundation of all the FBI's actions. As such, the prevailingly non-descriptive, expositional passages in Harris, concerned exclusively with the investigation, always allude to rationality. What follows is a shift in the mode of representation: from empirical to rational recognition of facts; from a posteriori sense-based depiction of the concrete to a priori conceptual presentation achieved through appealing to the faculty of reason. Paradoxically, however, rather than letting the reader interpret the events using his/her own faculty of reason, expositions supply the reader with ready-made inferences supported by logical links between assumptions and conclusions. The connection is made by applying laws of classical thought aided by the principle of cause and effect. The expositional passages are devoid of quasi-perceptual narration and, consequently, amount to a purely testimonial mode.

The embeddedness of those narrative instances in the principle of cause and effect discussed by Sławiński can be observed in Crawford's explanation of how Dolarhyde staged his suicide in front of Reba. According to Crawford, Dolarhyde's motive was to convince her and the FBI of his ultimate incapacitation and to gain advantage over law enforcement agencies. The Dolarhyde with whom the reader is familiar – the man in love, torn by internal conflict, clinging to life – is missing from the account. He is replaced by an individual rationally devising the meticulous details of a cold-blooded crime. Crawford reports to his colleague, Will Graham:

> "You know the routine about the key hanging around [Dolarhyde's] neck – that was to make sure [Reba] felt the body. So she could tell us she certainly did feel a body. All, right, it's this way and that way. 'I can't stand to see you burn,' he says and he blows Lang's head off with a twelve-gauge.

> "Land was perfect. He didn't have any teeth anyway. Maybe Dolarhyde knew the maxillary arch survives fires a lot of times – who knows what he knew? Anyway, Land didn't have any maxillary arch after Dolarhyde got through with him. He shot the head off Lang's body and he must have tripped a chair or something for the thud of the body falling. He'd hung the key around Lang's neck.
> "Now Reba's scrambling around looking for the key. Dollarhyde's in the corner watching. Her ears are ringing from the shotgun. She won't hear his little noises. (2002: 450)

Is Crawford's exposition equally believable as the quasi-perceptual part? It is, particularly since the majority of details overlap with the quasi-perceptual account given from Reba's perspective. Reason, guided by the principle of cause and effect, allows him to fill the blanks with hypotheses – "maybe Dolarhyde knew […] who knows what he knew?", "he must have tripped a chair" – and to substitute opinions for justified true beliefs (knowledge). A conclusion based on a conceptualization of the villain that functions in the society must follow: such a carefully devised and executed scheme can only be developed by a psychopath. Has the Dragon dominated Dolarhyde or has the humane side never existed?

Shortly before the climax the narrator reveals that the Dolarhyde persona is merely an act: "He still looked and sounded like Francis Dolarhyde – the Dragon was a very good actor; he played Dolarhyde very well" (2014: 408). The reader has the right to feel manipulated, especially since it is difficult to shake off completely the image of a conflicted, psychologically disturbed individual, despite this rather straightforward statement. One can understand the purpose of this elaborate deception to drive away the police and FBI, but why use it towards the reader? One could reasonably argue that Dolarhyde could aim at obtaining the reader's sympathy and trust; yet it is not Dolarhyde who narrates the story. What motives could the narrator possibly have to deceive the reader? It is impossible to find any inter-textual pragmatics. In the absence of any

explanation, should the reader assume that no such motive has ever existed? And if so, should the reader take the narrator's testimony to be a reliable piece of evidence? Answering these questions utilizes the faculty of reason and calls into question all the quasi-empirical evidence provided by the narrator.

8. Conclusion

To summarize, Harris' alternating narrative voice conveys the fictional universe by the means of showing it in a quasi-empirical mode through different narrative voices and points of view. Additionally, the narration is supplemented by expositions made in a testimonial mode resting on the chain of cause and effect but often contradicting the sense-based findings. The mixture of styles creates a rather ambiguous source of justification. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant posits that although cognition begins with experience, it must necessarily be complemented with reason (1998: 136). As if following this recommendation, Harris' narrative provides the reader with both kinds of sources, failing twice to be a justifiable source of true beliefs, especially when it comes to the main protagonist, Francis Dolarhyde. In a world so presented, all knowledge is fragmentary: it never adds up to an irrefutable whole and the closure of the novel gives rise to conflicting, though seemingly justified, propositions that can be either empirically or rationally challenged.

Consequently, the murderer remains a conundrum. In terms of the nomenclature proposed by Aristotle in Categories, his substance escapes cognition. Having read through Harris' narration, one fails to form any justified belief about Francis Dolarhyde. One merely becomes acquainted with what Aristotle calls accidents – the manifest and thus representable features. However, in epistemic terms, the state of "being acquainted with" does not qualify as propositional knowledge.

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Theatre as a means of countering resurgent nationalism and racism in the 21st century: Seth Baumrin's work in Europe

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Abstract

The paper describes how two European theatre groups, Subpoetics and Gershom, led by an American director, Seth Baumrin, use artistic tools to bring about political and social change. Their creative projects are aimed at combating nationalism and racism, while building a more open and more humane society, based on the dignity and self-respect of the individual, which are considered a necessary precondition of respect for others. The article testifies to the transformative power of the workshops and performances that Baumrin and his associates offer the European public, and the author supports her observations with well-established theories from the area of theatre studies and psychology. As up until now no other academic papers have been published on the subject, a large share of the information included in this article comes from primary sources such as interviews, informal conversations and direct observation.

Key words

performance, workshop, physical theatre, xenophobia, transformation

Teatr jako środek oporu wobec odradzającego się w XXI wieku nacjonalizmu i rasizmu: działalność Setha Baumrina w Europie

Abstrakt

Artykuł opisuje pracę dwóch kolektywów teatralnych działających w Europie, a prowadzonych przez amerykańskiego reżysera Setha Baumrina, skupiając się na wykorzystaniu przez nich narzędzi artystycznych w celu promowania politycznych i społecznych zmian. Projekty, o których tu mowa, nakierowane są na zwalczanie nacjonalizmu i rasizmu oraz działania mające prowadzić do budowy bardziej otwartego i humanitarnego społeczeństwa, którego podstawą jest godność i szacunek jednostki do samej siebie, traktowane jako warunek wykształcenia się szacunku do innych. Artykuł analizuje transformacyjny potencjał warsztatów i performance teatralnych oferowanych przez Baumrina i jego współpracowników europejskiej publice, podpierając się przy tym ugruntowanymi teoriami z dziedziny studiów teatralnych oraz psychologii. Do tej pory nie powstały żadne artykuły naukowe traktujące o poruszanym tu temacie; z tego też względu większość informacji pochodzi z wywiadów i bezpośredniej obserwacji.

Słowa kluczowe

performance, warsztaty, teatr fizyczny, ksenofobia, przemiana

1. Introduction

From its beginnings dating back to ancient Greece, theatre has been a tool of political and social influence, an active voice in the important debates of its day. The relationship of theatre and politics throughout the history of Western civilization has been analysed rigorously by a number of highly-regarded theatre researchers, among them Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) and Hans Thies-Lehmann (2012). This relationship is holding strong, with such renowned contemporary directors as Peter

Brooks, Eugenio Barba or Christoph Schlingensief[1] engaging in heated discussions on nationalism, racism and inter/multiculturalism that are crucial to understanding the present political conflicts of the Western world. Still, theatre artists are not politicians, which is why they use different methods of influence, relying on "indirectness and deceleration, on a reflecting immersion in political topics" (Thies-Lehmann 2010:184). In this article I intend to show how Seth Baumrin, an American director presently working in Europe, uses the tools offered by theatre to combat nationalism, racism and xenophobia, in an effort to contribute to building a more open and more humane society. As Baumrin's European projects and his methodology were developed in the recent years, no major analysis concerning the subject has been published so far. My hope is to fill this gap and provide information on the socially valuable and artistically compelling initiatives headed by Seth Baumrin to a larger circle of readers interested in theatre studies and theatre applications.

2. From America to Europe: Seth Baumrin's trajectory and mission

Before 2014 Seth Baumrin carried out his professional activity mainly in the United States. Born in Baltimore, Maryland, in the 80s Baumrin participated in a series of trainings organized in New York by the famous Polish theatre director, Jerzy Grotowski. These, as well as the opportunity to practice under the supervision of Grotowski's associate, Jacques Chwat, proved to be a turning point for Baumrin,[2] who decided to dedicate his life to the stage. By 2018 he had directed over 60 performances/plays, and this impressive practical experience has been accompanied by theoretical reflection – Baumrin au-

[1] Sadly, deceased in 2010.

[2] Most information on Baumrin's professional trajectory and his work based on a series of interviews carried out by the author in the period from Jan to June 2017.

thored numerous articles and two books on the subject.[3] In 2011, in recognition of his artistic and intellectual effort, Baumrin was awarded the position of the Chair of the Communication and Theatre Arts Department at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, which he holds to this day (July 2018).

A descendant of Ukrainian Jews who fled persecution during World War II and an ardent follower of Eastern European theatre masters,[4] Baumrin has always felt attracted to the old continent, collaborating with many European artists and visiting Poland and Ukraine for research. Ultimately, in 2014, his connection with Europe evolved into a firm bond, when his first European-based, but in fact intercontinental artists' collective, *Subpoetics*, was born.

Subpoetics originated in France, where the director met the other founding members of the group: Madeleine Bongard (Switzerland) and Eva Goldenberg (France). Later, more performers of Jamaican, Haitian, French, Austrian and Iranian origin, joined, and the first performance *Port d'Alger 1962* was presented to the public. It was built on a series of photographs from the Algerian Revolution which provided a point of departure towards constructing some physical actions. The theatre Seth Baumrin directs is largely based on improvisation, and as the actors evolved and the members of the group changed, the group felt a need to rename the performance.

The show's later title, *Nomansland*, perfectly reflects the idea underlying the whole project: to quote Vernice Miller, one of the co-creators of the performance, it is "to make theatre a weapon to fight ethnic stereotypes resulting from xenophobia". Baumrin, as a professor at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, a direct witness of the World Trade Centre attack in 2001, and last but not least, a member of

[3] Full description of Baumrin's professional trajectory available at: <http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/sites/default/files/faculty/cv/Seth%20Baumrin%20CV%2011417_0.pdf>.

[4] Apart from Grotowski, Baumrin mentions among his important inspirations such names as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold or Vakhtangov.

a long-persecuted diaspora, demonstrates both in his private and professional life a particular concern for social justice, and views art as a powerful tool in creating social change.

How may this change be brought about? By the physical co-presence[5] and exchange of life energy. Baumrin, trained by Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, great masters of physical theatre, tries to build an intimate connection between the performers and the spectators, creating such waves and bursts of emotion and energy that the audience cannot help but be engulfed and swept away by them. Turning to quantum physics, the director analyses the process of energy exchange between the performers and the spectators in a paper entitled: "Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces: On the Value of Actor and Theatre Group Autonomy in the 21st Century (Jerzy Grotowski at the Fifth Circle Railway Station)". At the beginning of the text he insists:

> For a theatre group to function effectively (autonomously or as part of a larger cultural program, i.e. a national, commercial, or academic theatre), two forces must co-exist and both cohere in the group: A centripetal force that nurtures actors individually, collectively, holistically, as wholly human, which protects the group, keeping it together. Concurrently, a centrifugal force that permits the actor and the group to transmit their work product to the public. That transmission should have such an impact that the performance's waves of energy, which also may be named the idea of theatre, reach beyond the immediate public to modulate within the greater cultural body – society. (upcoming Baumrin 2017: 1)

As the Subpoetics actors come from different cultural backgrounds and speak different languages, the audience, always situated close to the centre of action (Baumrin avoids traditional space distribution, with a clear division between the stage and the stalls), is submerged in a dense multisensory

[5] This aspect of a performance is analysed in detail by Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, chapter "Shared bodies, shared spaces: the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators" (2008:38-74).

and multicultural experience, during which gushes of foreign, unintelligible words, melodies and very intense emotions cross their bodies. Realizing the ideal of a theatre gathering as a temporal community of strangers, Baumrin creates in his postdramatic[6] performances intimate connections between the bodies and the senses of those present. It is difficult to imagine that after experiencing the humanity of the other so directly, after sharing in the performers' profound physical authenticity whose primordial power is attenuated by the spellbinding rhythmicity of movements and sounds, one could continue to reject another human being because of that otherness, be it their colour, race or nationality.[7]

3. A stranger (but not quite) in Ukraine: Project Gershom

The same technique is employed in the work of another European group led by Baumrin, the Ukrainian collective *Gershom* (again, it is important to mention that the boundaries between the two groups tend to be fluid). Its members are mainly former students (2017 graduates) of the Faculty of Culture and Arts of the Ivan Franko National University of L'viv. Baumrin met them for the first time in 2015 during one of his research trips to Ukraine, when he was asked to lead an actor training for this group. The cooperation turned out to be so satisfactory to both parties that it became permanent, ultimately resulting in an ambitious and successful project of opening a new theatre space in the artistic city of L'viv, where Gershom found its abode.

The name resonates with Baumrin's deepest concerns – according to the Bible Gershom means "a foreigner in a foreign land" (Ex 18:3). On the other hand, Daniel Hillel explains that

[6] As defined by Hans Thies-Lehmann (2010).

[7] However, it must be admitted that such an experience may not be welcomed enthusiastically by everyone – in December 2016 in Opole I witnessed a situation in which a member of the audience behaved in a clearly defiant or even abusive way towards the performers. Still, hostile or otherwise disturbing reactions to Subpoetics' performances are rare, the contrary being the norm.

> [t]he name Gershom has multiple connotations: *ger* means stranger, *garish* means "drive away", and *sham* means "over there". So, in a single name, Moses manifested his initial condition as one driven away from his native country and made to live as a stranger in a faraway land. (Hillel 2006:108)

And another Bible commentator, James K. Bruckner suggests that the wordplay "could also imply the irony that he [Moses] is at home as a stranger in Midian" (2012: § 3). This connects further with an admonition uttered by God in Ex 22:2 "Do not mistreat a foreigner or oppress him, for you were foreigners[8] in Egypt". Similarly, when asked to elucidate his choice of the company name, as well as the meaning of the title of the group's first public performance, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (2016), Baumrin stated:

> We are all strangers even in our country. So I look to the young people – my students in New York, my students here – they are going to inherit the world with environmental problems, with a crazy economy. So that word – even if it comes from a Bible story, I think it really speaks to experiencing the 21st century. I'm a father and I want to be perfect to my children, but I would not want to be dishonest to my children about the world that they are going into. When we push somebody to the outside because we don`t understand them it's very painful. (Gienda 2017)

This is why Baumrin points to the fight against xenophobia as an umbrella goal of his recent artistic projects. However, for this fight to be effective, it has to take place on a visceral, intuitive level, as confirmed by recent discoveries in moral psychology (Haidt 2013). To the chagrin of many, human beings once again turn out to be fundamentally emotional (as opposed to rational) creatures who may react better to indirect ways of persuasion than to rational arguments. In this context, art may definitely be treated as a powerful tool of persua-

[8] Modern English translations of the Bible use here alternately the nouns "aliens", "strangers" or "foreigners".

sion, especially when employed by such dedicated and talented actors as the members of Subpoetics and Gerhsom.

The author of the present article had an opportunity to witness the immediate impact of Baumrin's theatre and the reactions it elicited in the audience when attending a conjoint performance of the two groups in Opole in December 2016. Most of the spectators, used to a more traditional and, in a way, conservative repertoire, were visibly moved and some congratulated Baumrin warmly for the unusual, but (in their opinion) very enriching experience.

4. The texts: A choir conducted by Walt Whitman

Although it is to be assumed that most of the spectators in Poland and other countries where Gershom and Subpoetics have toured (Ukraine, Slovenia, France) are not able to decipher the words spoken on stage, their choice is far from accidental, even if the actors are allowed a far-reaching autonomy in that field. Neither in *Nomansland* nor in *A Stranger in a Strange Land* is it possible to find a linear argument based on a pre-prepared, pre-recorded story. Still, as confirmed by the author of the present article's observations of the rehearsals,[9] the actors' work is based on a coherent narrative whose existence may not be easily detectable for the spectators. What reaches their ears is a mixture of mostly unintelligible texts and songs, which nevertheless captivate their attention through enchanting rhythms and heart-stirring harmonies. Analysing the textual level of the above-mentioned performances in detail would require a separate article; at this point I mention only a few representative examples of the texts and authors Baumrin and his associates felt inspired by.

A prominent figure recurring throughout a large share of Baumrin's work is Walt Whitman. A great admirer of humanity, nature and life at large, this American poet is a perfect ex-

[9] I had an opportunity to participate in Subpoetics' and Gershom's rehearsals in December 2016 in Poland and in January 2017 in Ukraine.

ample of what Erich Fromm calls the biophilic attitude, an attitude promoting the growth and happiness of all living beings.[10] Baumrin, who himself seems deeply concerned with the well-being of people in his community and beyond, finds Whitman's poetry irresistible enough to employ it in all of his European shows (at least at some stage of creation – as the performance evolves, the selection of texts tends to change). Thus, for example, in *Stranger in a Strange Land* we could hear Vira Tsikhatska, a Ukrainian actress, recite a fragment of the "Song at Sunset":

> I sing the Equalities, modern or old,
> I sing the endless finales of things;
> I say Nature continues – Glory continues;
> I praise with electric voice;
> For I do not see one imperfection in the universe;
> And I do not see one cause or result lamentable at last
> in the universe. (Whitman 2009:179)

Nevertheless, Whitman is only one of a long list of poets, musicians and political activists evoked in the performances. In *Stranger…*, Baumrin introduced texts by such renowned advocates of human dignity as Mahatma Ghandi or Malcolm X. He also took care to include pieces by prominent representatives of ethnic minorities in the United States, such as Gwendolyn Brooks and Sonia Sanchez. Spectators who are able to understand the original texts without translation and are well-versed in American culture will instantly recognize Baumrin's ambition to establish a dialogue with, and continue the tradition of, the civil rights movement.

[10] Defined in Erich Fromm's *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (2010).

5. How to make a truly democratic theatre: Subpoetics methodology

Still, it would be incorrect to assume that the performances are dominated by explicit references to the politics of inclusiveness or the fight for human rights. Just as Hans Thies-Lehmann, Baumrin seems to believe that

> [t]heatre is not political because of its content, although it is possible, but it should be made in a political way. That is essential. It should be made in a democratic spirit of cooperation and mutual acceptance, leaving aside a hierarchical style and power relations. (in Soto 2017[11])

Hence Baumrin's decision to let the performers shape the show to a large extent, which includes their freedom to pick and change texts in accordance with their preferences and needs. As a consequence, apart from texts and authors promoting human rights and democracy, both in Subpoetics' and Gershom's performances we can hear a myriad of seemingly disconnected voices – fragments of Jack Kerouac's "The Brooklyn Bridge Blues" are intertwined with the biblical "Song of Songs", a Russian war song "Temnaya Noch" ("The Dark Night") is followed by Peter Handke's famous poem "Als das Kind Kind war" ("When the child was a child"), and a superb interpretation of Yuriy Izdryk's "A Prayer" ("Молитва") contrasts with Bob Marley's hit "Redemption Song". However, the final impression is that all of these voices converge into a consistent, although not easily decipherable, story. Talking about the *Subpoetics Methodology*, which later gave its name to the first European theatre collective led by Baumrin, the director explains how this confluence is achieved:

> [...] in Subpoetics the actor is like three trains traveling on a single track, all in the same direction and at the same time. When this is achieved, the story and theme emerge, adding the fourth

[11] Translation by E. Topolska.

> train to the track. The actor is the railroad track. The first train is the actor's body and voice – his/her physical self. The second train consists of the chosen texts that are spoken and sung by the actor. The third train is the actor's inner reality in which s/he clarifies and justifies how the first two trains can both be on the same track. Since the performer's actions emerge from arduous physical and vocal training that lasts for hours every day, the actors are at first disconnected from their texts. In the third step, the actor matches the actions and voices to the texts by telling him/herself stories – secret stories unknown to others. The way in which the secret stories connect the texts to the actor's physical actions are the subpoetics. (Baumrin in Glej Theatre pamphlet, November 2016)

The director insists that the performers should find their truth, connecting their body and the text via a story that is real and meaningful to them, as only in this way, by combining different individual and at the same time convincing stories, a spectacular global effect can be achieved. When interweaving their particular stories to create a whole, the performers and the director construct a more traditional dramatic structure with a beginning, a middle, and an end. That does not mean, however, establishing predictable cause-effect relationships and relying on a linear narrative. Rather, it means finding artistic and emotional logic that allows the spectators to enter a state of non-rational flow,[12] in which all languages and races come together in harmony.

6. Opole: Theatre and pedagogy

There seems to exist a general consensus among the artists collaborating with Baumrin that a part of their activity should involve the education of younger generations. This goal is realized through workshops accompanying the performances, as

[12] In her famous book *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics* (2008) Fischer-Lichte uses the term "enchantment" to describe this state of "deeper experience of being in the world and becoming newly conscious of that being" (Carlosn in Fischer-Lichte 2008).

well as through the project Gershom, created for and by students.

One such workshop took place at the end of November 2016 at the University of Opole, Poland. It was led by a Subpoetics member, Sylvain Paolini, with a little help from the author of this article, which provided an opportunity to observe this kind of work as a direct witness. Approximately 15 students participated in the workshop (the number varied on different days), training for 12 days in a row. During that time Paolini and I were able to notice gradual changes in the students, both on the individual level, as well as in the group dynamics. The goal of most physical theatre exercises (or actor training in general) is to find and deepen the consciousness of one's body, which in turn allows one to move and express one's self in a more authentic, but at the same time controlled and self-confident way. Just as actors have to be able to speak in front of an audience, those participating in actor training naturally acquire more courage to expose themselves and take a stance in public, as they speak from the sense of integrity, feeling more in control, stronger, being able to stand their ground and fend off possible attacks. During the Opole workshop Paolini and I had a great opportunity to observe these young people, some of them very shy and inhibited, break their barriers, overcome their complexes and every day become bolder, braver and visibly more satisfied with themselves, as they were letting their personalities and their innate creative potential unfold. It must be admitted that not everyone was ready and willing to undergo such changes – some of the participants abandoned the workshop precisely because of being encouraged to face their inhibitions; still, the general tendency was that of enthusiasm and growth.

It was uplifting to see how, within a couple of days, strong bonds developed between these perfect strangers, as only a few participants had been acquainted prior to coming to the workshop. They established very specific bonds, built on elements

typical of rituals[13] – physical proximity, touch, very close cooperation, repetition of movements and facial expressions of all the members, and finally trust, as many exercises required closing one's eyes and letting another person guide. Nowadays, when the problem of general emotional starvation caused, among other factors, by the disintegration of small communities[14] is becoming a major concern, the value of such emotional bonds, which are inherent in theatre groups and workshops, is not to be underestimated.[15]

7. Theatre as an incubator of respect for the life of another human being

The question remains, however, how is all of this supposed to protect us from hatred and violence ensuing from nationalist and racist ideologies?

In order to provide an answer, let us dwell for a while on another question: what is the profile of the people who embrace such ideologies?

Erich Fromm, one of the leading 20th century researchers of the relationships between people's psychological mechanisms and authoritarianism, dedicated a large share of his work to identifying the psychological background that makes people susceptible to developing hatred towards other ethnic groups. In his 1964 book, "The Heart of Man", Fromm propos-

[13] Ritual understood in the same way as the founder of theatre studies in Germany, Max Hermann, defined it – "the prevalence of bodily acts and the coming into being of a community as a result" (Fischer-Lichte 2005: 28).

[14] On the importance of small communities and face-to face contact that is fading away in our digitalized world, taking a serious toll on our mental and physical health see "The Village Effect: Why Face-to-Face Contact Matters" by Susan Pinker (2015).

[15] It must be admitted, just as Eugenio Barba does in his letter to Richard Schechner, that tight communities are at risk of evolving into tribes that exclude or even become hostile towards others; still, "When fundamentalist movements cannot sustain themselves by force, when they are restricted to the use of cultural weapons, they become substantially innocuous" (Barba 1995: 143).

es to conceptualize nationalism as group narcissism. He explains:

> For those who are economically and culturally poor, narcissistic pride in belonging to the group is the only – and often a very effective – source of satisfaction. Precisely because life is not "interesting" to them [the people], and does not offer them possibilities for developing interests, they develop an extreme form of narcissism. Good examples of this phenomenon in recent years are the racial narcissism which existed in Hitler's Germany, and which is found in the American South today. In both instances the core of the racial superiority feeling was, and still is, the lower middle class; this backward class, which in Germany as well as in the American South, has been economically and culturally deprived, without a realistic hope of changing its situation., has only one satisfaction: the inflated image of itself as the most admirable group in the world, and of being superior to another racial group that is singled out as inferior. The member of such a backward group feels: "Even though I am poor and uncultured I am somebody important because I belong to the most admirable group in the world – I am white" or "I am an Aryan". (Fromm 2010: 76-77)

In the same book Fromm affirms that impotent people, deprived of the possibilities to transcend themselves in a positive way, will necessarily develop negative compensatory mechanisms, of which violence is the most common.

How can active involvement with theatre, such as attending a workshop, help oppose such tendencies? Actor training provides participants with tools that help them become more self-confident, enterprising and creative. It helps them discover their latent potential and gives them an impulse to pursue their individual dreams instead of drowning in despair or hiding behind a comfortable but illusory shield of group narcissism – nationalism.

During the workshops offered by Subpoetics and Gershom, one has a chance to discover inside oneself a stronger, talented and more dignified human being, a human being that does not need to dissolve his or her identity in a powerful gang in

order not to feel disdained by the rest of the society for his or her lack of resources (of all kinds), but who is accepted and cherished within a group of equals as a valuable member capable not only of receiving, but also of giving.[16] Most forms of theatre training let the participant enlarge their mental and emotional horizons through unearthing or creating new layers and capacities that shape our identity.[17] The richer personalities we have, the more mature and emotionally intelligent we are, the more inclined we feel to perceive ourselves as deserving of respect and love. And as Fromm affirms, love and respect for oneself and one's life is a necessary precondition of respect for the lives of others (Fromm 2010).

Still, the transformative power of theatre does not necessarily require active participation; performances, especially performances as intense as those offered by Gershom and Subpoetics, in essence are events that impose the need for some form of participation, in this case sensual and emotional. Baumrin and his associates prepare for the audience "a liminal experience which can lead to transformations or which is in itself already experienced as transformative" (Fischer-Lichte 2008:190). The desired transformation is rejecting xenophobia; however, it is not encouraged by admonishing the public from the position of authority, but through "an aesthetic of responsibility (response-ability) […] [requiring] a mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images" (Thies-Lehmann 2010:185-6). In such a situation, uncon-

[16] Which is crucial for well-being, as Fromm assures us: "Giving is the highest expression of potency. In the very act of giving, I experience my strength, my wealth, my power. This experience of heightened vitality and potency fills me with joy. I experience myself as overflowing, spending, alive, hence as joyous. Giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation, but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness" (Fromm 1995: 20).

[17] This transformative influence on the psyche allows the theatre to be a very efficient means of therapy. Cf. Jennings (1998) or Jean-Pierre Klein, the founder of Institut National d'Expression, de Création, d'Art et Thérapie in Paris, who affirms in his book *Theatre and Dramatherapy*: "Dramatherapy in inchoative – it incites movement, difference, alterity of the I; it unchains a process, sets fire to the fuse of an explosive […]" (Klein 2017: 129; trans. from Spanish E. Topolska).

scious processes are triggered. And these processes are the arts' main area of operation.

8. Conclusions

Obviously, theatre is not the only way of preventing people from falling into the snares of nationalism, racism or other types of inter-group hatred that closed societies[18] are based on. However, the author of this article does claim that, if used adequately, it may be a very efficient means of protection. The authoritarian regimes know this only too well, going to great lengths to destroy this method of developing stronger, more independent and more active citizens that would question the group-think and search for constructive, instead of destructive, forms of expression of their human potential.[19] At this moment, when an augmenting wave of nationalism and racism is rolling through the Western democracies, and when urgent global problems require of us that we leave behind the outdated[20] 18th century notions of state and race, initiatives like Subpoetics and Gershom, opposing xenophobia and enhancing empathy, courage, community-building, the individual's creative potential, and, last but not least, celebrating the in-

[18] I am drawing here on the distinction introduced by Karl Popper between a closed and open society, with the latter "aiming at humaneness and reasonableness at equality and freedom" (Popper 2011: XXXV).

[19] Personal experience of one of the Subpoetics members, Alireza Daryanavard, is a good illustration of this thesis. Born in 1995 in Iran, Daryanavard was persecuted, imprisoned and mutilated by the Iranian regime (prison guards broke both of his legs) as a consequence of his engagement with dance and actor training/experimentation. Finally, in 2014 he was granted asylum by the Austrian government (source: interview by the author).

[20] And clearly artificial, as explained already in 1937 by José Ortega y Gasset *The Revolt of the Masses*: "More than anything else, a State is a project of doing something and a program of cooperation. People are called to do something together. It is not about blood relationships, linguistic unity, territorial unity or contiguity of residence. It is nothing material, inert, given and limited. It is pure dynamics [...] (2002: 209; trans. from Spanish by E. Topolska).

herent worth of human life and promoting responsibility for this life, are very much needed. The theatre of Seth Baumrin and his associates is a great celebration of human growth and human life, to which nationalism and racism are contrary forces, as history has made obvious on too many occasions.

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Decoding visual and acoustic signals: Epistemological uncertainty in Tom Stoppard's *After Magritte* and *Artist Descending a Staircase*

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Abstract

The paper discusses two plays of Tom Stoppard, *After Magritte* and *Artist Descending a Staircase,* from the perspective of the uncertainty pertaining to the possibility of perceiving and adequately describing the reality. The plays employ intertextual references to two modern painters whose names are included in the titles of the dramas and who are known to have experimented in their artistic ventures. In two series of pictures, *The Key of Dreams* and *The Use of Words*, Magritte dealt with the difficulties connected with representing reality in pictorial and linguistic terms, while Beauchamp tried to present not only three dimensionality but also movement on the two dimensional canvas. Apart from referring to art, Stoppard's pieces are also a kind of who-done-it, with each of them trying to solve a mystery. *After Magritte* discloses the solution of the identity of the strange figure the characters saw in the street and also logically explains the strange opening and closing stage images. Being a radio play, *Artist Descending a Staircase,* teaches the audience to decode aural signals and demonstrates that, similar to objects of visual perception, they may be decoded in different ways. The two dramas discussed thus deal with the relative quality of reality, whose perception and description depends on individual sensitivity of a concrete person.

Keywords

Stoppard, „Artist Descending a Staircase", „After Magritte", aural and visual signals

Rozszyfrowywanie sygnałów wizualnych i akustycznych: „After Magritte" i „Artist Descending a Staircase" Toma Stopparda

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje dwie sztuki współczesnego dramaturga angielskiego, Toma Stopparda: „After Magritte" i „Artist Descending a Staircase". Obydwa dramaty nawiązują do twórczości malarzy – w pierwszym przypadku jest to Rene Magritte, belgijski surrealista, w drugim zaś Francuz-kubista – Marcel Duchamp. „After Magritte" zaczyna się od surrealistycznej sceny, która zostaje wytłumaczona w logiczny sposób w trakcie dramatu. Sztukę kończy równie surrealistyczna scena, która nie jest przyjmowana w ten sposób ponieważ widzowie otrzymują w trakcie jej tworzenia wszelkie potrzebne informacje. Z kolei „Artysta schodzący po schodach" to teatr radiowy. Nagranie magnetofonowe staje się podstawą do wyjaśnienia sprawy śmierci jednej z głównych postaci. W trakcie dramatu Stoppard uczy słuchacza rozszyfrowywać sygnały akustyczne, co prowadzi do stwierdzenia, że na taśmie zarejestrowano nie morderstwo, ale nieszczęśliwy wypadek.

Słowa kluczowe

Stoppard, „After Magritte", „Artist Descending a Staircase", sygnały wizualne i akustyczne

Divergent as it is, Tom Stoppard's oeuvre is characterized by certain traits, one of these being the epistemological impossibility of perceiving and describing reality in a way unanimously agreed upon. Stoppard has repeatedly stressed his lack of certainty pertaining to defining reality precisely. It was Clive

James who first noticed the parallels between Stoppardian theatrics and Einsteinian physics. He argued that Stoppard's plays reflect the new, post-Newtonian outlook based on the proposition voiced by Einstein who "found himself obliged to rule out the possibility of a viewpoint at rest" (1975: 71). In an interview, Stoppard affirmed that he considered James's article to be brilliant and added:

> What he said was that you get into trouble with my plays if you think that there's a static viewpoint on the events. There is no observer. There is no safe point around which everything takes its proper place, so that you see things flat and see how they relate to each other. Although the Einsteinian versus Copernican image sounds pretentious, I can't think of a better one to explain what he meant – that there is no point of rest. (Hayman 1979b: 144)

Already George Moore in *Jumpers* (1972) complained about the uncertainty resulting from the development of science: "Copernicus cracked our confidence, and Einstein smashed it" (75). The main character of the drama also mentions the Wittgenstein anecdote. On being told by his friend that people assumed that the sun went round the earth because it looked like it did, Wittgenstein asked: "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if earth was rotating?" (75). Copernicus proved that sometimes our interpretation may be misleading and that, due to imperfect perception, the description of reality may be faulty. Furthermore, Copernicus's discovery may also be viewed in the light of Einstein's theory of relativity concerning space.

Making numerous references to the discoveries of modern physics, another play of Stoppard, *Hapgood* (1988) demonstrates the changes that have occurred in our conception of reality and the epistemological uncertainty as a result of the shift from Newtonian mechanics to the formulation of relativity and quantum theory. Classical Newtonian physics postulated a permanent external world, fixed, objective and describable. Scientific laws were always based on strict cause and effect

principles and were independent of the perceiver. Modern physics has shown that once it is discovered, a law does not hold in conditions in which it has so far been considered to hold, it is necessary to search for new explanations. This notion was expressed by Richard Feynman in his *Lectures on Physics* from which Stoppard takes the motto of *Hapgood* and to which he often refers in the course of the drama. This play may be perceived, among others, as an investigation concerning epistemological uncertainty pertaining to individual identity.[1]

In many cases, a given situation can be understood differently depending on the observer, the perspective from which they are observing the phenomenon, their individual perception and their subjective interpretation. In such instances, it is just not possible to establish what the reality is and what is its mere illusion. George in *Jumpers* poses the question: "How does one know what to believe? . . . How does one know what it is one believes when it's so difficult to know what it is one knows" (71). George's lack of certainty reflects a similar lack of certainty on Stoppard's part. He has repeatedly argued that he "write[s] plays because writing dialogue is the only respectable way of contradicting oneself" (Gussow interview 1972). According to him his plays "are a lot to do with the fact that [he] just [doesn't] know" (Hudson interview 1974: 48). Ronald Hayman has written: "Stoppard makes a virtue out of uncertainty – 'Tom Stoppard Doesn't Know' was the title chosen for his 1972 contribution to *BBC* Television's series 'One Pair of Eyes'" (1979a: 25). Janet Watts quotes the artist saying: "A truth is always a compound of two half-truths and you never reach it because there is always something more to say" (1973: 12).

The issues of different individual perceptions of reality and its divergent descriptions are also among the main problems of Stoppard's two short dramas, making intertextual references to the art of painting: *After Magritte* (1970) and *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972). The titles of these two pieces bring up

[1] For the discussion of this issue see Uchman (2013).

the names of two painters, both of whom were investigating reality and experimenting with it and its artistic (and also linguistic, in the case of Magritte) representation.

The title *After Magritte* may be interpreted in a number of different, yet not contradictory ways. Firstly, the events of the play take place after the Harrises's visit to an exhibition of Rene Magritte's paintings. In this sense, the word "after" has a strictly chronological meaning in reference to the events of the day. Secondly, the drama was written "after Magritte" in an iconographic sense, "by the way of pseudo-painterly quotation (as in 'after Leonardo')" (Elam 1984: 471), which is visible in the opening stage image reminiscent of *L'assassin menace* and also in the reproduction on the stage of certain motifs from Magritte's paintings.[2] Thirdly, the play may also be treated as a kind of response to surrealism. And finally, the drama was written after Magritte's work established itself in the collective imagination. It could be argued, however, that while the play starts with a surrealistic stage image, later on all the surrealism dissolves while the audience is provided with a logical and reasonable explanation, a point which has been noticed by a number of critics.[3]

Rene Magritte painted two series of pictures, *The Key of Dreams* and *The Use of Words,* in which he investigated the imperfect and imprecise attempts of rendering reality in pictorial and verbal terms. Furthermore, he discussed the issue in an essay dealing with the arbitrariness of pictorial and linguistic systems of representation – *Les mots et les visages*. Stoppard was fascinated with the art of Magritte, this being visible not only in his having written a play bearing the name of the Belgian artist, but also in what he conceded in the review, entitled *Joker as Artist*, of Suzi Gablik's book on Magritte:

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[2] For a discussion of these see: Elam (1984: 471); Goldstein (1975: 19) and Hu (1989: 77).

[3] Corballis (1984: 57); Dean (1981: 51-53); Goldstein (1975: 20-21); Hu (1989: 69); Jenkins (1988: 54); Kelly (1991: 89-90); SammelIs (1988: 60) and Whitaker (1986: 78).

> But the one omission which I find incomprehensible is any acknowledgement of the fact that the man's technically perfect execution is crucial to the impact of his ideas [when Magritte] wished to remind us that you can't smoke a painting of a pipe, [he] was able to paint one so smooth, so woody, so rounded, so perfect that you could, as they say, smoke it; and thus made the idea work. (Stoppard 1970b: 40)

The title of Stoppard's review refers to the quality of the painter's art which Stoppard shares with him, namely an outrageous sense of humour. The playwright is simultaneously dealing with serious epistemological problems and evoking laughter, thus achieving his aim as described in one of the interviews: "What I try to do, is to end up by contriving the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce or perhaps even high comedy" (Hudson interview 1974: 8).

The difficulty connected with accessing a clear and convincing explanation of reality is demonstrated in *After Magritte* by the weird and shocking opening stage image and the hopping figure, seen by the Harrises on their return journey from the museum. Who the figure really was, what he actually looked like and what he was doing become the source of argument and disagreement, culminating in the following exchange of views:

> FOOT: Can you describe him?
> MOTHER: Yes. He was playing hopscotch on the corner, a man in the loose-fitting striped gabardine of a convicted felon. He carried a handbag under one arm, and with the other he waved at me with a cricket bat.
> (FOOT *reels*.)
> FOOT: Would you know him again?
> MOTHER: I doubt it. He was wearing dark glasses, and a surgical mask.
> (HARRIS *comes forward to restore sanity*.)
> HARRIS: My mother is a bit confused, Inspector. It was a tortoise under his arm and he wasn't so much playing hopscotch as one-legged.

> THELMA: (*deftly slipping the dress over* HARRIS.) A tortoise or a football - he was a young man in a football shirt –
> HARRIS: *If* I might just stick my oar in here, he could hardly have been a young man since he had a full white beard, and, if I'm not mistaken, side-whiskers . . . .
> FOOT: So the best witness you can come up with is a blind, white-bearded, one-legged footballer with a tortoise. (39-40)

A great many of the misunderstandings which occur in the play result from the characters being "victims of their own logical absolutism" (Elam 1984: 476), of their being "entrapped by their interpretative logic" (Kelly 1991: 90), which is explicitly illustrated by an earlier exchange between Thelma and Harris. When Harris insists that the man had "a white stick", Thelma argues it was "an ivory cane" to which Harris shouts: "An ivory cane IS a white stick" (19). Pursuing their own logic, the characters each try to convince themselves and the others that their own description and interpretation is the only correct one. In this case, Reginald insists on the thing being a white stick because he has argued earlier that the man was blind. An ivory cane does not denote anything special, while a white stick symbolically indicates the blindness of the person carrying it.

As the play is coming to its end, the Inspector provides an explanation of the strange figure which caused so much confusion:

> Well, I woke up late and my migraine was giving me hell and my bowels were so bad I had to stop half way through shaving, and I never gave the traffic warden a thought till I glanced out of the window and saw your car pulling away from the only parking space in the road. I flung down the razor and rushed into the street, pausing only to grab my wife's handbag containing the small change and her parasol to keep off the rain – […]
> I got pretty wet because I couldn't unfurl the damn thing, and I couldn't move fast because in my haste to pull up my pyjama trousers I put both feet into the same leg. (45-46)

Strange as it may seem, the story of the man in the street, highly improbable, yet possible, was based on an actual situation. Stoppard recalls it

> was based on fact for a start – somebody I know had a couple of peacocks in the garden, and one escaped while he was shaving. He chased it and he had to cross a main road to catch it, and he was standing in his pyjamas with shaving cream on his face holding a peacock when the traffic started going by. (Hudson interview 1974: 17)

From the whole play, it clearly transpires that even the seemingly surreal pictures – the opening and closing stage images and the figure encountered by the Harrises – can, after all, receive a simple and convincing, though strange, explanation. It must be pointed out that there is a difference between the figure in the street and the stage images of the beginning and end of the play. While we do not see the Inspector hopping on one leg in the street and the picture is evoked by different descriptions of the event, as a theatre audience we directly experience the situation at the beginning and end of the play. We undoubtedly come to the conclusion that the opening of the play is weird and shocking. Gradually, as the play develops, all the oddities are logically explained. The situation at the end of the drama presents an opposite case – the bizarre final situation is constructed gradually in front of our eyes and each thing which could seem otherwise odd is justified in the process.

The title of the other play discussed here, *Artist Descending a Staircase,* also contains an intertextual reference, in this case to the famous picture of Marcel Duchamp *Nude Descending a Staircase*. In this picture, the artist tried to evoke not only the three dimensionality of the object presented on a two-dimensional canvass but also, seemingly the impossible, to evoke the movement of the figure. Art does not speak for itself, its overall meaning is the result of the creative effort first on the part of the artist himself and then on the part of the spec-

tators. Marcel Duchamp, who perceived himself as a cubist (D'Harnoncourt 1989: 256), made this point clear when he described the effect of "elementary parallelism": "[The] movement is in the eye of the spectator, who incorporates it into the painting".[4]

In his play, Stoppard also tries to achieve the seemingly impossible and he succeeds in his venture. Not only does he write a radio drama pertaining to surrealist art, but he also deals successfully with aural reality to teach the audience to decode sound effects and the reality signaled by them. This drama, further characterized by a specific time structure, tries to solve two mysteries: who Sophie fell in love with and what the cause of Donner's fall down the stairs was.

The drama presents three surrealist artists, Beauchamp (whose name evokes Duchamp), Donner, Martello and a young woman, Sophie, who met them in the past, during an exhibition of modern art. At that time she had very bad eyesight and at present she is blind. Before she went blind, Sophie fell in love with one of the four men she met. Remembering that each of them had been photographed with the picture he had painted, she identified her beloved as the one who had painted "black railings on a field of snow" (41), that is as Beauchamp. It was, however, Donner who truly loved her and wanted to help her after Beauchamp's abandoning her which finally led to her suicide. When, in the conversation with Martello, Donner expresses his regrets and says "She would have been happy with me", Martello remarks: "To *us* it was Beauchamp, but which of us did she see in her mind's eye . . . ?" Speaking about the picture she remembered, he says: "she described it briefly, and it had an image of black vertical railings, like park railings, right across the canvas, as though one were looking at a field of snow through the bars of a cage; not like Beauchamp's snow scene at all" and "Thick white posts, top to bottom across the whole canvas, an inch or two apart, black in

[4] Pierre Cabanne (1971). *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. Trans. Ran Padgett. New York: Viking Press, 29. Quoted in Kelly (1986: 193).

the gaps –" (55-56). With which man did she fall in love, then? The one who had painted black railings against a white background or the one who had painted white posts against a black background? It could, perhaps, be argued that her mistake was due to the inefficiency of the two artists or to the fact that art, especially abstract art, is not really meant to be a reproduction of a concrete, objective reality. It could also be conceded equally well that, in certain situations, the interpretation depends solely on the perceiver. In this case, it is he who chooses which of the colours functions as the background and which one as the foreground. If we support the latter argument, it becomes obvious that once more the interpretation of reality or of its representation depends on the onlooker. Whichever reading we accept, however, it is not certain whether she has actually erred in visual perception and has thus become a victim of love at first sight, that is blind love, a word especially appropriate in the context of the play. The answer to the question is not really important to us, unlike to Donner who goes through a shock when he realizes that he may have lost his love due to an optical illusion.

Apart from the difficulty of interpreting visual reality, the drama deals also with a similar situation in reference to aural signals. Stoppard recalls that the genesis of *The Artist Descending a Staircase* lay in a

> tape gag where we play a tape at the beginning and 75 minutes later we'd peg it off by showing that the whole thing had been, as it were, misinterpreted. So there was the need for 74 minutes of padding or brilliant improvisation if you like or very carefully structured and meticulously built-up plot.[5]

It is Beauchamp who is experimenting in producing "tonal art" (18). At present he is engaged in producing two different kinds of tapes, one of which *"is a bubbling cauldron of squeaks, gur-*

[5] Tom Stoppard, Interview with Richard Mayne from the BBC's *Arts Commentary*, BBC Radio Three, 10 November 1972. Quoted in Delaney (1991: 171).

gles, crackles and other unharmonious sounds" (21). The other one is a tape of silence: "These unheard sounds which are our silence stand as a metaphor – a correspondence between the limits of hearing and the limits of all knowledge: and whose silence is our hubbub?" (56). It is the intended tape of silence (evocative of John Cage's musical experiments) that we listen to when the play begins:

> *We hear, on a continuous loop of tape, a sequence of sounds which is to be interpreted by* MARTELLO and BEAUCHAMP *thus:*
> (a) DONNER *dozing*: *an irregular droning sound*
> (b) *Careful footsteps approach. The effect is stealthy. A board breaks.*
> (c) *This wakes* DONNER, *i.e. the droning stops in mid-beat.*
> (d) *The footsteps freeze.*
> (e) DONNER*'s voice, unalarmed: 'Ah! There you are. . .'*
> (f) *Two quick steps, and then Thump!*
> (g) DONNER *cries out.*
> (h) *Wood cracks as he falls through the balustrade.*
> (i) *He falls heavily down the stairs, with a final sickening thump when he hits the bottom. Silence.* (15)

The ensuing dialogue between Martello and Beauchamp informs us about a few things. Firstly, the tape of silence has been spoilt by the unexpected events. Secondly, Donner is lying on the floor at the bottom of the stairs, dead. Thirdly, Donner's words "There you are" are, according to Martello and Beauchamp, indicative of the fact that he knew the person whose steps we heard so one of them must have killed him. As the play progresses, the audience gradually recognize that the sounds they hear may often be interpreted in a wrong way: they are not produced during the events taking place in the present but they are reproduced from the tape recorder, registering a different reality. As the drama develops, little by little the audience learn not only to recognize which sounds come from the reality of the characters and which are recorded but also learns to interpret them correctly. The play contains numerous references to a buzzing fly, either verbal (16, 22, 45, 47 and 58) or aural (the buzzing is actually heard: 45, 57 and

58) and the fly is smacked by one of the characters (22 and 24 3 times, 45 twice, 47, 56 and 58). As the play ends, the listeners hear Beauchamp chasing and finally killing a fly. They realize that the sound sequence is a repetition of what was recorded on his tape. The purely aural, non-verbal sounds, just like the words actually uttered by the two men, are very similar or even identical. The mystery of Donner's death is therefore explained to the radio audience: Donner was not killed but, while chasing a buzzing fly destroying Beauchamp's tape of silence, fell down the stairs and killed himself. Whether this chain of events is also made clear to Beauchamp and Martello remains unclear.

Both in *After Magritte* and *Artist Descending a Staircase,* Tom Stoppard investigates mysteries pertaining to reality and its representation by means of fine art, language, or a tape recorder. His presentation proves that a given reality may be perceived and interpreted variously by different onlookers which may lead to unpredictable, often funny consequences. Dealing with the serious issue of the difficulty of epistemological certainty concerning reality the playwright has written two plays which evoke laughter. He has thus achieved his aims connected with playwriting: he contrives "the perfect marriage between the play of ideas and farce" and manages to "entertain a roomful of people" (Hudson interview, 1974: 8 and 6).

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Truth and meaning in the maze of irony: A glance at Muriel Spark's fiction

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Abstract

The article addresses the issue of truth and its treatment in the fiction of Muriel Spark (1918–2006), who with her first novel, *The Comforters*, made her name as a distinctly post-modern novelist. The publication of *The Comforters* coincided with her conversion to Roman Catholicism, and Spark was explicit about the vital influence which her newly-embraced religion had upon her becoming a writer of fiction. The major point in the following argument is Spark's overt declaration that her writing of novels, which she defines in terms of lies, represents her quest for absolute truth. This apparently paradoxical admission is reflected in Spark's creative output, which combines most unlikely features: postmodernist leanings, commitment to religious belief and a deep-seated conviction on the part of the author about the irrefutable validity of absolute truth. The article focuses mainly on two of Spark's novels: *The Only Problem* and *Symposium*, which demonstrate the postmodernist perspective with its insistence on the relativity of truth or its outright negation in the form of the concept of "post-truth". The presented analysis shows how Spark's narratives pursue truth across the multiplicity of continually undermined meanings jointly generated by the text and the reader as its recipient. The discussion emphasises the irony which Muriel Spark proposes as the most effective strategy for getting an inkling of

absolute truth, which remains for Spark a solid though evasive value, hidden under the multiplicity of meanings.

Keywords

Muriel Spark, fiction, truth, irony, postmodernism

Prawda i znaczenie w labiryncie ironii – refleksja nad fikcją literacką Muriel Spark

Abstrakt

Artykuł podejmuje rozważania na temat prawdy w fikcji literackiej Muriel Spark (1918–2006), pisarki angielskiej która już w swojej pierwszej powieści, *The Comforters* (*Pocieszyciele*), dała wyraz postmodernistycznemu profilowi własnej twórczości literackiej. Wydanie *The Comforters* zbiegło się w czasie z jej konwersją na rzymski katolicyzm, a sama pisarka wyraźnie podkreślała wpływ, jaki przyjęcie religii katolickiej miało na jej twórczość powieściopisarską. Główny punkt odniesienia w dyskusji stanowi stwierdzenie Spark, że powieść, którą ona sama definiuje w kategoriach fikcyjnego kłamstwa, jest w istocie poszukiwaniem absolutnej prawdy. To paradoksalne na pierwszy rzut oka wyznanie, znajduje odzwierciedlenia w całej twórczości Spark, która łączy na pozór nieprzystające do siebie elementy, jak postmodernistyczne predylekcje, katolicką religijność, a nade wszystko głębokie przekonanie autorki o niepodważalności prawdy absolutnej. Artykuł skupia się głównie na dwóch powieściach: *The Only Problem* (*Jedyny problem*) i *Symposium* (*Uczta*), które podejmują dialog z postmodernistyczną perspektywą relatywizacji prawdy bądź też jej całkowitej negacji w koncepcji "post-prawdy". Przedstawiona analiza ukazuje jak dyskurs narracyjny podąża za wyznacznikiem prawdy mimo, albo przy pomocy, ciągłego podważania cząstkowych znaczeń generowanych łącznie poprzez tekst powieści oraz czytelnika jako odbiorcy przesłania tekstu. Artykuł podkreśla znaczenie ironii, która w powieściach Spark staje się najbardziej efektywną strategią zbliżania się do prawdy absolutnej, a ta w jej twórczości pozostaje wciąż trwałą, chociaż nieuchwytną, wartością skrywaną pod wielością znaczeń i interpretacji.

Słowa kluczowe

Muriel Spark, fikcja, prawda, ironia, postmodernizm

The sense that at present we live in what has been termed a post-truth age has pervaded and to a large extent shaped the political and cultural discourse of the twenty-first century. Significantly, the very word "post-truth", which came into general circulation at the beginning of the third millennium, was declared by Oxford Dictionaries as the 2016 word of the year, with a 2,000% increase in usage when compared to the previous year 2015. No matter how strongly one might oppose the widespread use of the term post-truth, it has to be recognised and intellectually confronted in contemporary critical discourse. "Post-truth" was originally used in reference with politics, and it was in this context that it was introduced in a blog post for the online magazine *Grist* on 1 April 2010. The blogger wrote: "We live in post-truth politics: a political culture in which politics (public opinion and media narratives) have become almost entirely disconnected from policy (the substance of legislation). This obviously dims any hope of reasoned legislative compromise. But in another way, it can be seen as liberating" (Roberts, Web). Significantly, the term post-truth owes its widespread circulation to electronic media, especially the internet, and however paradoxical it may sound, it has become valid cultural currency in the contemporary world. It is worth noting that "post-truth" has little to do with the temporal or chronological criteria which the prefix "post-" might suggest. It is distinct from lies and falsehood because it builds not so much on distortions of facts as on ignoring them altogether. Thus it advocates the primacy of emotional appeal over factual veracity, and postulates the replacement of processes of verification by compliance with prevailing personal opinions and beliefs. Clearly, "post-truth" concerns the narratives which disconnect a communicative act from any regard for its validation and legitimization in the substance of facts, either experi-

ential or speculative. Such epistemological dissociation can take place only because truth as such is considered to be of secondary importance. In consequence, in the long run it leads to the undermining of the notion of truth altogether.

When Muriel Spark died in 2006 the term "post-truth" was not yet so popular, but it was already present and easily detectable in many spheres of public life. However, in the field of literature the socio-philosophical phenomenon later known as "post-truth" entered into the domain of novel writing much earlier. Its bold advent coincides with the spread of relativism and the substitution of the democratic rule of a variety of apparently legitimate subjective points of view and highly personalised opinions for the unshakable authority of the absolute. "Post-truth", which primarily started as a political notion, may easily be transposed into a distinctly aesthetic concept in the poetics of postmodernism. It seems that the philosophical framing of postmodernism provides an excellent breeding ground for diverse forms and manifestations of post-truth. The aim of the following discussion is to relate post-modern involvement with post-truth to Muriel Spark's commitment to absolute truth and her specific version of postmodernism. Without doubt Spark can be classified as a post-modern novelist. Martin McQuillan's collection of essays, for example, places her literary output in a clearly postmodernist perspective. Spark's novels show characteristic features of post-modern fiction conceived in terms of the ontological dominant which Brian McHale defined by foregrounding "post-cognitive" aspects (McHale 10), where the prefix "post-" is evidently a significant cultural marker. Postmodern traces and influences can be found in Spark's entire fictional output. They are perhaps least conspicuous in the quasi-autobiographical *Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), but her first published novel, *The Comforters* (1957), with its metafictional implications, clearly testifies to the post-modern penchant of Spark's writing. It is worth noting that Patricia Waugh in her well-known study of metafiction

refers to *The Comforters* as a very good example of the self-conscious novel.

However, it cannot be denied that Muriel Spark's early pronouncements regarding the status of literary fiction and her explanation of her own reasons for writing novels run against the grain of post-modern questioning of the position and role of truth in the processes of cognition. Unlike the most radical post-modern thinkers and propagators of "post-truth", Muriel Spark does not undermine the validity of truth; nor does she draw a clear demarcation line between truth and fiction, or reality and dream, which is for her a misleading opposition as she demonstrates in her novel bearing this very title, *Reality and Dreams* (1996). On the contrary, in a clearly non-postmodernist manner she emphasises the significance of absolute truth as the pivot of her novel writing, and reveals that the quest for truth constitutes both the motive power and the justification of her decision to write novels. Hence, in her interview with Frank Kermode, Spark admits: "I don't claim that my novels are truth [...] I keep in mind specifically that what I am writing is fiction because I am interested in truth − absolute truth – and I don't pretend that what I'm writing is more than an imaginative extension of the truth" (Kermode 1963, 61). Spark treats fiction as lies, but she is far from looking upon lying in the mode of fiction as a departure from, or distortion of truth. That is why her declaration that the lies of fiction are "an imaginative extension of the truth" provides a useful clue to the understanding of her perception of the intricate relation between truth and the novel, which poses a challenge to one of the fundamental assumptions of postmodernism.

The title of this essay evokes truth and meaning as two distinct though interconnected categories. In the subsequent analysis I will try to show how they come to be inscribed into Spark's fiction and how the rhetorical strategy of irony becomes for the novelist an important epistemological path to approach what Spark calls "absolute truth", and for the reader, a means to retrieve the meaning interwoven into the intri-

cate and multi-layered network of her narratives. At the beginning, however, a brief clarification of the notion of truth is required.

In philosophy there have been many attempts to define truth. However, it remains an evasive concept which nevertheless seeks unconditional acceptance, like axioms in mathematics which are taken for granted. Pontius Pilate's famous question "What is truth?" (see John 18: 37-38) reverberates throughout two millennia of intellectual speculation, and it has become an inseparable part of the cultural discourse of Western civilisation. Muriel Spark's literary debut as a novelist coincided with her conversion to Catholicism, and she made it clear that her decision to become a Catholic was an important step in her life for it helped her to define her own identity as a writer of fiction. In a short autobiographical piece published several years after her conversion Muriel Spark acknowledged the link between her acceptance of the Christian viewpoint and her writing of fiction: "I think there is a connection between my writing and my conversion, but I don't want to be too dogmatic about it. Certainly all my best work has come since then. [...] I find I speak far more with my own voice as a Catholic and I think I could prove it with my stuff" (Spark 1961: 58-63). That is the reason why Spark's "absolute truth" should be viewed from the vantage point of metaphysics rather than as a strictly logical proposition.

Truth is seen by Aristotle in terms of a correspondence to, or with, a fact (*Metaphysics* 1011b). Thomas Aquinas' well-known definition, elaborated in *Summa Theologiae* (Q.16) and *De Veritate* (Q.1, A.1-3), perceives truth as the equation of a thing and intellect, *veritas est adequatio rei et intellectus*, and makes the claim that a judgement is true when it conforms to the external reality. In the classic definitions of Aristotle and Aquinas, truth means being in accord with reality. Since the so-called correspondence theory of truth presupposes the correspondence of language and thought to an independent reality, it should be emphasised that for both thinkers, and partic-

ularly for Aquinas, reality comprises not only the natural world but also the metaphysical realm of the Divine. Spark's "absolute truth" is ontological, and as such it bears a resemblance to the biblical Logos which both orders and explains the world. Such ontological, or absolute, truth comes close to the absolute perfection of the final goal of Hegel's dialectical triplicity, i.e. the continuing movement from thesis, through antithesis, to synthesis, and so on towards increasingly more accurate approximations of absolute truth. The meaning, or rather multiple meanings, discovered in Spark's novels should not be treated as identical with truth, but they should be regarded as cogent pointers to truth. If one adopts the language of metaphor and poetic idiom to the analysis of Spark's novels, meaning can be described as truth's distant relative, or else as its more or less audible harbinger. Such figurative comparison in the critical discourse is not unjustified since Muriel Spark thought of herself primarily as a poet. In *Curriculum Vitae* (1992) she stresses her leanings towards poetry when she says: "I think of myself as predominantly a poet" (CV: 206). She was seen as such by many of her critics, including Frank Kermode (see Kermode 1971, 267-84) and Malcolm Bradbury (see Bradbury: 137-49).

Muriel Spark's claim that truth is the fundamental issue to be explored across her fiction is presented in imaginative terms in the novel significantly entitled *The Only Problem* (1984). Its main protagonist, Harvey Gotham, a multimillionaire philosopher totally dedicated to the study of the *Book of Job*, which he considers to be the "pivotal book of the Bible" (OP: 29), is intrigued by the metaphysical puzzle of Job's undeserved suffering, which he wants to resolve. However, while immersed in his speculative scholarship, Harvey is forced by the circumstances of his life to confront his own personal suffering with the plight of Job, which radically modifies his perspective. The narrative of *The Only Problem* is governed by the interrogative mode: questions are continually asked, but they are never completely and satisfactorily answered. What is

more, answers to them cannot even be predicted on the basis of logical assumptions. The gap of unpredictability which becomes an abyss in the process of arriving at truth is epitomised in the character of the main protagonist who is "predictable only up to a point" (OP: 11). In his essays on irony A.E. Dyson underscores unpredictability as an element conducive to ironic discourse, and he claims accordingly: "Neatness and predictability are precisely the qualities that any ironist will mistrust" (Dyson 1965: 121). Apart from underscoring unpredictability, the discourse of the novel oscillates between "what is" and "what is not", and so it persistently evokes "Yes" and "No" as equally plausible answers to the questions that have been implicitly posed. In this way the rhetorical strategy which Muriel Spark employs in her novels, including *The Only Problem*, makes frequent use of contradictory answers and reversible affirmatives, all of which constitute the proper domain of irony.

The interrogative mode embedded in the narrative structure of *The Only Problem* is reflected in the imagery framing the narrative. The image which dominates the fictional world of the novel and underpins its setting is the network of roads between Nancy, St Dié and Epinal, among which Spark's characters move as if through convoluted paths of communication in search of answers to unanswerable questions. The topography of the world depicted in the novel bears some resemblance to the setting of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", where "Streets [...] follow like a tedious argument / Of insidious intent / To lead you to an overwhelming question ..." (Eliot 2002: 3). The fictional space represented by the grid of crisscrossing motorways becomes a figure of irony adopted by the novelist and offered to the reader as an epistemological path on the way to discovering meaning and, most importantly, to ultimately finding truth. A.E. Dyson compares following the path of irony to being in a maze, and he claims, accordingly, that "irony is as full of unexpected turnings as a maze" (Dyson 1965: 121). The most representative characteristic of irony,

which is the discrepancy between reality and appearance, underlies all Spark's fictions and represents a conspicuous feature of the narrative discourse and the fictional setting of her novels.

As the plot of *The Only Problem* gradually unfolds it becomes more and more clear that Harvey will neither solve the metaphysical query concerning God's consent to the infliction of unjust suffering upon the just man, nor find out the truth about his wife Effie. The investigation of Job's predicament is for Harvey like Prufrock's "overwhelming question" – "Everything around him, she knew – all his comings and goings – were really peripheral to his preoccupation with the Book of Job" (OP: 39). Coming to grips with "the only problem" of "all his comings and goings", Harvey gets caught in the epistemological trap because his concern with particular meanings impedes him on the way towards absolute truth. He completes writing his exegetic monograph on the *Book of Job* without finding the answer to his question. However, while pursuing it through contradictory meanings in the maze of irony, Harvey gets an inkling of truth which, paradoxically, is related to the human limitation of knowledge.

> Job's problem was partly a lack of knowledge. […] Everybody talked but nobody told him anything about the reason for his suffering. Not even God when he appeared. Our limitations of knowledge make us puzzle over the cause of suffering, maybe it is the cause of suffering itself. (OP: 111)

In the maze of irony false tracks often have to be taken, while commonly accepted landmarks of conceptual thinking must be sometimes overthrown. Therefore it is not accidental that irony is often perceived in terms of devaluing commonly accepted values. Joseph Dane links this tendency with Socratic irony, claiming that "Socrates devalues what others value" (Dane 1991: 18). *The Only Problem* shows that the paradigm of questions arduously leading to answers supposedly containing truth may be shattered. Hence the novel generates intimations

of answers by invalidating questions. From such a perspective Harvey reflects on his seemingly inconclusive experience: "If the answers are valid then it is the questions that are all cock-eyed" (OP: 180).

Multiple and equivocal meanings appear as impediments or distracters on the way to truth. Although widespread irony may be viewed as a form of denial and negativity, yet in Spark's fiction it certainly does not deny "absolute truth". In this context it may be appropriate to evoke D. J. Enright's discussion of Socratic dialogues and his claim that even though "uncertainty is intrinsic, of the essence of irony" (Enright 1986: 6), it does not produce the devastating effects of negativity, for it is redeemed by the distinct (although it appears as blurred and distant) objective of truth. Muriel Spark's post-modernist fiction definitely supports this view and testifies to its validity. Anne K. Mellor, likewise, notes the same positive effect of irony when she points to Kierkegaard's argument in favour of Socrates whose "ironic questioning functioned positively" (Mellor 1980: 180).

In Spark's fiction the reader is invited to a symposium of truth-seekers, and that literary symposium comprises all of her twenty-two published novels. One of them is actually entitled *Symposium* (1990), as it makes an overt allusion to Plato's philosophical text. The analogy is evident not only in the title and the motto of the novel, but also in the setting, which foregrounds a convivial meeting of members of the financial, intellectual and artistic elite who come to the banquet – not, however, in Athens but in Islington, London. The leading motif of the dialogues in Plato's work and Spark's novel is also similar. However, in the post-modern counterpart of *Symposium* the theme of love from Socratic debate is transformed into the "philosophy of *Les Autres*", a phrase many times evoked in the novel and mostly associated with Margaret, newly-married to William Damien. Like "modern irony" which, in the words of Charles Glicksberg, "mediates between comedy and tragedy without ever reconciling them" (Glicksberg 1969: 33), Spark's

narrative oscillates between comedy and tragedy, and so it encompasses the frivolous and trivial, which are placed in the vicinity of the solemn and grave. The posh dinner party comes to an abrupt ending with the arrival of the police informing of the death by strangling of Hilda Damien, William's mother and a would-be guest at the banquet. Before the final disruption of the meeting there are some minor disturbances which destabilise the elegant social decorum by introducing a sense of confusion in the occurrences and thus intensifying chaos, both of which obscure the clarity of vision, and consequently blur truth.

Margaret is the most intriguing character in the novel, and in *Symposium*, as elsewhere, Muriel Spark is, in the words of one of her critics, "parsimonious in the provision of interpretative hand-outs" (Kermode 1970: 427). Margaret's maiden name, Murchie, is irresistibly suggestive of "murky", meaning dark and unpleasant, but also shameful, which accords with the reputation she has for "the evil eye" (S: 143), attracting trouble and misfortune even without her direct personal agency. Her reputation for working mischief and the surrounding aura of suspicion are not at all unfounded because many deaths and tragic accidents take place in Margaret's proximity: "Margaret's capacity for being near the scene of tragedy was truly inexplicable in any reasonable terms" (S: 142). She is linked by mysterious ties, "an old alliance" (S: 143), with her eccentric Uncle Magnus who suffers from a mental disorder, which, however, makes him more perceptive than most mentally sound people. Uncle Magnus gives the most accurate, and at the same time most ambiguous, appraisal of Margaret, calling her "capable of anything" (S: 80):

> What Dan was consulting his brother about, there in the woods walking along the edge of the dark pond, was Margaret. 'Do you think her capable of murdering Mama?'
> 'I think her capable of anything,' roared Magnus. 'An extremely capable girl, very full of ability, power'. (S: 80)

Margaret balances on the borderline between nature and the supernatural, and she represents a bundle of contradictions. One of the characters at the dinner party speaks of Margaret as "a female Jekyll and Hyde" (S: 187). Yet if the comparison with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is evoked, it has to be emphasised that in the case of Margaret they are not two sides of one personality but a perfect blend, as she is simultaneously a paragon of virtue and a paradigm of vice. In his reflections on irony, Tieck stresses that opposites are reconciled in the ironic awareness that sees unity in duality, which leads to the reconciliation of contradictions without, however, resolving or dissolving them (see Wheeler 1984). In respect of her deviousness Margaret Damien, née Murchie, is a character constructed according to the ironic formula which induces dubiety and brings together affirmation and denial.

The narrative discourse in the novel, like the underlying Socratic debate, is informed by the dialectic between the continual "Yes" and "No" of irony. The progress towards the final goal of truth is made with the help of a rhetorical strategy which Spark called "the nevertheless principle" (Whittaker 1982: 143): each affirmative is modified by "but", "except", etc. This can be seen, for example, in Hilda's general reflection on the Murchies': "They are quite all right but there's something wrong" (S: 54). At the banquet, Margaret loudly articulates her philosophy of *les autres* and secretly contemplates the murder of Hilda. However, while the guests of the convivial gathering are arguing and speculating, fate operates out of their control or consciousness, regardless of what they say or do. Hilda is murdered by random thieves, absolutely independent of Margaret's scheming, and so Margaret's plan to become an active agent of evil is frustrated by the working of blind chance. Hence Uncle Magnus' words, addressed to Margaret when she speaks of her wish "to actively liquidate the woman" (S: 159), turn out to be prophetic: "destiny might do it for you" (S: 160). Margaret's "wild cry" (S: 191) at the news of Hilda's death is

the expression of a violent protest raised from the level of humanity against the incomprehensible workings of destiny.

> '... I'm very sorry to tell you that Mrs Damien has been the victim of a misfortune. My condolences.' [...]
>
> 'No, it can't be,' Margaret shrieks. 'Not till Sunday.' [...] From upstairs comes Margaret's wild cry: 'It shouldn't have been till Sunday!' (S: 191)

The two novels, *The Only Problem* and *Symposium*, presented here in greater detail and selected because of their overt and unmistakable references to the question of truth, show Spark's use of irony as a route towards absolute truth, which is hidden under the multiplicity of meanings. No matter how relative and evasive meaning may be in the discursive maze of irony, truth for Spark always remains solid, that is absolute and real, not illusory or subjugated to different vantage points of interpretation. In consequence, many of her novels represent what might appear like a most unlikely blend: attraction to post-modern forms and strategies, commitment to the positive and objective value of truth and the conviction of the significance of religious belief for the craft of the novelist. These seemingly incompatible factors are interlocked in Spark's fiction, and as a distinctive triad which underlies her novels they have to be taken into consideration. In Muriel Spark's novels truth is not worded, but rather cultivated in gaps of silence related to the mystery of existence. However, the search for meaning to which Spark's novels invariably invite the reader, may assist on the way to at least partial unlocking of that mystery. Even though the knot of meanings cannot be easily disentangled, as is often the case with Spark's fiction, this does not in the least preclude the quest for truth in the narrative. In Spark's view the novel is the most suitable medium for such quests, and irony is the best method to adopt. In the interview with Sara Frankel, Spark refers to the significance of novel writing in her life and stresses the close link between the form of the novel and the theme which the form expresses: "A prose style is not just a decora-

tor's piece of icing on the cake – it's a form of expressing a theme that can't be expressed in any other way" (Frankel 1987: 445). Although the maze of irony in Spark's fiction renders the route towards truth tortuous and meandering, it offers a promise that its twisting and intersecting paths of meaning and understanding lead to the heart of the labyrinth, where the most desired object of the search may be, if not completely grasped, at least partly glimpsed.

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Abbreviations used for quotations from Muriel Spark's novels

OP – *The Only Problem*
S – *Symposium*
CV – *Curriculum Vitae*

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American Indian epistemology in Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*

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Abstract

The essay proposes that Deborah A. Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) is a work animated by the principles of American Indian epistemology. First, a model of Native philosophy is outlined after Native philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith. Secondly, four dimensions of Miranda's work – its ethical and procedural purpose, generic location, metalinguistic strategy, narrative as a vehicle of knowledge – are analyzed in the light of Norton-Smith, Roland Barthes, California historians, American Indian literary studies, decolonial theory, and auto-ethnography. In conclusion, it is posited that Miranda's story is an animated entity enacting ontological, intersubjective, historical difference, and that it intervenes into the genre of memoir/autobiography.

Keywords

Deborah A. Miranda, California Indians, American Indian epistemology, California missions, memoir, Roland Barthes

Epistemologia Indian amerykańskich w *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* Deborah A. Mirandy

Abstrakt

Zamiarem autora jest dowiedzenie, że pamiętnik Deborah A. Mirandy zatytułowany *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) motywowany jest zasadami epistemologii Indian amerykańskich. Analiza przebiega następująco: najpierw zarysowany jest model rdzennej epistemologii; potem, analizie w świetle propozycji filozofa indiańskiego Thomasa Nortona-Smitha, a także Rolanda Barthesa, historyków Kalifornii, literaturoznawstwa indiańskiego, teorii dekolonialnej, a także, elementów auto-etnograficznych poddane są cztery aspekty dzieła Mirandy: etyczny i proceduralny cel, lokalizacja gatunkowe, strategia metalingwistyczna i narracja jako przekaźnik wiedzy. W konkluzjach autor argumentuje, że opowieść Mirandy jest potencjalnym bytem ożywionym uosabiającym ontologiczną, intersubiektywną i historyczną różnicę oraz, że Miranda realizuje ten byt między innymi poprzez interwencję w gatunek autobiografii.

Słowa kluczowe

Deborah A. Miranda, Indianie kalifornijscy, epistemologia Indian, misje kalifornijskie, pamiętnik, Roland Barthes

> Even dead Indians are never good enough.
>
> (Miranda 2013: 99)

Deborah A. Miranda (Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen, Chumash, Jewish) is a contemporary American Indian writer.[1] In this es-

[1] The term "American Indian", albeit used interchangeably with "Native American", "Native", and "Indigenous", is the preferred one in the essay. I am aware of the many controversial connotations the term invokes; however, the choice is deliberate. I follow Thomas Norton-Smith, whose account of American Indian philosophy provides me with the main theoretical framework in this essay. Norton-Smith insists on using the term "American Indian" and his argument is worth citing at length: "What is the appropriate way

say, I interpret Miranda's work, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) as a vehicle for the American Indian epistemology. To do this, I first outline a model of Native philosophy adopted here mostly, but not only, after Shawnee philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith. Secondly, drawing insights from Norton-Smith, as well as a number of other sources, i.e. Roland Barthes, California historians, American Indian literary studies and decolonial theory, I offer four areas of interpretation of *Bad Indians*: its ethical and procedural purpose, its generic location, its metalinguistic strategy, and narrative as a vehicle of Native knowledge. To better illustrate the contrast between the "Western" thinking and Miranda's perspective I use elements of auto-ethnography. In conclusion, I posit that Miranda is the writ-

to refer to the indigenous people called *Indians*? Of course, it is currently trendy, especially within the academy, to use 'Native American,' but I reject the label—perhaps shockingly—in favor of 'American Indian,' despite the fact that 'Indian' is a name imposed by colonial powers that recalls the disease, depredations, and dispossessions Native peoples have suffered at their hands. However, I know of no Indian who really appreciates being called a 'Native American.' First, the name 'Native American,' fashioned after 'African American' and similar labels, suggests that Indians are American citizens who just happen to be of Native descent. However, unlike African or Asian Americans, who *are* American citizens of African or Asian descent, Indians are also proud citizens of *sovereign* Indian nations—Cherokee, Choctaw, and Shawnee among them—so the 'politically' appropriate label misconstrues and inaccurately portrays the actual political situation. Unlike her Asian American neighbor, who is an American and state citizen, an enrolled Cherokee woman is a citizen of a third sovereign entity: The Cherokee Nation. I once heard an Indian voicing a second perhaps more compelling reason for rejecting the label 'Native American.' He argued that the approximately 390 treaties struck between the federal government and various tribes refer to indigenous nations by name or to 'Indians.' In fact, Article 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution empowers the Congress '[t]o regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes' (Mount 2007). 'If we begin calling ourselves 'Native Americans' and not 'Indians,'' he argued, 'then that will just give the federal government another way to abrogate the old treaties, because the treaties were made with Indians, but all of the Indians will be gone—*replaced by Native Americans*.' Anyway, Indians call themselves 'Indians,' both formally and informally, as the National Congress of American Indians and the American Indian Philosophical Association illustrate. So, rather than adopt some monstrous invention like 'Amerindian,' or some overbroad and imprecise labels like 'indigenous' or 'aboriginal people,' I'll stick with 'American Indians' (and sometimes 'Indians' or 'Natives'). This usage has the additional virtue that folks who *are* Indian will know that I'm talking about them" (2010: 2-3).

ing storyteller whose tale is an origin story which by provoking the reader to its active co-creation turns into an animated entity that enacts an area of ontological, intersubjective, historical difference. It is also argued that Miranda's work is part of the American Indian life writing tradition and represents an intervention into the genre of memoir/autobiography.

1. Four principles of American Indian epistemology

Building on Nelson Goodman's constructivist theory, Norton-Smith's *Dance of Person and Place: American Indian Philosophy* (2010) offers "one possible interpretation of American Indian philosophy as *a dance of person and place*" (Norton-Smith 2010: 3-4). The philosopher identifies four "common themes" which, "seem to recur across American Indian traditions" and hence form the basis of the "American Indian world version" (Norton-Smith 2010: 1) which the metaphor of the "dance of person and place" serves to express. These four notions are: "two world-ordering principles, relatedness and circularity, the expansive conception of persons, and the semantic potency of performance" (Norton-Smith 2010: 1). They name the "ways of regarding" and ordering the Indian world (Norton-Smith 2010: 3). In other words, they encapsulate Native ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

1.1. Relatedness

In the Western world, "the individual human subject is the fundamental "unit" of knowing" says Norton-Smith (2010: 57) and the Cartesian dogma of "I think therefore I am" confirms this. However, this is not the case in the American Indian world version which, Norton-Smith holds, constructs "a universe that is interconnected and dynamic" (Norton-Smith 2010: 75), ontologically plural and unfolding in intersubjectivi-

ty.[2] *Relatedness* names this version of reality as a network where "[a]ll beings […] are related and interconnected" (2010: 58). American Indian languages, says Norton-Smith, following Goodman's assertion that "linguistic versions of the world […] make worlds by identifying, categorizing, and ordering sense experiences" (Norton-Smith 2010: 116), construct and encapsulate this in their syntax and semantics.[3]

In such a world version, humans are obligated to partake in social and moral relationships with other humans – James Axtell says "that in native society, an unattached person was *persona non grata*. To be accepted as a full member of a tribe or band was to be related […] to other members" (1991: 20) – as well as with other types of ontologies: ancestors, spirits, animals, plants, and places (Norton-Smith 2010: 92). It is by virtue of recognizing and sustaining these (ontologically expansive) kinship ties that entities "are raised to the ontological and moral status of *person*" (2010: 11) – I will expand on this assertion shortly. Hence, it is imperative to sustain relationships and the values of "*respect for others*" and "e*quality"* of beings undergird these processes (Norton-Smith 2010: 92). As Norton-Smith puts it: "everything is related and we are all rela-

[2] The principle of relatedness is found in the concept of the Great Spirit which denotes a reality as an all-encompassing network. The Maya scientific/religious concept of "IN LAK'ECH: *Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo*" (Valdez 1994: 173) means essentially the same: that, as Maya scholar Hunbatz Men says, "each individual [is] one with every other being – the same entity". For the Maya "'you' was declared non-existent, leaving the notion that 'you are me' and 'I am you'" (Men 1990: 25). Building on research in Indigenous California and New Mexican songs Herbert Joseph Spinden argues that American Indians are driven by "directive mentality" the aim of which is to "fit into a universal scheme" (1993: 7), to integrate with the World, to actively participate in this higher reality of mutuality. A Yokut (California Indian) song expresses this interconnection this way: "My words are tied in one / With the great mountains, / With the great rocks, / With the great trees, / In one with my body / And my heart" (in Spinden 1993: 7).

[3] Pointing to European languages' syntactic distinction into genders Norton-Smith asserts that Native languages construct a different world version by linguistic means: "Many American Indian languages like Shawnee use a syntactic device to mark a different sort of category, namely, the *animate*, recognizing and reinforcing the fundamental distinction between animate and inanimate entities in their worlds" (2010: 7).

tives, so all entities and beings are interconnected, valuable by virtue of those interconnections, and due *respect*" (2010: 59). Thus the core of the American Indian world version can be summarized as: "I relate therefore I am".

In epistemic terms, this translates into "visualizing or constructing relationships or connections between entities" (Norton-Smith 2010: 9), a cognitive method of ordering and "creating patterns of relatedness in sense experience" (Norton-Smith 2010: 58) or, as Vine Deloria says, "looking for relationships between various things" (1999: 34). Norton-Smith talks of a "holistic perception" (2010: 59) which "actively seek[s] out newly emerging connections between experiences" (2010: 58) and incorporates contradictions into a larger whole. What is called for is one's *active relationship* to the world and an epistemic apparatus which rejects any strict separation between branches of knowledge (2010: 4) and in which "categorization cannot be static and projection must be cautious, necessitating an ongoing process of verification" (Norton-Smith 2010: 75). Thus the most important question one can ask is "*how*" to proceed through life "in a web of normative relations" (Norton-Smith 2010: 64; my emphasis). If the most important human goal is, to quote Deloria, "to find the *proper* road along which […] individuals were supposed to walk" (1999: 46; my emphasis) the first injunction is one of mindfulness. In other words, Native epistemology emphasizes procedural (as opposed to propositional) knowledge, for in the world conceived as a network, our every action and thought counts; it has a "moral content" (2010: 65), and thus is subject to moral qualification.[4]

1.2. Circularity

Drawing on Donald Fixico's assertion that "'Indian Thinking" is "seeing" things from a perspective emphasizing that circles and

[4] As Vine Deloria says, "there is a proper way to live in the universe: there is a content to every action, behavior, and belief" (1999: 46). Norton-Smith adds that, in a world teeming with relations one "must be constantly mindful of [one's] actions and their consequences" (2010: 137).

cycles are central to the world" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 9), Norton-Smith proposes that the principle of *Circularity* marks another important difference between American Indian philosophy and the Western linear mind.[5] In the Native world circularity unites and "orders both temporal and spatial sense experiences" (Norton-Smith 2010: 125).[6] It is responsible for the prioritization of place and the interpretation of the present through the past which explains the Native moral obligation to perform particular ceremonies periodically at specific sacred sites where people reconnect with spirits. These sites may be considered centers of power and hence the "center of the circle—or the sphere" is the central Native symbol standing for "the place of peace, balance and equilibrium" (Norton-Smith 2010: 133). Norton-Smith holds that circularity "patterns all [...] facets of American Indian life, especially social life and practice" (2010: 127) but also the verification and transmission of knowledge.

1.3. Expansive conception of persons

Connected with the above principles is the already-mentioned assertion that we *become persons* by virtue of heeding the rules of conduct relatedness as the ultimate reality demands.

[5] Deloria famously polarized Indigenous and European cultures by suggesting that for American Indians lands and their sacred places hold "the highest possible meaning and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind" (1992: 62) while the Western Europeans privilege time and history in their identity. Norton-Smith however, suggesting that circularity orders both spatial and temporal reasoning of American Indians, argues that the proper binary opposition between the Indigenous Americans is that between circularity and linearity (2010: 125).

[6] Temporal circular patterning is based on observation of the natural world and its cycles as well as on intergenerational understanding of reality as "the experience of the moment coupled with the interpretive scheme that had been woven together over the generations" (Deloria in Norton-Smith 2010: 38). Circular patterning of space is based on a belief "that the powers of the cardinal directions are associated with the powers of the seasons or parts of the day—*temporal* orderings" (2010: 125). Each of the directions, then, is also associated with a circadian or seasonal cyclical or circular event or occurrence.

This reflects what Norton-Smith calls the *Expansive Conception of Persons*. It is based on two convictions: 1. human beings are not the only entities included in the category of a person; our "siblings" are "powerful spirit persons embodied as places, physical forces and cardinal directions, ancestors, nonhuman animals and plants—even the Earth itself" (Norton-Smith 2010: 91, 137) and, in general, one may say that, "[p]*ersons* are animate 'spirit beings'" and that "being animate is a necessary condition for personhood" (Norton-Smith 2010: 94); 2. human personhood has a deontological dimension, that is, humans *become persons* by *properly* fulfilling certain responsibilities, like "participation in certain forms of social practices and performances" which sustain "relationships with and obligations to other persons" (2010: 90). Only when humans cyclically address "this actual, concrete nexus of moral relationships and obligations" (Norton-Smith 2010: 91) do they become "*real persons*" (Norton-Smith 2010: 94). In other words, personhood is conditioned on participating in the spirit world, that is on becoming one, the same entity, with all animate beings. This explains why when during the first encounters between the whites and the Indigenous Americans the former "displayed behavior that was less than 'divine'", the latter called them "'human'" (Axtell 1991: 17).

1.4. Semantic potency of performance

The emphasis on procedures and obligations indicates the central role of, what Norton-Smith calls the *Semantic Potency of Performance*, a principle which holds that: 1. ceremonies, symbolic acts or performances with symbols (i.e. words, objects) such as speech acts, gifting, dance, naming, etc. are the "principal [vehicles] of meaning" (Norton-Smith 2010: 11) which "[empower] the symbol, [transform] the participants, [categorize] and [order] experiences, and [help] construct the American Indian world" (2010: 95); 2. a performance is "in all its aspects […] an animated entity with a spirit created by the participants" (Norton-Smith 2010: 101). In other words, it is

not only language that orders sense experience according to the reality of relatedness but, most importantly, the performance serves this purpose.

The central role of performances in American Indian cultures was recognized, for example, by the seventeenth-century evangelizers of New England, Thomas Mayhew, Jr. and John Eliot. Eliot called the powwows the "guardians of the traditional native order" (in Cogley 1999: 172) and Mayhew referred to them as "the strongest cord" tying Indians "to their own way" (in Cogley 1999: 173). Eliot specifically acknowledged the healing power of the powwows, calling them an effective type of native medicine (Cogley 1999: 175). In 1647 he wondered: "if they leave off powwowing, and pray unto God, what shall they do when they are sick?" (in Cogley 1999: 175).

Examples of such cultural and healing performances are many. Norton-Smith points to Shawnee dances (2010: 101). Fixico speaks of speech acts (prayers, storytellings, counselings, sacred songs, etc.) asserting that, "each account is an entity of power" (2003: 22) where the "power" is "both the Powers and the People", establishing ties to other spirit entities and conveying "knowledge and values across generations" (Norton-Smith 2010: 100). Naming is one such performance. For example, among the Shawnee names belong to name groups (*um'soaki*) represented by animals (Norton-Smith 2010: 102). Names as animate entities care for their bearers and the latter, by way of what C. F. Voegelin calls an "emotional rapport" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 104), are said to develop characteristics associated with these animals. It is in this way, that naming as a performance establishes kinship ties within an expansive ontology and creates a deontological relationality between humans and their *um'soma* (Norton-Smith 2010: 104). And gifting – the primary means of exchange and sustaining relationships (Norton-Smith 2010: 93) in the American Indian axiology – is also a world-ordering performance with

a deontological dimension: to give, to accept, to reciprocate.[7] A gift, like a name, is believed to be an "animate being that is enlivened or ensouled" (Norton-Smith 2010: 110) and conveys a part of the giver onto the recipient, creating "the core *moral* obligation" (Norton-Smith 2010: 110) to reciprocate.[8] That is why gifting practices are not only, as Axtell says, "at once 'words' in the rich metaphorical language of political councils and sureties for one's word" (1991: 33) but also, following Deloria, express "gratitude [...] on behalf of all forms of life", acting "to complete and renew the entire cosmos" (1999: 332).[9]

It is this higher obligation of world-ordering and world-renewing by *doing* on behalf of all beings that captures the goal of human life in the Native world version: "persons participating in their required dances [or other performances] at specified times and places return balance to and gratefully reaffirm their place and the place of all other human and nunhuman persons – in that world" (2010: 136). This is why Norton-Smith uses the metaphor of "the dance of person and place" to render the Native way of *mindful* and *proper* doing in and on behalf of relatedness. It is this practice – cyclical, moral, ontologically expansive, intersubjective – that transforms/heals humans into *Real Persons*. Jace Weaver says that Native religious traditions are best understood not in terms of "ethics, or dogma, or theology" but as religions which "permeate every aspect of daily life and existence", are based on "ritual practice", and are "inexorably tied to the land" (2001: 179).

[7] The obligations involved in gifting are: 1. to *Give* - grounded in the obligation *to care for* and *to be generous to* relations, an extended family, kinfolk (Norton-Smith 2010: 113); 2. to *Accept* – refusing either to give or accept is a rejection of relatedness, of "alliance and commonality" and as such is "tantamount to declaring war" (Norton-Smith 2010: 109); 3. to *Reciprocate* – one has to give back "because to accept something from somebody is to accept some part of his spiritual essence, of his soul" (Norton-Smith 2010: 109). Gifting is thus one specific, transformative and empowering, "performance with a symbol" (Norton-Smith 2010: 105).

[8] The gift is endowed with the power to "punish transgressions of the moral obligations" (Norton-Smith 2010: 110).

[9] As Deloria explains: "Tribal people have a moral responsibility to perform these ceremonies on behalf of other peoples in the world" (1999: 331) in order to recreate the world and maintain its equilibrium.

Having outlined the key concepts and the axiological and procedural guidelines of the American Indian philosophy derived from them, let me inquire about their function in *Bad Indians*. Do the notions of relatedness, circularity, expansive conception of persons and the semantic potency of performance and injunctions for mindful conduct play out in the work? What is Miranda's ethical purpose? How does she advance it in structural, generic, linguistic, and situational descriptive means? How does that build the American Indian world version?

2. American Indian worldview in *Bad Indians*

2.1. *Bad Indians*' ethical and procedural goals

Miranda calls herself a descendant of survivors of "a great holocaust" (2013: 76) thinking of California American Indian history. *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* is simultaneously a personal confession and an attempt to understand her own story as "a mixed-blood 'Mission Indian'" (2013: xiv). These people are the products of two processes. The first was what Benjamin Madley calls "an American Genocide" (when Spanish missions and American settlers almost completely wiped out the state's Native population).[10] The second is the legacy of "enduring and/or celebrating mixed-race unions for about two hundred years in one form or another" (Miranda 20134: xiv).

[10] To be fair, in his *An American Genocide* (2016) Madley concentrates on the American era (post-1848) because it is during this period that, he argues, events occur which fall unequivocally under the definition of "genocide" as adopted in the 1948 United Nations' *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. Madley sees the mission era, however, as a directly contributing factor: "[b]y declaring baptized California Indians the legal wards of the Franciscans, Spanish authorities made them second-class subjects, and established precedents on which Mexican and US authorities would later build". The Spanish attitudes to Indian humanity, says Madley, "would later cross-pollinate with preexisting Anglo-American practices and policies toward American Indians to create some of the conditions for genocide in California between 1846 and 1873" (Madley 2016: 27, 26).

In short, Miranda deals here with the consequences of the catastrophe and the price of survival.

The book begins with an "Introduction: California is a Story" in which Miranda reveals her mixed-race background – her mom was Jewish, her dad Chumash (Santa Barbara/Santa Ynez Mission Indians) and Esselen (Carmel Mission Indian). Recounting the shock her parents' marriage brought to her mother's white parents, Miranda underscores one of the goals of her book – to probe the legacy of mixing as a survival strategy: "Those who will not change do not survive; but who are we when we have survived?" (2014: xiv). Although Miranda identifies in herself "two separate streams of human history and story" (2013: xiv) she makes explicitly clear that for her it is the Indian side that is important for its "history and story" were doomed to extinction and oblivion; it was this side that she had always been challenged about "in large part because I do not have the language of my ancestors" (2013: xiv). To this she counters: culture does not disappear when the language is absent but "when we stop telling stories of who we are, where we have been, how we arrived here, what we once knew, when we stop [...] the long, long task of inventing an identity" (Miranda 2013: xiv). Stories, the body of knowledge of a people, hold the keys, the epistemic coordinates to the world version, hence they are "the most powerful force in the world" (2013: xvi). More dangerous than the loss of language is thus the loss of stories people recount to and about themselves. In these assertions we find the directive intentionality of the work – a commitment to (re)tell (produce, do) for the purpose of cultural/communal (re)affirmation.

But Miranda also knows what she is up against – stories told by others. In the history of the American West these others' stories about the Indians often amounted to proverbs like that attributed to General Philip Sheridan (Mieder 1993: 38), that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian". Bad Indians are then those who survived and Miranda as their descendant makes them her subjects. But the term "bad Indians" resona-

tes also with another popular stereotype rooted, Miranda says, in "the only one story about the California Indians", a story so dominant that "even other Indians" believed it, the most oppressive story of all, that of "missionnization of California" (2013: xvi). This Story, buttressed by architectural styles, splendid landscaping, and the educational system, cleanses the state's inaugural moment by celebrating the "benevolent" mission padres and, as a reverse of that saintly image, by denigrating Indian victims' humanity as "diggers" (Miranda 2013: 51-53), "primitive, ugly, passive, drunken, immoral, lazy, weak-willed people" (Miranda 2013: xvi).[11] Despite the fact that, as she indicts, missions were chattel slavery institutions which operated not unlike concentration camps (2013: xvii) – rendered metaphorically as "Mission Conversion Factory centered around a *furnace* … and dependent on continuing fresh supply of human beings" (Miranda 2013: 16-17; my emphasis) – in which "out of an estimated one million Indigenous inhabitants, only twenty thousand survived" (Miranda 2013: 76)[12] the official story of the Spanish missions is a pastoral fantasy: "the padre stood in the shade of the church doorway and watched the Indians – men, women, children – go meekly about their daily work, clothed, Christianized, content" (Miranda 2013: xviii).[13] Historians have termed this version of California's past a "fantasy heritage" (McWilliams 1968 [1948]: 35-47) or "ersatz history" (Davis 1992: 30) but its promotion has depended, on keeping the "Indian in the closet" (1994

[11] Miranda offers more adjectives to describe this stereotype: "godless, dirty, stupid, primitive" (2013: xvi), "Indian outlaws, banditos, renegades, rebels, lazy Indians, sinful Indians", "troublemakers, horse thieves, fornicators, […] polygamists, Deer dancers, idol worshippers" (Miranda 2013: 97), "pagans who refused to convert" (2013: 99), etc.

[12] Miranda does not provide a source for this number. Most contemporary historians estimate the pre-contact population from around 310 000 (Madley 2016: 23; Sandos 2004: 14) to 350 000 (Castillo 2015: 44).

[13] The state's early promoters, like Charles Fletcher Lummis, understood that the missions were "the best capital […] California has" (Lummis in Davis 1992: 24). Thus a pervasive mission mythology, extensively promoted since the booster era and still dominant today in the state's architecture and public space policies, came into being.

[1947]: 21), as Carey McWilliams noted in the 1940s, on silencing the story of the Indian gehenna and continuing trauma.[14] The perpetuation of the stereotype of deficient, indolent people has helped to sanitize the "Mission Mythology" (Miranda 2013: 63). Inflating the civilizing aspect of the missions and diminishing Indigenous agency, it renders Indian existence past and present as "ungrievable life", to use Judith Butler's formulation (2009: 38), which Miranda translates into the "brutal wisdom" (2013: 99) of the epigraph to this essay. Miranda understands that the "Fantasy Fairy Tale" of the missions "has done more damage to California Indians than any conquistador; it "has not just killed us, it has taught us to kill ourselves and kill each other" (2013: xix). She reads its power expansively – "This story is a kind of evil, a kind of witchery". Hence her second urgent purpose: "We have to put an end to it now" (2013: xix).

And how best to do it? "What's the best way to kill a lie?" (Miranda 2013: xx) and to crush the evil spell? Miranda by the end of the "Introduction" has come to fully own her Native side. She claims a larger community she belongs to of "California Indian peoples and allies talking back to mythology, protesting, making waves" (Miranda 2013: xx). Having referenced Leslie Silko (2013: xi), N. Scott Momaday and Linda Hogan (2013: xvi), she steps into the role of a Native storyteller to, as she declares, "create a space where voices can speak after long and often violently imposed silence" (2013: xx). Naming her work *Bad Indians*, she signals her goal of establishing an emotional rapport with those ancestors whose names official historical (i.e. mission) records mention only in relation to crimes and/or prescribed punishment. If they were

[14] The promotion of the missions turned them into "the state's biggest tourist attractions", resulted in the proliferating "mission décor" (Miranda 2013: xvii), produced literature (Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona,* Isabel Gibson Ziegler's *The Nine Days of Father Serra*), mission pageantry (John Steven McGroarty's *The Mission Play*), mission adventure film (*Seven Cities of Gold*), mission public space projects and mission renovation projects, and sanitized the figure of Junípero Serra to promote him to, first, the state's Founding Father and then, in 2015, a Catholic saint.

found guilty of transgressions against the heteronomy of the Christian Western world they are her *santos* to whom she writes a passionate novena (2013: 97-99). It is their "unrepentant," "pagan" (2013: 99) graces that she implores: "make us in your image, grant us your pride. […] illuminate the dark civilization we endure" (2013: 99). We may think of those "Indian outlaws" (2013: 97) as Miranda's *um'soma*, her siblings. Such relationships entail obligations, including an obligation to "balance accounts" (Norton-Smith 2010: 137). Hence her offering of a "bridge back to" the ancestors, "to their words and experiences" (Miranda 2013: xx). This is her way of dispelling the evil story – by reclaiming relatedness and (circularly) doing (performing) culture.

When she says, "I feel voices present" (Miranda 2013: xx), she signals that her book will offer a space for those relatives, their ghosts, to speak through her. And indeed, it is a collection of stories recovered, salvaged, hypothesized, conjectured in a circular movement between the present and the past, fact and imagination. Based on extensive research, witty but respectful, constantly moving between personal and communal, her chapters are heterogeneous portals into times, spaces, subjectivities (Serra, Isabel Meadows, Vicenta, Ularia and the river, Digger Belles, Tom Miranda). It is in this sense, that the book actualizes the *living* continuum of the Indigenous culture/community, that is, acquires a different ontological status, perhaps best rendered as the entity of power. In other words, as "the antidote to lies" (Miranda 2013: xx), to the witchery of representation, Miranda performs a rite, becomes a medium, whose work is an instance of glossolalia. That the communal dominates over the personal is also clear from the structure of the book with its organization into four, chronologically-ordered parts focused on the trajectory of a people: "The End of the World: Missionization 1776-1836", "Bridges: Post-Secularization 1836-1900", "The Light from the Carissa Plains: Reinvention 1900-1961", "Tehayapami Achiska: Home 1961-present".

To summarize the ethical and procedural goals of Miranda in the light of Norton-Smith we may say that the book is premised on: a. relatedness, communal identification, and intersubjectivity; b. the principles of circularity and expansive personhood (transformative ontology) as the metaphor of the "story-bridge" (2013: xx) and the title indicate; and c. a procedural belief in the semantic potency of performance as the author endeavors to *do* culture despite the loss of the tongue. Let me now illustrate how Miranda puts these into practice.

2.2. The "right road" of the memoir

Consider the generic location of Miranda's work. The memoir, we may be reminded, arises in Europe contemporaneously with the rise of Modernity. Andrzej Cieński offers this periodization of the memoir's history in the strictly European context: handwritten in the eighteenth century, edited and printed in the nineteenth century (Cieński 1981: 69-70). Together with the closely-related autobiography – Andrzej Cieński, after Ireneusz Opacki, says that in autobiographies the author tells us more about himself/herself than the world, while in memoirs the description of the world prevails (Cieński 1981: 16)[15] – the memoir relays the character and strategies of European individualism and imperialism from the seventeenth century through the end of the nineteenth century.[16] By the eighteenth century it had developed enormous stylistic heterogeneity

[15] Cieński says: "utwory pamiętnikarskie, w których autor więcej mówi o sobie niż o świecie, to autobiografie, natomiast te, w których dominuje opis świata, to pamiętniki" (1981: 16).

[16] Andrzej Cieński, in his study of eighteenth-century memoirs, reminds us that a "memoir" is much more than a "diary". In the Old-Polish meaning it stood for a person who remembers a lot (Cieński 1981: 8). Cieński adds that, "*'Pamiętnik' to także materialny, konkretny przedmiot pamiętający jakieś zdarzenie* ["'Memoir' is also a material, concrete object which remembers some occurrence"]" (1981: 8; my translation, all other translations in this text are by the author) and that it used to be identified with the word "*pamiątka*" (1981: 8) which denoted physical places (castles, battlefields), a meaning which survives in the English "memorial". It also stood for a text composed in order to commemorate important events.

(Cieński 1981: 17)[17] and, at the height of the Enlightenment, it became synonymous with *fictional* narratives (Cieński 1981: 9). Such formal syncretism is also the case with Miranda's work[18] but this is not the only reason to call it a memoir in the Western tradition. Another is its concern with the world (research-based method) as well as its, at times, fictional, or counterfactual character linking it to some traits of the high Enlightenment memoir.

However, Miranda's generic choice seems to derive most probably from the American Indian context. As A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff informs us, American Indian autobiography has been written "more consistently than any other form of prose" at least "[s]ince the early nineteenth century" (1990: 251).[19] This has been so perhaps because the Native conviction is that "there are no real distinctions between various branches of human knowledge—science and religion, philosophy and

[17] Cieński writes that the memoir narrative of that period would often include such elements as: "własne i cudze wiersze, listy […], fragmenty własnego diariusza, odezwy, artykuły prasowe z gazet drukowanych i gazetek pisanych przepisane w całości lub streszczone z podaniem źródła lub bez żadnej wskazówki, że to tekst cudzy, mowy, kazania, rozmaite akty prawne, jak metryki dzieci, nadania ziemi, konstytucje sejmowe, […] modlitwy, rachunki bieżące, rozmaite wykazy, np. zatrudnionych w majątku osób [original and adapted poems […] excerpts from one's own diary, proclamations, print paper articles as well as articles handwritten and copied in entirety or summarized with source information or without any suggestion that these texts are adaptations, speeches, sermons, legal acts of various kinds, such as birth certificates, land titles, parliamentary constitutions […] prayers, bills, various lists, for example, of persons employed by the estate]" (1981: 17-18).

[18] Her tools are equally broad: "old government documents, BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] forms, field notes, the diaries of explorers and priests, the occasional writings or testimony from Indians, family stories, photographs, newspaper articles" (2013: xx), prayers and letters to victims and ancestors, original poems or poems based on others' writings or poems adapted from articles, statistical charts and data, philosophical passages, historical and conjectural (re)writings, medical examinations, surveys, mock-up elementary school assignments, graphs, tables, drawings and symbolic images, photographs, etc.. The memoir ends with a list of "Sources and Permissions", works cited, and a "Family Ancestry Chart".

[19] In *An Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies* (1981), Brumble lists almost 600 Native self-narrations (Wong 2005: 130).

song—because everything is related" (Norton-Smith 2010: 138) and the memoir/autobiography has offered American Indian writers an inclusive, adaptable paradigm. One example of this tradition is Silko with whom Miranda establishes a kinship tie at the outset.[20] Silko's *Storyteller* (1981) is accepted as a paradigmatic example of what J.A. Cuddon, in his entry on autobiography, calls its "interesting, hybrid forms" which "articulate communal, oral traditions … by presenting … material as the product of many voices" (Cuddon 2013: 62).[21] Brewster E. Fitz explains that Silko adopts the voice of a "syncretic and ancestral figure: the writing storyteller" who is "linked … with a spiritual narrator and with the voices of many spirits for whom she is the scribe" (Fitz 2004: 8). Her work, which is "cosmopolitan, and at times almost postmodern", negotiates the "tension between orality and writing in the content and in the narration" (Fitz 2004: 4), interweaving both modes "with the practice of medicine" (Fitz 2004: 5). Thus Fitz calls Silko the "writing medicine woman" (2004: 5). Both in the form of her work and in her declared allegiances (2013: ix-x), Miranda must be seen as part of this lineage.

The figure of the writing medicine woman brings me back to the Western roots of the memoir. The genre, in its epistemic certainties of the individual, rational mind represents the opposite of Miranda's existential center; it is an artform upon which the Romantic ideology – the building block of colonialism and the literary companion to European expansionism – stands (Cieński 1981: 71). But precisely because of this the writing medicine woman who must acknowledge *all* relations must take it up to perform, must approach the shadow, the dark side of form, the doing of ideology, the center. She must work through it as a Western genre just as she works within

[20] Miranda thanks Silko for "the clarifying fire of her faith in this project", and Linda Hogan for "inspiration and unwavering truth" (2013: ix-x).

[21] Silko's *Storyteller* juxtaposes "poems, short stories, myths, letters, essays, anecdotes, and photographs", and telling "mythical, community, and personal narratives, continuing the Laguna Pueblo practice of articulating personal identity from communal stories" (Wong 2005: 139).

the long continuum of Native life writing.[22] It is here that Miranda finds the epistemically *proper road*.

2.3. Performing the American Indian world

A prayer in Esselen and English by Louise Miranda Ramirez, the chairwoman of the Ohlone/Costanoan-Esselen Nation, opens the book. It sets the first, high interpretive frame for the memoir. It is an offering and a plea "that our people exist" (Miranda 2013: viii).[23] Miranda's "Introduction" follows. The first few elements of this beginning section, the epigraph and the first paragraph, provide a good example of how Miranda's writing performs its purpose.

The book begins with a quote from a missionary questionnaire filed at Mission San Juan Bautista in 1812.[24]

> They love their children in excess, but they give them no education whatever. They merely recount to them the fables which they heard in their pagan state. […] They held and do hold those as wise men who knew and could relate more of these fables. This is their chief knowledge. (qtd. in Miranda 2013: xi)

The voice is that of a missionary. The excerpt stands for the tale and subjectivity dominant in the imagination of California and enshrined in the figure of St. Junipero Serra and in recreated mission sites. Its content succinctly reveals the

[22] Wong points to "narrative wampum belts, quillwork, and pictographic life narratives", as well as, after H. David Brumble III, to "coup tales, informal autobiographical tales, self-examinations, self-vindications, educational narratives, and stories of quests for visions and power" (Wong 2005: 127) as the autobiography's predecessors in the American Indian life-writing tradition.

[23] The prayer declares the intentions: "we come in a good way. Days of ancestors are gone but we will not forget […]. We honor the Ancestors that suffered so that we could live. […] know that our people exist" (in Miranda 2013: viii).

[24] In 1812 a detailed questionnaire (*interrogatorio*) was sent from Spain to all Alta California missions. Sandos says, that it was answered "between 1813 and 1815. Responses were collected from eighteen of the then nineteen missions, lacking only those from La Purísima" (2004: 118).

governing biases of this origin Story. In epistemic terms, temporal linearity (history moving forward from the moment of the original, radical break) is privileged while the Indians are subject to what Johaness Fabian has termed "denial of coevalness" or a method by which non-European societies are "deemed to exist … in a radically different timeframe" (Fabian 1983: 35). This is why, the missionary implies, they lag behind: they *still* tell stories heard in a former, "pagan" state; *still* value those who can remember more. If, as Walter D. Mignolo says, "'time' is a fundamental concept in building the imaginary of the modern/colonial world and an instrument of both controlling knowledge and advancing a vision of society based on progress and development" (2011: 161), the denial of coevalness and linearization, together with normative preference for Western literacy over the Indigenous performative orality based on recounting/repetition (circularity), usher in an epistemic center of the epigraph that is teleological, horizontal, and genuinely narrative in orientation.

Further, linked with the dismissal of traditional pedagogy as non-pedagogy is a tacit suggestion, we surmise from the missionary's words, that a different model of parenthood is called for, one that perhaps can be described with George Lakoff's "Strict Father Model" (Lakoff 2009: 77).[25] By suggesting a double deficiency of the Indian upbringing – their love of offspring in "excess" (not strict?), their education a nonsense – the epigraph appeals to what, after Roland Barthes' theory of five narrative codes offered in *S/Z* (1972), we can call the American and, more broadly, colonial "cultural code".[26]

[25] In this model, "the strict father is the moral leader of the family, and is to be obeyed. The family needs a strict father because there is evil in the world from which he has to protect them" (Lakoff 2009: 77). Punishment is legitimated: "You need a strict father because kids are born bad, in the sense that they … don't know right from wrong" (Lakoff 2009: 78).

[26] The five codes are: hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, cultural. As each reader animates the codes differently they arrive at different meanings, hence, Barthes argues, the plurality of the writerly text, its polyglossia,

A cultural code, holds Barthes, is "Gnomic" (1974: 18), that is it offers the discourse a base in some "scientific or moral authority" (1974: 18), it references some set of governing precepts. Barthes explains that because, "[t]he utterances of the cultural code" reference "a general will, the law of a society, making the proposition concerned ineluctable or indelible" they are "implicit proverbs" (1972: 100) and the way to discover a cultural code in an utterance, Barthes adds, is to transform it "into a proverb, a maxim, a postulate". Such a "stylistic transformation 'proves' the code, bares its structure, reveals its ideological perspective" (Barthes 1974: 100). What proverb best matches the ideological position of the missionary's discourse? One comes to mind: "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man", and, by association the one mentioned here before. Although these proverbs have a shorter history than the missions,[27] they express the same normative biases Columbus inaugurates and the missionary of San Juan Bautista recapitulates: that European beliefs and values are universal and Europeans are obligated to impose them upon others who, in contradistinction, have either inferior values or no values "whatever". In other words, the appeal to the colonial cultural code – the appeal not only expressed in this epigraph but which forms the foundation of the Mission Mythology – implicitly grants moral authorization for the darkest reality the West imposed upon the Indigenous populations: that of family separation, of *taking children away* for "proper" education and for "their benefit". It excuses cruelty and physical violence for it (by implication) calls for strict supervision (the antidote to excessive love) and, if we consider that the missionaries' strict

and instability, its productive rather than representative character. I return to this topic at the end of this essay.

[27] "Kill the Indian, and Save the Man" is the title of a speech delivered by the founder of the Carlisle Indian School, by Captain Richard H. Pratt, in 1892. "The only good Indian is a dead Indian", on the other hand, is attributed to General Philip Sheridan. For a detailed history of this slur see Wolfgang Mieder's "'The Only Good Indian Is a Dead Indian': History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype". *The Journal of American Folklore.* Vol. 106, No. 419 (Winter, 1993). 38-60.

paternal authority (*in loco parentis*) extended to all, adult and children Indians at the missions under the legal framework the institutions operated,[28] we are talking, ultimately, of the reality of cultural genocide.[29] By encoding the "Strict Father" model the epigraph always-already implicitly exonerates the genocidal relations which are its *raison de'etre*.

But there is more to the epigraph. The missionary tells us about people telling and passing down stories, and while his report aims to deny the validity of the American Indian culture, by, transitioning at the end into a quasi-anthropological discourse, it seemingly contradicts its tacit purpose of excluding Indians from the category of Man by admitting that they do use criteria for the verification of knowledge (mnemonic virtuosity) and do sustain culture through education in their "chief knowledge" – stories. Read from start to finish the excerpt suggests thus both Indigenous cultural lack and wealth; rehearsing ambivalence this way it assumes an aura of detached objectivity and mystifies its interestedness.

We can read this ambivalence with Barthes' concept of the modern myth. The modern myth, Barthes teaches us, operates by "an ambiguous signification" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127)

[28] Under the framework established by the Spanish crown the missionaries were granted exclusive, parental authority "to manage the mission Indians as a father would manage his family" (Engelhardt 1908: 117).

[29] I adopt the definition of the "cultural genocide" after the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015). This is because Miranda's text, the California missionary's report, and the Canadian Commission's report on the legacy of the Indian residential schools are all focused, either explicitly or implicitly, on the issue of family separation. The *Final Report* specifically points to the measure of family separation as one of the most essential elements of the cultural genocidal practices: "*Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, *most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next*" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 1; my emphasis).

which he describes with the concept of a moving "turnstile of form and meaning" where "form is empty but present, its meaning absent but full" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127). Such myth is consumed by dynamic "focusing" happening "according to the very ends built into its structure" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 127). It operates by what Barthes calls, "speech *stolen and restored*" (1991 [1972]: 124): that which is well-defined is brought back hollowed out of its content, historical complexities are destroyed, "meaning leaves its contingency behind" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 116). Having in mind that the occluded objective (the contingency) of the missionary's work within the context of the state institutions of colonial domination and exploitation is, to excerpt a definition of cultural genocide from the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the "destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group" (2015: 1) Barthes helps us understand the missionary's mystification: he commits what Barthes calls "brief act[s] of larceny" and "surreptitious faking" by appropriating parental (civilizing), pastoral (proselytizing), and scientific (anthropologist's) discursive strategies and evoking a tangle of moral certainties to assume a "benumbed look" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 124). It is here, on the verge of the true and unreal, in the constant, dynamic (re)focusing between what is denoted (salvation) and what is connoted (destruction) that the excerpt in its totality is revealed as what we can call, after Barthes, "the mythical signifier … an inextricable whole made of meaning and form" (1991 [1972]: 127).

The Esselen, Miranda's father's tribe, fell early prey to St. Serra's policy of Native child abduction.[30] Miranda's chosen

[30] The Esselen's territory lay immediately south of Mission Carmel, St. Serra's headquarters, and quickly fell under its proselytizing influence. Breschini and Haversat (following Tibesar and Geiger) observe that many Esselen did not move to the mission voluntarily. Rather, they were forced to relocate there from remote villages to be reunited with their children. "After baptism, children were permitted to live with their parents in their native villages until they reached the age of reason, after having completed their eighth year" (Breschini and Haversat 2004: 181). Then they were expected to

motto belongs to a larger, normative official/bureaucratic/ethnographic body of accounts about the California Indigenous Other (basically, about Miranda's kin). It represents the official origin Story of the state, as well as the apparatus of knowledge, always usurping a pretense of distant objectivity, in its entanglements with the regime of colonial destruction. In other words, it is Miranda's mortal enemy. Its choice and placement at the outset of her tale reveal Miranda's concerns: not only to dispute the origin Story and its epistemic and axiological certainties but also, in a manner already visible in her generic tactics, to inhabit the Story, to tell her own and her kinfolk origin myths and stories of survival not only against it but through it; to intervene in the mythical speech, to become, as Barthes advises, "a reader of myths" (1991 [1972]: 127) or a "mythologist" who "voluntarily interrupt[s] this turnstile of form and meaning" (Barthes 1991 [1972]: 122) and creates her own patterns of form and meaning. Thus, Miranda declares herself a student of history, epistemology and ethics as well as of discourse and the turnstile's logic. If the epigraph assumes a disembodied and sexless (to the extent that the missionary's cowl obscures the masculinity within it) authority, her work promises to assume an intimate (and feminine) voice; one,

move to the mission. If children were not given up voluntarily, soldiers took them away. Breschini and Haversat reference a documented 1783 altercation between the Esselen and Spanish soldiers, in which, as James Culleton reports, "a few of the former lost their lives" (Culleton in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 180). Breschini and Haversat speculate that the reason behind this skirmish was a dispute over the transfer of the children of the tribe to the mission. "If this was indeed the case", they add, "then the large number of Esselen being baptized during the following months would be understandable – they had been shown that they could not stand up to the weapons of the Spanish, and they simply wanted to be reunited with their children" (181). If the historians are correct then what is revealed is that the practice of child abduction, a practice enforced under the penalty of death, served also as an instrument of congregating (reducing) Indians at the missions. If many defenders of St. Serra claim that Indians relocated to the missions voluntarily this particular incident which occurred a year before the President's death and involved a reduction at San Carlos sheds light on the missionary's techniques of "moral suasion". The claim of extinction is explained later in this essay.

however, always embracing, open to contingency, hence to heterogeneity, syncretism.

That this is indeed the case is confirmed by part two of the opening segment, the first words by Miranda: "CALIFORNIA IS A STORY. California is many stories. As Leslie Silko tells us, don't be fooled by stories! Stories are 'all we have,'" (2013: xi). Having evoked the paradigm of the Mission Mythology, Miranda loudly, by capitalization, stands up to its authority; it is no longer "the" California Story but explicitly "A", one of "many". The missionary's words meet a different authority, that of Silko. Silko's words further decenter the Story; a warning, "don't be fooled by stories!", is a plea for informed, critical mythologist perception. To whom is it addressed? To a community of readers/listeners she establishes by this conative act. But just as stories may be misleading, for American Indians, Miranda quotes Silko further, they are "all we have". Silko's plea then first ushers in a community and then offers this community, the larger "we", a unifying paradigm upon which *we* (Silko, Miranda, the readers) thrive.

It is a fourth voice (after the missionary's, narrator's, Silko's) that now, having first agreed with Silko – "And it is true" (2013: xi) – not only explains but also, in another type of confluence of meaning and form, provides a direct example of that which the missionary calls the chief knowledge and Silko defines as *our* existential foundation. We hear: "Human beings have no other way of knowing that we exist, or what we have survived, except through the vehicle of story" (Miranda 2013: xi). The meaning and effect of the sentence hinges on its syntax and the syntagmatic, final placement in the paragraph – it confuses the reader's expectation as to the semantic consistency between Silko's "we" and the "we" here.

When that voice first speaks the reader is led to assume it is the narrator's own, Miranda's, who as a reader of Silko now takes over and as if inherits the communal aura the older writer's words just generated (by direct appeal to readers and a collective generalization). But in the sentence that follows,

the "we" is made separate from the "human beings" the humans only get to know *us* and learn about *us* through stories. The shift from the human "we" in Silko into a clearly Other voice here is abrupt. It estranges me and intrigues me. Grammatical inconsistency breaks the semantic inertia and I undergo a shock of incomprehension, instantly short-circuited back to the beginning of the sentence. And again. Who is the "we" here? I reread, want to correct it. Then I realize that Miranda has just played a circular trick on me. When one realizes this one falls into an ontologically-expansive horizon, a chasm of uncertainty, into another dimension. The "we" of the previous sentence, hitherto taken for granted, and to which I, the reader, can relate as my community, still echoes in my mind, amplified by Silko's authority, while it collapses into and integrates with this collective, plural voice of the Other coming from another entity. This recognition awakens me meta-linguistically and I become an active participant in the making of the book. And it awakens me ontologically. To discover spirits residing in these lines is not effortless and when one finally comes to this realization one has a sense of having animated them. Simultaneously the experience exposes porous borders of my subjectivity. Who talks to me, in me? Perhaps Miranda's ancestors but also, possibly, other non-human *Persons* like spirits, plants, animals, etc.. Simply put, Miranda, even though she writes in English, now speaks in tongues and when one realizes this one creates and hears glossolalia.

The sentence performs an actualization of what would otherwise have to be an elaborate explanation of the ultimate purpose of the American Indian stories: to enable cross temporal and cross-ontological communication and communion. At the same time, the "we" is also the "we" of the people, the trans-historical "we" spanning generations from the past and into the future. Either way, the time consciousness that the sentence engenders corresponds to the time of the Native stories – it is sacred, non-linear, non-human. When we are forced to reread, circularity is affirmed and *performed*. In general, the

sentence engenders another world by language confirming Norton-Smith's claim that "*Different words make different worlds*" (2010: 7), that "worlds are constructed … through the use of language" (2010: 6). Miranda's text becomes at this moment an entity of power where the power is the Powers and the People.

The opening segment assumes voices, engages in mediumship and glossolalia, demonstrating Miranda's collective, permeable, genealogical/anamnestic, playful, sacred/mythical, productive approach. Stories, like prayers, she seems to tell us, are vehicles of hierophany, of momentarily ascending a different, sacred order of things. The very arrangement of the theme of storytelling here (from the detached epigraph, through Silko's critical closeness, to the transcendent) combined with skillful meta-linguistics offer one example of how Miranda organizes her text into what can be termed hierophanic ladders, which take her readers onto a journey of epistemic expansion, reawakening. And if we consider that this is the purpose of ceremonies, and ceremonies are inseparable from medicinal purposes, we may conclude that the ultimate purpose of Miranda is writing as medicine, which confirms the thesis that Miranda is the writing medicine woman.

2.4. Mission soledad: The epistemic differential

Both Miranda and I have separately visited the same place. I stopped at Mission Soledad in California's Salinas Valley in July 2013 and the experience left a lasting impression on me.[31] It was during later research that I stumbled upon Miranda's short story "Soledad", included in *Bad Indians*, which revealed to me an aspect of the place I had entirely missed. It may be instructive to compare our reactions as it illustrates

[31] I published an article about the experience: "A Visit at Mission Soledad: On Path to Communion" in *Borderlands: Art, Literature, Culture* (2016). Ewelina Bańka and Zofia Kolbuszewska, eds. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL. 119-162.

the difference between propositional and procedural knowledge.

Mission Soledad was established on the site of an Esselen Indian village, Chuttesgilis (Breschini and Haversat 2004: 85) in 1791.[32] The Esselen lived in the Santa Lucía Mountains south of Serra's headquarters in San Carlos. Their small population[33] had been exposed to mission influence from the beginning and the founding of Soledad marked the next step in the bilateral, Spanish-Esselen history – it spelled the Esselen's final encirclement.[34] Soledad contributed to the massive reduction of the Esselen population. The last five Esselen were baptized in 1808 (Breschini and Haversat 182), in 1833, it was reported, that "there were already few Esselen left" (Beeler in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 8). Alfred Kroeber considered the tribe "the first to become entirely extinct" (Kroeber in Breschini and Haversat 2004: 8).[35] As if to match this dark impact, by 1830 Mission Soledad was, in the eyes of one reporter, "the gloomiest, bleakest and most abject looking spot in all California" (Robinson in Evans 1956: 20). After the secularization (1834) the mission fell into ruin. Reconstructed in 1954 and rededicated the following year, it serves today as a church and museum.

When I arrived in Soledad I hoped to locate a neophyte cemetery, for I knew that at missions it was the Indians, not

[32] This version of the village name after Gary S. Breschini and Trudy Haversat (2004: 85). Engelhardt's version is essentially the same: *Chuttusgelis* (1897: 95); Alfred Kroeber's entirely different: *Wacharo-n* (in Evans 1956: 25, note 1).

[33] Gary Breschini and Trudy Haversat estimate that upon contact the entire population of the Esselen was between 1,185 and 1,285 (2004: 67).

[34] To the south of Soledad, Mission San Antonio was established in 1771 among the Salinan Indians. It was the third Spanish mission and for the twenty years preceding Mission Soledad's founding had exerted an influence on the Esselen communities.

[35] The Esselen have survived and today there are two groups claiming Esselen descent. These are the Ohlone/Costanoan Essselen Nation and the Esselen tribe of Monterrey County. Miranda is a registered member of the former.

priests, who lived, worked, and died.[36] To my disbelief I found only two tombstones. Both are of distinguished Spaniards: one of padre Florencio Ibañez, the other of governor José Joaquin Arrillaga. I did not know at the time that originally two Indigenous cemeteries had been in operation here, nor that Harry Downie, the master builder in charge of the reconstruction, bulldozed the site causing "extensive destruction" (Kimbro, Costello, Ball 2009: 221). Currently, one Neophyte Cemetery is "under agricultural use" and the other has been converted into a parking lot ("Soledad Register" 2014: 11).[37] The absence of Native graves or any information about them was glaring. The site's uncanny tranquility, occasionally interrupted by a tractor plowing nearby, only intensified my unease. Questions were mounting as I drove off.

Miranda's story came as a shocking revelation:

> It's Saturday morning, and we have never walked so mindfully. We find bone fragments on paths, in the parking lot, at the edges of groomed green fields. Here is a finger joint, here a tooth. Here a shattered section of femur, here something unidentifiable except for the lacy pattern that means human being. (2013: 149)

What I missed that day were human remains! In the difference between mine and Miranda's concerns at the site, we find a good illustration of the difference between what we may call, albeit at the risk of generalization, the Western linear and Native circular epistemology.

My reaction corresponds, roughly, to the former. First of all, I came with a *purpose* of confirming/refuting a thesis (say, about the "Mission Myth" or "Indian in the closet"). It was "me"

[36] In Mission Soledad, despite epidemics of 1805 and 1806, its population peaked in 1805 with 727 (Engelhardt 1897: 381) or 688 (Jackson and Castillo 1995: 55) neophytes.

[37] Owned by the Diocese of Monterey the Neophyte Cemetery's "exact historical dimensions […] have not yet been determined. The east boundary lines of the district as they exist today were established at a distance from the East Wing. This area likely includes the anticipated extent of the cemetery area, and the actual limits will not be known until more archaeological investigation takes place" ("Soledad Register", 2014: 11).

and "my" epistemic center that were the source of inquiry. Second, because museums are conventionally, by way of syntagmatization of exhibits and discourse, spaces of "transparent" objectivity, I was unwittingly following the lead of curators and so – my skepticism as a student of discourse notwithstanding – I was *reading* the site. Third, perplexed by the museum's silences, I resorted to a sort of new-age mysticism of "feeling" the site, that is I withdrew to the kernel of the self. Thus, in all three instances, I approached the site propositionally from the position of an inductively reasoning rather than experientially perceiving subject. Such linear, future-oriented ratiocination allowed me to project my assumptions on the place and blinded me to the reality literally unfolding on the ground.

Consider now that American Indian knowledge proceeds, as Norton-Smith says, from "observing the world to learn something from it", that is, it emphasizes the "experiential content" (Norton-Smith 2010: 59, 61). More precisely, says Gregory Cajete, native philosophy "roots the entire tree of knowledge in the soil of direct physical and perceptual experience of the earth" (2004: 45). When we add to this, first, the moral injunction to proceed with caution because "everything we do and say – even everything we think – has a moral dimension" and, second, that truth in the Native world is what one does and not what one says, truth as "a property of respectfully successful action" (Norton-Smith 2010: 61, 64) then we may begin to grasp the motivations of Miranda's group. If all actions are morally salient then this includes one's every step and what is called for is a downwards-oriented mindfulness. This is especially true if one is walking on ancestral land and comes not to study discourse but to pay homage.

Most Western visitors walk differently. They wander around, admire an old chapel, take pictures, and, perhaps, stumbling upon the two graves, sympathize with the Europeans in monks' clothing. Then they whizz away in their "Chevy trucks and Mercedes-Benzs […] across the dirt parking lot created by

bulldozing the graveyard of Soledad's Indians. Bits of bone rise up from the dirt, catch in the steel-belted tire treads of tourists, carry our ancestors out to Highway 101, scatter them to the wind" (Miranda 2013: 149).

Places like that hold sacred value for California Indians. Many are sacred twice. First, because, like Soledad, they were established where original Native villages once stood. Second, because as Deloria teaches, a place can "be sanctified by an event that occurred at that site" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 14). Thus even if this had not been an ancient place, Mission Soledad and its catastrophic consequences would have made it sacred. For American Indians such sites are not museums. They are places of remembrance and mourning which must be periodically visited and where ceremonies must be held.

There is a jar at Mission Soledad with a sign: "Please: do not collect any bones" ("The Missing Burial Ground …"). Métis writer Lorraine Mayer summarizes the indigenous way of being in the world as the three "Rs" of "respect […] responsibility and relationship". The respect called for here is not for any signs but for "other people and […] all other living things" (in Norton-Smith 2010: 112). Miranda and her companions act upon this higher law:

> We gather this chipped harvest in our hands, pockets, cotton tobacco pouches, circle the mission slowly, follow Louise, who found our language buried beneath her tongue … James kneels, digs a hole with a flat sharp stone. Chris prays shyly: the old grandmother hums inside her skin. Ernie holds up the iridescent abalone shell, lets pale blue smoke bless this lonely air. (2013: 150)

The group "circle the mission slowly" in a mindful search. Once bone fragments are collected a symbolic and actual burial follows; a ceremony, an act of gratitude which aims to honor the relatives and renew the entire cosmos. As smoke rises – smoke as the sacred conduit connecting humans with the di-

vine, with another ontology – prayers are lifted to heaven.[38] Louise, the leader, initiates a speech act in the Esselen, a language "buried" but now resurrected – another sacred conduit.[39] "'*Xu-lin*, we say to our broken ancestors.' "'*Xu-lin*'", Miranda explains, "means 'reclaim, return, recover'", three other principle Rs. The word signifies a homecoming, mending, making whole. Miranda continues: "*xu-lin*, sprinkling sage, mugwort, and tobacco over the small grave. *Xu-lin*, we whisper as the earth takes back. *Xu-lin*, a plea and a promise: return".

We see here at play all of the four Native principles. Relatedness undergirds all the actions. Circularity dictates the manner of proceedings. Expansive personhood motivates Miranda's lexical choices and imagery – "children run to us with handfuls of ancestors", "our relatives scattered on the earth" (Miranda 2013: 149) – and the group's solemnity. Affirming the semantic potency of performance the group engages in a respectful action with a symbol, offers symbolic speech, prayer, and gifts to renew and sustain the networks of relations, their ties with other Persons, and to elevate their own personhood. When "the children hover like butterflies, taste the past without fear" (Miranda 2013: 150) an actual dance takes place and a communion with the past and the ancestral animate spirit beings present at this place is made.

Here, in the contrast between my reactions and those of Miranda's team, we find the parameters of the difference between the Western and Indigenous epistemic logic. The Western model starts with the self and self's concerns. One looks for causality and linear patterns, mobilizes grand narratives and engages in the play of rational deciphering of structures of representation and in psychological mystifications. The American Indian subject is motivated perceptually (experientially) and

[38] For more on the role of smoke in Indigenous cultures see for example James Axtell's *Imagining the Other: First Encounters in North America* (1991), 17-18.

[39] The "Louise" here is most probably the Esselen Tribal Chairwoman Louise Miranda Ramirez who has worked to revive the Esselen language and traditions. Hence Miranda's reference to Louise as the one "who found [...] language buried beneath her tongue".

procedurally (morally); the self emerges in seeking out relations and patterns of cycles within the reality of expansive personhood; hence mindful awareness of one's every step, balancing accounts, and re-ordering action which have the effect of (re)integrating one with that higher reality and with a different, eternal time frame, that is, of elevating ("hover like butterflies") and healing the (no longer alone) Native subject(s).

3. Conclusion: *Real Persons*

Above, I was able to signal at least four ways of considering Miranda's work from the point of view of the American Indian epistemology. In the first section, I discussed the author's declared intentions (affirmation and an antidote to lies) and her strategy (doing, glossolalia). In the second, I discussed the generic location of the text and linked it to the medicinal purpose and form-exorcism tactics of the writing medicine woman. Third, I demonstrated in detail how Miranda's text creates in language a plural, historically and ontologically expansive space which offers itself up to its readers for decoding and in this way engages the reader in the process of its creation, in its *doing*. Fourth, I discussed how Miranda's narrative underscores experiential and procedural knowledge, and is one instance of a dance of person and place. The memoir's other sections – for example, the opening poems in which Miranda inhabits the voice of Junípero Serra (2013: 3-5) – support the thesis that Miranda's work is *respectfully* expressive of, and performs, the Native worldview. In other words, the memoir passes the Native test of "truthfulness".

Norton-Smith says that "the successful telling of an origin story puts the People's experiences into perspective and helps them to understand their place in the world" (2010: 100). By writing down history and reflecting on the present, offering, to adopt Hertha D. Sweet Wong's words, a "form of testimony, bearing witness not only to a history of genocide, but to survival and continuance and the possibility of healing from the

'wounds of history'" (Wong 2005: 142), Miranda's memoir may be considered a tale of the origin of the tribe – the new tribe of Bad Indians, of survivors and those subjected to both genocide and syncretism, and deontological purgation by means of biased representations. Despite Norton-Smith's claim that it is performed oral stories and not written texts that possess the world-ordering power (2010: 11),[40] I want to argue that Miranda's work exemplifies a written text which due to its truthful character, its successful *doing* – strengthening bonds, incorporating difference, and tying Native life "to other human and nonhuman persons in the world" (Norton-Smith 2010: 100) – can be considered a successful instance of a dance of person and place. And Miranda, the master of the ceremony, can be called a Real Person for she accomplishes this dance, becoming a writing storyteller of her tribe. Crucially, however, her readers also stand a chance of becoming *whole* when they animate *Bad Indians* with each *mindful* reading correlating various registers and codes (movements) of the text.

One way of thinking about *Bad Indians* as an animated entity in a more traditional, narrative theory manner, could be to reference Barthes' concept of the "writerly text" as a plural, unstable, and multivalent network of the five codes mentioned before. Fitz was perhaps the first to suggest a parallel between the "strategy adopted by the writing storyteller" (2004: 5) and the Barthesian model. Barthes explains the writerly text as that which is "written (rewritten) today" (1974: 3) that is, one which is no longer consumed but produced by the reader who "function[s] himself, […] gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing" (1974: 4). The five codes are the cords the reader animates; it is, as Fitz says, "*ourselves writing*", but how one navigates the different codes is always a matter of difference in a "perpetual present, upon which no *consequent* language […] can be superimposed, […] before […]

[40] Norton-Smith emphasizes: "the *written* text of stories cannot put experiences into perspective, teach moral lessons and strengthen tribal bonds in an oral tradition. The stories must be performed" (2010: 1000).

some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances" (Fitz 2004: 7).

Barthes proposed this liberatory methodology in reaction to the Western tradition of what he calls "the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader" (1974: 4). But perhaps the problem Barthes identifies is deeper and goes back to Western epistemology? The memoir/autobiography is a quintessential Western genre and it is here that one sees this producer/user divide perhaps the most. As James Olney, the founder of autobiography studies, defined it: it is an offering up of one's life "to the general public for consumption" (2015 [1980]: 3).[41] It is noteworthy, then, that American Indians have not only embraced the genre but have transformed it by making "tribal culture and history important parts of their life stories, [which reflects] their continuing perception of themselves as part of a tribal community" (Brown Ruoff 1990: 265-266). In other words, American Indian writers have embraced the "master's tool" but, drawing from their own epistemic and axiological American Indian difference, they have proposed a "reconsideration of all three of [the autobiography's] roots – self, life, and writing" (Wong 2005: 126). Wong says:

> Native American notions of self, while varied, tend to share an emphasis on interrelatedness (not only among people, but between humans and the natural world) and community, rather than individuality; indigenous ideas of what kind of life is worth narrating are inclusive of the partial, everyday experiences of ordinary people, rather than focused on the complete lives of important public people; and while Native people have and do write

[41] For more on this, see Hertha D. Sweet Wong's "Native American life writing" (2005) in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*. Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 125-144. For the perspective represented by Olney and others see, James Olney's *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 [1980].

> autobiographies, historically, they spoke, drew, and performed aspects of their life stories. (Wong 2005: 126)

In general then, the memoirs/autobiographies by the American Indians lean toward the productive, fragmentary, inclusive, ontologically plural and intersubjective. They do so because of the values and the world version – the epistemology – they uphold and (re)construct. Miranda's text, as I have demonstrated, does exactly this. It represents a ceremony, a redressive action, it continues and expands on the tradition of American Indian life writing, and it reflects a practice of "feminist and ethnic-American self-narrations" (Wong 2005: 125) which seeks to inhabit and redefine the form and subject of the autobiography. If we remember the memoir/autobiography's paradigmatic role in the Western cultural realm, then Miranda's and other Native writers' interventions into the genre have larger ramifications. They aim to reprogram the Western epistemic coordinates from within and the key to this reprogramming lies in bridging the divide Barthes laments, in *giving one's life to the general public for production*.

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The eye looks back: Seeing and being seen from William Bartram to H.P. Lovecraft

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the sense of sight and seeing in the selected texts of American literature from the late 18th century to the 1930s, i.e. from William Bartram to H. P. Lovecraft. Adopting a perspective of changing "scopic regimes" – conventions of visual perception presented in a number of literary and non-literary works, the author analyzed a passage from Bartram's *Travels* to reveal a combination of the discourse of science with that of the British aesthetics of gardening. In Margaret Fuller's *Summer on the Lakes* (1843) the main factor is the work of imagination dissatisfied with the actual view of Niagara Falls, while in Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* substantial subjectivity is reduced to pure seeing. In Henry David Thoreau's essay "Ktaadn" the subject confronts nature that is no longer transparent and turns out meaningless. In American literature of horror from Charles Brockden Brown through Edgar Allan Poe and H. P. Lovecraft, the narrator's eye encounters the inhuman gaze of a predator, a dehumanized victim of murder, or a sinister creature from the outer space. To conclude, the human gaze was gradually losing its ability to frame or penetrate nature, bound to confront the annihilating evil eye from which there was usually no escape.

Keywords

eye, seeing, gaze, scopic regime, nature, subjectivity

Spojrzenie w odpowiedzi: podmiot i przedmiot widzenia od Bartrama do Lovecrafta

Abstrakt

Tematem artykułu jest zmysł wzroku i widzenie w wybranych tekstach literatury amerykańskiej od drugiej połowy wieku XVIII do lat trzydziestych wieku XX, czyli od W. Bartrama do H. P. Lovecrafta. Przyjmując perspektywę zmiennych „dyskursów skopicznych", czyli konwencji postrzegania świata utrwalonych w różnego rodzaju utworach o charakterze literackim bądź paraliterackim, autor poddał analizie fragment *Travels* Bartrama, by odsłonić w nim połączenie dyskursu naukowego z dyskursem zapożyczonym z angielskiej estetyki ogrodów. W *Summer on the Lakes* M. Fuller z roku 1843 na plan pierwszy wychodzi praca wyobraźni rozczarowanej rzeczywistym widokiem wodospadu Niagara, podczas gdy u R. W. Emersona (*Natura*) czytelnik ma do czynienia z samozaprzeczeniem substancjalnego podmiotu zredukowanego do czystego widzenia. Z kolei u H. D. Thoreau (*Ktaadn*) podmiot zderza się z naturą nieprzenikniona, która odmawia ujawnienia jakiegokolwiek sensu. W prozie gotyckiej od Ch. Brockdena Browna, poprzez E. A. Poego aż do Lovecrafta oko podmiotu (narratora) napotyka niekiedy na spojrzenie nieludzkie: drapieżnego zwierzęcia, odczłowieczonej ofiary mordu, złowrogiej istoty pozaziemskiej. W literaturze amerykańskiej spojrzenie stopniowo traci swoją siłę ujmowania i przenikania natury, z drugiej zaś strony napotyka w świecie oko złe, spojrzenie unicestwiające, przed którym najczęściej nie ma ucieczki.

Słowa kluczowe

oko, spojrzenie, dyskurs postrzegania, natura, podmiot

The present essay is not a rigorously argued study of some specific, chronologically limited aspect of American literature, but rather an overview of the vicissitudes of the subject from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, focusing on the "ways of seeing" nature and other human or non-human beings that imply power relations, including, in the case of

gothic fiction, a possibility of the subject's annihilation. The sense of sight will not be approached in any precise physiological or epistemological terms, but rather as a metaphor that fitted different contexts and served various American writers, from William Bartram in the 18th century to H. P. Lovecraft in the 20th, as a more or less effective instrument of the subject's self-fashioning.

Probably the first white American who saw New England nature not just as a series of handwritten messages from the Almighty, the Foucauldian "writing of things" (Foucault 1973: 35), but also, at least to some extent, as a set of beautiful objects in their own right was Jonathan Edwards. Expelled in 1750 from his Northampton parish for verbally harassing the meeting house audience to live in the woods fifty miles west and bring spiritual care to Indians, he started penning his last, unfinished work, edited two hundred years later by Perry Miller under the title *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*. This rather traditional allegorical Puritan reading of the "wilderness" ends with a somewhat surprising brief expression of praise of nature almost "as is", called simply "The Beauty of the World":

> It is very probable that [the] wonderful suitableness of green for the grass and plants, the blues of the skie, the white of the clouds, the colours of flowers, consists in a complicated proportion that these colours make one with another, either in their magnitude of the rays, the number of vibrations that are caused in the atmosphere, or some other way. So there is a great suitableness between the objects of different senses, as between sounds, colours, and smells; as between colours of the woods and flowers and the smells and the singing of birds, which is its probable consist in a certain proportion of the vibrations that are made in the different organs. So there are innumerable other agreeablenesses of motions, figures, etc. (Edwards 1977: 135)

Edwards remained a staunch Calvinist till the end of his days in 1758, yet as a reader of Locke he combined a theologian's

diction with a new, empiricist discourse of the senses that eventually brought him to the sheer joy of seeing, hearing, and smelling. Mason Lowance writes: "More closely related to the Puritan habit of discovering 'remarkable Providences' in the natural universe than to the Puritan doctrine of tropological exegesis, Edwards's typology here is more like the epistemology of his empiricist contemporaries than that of his Puritan predecessors" (Lowance 1980: 261). In other words, despite the persistence of the Puritan intellectual background, in the mid-18th century New England had a chance to hear the voice of the new science. Paradoxically, that chance was missed since Edwards's notes remained in manuscript till 1948.

Three years before Edwards's premature death, William Bartram, then sixteen years old, accompanied his father, a noted botanist, on a research expedition to the colonies of Connecticut and New York. Eleven years later, much better educated and prepared, he joined the father on another trip, that time to Florida. Eventually, in 1773, he started a series of professional travels on his own, which ended in 1777 after providing him with ample material for a long report, published in 1791. As a result, William Bartram became the most outstanding and famous natural scientist of the Early Republic.

His expertise was well-founded and authentic. He knew his Linnaeus by heart, naming all the plants on his way in Latin according to their scientific classification and giving names to the still nameless ones whenever necessary. His descriptions were accurate, yet sometimes they seemed to reach beyond the pale of science. For instance, in 1774, ascending St. John's River in Florida, he wrote:

> In being a fine, cool morning, and fair wind, I sat sail early, and so, this day, vast quantities of the Pistia stratiotes, a very singular aquatic plant. It associates in large communities, or floating islands, some of them a quarter of a mile in extent, which are impelled to and fro, as the wind and current may direct. … These plants are nourished and kept in their proper horizontal situation, by means of long fibrous roots, which descend from the nether

> center, downwards, towards the muddy bottom. Each plant, when full grown, bears a general resemblance to a well grown plant of garden lettuce, though the leaves are more nervous, of a firmer contexture, and of a full green colour, inclining to yellow. (Bartram 1996: 92)

Here reigns the idiom of the scientist, as precise as it could be at that time, combined with an effort to make the peculiar *Pistia stratiotes* more familiar to the lay reader thanks to a comparison with garden lettuce, but the concluding part of the passage shows a significant change of the dominant discourse:

> These floating islands present a very entertaining prospect; for although we behold an assemblage of the primary productions of nature only, yet the imagination seems to remain in suspense and doubt; as in order to enliven the delusion, and form a most picturesque appearance, we see not only flowery plants, clumps of shrubs, old weather-beaten trees, hoary and barbed, with the long moss waving from their snags, but we also see them completely inhabited, and alive, with serpents, frogs, otters, crows, herons, curlews, jackdaws, &c. There seems, in short, nothing wanted but the appearance of a wigwam and a canoe to complete the scene. (Bartram 1996: 93)

The most important keyword in this passage is "imagination", a term not infrequently used by the art theorists, critics, poets, and scientists of the Enlightenment. Another keyword is the adjective "picturesque", definitely not taken from the vocabulary of Linnaeus but from that of the English eighteenth-century theorists of landscape gardening. When combined, imagination and the picturesque turned the empirically tested view of St. John's River into a frame complete with the animals and birds that were actually not there, and the metonymic traces of Indians – a wigwam and a canoe – though the Indians themselves were missing. Undoubtedly the whole extended paragraph has two patrons: the Swedish natural scientist and Edmund Burke. As Pamela Regis argues, "The Burkean mode of description provides Bartram with a means of objectively

representing his reactions to the locales through which he travels. Taken together with the natural historical mode, the two forms of description represent to the reader the natural scenes observed in America and the effects of those scenes on the observer" (Regis 1992: 70). The scientific intellect imposes on reality its specialist verbal network of terms, but at the same time the eye turns the view into a picture. As a result, the subject takes what he can see under double control.

About half a century later, on June 10, 1843, Margaret Fuller arrived during her trip to the Great Lakes at Niagara Falls. Having read a great deal about that famous wonder of American nature, which was a tourist trap even then (Sears 1989: 12-30), she was, however, doubly disappointed: first, with the waterfall, which she had imagined much bigger and more impressive, and second, with herself since she proved unable to appreciate the view as she should have according to the books. Embarrassed, she kept returning to contemplate the falling water for three days in a row until finally she wrote with some relief, mixed with awe:

> Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene. After awhile it so drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence. The perpetual trampling of the water seized my senses. I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start and look behind me for a foe. I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, usought and unwelcome, images, such as never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks; again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me. (Steele 1995: 72)

In this case, everything begins on the level of the senses again, apparently as in the quoted passage from Bartram's *Travels*,

but the stage of the sensory perception lasts only for an instant, to be followed by that of an emotional response. Fuller has the experience of the sublime – another Burkean concept – a mélange of joy and fear that almost immediately gives way to an imagined view of "naked savages", aggressive Indians with tomahawks who seem to supplement Bartram's incomplete frame although this supplement is by no means serene. The author of *Summer on the Lakes* clearly needed those Indians to become scared enough and perhaps also to articulate her desire at the boundary of the Imaginary and the Symbolic: on the one hand, in 1843, the violent confrontation between the "savages" and the white settlers was already a well-established element of the US symbolic order, on the other, the "savage" warriors did not have habit of going on the warpath stark naked. Fuller's control of the natural scene with the eye also required imagination, but her eye belonged to a subject that was much "weaker" and more disturbed than the scientist-painter.

When considering the vicissitudes of the eye in nineteenth-century American culture, it is virtually impossible to ignore Emerson's "transparent eyeball" from Chapter I of *Nature*. Emerson did not really like uncivilized places. He did not like to travel to see distant rivers or waterfalls, and usually felt satisfied with walks on Boston or Concord common and visits paid to his friend Thoreau at Walden Pond located about a mile from his house. As all students of American literature know, the famous core of *Nature*'s Chapter I is the following: "Standing on the bare ground, – my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, – all mean egotism vanishes. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (Spiller 1971: 10). These four sentences, familiar as they may have become, are indeed strange. First, Emerson's body grew so much that it seemed to have penetrated at least into the stratosphere. (A fellow-transcendentalist, the artist Christopher Pearse Cranch, was so impressed by this that it inspired him to draw a caricature of the philosopher.) Second, in the next sentence

the subject vanishes, though it keeps speaking. (This moment oddly brings to mind the climactic confession of Poe's M. Valdemar, a Pole allegedly hypnotized *in articulo mortis* in New York's Haarlem: "Yes; – no; – I have been sleeping – and now – now – *I am dead*" (Mabbott 1978: 1240). Emerson's "I" also both is and is not: the English language, which allowed Poe to write the perfectly good sentence "*I am dead*", gave a similar possibility to his confirmed enemy, who plays with the tension between the affirmative "I am" and the negative "nothing".) Third, "I see all," even though it suggests all-embracing visual omnipotence, cannot match what is really "all". How is it possible to visualize this all and what does it actually offer to the reader? Besides, "all" is not particularly American, a general term as full as it is empty. In consequence, there is little left for the Emersonian subject to do but transform into a particle of God to whom no sense impressions can legitimately refer. The eye has acquired much power, but its power can hardly be used to perceive the world.

Carolyn Porter makes a point when she claims: "Emerson wipes away all the clutter of culture which he finds obstructing his vision in order to forge an 'original' relation between man and nature, a relation free of alienation [...], but constructs a theory in which alienation resurfaces as a split between the I who sees nature and the I who inhabits it" (Porter 1981: 106-107). In fact, however, under the circumstances one cannot be sure what that "I" sees and whether it still inhabits as a creature of flesh and blood the city of Boston, Massachusetts. The "transparent eyeball" passage turns out to be an ambiguous record of self-denial.

Emerson and Thoreau were both transcendentalists and personal friends, but Thoreau's visual experience of nature brought him to surprisingly different conclusions. In 1846, going down Mount Katahdin in the company of lumberjacks, he traversed an area devastated by a natural forest fire, which left him almost speechless. Realizing that the burnt out stretch did not belong to anyone and indeed had nothing to do with

human beings, the writer lacked words that would even vaguely correspond to the space before his eyes:

> It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. […] Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, not woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste-land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever, – to be the dwelling of man, we say, – so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. (Thoreau 1972: 70)

This passage from "Ktaadn", an essay included in *Maine Woods*, also famous enough, reads like the opposite of the "transparent eyeball" one. While Emerson was comfortable and delighted, Thoreau felt uneasy and helpless. His rhetorical skill almost failed him, but fortunately his Harvard education came to the rescue. First, summoning the plural "Powers", he made a probable reference to Goethe, popular among the members of the Transcendental Club, then quoted from Book V of Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("Chaos and Old Night"), and finally paraphrased pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; the unique one-page Chapter V of the tract on mystical theology which is the foundation of the *via negativa*, listing what God is not and thereby possibly coming closest to Him. At any rate, He remained outside nature. There were no "currents of Universal Being" around him and the self was painfully alienated from the matter that surrounded it. Emerson's "I" dissolved, leaving only an eye. Thoreau, in contrast, confronted something hopelessly opaque and inaccessible.

Still, self-effacement or self-exclusion were not the only dangers faced by the American eye and the subject to whom it belongs. The first case in this respect can probably be found in

Edgar Huntly, Charles Brockden Brown's novel of 1799, one of the first examples of the vernacular New World gothic. The protagonist, who is a somnambulist and, when asleep, takes long walks far away from home, once wakes up in an unknown dark place where his senses, in particular the sense of sight, cannot provide him with any reliable knowledge of his whereabouts. Moving slowly ahead in what is a long underground cavern, suddenly he sees before himself two small green lights: "They resembled a fixed and obscure flame. They were motionless. Though lustrous themselves they created no illumination around them. This circumstance, added to others, which reminded me of similar objects, noted on former occasions, immediately explained the nature of what I beheld. These were the eyes of a panther" (Brockden Brown 1984: 166).

If Edgar can see the panther's eyes, certainly the animal can see him in the dark much better, as it prepares to leap at him and kill him. Brockden Brown's character not only sees something mortally dangerous, but also is seen by the predator, and only animal-like reflex and an Indian tomahawk, found by accident and used just in time, saves his life. Thus, being seen was defined as a serious predicament, a prelude to the ultimate, a trap from which there is almost no escape. Even the victory was costly: after the encounter with the panther and then with five Indians whom he also has to kill one after another, Edgar transforms into an alien monster, unrecognizable as a gentle, white boy by the party of local vigilanti who are trying to find the hostile redskins on their own. What is more, the young man can no longer recognize himself. Before the dramatic adventure, he was neither an expert hunter, nor a good warrior. Killing the wild animal proves to be the trigger that releases his dark, destructive side, which can only with difficulty be brought back under control.

No control is possible in Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), a tale of horror which follows Brockden Brown's pattern, where seeing and being seen are absolutely crucial. The nameless narrator feels compelled to kill the old man whom he loves and

whose gold he does not want, but he cannot stand the look of the old man's eye which is referred to as "that of a vulture – a pale blue eye with a film over it" (Mabbott 1978: 792). Since the vulture, which feeds on carrion, is considered a bird of death, it is obvious almost from the very beginning that the narrator identifies his victim with death itself, so in killing him, he wants, as it were, to kill death, a task it is unlikely he can successfully perform. When on the night of the murder the assassin slowly opens the old man's bedroom door, the latter is fast asleep, so his fearful gaze does not pose any threat. After some time, however, he hears a noise and can no longer sleep, afraid as he is that something horrible may happen to him. Since the man is awake, his eyes are open and when a single ray from the narrator's lamp falls upon the "vulture's eye" – "all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in [his] bones" (Mabbott 1978: 795) – there is no time left for deliberation. With a "loud yell" and a single leap (like a panther indeed), the murderer does what he has been planning carefully for many days, to get only some temporary relief.

Still waiting on the threshold in pitch dark, at a certain moment Poe's narrator makes a significant observation, prompted by his acute sense of hearing:

> Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief – oh, no! – it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. (Mabbott 1978: II 794)

Thus, the two protagonists are bound together by two senses: hearing and seeing, with the former as a more important and consequential link since both seeing and being seen bring fear and eventually lead to death. Analyzing "The Tall-Tale Heart" in psychoanalytic terms, Robert Con Davis recapitulates

Freud's considerations on the scopic (visual) drive and its dialectic. First,

> "looking" is a gesture toward control, visual "possession" or "mastery" of an object. It is discrete and without any reciprocal response, a frozen act. After this initial look takes place, there is a reversal, a seemingly impossible shift from a subject's viewpoint to an object's. This shift entails a virtual "giving up of the object as a thing to be seen and mastered" and a repositioning of "seeing" from a different position. The looker, in effect, becomes an object. In one sense, what happens here is that the looker first looks and, as a part of looking, as a kind of culmination of possessing the object, becomes that object; as a result, the subject surrenders visual mastery, as it then enters the field of vision as an object in a different position. (Davis 1983: 985)

Second, then, the scene, as far as the position of each of the participants is concerned, turns upside down:

> The object position here – as if occult – virtually looks back at the (former) subject. With this elaboration of subject and object relations, wherein the direction of sight has been reversed, and wherein the complete expression of seeing has become necessarily twofold – seeing and being seen – the whole process of "seeing" has gone, additionally, through a middle range, neither active nor passive, in which the looker – in the stage of becoming an object – is a partial object, one looking at itself, part subject and part object. (Davis 1983: 986)

This account of the process cannot, of course, refer to the encounter of Edgar Huntly with the panther since we are unable to reconstruct the animal perception without making an error of anthropomorphism, but the "vulture" in Poe's tale is, again, just a metaphor that conceals a human subject. Finally, as Davis writes, echoing Freud, "in the last scene the looker is made passive, fully an object for another watcher" (Davis 1983: 986). In "The Tell-Tale Heart", it does not matter that the alleged watcher is already dead. His eyes are closed and his

quartered body rests under the floorboards, yet his heart still keeps beating in his killer's mind, which means that the sense of hearing proves indispensable as a prosthesis of seeing, the evidence of being "seen" also after the see-er's death. The conclusion is that once the dialectic of seeing and being seen has been put in motion, it cannot be stopped, and in Poe's fiction, with the fear of death as a ubiquitous underpinning, there is no escape to a safe haven where one can remain invisible – alive – forever.

Poe's best known continuator and self-proclaimed disciple was Howard Philips Lovecraft, author of a short story entitled "The Haunter of the Dark" (1935). The story, in opposition to Poe's usually indefinite settings, is set in Lovecraft's native Providence, Rhode Island. The protagonist, a student of painting named Robert Blake, who lives on College Hill just opposite Federal Hill (both locations authentic), starts exploring an abandoned church on the Hill, and at last dies in mysterious circumstances. Exploring the boarded-up interior, he first finds in the rear vestry room beside the apse an impressive collection of books about different occult cults and mysteries, then climbs the church tower and there, at the top, discovers a strange "egg-shaped or irregularly spherical object some four inches through" (Lovecraft 1963: 101-102). As it turns out, the object is a "*Shining Trapezohedron*", a stone that once allowed the members of an ill-famed sect active in the 19th century to communicate with some unknown dimension. Driven by curiosity, Blake looks into the stone where an ominous sight meets his eye:

> He saw processions of robed, hooded figures whose outlines were not human, and looked on endless leagues of desert lined with carved, sky-reaching monoliths. He saw towers and walls in nighted depths under the sea, and vortices of space where wisps of black mist floated before thin shimmerings of cold purple haze. And beyond all else he glimpsed an infinite gulf of darkness, where solid and semi-solid forms were known only by their windy stirrings, and cloudy patterns of force seemed to superimpose or-

> der on chaos and hold forth a key to all the paradoxes and arcana of the worlds we know. (Lovecraft 1963: 104)

The world that Mr. Blake from Wisconsin can see in the Trapezohedron is radically different from the one perceived earlier by Bartram, Fuller, and Thoreau. The wish to penetrate new spaces leads him not just outside the North American continent but outside the planet Earth, into a realm that should have remained unknown to the human subject. The problem is that the protagonist not only sees the distant universe, but also is seen "by some formless alien presence close to him and watching him with horrible intentness" (Lovecraft 1963: 104). The gaze of that "presence" grows more and more unsettling until Blake can no longer bear it and realizes that there is no escape and no hope of resisting it. The worst moments come when the electricity in Providence is down, and that happens more and more often. In sheer darkness, the alien being seems to have easier access to Blake's mind and body, access which must end in their destruction. In a number of his tales, Lovecraft quotes personal documents left by the victims of various sinister powers and this is also the case in "The Haunter of the Dark". When the lights in the city go off again, the demon from the Shining Trapezohedron strikes one last time as a monstrous, "three-lobed burning eye" that takes the protagonist's life. Besides, right before dying (Blake, like Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, continues writing his diary till the very end), the student mentions the name of Roderick Usher and unites mentally with his monstrous persecutor: "I am it and it is I". (Lovecraft 1963: 115) Ultimately, the boundary between the subject and the alien other has vanished.

The vicissitudes of the American eye and the changes of the scopic regime from Bartram to Lovecraft seem to form a gothic storyline of their own kind. The eye and the subject want to take reality – nature – into their control, and they do it by using various discourses, from that of theology through those of natural science and aesthetics. In the mid-19th century, however, Emerson and Thoreau, each in his own way, fell into

trouble: the persona of the author of *Natur*e became one with the Divine, while the author of "Ktaadn" understood that the human gaze needs words to account for observation, although no words can match what has been seen beyond the range of human activity. What is more, the predicament worsens whenever some other eye returns the look, particularly as usually it is the eye of an alien: an animal, one's alienated other in a death bird's disguise, or a dreadful "presence" from some alternative dimension. When the eye returns the look, it is nearly always too late for the human subject to retreat. Only Edgar Huntly survived, although it took time before he fully recovered, if he ever did. Both the nameless narrator of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" and Lovecraft's Robert Blake perished. They entered two forbidden spaces, off limits: the inner space of insanity and the fantastic outer space of the inhuman.

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