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## **Figurative language in Business English: Health, sports and marriage metaphors**

ANNA ŁUCZAK

### **Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to present selected metaphors which are frequently employed in Business English. These metaphors are based on the similarities between business and three domains: human beings, sports and relationships. Companies – like people – should be healthy; if they fall ill, they may be cured. Moreover, they compete with each other and engage in relationships.

In this paper, we adopt the approach to metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). The analysed metaphors come from magazines such as *Newsweek*, *The Economist* and *Business Week* as well as from teaching materials designed for students of business and economics.

### **Key words**

Business English, conceptual metaphor, humanizing metaphor, similarity

### **1. Introduction**

It has been argued in another paper that the language of business makes use of many natural world metaphors (Łuczak 2010). A vast majority of them fall into a wide category of the BUSINESS IS A LIVING ORGANISM metaphor group, in which the metaphor BUSINESS IS A HUMAN BEING takes a prominent place. Perceiving the world through the scope of

possibilities and limitations of one's own body, its functions and activities seems to be natural for a species so self-centered as humans. Business means not only livelihood but it can be a source of luxury. It is tempting to suggest that business is so dear to the human heart that it is treated like one's own soul and body. This attitude is reflected in language in the form of health, sports and marriage metaphors.

In this paper, the approach to metaphor is the theory of conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and developed by numerous researchers, including, *inter alia*, Kövecses (2002).

## 2. Health metaphors

Humans are preoccupied with their health. Health is considered to be one of the deciding factors in achieving success. The same way of thinking is to be found in economics. Businesses should be healthy to be profitable. Problems that they face are treated as debilitating illnesses that must be cured. There are two major metaphors, which unavoidably entail many others, used to show our health-oriented attitude to business: ECONOMY/BUSINESS IS AN ILL MAN and ECONOMY/BUSINESS IS A PATIENT THAT CAN BE CURED. MacKenzie (1997: 21) chose twelve health metaphors for his *Management and Marketing* practice book: *suffer* is used to describe what small businesses undergo when interest rates rise, a cure for an *ailing* company is an *injection* of cash but a *terminal* decline of the textile industry sounds final, so it can be said that the textile industry is a *casualty* of the new developments in the economy. Yet some companies *recover* from their *diseases*, gain new *vitality*, are given a *clean bill of health* and *produce healthy* profits. Then they are thought of as companies *in good shape* that have *returned to form* and are simply *robust* so nobody dares mention any drastic *surgeries*.

MacKenzie's examples belong to the most popular group of health metaphors used in business; however, the range of possibilities is unlimited. First of all, healthy individuals eat



properly and it is also true of companies: “Insurers, among others, are showing an *appetite* as other alternatives, such as hedge funds, begin to disappoint” (“Private equity in Germany /Anglo-Saxon attitudes” 2005: 74). When there is an appetising snack in sight, saliva is produced in one’s mouth: “[...] rivals are clearly *salivating over* the troubles of the industry leader” (Stone 2005: 50). Hopefully, the stomach is well prepared for the food it gets: “A company such as Raleigh (N.C.) – based Progress energy Inc., with a relatively *digestible* market capitalisation of \$500 billion for construction and repair of roads and bridges over the next decade just to maintain the status quo” (Farzad 2005/2006: 99). Yet if one eats too quickly, a series of strange sounds may appear in his/her throat causing not only a great deal of discomfort but embarrassment as well. The same is true about profit-hungry companies: “Its shareholders, inherent risk takers, close their eyes in the run-up to the earnings season, never sure where the *hiccups* will appear” (Truscott 2005: 16). Obviously, there are far more serious problems than hiccups that men and companies have to deal with. The decrease in investors’ interest in equities is referred to, by the *Financial Times* as “equity *malaise*” (Tassel and Tett 2005: 17). Certain kinds of diseases are contagious and are easily passed on to other entities. Crises seem to behave like that: “After all, in July of that year a seemingly insignificant event in the global scheme of things – a devaluation of the Thai baht – led to a financial crisis that *spread* from Indonesia to South Korea and eventually enveloped countries as far away as Russia and Brazil” (Garten 2006: 36). Another example of treating the poor condition of economy as if it were an illness is provided by Samuelson (2005/2006: 75): “A big part of the world economy is already *sickly*: Western Europe. From 2001 to 2005, annual economic growth in the euro zone – the 12 countries using the euro – averaged a meager 1.3 percent. Until recently, Japan was also *weak*; its present *recovery* is hardly guaranteed”. Theoretically, there should be some kind of medicine to help the world economy and “a truly free market would provide

a quick *cure*” but as the oil market is far from free, “the world is constantly *vulnerable* to a catastrophic supply shutdown [...]” (Samuelson 2005/2006: 75). The situation in Germany requires similar metaphors to provide a description of its economic problems: “The betting, though, is that if Springer deal falls through, Saban and his backers will opt to hang on until there are signs of *recovery* in the *ailing* German ad market, which would boost Prosieben’s valuation. Much depends on Germany’s *still-feeble* economy” (Wassener 2005: 26). Sometimes the “patients” are so weak that they faint and this is exactly what happened to the Japanese market: “[...] when foreign money skipped town in 2003, the market *swooned*” (Bremner and Farzad 2005/2006: 20). The poor *health* of the Italian textile and clothing industry has manifested itself in *bleeding*: “Indeed, Italian factories are closing, exports are falling, and whole industrial districts – where companies all make the same type of product – are *suffering*. But there are early indications that the *bleeding* has been stemmed and that Italian *qualità* is holding its own once more” (Kline 2005/2006: 25). When a company loses its resources very quickly, “haemorrhage” is used instead of “bleeding” to show the seriousness of the situation: “We have seen a *haemorrhage* of jobs from the region” (Bullon 2003: 726) or: “The figure showed that cash was *haemorrhaging* from the conglomerate” (Sinclair 2001: 701). The importance of blood for a human being is undeniable. Once we have accepted the ECONOMY/COMPANY IS A HUMAN metaphor, we must accept that the circulatory system of the blood is essential for the economy or a company. The metaphor ECONOMY’S/COMPANY’S RESOURCES ARE ITS BLOOD emphasises how important economic resources are: “The *life blood* of the Internet company – small, start-up, innovative, high tech companies at the leading edge of the industry – are being still born through lack of capital” (Mascull 2001: 170).

### 3. Sports metaphors

Sports metaphors are an integral part of the language of business. Sport involves competition. Companies compete with each other in the same way healthy human beings do. Living organisms are programmed by nature to be competitive in order to be able to survive and have offspring. We can see competition in the animal world but it is only the human being who was able to develop its most sophisticated and noble form – sports competition. As the world of business strives to be seen as sophisticated and noble, it is only natural that expressions “taken from horse-racing, boxing, athletics, football and chess” (MacKenzie 1997: 20) have found their way into Business English. Mackenzie (1997: 20) presents sixteen popular metaphors in his *Management and Marketing* practice book for students. A considerably big group constitute metaphors that are based on the metaphor system ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IS A RACE. If an economic activity is long and exhausting, it can be described as a *marathon*: “The *marathon* takeover battle for the British food company Lewis & Son took a new turn yesterday when the Swiss conglomerate NFC claimed that they had evidence that their British rival Associated Foods are engaging in an illegal share support operation [...]” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). An especially difficult race where runners must jump over wooden frames called hurdles has its equivalent in an economic activity that entails overcoming numerous obstacles: “He asserted that there are other financial *hurdles* facing foreign bidders in Switzerland [...]” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). A leading company is frequently called a *front runner*, a company which is likely to outperform other companies is the *favourite*, and the one nobody considers an expected winner can be referred to as an *outsider*. If the competing companies are level with one another, they are *neck and neck*. Observers talk about the *odds* of one of them succeeding in winning a bigger market share or even a monopolistic position. Sport has been associated with gambling and so has business. The *favourite*

and *odds* have already been mentioned but there is also *betting*: “Investors were willing to *bet* on Oncogene, and its shares jumped \$1.94 to \$9.06” (Summers 2000: 39). Another group that can be distinguished in MacKenzie’s sports metaphors are *game* metaphors. The metaphor BUSINESS IS A GAME has as many subgroups as there are games. BUSINESS IS FOOTBALL, BUSINESS IS BASEBALL, BUSINESS IS HARDBALL belong to the more popular ones. There would not be any game without players. In business COMPANIES ARE PLAYERS: “None of the big financial institutions, who are after all the *key players* in the battle, have yet decided whether they are going to sell their shares or to whom” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). Games need rules, but these are sometimes changed even during the game: “[...] the authorities often seemed to *move the goalposts*” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). When the situation changes completely we speak of *a new ball game* and when the situation does not favour anyone it is *a level playing field*. At times a company may make a bad move and cause damage to itself by scoring *an own goal*: “Lewis & Son’s chairman Mark Younger said yesterday that this certainly looked like an *own goal* on the part of Associated Foods, but he complained again angrily that NFC were not playing on *a level playing field* as Swiss companies are protected from takeovers by a system of registered shares” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). If a company does not obey the rules imposed by market regulators it may be punished: “If Associated Foods are *shown the red card* by stock exchange investigators, NFC will once again be the firm *favourite* to take over Lewis & Son” (MacKenzie 1997: 20). The metaphor BUSINESS ACTIVITIES ARE BOXING is illustrated by MacKenzie with *a knockout blow* and to be *on the ropes*: “If this allegation is proved it could be *a knockout blow* for Associated Foods, previously *an outsider* in this race, but recently thought to be running *neck and neck* with NFC” (MacKenzie 1997: 20), and “A spokesman for the third contender, the American company FoodCorp, whose bid last week seemed to be *on the ropes*, said yesterday [...]”

(MacKenzie 1997: 20). Finally, there is one metaphor from the domain of chess to be found in MacKenzie's set of sports metaphors. *Stalemate* is used to describe a situation in which neither of the chess players can make the next move. In business a *stalemate* takes place during talks or negotiations that have reached a point where no further progress is made: "But a city analyst said yesterday that there currently seemed to be a *stalemate* between Associated Foods and NFC, with the American contender in a poor third place, so that Associated Foods' withdrawal would not help FoodCorp: at least, the *odds* are firmly against it" (MacKenzie 1997: 20).

In their *American Business Vocabulary*, Fowler and Martinez (1997: 88) stress the importance of sports metaphors in the language of business and present quite a different set from the one proposed by MacKenzie (1997: 20). Five out of fifteen metaphors come from baseball, which comes as no surprise in an American selection of metaphors. After all, baseball is a national game in the US. Throwing a ball in baseball is called *pitching*. In business one must *pitch* for custom which frequently involves "throwing" words at potential customers: "The trick to making a lot of sales is to have a quick *sales pitch*" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). However, customers may not be interested and refuse straight away: "No they didn't hesitate. They said 'no' *right off the bat*" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). The name for the baseball field, *ballpark*, has become an idiomatic expression used for giving approximates: "I don't have the exact cost estimate with me, but I can give you a *ballpark figure*" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). If one is unsuccessful in hitting the ball three times, one *strikes out*. The same expression is used to refer to a fiasco in business dealings: "Sandra's depressed today because she *struck out* with that big client she was hoping to sign" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). Finally, *touching base* is used to describe contacting people one works with: "I wanted to *touch base* with you earlier but your secretary said you were busy" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). Fowler and Martinez (1997: 86) provide two more expressions connected with playing ball in general:

*rebound* used in reference to a company regaining its position and *playing hardball* which means trying to win at all costs. The latter metaphor frequently excludes playing *by the rules* but may involve taking a *rain check*. A *rain check* is a ticket which makes it possible for its holder to use it again if the game he/she was watching was stopped because of the rain. In colloquial American English it means postponing things: "Sorry, I'm busy tomorrow evening. Can I take a *rain check*?" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86). The metaphor A POWERFUL COMPANY IS A HEAVYWEIGHT is based on qualities of boxers who weigh almost 90 kilograms and are able to distribute crushing blows. No wonder *heavyweights* command respect: "Although our company has gained a lot of market share, I don't believe we're ready to compete with the *heavyweights* just yet" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 20). The metaphor COMPANY STAFF IS A TEAM seems to be so embedded in company business now that it is difficult to notice its metaphorical qualities: "Good work from individuals is important but the most productive work is always accomplished through *team work*" (Fowler and Martinez 1997: 86).

The metaphors singled out by the authors of teaching materials belong to the sports metaphors used very frequently in the language of business press but many more examples could be quoted. It looks as though any expression that is good for talking about sports is good for talking about business too: "On Wall Streets's sloppy *playing field*, no *team* has made a more surprising comeback in *blocking, tackling*, and most importantly, in *scoring* than Merrill Lynch" (Tully 1996: 47), "Some people believe that Enrico will be an interim CEO, a *relief pitcher closing* Colloway's *game* while a trio of PepsiCo all stars – Craig Weatherup, Chris Sinclair, and Steve Reinemund – *wait on the bench*. Is the new boss in for the whole *season*?" (Sellers 1996: 46) or "Downloads are transforming the music business, and pay per view is looming for movies and cable TV, while advertising is *sprinting* to the Internet" (Mullaney 2005/2006: 72).

#### 4. Marriage metaphors

Marriage metaphors constitute another sub-group of human activities metaphors. One of the reasons for men and women getting together is to have children and thus fulfil Nature's great plan of species continuation. The institution of marriage is a result of the development of societies which need rules to function effectively. Married couples enjoy numerous benefits of conforming to the system – their financial situation is more stable when they combine earnings coming from two different sources, they may obtain loans more easily, and sometimes choose a more favourable form of taxation, they may provide constant support to each other and their status in society is frequently higher than the status of single people. Companies, which share so many features with humans, find getting together very attractive too. The metaphor COMPANIES ARE MARRIAGEABLE GIRLS is favoured by journalists describing mergers and acquisitions. First of all, there is courtship: "Emerging markets, it seems are appealing to a different class of *suitor* these days" ("Middle-age spread" 2005: 80). The aim of suitors, seduction, has been well known for ages: "The challenge for emerging markets, the forum-goers concluded, is not only to *seduce* and *tame* overseas capital, but to put their own savings to better use at home" ("Middle-age spread" 2005: 80). The courtship may prove unsuccessful: "In the past year the exchange has fended off informal *advances* from two continental exchange groups, Deutsche Börse & Euronext, although neither has abandoned its interest altogether" ("All roads lead to London" 2005: 76). Finally, when the right partner is found, companies formalise the relationship: "In September 1993 Volvo and Renault announced they were to *tie the knot*, with Volvo holding a minority 35% stake" (Tullis and Trappe 2000: 118). However, whether a merger is going to be successful depends on the companies' compatibility: "[...] agreeing whose values will prevail and who will be *the dominant partner*" (Cotton, Falvey and Kent 2001: 111). Each partner-to-be usually concentrates on the values that make

a good match: “AUO’s strategy is to *marry* the agility and independence of Taiwanese firms with a size approaching that of a Korean chaebol” (Adams 2005: 57). MERGERS ARE MARRIAGES that need good planning. If difficulties appear in the pre-nuptial stage, the ceremony may be postponed: “I can’t promise that Apple and Intel will actually *get together* and build the perfect digital entertainment hub [...]” (Wildstrom 2005/2006: 10), or called off: “However three months later Volvo shareholders and senior management rejected the *marriage* plans because of concerns that the deal undervalued Volvo, and was turning into a Renault takeover, without Renault paying the acquisition premium” (Tullis and Trappe 2000: 118). Rejections of merger plans are usually preceded by stormy boardroom meetings: “[...] it is not surprising that every time a mega-merger is announced, there’s high probability of a boardroom *bust-up*” (Tullis and Trappe 2000: 118). “When mergers are called off, the two companies fail to ‘*make it up the aisle*’ or their relationship remains ‘*unconsumated*’” (Cotton, Falvey and Kent 2001: 111). Unfortunately, numerous mergers fail: “This suggests that some of the *mismarriages* of the 1980s may be brutally exposed by a 1990’s mix of Saddamised oil prices and already-slowng economies” (Cotton and Robbins 1993: 138) and companies go their separate ways. This situation is reflected by the metaphor DEMERGERS ARE DIVORCES: “The *divorce* is reputed to have cost Volvo several hundred million dollars and forced the resignation of Gyllenhammer after more than two decades in the driving seat” (Tullis and Trappe 2000: 118).

## 5. Conclusion

The metaphors discussed above are frequently employed in Business English. They are based on the perceived similarities between business and three domains: human beings, sports and relationships. Companies – like people – should be healthy to function well; if they fall ill, they may be cured. Moreover, in Business English companies may also resemble people



because they compete with each other and engage in relationships.

As has been demonstrated, we talk about business using terms referring to health and illnesses and we perceive relations between companies as human relationships; moreover, companies are seen as competing people in sports. Undoubtedly, humanizing metaphors help us to understand how companies function.

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## **Conceptualizations of death**

ALICJA MAZUR

### **Abstract**

The research presented in this paper aims to identify various ways in which the native speakers of English conceptualize the notion of death. This is achieved through the examination of numerous expressions, mainly euphemisms, which are used in everyday English to describe and discuss the event of dying. The research is based on the Conceptual Theory of Metaphor which claims that the general conceptual system, underlying both thought and action, is largely metaphorical in nature. In accordance with this claim, metaphor serves as a basis for understanding different concepts, which is reflected in the language used to talk about them.

### **Key words**

conceptualization, conceptual domain, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, death, dysphemism, euphemism, metaphor, taboo

### **1. Introduction**

The awareness of mortality evokes the feeling of horror in many human beings; therefore, in most cultures, death is one of the major taboo topics. What is most terrifying about this event is its finality, irreversible character, the accompanying pain, and its power to deprive one of everything that is known and dear. As Becker observes, “the idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is the mainspring of human activity – activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some

way that it is the final destiny for man” (Becker 1973: 9, quoted in Moore and Williamson 2003: 3). Strong anxiety accompanying thoughts of death makes people instinctively separate from everything that reminds them about the inevitability of their fate. In modern Western culture, this stance can be observed in miscellaneous social practices, such as locating the terminally ill in hospices, keeping corpses in funeral homes where they await burial or cremation or embalming the dead so that they look as if they were only sleeping. What is more, the attitude of denial is strongly reflected in language, where the topic of death is rarely described in straightforward terms.

The aim of this paper is to identify and describe different ways in which English speakers reason about the taboo of death. This is obtained through the examination of numerous everyday euphemistic expressions applied in talking about the end of human life.

## **2. The theoretical basis of the research**

The research presented in the paper is based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory which emphasises the crucial role of metaphor in making sense of reality. More specifically, this theory claims that the nature of the general conceptual system, responsible for defining our perception of reality, is largely metaphorical. In accordance with this statement, metaphor provides the basis not only for linguistic expressions, but also for thought and action. The reason why people are usually not aware of the pervasive role of metaphor in their lives is that the extensive system of concepts governing both functioning and perception operates mostly unconsciously. In other words, the way people reason and act while performing everyday tasks is, to a large extent, automatic (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 3).

Due to the fact that action, thought and communication are grounded in the same system, it is possible to examine linguistic phrases in order to determine the nature of their

cognitive basis. It was the thorough examination of everyday language that led Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to the conclusion that our ordinary conceptual system has a metaphorical character. According to their findings, metaphor enables comprehending one conceptual domain in terms of another. A conceptual domain may be elucidated as a mental representation of any coherent area of experience (Kövecses 2001: 4). The domain providing structure in terms of which another type of experience can be understood is referred to as *a source domain*, whereas the one which obtains this structure is called *a target domain*. Typically the latter is more abstract, whereas the former is much more clearly delineated. In strictly technical terms, metaphorical association can be defined as a set of systematic correspondences between two distinct domains. These ontological relations, defined at the level of a general conceptual system, are referred to as *mappings* (Lakoff 1993: 207).

Traditionally, in cognitive linguistic research, the metaphorical relation between different experiential domains is represented in the following way: TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN. Characteristically, small capital letters are employed as mnemonics to name the conceptual metaphor (Lakoff 1993: 207). Not to cause any confusion, this pattern of describing cross-domain metaphorical correspondence will also be adopted in this work.

### **3. Objectives of the research**

As has been mentioned above, the main objective of the research presented in the article was to identify different ways in which death is conceptualized by English speakers. This was achieved through the examination of a number of everyday English euphemisms, mostly in the form of metaphors, applied in talking about death and dying. The linguistic material was obtained from various sources; however, the majority of expressions come from *A Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk* (Rawson

1981), *How Not to Say What You Mean: A Dictionary of Euphemisms* (Holder 2002), *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (Siefring (ed.) 2004), *Thesaurus of Traditional English Metaphors* (Wilkinson 2002) and the Internet. On the basis of the findings, one may obtain information concerning the background knowledge against which the notion of death is understood. Moreover, one can learn what conceptual mappings are used in reasoning about this taboo.

#### **4. Conceptualizations of death**

Owing mainly to fear, superstition or social respect people are usually unwilling to talk about death in straightforward terms. However, there are numerous communicative situations, like funerals or reporting personal or social tragedies, in which it is impossible to evade mentioning death. In such cases, in order to avoid discussing death openly and to soften the effect of the message, speakers tend to use euphemisms, frequently achieved through metaphors. Such linguistic devices provide a comfortable way of discussing a concept otherwise banned from the public discourse. What is important, the language used to talk about certain topics reflects the way people think about them. Therefore, in order to identify the conceptual metaphors underlying human thought, one must examine expressions that reflect these metaphors in language.

The examination of the linguistic evidence, obtained for the purpose of the present study, made it possible to distinguish several different conceptual mappings used in reasoning about this notion. These conceptualizations, together with the everyday linguistic expressions reflecting them, are presented below. Importantly, one of the conceptual categories indispensable for understanding death is that of life; therefore, for most of the conceptualizations of death, the matching conceptualizations of life are provided.



#### **4.1. DEATH IS A JOURNEY**

One of the most common ways in which English speakers understand death is through the metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY. This observation is based on the fact that linguistic expressions reflecting this metaphor constitute the biggest portion of the material analysed. In this conceptualization, the death of a human being is comprehended via the totally different and much more concrete concept of a journey. More specifically, the event of dying corresponds to the moment of departure; the condition of being dead to the act of traveling; the dead person to a traveller; and the destination of a journey to the place to which this person “goes” after death.

It must be emphasized that not all euphemistic phrases belonging to this group specify the final destination of the last journey; therefore, within the general conceptualization discussed it is possible to distinguish three more specific ones, namely: DEATH IS DEPARTURE WITH NO SPECIFIC DESTINATION GIVEN; DEATH IS GOING TO THE FINAL DESTINATION and DEATH IS CONTINUATION OF THE LIFE’S JOURNEY.

##### **4.1.1. DEATH IS DEPARTURE**

In this metaphorical mapping death is understood in terms of departure; however, the final destination of the journey is not specified. Expressions representing this metaphor focus on the aspect of the beginning of a journey, rather than on its conclusion, which is indicated by such verbs as *depart*, *go*, *pass*, or *leave* occurring in most of them. The event of dying is represented as the act of leaving and, consequently, the deceased are travellers embarking on a journey.

One of the oldest and most frequently used euphemisms for dying, also reflecting the metaphor in question, is *pass away*. According to Rawson, it is a borrowing from the French word *passer*, which itself is a euphemism for *mourir*, meaning ‘to die’ (Rawson 1981: 204). Dating back at least to the fourteenth century, the term was popularized in pre-Victorian times,

when it was frequently applied to tombstone inscriptions (Rawson 1981:204). Numerous variants of this expression, for instance, *pass on*, *pass beyond*, *pass over*, *pass out*, or *pass off the Earth*, some of them reflecting other conceptualizations, are also commonly used.

Some of the euphemisms representing the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor, namely *go west*, *go north*, and *go aloft*, portray dying as going away in a certain direction. However, although the direction of the journey is given, its final destination is not mentioned. Among these expressions, the oldest and most widely used one is *go west*. The phrase became popular in English during the first World War; however, associating death with the West, where the sun sets, is typical of many cultures and has its roots in ancient times (Rawson 1981: 125). For instance, the English term *occident*, borrowed from the Romans for describing the West, comes from the word *occidere*, meaning 'to die'. Moreover, the Celtic Overworld was located in the West (Rawson 1981: 125).

An interesting observation concerning the phrases representing the conceptualization discussed is that some of them name different means of departure. These include: *riding the sandman express*, *go to pay the ferryman*, *take the cab*, *step onto one's last bus*, *ride off into the sunset*, *go for a ride to be launched into eternity*, *head for the hearse*, or *take off*. Although these vehicles differ from one another, they all belong to the domain of journey and thus can be used in thinking about dying. Obviously some of these phrases, like *take the cab* or *take off*, are not typically used to talk about death. Nevertheless, when they are used in appropriate context, English speakers have no problems with understanding them as referring to the end of human life.

What is more, the linguistic data reveal that death is conceived of as departure without return, which is reflected, for example, in the phrase *get a one-way ticket*. In fact none of the euphemisms suggests the possibility of coming back from the journey. This is in line with the semantic frame against which the notion of death is understood as a permanent and

irreversible condition. It can also be observed that certain euphemisms, such as *go for a ride* or *go away*, are obvious understatements. It can be assumed that they are used to soften the taboo of death.

What is important, in the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor, as well as in other instances of the DEATH IS A JOURNEY mapping, a dying person corresponds to a traveler beginning a journey. As a consequence, the deceased are presented as capable of moving, which is characteristic of the living. The dead are referred to as *the departed* or *the dear departed*, and dying is described with use of various verbs of motion, namely *go*, *leave*, *depart*, or *pass*. This is in contrast with the semantic frame, according to which death is the cessation of all biological functions of the body. Therefore, describing the dead as being able to move is, in fact, the negation of death itself, which illustrates the softening and covering power of euphemistic expressions. It can be assumed that ascribing the attributes of the living to those who are dead stems from the belief in an afterlife characteristic of most religions.

#### **4.1.2. DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION**

Another instance of the DEATH IS A JOURNEY metaphor presents death as going to a final destination. This conceptualization is an obvious inference from the LIFE IS BEING PRESENT HERE metaphor. In certain cases, the name of the place in which the journey ends is provided, whereas in others it is not specified.

As Lakoff and Turner (1989: 7) observe, this conceptualization derives from the basic mapping which presents STATES as LOCATIONS that a person can enter, leave or be in. The state of being alive ceases at some point and changes into the state of being dead, which is metaphorically understood as leaving one's earthly location and moving to some other place. Therefore, DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION can be regarded as a specific-level case of the more general CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION metaphor. It cannot be doubted that this conceptualization is, at least partially, grounded in

religious beliefs assuming the existence of the soul which departs from the body after death and moves to a different, hopefully better place.

Similarly to the DEATH IS DEPARTURE metaphor, also in this conceptualization death does not mean the end of existence. The deceased is metaphorically presented as a traveler who begins a journey to a certain destination. The use of such verbs of movement as *go*, *pass*, *wander* or *arrive*, reflects the conceptual mapping of the attributes of a living person onto the one who is dead.

It has already been said that some of the euphemisms reflecting the DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION metaphor do not name the exact place in which the journey ends. Certain expressions belonging to this group describe dying as going to some other place, without comparing it to the world of the living and assessing it as either better or worse. These include: *going to the other realm*, *passing to the next world* or *going to the big blue yonder*. One of the phrases describes dying as *going to a better world* or *land*. Although the location of this destination is also not specified, what we have here is the promise that after death existence is more pleasant than during one's life. Interestingly, two euphemisms, namely *go to the undiscovered country* and *go to the great adventure*, present afterlife as a possibility to experience something new and exciting.

A number of euphemisms examined provide the name of the place to which one goes after death. Some of these locations are determined by religious beliefs, superstitions or tradition. For example, places such as *heaven*, *hell*, *Abraham's bosom*, *the kingdom come*, and *banks of Jordan*, but also *pasture* and *valley*, are connected with the Christian religion. *Wander the Elysian fields*, on the other hand, has its roots in Greek mythology, where Elysium was part of the Underworld reserved for the souls of heroes and virtuous people. *Arrive at the banks of Styx* is also a phrase, which the English language owes to the ancient Greeks. Moreover, the circumlocution *go to the Happy Hunting Ground* stems from the tradition of the

American Indians, whereas *go to Davy Jones's locker* can be credited to marine slang. However, although these phrases differ in origin and represent particular systems of beliefs, they are now widely used in everyday language.

It should be stressed that some phrases specifying the destination of the last journey are not connected to either religion or tradition. These are, for instance, hyperbolic euphemisms *go to the land of forgetfulness* or *go to the land of heart's desire*. They reflect the belief that dying is not a negative event because afterlife is characterized by happiness, fulfillment of dreams and lack of problems. Moreover, dying can also be conceptualized as *going home*, which is also a positive connotation.

#### **4.1.3. DEATH IS THE CONTINUATION OF LIFE'S JOURNEY**

In the last example of the DEATH IS A JOURNEY metaphor death is figuratively understood as a continuation of a journey through life. This mapping, exemplified by such phrases as *go on*, *go forth with your cerements* and *go forward*, is related in the conceptual system to the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor. However, in the case discussed, death is not the finishing point of life's journey but its continuation, which means that the event of dying does not prevent the traveler from going forward. This is in opposition to information included in the basic semantic frame of death, which equals the end of life with the cessation of all bodily functions in an organism.

#### **4.2. DYING IS CROSSING THE BOARDER / BEING DEAD IS BEING ON THE OTHER SIDE**

The moment of death can also be metaphorically understood as crossing the boarder, which is represented by a plentitude of English expressions, like *cross the river*, *cross the bridge*, *cross over the range* or *cross the Styx*. In this metaphor, one side of the boarder is mapped onto the concept of life, whereas the moment of crossing this boarder is mapped onto the event

of dying. Furthermore, as in the journey metaphors discussed above, here the dying person is also understood as capable of moving across a given barrier. It is, however, not specified what can be found on the other side.

Looking at the phrases representing this mapping, one can easily notice that there are various different boarders which metaphorically separate life and death. First of all, dying can be understood as crossing the waters of *a river* or *a creek*. As far as this conceptualization is concerned, most of the euphemisms presented above refer to the river Styx which, according to Greek mythology, marked the boundary between Earth and the Underworld. In order to get to the other side, the souls of the newly deceased had to pay the ferryman called Charon to transport them across the river. Moreover, some expressions are grounded in biblical history which states that the Israelites crossed the river Jordan to enter the Promised Land. Here, the crossing represents the final stage of the journey. Importantly, expressions referring to *the Styx* and *the Jordan* rivers require rich background knowledge to be understood as referring to death. However, it is worth mentioning that some phrases do not contain the name of a particular watercourse presenting the act of dying as getting to the other side of *the river*, *the creek* or *the bridge*.

In addition to rivers and creeks, there are also other types of boarders, which are different in nature. Due to the fact that the Jordan and the Styx are connected to well-known mythological and religious stories, one may have certain expectations as to what can happen after crossing these rivers. In contrast, the euphemism *pass beyond the veil* presents death as going to an unknown place which is hidden from the eyes of the living as the veil prevents them from looking at “the other side”. The opposite situation is represented by the phrase *go to the other side of the mirror*. What is interesting about this conceptualization is that it presents the world of the dead as a mirror reflection of the world of the living. Furthermore, dying can be metaphorically understood as *stepping through the door to another world*.

Another observation which can be made is that certain metaphorical expressions belonging to this group do not contain detailed information concerning the border between the world of the living and that of the dead, depicting it, for instance, as *the range*, *the bar* or *the barrier*. What is more, expressions like *go over*, *cross to the other side* or *go to the great beyond* are even less specific as they do not include explicit reference to any type of boarder. Nevertheless, the existence of a certain barrier can be easily inferred; therefore, these phrases can also be counted as obvious examples of the DYING IS CROSSING THE BORDER metaphor.

#### **4.3. DYING IS BEING TAKEN TO ANOTHER PLACE**

In the English language, the event of dying is also conceptualized as being taken to another place. The conceptual metaphor underlying such understanding is, similarly to DEATH IS GOING TO A FINAL DESTINATION, a specific-level instance of the CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION mapping. However, in contrast to all conceptualizations discussed so far, in this case, a dying person is not seen as an alive being, capable of moving; instead, the departure from this world is understood as the result of an action performed by some force or agent.

In spite of the fact that the change of location is not intentional but motivated by certain external factors, it can be perceived as a positive event, which is reflected by such euphemisms as *to be taken to paradise*, *to be taken home*, or *to be carried into heaven*. Nevertheless, phrases describing the deceased as being *snatched away* or *taken from us* reveal that, within this conceptualization, death can also be understood as an unwonted, violent and sudden event. From this perspective, a dying person is depicted as being involuntarily taken away by, for instance, a deity or malign fate. It can be thus said that these expressions represent a dysphemistic approach to death as they evoke highly unfavourable connotations.

#### **4.4. DYING IS ANSWERING A CALL**

Another way in which death is understood in English is through the conceptual metaphor DYING IS ANSWERING A CALL. This conceptualization is similar to the previous one; however, in this case the deceased person is not taken away but merely summoned to leave the world of the living.

Some of the expressions reflecting this mapping, such as *to be summoned to heaven*, *called to a higher place*, or *called home*, contain the name of a place to which one is supposed to go after death. Although it is not explicitly stated whether a dying person answered the call or not, it can be argued that phrases of this kind are based on the CHANGE OF STATE IS CHANGE OF LOCATION metaphor.

Other phrases do not specify the destination to which one is summoned after death; instead, they simply state that the deceased person was called away. Many expressions belonging to this group, namely *to be summoned to Abraham's bosom*, *hear the call to the seat of judgement* or *the Lord sent for you*, obviously refer to Christian religious beliefs. There are also euphemisms which present the event of death as *answering the last call* or *answering the everlasting knock*, the focus here being not on the change of location but on the moment in which one's life ends. What is more, the phrase *receive one's death warrant* employs humour because using funny euphemistic expressions makes the subjects of taboo appear less serious.

#### **4.5. DEATH IS SLEEP**

DEATH IS SLEEP is another metaphor in terms of which the end of life is conceptualized in English. The existence of this mapping in the conceptual system is responsible for comprehending death as a state of being asleep, which is reflected by a large number of everyday expressions.

In the metaphor represented by these euphemisms, certain aspects of the domain of SLEEP correspond to relevant aspects



of death. More specifically, the concept of a sleeping body is mapped onto the concept of a corpse, and the way the body of a sleeping person looks corresponds to the appearance of a corpse in that they are both motionless and inattentive. What is more, the experiences of the human consciousness or the soul in afterlife can be understood in terms of the mental experiences which accompany dreaming, namely the images, thoughts, emotions and sensations which occur in the mind during sleep (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 18-19). Considering these correspondences it can be concluded that the metaphor in question has a clear experiential basis. However, one crucial aspect of the source which is not mapped onto the target domain is that a living creature sleeps for a particular amount of time in order to take some rest and then wakes up. Death, on the contrary, is conceptualized as a particular kind of slumber euphemistically described as *the sleep that knows no waking* or *the eternal sleep of no escape*. Other phrases emphasizing the irreversible nature of death describe it as *taking one's last sleep*, *closing one's eyes for the last time*, or *taking the eternal nap*.

The euphemistic reference to death as sleep was used as early as in the ancient times. For instance, in one of his epigrams, the Alexandrian poet known as Callimachus (ca. 310-240 B.C.) wrote the following words: "*Here sleeps Saon, of Acanthus, son of Dicon, a holy sleep, say not that the good die*" (Banks, trans., *The Works of Hesiod, Callimachus, and Theognis*, 1856, quoted in Rawson 1981: 258). Furthermore, the Christian Bible describes the deceased as the asleep awaiting the Day of Resurrection in this state. It can be thus said that, in certain cultures, the DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor has been used for conceptualizing death for centuries.

The state of being asleep has a restorative function as it facilitates the regeneration of the body and is indispensable for regaining energy which is gradually used up when one is awake. Sleep is also associated with rest, quiet, unconsciousness and pleasant dreams which bring relief and enable one to forget about the problems that one encounters

during the day. Taking these facts into consideration, it can be argued that comprehending dying as falling asleep presents death as a positive event, and thus makes it easier for people to come to terms with the fact that life invariably ceases at some point.

Furthermore, one can observe that some of the phrases exemplifying the DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor, such as *conk out*, *drop off*, *go off*, *go to the final snoozing place* or *dirt nap*, are highly informal; therefore, they may seem inappropriate or offensive, especially when used in formal contexts. However, such phrases also play an important euphemistic role because their informal and casual character deprives the event of death of its solemnity, seriousness and grandeur, and, as a consequence, makes it appear less frightening.

#### **4.6. DEATH IS DARKNESS / NIGHT**

This conceptualization, related to the DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor, allows death to be understood as darkness or as night. In fact, DEATH IS DARKNESS and DEATH IS NIGHT are two distinct metaphors; however, they are closely connected, therefore, for the purpose of the present article they are examined together. What relates the conception of death as darkness and its presentation as night, is the common knowledge linking their source domains. In most parts of the world night is characterized by the lack of sunlight. Night is also the time when people typically sleep, hence the connection with the DEATH IS SLEEP mapping.

The understanding of death as darkness is possible owing to the existence of the LIFE IS LIGHT metaphor in the conceptual system. Euphemisms reflecting this metaphor reveal that LIGHT representing LIFE may have different sources. For instance, it may come from the flame of a candle, which reveals the conceptual correlation with the LIFE IS A FIRE mapping. In this case, the extinction of the flame corresponds to the event of death, which can be observed in phrases such as *wink out* and *go out like a light*, together with the more

elaborate circumlocution *go out like the snuff of a candle*. The expression *snuff out*, which is the euphemism for killing, is also based on this conceptual mapping. Moreover, death can be understood as the extinction of the person's inner light, which is reflected in such expressions as *one's life faded*, *fade away*, or *extinguish one's light* which is a substitution for *kill*. However, some of the euphemisms do not specify the source of light but focus on the moment of its extinction. Thus a dying person metaphorically *leaps into the dark* or *slips into the outer darkness*.

Death can also be conceptualized in terms of night, which is an inference from the LIFE IS A DAY metaphor. In this mapping, birth is understood as dawn, maturity as noon, old age as dusk, the event of death as sunset and the state of being dead as night (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 6). As a result, it is possible to say that *one's sun is setting* with reference to a person who is about to die.

#### **4.7. DEATH IS REST**

Another conceptualization, closely associated with the view of death as sleep, presents the end of life as rest after an earthly existence. Euphemisms describing the state of being dead in terms of peaceful rest reveal a positive evaluation of death as they depict it as a desirable condition. The word which appears most frequently in the linguistic material examined for the purpose of the present study is *rest*, which can be observed in such phrases as *go to one's rest*, *earn one's rest* or *to be laid to rest*, as well as in more elaborated ones, such as *go to the mansions of rest* or *rest from the labours of life*. What is more, the term can be found in the famous expression *rest in peace*, borrowed from Latin *requiescere in pace*, which frequently occurs on tombstones in its acronym form *R.I.P.* The word *rest* also serves as a basis for euphemistic one-for-one substitutions, such as *a place of rest* and *final resting place* for *grave* or *the garden of rest* for *cemetery*. Other terms which

reflect the DEATH IS REST metaphor are *repose* and *peg out*, the latter being highly informal.

Similarly to the DEATH IS SLEEP metaphor, the conceptualization of death as rest appears to be grounded in the fact that a human body in the state of repose resembles a corpse in that they are both inactive and motionless. Obviously, the major difference between these two states is that death is an irreversible condition, whereas rest lasts only for a particular period of time. However, it is not the temporary character of rest which is mapped onto the domain of death, but its restorative and pacifying function. As a result, the conceptual metaphor which enables reasoning about dying in terms of taking rest constitutes a very effective euphemistic reference to the fear-based taboo. Owing to this conceptualization, death is no longer perceived as an inevitable and terrifying event, but as falling into a pleasurable state of relaxation.

#### **4.8. DYING IS JOINING A GROUP**

In everyday English, there are numerous expressions which reveal that dying can be understood by the speakers of this language in terms of joining a group. Within this general conceptualization it is possible to distinguish four specific types of mappings depending on the kind of group with which one is united after death.

First of all, dying can be comprehended as joining all the people who died in the past. The deceased can thus metaphorically *join the majority*, *be numbered with the dead* or *go the way of all flesh*. This conceptualization has a clear experiential basis as it reflects the undeniable truth that a dying person shares the faith of all human beings who passed away before them. The phrase *slip into the great democracy of the dead* emphasizes the fact that all people are equal in that they all must die. Moreover, expressions like *go to a necktie party* and *join the gravestone gentry* are obviously humorous thus aiming to diminish the fear of death.

Secondly, death can be understood as a reunion with one's relatives, which is reflected in such phrases as *join one's fathers / ancestors*, *meet one's people* or *follow one's spouse*. It can be assumed that this conceptualization is grounded in the fact that after death a person is frequently buried among the members of his or her family or among people representing the same religious beliefs, social ground, race, ethnic group etc. Moreover, it seems to be connected to the belief that the soul of the deceased meets the souls of his or her ancestors, parents or friends who died before. In both cases, death is depicted not as a terrifying and inevitable end to existence but as a possibility of being reunited with one's loved ones.

Thirdly, dying is conceptualized in English as joining the angels, presumably in heaven. This conceptual mapping seems to be rooted in the Christian belief that after death the souls of virtuous people go to heaven, which is the place in which God and his angels reside. Moreover, the expressions *get your wings* and *get your halo* reveal that the deceased person can even become a member of the angelic host. All euphemisms belonging to this group have thoroughly positive connotations as they suggest that what awaits a person after death is ennoblement and a peaceful existence.

Finally, dying can be understood in terms of meeting a deity or personified death. This mapping is partially based on a religious belief according to which the soul of a dead person is united with a deity. Here, the focus is on what happens with human consciousness in afterlife. Nevertheless, those expressions referring to encountering death, namely *meet the Reaper* or *meet one's death*, place emphasis on the very moment in which all biological activity in an organism comes to an end and a person dies.

#### **4.9. DEATH IS LOSS**

The English language contains several phrases which betray the conceptualization of death in terms of loss. The DEATH IS LOSS metaphor is based on the conception of life as a precious

possession. Consequently, death is understood as a loss of this possession. Therefore, unlike most mappings employed in reasoning about the cessation of life, this view does not bring any type of consolation, but presents death as a thoroughly negative event. As Allan and Burridge (2006: 224) observe, in the conceptualization discussed death is depicted as malign fate which cannot be controlled by human beings thus leaving them powerless and terrified in the face of the event which can be neither avoided nor prevented. However, the cognitive association between death and loss seems to be based not only on the LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION metaphor, but also on the EFFECTS OF DEATH STAND FOR DEATH metonymy which emphasizes the negative consequences of losing life.

Importantly, the linguistic material reveals that the source domain of loss refers not only to losing one's life, but also to losing loved ones. This claim is based on the observation that the majority of the expressions given above assume the point of view of those who are still alive. Therefore, the death of a family member or a friend is referred to as a *tragic loss* or *bereavement*, and the deceased person, having been *lost*, is described by the living as *missed*, *deeply regretted* or *dear lamented*.

#### **4.10. DEATH IS A NEW LIFE**

Among the English euphemisms, there is a small group which reveals that the event of death can be understood as the beginning of a new life. In this metaphor, the source domain of life is mapped onto the target domain of death. In contrast to other metaphors which also assume the continuation of existence after death, this conceptualization does not involve the aspect of moving to another location, neither does it specify the place in which the new life is to be led. Certain phrases, namely *exchange this life for a better* and *in the sweet hereafter*, present afterlife as preferable to earthly existence. Furthermore, most of the expressions, like *afterlife*, *eternal life*,

*everlasting life* or *life immortal*, emphasize the everlasting character of life which starts after the person's death.

#### **4.11. DYING IS GIVING UP**

The event of dying can also be comprehended as giving up. In the euphemisms which represent this conceptualization, dying is understood as the act of giving up and, consequently, the deceased is the person who performs this act. As a result, dying is verbalized by means of such verbs as *give up*, *lay down*, *resign*, *relinquish*, *succumb*, *surrender* or *yield up*, used with reference to one's *life*, *breath* or *ghost*. Moreover, the moment of death is referred to with use of highly informal phrases, like *call it a day*, *call it quits* and *jack it in*.

Furthermore, this conceptualization of death seems to be related to the conception of life as a struggle. In this context, resigning oneself to death can be understood as a voluntary action which enables one to liberate oneself from earthly existence. The end of life is perceived within this view as a positive event. On the other hand, giving up can be interpreted as an admission of being no longer capable of coping with life. In this sense, dying is comprehended as suffering a defeat.

#### **4.12. THE DEATH OF A HUMAN BEING IS THE DEATH OF A PLANT**

Human death is also conceptualized in terms of the death of a plant. The mapping underlying this conceptualization seems to be inferred from the PEOPLE ARE PLANTS metaphor, in which human beings are viewed as plants that grow, flourish and finally wither and die (Lakoff and Turner 1989: 6). In this view, death can be understood either as a natural end of biological processes in a plant or as a result of the harvest. Most phrases reflecting this metaphor represent the latter case; therefore, it can be assumed that they do not describe natural death, but the sudden and premature end of human life. The premature character of death is explicitly emphasized by euphemistic

circumlocutions *to be cut away in the bloom of one's life* and *to be cut off before the prime*.

#### **4.13. DEATH IS THE CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS**

There are numerous English euphemisms which reveal the conceptualization of death as the cessation of bodily functions. Interestingly, only a small number of them refer to the end of all biological processes in a human body. Most phrases are related to the cessation of a particular biological function, such as breathing or blood circulation, or to the end of life as a result of inadequate treatment. Each of these groups of euphemisms is described below.

It is part of our common knowledge deriving from everyday experience that an organism dies when it is no longer capable of carrying out the vital functions of life. Therefore, understanding death in terms of the end of all biological activity is fully justifiable as it reflects reality. One can thus say that a dead person *has lost his or her vital signs* or *is in a condition non-conductive to life*. Moreover, the deceased can be described as *nonviable* or, to be politically correct, *permanently indisposed*. Euphemistic effect can also be achieved by means of humorous phrases like *one's metabolic processes are history* or *to be vis-à-vis metabolic processes*.

Another group of euphemisms reflecting the conceptualization in question includes phrases referring to breathing and the circulation of blood. These two processes are specific instances of biological functions indispensable for sustaining life in a human being; therefore, it can be argued that they are connected to the general metaphor DEATH IS THE CESSATION OF BODILY FUNCTIONS through the PART FOR THE WHOLE metonymy. Some of the expressions instantiating this group, such as *breath one's last* or *cease to breathe*, indicate that a person dies when the respiratory organs stop functioning. However, phrases like *resign one's breath* or *yield one's breath* suggest that an individual consciously chooses not to breath anymore; therefore, they can be treated as instances of the DYING IS



GIVING UP mapping which was discussed earlier. What is more, this group includes humorous expressions like *kick the oxygen habit* and *hold your breath forever*, which fulfill their euphemistic function by making death appear less serious than it really is. The same can be said about the phrase *respiratory challenged* which mocks the jargon of political correctness.

Finally, the cessation of bodily functions can be caused by the failure of medical treatment, which can be assigned either to the incurable character of the disease or to the mistake of doctors. For instance, the phrase *succumb to one's disease / injuries* is a roundabout description of death caused by some illness or certain type of harm, whereas the humorous circumlocutions *diagnostic misadventure of high magnitude* and *sustain a therapeutic misadventure* place the blame for a patient's death on doctors. The term *adverse event* is frequently used in the medical jargon with reference to the death of a patient. The policy of not discussing death openly is used in hospitals where this topic is a strong taboo, especially among terminally ill patients and their relatives. It must be emphasized that, although phrases representing this group do not explicitly refer to the cessation of any biological functions, the background knowledge against which these expressions are understood makes it possible to interpret the failure of treatment as the failure in keeping an organism alive.

It is worth noticing that most phrases are based on the metonymy THE CAUSE OF DEATH FOR DEATH. In contrast, euphemisms *slowly cool to room temperature*, *assume room temperature* or *to be a stiff*, which also employ humour for euphemistic effect, are founded on a different metonymic correspondence, namely THE EFFECTS OF DEATH FOR DEATH. This assumption is made on the basis of the fact that the stiffening as well as the drop of bodily temperature do not occur until all biological processes stop functioning.

#### **4.14. DEATH IS THE MALFUNCTION OF BODILY PROCESSES**

The domain of death is comprehended not only as the cessation but also as the malfunction of bodily processes necessary for keeping an organism alive. All of these phrases can be described as understatements as they depict death in terms of processes characteristic of a living organism. Some of them, namely *cough*, *choke*, *croak*, and *wear away*, refer to the symptoms of being ill. It must be emphasized that symptoms denoted by these expressions are typically not associated with fatal diseases; therefore, using them with reference to death diminishes the status of this taboo and makes it seem less terrifying. On the other hand, such phrases can be perceived as offensive because they openly downgrade and mock the event of losing life. From this point of view, *cough*, *choke*, *croak* and *wear away* can be counted as instances of one-for-one dysphemistic substitutions for the verb *die*. Other expressions representing this conceptualization, including *blink for an exceptionally long period of time*, *take a long deep sniff* and *the eternal yawn*, can be described as humorous circumlocutions in which death is referred to in terms of slight anomalies in biological processes.

#### **4.15. DYING IS CHANGING THE POSITION OF THE BODY FROM VERTICAL TO HORIZONTAL**

Human beings have bodies which enable them to walk in an upright position and stand erect. In the English language there are several phrases which show that death can be conceptualized as a change of the axis of the human body from vertical to horizontal. This mapping is grounded in the fact that a dead person is no longer capable of walking or standing upright. What is more, expressions like *ten toes up* and *tits up* refer to the typical position in which the corpse is buried, namely lying on its back.

Obviously, lying flat with one's toes up is not an idiosyncratic feature of the deceased. The position of the

human body frequently changes from vertical to horizontal, for instance when one rests or sleeps; however, in the case of the dead this change is irreversible. What is interesting, the states most typically connected with lying on one's back, namely rest and sleep, also play the role of source domains in terms of which death can be conceptualized.

#### **4.16. DEATH IS THE END**

The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema makes it possible to understand life as a complex process which has an initial point, a series of intermediate stages and a final point. From this perspective, death is conceptualized as the final point of the human lifespan, which gives rise to the DEATH IS THE END metaphor. This highly general mapping serves as a basis for several more specific conceptualizations which are presented below.

#### **4.17. DEATH IS THE END OF EXISTENCE**

In this conceptualization, the event of death is depicted as the irreversible end of existence. In contrast to the mappings in which human consciousness or soul do not die together with the body, this conceptualization excludes the idea of the continuation of being in the afterlife. The understanding of death as the finishing point of life is in line with the semantic frame of death. However, the cessation of biological functions, which is an important part of the frame, is not included in this mapping. Instead, dying is described by means of such phrases as *cease to be*, *end one's days*, *be no more*, *be all over with one* or *come to an untimely end*, which place emphasis on the fact that death is *the end*.

What is interesting is that a group of phrases from the domain of killing can also be counted as representatives of the conceptualization discussed. For instance, expressions like *disappear* and *vanish* meaning 'to be murdered' implicate that a corpse is unlikely to ever be found. Therefore, although it is

obvious that the body does not literally disappear, it can be said that it ceases to exist among others. Furthermore, the phrases *rubbed out* and *erased*, meaning 'killed', place emphasis on the fact there is no trace of the deceased left. In other words, death is comprehended here as the absolute cessation of existence.

#### **4.18. DEATH IS THE END OF CASUAL EARTHLY ACTIVITIES**

There are several expressions in the English language which reveal that death can be understood as the end of casual activities performed in everyday life. In this conceptualization, the finishing point of a particular routine activity is mapped onto the moment in which a person passes away. Some of the phrases reflecting this mapping refer to the ways in which people typically end their work; therefore, while discussing the taboo of death, one can substitute the verb *die* with such expressions as *hang up one's harness*, *lay down one's shovel and hoe*, *lay down one's pen* or *coil up one's ropes*. It can be assumed that these expressions are most easily understood when used in order to describe the deceased who actually applied the tools mentioned for their work. However, they are not restricted to such cases and can be used with reference to the members of other professions as well.

What is more, a group of expressions depict the end of life in terms of finishing a meal. These include such phrases as *hang up your spoon*, *hand in your dinner pail* or *lay down one's knife and fork*. This mapping can be grounded in the fact that after death a person no longer ingests food in order to satisfy nutritional needs indispensable for proper development, growth and energy.

#### **4.19. DYING IS PERFORMING AN ACTIVITY FOR THE LAST TIME**

Another instance of the DEATH IS THE END metaphor enables understanding dying in terms of performing an activity for the

last time. Euphemisms representing this mapping can be divided into two groups.

The first group consists of phrases describing death in terms of an activity which is performed for the last time before one's life ends. Here we have such expressions like *breath your last* or *take one's last supper*. What is interesting about this conceptualization is that it focuses neither on death as an event nor on death as a condition. Instead, it uses an action which precedes the end of life as a source domain for understanding death.

In the second group, dying itself is understood as performing a certain activity for the last time. This understanding is reflected by such phrases as *head for the last round-up*, *take one's last sleep*, *make the last voyage* or *go on a last journey*. As one can see, some of these additionally represent other conceptual mappings, namely DEATH IS SLEEP and DEATH IS A JOURNEY. What can also be observed, this understanding makes reference to death as a condition. However, contrary to the semantic frame in which death is understood as a condition in which an organism is incapable of carrying out biological activity, in the conceptualization discussed biological functions do not cease after the end of one's life.

#### **4.20. DEATH IS THE END OF A PLAY**

A relatively small number of metaphorical expressions detected reveal a conceptualization of death in terms of the end of a play. This conceptualization is an inference from the LIFE IS A PLAY metaphor. In this understanding of life, a human being corresponds to an actor, people in the nearest surrounding are fellow actors, the way in which a person behaves is the style of acting and the world is a stage. From this perspective, death is comprehended as the end of life's play. Thus, as one can observe, the act of dying is euphemistically described as *quitting the scene*, *taking the last call*, *making one's final exit* or *making the last bow*, the last of these phrases being also an

instance of the DYING IS PERFORMING AN ACTIVITY FOR THE LAST TIME metaphor. Moreover, the event of death is referred to as *the last bow* or *curtains*.

#### **4.21. DEATH IS THE LAST DANCE**

Another conceptualization instantiating the DEATH IS THE END metaphor enables understanding death as the last dance. Dancing is generally associated with positive emotions and fun, therefore, describing death in its terms enables understanding a terrifying event as a pleasurable activity. It can be thus said that the conceptualization discussed fulfills its euphemistic function very well. For example, in this mapping a dying person does not simply “depart this life”, but *dances a two-step to another world* or *goes to a dance party with God*. These phrases evoke positive connotations and, as a consequence, portray the event of death as less tragic and terrifying than it is in the eyes of most people. The expressions *dance the last dance* and *enjoy one’s last dance*, are also deprived of negative associations. Moreover, they can be counted as instances of the DYING IS PERFORMING AN ACTIVITY FOR THE LAST TIME metaphor.

The vocabulary from the domain of dancing is also used in humorous euphemistic circumlocutions for certain artifacts or phenomena related to death. For instance, there are such substitutions as *dance floor for the last horizontal tango for coffin*, *dance-hall for condemned cell* or *dance master for a hangman*.

#### **4.22. DEATH IS THE END OF THE GAME**

Repeating after the astronaut Alfred M. Warden “When you are out there 200 000 miles from earth, if something goes wrong, you know that’s the end of the ball game” (*New York Times*, 8/14/71, quoted in Rawson 1981: 28). In this quotation, the end of human life is described as the end of the game. In fact,

the English language contains numerous phrases describing death with use of vocabulary from the domain of games.

In English, life is frequently conceived of as a game, which can be seen in such phrases as *the odds are against him*, *my brother is a loser* or *if you play your cards right, you can have whatever you want*. In this metaphorical understanding, life is understood as a game and a person leading a life is a player. Therefore, it is not surprising that death should be conceptualized in game-playing terms.

The largest number of phrases representing this conceptualization relate to the domain of gambling, particularly to various card games or dice games. In this case, the event of death is described by means of such expressions as *cash in one's chips*, *throw sixes*, *play the last trump*, *chuck seven* or *to be tapped out*, to name just a few. Phrases connected to races also form a large group including such euphemisms as *jump the last hurdle*, *conk out* or *keel over*. There are also certain expressions related to the domains of boxing and ball games, for example, *take the last count*, *be knocked out* or *be struck out*. Moreover, we can encounter single phrases based on the vocabulary from other disciplines, such as surfing (*ride the big wave*) or billiards (*drop the cue*).

As one can observe, in most of the aforementioned expressions the end of the game is marked by either victory or defeat of the player. Thus, we have phrases which refer to losing, like *kayoed for keeps* or *struck out*, and those which indicate winning, for instance, *chuck seven*. However, the majority of expressions focus simply on the fact that the *game is over*, without specifying whether it has been won or lost by the player.

It must, however, be emphasized that not all expressions referring to death with use of game-playing terminology focus on the end of the competition. Being dead can also be conceptualized as playing a game, which is reflected by such phrases as *play tennis with Jesus*, *ride the big wave*. These expressions are humorous and evoke positive connotations

related to practicing various sports; therefore, they work effectively as euphemisms for death.

#### **4.23. BEING DEAD IS BEING BURIED**

BEING DEAD IS BEING BURIED is another conceptual mapping by means of which English speaking people reason about death. Euphemisms representing this conceptualization formed one of the largest groups in the linguistic material examined for the purpose of the present study.

Whenever a member of an organized society dies, certain procedures and rituals must be undertaken. The fear of death together with the fact that the corpse quickly decays make it impossible for a dead person to be kept among the living. In modern Western societies, dead bodies are most commonly disposed of by being buried in the ground; therefore, conceptualizing death in terms of burial is both natural and well grounded in experience. What is more, apart from having experiential basis, the cognitive association between death and burial is grounded in the AFTERMATH OF BEING DEAD FOR DEATH metonymy. This metonymic relation focuses on what happens with the human body after death.

The majority of expressions reflecting this conceptualization are humorous euphemistic circumlocutions for being buried, which mostly refer to death understood as a condition. Some of these phrases, such as *pop up the daisies*, *grin at daisy roots*, *eat grass by the root* or *push up weed*, stress the fact that a dead person lies in a horizontal position under the layer of soil covered with plants on the surface. A similar group of expressions which can be distinguished within the conceptualization in question utilize the image of a corpse being placed under the ground. These include such euphemisms as *to be six feet under*, *take an earth bath*, *sink into the grave* or *return to the ground*. Furthermore, many funny expressions referring to dying, like *marinate in soil and worms*, *to be an incredibly decaying man*, *become food for worms* or *go into the fertilizer business*, place emphasis on the



decomposition of the body. A relatively small group of phrases, for example *put on the wooden overcoat*, *buy a pine condo* or *to be screwed down*, focus on the coffin as a case in which a dead body is typically buried.

What is important, conceptualizing the condition of being dead in terms of being buried does not only underlie expressions describing the deceased but also those referring to the living, such as *remain above ground*, meaning 'to be alive', or *to be one foot in the grave*, meaning 'to be about to die'.

#### **4.24. DEATH IS A REWARD**

In this conceptualization death is not a terrifying event ending our existence and separating us from the living but a reward. Some phrases do not specify what kind of reward death actually is, describing it simply as *going to one's final* or *just reward*. In other expressions, dying is depicted as *winning home*, *winning rest*, *winning one's way*, or as *going to glory*. The phrase *win to rest* is additionally based on the DEATH IS A REST metaphor. Moreover, it is not stated in the mapping why a dying person should be rewarded; however, it can be assumed that one is understood to be deserving a reward for conducting a virtuous life.

#### **4.25. DEATH IS PROMOTION**

A small number of the English expressions examined for the purpose of the present study reveal that death can be understood in terms of promotion. The conceptual metaphor represented by these euphemisms enables understanding death as a highly positive event, namely as an advancement in position. In other words, the condition of being dead is understood as having higher status than the condition of being alive. Becoming superior to the living is obviously a positive perspective; therefore, conceiving of death in such terms is encouraging for those who fearfully await the end of life.

Expressions representing the DEATH IS PROMOTION metaphor instantiate different types of euphemisms. The expression *promoted to glory* used to describe the deceased is hyperbolic in nature. The phrase *move into the upper management* uses the terminology from the domain of business to describe death. As a result, dying is understood as a desirable promotion to higher rank. The euphemism *promoted to the subterranean truffle inspector*, on the other hand, is a humorous circumlocution which is also based on the BEING DEAD IS BEING BURIED metaphor.

#### **4.26. DEATH IS A RELIEF**

Another conceptualization which can be distinguished on the basis of the linguistic material enables understanding death in terms of a relief. In this mapping, dying is understood as a relief from problems, worries and sufferings which one continuously encounters in life. From this point of view, the event of death is not terrifying but rather eagerly awaited. Such understanding of the notion of dying is connected with perceiving life as a period full of trials, tribulations and pain. Reasoning about death in terms of a relief may be the source of consolation, for instance, to those who suffer from fatal diseases and endure severe pain for a long period of time and thus impatiently wait to *pass from the sorrows of Earth* and enjoy *peace at last*.

#### **4.27. DYING IS GETTING INTO CONTACT WITH THE GROUND**

DYING IS GETTING INTO CONTACT WITH THE GROUND is another conceptual mapping which serves as a foundation for reasoning about death. This conceptualization utilizes the image of a corpse lying in a horizontal position with the face turned to the ground. In contrast to the BEING DEAD IS BEING BURIED metaphor which also involves contact with the ground, here a person is not covered with soil but lies on its surface. Moreover, different active zones are involved in both cases. In

the former mapping the entire body is buried in the ground, whereas in the latter the focus is on the contact between the mouth and the dusty surface of the ground.

Expressions reflecting the DYING IS GETTING INTO CONTACT WITH THE GROUND metaphor can be used in either a humorous or sarcastic way. They are highly informal and can be considered offensive when used in inappropriate contexts. What is more, phrases like *bite the dust* or *kiss the ground* are typically used with reference to violent death (Holder 2002: 30).

## 5. Conclusion

The idea of losing life is a source of numerous fears and doubts which have troubled humanity throughout its history. First of all, the fact that death is an inevitable event issues a challenge to the claim that our existence is meaningful and purposeful. The uncertainty as to what happens after the end of life also fills people with strong apprehension. Moreover, thoughts concerning the unavoidable separation from loved ones as well as those related to physical pain that typically accompanies dying evoke the feeling of horror in most human beings. For these reasons, the living tend to avoid contact with all possible reminders of the fact that they are mortal and their existence must end at some point.

This strong stance of denial, characteristic of modern Western societies, has its reflection in language used in talking about death. To combat their anxiety, people have invented a whole array of substitute expressions to protect themselves from discussing the topic of death openly. Repeating after Rawson, “euphemisms are society’s basic lingua non franca. As such, they are outward and visible signs of our inward anxieties, conflicts, fears and shames” (Rawson 1981: 1). Therefore, the large number of English expressions collected for the purpose of this paper reveals how strong the taboo of death is in this culture. Such a variety of phrases, including formal phrases, humorous circumlocutions, hyperboles,

understatements, acronyms, borrowings, one-for-one substitutions and dysphemisms, makes it possible to evade discussing death openly in miscellaneous social situations.

The findings summarized above show that, although dictionaries define death as the end of all biological activity in an organism, there are many alternative ways of thinking and talking about this inevitable event. As one can observe, the majority of metaphorical understandings of death reflect the belief that the cessation of bodily functions does not mark the end of existence. This optimistic view brings consolation and makes it easier for people to come to terms with the fact that humans beings are mortal.

Obviously, the proposed list of concepts in terms of which death can be conceptualized by the speakers of English should by no means be treated as complete; however, it illustrates the fact that a single event can have a proliferation of alternative understandings.

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# LITERARY STUDIES





**Sister of Philomela:  
Debt in Coetzee's *Disgrace***

IZABELA FILIPIAK

**Abstract**

This essay discusses the financial and moral complexities at the center of *Disgrace* by Coetzee, its inquiry positioned in the context of the postcolonial decoding of the novel. Primarily, I focus on Lucy's choice to stay in the house where she falls victim to the crime. Following "the rhetorical signal to the active reader, to counterfocalize," which Spivak pinpoints in *Disgrace*, I reconstruct Lucy's story from intimations and hints woven into the main narrative. Having unraveled the mystery of Lucy's abortion, mentioned in passing, I propose that during David's visit to her house, Lucy falls victim to corrective rape as both a lesbian and a single woman who thrives living in the countryside; lastly, I proceed to prove that Lucy acts like a woman "corrected" when she signs her property over to Petrus, although the true price she has to pay to her assailants staged as "debt collectors, tax collectors" (158) is her sexuality.

**Keywords**

Coetzee, South Africa, sexual violence, gay/lesbian, apartheid

Modernity's others suffer losses and violence like everyone else—but a seal of seeming inevitability is added to their suffering. Their experience appears determined by their being. Nothing *befalls* them:

because their very existence seems tragic, not only every catastrophe but every passing disappointment takes on the character of a curse and seems to arise from within rather than from without. The tragic condition of the scapegoat underlines his suffering, making it appear obvious, even natural.

Heather K. Love

## 1. Making Amends

In Chapter 4 of her collection of Massey lectures, *Payback: Debt as Metaphor and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Margaret Atwood restores an obsolete expression, “making amends” (171) to explore further the concept of moral debt. “To amend” means to change for the better, to remove faults and errors, and to eliminate hindrances we presumably created for those who consider themselves injured by our actions.

Before starting off the process of retribution, that is to say, making amends, one has to determine what one owes and to whom. It remains the debtor’s responsibility to first recognize such a debt, and then decide both on the form of payment and the recipient. Contrary to a monetary debt, the moral one does not have to be repaid to anyone specific. Dickensian Scrooge, Atwood writes, “owes it to his fellow man: he’s been on the take from other people all his life—that’s where his fortune has come from—but he’s never given anything back” (171). Atwood sides with Samuel Johnson in considering the debtor/creditor balances as immoral and ruinous to individuals, as well as to the planet.

At the same time she acknowledges the narrative benefits of debt. Years earlier, as a less experienced reader, she used to believe that “the nineteenth-century novel was driven by love,” but now she sees “that it’s also driven by money, which indeed holds a more central place in it than love does, no matter how much the virtues of love may be waved idealistically aloft (100).” Financial debt places characters of these novels in an

indecorous dependency on each other. More desperate than despondent, they act upon unseemly choices which they would not normally have made, and the wheel of the narration begins to turn.

Following Atwood, I intend to discuss the financial and moral complexities at the center of *Disgrace* by Coetzee (in particular, how debt propels the action and who owes what to whom). As I position my inquiry in the context of the postcolonial decoding of the novel, I intend to focus on what has been left aside by previous interpreters as “a purely private matter” (112); that is, Lucy’s choice to stay in the house in which she fell victim to the crime, with the full knowledge that the crime can be repeated at the whim of the attackers who remain free.

## **2. Melancholic Stalker**

*Disgrace* begins when a university professor, “a fifty-year-old divorcé at a loose end,” (52) David Lurie, who until now has lived “within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means” (2) develops an odd penchant for stalking women. He starts off by pursuing Soraya, a prostitute with whom he used to have a weekly arrangement. When she quits her job at the agency, her anxiety raised by their accidental meeting in public, he “pays a detective agency to track her down. Within days he has her real name, her address, her telephone number” (9). When he attempts to make use of it, however, Soraya discourages him from ever trying to contact her again. He then switches his interest to Melanie, a student in his Romantic poetry class and a more vulnerable object. After meeting her once, in order to effectuate his pursuit, Lurie proceeds to spy on Melanie by himself this time. He “lets himself into the department office. From the filing cabinet he extracts Melanie Isaacs’s enrolment card and copies down her personal details: home address, Cape Town address, telephone number” (18). Then he calls her and invites her to dinner, has sex with her, and proceeds to follow her around town: pays her

a visit in the apartment which she shares with a relative, tracks her at a theater rehearsal, and so on.

David poses as the last successor of the European Romantic tradition, while he teaches communications, a subject too rational for his taste, at the Cape Technical University, renamed to denote a practical approach to education; no wonder that David, with his fondness for Wordsworth, finds himself displaced there. To him, Melanie's averted glances, pained stares, and weighty silences do not stand for her manifest lack of interest in him, but rather constitute a proper, even titillating feminine response to a male erotic pursuit. He appears to believe that a generation gap between him and his students is a chasm impossible to bridge, and, as if to prove his point, he keeps misreading these signals which to anyone else would stand for the woman's lack of interest. Not to David, though. He is genuinely surprised when Melanie files a complaint against him. He presents himself as a servant of Eros, and indeed seems driven by the force that precludes any fulfillment of his desire and prepares him for self-annihilation.

Injured by Melanie's complaint, David refuses to acknowledge its seriousness; he is soon asked to resign from his job without severance pay. He then leaves Cape Town to visit his daughter Lucy on her smallholding in the Eastern Cape. A week after his arrival, three men enter the house, rape Lucy, steal his car, and attempt to set him on fire. He nurtures his daughter through the worst part of her recovery. The communication between them sours, however, as soon as she refuses to report the rape. When David returns to Cape Town, he finds his house broken into and his personal space violated. He considers selling the house which he can no longer afford as a way of improving his supply of funds. Before his ill-fated pursuit of Melanie he was able to control both his desires and his money; afterwards, he can only witness himself going down. "His finances are in chaos. He has not paid a bill since he left. He is living on credit; any day now his credit is going to dry up" (175). David's life may just as well

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end as soon as his credit runs out. Then he will follow the path of the dogs.

Even before establishing his affinity with the dogs whom he attends in their final moments of life and then to their impromptu burial place (like them, he too is surplus), David experiences his exclusion in an oddly feminized way. He moves in with his daughter because his returning to Cape Town—the place where he was silenced and misunderstood—is beyond his ability to cope. “He cannot imagine taking up residence once more in the house on Torrance Road, in the shadow of the university, skulking about like a criminal, dodging old colleagues” (175). He will not bear living in shame. David believes himself to be scapegoated by the new intolerance of seduction, refuses to make amends, and rallies his readers to sympathize with him. Drawn in by his misfortune, we tend to forget that had David not been dismissed, this part—silencing, expulsion—would have been Melanie’s to live; indeed, the young woman’s instinctual response was either to quit school or to attempt suicide (45).

In 2001, Human Rights Watch issued a brief report titled “South Africa—Sexual Violence Rampant in Schools.” This report, focusing mainly on the 8-graders, discusses the range of responses the female students have to sexual violence, with either their teachers or their classmates as perpetrators. These students appear to experience their exclusion in patterns strikingly similar to how David voices his discomfort. One student cannot bring herself to return to school, another remains in class where she is alienated by her classmates; still, she does not consider starting over at another school, since “[i]f it can happen here it can happen any place.”<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Apparently not even good students are immune to the normalization of violence: “When we interviewed W.H., she had not attended school for several months. She told us, ‘My mom asked me if I wanted to go back to school. I said no. I didn’t want to go. All the people who I thought were my friends had turned against me. And they [the rapists] were still there. I felt disappointed. [Teachers] always told me they were glad to have students like me, that they wished they had more students like me. If they had made the boys leave, I wouldn’t have felt so bad about it.’” “South Africa: Sexual

kind of rationale will return in Lucy's refusal to leave her farm after the assault. For these eight-graders, going to a new school equals exposing themselves to the same danger in a new setting. Interestingly, David's peregrination between town and country proves them right.

### **3. Lucy's Business**

Rather than dwelling further on David's misreading of Melanie, which has already attracted the attention of many a scholar,<sup>2</sup> I intend to focus on his daughter Lucy and her decision to stay on in the house in which she was raped. I will also consider the concept of rape as a form of retribution or repayment, which is how Lucy interprets it.

It may be interesting to see if the parallel Lucy draws comparing a financial agreement and an act of violence with the assailants staged as "debt collectors, tax collectors" (158) offers any similitude to Atwood's idea of repaying a moral debt, and if such a parallel is to be drawn, who should collect—the black people of South Africa? Or should the arrangement remain Lucy's "business" (112), with Lucy acting as an independent contractor. However, reducing the assault to an obscure deal does not explain why Lucy has to be in debt (as, by definition, we owe for a reason). Finally, if we follow her disavowal of David's historical context, we are at a loss as to what Lucy owes and to whom. In chapter 13, Lucy discloses to David why she refuses to report the rape to the police:

The reason is that, as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone. (112)

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Violence Rampant in Schools." *Human Rights Watch*. 27 March 2001. Web. 22 June 2011. <<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2001/03/26/south-africa-sexual-violence-rampant-schools>>.

Lucy's response angers David who assumes that she wants to avoid violence by pretending that it never happened. He fears that his daughter, about to embrace the idea of retribution through suffering, exposes herself to ethnic vengeance. But his question, "Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?" angers her in turn. "You keep misreading me," (112) she says as if her intent was ever made clear. "Guilt and salvation are abstraction," (112) she adds, prompt to disavow religious terms when applied to her experience much as David did earlier during his trial. The conversation ends with David's learning that Lucy neither "try[s] to save her skin," nor "act[s] in terms of abstractions" (112). Unresolved and unsettling, the quarrel leaves him confused, believing that "[n]ever yet have they been so far and so bitterly apart" (112). Lucy seems beyond his reach because while she vehemently rejects David's discourse, she refuses to choose any at all.

The unfulfilled promise of the return of David's car culminating in the ultimate show of police inefficiency, and resulting in the pointless trip to New Brighton prompts another discussion. David tries to talk Lucy out of her insistence on interpreting the rape as a "purely private matter" (112), but all he has to offer as a distancing tool is a historical treatise weighted with abstract terms. "It was history speaking through them," he says of the rapists. "A history of wrong" (156). He believes that his daughter needs to gain distance from the trauma: "It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't" (156). Contrary to what *The Cambridge Introduction to J. M. Coetzee* claims, it is not Lucy who appears "to accept with some fatalism that 'it was history speaking' through the rapists' (156)" (77). Indeed, she refuses to do so.

Driving in the car, away from the house and in motion, offers Lucy just enough freedom to name key aspects of her "unspeakable" experience; all the same, embracing her perpetrators' point of view, she counters David with an abstract concept of her own:

What if... what if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. (158)

Lucy not only legitimizes her attackers' perspective; she also takes on their voice: "Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves" (158). But Lucy's response is hesitant at the core; she uses three perhapses in the course of five sentences. In addition, positioning herself as a white woman who has had the misfortune to pay for her ancestors' crimes, she plays ball in David's court of historical interpretation. Paying the price, read through the historical lens, comes close to "guilt" and "retribution"—terms previously rejected by Lucy. David reasonably advises his daughter not to look at her experience from the perpetrators' point of view: "I'm sure they tell themselves many things. It is in their interest to make up stories that justify them" (158). His message reads: "trust your feelings" (158). David even reminds Lucy of what she felt: "You said you felt only hatred from them" (158). However, the hatred was what her perpetrators felt. What Lucy felt was being "stunned" (156) by the personal aspect of this hatred. "Personal" and "private" are almost synonymous. Her insistence on keeping the rape her "private business" may have something to do with this "personal" hatred.

Responding to David's insistence on focusing on her feelings, Lucy starts reading rape through gender: "When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting" (158). Then she challenges her father directly: "You are a man, you ought to know" (158). Finally, she gives the most concrete summery of her experience thus far, affirming that the rape felt like "fighting with death" (159). David belatedly becomes defensive. Until now, the attackers' race has not been discussed: only their age and number were certain; at one thrust, David now marks the attackers as non-white and



parses Lucy's argument, which aims partly at him (a white man and her father) by blaming the racist discourse on Lucy: "If they had been white you wouldn't talk about them in this way,' he says. 'If they had been white thugs from Despatch, for instance'" (159). All Lucy can do at this point is retort: "Wouldn't I?" (159). David confirms: "No, you wouldn't," (159) and changes the subject.

All David accomplishes here is subtle but effective blackmail: if Lucy continues to challenge him in his male prerogative, he will respond with accusations of racism, even though it is he who consistently smirks at African names ("Not Mncedisi? Not Nqabayakhe? Nothing unpronounceable, just Pollux" (200)). Lucy kindly does not bring up racism, just calls his mocking "that terrible irony of yours" (200). In the car conversation David succeeds in blaming Lucy, but she retreats into herself, and he will never find out any more about the unfortunate event.

David's defensiveness precludes his being entrusted with any deeper knowledge about anyone but himself. His sentimental attachment to Soraya becomes understandable when we take notice that Soraya is the only person he speaks to at length ("During their sessions he speaks to her with a certain freedom, even on occasion unburdens himself. She knows the facts of his life. She has heard the stories of his two marriages, knows about his daughter and his daughter's ups and downs. She knows many of his opinions" (3)). Soraya knows more than we do. This may sound touching until we note that a prostitute's job is not to contradict her client. Soraya thus becomes the only woman who does not challenge David's opinions. All other female characters do, vehemently at times: Rosalind, Lucy, Mathabane and other women in the committee of inquiry; even demure Melanie surprises David with her opposition when, instead of withdrawing from school, she makes his pursuit of her a matter of public discussion. If David agreed to have a female lawyer representing him in front of the committee, as his lawyer suggested, she would not have let him indulge himself by playing a martyr to Eros. If he

agreed to counseling, his counselor would not simply listen to his opinions the way Soraya does. In the end, Soraya remains the inconsolable loss. Bev Shaw who does not oppose David's decision to send the dog he loves to death will never even come close. Meanwhile, he never learns much about Soraya, Melanie, and any other women who, he believes, have made him "a better person" (70). Now he proves unable to find out anything about Lucy.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls David, "Lurie-the-chief-focalizer" ("Ethics" 22). "Disgrace is relentless in keeping the focalization confined to David Lurie" (22), she observes. Our duty as active readers in response to the narration that professes its own "inability to 'read' Lucy" (22) is not only to resist this focalization, but "to counterfocalize" (22).<sup>3</sup> However, there is no alternate voice to align ourselves with. As Lucy Valery Graham remarks in "Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," the difficulty of hearing Lucy's voice is particularly troubling since Lucy is "compelled to be silent" to the point of colluding "with perpetrators" (Graham 442). Over her body, as David notes, "silence is being drawn like a blanket" (Coetzee 110), but not without her consent to "stifling of rape narrative" (Graham 433). Therefore, discovering its missing parts must take place against Lucy's and David's joint effort, as both father and daughter have their own reasons to keep obliterating its elements, sometimes working against one another, at times together.

Graham posits that "[i]n canonical literary narratives of the West, rape is often depicted as 'unspeakable', as severed from articulation, and literary references to hidden rape stories cannot but bring into relief the complex relationship between literary silences and the aftermath of actual violation" (439).

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<sup>3</sup> Spivak notes how the focalization in *Disgrace* becomes "the vehicle of the sympathetic portrayal of David Lurie. When Lucy is resolutely denied focalization, the reader is provoked, for he or she does not want to share in Lurie-the-chief-focalizer's inability to 'read' Lucy as patient and agent. No reader is content with acting out the failure of reading. This is the rhetorical signal to the active reader, to counterfocalize" (22).

She evokes two figures representing two rape narratives in Western culture; the first is “Shakespeare’s Lucrece [who] names the one who has raped her, [but] her account does not save her from perceiving herself as ‘disgraced’, or from giving herself death” (439). The second is Philomela, a mythological character who returns to view in Romantic poetry. Keats and other Romantic poets inherit Philomela from Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* where she “is raped and has her tongue cut out to prevent her from naming the crime and the perpetrator. Yet she sews her account into a tapestry, thus making it possible for her sister to discover the rapist’s identity. In the workings of art, Philomela can thus convey that which is ‘unspeakable’ in the realm of life” (439). Apparently, Philomela and Lucrece are each other’s direct opposite: Lucrece chooses to punish herself for speaking, whereas Philomela tries her hardest to speak. Graham notes: “It is no accident that the names of Melanie and Lucy in *Disgrace* echo those of the two mythological rape victims, highlighting Western artistic traditions in which rape has had a fraught relationship with articulation or representation” (439).<sup>4</sup>

This fraught relationship hints at the experience that dares not speak its name in a feeble attempt to refuse being caught in misrepresentation. “The power to withhold” doesn’t ennoble Lucy as a character, self-restraint proves self-destructive. Graham accurately notes that “Lucy’s refusal to speak about her experience certainly does not empower her and means that her story belongs to her rapists” (422). The unspeakable in the form of rape becomes a forced secret that a victim must bear on behalf of perpetrators who become “its owners” (135). This

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<sup>4</sup> As Graham observes, “[t]his stifling of rape narrative is a feature of the entire novel (433). The central incidents in both narrative settings of *Disgrace* are acts of sexual violation, but notably, in each case, the experience of the violated body is absent, hidden from the reader. Although Lurie acknowledges that his sexual violation of a student, Melanie Isaacs, was ‘undesired’ by her, he maintains it was ‘[n]ot rape, not quite that’. During the disciplinary hearing that ensues, Melanie’s account never reaches the reader, and Lurie, who refuses to defend himself, is accused of being ‘fundamentally evasive’” (433).

self-enforced duty makes her drift, speechless, out of narrative focus (as soon as Melanie *voices* a grievance, she vanishes into the barren narrative area devoid of readers' sympathy; we cannot access her, and only the most attentive can track her comings and goings between her boyfriend and her professor wooer).

Graham finds the two female characters similar, almost mirror-like in their forced evasiveness. "The predicaments of Lucy and Melanie point to a context where victims are compelled to be silent, and thus collude with perpetrators" (422). But they differ vastly. Unlike Melanie, endowed with mercurial agility, Lucy remains rooted to the ground, immobile and immovable, her homosexuality a love that dares not speak its name, her rape a case of violence beyond words. She never speaks directly of her former relationship with Helen, her initial decision to share a life with a woman announced by a metonymic having "fallen in love with the place" (59). If she was ever effusive about pleasure or willing to talk about commitment, David, bent on idealizing her country life ("Now here she is, flowered dress, bare feet and all, in a house full of the smell of baking" (60)) sees it as something *he* helped to bring about ("He helped her buy it" (60)). He has never acknowledged that Lucy was already bearing one secret, nor is he sure that she is a lesbian. However, this doubling of the secret increases the burden that nails her to the ground. Contrary to Melanie and her success on stage, Lucy has no avenue with which to recreate herself (apart from her pregnancy).

Graham relies on the collection of essays *Rape and Representation* to "examine how rape may be read in its absence," as "reading sexual violence requires 'listening not only to who speaks and in what circumstances, but who does not speak and why'" (434). She proceeds to demonstrate that the omission of the rape scene in *Disgrace* not only "emphasizes the violence and suggests the possibility of making it visible," but "also leaves a certain responsibility with the reader" (434). It is then our responsibility to follow the

trail. Provided that Melanie's name echoes Philomela and Lucy's Lucrece and that their situations, parallel but not alike, both mirror and contrast one another, we should be able to find Melanie's and Lucy's stories woven into the text, taking up Spivak's drawing her notion of "text" as "web" from the Latin verb *texere* –"to weave" ("Ethics" 18). Thus an act of reading through with a "loosely defined" (19) idea of intertextuality in mind becomes a-weaving, allowing us to decipher enigmatic sentences and read text as in textile.<sup>5</sup> In the remaining part of this essay, I will attempt to detect the presence of stories woven into the text and decipher their content.

#### **4. Philomela's Sister as a Reader**

Lucy's story is then to be found woven in the tapestry for the reader who assumes the position of Philomela's nameless sister to unravel. Partly a kindred spirit, partly a post-modernist transgressor, in the spirit of the series of the 20<sup>th</sup> century rereadings of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," the reader becomes an active agent, a vigorous interpreter, a relentless detective tracing clues scattered in the text. She remembers to find answers in the most visible places, bypassed by other interpreters. David's story proves easy to delineate; despite his declaration to the contrary, David changes throughout the narrative: he develops "a certain amount of empathy and care, for the 'plain ordinary' Bev Shaw, and for the dog he carries to its death" (Graham 443). Lucy's insistence on having her own narrative, rather than acting like an appendage to David's story comes as surprising as David's declaration that his lame lovemaking has anything to do with Eros. He is as much a far cry from a libertine, as she is from a feminist lesbian. Or is it rather than human

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<sup>5</sup> "This is already intertextuality, where one text, Hoffman's, would make its point by weaving itself with another, the dance. A shot silk, as it were. Again, that venerable sense of text as in textile, and *texere* as weave" (Spivak 19).

embodiment of these ideals becomes no more than a parody when put in practice? When Lucy declares her narrative independence from David, she does not base her argument on emotional elocutions or common-sense reasoning, and she sounds not like a farmer, gardener, or dog-sitter, but like a young philosopher in training:

I can't run my life according to whether or not you like what I do. Not any more. You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until halfway through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions. (198)

Still, Lucy is her father's daughter, and her choice of words may come simply from her wish to reach out to David, rather than to be scorned by him. Story, after all, is a key word in *Disgrace*. We are invited to listen to stories, discouraged from giving into them, and at times we are also duped into overlooking them. "It's a long story. I'll tell you some other time," says David when Melanie asks him what happened to his first wife (29). "The story must be out," thinks David to himself noticing poor attendance in his class (37). "The story is, she took sleeping pills. Is that true?" Rosalind, his ex-wife, confronts David at dinner before handing him the newspaper report (45). And then there is history, "the long history of exploitation" (53), "the history" that has "the larger share" in producing Lucy according to David (60). Demanding narrative independence, Lucy announces her wish with a flourish and links it with her refusal to let the fruit of rape wither, by pharmaceutical means, without a trace. Instead, she will write her own story with her own body: a feminist gesture safeguarding oblique content. "I never said I took Ovral" (198), she informs bewildered David.

Let us then return to the only representation of the rape scene: Lucy's halting account adumbrated in her conversation

with David, on their humbling return trip from New Brighton, the farthest she goes away from the house (156). Since we already know that Lucy does not dab in abstractions, we are prompted to take her specific enough description verbatim. What “stunned” her was the hatred. The rest, as she says, was “expected” (156). Against this hatred, she is defenseless, suddenly slipping to the level of a child, whimpering: “But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them” (156). The attuned reader is bound to wonder where Lucy’s expectations come from. Did consciousness raising meetings and *Take Back the Night* marches on the campus in Cape Town provide her with enough background? Had she received so much rape prep that once the actual violation took place, she just braced herself against the expected? Considering Lucy’s lesbianism, why is hatred the only aspect to surprise her?

In David’s view, the impulse and the background mixed together, the painful legacy of the apartheid descended on Lucy, personalized in three black men, (“It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors” (156)). But Lucy finds no consolation in the abstract idea and supposes that “for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting” (158). That’s personal, and David shrinks from the challenge. Lucy, however, simply hovers at the blurred boundary between consensual sex and rape, which is not a territory unfamiliar to David. When he has sex with Melanie for the first time, “he finds the act pleasurable, so pleasurable that from its climax he tumbles into blank oblivion” (19). Melanie’s silence suits him; he is not troubled that “she is passive throughout” (19). He will never comprehend that her experience did not mirror his.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Adrienne Rich too notes the lack of the clear boundary between sex and rape in her 1980 essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”: “MacKinnon raises radical questions as to the qualitative differences between sexual harassment, rape, and ordinary heterosexual intercourse. (“As one accused rapist put it, he hadn’t used ‘any more force than is usual for males during the preliminaries.’”) She criticizes Susan Brownmiller for separating rape from the mainstream of daily life and for her unexamined premise that “rape is violence, intercourse is sexuality,” removing rape from the sexual

People who, as children, happened to witness adults having sex report recoiling from the sight which, to them, appeared charged with violence. In *Atonement*, a movie by Joe Wright, Briony Tallis, who will grow up to be a writer much like Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello, at thirteen witnesses her sister Cecilia and Robbie, an object of Briony's secret crush, having sex in the library during the day; then, in the course of events, she runs into her teenage cousin Lola being raped in the woods at night. In both instances a female seems pinned against a flat surface and both situations look similarly violent to Briony. The viewers, but not Briony, are prone to discover that Cecilia was comfortably seated on a bookshelf. The girl, who witnesses both events from a distance, without access to words and gestures exchanged before either act took place, registers no difference.

David, who misses what the men, getting ready to leave, smirk about outside of his bathroom window, encounters a similar lack of contextualization. The house, once Lucy disappears inside, offers nothing but "silence" (36). Not a single insult that could narrow down the grounds on which violence takes place comes through to denote *as who* Lucy is raped: as a white woman? as a lesbian? as a single woman who thrives living in the countryside? The readers alike are without context. After the assault David is repeatedly told, by Lucy and Bev Shaw, that he does not know what happened. "There are things you just don't understand," Lucy says. "To begin with, you don't understand what happened to me that day. You are concerned for my sake, which I appreciate, you think you understand, but finally you don't. Because you can't" (157). David's epistemological failure will become the subject of my following inquiry.

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sphere altogether. Most crucially she argues that "taking rape from the realm of 'the sexual,' placing it in the realm of 'the violent,' allows one to be against it without raising any questions about the extent to which the institution of heterosexuality has defined force as a normal part of 'the preliminaries'" (28).



## 5. Regressing Into Dreams, Coming Out With Insights

Lucy's idea of heterosexual sex, as she abbreviates it to David, strangely matches Briony's experience in *Atonement*; it sounds as if a 13-year old girl was speaking through Lucy, or a person who regresses to the 13-year-old state of mind in response to the trauma which already makes her fall asleep with "her thumb in her mouth like a child" (121). Lucy's decision to stay at the farm after the assault will never cease raising confusion and resistance on the part of readers. Particularly that she is not the one to romanticize sexual violence; quite to the contrary, Lucy locates violence at the core of a normative sexual encounter:

When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood—doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder? (158)

One has to wonder why a woman presented in Lucy's summary of straight sex is designated as "someone strange" and why her body has to be left "behind" covered "in blood." This description looks more like an acquaintance rape, when someone barely known to the victim, by means of surprise, proceeds to a rush act, void of tenderness.

Is Lucy stunned and brainwashed by her perpetrators into "subjugation" (159) when she declares that—despite her conviction that the perpetrators "marked" her and may come back—she decides to stay on the farm? Does she take after her father? Are the Luries keen on cultivating every misery that befalls them until their misfortunes grow out of proportion to become the new stases in their lives? When interrogated by the university disciplinary committee, David grows stupendously passive: he does not seek legal representation; instead, he insists on presenting his pathetic pursuit of

Melanie as acting in the capacity of “a servant of Eros” (52).<sup>7</sup> Father and daughter appear single-mindedly joint in self-destruction, locked in a suicide pact; his fantasies of writing an opera will come to an end together with the drying up of his credit, while Lucy, his daughter, proceeds to give up her land and seek protection from Petrus, the man related by marriage to the rapists, whose primary interest, as he has proved already, is to protect them and not her. As Spivak notes, “Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through” (“Ethics” 21). This suicidal wish inscribed in father’s and daughter’s bodies might be just the power that drives both of them to externalize their secret melancholia.

When it comes to women in her life, Lucy appears orphaned. Bev Shaw remarks that she never speaks of her mother (Coetzee 161). Her lover, Helen, having left for Johannesburg, has remained absent since April. The drawers and wardrobe are empty when David moves in; the only object left there is “a blue overall hanging” (61). Disturbingly, both Petrus and the rapists sport the same blue overall. Helen must have left her role as “the man of the family” behind; Lucy does not summon her after the assault, so we assume that the separation is final. Thus Lucy is caught bereft, abandoned by her female companion, with Bev Shaw, a poor imitation of a stepmother, primarily focused on men.

David’s relationships with women rest on an assortment of sentimental fantasies; Lucy similarly nurtures fantasies of her own. When she wants to console her father, she tells him that “[w]omen can be surprisingly forgiving” (69). Contrarily, neither does Melanie forgive David (“Melanie will spit in your eye if she sees you,” her boyfriend, Ryan, warns David at their last meeting (194)), nor does Helen return. If Lucy appears to be a down-to-earth person, on her way to become a “peasant” (217), it is only because David insists on seeing her that way.

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<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, since David is persuasive, *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* defines his stalking of Melanie as “having an affair” (77).

But Lucy may be no more than an enthusiast, a late daughter of Thoreau transplanted to South Africa to live in her little cabin, as though, in an odd experiment in self-sufficiency, she aims to ascertain how little a person needs to persevere.

Like Philomela, Lucy preserves an unspoken story, but unlike Philomela's, Lucy's untold story is not the rape (un)witnessed by David. Pressed by her father to explain why she wants to go on with her pregnancy, she stuns him with another revelation: "I am not having an abortion. That is something I am not prepared to go through with again" (198). David instantly catches the word "again," and wonders: "Therefore she has had an abortion before. He would never have guessed it" (199). Then he brings the narrative attention back to himself. "When could it have been? While she was still living at home? Did Rosalind know, and was he kept in the dark?" (199). David has a singular ability to turn his daughter's experience into his own. A less self-centered listener would have paused at Lucy's revelation, at her "I am not prepared to go through with again" to wonder how a young lesbian found herself facing an unwanted pregnancy. David mentions no boyfriends whose disappearance he mourns forever.

Possibly due to David's musing: "Perhaps he is wrong to think of Lucy as homosexual. Perhaps she simply prefers female company" (104), Spivak calls Lucy "his possibly lesbian daughter" ("Ethics" 20).<sup>8</sup> However, although we never meet

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<sup>8</sup> Spivak notes: "It is interesting that Petrus's one-liner on Lucy shows more kinship with the novel's verdict: 'She is a forward-looking lady, not backward-looking'" [136]. If we, like Lurie, ignore the enigma of Lucy, the novel, being fully focalized precisely by Lurie, can be made to say every racist thing" (24). In like manner, can the novel be made to say every sexist thing once we start focalizing on Lucy? Is she a strong enough character to oppose such innuendos? Spivak responds that yes, and besides, there is no other way: "Postcoloniality from below can then be reduced to the education of Pollux, the young rapist who is related to Petrus. Counterfocalized, it can be acknowledged as perhaps the first moment in Lucy's refusal of rape by generalizing it into all heteronormative sexual practice: 'When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more.... They spur each other on ....' 'And the third one, the boy?' 'He was there to learn' [158-59]" (24). *Disgrace* defocalized by Spivak means that Pollux was present at the rape

Helen, bearing witness to David's melancholic self-reproaching leaves no doubt as to Lucy's lesbianism. "Attractive," David observes of his daughter, "yet lost to men" (Coetzee 70). He cannot help but perceive her choice of "a large, sad-looking woman" (60) as a rejection, as unfair as unjustified, of his love: "Has it been too much, that love? Has she found it a burden? Has it pressed down on her? Has she given it a darker reading?" (70). To David, Lucy's lesbianism becomes his business, the result of his doing either too much or too little, the object of relentless inquiry. His misreading has the potential to elucidate on Lucy's cryptic words: "I wish I could explain. But I can't. Because of who you are and who I am, I can't" (155). Unwilling to listen, David remains subconsciously attuned to his daughter. His fascination with Wordsworth is not accidental. David appears more intuitive than verbal and whatever knowledge he resists directly, he takes in as if by osmosis. As soon as Lucy's words "[c]overed in blood (158)" begin to reverberate in his mind, David connects them with his recurrent nightmares. Earlier on, in response to the attack on the farm, David dreams about his own "wallowing in a bed of blood" (121), all the while he nurses his daughter back to life. But his bloody visions steer away from the latest incident. In the aftermath of the rape, Lucy does not look battered: "her face clean and entirely blank" (98). Later on in the night Lucy's face gets "puffy," but only "with sleep" (103). The policemen find "[n]o blood, no overturned furniture" (109). Lucy has no evident injuries to match David's visions, and enough strength and presence of mind to clean up "[t]he

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scene (which is no longer *the* rape scene) to learn how to be a man. This means, however, that Lucy is going to be subjected to "heteronormative sexual practice" anew, when her rapists return. The rape becomes similarly annulled if we seriously consider Adrienne Rich's pronouncement: "Never is it asked whether, under conditions of male supremacy, the notion of 'consent' has any meaning" (642). Either way, Spivak's reading of Lucy's decision to stay at the farm as the radical annulment of rape, when confronted with Lucy's adapting herself to her future prospects, at a stroke annuls her lesbian identity and reduces her instead to "possibly lesbian" (20) and "perhaps' a lesbian" (21).

mess in the kitchen” (109). David’s premonitions, as much as they are consistent, appear to refer to a different event: at one point he dreams of Lucy crying out for him to save her (103); at another he has a revelation that “[r]aping a lesbian [is] worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow,” (105) which is a claim impossible to prove. His visions full of bloody beds and baths of blood do not match the latest rape; however, the loss of blood stands for a phantasmatic – or real – loss of virginity.

Lucy’s words: “There are things you just don’t understand” (157) and: “you don’t understand what happened to me that day. [...] Because you can’t” (157) begin to make sense only when we conclude that Lucy’s gory description of straight sex and David’s bed-of-blood vision hint at the mysterious cause of Lucy’s abortion and its circumstances. Lucy, however, cannot tell David any more because any suggestion that her present trauma echoes one from the past would serve David as further proof that Lucy is not really a lesbian, but only a victim.

## **6. (Un)raped? (Non)lesbian?**

Perhaps it is fitting to inquire about the purpose of placing a lesbian at the center of the narrative. David’s daughter could have been just a spinster, like Magda, the narrator of *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee’s 1976 novel, or she could have been fashioned as a single straight woman whose boyfriend decided that city life suited him better. But were Lucy straight, we would not be invited to take note of her abortion. The unfortunate outcome of a straight woman’s misguided love affair, an abortion would be considered her private matter.

Six years before the present, Lucy left Cape Town in favor of a transient life “as a member of a commune, a tribe of young people who peddled leather goods and sunbaked pottery in Grahamstown” (60). Before that, Lucy lived in Holand where she moved with her mother Evelina after her parents divorced, but she did not get along with her new stepfather and returned to South Africa (161). While in school in Cape Town, she lived

with her father and his second wife. We do not know what Lucy majored in, and she has no professional history linking her to town. David, who dwells on Lucy's attractiveness "lost" to men, does not similarly lament the diploma hidden in the drawer, first earned and then scorned by his daughter. If Lucy is 26 at present, and she moved to the country at 20, she would not have had time to finish college. The abortion probably took place during Lucy's school years, its most unlikely cause a clandestine affair with a man. If Lucy's first pregnancy resulted from rape, it must not have been one accompanied by hate. Considering her move to Holland after her parents' divorce, her return to South Africa, followed by her leaving Cape Town for the countryside, Lucy had a history of leaving one place behind in favor of another in response to unpleasant events. These earlier migrations justified, it also becomes clear why Lucy dug in her heels and wished to put a stop to the pattern.

No one can bear seeing the path of her life comprised of nothing but sexual assaults and abortions, followed by relocations. "Yes, the road I am following may be the wrong one," Lucy explains to David in a letter. "But if I leave the farm now I will leave defeated, and will taste that defeat for the rest of my life" (161). At 26, Lucy acts as if her life depends on a single choice, and her father seems to agree. David too believes that Lucy is going to be defeated if she leaves. While he assumes this defeat to be inevitable, he also considers it a lesser evil: "Defeated. It is not hard to imagine Lucy in ten years' time; a heavy woman with lines of sadness on her face, wearing clothes long out of fashion, talking to her pets, eating alone" (151). He does not expect his daughter to have "much of a life" (151) no matter where she settles; still, he believes relocating to be better than constant fear of death. For Lucy, however, leaving equals entrapment which makes her deal with Petrus non-threatening by comparison. While she fears that she remains in the rapists' "territory," (158) going to live elsewhere does not solve the problem because she will always be in somebody's territory.

In the opening scene of *Disgrace*, the movie by Steve Jacobs, before we make out the shape of the window opening onto the street, the shades, and a man's face behind them, we hear David Lurie played by John Malkovitch abbreviating his daughter's life in the country to Soraya: "She thinks it's safer." Safer than where? We do not find out at once. Rereading the novel with this line in mind, although it does not come from the text, prompts the right answer. Safer than living in town, which Lucy left behind. "Does that follow, logically?" (155) Lucy asks after her visit to the parking lot. For Lucy it apparently follows that rape "is the price one has to pay for staying on" (158). As Atwood observes, "[m]oney isn't the only thing that must flow and circulate in order to have value: good turns and gifts must also flow and circulate [...] for any social system to remain in balance" (171). Lucy, "marked" (158) by the rapists, in accordance with Luce Irigaray's notion of "women as chattel" thus enters into circulation. In "[t]he society we know, our own culture, ... based upon the exchange of women" (Irigaray 170), rape, taken into account as the repayment of debt, becomes a new currency.

David, through his pecuniary relationship with Soraya, takes part in this exchange. Lucy additionally challenges him and makes him wonder, "Are she and he on the same side?" (159). They are not; however, he develops an ability to relate to Lucy in her despair more than she is able to relate to herself. Spivak, referring to Lucy's wish to start over with nothing compares *Disgrace* to Shakespeare's *King Lear*: "If Lucy ends with nothing, Cordelia in the text of *King Lear* begins with the word 'nothing'" ("Ethics" 40). David sums up her choice (giving up the land and signing the title deed to Petrus) as a humiliating end of "high hopes" (205). But pregnant Lucy doesn't end "with nothing" (205). As Spivak notes, "Just as *Disgrace* is also a father-daughter story, so is *King Lear* also a play about dynastic succession in the absence of a son, not an unimportant epic in Jacobean gland" (20). But Lucy does not end with nothing; contrarily, Lucy ends precisely with "nothing but." Her father's daughter, she manipulates us into

overlooking her going against her own declaration, as she twists the logic of the discourse: by the end of the novel, Lucy's value appears to rise once she starts exercising her reproductive capacity.<sup>9</sup> With time she will give up custody of the child who is going to belong to Petrus's family, but for now David as a grandfather-to-be remains in the background.

*Disgrace* clearly is not about a daughter's love for her father. Unlike *King Lear*, it is rather about a father's love for his daughter. With plenty of literary criticism tending with quiet admiration to David's newly discovered love for dogs, not much appears to be written about David's unflinching devotion to Lucy. He repeatedly declares his support of her choices and continues to do so even as Lucy rejects his values and his protection in favor of local values and surrender to perpetrators. Meanwhile, David becomes gradually absorbed by the question, "does he have it in him to be the woman?" (160). He gives voice to aging Teresa Guiccioli, Byron's discarded lover (183); all the while, he continues to *essentialize* women, as if the concept of gender as camp had nothing to do with his operative pursuits. David simply cannot help paying respect to the classic concept of womanhood. When visiting Lucy for "a new footing, a new start" (218), he sees her as the embodiment of eternal femininity: "the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewig Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat" (218). But this essentializing happens at a cost. Earlier in the narrative, David

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<sup>9</sup> Spivak, however, argues that Lucy manages to establish her independence against the heteronormative discourse: "Lucy's 'nothing' is the same word but carries a different meaning from Cordelia's. It is not the withholding of speech protesting the casting of love in the value-form and giving it the wrong value. It is rather the casting aside of the affective value-system attached to reproductive heteronormativity as it is accepted as the currency to measure human dignity. I do not think this is an acceptance of rape, but a refusal to be raped, by instrumentalizing reproduction" (21). However, we do not see how Lucy is going to perform her rejection of reproductive heteronormativity, if she agrees to become part of Petrus's family.



recalls Lucy and Helen as being “vehement against rape” (105), their vehemence an offshoot of their lesbianism. David thus reiterates Doris Lessing’s presumption, as noted by Adrienne Rich who, in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” observes that in *The Golden Notebook* “the lesbian choice is simply an acting-out of bitterness toward men” (Rich 632). No longer vehement, reinstalled in society, taking on a straight woman’s role, Lucy at last becomes an abstraction and surrenders to David’s love.

Lucy could have been inspired by or at least familiar with the concept of “lesbian continuum” as formulated by Rich (648), when she stayed behind on the farm and decided to live there with Helen, but now she disclaims it. Vehement in the past, Lucy disavows the reading of rape as political as soon as she proceeds to consider rape as a “purely private matter” (112). Most importantly, Lucy renounces resistance—an important issue for both Coetzee (Head 5) and Rich (649).<sup>10</sup> When David calls Lucy’s future prospects “slavery,” she corrects him: “Not slavery. Subjugation. Subjugation” (159). Rich begins her essay with a quote from Alice Rossi, which she uses as a motto to build her argument against. The quote says: “Biologically men have only one innate orientation—a sexual one that draws them to women—while women have two innate orientations, sexual toward men and reproductive toward their young” (631). Rich then proceeds to argue against this assumption, while Lucy embraces it, proceeds to fulfill her reproductive orientation, and learns to accept men in her life. “I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life,” (161) she tells David after the assault. Giving

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<sup>10</sup> Rich defines lesbian resistance in terms of an active opposition to gender politics in social systems that subscribe to the notion of men’s access to women’s bodies. This passage from her essay makes it clearer why lesbians, flaunting their “independent subjectivity,” become targeted with corrective rape in South Africa: “Lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women. But it is more than these, although we may first begin to perceive it as a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance” (Rich 649).

shape to David's enchanted vision at the end of the novel, she may be still a corpse, going through the motions, carrying nothing but stillness within, dead and yet amazingly fertile.

Lucy's vehement resistance at present becomes limited to her refusal to give a specific reading to the assault "in this place, at this time"; that is, "in South Africa," (112) and then to her refusal to leave. During one heated discussion, Lucy tells David that "[t]here is nothing [he] can suggest that [she] ha[s]n't been through a hundred times [her]self" (71). Did this scrolling through ideas, considered and then rejected by Lucy, include David's chivalrous vision of women who would be happier "living in communities of women, accepting visits from men only when they choose" (104)? Lucy appears to no longer express any desire to live with or even close to other women. Contrarily, her process in *Disgrace* is about becoming a woman first, with "woman" and "mother" conflated, an act performed at the cost of disavowing "lesbian," an identity that Lucy stood for at the beginning of the novel. This is the price she pays and the amends she makes in order to be incorporated back into society and both patriarchal family structures—Petrus's and David's. Since part of this process blends with her individuation from David, and her learning to make her own choices, it seems as if prior to his arrival she was a lesbian only to spite him. When informing David about her pregnancy, Lucy confronts him with the full power of her essentialist femininity: "I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children?" (198). Since being a woman does not automatically imply that one loves children, David is left too stunned to answer. Lucy, fond of tracing logical fallacies, no longer bothers to notice that she keeps breeding her own.

A former hippy lesbian turned conservative single mother, Lucy comes closer at last to David's understanding of personal events through a historical lens when she asks, "Should I choose against the child because of who its father is?" (198). On the one hand, Lucy breaks free from the pattern of vengeance which prompts citizens of numerous countries affected by war and exploitation to indulge in never-ending

violence. On the other, however, Lucy dissociates from her earlier self, and prompts us to wonder how much of the self was there to begin with.

When Lucy refers to her pregnancy as “a child” (198), she sounds like an acolyte of the pro-life movement. But did Lucy ever sound like a lesbian? When introducing the story of the farm, David says that “when the commune broke up, [...] Lucy stayed behind on the smallholding with her friend Helen” (60). The word “friend” may conveniently stand for an acquaintance, as much as a lover. The choice of words is David’s, so we are startled to read, “She had fallen in love, (60)” only to have the meaning clarified in the second half of the sentence: “with the place, she said; she wanted to farm it properly” (60). Lucy never came out to David, leaving him free to wonder, fantasize, and draw his own conclusion as to why Lucy’s cohabitation with Helen extended to six years. “The place” was bought with David’s money (60), and Lucy remained the sole co-owner, never adding Helen to the contract, an astounding fact if we consider Lucy’s eagerness to sign her land over to Petrus later in the novel.

Graham, who reads *Disgrace* through Coetzee’s essay “The Harms of Pornography,” notes that “*Disgrace* points to a context where women are regarded as property, and are liable for protection only insofar as they belong to men. As a lesbian, Lucy would be regarded as ‘unowned’ and therefore ‘hunnable’, and there is even a suggestion that her sexuality may have provoked her attackers” (439). When Lucy tells David that “if there were to be a break-in, I don’t see that two people would be better than one,” (60) she means that Helen, blue overall and all, in case of an attack would be just another woman—not only unable to offer protection but doubling the trouble. Helen gone, long live Petrus. After Helen and David, two discontented rivals, fail to protect Lucy, he is the man whose promise carries weight.

## 7. “Corrected”

For the last part of my reading I propose that Lucy not only fell victim to corrective rape, but in the process she also became “corrected” and, as such, returned to the patriarchal order represented by milder, albeit ambivalent male figures, her father David and “fatherly,” as David ironically calls him, Petrus (164). Helen Moffett, a South African scholar, in her essay “‘These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them’: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” argues that “sexual violence in post-1994 South Africa is fuelled by justificatory narratives rooted in apartheid discourses” (141). She then proceeds to delineate these narratives remarking on their resemblance to the methods used by the apartheid against the black people of South Africa. While the purpose remains the same, gender ranking replaces racial ranking:

For over 50 years, South African society operated on the explicit principle that the Other was unstable, potentially extremely powerful and therefore dangerous, and needed to be kept in its place by regular and excessive shows of force. Women—the current subclass—are also seen as having significant agency and therefore they pose a potential threat to the uncertain status quo. Today, as under apartheid, there is considerable social anxiety about a powerful, unstable subclass that must be kept in its place. (137)

Thus women are regulated “through sexual violence, in a national project” which allows many men to believe that by “enacting intimate violence on women, they are performing a necessary work of social stabilization” (141). This project and its ideological underlining bear an uncanny resemblance to Lucy’s idea of peace understood as stabilization; in particular, to Lucy’s scolding David for trying to protect her from Pollux: “I must have peace around me. I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace” (208). The notion that Lucy’s stabilization includes her juvenile rapist

entertaining himself by peeping at her in the shower brings comfort neither to David, nor to the reader.

Since the main purpose of the attack appears mercenary rather than moralistic (the car, the TV, as well as David's clothes and shoes are collected by the robbers), David only fleetingly wonders in the aftermath of the attack, "Did they know what they were up to, those men? Had the word got around?" (105), referring to Lucy's sharing living quarters with Helen. Watching the rapists from the bathroom window, he witnesses grim smiles and "a burst of laughter" (95) but does not discern the words they use to sum up their victim. Familiar only with glimpses of Lucy's previous life, processed if not censored by David's memory, we still cannot help but note small differences between Lucy before and after the attack. A woman who might have made appearances at the local market with Helen dressed in a blue overall (as though suggesting that men could be replaced by women wearing their paraphernalia), now relegates herself to the uncertain position of a tenant, ready to sacrifice her father's love for a vague promise of peace.

Her language dramatic or scarce, but always washed of irony, her pregnancy and the aura of *das ewig Weibliche* (the *fin de siècle* glorification of eternal femininity presented as bait to female readers in the mid-European battle of the sexes) obscuring her vulnerability; isolated, sexless, and protected by her perpetrators, Lucy resembles other victims of correctional rape who, as Moffett alleges, begin to "self-regulate their movements and adopt guarded patterns of living" (139). David notes how, following the assault, Lucy acts as if she was poisoned by its slow-acting effects:

She doesn't reply. She would rather hide her face, and he knows why. Because of the disgrace. Because of the shame. That is what their visitors have achieved; that is what they have done to this confident, modern young woman. (115)

This achievement turns the rapists into educators, gossip their most effective publicity campaign: “Not her story to spread but theirs: they are the owners” (115). David also discerns the pedagogy of rape: “How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for” (115). Moffett posits that through the combination of “physical violence with deep shame and self-blame on the part of the victim” sexual violence as a tool of social control is “especially effective” as it “leads to self-punitive and self-monitoring behavioural changes by the victim” (141). Particularly when the attacker is “part of her immediate circle,” the “victim is extremely unlikely to report her attacker or seek legal redress”; instead, she becomes “withdrawn, submissive, fearful, restricted in her movements, and so on” (141). Lucy flees from Petrus’s party celebrating “the land transfer” (Coetzee 124) upon discovering one of her attackers at his house, leaving David to face the sudden hostility of the crowd, as soon as he threatens “to telephone the police” (132).

Such a communal opposition to reporting the rapist echoes Moffett’s observation that “if rape is believed to be deserved—if a woman is simply being ‘corrected’, or ‘taught a lesson’, it is somehow not considered to be a criminal activity” (138). Eventually, the police will be proved blatantly ineffective in the car retrieval scene, and Lucy, “stubborn, and immersed, too, in the life she has chosen” (134) will not want to antagonize the local people.

The land transfer party demonstrates how Petrus and his neighbors take it upon themselves to pass on and maintain the status quo that endorses the attack on Lucy and prevents her from seeking justice. Petrus comments on his expectant wife: “Always it is best if the first one is a boy. Then he can show his sisters—show them how to behave” (130). Most strikingly, Petrus and his pregnant wife are “praying for a boy” (130) together, both man and wife endorsing the kind of home-made pedagogy that breeds future victims and perpetrators. Petrus’s son will learn early on that correcting women’s behavior is his responsibility. The purpose of corrective rape

being primarily educational, men take upon themselves a “social duty” to “correct” women who belong to the close circle of family and acquaintances, as well as complete strangers. Moffett, who examines the justifications used by the rapists, observes that, differently “from western constructions concerning supposedly provocative behaviour or dress,” (138) the specific reason why someone believes that women “ask for it” (138) are “implicitly related to the project of not only refusing to ‘recognize [women’s] independent subjectivity’, but actively punishing such ‘independent subjectivity’” (138). It is never a question of a short skirt; instead, violence happens “because [women] dare to practice freedom of movement, adopt a confident posture or gait, make eye contact, speak out” (138). In short, women who demonstrate “a degree of autonomy or self-worth” are in danger.<sup>11</sup>

As soon as we meet Lucy in Chapter 7, we observe her exercising her independent subjectivity in her daily communications with David. Lucy appropriates irony and sarcasm, her father’s weapons with which he used to “mortify” his family (200) with skill. She catches David at each of his self-aggrandizing moments, including sentimentalizing his bungled romantic past, as when in response to David musing, “Every woman I have been close to has taught me something about myself. To that extent they have made me a better person,” Lucy responds, “I hope you are not claiming the reverse as well. That knowing you has turned your women into better people” (70). One of the rapists quoted by Moffett, a cab

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<sup>11</sup> When asked “whether all South African women do indeed live in fear of rape,” Moffett responds that “the degree of such fear is determined by the widely variant risks and resources presented to women (whether they travel to work by public transport or after dark, whether they can afford burglar bars and alarms, and so on). Nevertheless, visitors are often shocked by the extent to which many South African women self-regulate their movements and adopt guarded patterns of living” (139). She concludes this revelatory passage with even more striking personal insight: “I regularly interact with visiting North American and European students, and am invariably struck by the untrammelled sense of freedom with which many of these young women move around and conduct themselves socially, in sharp contrast to the cautious demeanour of my female South African students” (139).

driver, when asked what it means that “these women” force him to rape them, responds, “It’s the cheeky ones—the ones that walk around like they own the place, and look you in the eye” (138). Lucy is often cheeky; in a way, she looks David in the eye. When he “looks at her sharply,” Lucy “smiles. ‘Just joking,’ she says” (70). The assault radically changes her style of communication. Lucy ceases to use irony (with one exception when she calls the rapists “our friends” (155)); in addition, she becomes increasingly irritated by David’s use of it. Empty of irony, no longer emitting sparkly, pithy remarks, “corrected,” Lucy becomes deadly serious.

Lucy may not want to report the assault also because she does not wish to revive the “principles of ‘othering’” (Moffett 131) founded on racist patterns internalized under apartheid which still affect the discussion of gender-biased violence in South Africa; to put it simply, she may not want to witness her case being used to vilify black men as the generic offenders. Indeed, as Moffett asserts, the discussion about rape in South Africa continuously “demonises black men, hardens racial barriers, and greatly hampers both disclosure and educational efforts” (129). In the current discussion, apartheid continues to be blamed as the only culprit. Similar to communism in Eastern Europe, “apartheid is brought in as the source of the evil rather than the starting point of the discussion, and the blame becomes final” (134). In the popular narrative, it was apartheid which carried out “the attack on masculinity conveyed by ... degradation and humiliation,” and which caused “the breakdown of the African family through the system of migrant labour” (134). These excuses, however, rest “on the unspoken assumption that rapists [are] black” (134). Moffett, as evidence to the contrary, quotes her own years of experience “as a hotline counsellor in the latter half of the 1980s,” (134) which “disabused [her] of the notion that domestic and sexual violence were the province of poor, black, or ill-educated men” [134]. However, when presented as an excuse, the myth of “emasculated” black man “explicitly exclude[s] white men, thus implying ... that they do not rape”



(136).<sup>12</sup> The end result is that rape ceases to exist: white men act as servants of Eros; black men as educators.

Statistically speaking, Lucy's chances of having become a victim of corrective rape are high. Within the last decade, South Africa has been plagued by recurrent incidence of sexual violence, more often aimed at lesbians than not. The trend might already have started in the 1990s, before the numbers became striking enough to alarm human rights observers worldwide. Moffett posits that "the rates of sexual violence against women and children" combined with the lenience of the criminal justice "suggest an unacknowledged gender civil war," (129) as the numbers of reported and unreported gender-based violent acts become "increasingly described as having reached epidemic proportions" (129). She notices a certain stalemate about the issue: since the results of polls and survey data are so alarming, the authorities respond with disbelief; new surveys are drawn, only to prove that "South Africa has higher levels of rape of women and children than anywhere else in the world not at war or embroiled in

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<sup>12</sup> Despite "South Africans['] need to attribute male sexual violence to [the] legacy of apartheid repression or depressed economic conditions" (137), Moffett argues that "[r]ace, gender, class and sexuality continually inflect each other, and are often subsumed into one another, not just as a result of apartheid (which merged the categories of race and class), but also centuries of patriarchal colonialism which made strenuous efforts to monitor and control the category of gender along racial and ethnic lines" (137). She observes, however, that women who "experience identical pressures and deprivations ... do not resort to sexual violence" (137). Thus, the aforementioned factors might amplify violence, but they do not *cause* rape, particularly in the context of noticeable "prevalence of sexual violence across every sector of South African society, including the wealthy, privileged, educated and employed classes" (137).

Moffett thus centers her argument around the notion of the disempowered and therefore unstable and potentially dangerous Other, conspicuously active and yet concealed under the surface of political and social clichés. Thus the purpose of corrective rape is to keep this Other in fear, in a manner that includes both victims of rape and women who have not been raped but only heard of corrective rape or witnessed an assault. Moffett observes how some South African men sincerely believe that "by resorting to sexual violence, they are participating in a socially approved project to keep women within certain boundaries and categories (as well as in a state of continuous but necessary fear)" (140).

civil conflict” (129).<sup>13</sup> This data makes it probable that Lucy’s attackers were acting on the knowledge that she was a lesbian and on their compulsion to correct her behavior. Petrus’s calling Lucy almost “as good as a boy” and laughing “at his sally” (130) points as much to her lesbianism as to her financial self-sufficiency. Ettinger, on the other hand, in the conversation with David following the assault, notes that “it could have been worse.’ ... ‘They could have taken her away with them” (109). The positioning of the Other as alien and disempowered, and yet unpredictably dangerous, explains why lesbians not only fall victim to corrective rape but more often than not are murdered in South Africa.<sup>14</sup> To the perpetrators, they symbolize the most radical and unrelenting agents of alternative education.

“Stop ‘Corrective Rape,’” an on-line campaign launched by Avaaz, aims to pressure President Zuma and the South African government to “publicly condemn ‘corrective rape’ of lesbians, criminalize hate crimes, and ensure immediate enforcement, public education and protection for survivors.”<sup>15</sup> The Avaaz

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<sup>13</sup> Among other examples offered by Moffett, Sindiwe Magona’s outrage upon discovering that “nurses at her local clinic [keep] instructing mothers to bring in their daughters to receive contraceptive injections as soon as they [begin] menstruating—given the extremely high likelihood that they would be repeatedly raped during their teenage years” (134) is perhaps the most striking one. Magona, a South-African writer who returned to Cape Town after living for fifteen years in New York in “an exile of sorts,” (134) expressed “her grief and shock at returning home to discover that hers was now a society in which babies were raped on a regular basis” (134). Magona’s outrage further underscores the sheer ambiguity of Lucy’s decision to remain on the farm, now much more vulnerable as a tenant, unmindful of her future child or children safety. In comparison with Magona’s shock and bewilderment, Lucy appears to be taking a share in “the fatalism of a society that simply accepted that it was women’s lot to be raped, and saw this as a tragic cross to be endured, rather than an illegal and untenable act of violence, especially in the age of HIV/AIDS” (134).

<sup>14</sup> Liesl Gerntholtz (2009). “South Africa: Should Women Fear a Zuma Presidency? Maybe Not.” *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post Media Group, 28 May 2009. Web. 22 June 2011. < [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/liesl-gerntholtz/should-women-fear-a-zuma\\_b\\_208853.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/liesl-gerntholtz/should-women-fear-a-zuma_b_208853.html)>.

<sup>15</sup> This petition to stop corrective rape is one of many actions undertaken by *Avaaz* around the globe: <[http://www.avaaz.org/en/stop\\_corrective\\_rape\\_6/?fpla](http://www.avaaz.org/en/stop_corrective_rape_6/?fpla)>. A transnational community which aims to support democratic projects around the world, *Avaaz* focuses on bridges of

activists work against the silence imposed on victims. The picture accompanying their campaign shows a black woman staring painfully at the window. The majority of the rape victims in South Africa are black; they usually do not have an option to leave their country and go someplace better—to Holland, for instance—to start over. Lucy's decision to stay in the Eastern Cape makes her share the fate of women without opportunities, who are most often black, and who, apart from a cluster of activists risking their lives, remain silent. If they too live in "state of continuous but necessary fear," (Moffett 140) this fear, in the initial scenes of David's visit to Lucy's smallholding, matters less than pride Lucy's customers at the local market take in her success. In the movie rendition of *Disgrace*, we observe Lucy interacting with these local women—housewives, growers, and sellers.<sup>16</sup> The marketplace

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democracy worldwide by "signing petitions [online], funding media campaigns and direct actions, emailing, calling and lobbying governments, and organizing 'offline' protests and events -- to ensure that the views and values of the world's people inform the decisions that affect us all." Its purpose appears directly linked to empowering those considered secondary or lower in rank and counteracting the effects of political decisions and cultural patterns which result in silencing the victims of (often state-enforced) violence. As the website informs us, the campaign was "launched in 2007 with a simple democratic mission: organize citizens of all nations to close the gap between the world we have and the world most people everywhere want." *Avaaz*, as the website asserts, means "voice" in several European, Middle Eastern, and Asian languages, its name evoking a mission to empower the subaltern to speak, in keeping with Spivak's assertion: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow..." (28) formulated in her 1998 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

<sup>16</sup> The movie version of *Disgrace* provides us with additional context of which an Eastern European reader otherwise risks remaining unaware, and allows us to follow Spivak's principle of active counterfocalization. Since David as a narrator is sure to expand only on those situations that correspond to the set of conventions embedded in his literary education, he is bound to wipe out some constitutive parts of Lucy's life because, notwithstanding his love for her, he cannot relate them directly to his reading. For instance, unlike the sight of his daughter, "lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat" which he zealously compares to a "scene ready-made for a Sargent or a Bonnard," (218) a South-African marketplace does not inspire David to infuse its leisurely commerce with analogies conveying similar grandeur. Thus he only duly reports that:

and its thriving subculture remain the territory untouched by David's focalizing eye, as he cannot infuse them with his embellishing fantasies. The scene where Lucy hands a black woman a bouquet of flowers, wrapped in a newspaper, collects a frail banknote the buyer hands her, the flowers, bought perhaps to adorn the kitchen table, tucked on top of the groceries, two women presented in the act of fair exchange, carries the power to overwrite the script of Lucy's life so far. No room for debt here; only fair trade.

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Many of Lucy's customers know her by name: middle-aged women, most of them, with a touch of the proprietary in their attitude to her, as though her success was theirs too. Each time she introduces him: "Meet my father, David Lurie, on a visit from Cape Town."

"You must be proud of your daughter, Mr Lurie," they say.

"Yes, very proud," he replies. (72)

Meanwhile, the market scene included in the first half hour of the movie, with its intrinsic shapes and sounds, has the power to convince the reader that Lucy does not tend to her garden to support her father's penchant for distant cultural images; instead, her gardening points to the marketplace as its immediate goal.

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## **Robert Burns's versed epistles**

MIROŚŁAWA MODRZEWSKA

### **Abstract**

Robert Burns wrote a number of poetic letters, such as *Epistle to John Rankie*, *Epistle to Davie*, *A Brother Poet*, *Epistle to John Lapraik*, *An Old Scottish Bard*, *To William Simpson*, and others. Versed epistles, although practiced by poets of various epochs, is a typically neo-classical genre connected with Horatian tradition, and followed by A. Pope. It was part of aristocratic courtly culture and an elegant way of presenting a didactic or even satirical purpose, but also a powerful tool for manipulating public opinion. This paper examines the ways in which Robert Burns used those conventions and created his own rhetorical style, using parody, grotesque, speaking at times on behalf of the “public” or in a plural sort of voice, but in the end creating a free individual poetic personality similar to that of G. G. Byron in the Romantic way of composing motifs and registers of language.

### **Key words**

poetry, Romanticism, Scottish literature, versed epistle

There are a number of poems by Robert Burns directed to individual addressees who are named in the title:

*Epistle From Esopus To Maria*  
*Epistle To A Young Friend*  
*Epistle To Colonel De Peyster*  
*Epistle To Davie, A Brother Poet*  
*Epistle To Dr. Blacklock*  
*Epistle To Hugh Parker*

*Epistle To J. Lapraik, An Old Scottish Bard*  
*Epistle To James Smith*  
*Epistle To James Tennant Of Glenconner*  
*Epistle To John Goldie, In Kilmarnock*  
*Epistle To John Maxwell, ESQ., Of Terraughty*  
*Epistle To John Rankine*  
*Epistle To Major Logan*  
*Epistle To Mrs. Scott*  
*Epistle To Robert Graham, Esq., Of Fintry*  
*Epistle To The Rev. John M'math*

To start a poem with the word *epistle* (Greek επιστολη, *epistolē*, 'letter') in the title is a poetic strategy that opens to the reader the perspective of Antiquity and the tradition of biblical teaching through letters. A versed epistle is a convention that reaches back to the epistles of Ovid and his *Heroides*, which were poems written in elegiac couplets; fictitious letters of mythological female characters abandoned and mistreated by their heroic lovers. The form was perfected by Horace, who introduced familiar personal details into his letters and wrote about philosophical subjects. The idea of lovers writing to each other was obviously a favourite means of expression for the culture of courtly love in the Middle Ages.

There is also a wealth of European Renaissance versed epistles, the most eminent of which are the Latin poems by Petrarch *Epistulae metricae*, the Spanish letters in blank verse by Garcilaso *Epistola a Boscán* (1543). The versed epistle convention also inspired Samuel Daniel (1562-1619), an English poet and historian, the author of the *Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius* (Brogan, 1351).

Eighteenth century writers developed the genre in the context of a blossoming epistolary culture, in which the philosophical letters by Voltaire became a model for courtly intellectual culture (Matuszewska, 328). There was a return to Horace and Petrarch, as well as to Ariosto's *Satires*. The finest examples of the versed epistle, recognized on a European scale, were twelve epistles in couplets by Nicolas Boileau



(written 1668-95), which served as a model for eighteenth century poets.

In English literature Alexander Pope created his moral essays in the form of epistolary poems and their rhetorical composition became a model of the genre for many writers of the eighteenth century, including Robert Burns (Weston, 210). The four Parts of Pope's *Essay on Man* have an extension in Epistle I, II, III and IV. It seems, however, that Robert Burns's versed epistles are stylistically closer to Alexander Pope's Epistles to Several Persons, including the famous Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot (1735).

John Weston, in his article entitled "Robert Burns' use of the Scots verse epistle form" (*Philological Quarterly*, 1970), describes the original Scots version of the genre, still traceable in Scottish twentieth century literature, for example in the poetry of Robert Garioch, as having a genuine note of "jaunty bonhomie", although the genre does not enjoy the same popularity as it had in the eighteenth century. According to John West, Robert Burns himself is partly responsible for the short life of this poetic form, because, as he says: "all of those Scots forms Robert Burns employed received such a strong impress of his attractive genius and were therefore so slavishly imitated that they have died through lack of nourishment, and as a consequence the intellectualizing Scots poets of this century, like William Soutar, S.G. Smith, and Hugh MacDiarmid, have generally been forced to avoid literary types which have kailyard, Burnsian associations" (Weston, 188).

But there might be another reason why the Romantic writers rejected the versed epistle: it was too strongly associated with the neo-classical codification of genres, and letter writing in the form of essayistic prose became preferable. Prose, after all, became the dominant means of literary expression in the nineteenth century, strong rhyming of the Burnsian type being reserved for comical and satirical genres.

But then Robert Burns is considered to be one of the first Romantics and his poetry certainly inspired later Romantic writers. It is then interesting to see whether Burns's versed

epistles are stylistically suspended between the two epochs and document a state of transition between neo-classical and romantic rhetoric, or constitute a unique poetic method of Romantic comic expression.

Perhaps what saved the genre in the hands of Scottish writers was the dissociation of the poetic form from the exclusive, courtly cultural context. The origin of the Scots epistle tradition is attributed to an exchange of six poetic letters between Allan Ramsey (1686-1758) and William Hamilton of Gilbertfield (1704-1754). "The Scots epistle, says John C. Weston, connected in the nation's mind with Habby Simson and the poetry of the vernacular, was hardly respectable because of its associations with the lower orders. An interesting example of this attitude is shown in a true Scots epistle written, surprisingly, by James Beattie, *To Alexander Ross, at Lochlee, Author of the Fortunate Sheperdess, and other Poems in the Broad Scotch Dialect* (1768), his only poem in Scots. Beattie, the author of *The Minstrel* (1770, 1774), was esteemed for a while as a major writer, even by Burns. To the aid of Ross, the little known old vernacular poet, came the apparently thoroughly anglicized, but not yet famous Dr. Beattie, who at this stage of his career could allow himself to write a true Scots epistle, thus indicating his intimate acquaintance with the Hamilton-Ramsey models; could use a store of Scots words with fine effect; and could show by his references to old Scots poets his at least partial knowledge of the national tradition. But it is clear that he looks at the genre he employs and the popular poetry it is a part of as decidedly second grade" (Weston, 194). In the first printing of it in the *Aberdeen Journal*, he hides behind a pseudonym, Oliver Oldstile, which earns him the name of an "Anglicized Scottish snob" in the eyes of the critic John Weston (195).

What this indicates for us is that the Scots epistle has lost its high ranking position in the neo-classical hierarchy of genres, for the use of unsophisticated farmers' dialect and features of local Scottish folksiness (Weston 194), in this way becoming a valuable source of rustic poetic language so

attractive for romantic diction. The neo-classical elegance and sophistication of language, as one of the rules of *decorum*, is lost in Burns's epistle together with the clear discursive composition. To realize the difference, it is worth comparing Burns's epistles with the conversational tone of Alexander Pope's, of which the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* is perhaps the best known example. Pope's epistles have a clear rhetorical composition aimed at convincing the reader of the rightness of the author's views. In the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, nearly every stanza starts with a question which is answered in the same or the next stanza, as in the stanza between verse 125-134:

Why did I write? what sin to me unknown  
 Dipp'd me in ink, my parents', or my own?  
 As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,  
 I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came.  
 I left no calling for this idle trade,  
 No duty broke, no father disobey'd.  
 The Muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife,  
 To help me through this long disease, my life,  
 To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,  
 And teach the being you preserv'd, to bear.

There are several other questions tackled within the poem:

But why then publish? (135)  
 Soft were my numbers; who could take offence,  
 While pure description held the place of sense? (147-148)  
 Were others angry? I excused them too  
 Well might they rage; I gave them but their due. (173-4)

After a lengthy philosophical poetic dialogue in which he answers the questions asked by himself, the poem takes on a conclusive shape, entailing an expression of poetic creed:

Oh let me live my own! and die so too!  
 ("To live and die is all I have to do:")  
 Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,  
 And see what friends, and read what books I please.

Above a patron, though I condescend  
 Sometimes to call a minister my friend:  
 I was not born for courts or great affairs;  
 I pay my debts, believe, and say my pray'rs;  
 Can sleep without a poem in my head,  
 Nor know, if Dennis be alive or dead. (261-270)

The poetic creed is followed by a curse:

Curs'd be the verse, how well soe'er it flow,  
 That tends to make one worthy man my foe,  
 Give virtue scandal, innocence a fear,  
 Or from the soft-ey'd virgin steal a tear!  
 But he, who hurts a harmless neighbour's peace,  
 Insults fall'n worth, or beauty in distress,  
 Who loves a lie, lame slander helps about,  
 Who writes a libel, or who copies out: (283-290)

But in the end, in the name of Virtue, as one of the principles of order in the age of Reason, there is a blessing and a restoration of harmony:

O friend! may each domestic bliss be thine!  
 Be no unpleasing melancholy mine:  
 Me, let the tender office long engage  
 To rock the cradle of reposing age,  
 With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,  
 Make langour smile, and smooth the bed of death,  
 Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,  
 And keep a while one parent from the sky!  
 On cares like these if length of days attend,  
 May Heav'n, to bless those days, preserve my friend,  
 Preserve him social, cheerful, and serene,  
 And just as rich as when he serv'd a queen.  
 Whether that blessing be denied or giv'n,  
 Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n.

How much of this discursive rhetorical composition is left in Robert Burns's epistles? Robert Burns's epistles retain the

features of dialogue, but the composition of reasoning, and the poetic discipline of question and answer stanza form is lost. *The Epistle To a Young Friend* starts in a reflective manner:

I Lang hae thought, my youthfu' friend,  
 A something to have sent you,  
 Tho' it should serve nae ither end  
 Than just a kind memento:  
 But how the subject-theme may gang,  
 Let time and chance determine;  
 Perhaps it may turn out a sang:  
 Perhaps turn out a sermon.

The lack of genre clarity declared by Burns is accompanied by a somewhat split and conflicting advisory tone concerning the future of the young friend. This is expressed by the stanza construction, based on the juxtaposition: "yes, but...".

I'll no say, men are villains a';  
 The real, harden'd wicked,  
 Wha hae nae check but human law,  
 Are to a few restricked;  
 But, Och! mankind are unco weak,  
 An' little to be trusted;  
 If self the wavering balance shake,  
 It's rarely right adjusted!  
 [...]  
 Aye free, aff-han', your story tell,  
 When wi' a bosom crony;  
 But still keep something to yoursel',  
 Ye scarcely tell to ony:  
 Conceal yoursel' as weel's ye can  
 Frae critical dissection;  
 But keek thro' ev'ry other man,  
 Wi' sharpen'd, sly inspection.  
 [...]  
 To catch dame Fortune's golden smile,  
 Assiduous wait upon her;  
 And gather gear by ev'ry wile  
 That's justified by honour;

Not for to hide it in a hedge,  
 Nor for a train attendant;  
 But for the glorious privilege  
 Of being independent.

Here the neoclassical virtues are abandoned for the sake of “glorious independence”, which is part of Robert Burns’s personal and poetic creed so well expressed in *Epistle To J. Lapraik, An Old Scottish Bard*:

I winna blaw about mysel,  
 As ill I like my fauts to tell;  
 But friends, an’ folk that wish me well,  
 They sometimes roose me;  
 Tho’ I maun own, as mony still  
 As far abuse me.

The “public” aspect of the communicative situation in Burns’s versed epistles is still present, as in neo-classical poetry of the same kind. But instead of authoritarian didacticism, Robert Burns offers friendship:

But ye whom social pleasure charms  
 Whose hearts the tide of kindness warms,  
 Who hold your being on the terms,  
 "Each aid the others,"  
 Come to my bowl, come to my arms,  
 My friends, my brothers!  
 (*Epistle To J. Lapraik, An Old Scottish Bard*)

The friendly conviviality of Burns has been described and attributed to the native tradition of the Scots epistle (Weston, 190-191). The “communal tone” is built up on an assumption of shared nationality, views and values. In the epistles by Ramsey and Hamilton, the central purpose was to display friendship and create a public testimonial of mutual affection, of common experience, beliefs and emotions, such as joy of life or patriotism. The exchange of blessings and greetings was

often made in a witty and joking manner. The conversational, friendly tone in Robert Burns's epistles is, however, pervaded by an expressive portrait of the poet himself, poor but honest, allied with friends, but in opposition to the wicked world:

I'll no say, men are villains a';  
The real, harden'd wicked,  
Wha hae nae check but human law,  
Are to a few restricked;  
But, Och! mankind are unco weak,  
An' little to be trusted;  
If self the wavering balance shake,  
It's rarely right adjusted!  
(*Epistle To A Young Friend*)

Burns does not hesitate to curse his enemies and bless his friends in the next stanza, as also in *Epistle To John Maxwell, ESQ., Of Terraughty*:

If envious buckies view wi' sorrow  
Thy lengthen'd days on this blest morrow,  
May Desolation's lang-teeth'd harrow,  
Nine miles an hour,  
Rake them, like Sodom and Gomorrah,  
In brunstane stour.

But for thy friends, and they are mony,  
Baith honest men, and lassies bonie,  
May couthie Fortune, kind and cannie,  
In social glee,  
Wi' mornings blythe, and e'enings funny,  
Bless them and thee!

Many of Burns's epistles contain traditional "recipes for happiness" and praise of life and love, with the extensive use of erotic imagery so well described by Julie D. Prandi in the article entitled: "Sexual imagery in the verse epistles of Robert Burns and Anna Louisa Karsch": "Any reader of Burns knows that he holds a woman's physical love to be one of the best

consolations in life” (155). Prandi says later (157) that “with the exception of stylized rococo pastorage, when the mainstream poets of the eighteenth century do use sexual allusion, it is usually for the purpose of distancing the reader (satire, farce) or in order to convey disgust for physical reality”, whereas Burns expresses “pleasure or pain in bodily sensation, including the erotic realm, either to evoke sympathy or to help establish equality or solidarity between poet and reader”. A good example of this rhetoric is an extended allegory of male conquest as hunt in the *Epistle To John Rankine* (1784).

The poem starts with a taunting address to John Rankine, one of the author’s farmer friends, containing an accusation made comical by strong rhyming and the alliterative “r” sound, which mocks the very name of the addressee:

O Rough, rude, ready-witted Rankine,  
 The wale o’ cocks for fun an’ drinkin!  
 There’s mony godly folks are thinkin,  
 Your dreams and tricks  
 Will send you, Korah-like, a-sinkin  
 Straught to auld Nick’s.

Ye hae saw mony cracks an’ cants,  
 And in your wicked, drucken rants,  
 Ye mak a devil o’ the saunts,  
 An’ fill them fou;  
 And then their failings, flaws, an’ wants,  
 Are a’ seen thro’.

This address is followed by a dynamic metaphorical personification of Hypocrisy as a “holy robe”, but the “wicked sinner” Rankine is warned:

Think, wicked Sinner, wha ye’re skaithing:  
 It’s just the Blue-gown badge an’ claithing  
 O’ saunts; tak that, ye lea’e them naething  
 To ken them by



Frae ony unregenerate heathen,  
Like you or I.

Thus a sort of identity is established between the poet and his “wicked” friend, and there follows a story of “hunting” offered to him as “some rhyming ware”, starting with the lines:

’Twas ae night lately, in my fun,  
I gaed a rovin’ wi’ the gun,  
An’ brought a paitrick to the grun’ –  
A bonie hen;

The conclusive last stanza offers mockery again instead of remorse, and an expression of the independent individual self of a hunter counting on more fun:

It pits me aye as mad’s a hare;  
So I can rhyme nor write nae mair;  
But pennyworths again is fair,  
When time’s expedient:  
Meanwhile I am, respected Sir,  
Your most obedient.

The elegant convention of a courtly letter is thus parodied and turned into a humorous burlesque story that mingles the motifs of poetry, writing, dancing and singing with somewhat vulgar and grotesque images of the small game to be shot. It is a story worthy of Cervantes and the great writers of the Baroque, exploring the possibilities of antithetical juxtaposition of sensuality and spiritual freedom. This baroque kind of humour was later successfully taken over by G. G. Byron in his burlesque Romantic poetry, such as *Beppo* or *Don Juan*, in which an untamed, individual poetic personality emerges from the polyphonic and digressive rhythm of the stanzas. In this poetry, sublimation always acquires an individual concrete representation, such as the warm and direct address to individual people that we find at the end of Burns’s *Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*:

My compliments to sister Beckie,  
 And eke the same to honest Lucky;  
 I wat she is a daintie chuckie,  
 As e'er tread clay;  
 And gratefully, my gude auld cockie,  
 I'm yours for aye.  
 Robert Burns.  
 (*Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*)

Robert Burns's versed epistles then become a convenient way of expressing and publicizing a poetic manifesto: his "idle song" expresses the rhetoric of social pleasure, singing and drinking, the poet presenting himself democratically as a "friend and servant" to the addressee. His Pegasus might be a diseased and limping animal, as in *Epistle To Davie, A Brother Poet* or an inspired "bashing and dashing" (*Epistle to Mrs. Scott*), but it might just as well be the sublimation of the simple rustic life:

But to conclude my silly rhyme  
 (I'm scant o'verse and scant o' time)  
 To make a happy fireside clime  
 To weans and wife,  
 That's the true pathos and sublime  
 Of human life.  
 (*Epistle to Dr. Blacklock*)

Burns's epistolary poetry, despite clear affinities with eighteenth century literary conventions, offers an individualized version of the codified poetic genre. It is not only due to the references to the Scottish localities and characters, but also due to the powerful and warmly humorous presence of the author and his conversational digressive rhetoric.

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# ACADEMIC TEACHING



## **English for Academic Purposes: Theoretical considerations and practical solutions**

MARTIN BLASZK

### **Abstract**

In this paper I will briefly outline two models for the teaching of English for Academic Purposes: the study skills model, which concentrates upon developing student competence in such areas as reading, writing, and note-taking, and the discourse orientated model, which aims to help students understand discourse processes, structures and lexis in their specific disciplines. In relation to the latter, I will also look at a number of content based teaching practices, including Content Based Instruction, which is used in the tertiary sector of education. In reviewing these different approaches, I will also consider the promotion of learner autonomy, which is seen to be an important factor for learner development within the academic community. The descriptions I give will provide the background for the greater part of my paper, in which I will refer to various aspects of two university EAP courses I have facilitated.

### **Keywords**

English for Academic Purposes (EAP), skills based approach, academic discourse practices, learner autonomy, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Content Based Instruction (CBI)

### **1. What is English for Academic Purposes?**

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) from the teacher's point of view has been described as "courses and materials designed

specifically to help people who want to use their English in academic contexts” (Harmer 2007: 19). More broadly speaking, and placing the emphasis on the needs of the learner, it is also seen to be “concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems” (Jordan 1997: 1). In relation to the latter, the skills which are identified as important are “academic reading, with the addition, separately, of vocabulary development, which links reading and writing; academic writing; lectures and note-taking; speaking for academic purposes; reference/research skills; and examination skills” (Jordan 1997: 141). And indeed, as Jordan (1997: 5) reports, for a number of authors, EAP and study skills are seen to be synonymous. This has meant that EAP, following the study skills model, has relied upon identifying the study situation or activity the learner is involved in and then delineated the study skills appropriate to successfully function within it.

In one such list (Jordan 1997: 7-8), the study skills for various situations and activities are given. In seminars and tutorials, for instance, listening and note-taking, asking questions for repetition and clarification, the ability to state a point of view, as well as speaking with or without notes, are seen to be part of what is necessary. In writing an essay, meanwhile, the learner requires the study skills of planning, writing drafts and revising, and producing continuous writing in an academic style, in addition to being able to use quotations, footnotes and compile a bibliography. Complimentary to this, and depending on the situation or activity, the receptive skills are seen to provide input for the productive skills, as well as being linked to them. Jordan (1997: 7) describes this in the following way: “Note-taking is seen as an adjunct to listening or reading (i.e. receptive skills), but also as a lead-in to, or link with, the productive skills of speaking or writing, e.g. listening to a lecture, taking notes, and then making use of the notes to make comments in a seminar or in writing an essay.” According to Jordan (1997: 5), this particular approach to EAP is becoming less dominant



however, the additional features of “*general academic English register, incorporating a formal, academic style, with proficiency in the language use*” now gaining in importance.

Fast forward a little over ten years and Alexander (2008) is more critical. She sees the notion that academic English should be focused mainly on study skills as a misleading one, the result of backwash from the dominant academic English language examinations.<sup>1</sup> She also believes that EAP needs to go beyond these narrow confines, proposing a remit that places students firmly at the centre of practices related to their present and future academic needs. In effect, she believes the short-termism of getting students ready for examination should be replaced by the longer-term goals of preparing students for an academic career of which the foreign language is an integral part. Alexander (2008: 5) writes “EAP can be defined as the language and study competence required to function autonomously in an academic community, which includes the need to achieve academic goals but also to continue learning language in that environment.” The implication here is that EAP also needs to include work that will foster learner autonomy, “the taking of responsibility by the learner for the process of learning, [which] requires not only adequate competencies and a facilitative learning environment but also the feeling of control over the learning process” (Biedroń 2010: 307). This is important for EAP because as Alexander (2008: 5) states, students “need to *continue to develop their understanding of the language of their discipline* in order to use it to complete coursework, sit exams and *communicate research* [my emphasis – M.B.]” In addition to study skills, what then is Alexander proposing? Well, this appears to be a greater concern with structure linked to the various discourses<sup>2</sup> that the students are involved in. Drawing

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander believes that a lot of present EAP work focuses upon the ‘gate-keeping language exams’ such as IELTS and TOEFL. These, according to Alexander, test the skills of skim reading, taking notes in lectures, and giving oral presentations (Alexander 2008: 5).

<sup>2</sup> A description of discourse that is succinct and appropriate for my purpose here is the one provided by Thornbury. He writes “Put simply,

a picture of an EAP practice that is more subject specific than Jordan's, Alexander (2008: 5) writes "EAP classes need to provide students with the means to understand discourse processes and structures in their disciplines and identify key language to learn and use." This for Alexander (2008: 5) means that "EAP learners practise with authentic texts and tasks drawn from their subject disciplines." And that "teachers need thorough understanding of the criteria for acceptable performance in order to guide learners effectively. For EAP teachers, this requires a degree of engagement with the content and practices of their students' fields of study" (Alexander 2008: 5).

It would seem then that EAP is something more than 'simply' teaching general academic vocabulary or the skills appropriate to a particular academic activity. Indeed, there is an understanding that although a more generalized practice has benefits, supplying learners with the generic tools to carry out their research (Alexander et al. 2008: 26), there are now also possibilities to use information from subject and year specific corpuses to build EAP courses which are a much closer fit to the learners' needs (Alexander et al. 2008: 20).<sup>3</sup>

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*discourse* is the way that language – either spoken or written – is used for communicative effect in a real-world situation" (Thornbury 2005: 6-7). In the world of academia it would seem important to concentrate on both the written and spoken forms of the language.

<sup>3</sup> The discussion around this is onward going however, with advocates of English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) proposing that there are skills and features of language transferable across different disciplines and occupations, while those involved in Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) believe that the texts, skills and language forms needed by particular learners should be concentrated upon (Hyland 2002). The tenor of this discussion is also acknowledged by materials writers. Macpherson is explicit about this when he comments about one of his books, it "makes no claim to exhaustiveness in its description of academic English, not least because the respective disciplines and branches of science have evolved very distinctive traditions: the sheer volume of research being carried on around the world virtually precludes the possibility of a comprehensive overview" (2004, 7); Jordan hints at the fact when he suggests that as well as using his book on academic writing, teachers should let their students "see examples of essays, reports, etc. of the type they will need to write in the future. Information about the requirements and expectations of subject departments would be particularly useful" (2008: 5).

Thereby creating opportunities for the teaching of content relevant to students as members of specific discourse communities.<sup>4</sup>

## **2. Content and Language Integrated Learning, Sustained-Content Language Teaching and Content Based Instruction**

This idea of linking content to the learning of a language, Content Based Instruction (CBI), is not only confined to the tertiary sector of education. In the primary and secondary sectors also, it is seen to be beneficial, with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Sustained-Content Language Teaching (SCLT), being widely promoted and accepted as common educational practices.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the teaching of specific subjects through a second language is not a new idea. As Mehisto et al. (2008: 9-10) outline, the first programmes of this type were instigated by the Akkadians some 5000 years ago, while throughout the middle ages Latin was the language of instruction for European universities. More recently, in the French-speaking provinces of Canada, English-speaking children were allowed to study subjects in French in language immersion programmes, while work done on Language Across the Curriculum in the UK in the 1970s forged “An increased understanding that content and language needed to be taught hand in hand” (Mehisto et al. 2008: 10). With regard to the most recent development of content and language learning coming together, Mehisto et al. (2008: 10-11) see social and economic factors as being important, where “In an integrated world, integrated learning is increasingly viewed as a modern form of educational delivery designed to

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<sup>4</sup> In brief, paraphrasing Swales(1990: 24-27), a discourse community shares common aims and uses different means for communicating information between its members. In this communication and for the promoting of its aims, it may use various genres as well as a specific lexis.

<sup>5</sup> The major difference between SCLT and CLIL is that the former is linked more to the school year, taking place over a term or the whole year, whereas the latter is not restricted by the same constraints of time.

even better equip the learner with knowledge and skills suitable for the global age.” In addition to this, in terms of educational validity, CLIL also offers an approach more suited to students of the present generation, who are “particularly focused on immediacy as in ‘learn as you use, use as you learn’ – not ‘learn now, use later’ ” (Mehisto et al. 2008: 11). Taking on board these considerations, and the fact that the pupils of primary and secondary education become the students of the tertiary sector, it seems only fair to believe that they are very much in tune with what CBI has to offer, or should that be, CBI offers what they are willing to accept.

CBI has developed to suit the needs of the university sector, “where the content is potentially much more challenging for a language teacher to engage with” (Alexander 2008: 6). It affords two versions, sheltered and adjunct. The sheltered model, or theme-based, is usually used on pre-sessional courses and brings together the teaching of the language and content, providing preparation for what learners are to meet on their actual courses. The adjunct model is for in-sessional training, where EAP acts as a support for what is taking place on the learners’ courses as they are actually occurring. In this particular model the subject teacher and EAP teacher might work together to coordinate certain areas of their activity, for example, sourcing texts or deciding on forms and criteria for assessment. Another variation of this is where the two teachers work together in the same class. This team teaching is rare however, due to financial restraints, the amount of time it takes, and the commitment and trust it demands from both parties (Alexander 2008: 6-7).

Unsurprisingly, whether a study skills, generic, or content based approach, or a mixture of all three is decided upon, mostly depends on the resources and needs of the institution for which the EAP courses are run and the needs of the students themselves. This becomes apparent in the descriptions given by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998: 35-41) of EAP practices from around the world.

### 3. EAP around the world

Dudley-Evans and St John identify four situations in which EAP is likely to be taught. The first is in English-speaking countries, where English Language Units within universities prepare international students for their academic courses providing either pre-sessional or in-sessional teaching. In the former teaching set-up a more generic approach is adopted, where students work on common-core academic vocabulary and skills. With the latter, because the students have actually begun their university courses, more subject specific work can be carried out. The second situation Dudley-Evans and St John mention, concerns countries in Africa and South East Asia, where English is used throughout all levels of education but where the national language is used in everyday life. In this particular case, students may have a high level of English but need help with the study skills and language necessary to succeed in higher education. Because of this, a mixture of EAP and native speaker communication skills are worked upon. The EAP component replicating that of situation one above.

The next situation regarding EAP practices from around the world, is one where certain subjects in tertiary education are taught in English. This occurs mostly in the Middle East, where the emphasis is on helping students move from their secondary education performed exclusively in the national language, to the tertiary system where they will have to negotiate English input. However, because these are countries where English is not a second language, the tertiary system has developed various strategies to cope with the lower level of language, one of which is to use the national language in tandem with English during lectures. The final situation outlined by the authors includes countries from Latin America, South East Asia and Europe,<sup>6</sup> where tertiary education is carried out in the national language and English is given

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<sup>6</sup> What I am designating as Europe the authors list as mainland Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. I am presuming here that the authors would place Poland under Eastern Europe.

a supporting role. Here, the emphasis appears to be on developing reading skills, and classes may be run in the national language, with discussions centring around linguistic features or sub-skills such as deducing meaning from context. Generally, the classes are in-sessional and often take place in the first year of the course. As Dudley-Evans and St John report however, because of the actual demands upon students, such as project work or communication needs in future work, there is usually a need for such teaching to be resumed in the final year of courses which largely goes unheeded. In this context, and with regard to when EAP courses should take place, the “mismatch between the institutions’ perception of the students’ need and their true needs and ‘wants’ [...] often results in a lack of student motivation and the consequent disillusionment of teachers, as well as being a waste of resources” (Dudley-Evans and St John 1998: 41).

Bearing in mind the different approaches and models available to EAP teachers, and the fact that institutional demands, our awareness of students’ needs, as well as personal preference all have an influence on the choices we make, I would now like to take a closer look at two EAP courses I have facilitated. The courses were for undergraduate and doctorate students at the University of Gdańsk and took place in very different faculties.

The first situation I will describe is a *CLIL* course for undergraduates studying *Early Education with English*, in the Pedagogy Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences. I will then consider a *konwersatorium* for doctorate students working in the Faculty of Biotechnology and across different departments of the Faculty of Biology.

#### **4. EAP SITUATION 1 – CLIL, undergraduates, pedagogy**

The course was compulsory for all final year undergraduate students studying *Early Education with English*. Its official title was the rather imposing *Językowo-akademickie przygotowanie do zawodu nauczyciela początkowego w formule integracji*

*przedmiotowo-językowej CLIL*, although it was known more simply by the English title *CLIL*. In essence, as was described above, a CLIL course entails content being taught using a language which is not the student's native language, in this case English. In connection with *Early Education with English*, the course was more realistically a CLIL within a CLIL, as many of the subjects in this particular specialisation were run completely in English.<sup>7</sup> There were two main reasons for offering this particular course. One was to create a forum where students could further develop their involvement with academic English, and mainly in the form of reading and listening texts related to early education. It was also to practise a range of skills used by the academic community as a whole, such as taking notes, writing, and presenting papers at conferences. The other reason for providing the course, was to give students a 'self-conscious' experience of CLIL, so that they might consider using such an approach in their own teaching. This emphasis on loop input, where "The content is carried by the process, but the process is also part of the content" (Woodward 1991: 13), being signalled in the first session of the course where students read and analyzed, and then discussed, an academic text about CLIL.

The aims of the course taken from the course description<sup>8</sup> were as follows:

1. To familiarize students with the discourse features of written and spoken academic texts.
2. To raise awareness of grammar and vocabulary related to Academic English.
3. To practise the sub-skills related to reading, writing, listening and speaking in an academic context.
4. To expose students to various academic texts related to early education and the teaching of English.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, *Didactics, Knowledge of English speaking countries, and Children's literature*.

<sup>8</sup> This is based upon the syllabus for a given subject. It is written in advance and gives a more detailed account of the content for each lesson to be taught.

5. To allow students the opportunity to write summaries of their thesis.
6. To allow opportunities for peer and micro-teaching in relation to skills and sub-skills related to academic English (Blaszczak 2008).

As this group of students was fairly homogeneous it was possible to work on texts and sub-skills that were relevant to the majority of them, with the situation only changing in the sixth semester, towards the end of the course, when students concentrated on their chosen themes for dissertation. This meant that the first four aims were dealt with almost simultaneously throughout the course, where for example, a text on early education could be used for reading practice, identification of lexis related to the specialization, as well as being a source for text features that students themselves might use in their own writing – academic vocabulary, which as Alexander (2008: 6) mentions, “often goes unnoticed although it mediates the understanding of meanings in texts.”

It might appear strange that exposure to texts related specifically to the students’ studies, and therefore directly linked to their discourse community, was not the most important and placed at the very top of the aims list. However, there was an element of pragmatism at play here. The students were after two years of study in which they had already completed a year of general English, which aimed to bring them up to level C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. During these two years, the students had also come into contact with a great deal of content language, in both English and Polish. In connection with these two areas then, they were judged to be competent and in some cases extremely competent users, and unlike students on pre-sessional EAP courses, the issue here was not to give them content vocabulary to successfully negotiate their course, rather it was in-sessional training, fine-tuning what they already had, to make it more relevant to the academic context in which they presently found themselves, as



well as help lay the foundations for future involvement and development.

Reviewing the content of the course, it was split into three modules: academic reading and writing in English; academic listening and note-taking in English, and speaking and giving academic presentations in English. The syllabus for the course covered 60 teaching hours, with each module lasting 20 teaching hours. In the table below a number of extracts from the course description and the modules to which they belong are matched to the descriptors for the core features of CLIL methodology: “multiple focus”, “safe and enriching learning environment”, “authenticity”, “active learning” and “scaffolding” (Mehisto et al. 2008: 29). Here we can also see that the course combines work on discourse features, positions 1, 2 and 3, as well as study skills, positions 4, 5 and 6.

	Extracts from CLIL course description for academic year 2008-2009 (Blaszk 2008)	Extracts from core features of CLIL methodology (Mehisto et al. 2008: 29)
1	How an academic text is constructed 1- reading and discussion: analysis of a text; discussion of the main features – coherency and cohesiveness; identification and use of topic sentences; keywords as a way of summarizing text content. (academic reading and writing in English)	– increasing student language awareness (safe and enriching learning environment)
2	Vocabulary related to Academic English 2: matching of academic vocabulary to non- academic equivalents; dictionary work – giving more formal / informal equivalents for specified vocabulary items.	– building student confidence to experiment with language and content (safe and enriching learning environment)

	(academic reading and writing in English)	
3	Academic texts related to early education and English teaching: students search for texts related to their areas of interest; (academic reading and writing in English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– using current materials from the media and other sources (authenticity)</li> <li>– maximizing the accommodation of student interests (authenticity)</li> </ul>
4	How students take notes: brainstorm around different note-taking techniques – layout, function, advantages and disadvantages; analysis of own note-taking techniques; summarizing of techniques available. (academic listening and note-taking in English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– building on a student’s existing knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests and experience (scaffolding)</li> <li>– fostering creative and critical thinking (scaffolding)</li> </ul>
5	Improving note-taking techniques: what makes it difficult to listen and take notes from a foreign language text? / how can the process be made easier?; (academic listening and note-taking in English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– supporting reflection on the learning process (multiple focus)</li> </ul>
6	Micro-presentations 1: students watch and evaluate each other’s presentations. (speaking and giving academic presentations in English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– favouring peer co-operative work (active learning)</li> </ul>

It is also possible to view the work students were doing on the course from the perspective of student autonomy. Ellis and Sinclair (1991: 10) provide a list of strategies the teacher might follow in implementing learner training, and thereby foster learner autonomy. Viewing their guidelines with regard to

elements of the *CLIL* course description given above, student-led discussions relating to text construction (1) encourages “discussion in the classroom about language and language learning”; elicitation of different note-taking techniques (4) allows “learners [to] become aware of the wide range of alternative strategies available to them for language learning”, while generally, when the students are given opportunities to work with one another and think about the techniques they are employing (1, 4 and 6), they can “form their own conclusions about language learning and [...] [respect] individual points of view”.<sup>9</sup> For Alexander et al. (2008: 271) this autonomy is of the utmost importance, being “one of the clearest requirements for successful English-medium academic study” supporting the learner as someone working in their specialist field as well as a non-native user of the English language. In terms of the teacher helping to develop student autonomy in EAP classes, Alexander et al. (2008: 283) see the teacher’s willingness to take on different roles in their classes and throughout the courses they lead, as vital. These roles are given on a cline moving from teacher as controller, through supervisor and facilitator, and ending up at adviser. Teacher control over all aspects of the learning process becoming less

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<sup>9</sup> Other strategies Ellis and Sinclair give are:

- negotiating with learners about course content and methodology, if appropriate
- sharing with learners, in a way which is accessible to them, the kind of information about language and language learning that teachers have, but which is not always passed on to learners
- counseling and giving guidance to individual learners when possible (1993: 10).

The first strategy was used on this particular course when students were asked to bring in their own texts for analysis or when some ‘lighter’ content was requested. This strategy was more fully implemented for the second course I describe here. The second strategy was used throughout the course, occurring mostly in the discussions and group work that took place. The final strategy became important in the latter stages of the *CLIL* course when students were working on their theses and summaries. These strategies would also appear to facilitate the development of an internal LOC (locus of control), which Biedroń links to positive achievement in both language acquisition and the academic sphere (Biedroń 2010: 314-317).

the closer one is to adviser. The teacher role on this particular course was closer to the final two positions, rather than the first. Moving through the description of the *CLIL* course once again, it can be seen that students were given an increasing number of responsibilities, relating to the choice of materials (3), analysis and reflection on learning technique (4) and situation (5), and evaluation of each other's work (6).

In addition to teacher role creating a situation which will encourage student autonomy, Alexander et al. (2008: 277-281) also place great emphasis on learners developing study competence rather than simply study skills. Study competence is seen as a set of attitudes, strategies and practices that students engage in which are the basis for independent learning, and includes such things as being actively involved in the learning process, self-awareness as a learner, and being a critical thinker (Alexander et al. 2008: 277). They also, to a great extent, overlap with the core features of *CLIL*. Again, returning to the different characteristics of the *CLIL* course, getting learners to find their own texts to work from (3) and brainstorming their techniques for note-taking (4) gives them opportunities to be actively involved in the leaning process, as well as, with the latter, promoting self-awareness as learners. Meanwhile, asking learners to think about difficulties in listening and how it might be made easier, provides them with a chance to analyse critically the processes in which they are involved (5).

To finish my consideration of this particular course, as well as academic input, there was also room to be involved with more 'light-hearted' materials and activities. These included the use of non-academic texts to practice reading skills and analysis of paragraph construction; students delivering 3 minute papers on an unusual hobby or interest to practice language for presentations, and a translation chain activity<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The activity entails one student translating an original L2 text into L1, with the translation then being passed on to another student to be translated back into L2. The students then compare their respective translations with the original text and each other's translations. The original

using abstracts or short extracts from articles. One particular session popular with students, included a “3 stepped note-taking activity in relation to video/DVD” (Blaszk 2008), which entailed taking notes from a Mr. Bean DVD. This followed on from and was practice of issues encountered in an earlier stage of that same module: “Awareness raising activities for note-taking 1: visual clues – body-language and other visual types” (Blaszk 2008). An episode of Mr. Bean was felt to be an ideal choice for such practice due to the lack of verbal information. The fact that these light-hearted ‘episodes’ were included in the course correlates to the observation of Alexander et al. (2008: 21) that it is possible to use content not immediately associated with academia as “it not only lifts the atmosphere of a lesson but also enhances learning. Sometimes authenticity of task can be allowed to override authenticity of content.”

If the above *CLIL* course catered for a mostly homogeneous group of students, where the form and content were largely prescribed, the second course I want to look at was for a more heterogeneous group. The nature of the course also allowed for negotiation of form and content with the students.

### **5. EAP SITUATION 2 – *konwersatorium*, doctorate students, biology, biochemistry and biotechnology**

The official title of the course in Polish was *konwersatorium*, which is translated by one Polish-English dictionary as a seminar (Linde-Usiekniewicz 2004: 390) but is more aptly described in this particular case by the entry from a Polish internet dictionary, especially the second part of the description. It defines *konwersatorium* as “a form of lesson in higher education, which is based upon conversations and discussions with students upon chosen subjects: *Konwersatoria* are usually extra lessons, chosen by the

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idea for this activity, “Variations on a theme: reverse translation” (Duff 1992: 147-149).

students themselves, giving information in addition to the basic course in a given subject” (Gazeta.pl słowniki 2011).

Because most of the doctorate students who made up the group were at level C1 or above, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the weekly meetings were seen as an opportunity to maintain contact with English. In addition to this however, and more importantly, it was also a forum where they could talk about, explore and work upon their needs in English, connected to their particular specializations. There were then, two distinct strands to the sessions that took place: general English, where vocabulary extension and speaking were concentrated upon, and academic English, where a mixture of study skills work and analysis of academic discourse took place.

The course was less structured than that outlined in situation 1, though this does not mean it did not have a structure, or some form of syllabus. This was in part created through the use of an initial needs analysis, as well as a simple mechanism allowing two-way feedback. Basically, needs analysis carried out with students is a means of finding out why they are on a course and what they want from it, so that the teacher can carry out their job successfully (Scrivner 2005: 69). Although in addition to this and more broadly, it should also consider the needs of the institution, as well as the present and target use of the language (Jordan 1997: 25). The design of this particular course relied upon a meeting with the student liaison person,<sup>11</sup> as well as a needs analysis carried out in the first meeting with the group. This in turn led to the adoption of what I shall term a semi-process syllabus. As Ur writes, the process syllabus “is not pre-set. The content of the course is negotiated with the learners at the beginning of the course and during it, and actually listed only retrospectively”

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<sup>11</sup> As well as being responsible for basic administrative work, organizing a room and informing fellow students about the course, the student liaison person provided initial ideas about what the students themselves wanted from the course. Through an informal first meeting with the student liaison, ostensibly to discuss administrative details, a whole range of content ideas, upon which the course itself would be contingent, were brought to the fore.

(Ur 1996: 179). In this case however, the university would not accept a retrospective document, so a syllabus was produced but used more as a statement of intent rather than a fixed course of study. The needs analysis becoming a needs analysis-negotiation with the students, where as well as their ideas being presented, I could also present my own, based upon my experience of facilitating similar courses over a number of years.

The subject content of the syllabus for the winter semester, academic year 2009-2010, is given below (Blaszczak 2009). In response to the students' ideas during the needs analysis I suggested a number of the following alternatives:

### **Speaking and listening**

1. Various activities and tasks in which the students will be actively engaged in using English: including open conversations; discussions; problem solving activities and language games.
2. Preparation and delivery of student presentations (relating to the student's research area).
3. Talking in a variety of situations, both formal and informal: relaxing after work; talking with friends and colleagues.

### **Working with vocabulary and grammar**

4. Practice of grammar in areas of particular use to students: present and past passive tenses for talking about procedures; indirect questions; modals.
5. Practice of general English vocabulary: including areas such as describing people's character; education; travel; the arts; idiomatic expressions; different varieties of English.
6. Practice of particular areas of lexical grammar: collocation; noun phrases; prepositional phrases.
7. Practice using linking words and phrases both for speaking and writing: conjunctions; sentence adverbials; referents.
8. Practice of useful phrases for meeting new people; finding out about people; introducing people and responding to them.

**Pronunciation**

9. Using the phonemic alphabet: practice with the symbols both in relation to general English vocabulary and scientific vocabulary.
10. Practice with individual sounds that may cause problems for students: vowel sounds, minimal pairs such as /I/ and /i:/, and consonant sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/.

**Reading and writing**

11. Reading of scientific texts and general English texts to practise language sub-skills, as well as exploitation within the teaching situation.
12. Analysis of various text types in terms of text construction, useful phrases and vocabulary for students' own writing needs.

The procedure for carrying out needs analysis-negotiation with the students in the first session took the following form. First of all, students noted down what they wanted on the course. Then they shared their ideas with fellow students. Following on from this, there was a brainstorm where I acted as scribe, noting down the students' ideas on the board. When all of these ideas were written up to their satisfaction, I then added some of my own, which the students then discussed and either left intact, rejected or modified according to their individual and the group's needs and preferences. At this stage, I also entered in on the discussion, explaining why I would like them to work on the particular areas I had chosen. As a final step, the students decided how much time they would like to spend on the areas written up on the board by assigning percentages to them. The negotiations at this stage had to reach agreement, so that the different percentages of time finally had to add up to one hundred percent.

In the needs analysis-negotiation from October of 2009, a large number of initial ideas were defined and redefined to pare them down to four basic areas and allotments of time. It was finally decided that topics for discussion and analysis, chosen by students and the facilitator on a week by week basis



would take up approximately 60% of the time. Included within this was work upon the students' own articles, vocabulary and pronunciation. In addition to this, 20% of the time was given over to presentations of the students' research. There was also a specific focus on grammar, 10% of course time, and practice listening, also 10%. A final point to be made is that this needs analysis-negotiation was not the end of this particular type of dialogue. Throughout the course, at the beginning of each session, I explained to the students what we would be doing and where the idea for doing it came from. At the end of each session, I also asked if the students were happy with what they had just done, and whether or not they had requests for the next session. And it is worth stating here that this call for requests was not because I did not have ideas which I wanted to pursue with the students, rather it was to keep up the dialogue, so that students knew they could contribute content as an integral part of their participation, which they did. As Scrivner (2005: 74) writes, "The essential engine of a richer, more productive learning environment is communication, two-way feedback from learners and vice versa."

On this particular course, the idea of personal contribution is perhaps best illustrated by the use of the students' own written texts for language analysis and discussion. As students themselves needed to write articles in English for publication, sessions provided an ideal opportunity for peer work on the texts that students were actually producing. To encourage students to become engaged in this process, I offered to proofread extracts from their texts in return for group analysis – the group analysis taking place before the proofed version was returned. In guiding this analysis, I suggested that the students adopt two roles while reading. The first, as editor of the publication to which the article had been sent. What changes would they suggest or advice would they offer? The second, from a position of vested interest, in that they should look for words and phrases that they might use in their own writing. Adopting this approach, the students themselves came up with many relevant ideas relating to how

the text might be improved, as well as helping to build confidence in the writer's abilities by saying which parts they felt to be successful. My part in this analysis was to offer feedback and create opportunities for a deeper analysis where necessary. In many ways, this was similar to the text analysis which Thornbury demonstrates when he deconstructs two Japanese haiku-like poems. In doing so he is able "to demonstrate how much 'language' there is in a text and, therefore, how much potential texts, even very short texts, have for the purposes of exemplifying features of language – of phonology, orthography [...], vocabulary, grammar and discourse – for teaching purposes" (Thornbury 2005: 13). And indeed, this appears to echo Alexander's sentiments about English for academic purposes given towards the beginning of this paper, where it is important for students to be aware of and analyse structure as one of the basic building blocks of academic discourse, but very much in the context of text rather than as isolated elements.<sup>12</sup> The richness of such an exercise in terms of the grammar coverage it offers is hinted at by the number of items Thornbury identifies from each of his 23 word poems. These are as follows:

- all parts of speech
- the basic article system
- common ways of forming noun phrases and preposition phrases
- first and second person subject pronouns and possessive adjectives
- transitive and intransitive verb construction
- the infinitive
- affirmative and negative statements and question forms
- present and past simple tenses
- continuous and perfect aspect

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<sup>12</sup> This in turn is taken further by Thornbury when he writes "Learners of English [...] must mobilize a variety of 'text attack' strategies in order to glean some kind of sense from the text. And, through texts, they have access to 'insider knowledge' – about the language and the culture, of which the text is a realization" (Thornbury 2005: 9).

- sentence-initial and sentence-medial adverbials, and additive and contrastive connectors  
(Thornbury 2005: 14).

I should point out here that when the doctorate students were carrying out their text analysis it was not always as widely spread as the one shown above. In facilitating the whole process I suggested that students concentrate on identifying, and then analysing and discussing, one or two items, for example noun phrases and connectors. In this way, as Thornbury (2005: 14) quite rightly points out when he talks about the analytical work on his two poems, “The fact that the texts contain examples of X, Y and Z features of English grammar is not much use to language learners a) if they don’t notice these features, and b) if they don’t know how representative, typical, frequent, generative, etc, these features are. That is where the teacher comes in. It is by means of the teacher’s expertise that these features are ‘unlocked’.”

A further situation where students could work on content specific to their own disciplines, as well as incorporating more generic academic English, was in presentations of their latest research. Leading up to the presentations, students worked on a number of related areas. These included activities generating lexis relevant to their own subject areas,<sup>13</sup> a selection exercise where the students chose a number of phrases useful in the different stages of a presentation, and pronunciation practice for both individual sounds and connected speech, using abstracts that the students had themselves written, or which belonged to an article of which they were co-author. In addition to this, a reading text on good practice for giving presentations was read and discussed. This concerned various

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<sup>13</sup> One activity included a variation on a dominoes vocabulary game where the students created their own dominoes. The possibility of being able to place their particular domino next to their colleagues’ was the verbal justification they gave. This could be questioned by anyone else in the group. The right to keep the domino in place was based on the strength of argument used. The original idea for this activity, “Word association dominoes” (Watcyn-Jones 1993: 6, 62-64).

aspects of giving a presentation, including the importance of body language. There was also some grammar work on indirect questions, the form most likely to be used after a presentation.

At the beginning of the semester, each student chose the date they would like to carry out their presentation and signed up with its title. Up to three presentations were given in each session, which gave time for questions to be asked and answered, as well as allowing for feedback, and any delays that might occur. The presentations themselves lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes, the standard time allowed at conferences for such events. During the presentation I took notes relating to various aspects of the students' performances. These included pronunciation, use of lexis, both content specific and generic academic English, and the appropriate use of phrases for giving presentations. Layout of slides and body language were also commented upon. The students participating as audience were encouraged to make notes for feedback to their colleagues. They also noted down questions they would like to ask them after each presentation. These had to be in the form of indirect questions. After the presentations and general feedback, students sat with me individually for approximately 5 minutes and we discussed their performance. Each student received the notes I had written during their presentation.

## **6. Conclusion**

An area of debate concerning EAP at present, aims at redressing the balance of a practice that has concentrated upon study skills to the detriment of "the language of academic purposes" (Alexander et al. 2008: 26). This has led to a situation where a discourse orientated practice is now being promoted. Alongside this move to become more involved with academic language, there has also been a shift towards creating content based courses where the discourse specific to particular academic disciplines is taught, rather than a more generic academic English. This is especially true of in-

sessional courses where the students form a homogeneous subject group. Both of the courses I taught at the university of Gdańsk were in-sessional, although their degree of homogeneity varied.

The faculties and range of departments represented within the *konwersatorium* meant a more generic approach had to be applied when choosing materials and activities, with forays into more subject specific content being negotiated with the learners themselves. In this case, analyses of the student's written texts and presentations of their research were the two areas where students gladly participated in each other's subject domains. With the *CLIL* course, there was more opportunity to work on texts and activities which were appropriate to the specific needs of the learners. This was because they were all working within the same specialisation. However, the homogeneity only went so far. This became most apparent in the final semester of their studies, when students were completing their theses. As only very few students (if any) chose to write their dissertations in English then the usefulness of a subject specific content instruction became negligible. In addition to this, if a student did choose to write their thesis in English they were very much under the auspices of their individual tutors who had their own demands on content and how it should be presented. In reality, the greatest need for the learners on the *CLIL* course was contact with a generic academic English which would extend and supplement their studies in English, making them more aware of and able to function successfully in the academic community as a whole. For their more immediate needs, the course introduced them to and helped them negotiate academic texts in English for their own writing, as well as extending their skills in note-taking and presenting information logically and appropriately. In the longer term, the *CLIL* course 'set up' students for their further careers in academia, to second and third level studies, and hopefully beyond, where English will play an ever more important role.

Reviewing the two courses from the perspective of learner autonomy, learner training played a vital role in both. In the *CLIL* course, this included getting students to provide their own texts for analyses, looking critically at the different strategies they employed for listening and taking notes, as well as evaluating each other's work, be it their translations of academic texts or their presentations. The fact that the *konwersatorium* was a negotiated course from the outset, meant that control of the learning process was a shared enterprise, becoming more fully autonomous in those sessions where the students worked and commented upon their own and each other's texts and individual presentations. In these situations, on both courses, the role of the teacher could not be that of a controller, as that would block any chance of the students developing greater autonomy. Instead, the facilitator and adviser roles were the ones adopted. This of course did have its repercussions on how the courses were run. As a teacher, there was a need to listen to what students were saying about the learning processes and materials they were involved in. To discuss with the students, if needs be, the reason why an activity was being used, or why certain materials had been chosen. It meant, in particular, that channels for such a 'discussion' had to be opened and maintained. This was easier with the *konwersatorium* considering the more process orientated nature of its syllabus, and to some extent the level of studies upon which the students were engaged – the majority of them were already involved in such processes working together in teams on their research. The students on the *CLIL* course sometimes found it more difficult to formulate their opinions beyond liking or not liking something, and on a number of occasions, linked to the day and the timing of the course.<sup>14</sup> Trying to maintain

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<sup>14</sup> The course I led took place on Fridays, one group starting at 8.00. The situation became more difficult for students in the second semester, when the course was extended from two to three teaching hours in a row because of timetabling demands. This is when activities that got them involved in academic processes but with more 'lighthearted', non-academic content, were very much appreciated by the students.

a flexible approach was important here also however. This sometimes meant leaving behind the strictures of the course description and lesson plan, allowing students to develop ideas in a way they perceived fit. An example of this was the translation chain activity mentioned above. One group of students not only shared their translations with their partners, as was originally planned, but also with the other members of the group, willingly passing comment on their language choices in comparison to the 'originals'. This was a small change to the plan perhaps, but one where everyone was engaged with each other, sharing and commenting on the process they had gone through and, in the main, sharing constructive criticism on each other's efforts.

Creating an EAP teaching situation that allows for such student initiatives, and the fact that it places the student more at the centre of what occurs within the learning situation, can only have benefits for students and their continuing careers in academia and even for the academic world itself. Making students more aware of what they are involved in and that there are choices to be made, gives them a greater chance of developing "their own identity and voice in their use of academic English" (Alexander et al. 2008: 27). In turn, this route to empowerment may help students to become "agents of change in the disciplines they choose – changing the tribe from within" (Alexander et al. 2008: 27). Neither are these soft and hard versions of critical pedagogy available to EAP mislaid within a Polish context. Szkudlarek (2009: 33-34), who has been writing about and promoting critical pedagogy within Poland for over twenty years, sees the need for such an approach within Polish education just as vitally, if not more so, than when he first began. The critical awareness, and through that autonomy, which we help students develop, enabling them not only to succeed in the academic community but also, in the wider context, to become independent and responsible individuals within the community as a whole, a project which lies at the heart of democratic society (Biedroń 2010: 318).

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**A more equal canon:  
Bringing American minority voices  
to Polish classrooms**

LILLY-MARIE LAMAR

**Abstract**

In this paper I will discuss the importance of introducing minority voices when teaching American literature in Polish universities, and explore the multi-layered process necessary in doing so. I will argue that an interactive approach is essential in giving students a real understanding of diversity in America through literature. As examples of diverse American literature I will consider some writers already included in the standard American canon, such as William Faulkner and James Baldwin, and others who, though not canonical, represent important perspectives in the fabric of the American literary landscape, including Zadie Smith and David Sedaris. I will explore the ways in which these texts represent aspects of American diversity that are necessary for Polish students seeking to understand the American experience. Into this discussion of multiple voices, I will interweave my own account of the teaching process, beginning with choosing writers who accurately represent the complex cultural experience of America, to referencing the cultural background of the students, to offering concrete information about the cultural context of the writing under discussion. I will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which accurate readings of American literary diversity inform students' broader understanding of American literature, and provide suggestions for others interested in teaching such a course.

**Key words**

American perspective, class discussion, cultural multiplicity, diversity, group work, minority voices, Polish students, presentations, teaching

American literature, teaching tools, teaching writing, the American experience

Educating students about American cultural diversity in the context of a literature course poses a number of challenges, from outlining the need for an exploration of diversity, to choosing writers who offer a cultural balance, to guiding students through the confusion and questions that arise when sensitive issues, including race and sexuality, become integral to the curriculum. Educating about diversity is a matter not simply of imparting demographical statistics and philosophical concepts. In order to gain anything beyond the most abstract sense of how multiple cultures co-exist within America, students will require a specific structure intended to help them process reading material. In this paper I will argue that diversity is a necessary consideration within an American literature course, and that instructors must employ certain interactive tools, outside of lecture and long essays, in order to make the concept accessible to Polish students.

I began teaching in Poland as an American Fulbright scholar. Upon our arrival at the ambassador's house in Warsaw, we Fulbrighters were reminded that we were to play a diplomatic role of sorts, exemplifying the United States at its best. At Gdansk University in the American Studies Department I was given an English conversation course; I could choose whatever material I thought appropriate for first-year MA students to discuss. The ambassador's charge surely had some effect on my choice of texts, since I consider our diverse panorama of voices a great source of richness in American literature. My decision to pay particular attention to literary multiplicity was partly conscious, partly accidental. A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, and an alumna of Mills College, a school dedicated to educating a diverse population of women, my foundation for understanding the scope of American literature included a mixture of male, female, queer, Asian, and African-American voices, to name a few. Yet in designing this course, I was aware of an

obligation to Polish students, who would see me as an expert on my country whether or not I agreed with their assessment. I am sure my students knew ten times more about American pop culture than I, and had studied the American classics almost as many times. The only right path for me then, was to teach them about the America that I, even if I was not an expert, knew and considered real and substantial. I needed to offer a sampling of twentieth and twenty-first century poetry, fiction, and memoir that was memorable, multifaceted, and representative of my culture.

Though I am speaking from a specifically American perspective, I do not suggest that diversity can or should be taught exclusively by Americans. Rather, I intend to offer my unique point of view on an issue which all teachers and scholars of American literature should consider. Convincing my students of diversity's relevance to their studies was, in fact, one of my long-standing goals throughout the course. The greatest challenge in embarking on an exploration of diversity lay in persuading students that the issue was of importance to their understanding of American literature and culture. Poland is not, at least on the surface, an ethnically diverse country, which is to say that unity, rather than diversity, appears to be celebrated. In addition, students who have little practice claiming their own diversity are then invited to experience it upon encountering Latino, Asian, Indian, and African-American literary characters without any face-to-face contact with their cultures. Queer writers and writers with disabilities are not a routine focus of literature courses here, and few representatives of these groups appear in the stereotypes of American culture students receive in the media. My job then, began with introducing students to literature that would broaden their perception of the United States.

I called my syllabus *The Contemporary American Canon: Reading and Writing in America*, and took a survey approach, placing these writers on equal footing within the scope of the course. I divided the curriculum into short-stories, novels, and creative non-fiction. The short-story unit included William

Faulkner, whom the class was familiar with, as well as James Baldwin, Eudora Welty, and Mary Gaitskill, among others. This selection of writers allowed us to draw multiple comparisons, using Faulkner as a springboard: portrayals of black men in Faulkner's "That Evening Sun" and Baldwin's "Sony's Blues," speech patterns of the American South used by the Compson family and by Welty's protagonists in "The Petrified Man," and the agency of a black prostitute in turn of the century Mississippi versus her white middleclass counterpart in 1980s New York City. Using Faulkner as a jumping-off point allowed students to consider an author with whom they were already familiar in a new light, showed him as a member of a diverse group rather than of the majority, and made the writers presented alongside him seem more accessible. By starting the course with discussions of everything from race to language to sexual agency, students were given to understand that diversity takes many forms.

Class started with each student offering an impression or question about some aspect of the day's reading. If someone said, "I liked the way Baldwin incorporates music into his characters' lives," I might respond with, "How does music reflect the cultural background of the characters?" This was my chance to encourage individual thoughts and reactions, to expand on observations, and to ensure that diversity had a place in the understanding students were busy developing of these fresh texts. The discussion format created a balance between the teacher-centered classrooms students were used to, and the participation which, though difficult for some, was required and even graded.

I followed the full class discussion with group work. After their first session in groups, I asked my students whether they had experienced group work before, and if so, whether it happened often. All twenty seven of them said no, that they had never worked in groups during a class, that doing so felt strange to begin with, but that it was pleasant nonetheless. This surprised me since group work had been a mainstay of my education starting in first grade. I based the size of my

groups upon the purpose of the activity – the importance of hearing numerous opinions versus the need for smaller, more intimate discussions. Groups usually ranged between three and six people, who were given approximately twenty five minutes to complete a task, often answering between seven and a dozen questions. Here is a sample of the questions I designed for a group session during the short-story unit:

Create a cause and effect synopsis of the story. Example: Nancy went to stay with the Compsons because she was afraid of Jesus etc.

Nancy's presence exposes the negative aspects and the fears of her neighbors, both black and white. Consider the people she comes in contact with and make a list of their responses to her, both conscious and subconscious.

Both Nancy in "That Evening Son," and Stephanie in Gaitskill's "Trying to be," are prostitutes, but the two characters are written in drastically different manners. Make a list of the differences between the two tones and perspectives. How do these different perspectives affect our readings of the two women? Explain.

In "The Petrified Man," why is the beauty parlor important as a setting?

In the spirit of the course, I took care to recognize that learning styles too vary widely. I made a point of creating different types of group activities, using free-writes and structured prompts, and forcing students to join groups with those they had not worked with before. I will admit that I had been apprehensive about whether students would engage or even understand the purpose of group work without prompting and guidance. But while the process was new to them, they immediately caught on, interacting with the material and generating ideas as if group work came naturally. Here too I responded to their observations, asking questions like, "How do these two drastically different prostitutes reflect their respective eras?" Having begun analyzing the texts, students were better prepared to delve more deeply into the issues at hand through the use of weekly response papers, which were particularly necessary once we progressed to longer works.

For the novel portion of the course I chose *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith. It was a risky choice, partly because it was long and forced me to limit the novel unit to one text, and partly because Smith, originally from Britain and now teaching in the States, is not identified as an American writer. But I felt that the content of the book won out. The novel, centered around a bi-racial family in a university town, not only depicts a wide range of cultural and academic issues in America, but also includes a protagonist who, being British, offers an outsider's perspective on life in the States. For the studying of *On Beauty*, the tools I found most useful were presentations, exploratory writing prompts, and portions of the audio book played aloud in class.

For the purpose of highlighting important themes, I selected presentation topics that offered students a clearer understanding of the art and culture explored in Smith's text. These included the development of rap music, the American artist Edward Hopper, and the pantoum, an uncommon poetic form (Smith 152-153). The audio and visual components of these presentations not only strengthened the students' sense of these aspects of culture, but also caused them to position the novel in a larger context, as a reflection of the time and place in which it is set. Like the discussions, presentations encouraged a diverse group of voices, since no one was allowed to present more than once. During these 15-minute intervals I adopted the role of attentive scholar, partly to encourage the presenter, but mostly to make it clear that even I, the sole American in the room, still had much to learn of my own culture.

In contrast, I treated the audio segments of *On Beauty* as my unique presentation to the class. My America, like that of Smith's novel, boasts a plethora of accents: Southern, African-American, Bostonian, collegiate, and the ambiguous, standard American accent used by news-anchors, among others. I played segments of the book that included Kiki's Florida drawl, Howard's upper-class English delivery, and Zora's valley girl shout. I asked students to note the difference between



Levi's standard inner-city black accent, and another, more sing-song African-American voice. I was careful to remind my class that these audio clips did not represent the speech of all Floridians, black people, or Bostonians, but that they did allow us to put unique voice qualities alongside the character descriptions offered in the text. Though I encourage students to draw their own conclusions about material presented to them, I felt it worthwhile to end my audio presentation with a summing up of my own. "These characters are all from the same family," I said. "Yet they all speak differently, and their accents, to some extent, reflect their cultural identities within America." This revelation may have meant more to some listeners than to others, but my goal of exposing them all to this vocal multiplicity had been achieved.

While the presentations, listening, and discussions created a broader scope in which to understand *On Beauty*, the writing prompts encouraged students to delve deeper, to compare it with other works we had read, and even to connect it with personal experience. Here are some of the prompts I created:

Consider the central role music plays in Levi Belsey's life and identity, and respond by writing about your own connection to music.

This book includes a number of outsiders: Carl, Kiki, Howard, and Levi, among others. Write about the ways in which education and culture place them on the fringes.

Write a pantoum. (I came up with this last prompt in response to that day's student presentation on pantoums.)

As in the case of group work, students engaged readily with the writing assignments, sometimes using the suggested prompts, at other times choosing their own topics. Connecting literature with personal experience was particularly popular, as was the theme of music in general. My feedback contained suggestions as to how to make these two-page papers more critical, more specific, or, most often, how to deepen the observations on the page. "Your paper has convinced me that Levi is an outsider within his community," I might write. "But

how and why? What aspects of the African-American identity he has adopted make him seem out of place in an all-white neighborhood?" Weekly peer reviews, which involved students reading and critiquing each other's work, not only provided another critical perspective on their own writing, but exposed them to each other's opinions on such sensitive issues as race, class, and family relationships. The guidelines for critiquing included giving academic observations. The revision process that followed required them to implement my comments and those of their peers. The grading reflected the importance of students interacting coherently, critically, and thoughtfully, with the text at hand.

The creative non-fiction unit came at the end of the course, and began with Alice Sebold's memoir *Lucky*. This text, like *On Beauty*, was a carefully calculated choice. My preference would have been Augusten Burroughs's *Running with Scissors*, which would have offered a fascinating look at the more dysfunctional side of upper middle-class America, and a chance to consider emotional disability as one more state of diversity. However, I planned to follow the memoir with a few short essays by David Sedaris, and so chose a female perspective over that of an additional gay white male. It was a reasonable enough decision, but carried its own complexities.

Though I had chosen *Lucky* for its point of view, I would have done well to consider more carefully, in advance, how it would be received. *Lucky* recounts the story of Sebold's rape at eighteen, the legal proceedings that followed, and her own emotional recovery. Certainly, *Lucky* was the rawest, least academic text we would read during the semester. The narrative begins with a methodical account of the rape and its immediate aftermath, delivered in a tone devoid of emotion. Valuable though this first-person account was in understanding the perspective of a rape victim, I realized, upon walking into a sea of stunned faces on the first day of the discussion, that I should have prefaced the reading by assessing my students' level of comfort with the subject, and

included some free-writing (not to be turned in) on rape. In response to the consensus that chapter one had been a disturbing, even painful read, I did what I could to soften the impact, thanking students for having taken on this unsettling material, and acknowledging that rape is, for both men and women, often a highly charged, deeply sensitive topic. I asked that we all listen actively to each other during this discussion, and take special care to respect each other's words. It felt like too little too late, but it was the best I could do.

*Lucky* invited the class, in group work and in writing, to consider various stereotypes held about rapists and rape victims. In discussing stereotypes I cautioned students against broad generalizations. In one instance a male student observed, in a mild enough tone, that in comparing Sebold with the female characters in *On Beauty*, it appeared that women carry significant amounts of anger. Knowing that a judgmental response would serve little purpose, I advised him against making blanket statements about groups of individuals, adding that all academic assertions must be grounded in evidence, and that such broad claims are often difficult to prove. Another, perhaps better option, would have been to ask him to clarify the difference between women in life and women in literature. I then opened the floor for discussion. I also asked students to compare their own college experience to Sebold's, and whether any aspect of hers came as a surprise.

In a more academic vein, I asked students to compare the neutral tone of the first chapter to the warmer one Sebold employs throughout the rest of the memoir. In groups they considered why she relates the story of the sexual assault, the importance of bringing such narratives to public attention, and the purpose of reading personal accounts of traumatic events. The class discussed the differences between the fiction and non-fiction we had read thus far, and weighed the benefits of writing of one's own experiences versus a novel that tells a similar story. This academic examination of the text created a balance with the more personal approach we had taken at

first. In addition, we could now add the multiplicity of narrative forms to the list of characteristics that make for a diverse body of literature.

I spent little time on David Sedaris, but the class's response to the themes in his writing surprised me. Back in November, I had played the audio version of "Santa Land Diaries," Sedaris's account of working at Macy's in New York City as an elf during the Christmas season. It was the week following American Thanksgiving, and I had explained to the class that this was the time when the Christmas rush officially started in the States. They had laughed and enjoyed themselves while listening to this humorous essay, and I felt optimistic about teaching more of Sedaris's work.

Now, in the final weeks of the spring semester, I chose "Go Carolina," and "Giant Dreams, Midget Abilities," both of which appear in *Me Talk Pretty One Day*. Even though, or perhaps particularly, because Sedaris is not treated specifically as a gay writer, I wanted my students to examine the issue of gayness in his text. I asked them to consider the problematic nature of the infraction he commits in the course of "Giant Dreams, Midget Abilities," singing a Chevrolet jingle in the style of Billie Holiday in front of his guitar teacher. Students acknowledged that the singing had angered the guitar teacher, that Sedaris had been shut down as an artist by this anger, but were reluctant to address the issue of Sedaris's having outed himself as gay. Similarly, in "Go Carolina," where the character's lisp refers directly to his being pegged as a future homosexual of America, my students ignored the theme. We had discussed gay rights earlier on in the year, and the text clearly alluded to Sedaris's gayness as the source of his educational marginalization, but students continued to shy away from it even when in my summing up I addressed gayness directly. In the end I concluded that their discomfort must result from the newness of discussing gay issues in a classroom setting. Like Sedaris, my students had been informed by the education they had received within a unique cultural context. I may not have persuaded them into

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a discussion of queerness, but I had provided them exposure to the concept, the first and most essential step.

As I have shown in this paper, considering the diversity of American literary voices is crucial to understanding the fabric of America's multi-racial and ever-changing population. Rather than conceiving of the United States as a melting pot, in which the voices of many lands are homogenized, examining diversity speaks to the experience of individuals who, though they inhabit the same country, and identify as Americans, hail from widely different points of view as women, African-Americans, Caucasians, and LGBT people, to name a few. As twenty-first century readers, it is our obligation to reread already canonical writers, such as James Baldwin and William Faulkner, focusing on the gender, class, and race relations prevalent in their work. The necessity of a multi-cultural approach to literature may not, at first, seem apparent to students, but becomes clearer when they are encouraged to parallel their reading with their unique experiences and their understanding of American life.

For any of us planning to teach such a course, it is important to remember that the first step in educating anyone about diversity is exposure. To this end, it is necessary to examine texts in a wide range of styles, and written from differing, even conflicting perspectives. To make use of these works in an environment where emphasizing minority voices is not a usual theme, guidance from the instructor is essential. Thus, it is best to employ an equally diverse range of activities and methods, providing a more hands-on classroom experience, and respecting our students' varied learning styles. Tools such as group-work based on a series of questions, presentations, and audio-visual aids, provide in depth access to the material at hand, and allow students to examine texts from different angles. Although it is necessary, given the importance of clear instructor-student boundaries, to limit the personal insights that we impart regarding our individual cultures, experiences of gender, or sexual orientations, some anecdotes, such as my references to American Thanksgiving,

Mills College, and my childhood, are memorable and of interest. Active listening is also a must as it gives students the sense that their points of view on culture and literature are of value, and allows them to speak more freely. The chance to offer input into the course, by voting on which novel to cut if time is running short, provides students with agency, especially under the Polish university system, in which they do not choose their own classes. While student responses are essential to such a course, we need not be afraid of front-loading the discussions with our own interpretations as to how a given text expresses diversity. In the case of texts which explore sensitive issues such as rape or gay rights, we must offer scaffolding before presenting them, and create a safe space for discussion which discourages stereotyping and promotes active listening. Most importantly, we must model the behavior and language we expect from our students.

In response to exposure and guidance comes the third step, engagement, which is the job of the students. As instructors, we must remember that we do not bear responsibility for the conclusions students draw about the material we assign, or for their personal development. With our help, the chances of their responding favorably and insightfully to a diverse palate of work are great. But we must also take into account that participants will approach the course at their own individual levels of tolerance, experience, and interest. To some, we will introduce diversity as a fresh, even obscure concept. To others, the language we use in talking about the subject will iterate ideas and experiences of their own. To all, the course will promise a rich and multi-layered adventure.

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# LANGUAGE ACQUISITION



## **Cognitive appeal as a criterion in the choice of teaching materials**

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### **Abstract**

The paper presents an attempt to provide a criterion for potentially useful materials in second-language teaching. That criterion is “cognitive appeal”, a notion introduced by Ryszard Wenzel in *The Education of a Language Teacher*, characterising those texts that are attractive for students because of a chance to expand their cognitive structures or owing to an artistic experience. The presence or absence of this feature is analysed on three texts and lessons conducted with their use.

The texts are Robert Frost’s “Stopping by woods on a snowy evening”, Alan Seeger’s “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”. The conclusion of the discussion is that, for a poem to be potentially good teaching material, it should not only provide an opportunity for artistic experience and in this way bear the feature of cognitive appeal but its lexical and structural content should be well adopted to suit the level of English that learners represent.

### **Key words**

cognitive appeal, cognitive structure, lexical content, structural content

Whenever the question of the choice of texts to be used in the classroom is concerned, the problem arises as to the usefulness of texts such as poems as teaching materials, with the likely conclusion that more popular materials like song

lyrics are more suitable, as students can become more gripped by tasks that involve texts they would like to analyse anyway because of their greater accessibility and popularity.

In order to see if it really is impossible to grip students' attention and introduce interesting material through poetry rather than pop songs, the notion of cognitive appeal should be introduced. According to Wenzel (2001: 46), it is "[...] a focus on the content and the topic of expression, so that the learner is genuinely involved in the meaning of what is said and listened to, and thanks to that learns new things. This is connected with an appeal to and a change of the cognitive structures of the learner." We might therefore describe it as a particular quality of a text that makes it intellectually appealing to potential students. The reasons for this appeal can be numerous, such as being humorous, surprising, connected with their current problems, shocking or dealing with a taboo topic, e.g. bodily functions or sex. However, there can be one other reason and it concerns an individual's mental needs, especially the need to know and understand the world and its aspects better by gaining more knowledge or by artistic experience.

Intellectual interests and artistic sensitivity will obviously vary individually, but on the whole it is possible to divide most teaching materials into those through which our perception of the world develops (because of their educational quality or because of the artistic experience that they give the reader) and those that utilise the existing knowledge of the world as it is by providing linguistic input perfectly familiar from the experience in the first language in the context of the second language, such as travelling, business, health, leisure etc.

While the kind of appeal that the latter case might have may be instances when the material is humorous or dealing with a taboo topic, the former is an example of cognitive appeal. Rychło (2007: 265) refers to it as "[...] the phenomenon in which language is specially addressed to exert influence upon the process of knowing by being attractive to the mind". This refers to the quality of a text, be it a teaching material or any

other text, when it is attractive because of giving more knowledge or artistic experience to the reader.

The question that remains is what literature could do both: present an opportunity for true artistic experience and serve as a valuable teaching material. The answer to the question might be illustrated by the comparison of an actual example of a discussion of three different materials conducted in a high school in classes of third and second graders; one of them being “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost, another: “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” by Alan Seeger and the last one: “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe.

The discussion of the poem by Robert Frost started by reading the text with the students and ensuring that the surface meaning of the poem was completely clear to all of them. The text goes as follows:

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.  
(Frost 1966: 194)

Then such issues were raised as the possible reference to the owner of the woods (since his house is in the village), the

significance of the time of the year (winter being the end of the cycle of life), the surprising fact of a snowy evening as being characterised by darkness, and the question of why the forest is so attractive as a place of repose. The few questions mentioned led to a lively discussion with all kinds of possible ideas resulting in the conclusion that the woods might stand for death and the owner of the woods might be a metaphor for God.

The important features of this poem that were crucial for the success of the lesson were most probably such facts as the poem's structural and lexical simplicity combined with the comparatively easily detectable existence of a meaning beyond the surface. The students could fairly easily notice the fact that such meaning is there because of the unexpected representation of the snowy forest as dark rather than bright and the surprising need of the lyrical ego to stay for a rest in the woods rather than to go home.

On the whole, because of the textual simplicity, the poem is accessible to students on various levels of English. Moreover, thanks to this, they can focus on looking beyond the surface and discover meanings that they would not have guessed at the first reading. As a result, high-school students, most of whom had never even heard the name of Robert Frost before, found themselves genuinely drawn into an authentic exchange of ideas that enabled them to appreciate a piece of poetry and thus expand their cognitive structures. Needless to say, this poem is an example of cognitive appeal at its best.

The next text on which a lesson was based was "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" by Alan Seeger, written shortly before his death in 1916. The text goes as follows:

I have a rendezvous with Death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple-blossoms fill the air -  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath -  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow-flowers appear.  
God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear...  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.  
(Seeger 2001: 98)

The key factor in discussing this poem was, first, to analyse various aspects that would eventually lead the students to the discovery of the reference that the “Rendezvous” has and, only after the discussion has been completed, share with them some information on the context in which the poem was written; namely, the fact that it was written during the First World War, by a 28-year-old American volunteer, who died shortly after writing it. Interesting as these facts may be, the whole discussion bore far more significance because of the fact that the students first discovered the reference to death and war in the poem and additionally to the hopes and dreams of the lyrical ego; and gaining the information about the facts concerning the writing of the poem in a way only confirmed their discoveries.

Needless to say, the class devoted to this poem was very successful, and the students, quite moved by the poem, joined in a lively discussion. As in the poem by Robert Frost, the key factors here must have been the combination of fairly accessible language, preceded by the explanation of the more

difficult lexical items, with a gripping theme which the students could explore and discover on their own. With the help of a few hints like: “What does ‘disputed barricade’ mean?”, or “What is ‘a scarred slope of battered hill?’”, or “Why do you think he mentions ‘a flaming town?’”, they fairly soon discovered the reference to the battlefield and war. That reference was only further confirmed by the image of the uncertainty of the time of death because of the last stanza, where it is mentioned that it may come or “pass him still”.

Additionally, the students’ attention was quite gripped when the analysis moved to the third stanza, and they came to realise that the author referred there to physical love. The giggles were soon enough stifled, though, when they started to look at the poem as a whole and saw the full contrast between the expectation of death and the acceptance of meeting it instead of a lover. When, in the final discussion, some facts from the life of Alan Seeger were given, students were on the whole fully involved in the discussion of the poem and it can be safely concluded that it gave them true artistic experience. Therefore, this particular poem could also be ascribed the feature of cognitive appeal.

The last text to be discussed is a poem which was given to the students after the success of Seeger’s “I Have a Rendezvous with Death” and it was “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe. The text is presented below:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door  
“Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door—  
Only this, and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor  
Eagerly I wished the morrow; vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—



For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore-  
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain  
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;  
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating,  
“some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door-  
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door;-  
This it is, and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,  
„Sir,” said I, „or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;  
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,  
That I scarce was sure I heard you”- here I opened wide the door;-  
Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,  
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortals ever dared to dream before;  
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,  
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, “Lenore!”  
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, “Lenore!”-  
Merely this, and nothing more

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.  
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice:  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore-  
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore;-  
’Tis the wind and nothing more.”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore;  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door-  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door-  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore.  
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven

Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly shore-  
 Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"  
 Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
 Though its answer little meaning- little relevancy bore;  
 For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
 Ever yet was blest with seeing bird above his chamber door-  
 Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
 With such name as "Nevermore."

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only  
 That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.  
 Nothing further then he uttered- not a feather then he fluttered-  
 Till I scarcely more than muttered, "other friends have flown before-  
 On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."  
 Then the bird said, "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,  
 "Doubtless," said I, „what it utters is its only stock and store,  
 Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster  
 Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore-  
 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore  
 Of 'Never- nevermore'."

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,  
 Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;  
 Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking  
 Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore-  
 What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore  
 Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing  
 To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;  
 This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining  
 On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamplight gloated o'er,  
 But whose velvet violet lining with the lamplight gloating o'er,  
 She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then methought the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer  
Swung by Seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor  
“Wretch,” I cried, „thy God hath lent thee- by these angels he hath sent  
Respite- respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore!  
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!- prophet still, if bird or devil  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-  
On this home by horror haunted- tell me truly, I implore-  
Is there- is there balm in Gilead?- tell me- tell me, I implore  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil- prophet still, if bird or devil  
By that Heaven that bends above us- by that God we both adore-  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore-  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend,” I shrieked, upstarting-  
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!  
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!  
Leave my loneliness unbroken!- quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”  
Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting  
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;  
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,  
And the lamplight o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted- nevermore!

Even though “The Raven” included the same themes as “I Have a Rendezvous with Death”, that is love and death, and although there was also a clear riddle for the students to discover something, namely, what mystery the raven stood for, and in spite of the horror-film mood in which it was written,

this class was far from being successful. The students were soon enough discouraged by the difficulty of the vocabulary when they saw words like: 'quaint', 'lore', or 'surcease' or unusual structures like 'there came a tapping'. In this case the lexical and structural content was simply too difficult to give them a chance for true enjoyment of the poem.

Furthermore, the length of the poem was an additional drawback, since students saw clearly that in order to see the message hidden behind the surface, they would have to wade through eighteen stanzas which would be just as difficult. One last thing that probably led to the lack of success of this class was the fact that a large part of the appeal of this poem is its rhythm, which envelops the reader in a mysterious atmosphere and feeds the images of darkness broken by the dying fire in the fireplace. The students taking part in this class could not have enjoyed this rhythm, as well as the dream-like melody that it created, since in order to notice it, one should read through the text (either aloud or to him/herself) fairly smoothly with confidence as to the pronunciation of individual vocabulary items. Not knowing too many words made it impossible for the students to be drawn in by the poem in this respect.

Taking all these factors into consideration, one can easily see that the lesson conducted with the use of this poem would be a failure in spite of its relative simplicity as to the content and, in the opinion of the present author, true attractiveness as far as its content and form are concerned. However, the most important conclusion which must be drawn from the experience of conducting these classes is of a more general nature. When defining cognitive appeal of a teaching material, it is necessary to look not only at the "objective" value of the text concerned, together with the state of knowledge of the students prior to the exposure to this teaching material (Rychło 2008: 26), but also at the structural and lexical content of the material in relation to the level of English which the students represent within this sphere.

The overall point of choosing materials with cognitive appeal is to let them draw students into exploring them for the sake of themselves and not because the teacher assigns them. If a text is too difficult, students may lose enjoyment. If it is too easy, on the other hand, it may never teach them anything, as it is too simple as far as its content is concerned and may not draw their attention in the first place, and because of that will not bear the feature of cognitive appeal.

There remains another problem that comes to mind and it is a practical one: what potential lies in such materials? The most likely answer is obviously that they should be treated as stimulus material for a speaking activity. The discussion of the literary significance has a chance of becoming authentic as long as students become truly involved and cognitive appeal has a chance of triggering their interest. However, such texts could also be easily used as materials for teaching any aspect of grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation, depending on the structural and lexical content of the text discussed. Whichever aspect of English is taught, its learning becomes more effective if it involves an authentic artistic experience, analogous to the reading of poetry in the mother tongue. Furthermore, it may become even more enjoyable, since being part of an English lesson it can be seen more like a break in the routine, while discussing similar poems during Polish lessons is a regular course of events. The success of teaching any aspect of English through such materials is further strengthened by the fact that any change in the cognitive structure is one of the most important circumstances in triggering long-term memory (Wenzel 2001: 37–38) and can consequently lead to remembering the content of such material much better.

All in all, it is possible to make a direct reference between the notion of cognitive appeal and the success of a text as a potential teaching material. However, if a text to be used in teaching combines relative (i.e. matched with a particular level of English) difficulty with something to be discovered in or beyond the text, it becomes even more valuable as a potential teaching material. Nevertheless, the teacher must be careful

and not choose materials which are too difficult as far as the structural or lexical content is concerned as then a potentially interesting text may simply cease to be truly enjoyable.

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## REVIEWS





***“Home Fiction”: Narrating Gendered Space  
in Anita Desai’s and Shashi Deshpande’s Novels***  
**by Ellen Denel-Janic**

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*“Home Fiction”: Narrating Gendered Space in Anita Desai’s and Shashi Deshpande’s Novels* is a recently published dissertation by Ellen Dengel-Janic in which it is argued that the two novelists not only engage their writings with the concepts of “home”, “family”, or “the private” but they also participate in the process of redefinition of national identity in a postcolonial context. The author uses the term “home fiction” to define “a frame for a literary representation of women’s situatedness in the gendered space of home” (2011: 3). In addition, the concept of “home” is aligned with that of the “the nation” due to the impact of the liberation ideology proposed by the Nationalist Movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its prevailing influence on Indian political and social life, and on developments in the Indian novel in English as well.

Dengel-Janic puts forward the argument that Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have vitally contributed to the development of the novelistic genre by depicting female protagonists located in – or in fact dislocated from – their home settings. Both novelists present female protagonists looking for identities in personal, gender and also national terms. In addition, both writers launch a debate over the nationalist discourse of the gendered space which locates women exclusively in the realm of the private, namely: “home”.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are not merely telling private stories but, by engaging with the concepts of 'home', 'family' and 'the private'; they simultaneously re-think the allegedly more significant topics of national history and the reconstruction of cultural identity in the postcolonial context. Therefore, what I call 'home fiction' is far from narrow in terms of subject-matter or thematic concern. (p. 3)

An analysis of "*Home Fiction*" clearly requires an interdisciplinary approach which would offer insight into the subject matter from at least a dual perspective, of sociology and of literary studies. For that reason, the author proposes multiple methodological approaches to the notion in question. Firstly, Dengel-Janic utilizes Henri Lefebvre's dialectic theory of space, in the light of which "home" is conceptualized by the subjects and thus effectively produced by social practices. Secondly, the author refers to Judith Butler's concept of performativity which allows social roles to be defined on the basis of a series of actions /performance and yet leaves room for an ongoing process of the re-definition of those roles. Since the problem in question is women's location, the author resorts to Sherry Ortner who maintains that spaces such as "the home" are semantically associated with the female, whereas the public realm is with the male. In addition, there is a hierarchical dependency between those two realms, with the male/public being dominant over the female/private one. The author proposes two ways of looking at the space in the analysis of literary texts. An analysis of discursive inscriptions of space from a gendered perspective is followed by a discussion of literary strategies which depict these discursive locations of women. In order to carry out this task, the author firstly determines how space is represented in the literary texts in the narratological sense and secondly, she investigates the manner in which spatial arrangements influence the gender norms or gender-roles ideology presented in the novels in question.

*“Home Fiction”* is divided into five parts. In the first one, the author presents the symbolism of Mother India from a historical perspective. In the second part, five Indian novels in English are analyzed in relation to the diachronic development of *“Home Fiction”*, defined as an independent novelistic genre. The third and fourth parts contain in-depth analyses of the novels by Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande respectively, with a focus on the location of women in gendered spaces. The last part offers a brief outlook on the challenges and the prospects for the development of “home fiction” in the future.

The origins of the symbolism of Mother India and its parallel connection with the gendered image of the nation, which is the subject matter of the first chapter, date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of the Indian Social Reform Movement whose aim was to prepare the ideological ground for the social changes after the liberation then yet to come. The nationalists felt the need to redefine the role of women in the new Indian society in order to revive Hindu traditional values which would put women/mothers, home and the nation/India in one line. This allowed women to be raised to the status of divinity and thus assume a highly specific ideological position. Denel-Janic refers to the works of Mahatma Gandhi in which he clearly defined women’s role in the nationalist movement, namely: “women’s role in the struggle for independence was by attaining purity, chastity and by spinning the wheel at home” (2011: 33). That restricted the political empowerment of Indian women virtually to the home, which Homi Bhabha referred to as “ideological limitation of women as makers of the nation and tradition”. Yet Dengel-Janic maintains that even such a limited emancipation in fact defined the political role of women in a sufficiently clear manner to path the way to a destabilization of the rigid, binary opposition between the private/ the female and the public / the male in the future.

In the second chapter, the author outlines briefly the development of home fiction defined as a novelistic genre. Five novels dating from 1864–1938 have been chosen to illustrate

the fact that home fiction is neither a recent nor a homogenous phenomenon. By means of a diachronic approach the author presents “the ongoing process of re-definition and re-positioning of women in the domestic space” (2011: 41). The author concentrates on an analysis of the space settings in those novels to provide evidence of “instances in which transgressions and dissent against colonial or nationalist discourse becomes visible through spatial arrangements and thus they help to conceptualize women’s roles beyond mere stereotypes”. The author underlines however, that pre-independence Indian literature in English manifests some ambiguity towards women’s representation accompanied with a very subtle unsettling of the binary oppositions of male/female and public/private respectively. The author has chosen five different novels in which the main female protagonist is placed in different spatial situations and by labeling them proposes her own typology of female protagonists. Thus we can encounter a romantic hero who is trapped in an unhappy marriage (B. Chatterjee, *Rajmohan’s Wife*), a New Indian Woman who as a romantic hero longs for personal liberation, (*The Story of a Hindu Life* by Krupabai Sattianadhan), the sacrificing woman who finds room for romantic love despite a constraining social context. (C. Sorabji’s *Love and Life behind the Purdah*), a female protagonist on the verge of both tradition and modernity is depicted in Narayan’s *Dark Room*, whereas a group of women from a fictional village in India – a collective protagonist of the novel – illustrate the social and ideological changes that take place in the country.

In the third and the fourth chapters, detailed analyses of the novels by Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande chosen by Dengel-Janic are presented. The focus of the analyses is on the representations of home and female protagonists located (or dislocated for that matter) from space settings in relation to feminist discourse which remains in sharp contrast to nationalist independence ideology. Dengel-Janic chose three novels by Anita Desai to depict an ideologically fraught concept

of home: a middle-aged wife, Sati, from *Where Shall We Go This Summer*; a retired teacher, Nanda, from *Fire on the Mountain*; and, Bim, a history teacher from *Clear Light of Day*. Such a choice of female protagonists is to illustrate the author's thesis that Desai employs three motifs: of exile and separation and of what Dengel-Janic names "unhomely homes" to express the writer's critique towards the nationalist discourse imposing on women gendered positions in the society. Sati decides on a temporary separation from her family to consider the possibility of not giving birth to her fifth child, which allegedly expresses Desai's dissent against the archetypal image of nurturing and life-giving Mother India. The anti-nationalist critique is sustained in the next novel in which Nanda chooses separation from her family in an "unhomely" environment of a haunted house which will become the backdrop for scenes of violence, rape and murder. Dengel-Janic claims that on the symbolic level those scenes reveal the authorial commentary on nationalist gendered discourse. *Clear Light of Day* presents a different approach to the gendered space setting as in this novel Anita Desai chooses the narrative technique of the multiple point of view to depict the image of the disintegrated home. It is not the female protagonists now who escape from home, but home as a ideological notion escapes any rigid conceptualizations and is no longer the centre of female activity.

Dengel-Janic carries out a similarly detailed analysis in respect of the chosen novels by Shashi Deshpande: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* with the female doctor, Saru; *That Long Silence* and the house wife narrator as well as focalizer – Jaya; finally, *A Matter of Time* presents a multifocal narration which juxtaposes female and male points of view on the concept of home. *The Dark Holds No Terrors* echoes the issue of the "unhomely home" settings which feminist writers deal with in the process of transgressing gendered space. The main protagonist Saru has to deal with her personal trauma, namely: domestic rape. Deshpande develops an anti-patriarchal and antinationalist discourse through a present-

ation of the sensitive issue of domestic rape and violence “in an experimental and post-modern mode of writing”, (2011: 150). In *That Long Silence*, which is a fictional autobiography, Deshpande presents a woman who, in accordance with nationalist discourse, is obedient, self-sacrificing and confined to the exclusively domestic realm and yet that woman attains her personal freedom through the process of writing her own autobiography. Dengel-Janic underlines an open critique of the nationalist discourse of the gendered space and social roles in this novel. *A Matter of Time* seems to be the most complex novel in terms of its home space setting and its impact on a female’s location within a society. The technique of a multiple focalization is employed there, and thus the effect of the fragmented narration and space setting is achieved. Each character expresses her own point of view on family and home through a personal dialogue with the normative cultural concepts on social roles that originate in the religious scriptures, e.g. Upanishads. This in turn challenges not only the nationalist, patriarchal discourse but the Hindu tradition; in this way she undermines the belief that there is one dominant, cultural discourse on the family, femininity and home.

In the last chapter Dengel-Janic suggests that home fiction has undergone further transformations and departed from a mere focus on the issues of gendered space and female identity. The present economic and political situation all over the world poses challenges to young women writers who have to deal with the current topics such as the themes of Hindu Rights and the Fundamentalist Fraction of the nationalist discourse (e.g.: Githa Harikharam in *Times of Siege*); the diasporic home and the globalization (Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss*) or the home setting of not only middle class but of other milieus and across social castes as well (Manu Kapur in *Joint Family*).

In her dissertation, Ellen Dengel-Janic brilliantly executes the thesis of her study, outlined in the introduction, namely: how Desai and Deshpande have tapped the development of

home fiction. The work offers a series of sensitive and in-depth analyses of Indian novels in English across the centuries. Although not free from imperfections, the work offers numerous inspirations for further research. There are at least three topics that call for further development namely: the definition of home fiction as a genre, the origins of the marginalized position of women in Indian society and finally, further analysis of literary texts by Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

The author uses the term “home fiction” which has been defined as a novelistic genre. However, the definition has only been implied through the examples of Indian novels in English, on the basis of which one could deduce that “novelistic genre of home fiction” pertains to novels featuring: a) female protagonists in the pursuit of their identity which stands in sharp contrast to nationalist, social roles; b) the home space setting depicted in a way that undermines an idealistic image of home; c) a set of parallels – women / guardian deities, home / the country, the family / the nation. Dengel-Janic in fact groups the novels according to thematic congruence but omits an analysis of the novels from a structural or descriptive point of view. It would, therefore, be more accurate to consider the term as a novelistic sub-type rather than a separate genre. It is the feminist, anti-patriarchal ideology that underlies the plots of the novels that differentiates them from other Indian novels, not the revolutionary literary devices nor their forms.

“*Home fiction*” deals with women’s position and their role within Indian society which is expressed in the space setting in the literary texts. The author claims that the motifs of space settings stem from the ideology of the national liberation movement that dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> C. Dengel-Janic maintains that the political programme of that movement limited women’s roles within Indian society to those of mothers or guardian deities in domestic environments. As a result, Indian women were marginalized and excluded from public life. Hard as it may seem to challenge the argument of the

marginalized position of Indian women, tracing the origins of this situation to the liberation movement of 200 years ago may result in too narrow a perception of the problem. Women's position in society could also be regarded from the point of view of religious scriptures that are 2000 years old, e.g. Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita – a part of the Mahabharata which regulates social norms concerning women's social roles; or the backdrop of more recent history namely the 15<sup>th</sup> / 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, during which the position of women was established. Such a perspective sets the feminist debate in a much wider, historical context. The reference to religious scriptures has been noticed by Dengel-Janic herself in her analysis of Desai's and Deshpande's novels and is definitely well worth a more profound study.

Finally, the third inspiration comes from a reading of the analysis of the literary texts by Desai and Deshpande. As mentioned before, the author presents sensitive and profound textual analyses that focus on the female characters depicted against the backdrop of the home motif. At present, each analysis is a separate entity and this calls for a more synthetic approach that would allow to draw conclusions about literary devices or themes treated by the two writers in question. Dengel-Janic chose *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai and *A Matter of Time* by Shashi Deshpande for her analysis – those two novels make use of the multiple focalization technique and thus the effect achieved is the image of the disintegrated home. In the case of *Clear Light of Day* the disintegrated home is additionally strengthened by the historical background, namely: the Partition of 1947; whereas in *A Matter of Time* the process of home disintegration is presented through the erosion of the social roles that originate in religious values. Similarly, two other novels deserve a comparative analysis; *Where Shall We Go This Summer* discusses the problem of an exile undertaken by the protagonist with a view to redefining her female identity, whereas *That Long Silence* depicts a female protagonist removed from her everyday routines – so in a sense exercising her personal exile – who overcomes the



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crisis through the act of creative writing of an autobiography. The remaining novels *Fire on the Mountain* and *The Dark Holds No Terrors* both deal with the problem of violence towards women and thus might provide excellent material for comparative analyses. These are a few suggestions about how to resolve the creative tension and anticipation that the work by Dengel-Janic evokes in the reader.

The work by Ellen Dengel-Janic published in 2011 by Konigshausen & Neumann in Germany vitally contributes to the development of feminist studies, literary studies on the Indian Novel in English, and more specifically studies on Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

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## INTERVIEWS



## **Interview with Alma Martinez**

GRZEGORZ WELIZAROWICZ

Alma Martinez is one of the most versatile and respected Chicana/Latina stage, film and television actors working in these milieus today. Discovered by Luis Valdez, founder/artistic director of El Teatro Campesino, one of the most important and dynamic political theater companies of the 1960s and 70s, she made her professional acting debut in the landmark 1978 stage and film productions of *Zoot Suit*. Today, as an Assistant Professor of Theater at Pomona College in Claremont, California, she holds the distinction of being one of the preeminent Chicano Theater practitioners/scholars working in the field today.

Martinez holds a Ph.D. from Stanford University in Directing and Dramatic Criticism, an MFA in Acting from the University of Southern California and, a BA in Drama from Whittier College. She has also studied at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, the prestigious Centro Universitario de Teatro (CUT-UNAM) and with Lee Strasberg, Jerzy Grotowski, Arianne Mnouckine, Augusto Boal and Anna Deveare Smith, among others. Since *Zoot Suit*, she has been Valdez's principal actress in many of his most significant productions including *Zoot Suit* (U.S., Mexico and film version), *Corridos: Tales of Passion and Revolution* (stage and television), *I Don't Have to Show You Any Stinkin' Badges*, *Mummified Deer*, among others. Her publications include "Zoot Suit: Mexico en la imaginación Chican", *Paso de Gato* (Mexican National Theater Journal), Mexico City, Mexico, October 2010, pages 46-48, and the forthcoming, "Pancho Villa's Head: The Mexican Revolution and the Chicano Dramatic Imagination" in *The Mexican*

*Revolution Through the United States Experience* (working title), Smithsonian Scholarly Press, Washington, D.C. Her scholarly research looks at the history and evolution of Chicano and Latin American Popular/political Theater (1965-1976) across the Americas and undertakes a critical comparative analysis of the fundamental ideological dynamics of these distinct yet highly similar transnational theater currents. She is currently completing work on her book manuscript, *Virgin Revolution: Luis Valdez, Augusto Boal and the Chicano and Latin American Popular/political Theatre Impasse, Mexico, 1974*. She was a recipient of a Fulbright Grant in Peru in 2005.

As an actor, Martinez has performed on Broadway, Off Broadway, in regional theaters across the country and on Mexican and European stages. Her films include *Zoot Suit*, *Under Fire*, *Barbarosa*, *Born in East LA*, *Crossing Over* and *Dollie Dearest*, among others. Her work has garnered national and international awards that include; an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature (*The Panama Deception*); the George Foster Peabody Award for Excellence in Television (*Corridos; Tales of Passion & Revolution*); Runner-up Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary, Sundance Film Festival (*Maria's Story*); Grand Coral Award, Havana Film Festival (*Born in East L.A.*); Golden Globe nomination for Best Motion Picture Comedy/Musical (*Zoot Suit*) and a Back Stage "Beverly Garland" nomination for her work in Valdez's *Mummified Deer*. Her current films, scheduled for release in 2012, include *Cristeros* with Andy Garcia and Peter O'Toole, *Strike One* with Danny Trejo and the dramatic short *Loncheros*.

In 2010, Martinez initiated a collaboration that brought Luis Valdez's play *Zoot Suit* to the National Theater Company of Mexico. With Valdez directing, the play received wide public and critical acclaim and in 2011 the Association of Theater Journalists voted *Zoot Suit* the "Best Mexican Musical" of the year. This is the first Chicano (non-Mexican) play ever to receive this award. Martinez served as U.S. – Mexico Project Coordinator and also performed.

Alma Martinez was born in Monclova, Coahuila, Mexico and immigrated with her family to the US at the age of one. She is the first in her family to graduate from college.

San Diego

November 20, 2000

**Grzegorz Welizarowicz** – When did your adventure with Chicano Theater start?

**Alma Martinez** – In 1978, I returned to the U.S. after attending the Centro Universitario de Teatro (CUT-UNAM), an acting conservatory in Mexico City, where I studied for about a year and a half. I moved to San Francisco and it was there that I auditioned for El Teatro Campesino and was accepted for a one-year bus-and-truck tour through Europe and the U.S. As you said, a Polish critic, Konstany Puzyna, saw our play *La Carpa de los Rasquachi* in Berlin and wrote “W Campesino śmiesz śmierć”.<sup>1</sup> So, to answer your question, I toured with El Teatro Campesino (ETC) from 1978 to 1979, where I worked with Luis’s sister Socorro, and Diane Rodriguez, doing *Carpa [de los Rasquachis]* and Luis’s newest play, at that time, *El Fin del Mundo*. Luis was already in Los Angeles (L.A.) doing *Zoot Suit*, so I did not work with him directly that year. By the time I finished the tour, Luis had seen my work and was already making preparations to get the L.A. cast ready to go to New York [with *Zoot Suit*]. Luis sent Andres Garcia, a member of ETC, to ask me, “why don’t you come to L.A. and audition.” I said “sure.” However, I had never worked in L.A. professionally so in 1979, when I was cast, *Zoot Suit* became my first union acting job. It opened many doors for me. So that is how I got involved with the entertainment industry in Hollywood and with Luis, with whom I have been

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<sup>1</sup> Puzyna, Konstany (1978). “W Campesino śmiesz śmierć”. *Dialog* 10: 137-144.

working for the past 30 years. I have been the lead actress in most of his major works since *Zoot Suit*.

**G. W.** – What were the characteristics of the style of the group at that time in Europe?

**A. M.** – It was the very classic Teatro style – broad comedy, part *commedia dell'arte*, *Mexican carpa* and *carpa* in the style of Mexican comic genius Cantinflas (aka Mario Moreno), and was always very Brechtian. It was easy for me to adapt to this kind of acting because I had done a lot of [Jerzy] Grotowski, and that gave me a strong background in physically based theater. Also, my personality is very broad, big, and physical. I started with Grotowski's work when I was first in Mexico in 1972. At that time, they were not yet teaching Grotowski at universities in the US. From 1972 to 1973, I studied theater at the University of Guadalajara in Mexico and this is where I was first introduced to the work of Grotowski. I later continued my study of Grotowski's technique at the CUT, the Mexico City acting conservatory. After I got back from Mexico City in 1978, and just before I joined El Teatro Campesino, I studied with Grotowski and his company at Mills College [Oakland, CA]. Fifteen actors, myself included, auditioned and were selected to participate in the intensive two-week workshop. We studied with three Polish actors, a woman and two men. Their names escape me at the moment. This prepared me very well for my work with El Teatro Campesino.

**G.W.** – What was interesting about Grotowski's technique for you?

**A.M.** – The extreme physicalization of an emotion – taking the essence of what an emotion is and lifting it to its full physical and vocal potential. In this style, you examine emotion from the top of your head, all the way to your toes, using your entire body. Doing this, you absorb everything fully, in your entire being, instead of intellectualizing or being realistic or becoming



caught up in the trappings of the propriety that your culture dictates. Grotowski's technique was beyond that.

I originally went to Mexico in 1972 because I was looking for my identity. As an American actress, born in Mexico and raised in the US, I was lost. I was also very shy as a young woman; I had not had much life experience or sexual experience, and I was very closed and sheltered. I felt very uncomfortable at theater schools here in the US, and did not fit in. Having grown up in a very insular Latino community in Pico Rivera, California, I was extremely intimidated by the stress on Stanislavski and psychological realism, and the sea of Anglo students in my class looking back at me. This is why I transitioned from going to theater schools in the US to Mexico. With Grotowski's focus on corporal expression, rather than the psychologically-based acting style of Stanislavski, race, class, gender, and ethnicity were eliminated or rendered neutral. For me personally, the key to opening up emotionally, was the physical. I applied these techniques in El Teatro Campesino while watching Chicano Theater master performers like Socorro [Valdez].

**G.W.** – What was the difference between Grotowski's techniques and the broad acting style of El Teatro?

**A.M.** – Well, there is a big difference. The first one that comes to mind is that there is more humor in Chicano Theater. Chicano political theater uses much more humor than Grotowski, than, say, Black political theater. For example, in one of Amiri Baraka's early plays, a character's head is cut off and there are machine guns fired. He did this because he wanted his audience to feel anger about their inequality. Given the egregious historical period of human trafficking that was American slavery, this style of theater, is very understandable. This theater wanted to incite people to become engaged, violently if necessary, but politically involved. In Chicano Theater there is also anger, but the early theater is tempered with humor. We cover and reach the people through humor.

So what, in essence, is the difference? We are funny. Our style is humorous with a focus on an expressive body. There is a definite political message coupled with humor and bawdiness. Grotowski is more metaphorical in his approach, and is very serious. Emotions become metaphors for larger issues, like the images reminiscent of the holocaust in *The Prince*. Chicano Theater is more pragmatic and immediate.

**G.W.** – Did Grotowski want you to forget your cultural identity?

**A.M.** – No, I never sensed that. With him it did not really matter because the work was so physical. With Grotowski it is a physical and emotional immediacy, energy, shoot it out, here, here and here, PA! PA! PA! On the other hand, in American Theater, it does matter – remember, Stanislavski and psychological realism. That is why I did not like the American style of theater in my early acting career. El Teatro Campesino was perfect; they were my people. It fit like a glove and I loved it. Still do.

**G.W.** – What are your memories of this tour with El Teatro to Europe? What was the reception? And have you traveled to Latin America and what was the reception there?

**A.M.** – I had never been to Europe before the 1978 tour. But since then, I have returned to Europe dozens of times. Yet, the trip in 1978 was the best I have ever experienced. It was fantastic. We had a wonderful time but it was also tough. You know, bus and truck tour. We would put up a set, get dressed and perform, and then take down the set, sell records and T-shirts, and then move on to the next town. It was exhausting but exhilarating. The audience's response was phenomenal, just phenomenal. People could plug into the energy, forget the language, and engage totally with what critics and audiences called "authentic". They [El Teatro Campesino] had already toured Europe with *La Carpa de los Rasquachis* before I joined



*Fin del Mundo*



*Mummified Deer* (with Lakin Valdez)

them. That tour, 2 years earlier, of *La Carpa*, which the audience also loved, was why they were invited to come back. I have purposefully forgotten the bad audiences – selective memory – but generally, it was fantastic. As far as the Teatro's reception in Latina America, this is the theme of my book manuscript. How Latin America perceived and reacted to Chicano Theater. I interviewed people who saw El Teatro Campesino in Mexico in 1970 and loved it, just loved it. It was dynamic, funny, bawdy, political and raucous. The performance of *La Carpa* in Mexico City in 1974 is another story but you need to read my book once it is published.

**G.W.** – Do the audiences connect on another, different cultural level?

**A.M.** – In Europe of course! In Germany and Amsterdam, it becomes the struggles of the Turkish immigrants who are the cheap service labor. For all of Europe, it is the story of the immigrants whose numbers they see growing each year and whom they both depend on and resent. For me, Jesus Pelado Rasquachi (the lead character in *La Carpa*) is Everyman, in the classical medieval sense, which is why people around the world relate to him.

**G.W.** – Did you also travel with *El Fin del Mundo*?

**A.M.** – Yes, I did the 1978 US tour with *Fin del Mundo*. We traveled to little towns and big cities in the Pacific Northwest and Southwest US. Marcos Rodriguez [another actor from the *Mummified Deer* cast] did the 1980 European tour with *El Fin*, two years later. I was told by the actors on this tour that it was tough going. *Fin* had a big set. *Carpa* was beautiful because it was one of the earlier pieces; since there was no money they purposely made a simple traveling set. *Carpa* was basically two poles. We placed them about 20 feet apart, put sandbags at the base to stabilize, added some short wings on each side,

hung a curtain made out of potato sacks and there it was. That was the set.

The *El Fin* set was a very large skeleton. We used tall padded PCP pipes. They were very high, about 25-30 feet and the set measured about 35-40 feet wide. There were four appendages, a spine and the large paper mache skull sat on top. Luis came in one day to observe rehearsal (we were rehearsing for the tour) and said, "The skeleton needs tennis shoes." So I volunteered to make the tennis shoes out of chicken wire, plywood, and potato sacks – there were lots of potato sacks around – thread, needle and some paint. The actors' costumes were one piece black leotards with a black cap to cover their heads. The leotards had bones painted on them, skeletons. We also wore heavy black grease paint, white cake make-up and half masks. This was the foundation of our skeleton costume. On top of that we added wigs, and on top of that, we put on costumes, usually several layers of costumes. We toured during the summer and the heat, in all that make-up and costuming, was unbearable! Sometimes, we had to perform in spaces where there was no water. Remember the heavy face make-up? In Europe, where we toured with *La Carpa*, we performed in Taormina [Sicily] in a large ancient Roman amphitheater on the coast overlooked by Mount Etna. We opened our 1978 tour in Munich then went on to Berlin, Hamburg, Maastricht, Antwerp, Naples, Messina and Rome. We also performed in a huge, beautiful, castle at a Milan arts festival – very high class! We performed in both large and small venues. We covered a lot of ground and saw more than I could ever have imagined!

**G.W.** – You acted in *I Don't Have to Show You No Stinkin' Badges*.

**A.M.** – Yes. Luis first premiered *Badges* at LATC [Los Angeles Theater Center]. I performed in it when he did it the second time around in 1990. We ran at El Teatro Campesino's theater

in San Juan Bautista, California and in San Francisco at the Marine's Memorial Theater.

**G.W.** – *Corridos*?

**A.M.** – I performed in *Corridos*, the stage play, in Los Angeles. I later did the PBS television version, *Corridos: Tales of Passion and Revolution*. The play opened in San Francisco and also ran in San Diego. In 1982, I auditioned for the first *Corridos* production in San Francisco. I was cast, but I turned it down because I had just gotten my scholarship back (I lost it when I dropped out of college in 1972) and was due to start college in a few weeks. Months later, when they were coming to LA after San Francisco and San Diego, they hired me to replace an actor. So I did the show in LA and then on PBS. We won a George Peabody Award – the highest award for a television program.

**G.W.** – Did you grow up with *corridos*, with ballads of the border? Was it something natural for you to enter this play – the dramatization of the classic revolutionary ballads?

**A.M.** – Yes, absolutely. You have to understand that most of us in the company are first, second or third generation Mexican immigrants or the children of immigrants. I was born in Mexico and raised in a Mexican culture in the US. My family went back to Mexico many times, sometimes twice a year, to visit relatives throughout my childhood. My family came to the US because they needed work. They were quite poor in Mexico. Most of the actors in El Teatro Campesino are still very tied to their Mexican family ancestry, the roots, and the land. This makes the Teatro very compassionate towards the poor, makes them push the need for education, judicial and economic parity and social justice. So when you talk about the ideals and stories of the Mexican Revolution, like in *Corridos*, you are talking specifically about our ancestors, our heritage, and our same class. My great great uncle was Mexican President

Venustiano Carranza but my family was from the “small house”: children born out of wedlock and thus rendered invisible by Mexican society. So yes, it is very personal.

**G.W.** – How does music function in Chicano culture?

**A.M.** – Music is essential. In Mexico, it is the poor people’s entertainment because when you do not have television or money for the movies, nor any albums and CD’s, you have the radio or you make your own music. During the Mexican Revolution, *corridos*, musical ballads, were used to pass the news of battles and canonize legends like revolutionary heroes Francisco Villa and Emiliano Zapata, among many more. Like the *troubadours* in Europe, the stories were passed on by creating a song, a myth around the escapades of those heroes who came from the popular masses. And that is what *Corridos* is – the glorification and mystification of the history of the peasant and working class. Now that Luis has staged these corridos for Chicano and general US audiences, they are now part of our Chicano mythology.

**G.W.** – Looking at your experience in *Zoot Suit*, *La Carpa*, *Corridos*, *Badges*, *Fin del Mundo*, *Ballad of a Soldier* and now *Mummified Deer* could you think of Luis Valdez’s theater as an evolution and in what sense?

**A.M.** – Yes, absolutely. I have thought about this a lot. In the beginning, Luis’s theater tried to assert a new Chicano political national identity. The concept of a national Chicano identity and political movement started in the 60s and out of this emerged what we know as Chicano Theater founded by Luis Valdez. This is *our* theater and it asserts that we are simultaneously American and Mexican – we are a new hybrid. And in the turbulent 60s, 70s to this day, we continue to demand equal rights.

After that, you have the period of Luis’s play *Corridos*, written, developed and performed off and on between the mid

70s to the 80s. In *Corridos* Luis states that Chicanos are also Mexican. We have a rich ancestry so let us explore our forefathers and Mexican roots by recreating the mythology and remembering those stories, which are also a part of the Chicano collective consciousness. In the late 80s, there was Luis's play *Badges*, which said: "We are not only Mexican, we are American, so let's demand the political power due to us!" Yes, we embrace our Mexican identity but the reality is we are not Mexicans any more. Chicanos no longer had to prove who they were and in *Badges* we are demanding that they be incorporated into the social systems as US citizens. How? In the case of *Badges*, through institutions. This meant that we needed to not only get more Chicanos into government and corporate positions and universities but also create our own Chicano-based businesses, educational systems and institutions. *Badges* thus becomes a critique of the institutionalized racism, and media stereotypes, in this country that has kept Chicanos on the fringes of US society. The play deals with how a young man achieves the American Dream by being one of the first Chicanos accepted to Harvard, one of the top educational institutions in the world. But the experience is so alienating he drops out and loses his grip on reality. Similar to my dropping out of college, the character in the play shows that Chicanos do not fit because of the imbedded institutionalized racism and thus must think and move "outside the box."

After *Badges*, you have *Mummified Deer*. In this piece, Luis is once again looking at identity but this time, through a different lens. He is looking through the lens of the Yaqui, Indian in Mexico. In this play, he is looking at identity and asking, "Who are we again?" What is a Mexican? I think it has a lot to do with the politics of what is going on in Mexico – an institutionalized dictatorship that is democratically elected every six years. Sadly, the system is very corrupt, from the street corner to the highest level of government. In *Mummified Deer* Luis is looking at the indigenous roots of Mexico, our indigenous roots as Chicanos, and he writes that we are not



just Mexican but also Indian and mestizo. Yaquis, like many Chicanos, are dark skinned people living in a country where, because of European colonization, light skinned Mexicans – or US white Europeans – are privileged. Because of this history, there is a lot of racism in Mexico, and the US, against dark skinned indigenous people or *indios*.

You look at me and see a brown person and you might ask where does this person come from? In *Mummified*, Luis is saying that the lead character, Mama Chu – the role I played – may be from Mexico, but she is not Mexican. She identifies as Yaqui Indian and admonishes Mexico because of the severe treatment of the Yaqui. There was genocide of the Yaqui by the Mexican government and this has not been easily forgotten. However, the Indians are not as persecuted in Mexico as the Afro-Latinos. Afro-Latinos are so persecuted that Mexicans are hesitant to even recognize this essential part of their history and heritage. *Mummified* could be considered a search for roots in the anthropological sense – who were the Yaquis and how is this identity kept alive? In this play, Luis is looking back at his roots but now on a deeper more complex level. The deeper psychological ramifications of being a Yaqui, an indigenous Mexican, a Chicano, living here in the US. Did I mention that Luis is of Yaqui ancestry? On the deepest personal level he is looking for a more profound sense of self and identity based on the indigenous Yaqui roots of his mother and grandmother.

**G.W.** – But such indigenous themes were employed earlier in *mitos*. What is the difference?

**A.M.** – Back then, circa late 1970s and early 80s, *mitos* were tied into a search for a cohesive political national identity for Mexican-Americans (later Chicanos). So, this early period consciously explored, re-envisioned and represented plays that embraced Aztec/Mayan thought and myth with a sense of pride and empowerment through extraordinarily high civilizations that predated the European conquest of the

Americas. Staging *mitos* was also a highly political act. In the early years of the Chicano Movement, most were Socialists or Marxists but, the irony is, they were still Catholics – dialectic. The syncretic bond of Christianity and Aztec/Mayan religion is clearly evident in the *mitos*. *Mummified Deer*, on the other hand, is personal and almost beyond politics. I say “almost” because everything is political. Luis wrote this play soon after the death of his mother so it is a tribute to her.

**G.W.** – How does the issue of genocide come into it?

**A.M.** – He brings up genocide because of Mexico’s history. Unlike *Corridos*, where we’re looking at popular mythology and embracing Mexico with no critical Chicano revision, in *Mummified* we are looking at the Mexico’s underbelly. In the early years of Chicano Theater, criticism was directed toward the US. Now, in *Mummified*, we are criticizing Mexico because of the genocide of the Yaqui and historic oppression of the *indios*. Looking at *indio* as a class rather than an ethnic/racial category, one can say that most of the US immigrants, beginning in 1910 at the start of the Mexican Revolution, were *indios*. Thus, the Chicano, particularly those that are dark skinned are *indios*. As a Chicano, Luis is also turning the mirror on us in *Mummified*. We are criticizing both parts of our lineage, the *indio* (Mexican) and the American, while trying to figure out where the center lies. Luis’s response in the early *mitos* and now *Mummified*, is that we belong everywhere because our indigenous roots originally extended across the entire western hemisphere, predated the Spanish conquest, and so allowed us to lay claim to being the original American indigenous population. As we embrace both parts we can also now criticize both. However, criticizing Mexico is a big step because Chicanos and Mexicans generally do not publically undermine each other. The global media does enough of that so if we ascribe to this, the larger population brands us as conflictive, not able to get our act together. Some conservative pundits would say that is why Chicanos are disenfranchised

or, in the case of Mexico, a third world country. I do not dare criticize other Chicanos in front of Anglos. If I do, I do so very judiciously, diplomatically, and discreetly. The few times I have done it I have paid the price which as an actor means I no longer work with certain Latino artists. We do not criticize other Latinos but Luis does just that in his play, which is what makes, *Mummified* such a unique departure for him and American Theater as a whole.

**G.W.** – How do you see the white characters in this play? Are they stereotypes?

**A.M.** – Yes, totally stereotyped. Similar to the way the Mexican and Chicano is stereotyped in almost the entirety of the American literary canon; it is the same thing. Two Chicanos discussing a *gringo* (Anglo) might go something like this, “You know that white guy? Yeah, he was that tall awkward guy. Kinda’ dumb, slow-witted with a big mouth. Yeah, him!” In *Mummified*, the doctor and the nurse are classic Anglo stereotypes; albeit they are highly educated, privileged, conservative, they are still highly racist. *Don Guero* (Mr. Blonde Man) is somewhat different because the cultural roots of that stereotype interface more with Mexico, it is a Spanish versus Mexican/*indio* oppositional binary. He is a Mexican of white European descent, hence his name, and because of this he holds a very privileged position in Mexican society. I brought up this issue of the Anglo stereotypes in one of the post performance forums of *Mummified Deer*, with a largely Anglo audience, and interestingly not one person in the audience was offended. When you are the dominant culture, you react quite differently to stereotypes of yourselves than say, a Chicano. Anglos see a racist white stereotype and they laugh loudly and say, “Oh, that’s not me. I don’t act like that. I like Mexicans.” They cannot see or will not acknowledge in themselves and within their social circles, the ingrained oppressive attitude toward people of color. As a Chicano you go to a theater where the audience is predominantly Anglo,

and you see a stereotyped Mexican, you take it very personally and are offended and outraged. Because Chicanos are not the dominant culture, they see any stereotype as an egregious political assault. So consequently, what was interesting about the post performance forums overall was that the Anglo audiences did not catch the reversed stereotype. In the hospital scene, Luis really hammers in this message because of the experience he had when his mother was interned and ultimately died. He has related to me that his mother's physician, as in the play, is the top of the hierarchy. The doctor was arrogant, condescending, lacking compassion and emotionally vapid because, as in the play, the doctor believes himself to be God. Yes, the doctor in *Mummified* is definitely an Anglo stereotype but one based on a very similar reality.

**G.W.** – How much and how do the actors contribute to the work in a play by Luis Valdez?

**A.M.** – The actors contribute quite a bit. I love that about working with Luis. In the very early days of Teatro Campesino the actors worked even more collaboratively. Before Luis developed his signature style as a playwright and director, the initial *actos* (political skits) were a collective creation where his first actors (farm workers) put their everyday life on the stage. The farm workers were the source of almost all the material. When Luis started to write by himself, like in *Zoot Suit*, it was a different process. In the US, when you are working in professional theater you do not have the luxury of conducting workshops everyday or developing a play slowly with the actors always present. In professional American Theater we have a four-week rehearsal period, and a four-week run with a possible extension that *Zoot Suit* definitely had. It ran for an entire year to packed houses. In all his work, Luis always attempts to create cohesiveness with his casts. When you work with him you always have exercises that deepen your connection with yourself, the material and the other actors. But again, given the short period of time in professional

theater, your input into the process is more limited due to time constraints. So, the actors do contribute but a director has to come in on the first day of rehearsal with a pretty much-completed script. In *Mummified*, we contributed but the play's meat and bones were there. However, that said, the play will continue to change. Luis is always writing, changing, editing. By the time *Mummified* gets published, I have no doubt that it will change again.<sup>2</sup> Not drastic, no big structural shifts, but from what I have seen in *Badges*, *Corridos* and *Zoot Suit*, there will be changes.

**G.W.** – You have worked a lot in television, what is the Latino representation on national TV?

**A.M.** – Abysmal. Worse now than it was in 1954. I do a lot of TV but we are not talking lead roles, no series regular. They hire you for one or two days but there are few substantial roles.

**G.W.** – *Mummified* functions on a multitude of levels: historical, symbolic, and presentational. How did you cope with such diverse material?

**A.M.** – I think a lot of what I know about the material comes from my long trajectory of work with Luis. I have worked with him enough to know his work ethic, style and I just connect. Good actors find work in Hollywood but on rare occasion do you connect at the same visceral emotional level that you achieve in theater. I have played doctors, suffering barrio mothers, attorneys, police watch commanders but nothing has approached the complexity and depth of Luis's characters. His Mama Chu is one such example. Marcos and I know the

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<sup>2</sup> *Mummified Deer* appeared in: Valdez, Luis (2005). *Mummified Deer and Other Plays*. Houston: Arte Publico Press. The collection also includes a remake of *El Fin del Mundo*, entitled *Mundo Mata*, and Valdez's first play, *The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*, which was first published in 1989 in *Necessary Theater: Six Plays about Chicano Experience*. Houston: Arte Publico Press.

archetypes and experiences Luis writes about: it is in our DNA. We understand the history, symbolism, humor, sexuality, and the politics. I know the life of Mama Chu washing clothes by hand in a river. These are visuals stored in the Chicano collective memory handed down by our ancestors. And these are key components in Chicano Theater. Luis moves as easily in Anglo culture as he does in Mexican culture, and so do I. This is what a Chicana artist mediates. This is the phenomenal source of Chicano theater's power and efficacy. There are many Chicanos who do not know Spanish or their roots. Because of poor government funding in Latino barrios, services like education, housing, are inferior. Thus many Chicano never fully master English or Spanish. Then there is the other extreme, very well educated Chicanos who are very anglicized and have mastered English but have walked completely away from their Latino heritage. In Luis's plays this archetype is the "vendido", the sell-out. From a young age, I chose to educate myself in both cultures and learned to speak Spanish well. I move easily between both cultures. This is what Luis and I have in common and why I think we work well together.

**G.W.** – You started with the training of the body to become an actor. Could you talk more about the Theater of the Sphere project?

**A.M.** – Yes, the bodywork in my early career was the key for me. Simply put, the Stanislavski method did not work and Grotowski did. Luis's theater training, that he calls The Theater of the Sphere, strives for a complete kinetic and spiritual connection and centering. You are acting what you feel, you are speaking what you know, you are performing daily life in all its minutiae and you explore and express the contradictions of life. It is very Zen rather, very Aztec/Mayan. It is from this indigenous religious-scientific philosophy that the foundation of this approach gleans its theoretical axis. You have to walk your talk each and every day and be connected

with everything around you. You must be open, receptive, and changeable. Theater of the Sphere sees the balance of life reflected in a ball, the earth. Human and natural energy turns into itself in a continuous momentum and explosion of power. This is the sphere, the world, the planet, and the soul. *In Lack' Ech*: translated from Nahuatl says, "You are my other self and what I do unto you I do unto myself." Luis has applied this balanced approach to the world, manifested in a human's spiritual and physical life, to Theater of the Sphere, to the actor and the theater of everyday life. That is my interpretation.

**G.W.** – What is the training like?

**A.M.** – I have done workshops with Luis and senior teatro members. I have also researched the roots of this approach. When we toured in 1978, we conducted Theater of the Sphere workshops with multiple and diverse communities in the US and Europe. These were physical exercises similar to Grotowski in the positioning of the solar plexus as the center of the energy in the body. Similar to Grotowski, the body in motion was the key that unlocked and theatrically revealed the essence of the actor's spirit, of the soul. But also, you have to remember, that Luis and El Teatro Campesino have been strongly influenced by *commedia dell'arte*, *carpa*, and *Cantinflasca* style comedy in the style of Cantinflas (aka Mario Moreno). Cantinflas used a lot of pelvis. The pelvis was the pivotal point for a lot of his movement, his comedy and you might even say his politics. In Luis's *teatro* technique the pelvis is not just the center of energy it also becomes the pivot, the rotor cup that allows the spine, the body to move in a fluid energized manner. In the broadest sense, the performance style in *Mummified Deer* is a more realistic style with touches of broad *carpa*. In both cases, with Luis's staging your body is always invested in everything that you do.

**G.W.** – What new playwrights, new tendencies do you see right now?

**A.M.** – It is a great question because Luis has influenced so many people across several generations. For example there is an excellent playwright, Oliver Meyer, who is a Chicano from Los Angeles. He credits Luis Valdez for influencing his writing. His most recent play, *Blade to the Heat*, is about the boxing world. There are always Latinos in his work but also Afro-Americans and Anglos. Luis's influence is not in the style necessarily, Oliver's style leans mostly to realism, but in the content of his material: the cultural contradictions, the burning questions of the time, racism, and classism. In Oliver's work, these issues affect not only Latinos but also all people of color. The new tendencies.... The new generation is definitely post modernist and is as interested in making movies and videos as working in theater. And, they are doing it. Luis's sons, Kinan, Anahuac and Lakin are excellent filmmakers. They are staging plays but with their sights set to turn them into films. They have the technical expertise and equipment and want to reach the widest audiences.

**G.W.** – How does it relate to Chicano culture?

**A.M.** – One of the first films that they did was an adaptation of one of Luis's early *actos*, *The Ballad of a Soldier*. The film was about a Chicano who enlists in the army and is about to go to Vietnam. The next generation of Chicano actors/directors/playwrights are interested in *teatro* but their politics are of their specific time and place in history. There is apathy among this generation that they themselves publicly acknowledge. These kids did not have to pick in the fields, were not drafted, have parents who are college educated. They are not as angry as we were in the 60s and 70s. They are better educated and have been exposed to and mediated more information than previous generations. Definitely post modern. There are other trends in Chicano Theater. Some are my contemporaries. One



trend writes about Mexico as the utopian homeland, our lost ancestral roots and all that. They write about how Chicanos have lost their connection to the earth and the more simple peasant life of our ancestors – the “proud savage.” But is Mexico so great? I am Mexican and love Mexico but politically and economically, it is not! It is a one-party dictatorship. The PRI has held a tight grip on the government for decades. I do not see this theater that glorifies Mexico or our indigenous ancestry as the kind of challenging theater that we need right now. These playwrights tend to be Chicanos who were born or raised in the US and have never lived in Mexico for any length of time. *Mummified Deer* is exciting because we are not only critiquing ourselves but also Mexico, our ancestral homeland. We do not want to go back to being peasants in Mexico. There was and is horrible poverty, discrimination, sexism, and a history of slavery and genocide in Mexico. So we have to get beyond this idealizing of our past, we have to deal with what is here in front of us. You do not want to go back, you want to create a better and equitable existence here and now on both sides of the border. There is another trend in contemporary Chicano Theater, which is more political than the latter; José Luis Valenzuela is part of this style. Jorge Huerta founded El Teatro de la Esperanza at the University of California, Santa Barbara with José Luis Valenzuela and José Saucedo. After Teatro Campesino, Teatro Esperanza was the best teatro of the 70s and 80s. José Luis and Evelina Fernandez (actor, writer, and José Luis’s wife) continue to write plays and work together. Most recently they filmed Evelina’s play *Luminarias*. The play, the film, is about four Latino women criticizing contemporary Chicano East LA culture and mores. A definite Latina perspective that has been too rare in Chicano Theater. The women criticize both Chicano and Anglo men, having sex with Anglo men versus Chicanos and, how their Chicano community holds them up to antiquated gender role definitions. The film is funny and witty but underneath it all there is a general critique, by women, of phallogentric Chicano culture and how Chicanas mediate living within Anglo social

structures. So it is Chicano agit-prop theater under the guise of middle age women, college educated, working women, self-sustaining, divorced, talking about their daily lives. Another trend in Chicano Theater is the work of playwright Cherrie Moraga. I love her work and am going to be doing a staged reading of her new play called *The Mexican Medea* in December [2001]. Basically, she writes that homosexuality is alive and well: lustful, hungry, passionate, forbidden, and very present in our Chicano community. Her plays are bold, brave and pronounce "I'm here in all my glory, come my lover, give me oral sex and let's get it on!" No explanations or apologies, in your face, offering no excuses. I love the passion in her work. In that way it is similar to Valdez. The fact that she is saying things that no other Chicana/o playwright is saying and would not dare say publicly; for me, as an actor, is very exciting. She is also a poet so her writing is lyrical, and a harmonious and poignant mix of English and Spanish. Cherrie goes for it all: a brown woman, a Chicana, and a lesbian. The boring opposite of a Moraga plays might read, "How are you today?" "Oh my poor Indian father was deported by the INS," "Oh, I went to the store and I was discriminated against," "Oh, there are not enough Chicanos on TV." Bad Chicano Theater! She chose the mythical character Medea who happens, in her rendition, to be gay. You have a classic Greek tragedy in the context of a queer dramatic plot. She kills her husband because he fucks around, and kills her children to get back at him. But now all the characters are women and they even play the men's roles. So Medea, the wife of Jason, now has a lesbian lover. As a heterosexual, this angers him. And as a bisexual woman, society scorns her. So as a heterosexual actress, I try to explore that same intimate passion for another woman that I have enjoyed all my life with men. It has to be so deep a passion that I am willing to kill my child. Passion that turns to anger, then hate, and murder. Can't wait! Great stuff! Another exciting playwright is Josefina Lopez. She knows how to tell a good story. She is funny and her writing appears light but there is great weight in the themes that she touches,

specifically about being a young woman mediating Chicano and Anglo cultures, and in one of her more well-known plays,<sup>3</sup> as they relate to body image.

**G.W.** – Other playwrights with that type of weight?

**A.M.** – I like Lynn Alvarez a lot. She has not produced a lot but she is wonderful. Her writer's gaze is unique in that it is the voice of a US Latina, which she is, looking at contemporary life in Mexico. I like Eddie Sanchez – his plays are not pretty which, is very refreshing. He writes about the underbelly, new plots and ideas that you never could have imagined. He throws you off guard. I like that. There is also Nilo Cruz, who is Cuban-American and writes about his memories of Cuba. His work presents a different twist on the US Latino immigrant experience. His voice is that of an exile raised in this country and living in a Cuban exiles' community in the US. His writing is not romanticized and his mediation of the personal and historical is fascinating and exciting to watch.

**G.W.** – What about performance artists? Nao Bustamante, Luis Alfaro, Guillermo Gomez Peña?

**A.M.** – You know what performance art is for me? I mean, as an actor, I am telling you what performance artists are – actors who got sick of the system and said I want to do my own work. I do not want somebody telling me what to do or when I can do it. There is no good material out there for Chicanos or Latinos, so I want to write my own plays. Anybody can hire me; I do not need a director, a set, or costumes. Actors in general are poor. We do not do it for money. But if I produce my own work, I can make one, two three thousand dollars a night. Maybe live off my work. I have not done performance art, but I have thought about it because I want to do good work, I do not want to depend on other people, I just want to get up and say “I have

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<sup>3</sup> *Real Women Have Curves*.

an idea for a play”, and then just do it. Boom! It is an excellent form for actors working outside the theatrical mainstream. It is truly a poor people’s theater. You know, Chicano Theater in the early years. In performance art, actors are the principle and most important component.

**G.W.** – Does this stuff have the “weight”?

**A.M.** – Absolutely. It is the cutting edge, avant-garde of Chicano/Latino Theater because no one is telling them what to do and they have nothing to lose. No investors, producers and their audiences are generally hard-core theater people who are invested in the art form.

**G.W.** – Can you compare original *carpas* and the contemporary Chicano theater?

**A.M.** – They are very different because *carpa* consisted of many performance genres under one rubric. *Carpas* were vaudeville shows held in outdoor traveling tents. One night you might see performers juggle, sing a song, dance, present a dramatic recitation, do comedy sketches, play an instrument, do magic tricks. It was a hodge podge. The shows were raucous, funny, bawdy, vulgar, political and very cheap. Just like Chicano Theater! What we did in Chicano Theater was to take the concept of the *carpa* form and contemporize it. In *Mummified Deer*, we have several *carpa* scenes that become a play within a play. So as far as a *carpa* style, yes we revert to the original style but we are reconfiguring it to the needs of our time and place in history. Like Shakespearean acting, I would think. Elizabethan actors did not, at the time, call it Shakespearean acting. Through the centuries, in retrospect, as the plays became popular, the term “Shakespearean” was coined. Similarly, Chicano Theater is recuperating and formalizing a *carpa* performance style for our time. Chicano Theater has definitely embraced this style and elevated it to an art form that it was not intended to be because it came from the poor

and working class. Socorro Valdez took that style and created many of the most popular archetypical characters we see in Chicano Theater today. So Chicano Theater took *carpa*, which my Mexican mother says, even poor and working class young ladies would never be caught dead in – and we turned it into a high theatrical art form. Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, in his article “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility” (from the book *Chicano Art and Affirmation*), writes about how Chicanos took *carpa*, a low class and popular performance style, and raised it to a high art form creating what he calls a definitive *rasquachi* aesthetic. He says that an example of *High Rasquachi* is when you buy frozen tamales as opposed to *Low Rasquachi*, which is when you buy tortillas in a can. He uses these funny examples to distinguish a new hierarchical value model within the paradigm of poverty. As children of immigrants and peasants (Chicanos), this is our background and as Chicano actors, playwrights and directors we are obliterating class and race and the boundaries between high art and low art which, is very, very exciting.

**G.W.** – Thank you very much.

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