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BREAKING THE SILENCE: THE IRISH CIVIL WAR IN THE SHORT STORIES BY DOROTHY MACARDLE

Abstract: The article focuses on Dorothy Macardle's collection of short stories *Earth-Bound* to complicate the traditional understanding of the Civil War (1922–1923) as a catastrophe subject to enforced silence or the aporia of representation. This despite the fact that Macardle's stories are not event-centric nor realistic accounts of the conflict: they are set before 1922, during difficult periods for the Irish such as in times of famine or the Anglo-Irish War, and, throughout the collection, realism combines with the supernatural, multiple temporalities mingle, and there is a peculiar co-dependency of politics and aesthetics. However, I contend that it is precisely by displacing the Civil War from her stories and by replacing it with narratives of other, 'minor' tragedies that Macardle thematically foregrounds the defining characteristics of internecine conflict: the collapse of the bonds of solidarity and the consequences of that for the most vulnerable. Story after story, through narratives of 'slow violence' dispersed across time and space, readers get a sense of a slow erosion of the Irish community, predating the war and then exploding in the destruction of the conflict, but also a sense that violence – its continuous perpetration now and in the future – is not inevitable. Some of the tales in *Earth-Bound* have the potential, through estrangement and shifts in setting, to move their readers to think critically about the status quo and possibly act on and change it. Hence, my article first explores the supposed un representability of the Civil War; second, by comparing the stories in *Earth-Bound* to the more celebrated ones by Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, it intends to highlight the peculiarity and originality of Macardle's writing.
Keywords. *Dorothy Macardle; Earth-Bound; Irish Civil War; anti-narrative tension; women prisoners; Gothic tropes.*

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The years 1914-1923 were a period of almost continuous warfare for many Irish people. The 1916 Easter Rising brought fighting to Ireland just a few months before the slaughter at the Somme, where the British army, also composed of Irish battalions, suffered probably the worst ever day in its military history. The Great War was followed at short intervals by the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, a fratricidal conflict that broke out in 1922 prompted by the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, which had ended open hostilities between the IRA and British Crown forces and granted a degree of independence to Ireland, but was not accepted by all Irish nationalists. These split into the supporters of the creation of the Free State under the Treaty and the 'Irregulars' led by Éamon de Valera, who continued to fight for the establishment of an Irish Republic (Palko 2). By the time the Civil War was over in 1923, the violence and trauma had been of such a vast scale that the writers and intellectuals involved variously in the conflicts struggled to find adequate words to describe it.

The Civil War in particular has been deemed impervious to articulation and fictional representation, with many commentators of the subsequent decades coming to understand the artists' difficulty in representing this catastrophic event as evidence of its un representability. As Síobhra Aiken observes (6-7; 21), it was commonly held among historians and literary scholars that most Irish and Free State authorities preferred to withdraw into a state of muteness when confronted about the conflict to the point of claiming that the literary history of the Civil War is marked largely by silence until its resurgence in artistic and literary discourses of the second half of the century. Writers were driven into muteness by unresolved individual trauma or silence was enforced among the literary community by the state: historian Anne Dolan highlights the controversial legacy of the cataclysmic conflict when she observes that "civil war, by its very nature, demand[s] silence" (4) and "it was the nature of the Irish Free State to suppress, to remember selectively, to try to forget" (124).

The present article seeks to complicate such understanding of the Civil War as a catastrophe subject to enforced silence or "the aporia of representation" (Luckhurst 13), by analysing the short fiction of Dorothy Macardle, specifically her 1924 collection *Earth-Bound*. For sure, the nine stories composing the volume bear the traces of trauma of such magnitude that it "colour[s] all attempts to come to grips with it" (Vees-Gulani 7), for, in *Earth-Bound*, Macardle does not tackle, in a direct and realistic way, the horrors of her detention in several prisons during the Civil War, where she was abused physically and psychologically. Nor does she

provide a 'proper' account of the conflict and war-related events: her stories are set before 1922, during difficult periods for the Irish such as in times of famine or the Anglo-Irish War and, throughout the collection, realism combines with the supernatural, multiple temporalities mingle, and there is a peculiar co-dependency of politics and aesthetics.

However, I do not interpret Macardle's elusiveness around the subject of the Civil War as evidence of the impossibility to deal with it. Rather, I believe that, in *Earth-Bound*, Macardle exploits "the potential" of literary narration "for the configuration and refiguration" of traumatic and catastrophic events, by rewriting the Civil War narrative into other historical contexts and by moving towards the imaginative (Luckhurst 89). The shifts in setting and the insertion of supernatural elements, I contend, are coping strategies she designed to embark on a path of healing and point to the potential of fiction to enable "one to get close to one's own trauma, a step necessary in healing, without causing the same level of distress as a non-imaginary recreation" (Vees-Gulani 91). Writing about past catastrophes and the liminal world of the Sidhe was Macardle's way to come to terms with her wartime traumatic experiences and discuss "the general viciousness that infected a nation" in the years 1922-23 (Grant 51) with the goal of turning her stories also into a call to action to her listeners and readers.

In these respects, my analysis contributes to the current scholarship on the topic of Civil War memory and representation, which has recently been given a high profile in Irish Studies and has challenged the belief of a supposed 'absence' of the conflict in the print culture of the post-war years. Remarkably, Aiken argues against what she considers an inflated use of the notion of the fictional un representability of the Civil War, by showing, in fact, that there is no dearth of written materials on the topic from the late 1920s. In her monograph *Spiritual Wounds*, she brings to light a multitude of veterans' memoirs from both war factions and Republican accounts of the revolutionary years that have received little attention so far, thus proving that, despite the Free State's notoriously brutal treatment of the 'Irregulars', the new government did not suffocate all dissenting discourse about the conflict (Aiken; Flanagan 13).

Frances Flanagan, John Grant, and Jennifer Malia, among others, have likewise documented how personal memories of the conflict are relived in the works by celebrated writers Sean O'Casey, Liam O'Flaherty, Sean O'Faolain, and Frank O'Connor, who, having experienced warfare first-hand, were able to describe vividly war-like situations and the pain associated with a conflict also

known as the *Cogadh nag Carad* or 'War of the Friends' (Boyce 106). In particular, Cork writers and IRA soldiers O'Connor and O'Faolain authored short stories inspired by their wartime experiences that not only have been praised in several literary reviews and dedicated studies, but, I believe, corroborate Jacques Rancière's argument that the problem of representability of traumatic events lies in finding suitable forms of representation rather than in the essential unrepresentability of the event (Laanes 124-5).

It is also worth noting that, like Macardle, the two Corkmen were confronted by "both inner psychological forces stemming from their experiences" and "cultural and historical pressures [coming] from their surroundings" when attempting to write about the Civil War (Vees-Gulani 7). As a result, they tended to resort to the same representational strategies to address the topic, such as reframing the Civil War as a narrative of the War of Independence. O'Faolain fictionalised his experiences as a rank-and-filer of the IRA in the collection *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932), but transposed them to the different context of the Tan War (Grant 51-2). One has to read between the lines to understand that the descriptions of stances of indifference or open hostility among Irish compatriots, in stories such as "Fugue", denote subtly that O'Faolain uses the fight against the British as a fictional surrogate to reflect on the Civil War (Grant 53).

Likewise, it took O'Connor almost seven years to write his celebrated "Guests of the Nation", the short story set during the War of Independence that nonetheless captures the tragedy and brutality of internecine conflict, as it is a tale of reprisals and counter-reprisals, of commitment to duty and the tragic consequences of friendship between sworn enemies (Creedon 277). That O'Connor revised "Guests of the Nation" multiple times after its first publication in 1930, later omitting the clearest allusions to the Civil War, attests to the writer's struggle to come to terms with his involvement in the conflict but also, I believe, that his very involvement "actively provoke[d] the production of narrative" (Luckhurst 83).

Hence, none of these writers was disengaged from the war or silent about it, but what sets Macardle apart is the fact that she wrote most of the stories collected in *Earth-Bound* as a political prisoner *during* the conflict. Her stories are not a continual working and reworking of the event *ex post*, in which truth and fiction mix up in various forms of autofiction, but the medium through which she intended to voice the female experience of political imprisonment while it was unfolding, shed light on consequences of the war for the most vulnerable, and put forward a "grammar of solidarity". Macardle deserves to be rediscovered after

years of critical oblivion, and considered alongside the more widely-studied O'Faolain and O'Connor, for her attempt to create bonds between audiences at home and in prison, and, even more significantly, between reading communities that were bound by related, though not identical, traumatic experiences (cf. Corporaal 58).

In his introduction to *Earth-Bound*, Peter Berresford Ellis argues that the stories in this collection would never have been written had Macardle not languished in the prisons of the Free State (ix). Born in a wealthy Home-Ruler family, Macardle became a committed Sinn Féiner after the Easter Rising and sided with the Republicans during the 1922-23 conflict. She was arrested for her seditious activity as a propagandist and imprisoned, together with other women Republicans, in first Mountjoy, then Kilmainham, and finally the North Dublin Union. Between February and September 1923, over 500 women and girls aged between twelve and seventy were incarcerated in Kilmainham Gaol; many more in Mountjoy. Both prisons were overcrowded and the forms of abuse suffered by inmates were innumerable, from the imposition of food to abominably unhygienic conditions and psychological degradation. Macardle recorded some of her experiences in her private jail journal, which was re-discovered in 2017, and, while in Kilmainham Gaol, she participated in one of the frequent hunger strikes held by the prisoners in an attempt to draw attention to the injustices of the Free State government.

Her prison experience and commitment to the Republican cause both helped and hindered her literary career: while serving time, she began writing the stories of *Earth-Bound* which she read to her fellow inmates. After the release, she went on to write plays, radio programmes, Gothic novels such as *The Uninvited*, the non-fictional *The Irish Republic* (1937) featuring a foreword by de Valera, and *Children of Europe* (1949), a series of interviews with the young refugees of WWII. Yet her fame rapidly declined after her death in 1958, perhaps due to her acquaintance with de Valera, and she had been largely forgotten until the 2010s when a group of scholars set out to rediscover Macardle the woman and the writer.

Among her recently re-discovered works is indeed *Earth-Bound*, whose stories reflect the centrality of the prison experience and Civil War to her life and development as a writer without, however, being "event-centric" (Andharia 32). The nine tales forming the collection deal with conflict "viscerally painted" (Berresford Ellis xvi), but do not describe realistically nor directly what happened in those fateful years. Post-Treaty Ireland features only in "A Story without and End", in which, however, the Civil War is transfigured into a "nightmare" that is unlikely to become real (cf. Caruth 4-6).

Incidentally, it is "A Story without an End" that best attests to the narrative and anti-narrative tensions at play in each attempt at fictional representing the Civil War thanks to its oneiric imaginary and narrative framing and interruptions. The tale recounts an evening meeting devoted to recalling "old prophecies, forebodings and tales of bad omens and dreams"; one of the attendees, Nesta McAllister, decides to tell a "troubling story", a nightmare that causes her disquiet (77), because she would like to be reassured that what she has dreamt will never come true. Nesta has dreamt of an execution taking place in a prison yard – one guesses it is the Stonebreakers' Yard in Kilmainham Gaol – and the one being executed is her husband Roger, an IRA propagandist in the War of Independence. The firing squad is made up of soldiers in green uniforms, led by "a splendid fellow with a fine reputation since nineteen sixteen – one of Mick Collins's right-hand men" (82). The adjective 'green' is in italics and precedes an exclamation mark to emphasise Nesta's incredulity as well as the improbability of the scenario. It is also repeatedly remarked by all attendees that it is a dream, explicitly defined as "so absurd" (80).

But towards the conclusion is the following "You see – the war will break out again of course, we all know that – but the green uniforms – it couldn't come true" (82), so full of dashes and abrupt transitions between different verbal tenses that one gets the idea of something inconceivable and therefore difficult to articulate but which, eventually, became true: the last words of the story and entire collection are "Mountjoy, December, 1922" (82) – the Civil War had already been going on for months. The reader can perceive both Macardle's shock and bitterness here. Of course, her bitterness is partly due to the failure of the Republican dream, which is alluded to in the dedication of the story to Nora Connolly, daughter and militant companion of that James Connolly, socialist and martyr (in Kilmainham Gaol) of 1916, to whom we owe the more 'egalitarian' sections of the *Forógra na Poblachta*. The 1916 leaders had dreamed that a free and independent Ireland would also be a caring one, guaranteeing "equal rights and equal opportunities to all its Citizens" (Coogan xii, 168). But 1922 Ireland resembled nothing of the Ireland envisioned by the 1916 rebels, as it was born in bloodshed and fratricidal hatred: "what was intended to be a massive and joyous party", i.e. the achievement of national self-determination, "ended in violence and destruction" (Coogan 141-2; see also Hall 5).

However, Macardle's short fiction does not only voice her and, presumably, her readers' bitterness. Some of the tales in *Earth-Bound* have the potential, through

estrangement and shifts in setting, to move their readers to think critically about the status quo and possibly act on and change it. This has to do with how the Civil War is simultaneously present and absent from the stories. Except for "A Story without an End", the Civil War catastrophe is indirectly represented through narratives of other, more private or localised catastrophes. Like a ghostly presence, the conflict is reverberated in the "tragic, little stories of Ireland's war that are forgotten" or deliberately "hushed among the many" (59), to quote from a character in the tale "By God's Mercy". And it is precisely by displacing the Civil War from her stories and by replacing it with narratives of other disasters that Macardle thematically foregrounds the defining characteristics of internecine conflict: the collapse of the bonds of solidarity and the consequences of that for the most vulnerable. Story after story, through narratives of "slow violence" dispersed across time and space (Franklin 128), readers get a sense of a slow erosion of the Irish community, predating the war and then exploding in the destruction of the conflict, but also a sense that violence – its continuous perpetration now and in the future – is not inevitable.

Acknowledging that Macardle's short fiction aimed at raising awareness and responsibility among its readers first implies the recognition of a perlocutive plan enacted through literary mediation and, second, complicates the traditional reception of Macardle's stories as nationalist, one-sided writings. In *Barred*: *Women, Writing, and Political Detention*, Barbara Harlow observes that literature "composed in prison and from out of the prison experience" is "necessarily partisan, polemical, written as it is against th[e] very structures of a dominant arbitration" or institution (qtd. in McCann 505). Leeann Lane and Ailbhe McDaid spot the trait of partisanship in the stories forming *Earth-Bound*, arguing that the latter and Macardle's propagandistic activities in the 1920s are marked by the "rigid binary of honour and integrity versus compromise and betrayal" that she constructed while an inmate as well as her need to assert her commitment to the republican cause (McDaid 395). But, in line with Berresford Ellis (xvi), I believe that the complexities of *Earth-Bound* are elided if we view the collection just as a partisan, polemical narrative.

For sure, Republican claims and binary oppositions feature in the earliest stories of the collection, dating to December 1922: "Earth-Bound", "The Brother", and "By God's Mercy". They are set during the War of Independence and their protagonists are soldiers or supporters of the IRA fighting the Black and Tans. Recurring is the figure of the 'non-traitor' because the protagonists sacrifice their

lives or are ready to do so not to betray their comrades and the national cause: after all, the war of independence represented "the dawn of all that Ireland has been waiting for these seven hundred years" (2). We can read these words and the image of the non-traitor as a sort of vindication of the legitimacy of the cause of the Republicans. Such reading appears to be corroborated by the author's choice to insert supernatural elements in these stories in the form of ghostly apparitions: the soldiers hunted down or tortured by the Black and Tans are rescued by mysterious figures who are then identified with the ghosts of past Irish heroes such as Red Hugh. Here the nationalist view of Irish history is recalled as a coherent and teleological narrative, as a succession of sacrifices and struggles for the nation's good that the Republicans only claimed to be carrying out. Republicans were generally more prone than Free Staters to recruiting the memory of the revolutionary dead to their side, for the spectres of past heroes were regularly summoned to justify their stance on the Treaty (Flanagan 10).

There are nonetheless dissonant elements in such 'Republican' narratives. Both the decision to set the stories during the war of independence and the evocation of a genealogy of patriots who died for Ireland betray a nostalgia for a past unity – at least in the variegated nationalist sphere, between Free Staters and Republicans. People from both sides of the Civil War had previously fought the British and the idea of a genealogy of patriots is part of a broader nationalist tradition cherished by both sides, the one embodied by the Easter Rising rebels who in their 1916 Proclamation invoked "the past generations" in their support. This past unity was then shattered to pieces by the Civil War, which reconfigured suddenly and brutally the lifelong relationships Irish people had fostered among themselves and with the places they inhabited (Anderson).

Moreover, less fitting in a celebratory and Republican narrative is the focus on both the tragic micro-histories of ordinary people and the unflagging generosity of the Irish population at large in helping IRA soldiers on the run. "Earth-Bound", for instance, gives a heartfelt description of how "poor old" farmers and "brave little" girls offer shelter to two soldiers hunted down by the Black-and-Tans (6). This warm generosity, apparent during the 'historical' War of Independence, was but a faded memory in the later conflict, when the Irregulars received little support and were often the targets of open hostility. In 1922-1923, "towns welcomed the [Free State] soldiers as liberators, freeing them of the unruly clutches of republican occupation, giving them back a longed-for normality" (Dolan 141; see also Grant 54). At the same time, the descriptions of the successes on the Irish side are toned

down by remarks on the tragic consequences of it for the people involved. Indeed, "By God's Mercy" tells of the killing of a young IRA rank-and-filer by fellow countrymen who had betrayed the cause, but does so from the very 'human' angle of a sister who mourns the loss of both brother (the soldier) and mother. Significantly, the very last line of the story abruptly shifts focus from the mother's pride in her son – "he did his work well" she used to comment – to the acknowledgement of her death of heartbreak: "But she died on me before the month was out" (66).

And that *Earth-Bound* is more than a partisan narrative becomes increasingly evident in the later stories, in which Macardle tries to strike a balance between her need to assert her Republicanism and disapproval of Free State authorities *and* a more 'humanitarian concern' to give voice to those who were suffering the consequences of the conflict, but whose voices were unheard. These voices are made audible in a very indirect way, through a series of fictional testimonies; the collection *Earth-Bound* has a frame story – some men and women, not all of them Irish, gather in the studio in Philadelphia of editors Úna and Frank and start telling their own stories of tragedies they survived or of which they were witnesses. Through the device of the embedded narratives, Macardle simultaneously shows how it is problematic to recover the actual voices of the most vulnerable and asserts the duty to engage ourselves in making note of their suffering. Moreover, the 'minor' tragedies, both collective and individual, are transgenerationally recalled to challenge present societal wrongs (Corporaal 53-4), for the goal is to create not a hierarchy of the traumas, but a common ground made of relatable experiences that enable solidarity out of specificities (Rotheberg 9; 16).

The stories in *Earth-Bound* evoke the Civil War through the fictional creation of spectral and supernatural presences, which, unlike their ghostly counterparts in "Earth-Bound" and "The Brother", metaphorically symbolise a concern for justice, for their creation aims to bring to light what is hidden in the present (cf. Daniels 394). "Folk wisdom", Judith Herman reminds us, "is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told" (1) and Macardle drew on Irish lore for themes and ideas that went into the making of her ghostly revenants.

Emblematic in this regard is the story "Samhain", which, at first glance, seems to be set during the Great Hunger of 1845-1852. "Samhain" is remarkable for its use of Gothic tropes and imagery that Irish writers, since the days of Charles Robert Maturin and Sheridan Le Fanu, have often employed to allusively address the spectres and 'unspeakable' problems that haunt Ireland's history and

contemporaneity (Smart and Hutcheson 111). Comparably, in Macardle's hands, ghosts, prophecies, persecution of the living, and the remembrance of past suffering serve here to "deal with the skeletons in the Irish closet, rather than ignoring them" (Palko 6).

Samhain is the night of the year when the Celtic Otherworld becomes visible to this one, and those who were wronged can return to exact vengeance on the living. The eponymous story begins in the summer, when heavy rains in West Kerry cause the potatoes to rot and famine comes to the village killing, directly or indirectly, a large part of the population: some die of starvation or of diseases that have arisen due to a weakened immune system; others let themselves die in specially dug pits; the village fishermen, who desperately venture out to sea even when it is stormy, drown. On the night of Samhain, all the dead return as ghosts to take their revenge: they spare the village priest who, though in vain, "sent an appeal to the Dublin friends" and begun "corresponding with traders in Cork and Dublin, trying to work up a market for carrigeen moss" (16; 17). The catastrophe is blamed on those who did not care to help, even though they were able to; so the ghosts try to drag their souls to the Otherworld.

In this land of superstitions, the catastrophe is thus displaced from the realm of divine intervention to the human one: emphasis is placed on the lack of solidarity among people and, through the focus on human agency, Macardle frames the famine as a socio-political, not natural, event. This reframing is noteworthy, because, first, it challenges some dominant views concerning famines in Macardle's times, especially those of George O'Brien, who, in the wake of William Wilde, was the most influential exponent of Ireland as a "land haunted by hunger", inevitably and cyclically subject to pestilence, flood, and drought (Kennedy et al. 15) Macardle appears to eschew this idea of a chronic vulnerability of Irish society to famine, depicting famine as something whose consequences can be mitigated or prevented if we take action.

Second, for its emphasis on the lack of solidarity, Dorothy's account seems to fit into that polemical tradition around the Great Hunger aimed at blaming the inadequacy of the measures deployed by London and the landlords in Ireland during the harshest months of the famine or, even, their deliberate indifference (Corporaal). Yet several things do not add up. The images of blackened potatoes and pits along the roads, the setting in West Kerry on the Atlantic coast, do indeed evoke the Great Hunger – and according to Leeann Lane that is the setting of the story – but the lack of precise time references as well as some passing remarks

about the peasants not having any Indian meal and the reminiscence of a Great Hunger in by-gone days complicate this mid-nineteenth century placement. What is more, Macardle does not once mention the English or the Landlords in her story: all the characters are Irish and the emphasis is on the lack of solidarity *between compatriots*.

The vagueness of the temporal references together with the characterisation in Gothic terms of West Kerry transposes the story into an indefinite time or, rather, along a continuum. The idea of continuity between past and present is then further pressed into the reader's mind by the image of the dead returning from the past, for, in addition to ghosts, the bodies of the fishermen are washed up by the tide on Samhain day. I interpret these narrative choices in light of Macardle's focus on inaction, as an attempt at awakening her public of the 1920s to the 'duty to solidarity'. The seeds of the indifference portrayed in "Samhain", far from rotting away, sprouted in her times to the point that the suffering caused by inaction and indifference in "Samhain" can be viewed as an analogue of the unspoken suffering of women prisoners during the Civil War, which was caused by the collapse of bonds of solidarity inside prisons and the indifference of the people outside.

Female militants not only suffered abuse while incarcerated but were targets of harsh criticism after release, because they had dared to push the boundaries of what was deemed appropriate for a woman in the highly conservative Irish society (Molidor 43). Because of the psychological and social constraints on them, many women preferred not to speak about their prison experience just as many more people felt discomfiture in remembering the civil war after its conclusion (McAtackney 49-50).

It is therefore noteworthy that a mix of realism with the supernatural and the focus on the 'duty to solidarity' characterise also the stories "The Prisoner", "The Return of Niav", and "The Portrait of Roisin Dhu". Here, we see on paper what psychologist Cathy Caruth argues from a Freudian perspective: that, when reality is traumatic, it can only be represented indirectly in distortive figurative or allegorical terms. In Macardle's stories, indeed, the anti-narrative tension of traumatic experiences is both re-asserted and overcome by the use of supernatural elements that alter reality.

Lisa Weihman deems "The Return of Niav" and "The Portrait" "fascinating simply as relics of Macardle's imprisonment" (174), although female captivity, psychological abuse, and starvation occur here not in a Free State prison but in the Celtic fringes where the boundaries between this world and the world of the Sidhe

are thin. The perpetrators are fairies who exert preternatural violence on their young victims with various degrees of success: whereas the girl in "The Return of Niav" is saved before she dies of starvation, the young woman in "The Portrait of Roisin Dhu" is not because of the awful living conditions imposed on her and because the women residing in the surroundings did not fully commit themselves to her rescue. To see the connection of these supernatural tales with the harsh reality of the Civil War, one has to consider that the stories were first read by Macardle in a prison cell populated by females, who would thus be reminded of the fundamental importance of female alliances (Molidor 47).

But not only that: a closer look at the two stories would also offer Macardle's *audience* reading them in print evidence of the crucial importance of 'caring' to the survival of the imprisoned women *outside* the prison. Macardle, I believe, meant to engage the outside observer by taking her grammar of solidarity into the public sphere through literary mediation so that her personal healing process could also turn into a project of social, nationwide transformation (cf. Anderson 184). Evidence of my claims is contained in "The Prisoner", the story of the hunger-striker Liam Daly in Kilmainham Goal, which features a tension between the real and the oneiric and an abrupt return to reality akin to those in "A Story without an End". The tale first appeared in the periodical *Eire/Ireland* in September 1924 under the title "The Prisoners 1798-1923", which Macardle asked to be changed as soon as she learned of it, preferring to keep any time reference vague.

"The Prisoner" is told by Liam Daly himself after his release and arrival at Úna and Frank's studio in Philadelphia. As we read in the frame story, he needs to tell what happened to him in Kilmainham as if his salvation depended on this: he has a "glittering eye" like S.T. Coleridge's ancient mariner and repeatedly states "There is a story I have to tell" (31). It is the story of a hallucination he had in the last days of the strike, when the doctors no longer assisted him and the guards did not care. The same indifference to which Macardle and the other inmates were victims at the hands of their fellow Irish men, with the peculiarity that the author is here channelling the problematic narrative of the female prisoners of the Civil War into more socially acceptable modes of representation by depicting a *man* prisoner of the War of Independence.

The 'presence' of the female prisoners' repressed stories is nonetheless dealt with in "The Prisoner" through the insertion in the narrative of the ghost of a young lad with his tragic history. On the verge of madness, Liam is saved by the appearance of this boy with "starved features", who had died in Kilmainham in

1798 – the year of Wolfe Tone's rebellion that constitutes a mythical alpha point in Irish nationalistic history. This spooky kid is afraid that he will be remembered as a traitor and that the "name of shame" will be placed on his family, for the British threaten to say that the boy betrayed his Lord to coerce him into giving information. So, he asks Liam to tell him his story if he ever gets out of jail alive (34-5).

In the end, Daly survives the strike and keeps his word by telling the lad's story to Úna and Frank so that they can write it down in their newspaper. Hence, "The Prisoner" highlights to the reader the significance of rebuilding and keeping bonds of solidarity even in tragic times, as Liam Daly almost dies in the hands of his jailers, but is saved by the companionship of the lad. And the appeal to Daly ultimately extends to the 'actual' readers of the story, as the creation of the tormented lad as a ghostly revenant invites them to ponder their own role as witnesses to others' lives and personal tragedies. Stories need audiences, which in turn need to have the capacity to listen and record. This would explain the centrality given to the act of narrating and the duty to write down the stories of ordinary people, for memory is unstable: asked his name, the ghost says, "I've forgotten. I can't remember my name" (37; cf. Weihman 176-7).

The allusion to the fleeting nature of memory is also a reminder of the urgency of much-needed help. "The Prisoner" is a call to action, via the literary medium, to help Republican women prisoners of the Civil War: the "name of shame" and the purgatorial life of the young lad were arguably what befell them. Until the very end, indeed, the reader hesitates between a supernatural and a natural interpretation of the story told by Daly due to the insistent repetition that he was probably hallucinating. But the very last words of the story – "Mountjoy and Kilmainham", the places of composition (38) – brutally bring readers back to reality and remind them that "The Prisoner" is a reworking of Macardle's experiences, which she wanted to unbury.

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LAUGHING AND CRYING AT THE SAME TIME: READING BIYI BANDELE'S *BURMA BOY* THROUGH A BERGSONIAN THEORY OF THE COMIC

Abstract: The fabricated disaster caused by war and conflict and its traumatic effect on people and the environment hardly seems an appropriate subject of comic representation. Yet such an unamusing topic has often been represented in literature and visual arts through humour. Joseph Heller's novel *Catch 22* and movies such as Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* or Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* exemplify artistic expression that uses laughter to substantiate the poignant absurdity of war and genocide. Similarly, British-Nigerian writer and film director Biyi Bandele's WWII novel *Burma Boy*, the focus of the present article, uses Comedy to portray the futility, irrationality and madness of a war that had mortal consequences and traumatic resonances on the lives of the often-forgotten young Black African soldiers who participated in the Burma Campaign. In this article, I read the novel through a Bergsonian lens of the Comic to suggest that such techniques reveal the absurdity and tragedy of war by dragging the reader onto the stage to perceive themselves as part of the failings of humanity and, above all, of western modernity.

Keywords: *Biyi Bandele-Thomas; Burma Boy; Henry Bergson; Comedy; the Absurd; the Burma Campaign.*

Susan Sontag proclaims disaster "one of the oldest subjects of art." (Sontag, n.pg.) Her essay 'The Imagination of Disaster' focuses on Science Fiction as one of its sub-genres. In this article, I address another — the war narrative. War has dominated fiction ever since the Ancient Greeks wrote about the Trojan Wars or the Revolt of Spartacus and, since then, it has "never been too far away" (Van Gils, De Jong, and Croon 1). Indeed, as Van Gils et.al. note, war continues to fascinate because of its "universal psychological themes of human frailty, and heroism,

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suffering and sacrifice, loyalty and betrayal, love and hatred, reasons for wanting to live or die, belief in luck or fate and, of course, the continuous presence of all-permeating fear" (1). Nigerian-British writer, playwright and film director Biyi Bandele-Thomas' World War Two novel *Burma Boy* (2007), the focus of the present article, exemplifies this thematic universality. And yet it extends these classic tropes to warn of the dangers of anthropocentric modernity, the over-emphasis on rationality and quantification to the detriment of humanity and its relationship to nature. Indeed, scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman and Edith Wyschogrod have disclosed the relationship between modernity, the war and more specifically the Holocaust. But, as a second generation British-Nigerian, Bandele's temporal and multicultural perspective allows a re-consideration of events within a contemporary socio-political, ecological and postcolonial lens. Indeed, Senayon Olaoluwa notes how the novel unveils the entanglement between colonialism and western modernity. And it does so through a blend of aesthetic approaches true to Bandele's literary style, from the use of historiography to techniques common to the Theatre of the Absurd, such as surrealism, satire and humour (Bouchard; Kehinde; Negash). Having discussed the novel previously through the philosophical framework of Albert Camus' Absurd to suggest it a critique of anthropocentric western modernity within an African epistemology, this article focuses on Comedy as a rhetorical device inciting the reader to see the illogicality of the logicality of our machine world, the irrational of the apparently rational and, as a corrective, to reconsider our cosmological connectedness if we are to survive in a more peaceful world.

Thus, I argue here that the techniques of Laughter strengthen the perception of the absurdities of western anthropocentric modernity, a technological world that has lost contact with the reality of human existence, and the disconnect from the one profound truth of life — Cosmic Relationality and human interdependence — at the heart of the disastrous events, not only of World War Two but of all war.

Burma Boy is Bandele's most personal novel. Based on his father's traumatic war experience in the Burma Campaign of World War Two, it can be regarded as a postmemorial act, filling in the gaps of familial experience through historical investigation and fictional recreation (Hirsch). Bandele admits that its composition enabled him to "confront and exorcise those demons that had hovered over [him] from [his] childhood" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 216). Yet, it not only commemorates his father, who came back from the war "in a straitjacket" (Bandele n.ng.), but also, the forgotten history of these young black Nigerian soldiers who sacrificed their

lives, and often their sanity, for the Allied Forces. They served in a group of special forces called the Chindits under the mandate of the infamous and eccentric General Orde Wingate against the Japanese in what was then known as Burma — present-day Myanmar. And Bandele leverages historical hindsight to great effect in his often-satirical portrayal of the general as a member of the colonial forces, whilst maintaining a respectful appreciation of his position and accomplishments.

The protagonist, 14-year-old Ali Banana, a Hausa Nigerian, joined the British army — having lied about his age — typically under heroic delusions of courage and bravery, and naivety of his status as cannon fodder to the 'Whiteman's' war. Indeed, Senayon Olaoluwa, in his postcolonial reading through the Anthropocene, viewed these mainly Nigerian soldiers as children exploited by the excesses of western modernity at the heart of colonialism. The narrative, furthermore, reveals Banana's transformation from innocent and ignorant of this reality to his confrontation and final acceptance of the absurdity of his situation. As I have argued previously within the philosophical framework of Albert Camus, by accepting the Absurd and realising the beauty of the world and his relation to it, Banana finally finds consolation and meaning, exemplifying what Camus termed 'Revolt' (Howes).[1] In a nutshell, the novel functions simultaneously as therapeutic — working through family trauma — and political in its revelation of the futility of war, the ills of colonialism and imperialism rooted in anthropocentric technological modernity. Nevertheless, Bandele engages with such critical and weighty themes through irony, satire and, as we shall see in what follows, instances of Laughter.

The use of Comedy as a narrative strategy to portray the horrors of war presents a paradox bordering into the unethical. Surely, war is no laughing matter. And yet there are many artistic representations that employ this technique. The most notable of these include Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), Spike Milligan's World War Two memoirs, *Milligan's War* (1988), and the popular British BBC sitcom *Dad's Army* (1968-1977) or the World War One series *Blackadder Goes Forth* (1989) — of which the final scene remains poignantly memorable as the main characters are absurdly ordered to 'go over the top' to their inevitable deaths. By marrying Comedy with tragedy and disaster, this scene brings viewers onto the stage to perceive the inflexibility and dogged rigidity of the higher command and, thus, realise the heart-rending absurdity of these young men's death. The use of

[1] Article currently under review for publication (2022).

Laughter unites these narratives as an instrument to highlight the futility, irrationality, and in Paul Fussell's terms 'the madness of war'.

The way these narratives draw attention to absurdities resembles Henry Bergson's conceptualization of the Comic outlined in 'Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic' (1912) in which he suggests that Laughter acts as 'corrective' by permitting us to see beneath such inelasticity of body, mind and character, and to view the world as creative, chaotic and unpredictable. Thus, with Bergson's theory in mind, as Joseph Heller, and Richard Curtis and Ben Elton — the writers of *Blackadder Goes Forth* — well knew, Laughter provides an ideal technique to critique the extreme logicality of the dispassionate and 'inelastic', to use Bergson's term, military machine over human need, emotion and adaptability. Military inflexibility, moreover, reflects the strict rationality, quantification and Cartesian workings of modernity. Thus, I suggest Bandele's war narrative frames a converging critique of colonialism, western modernity and a re-assessment of Relationality through a narrative focusing on the peculiar logic and intransigence of the British military forces.

Besides his opposition to Cartesian dualism, attracting many female followers at the time, Bergson thought that Humankind must adapt to the environment and its inherent changes as part of evolution and progression. And we laugh at its absence. We find humour in inflexibility and automatization "where one would expect to find a wide-awake adaptability and the living pliableness of a human being" (Bergson 10). In other words, we find funny a person who insists on the logical or mechanical habits, ignoring the need for adaptation to circumstances, or 'pliableness'. As Simon Critchley puts it, "[w]hat fascinates Bergson is the comic quality of the automaton, the world of the jack-in-the-box, the marionette, the doll, the robot" (56). To support his argument, Bergson cites examples such as an involuntary stumble or sitting on a non-existent chair. But perhaps his most pertinent example is Charlie Chaplin's most notable achievement, *Modern Times*. Written at a time of increasing automation, and rising fascism with its emphasis on rationality, it criticises industrial, technological modernity and a system in which human beings have become products for capitalist consumption. Heidegger termed this condition 'standing reserve' — a state in which "human beings [have] become a resource to be used, but more important, to be enhanced like any other" (Dreyfus 306).

Echoing Bauman and Wyschogrod's argument in which the Holocaust and Slavery remain the utmost extreme of the 'mentalité' of technological modernity

and western capitalism, in his postcolonial reading of *Burma Boy*, Olaoluwa argues that these child African soldiers are mere objects. I support this viewpoint and suggest that they too have become mere 'standing-reserve', product for the consumption of the Imperial War Machine. Significantly, Chaplin was inspired by meeting an upholder of Relationality and opposer of colonialism, Indian activist and pacifist, Mahatma Gandhi in London (1931). Ghandi's abhorrence, however, was not only of the machines themselves that had taken over a more culturally traditional lifestyle but rather, to use Heidegger's term, in the 'mentalité' of the machinist world which blurs the boundaries between machine and humankind. *Modern Times* and Bergson's theory of the Comic reflect this mentalité. In brief, Bergson tied his observations around one main thesis — that laughter occurs when instead of adapting to new circumstances, we maintain what he terms 'mechanical inelasticity'. And it is precisely this 'machinic' characteristic in Chaplin's protagonist that we find so humorous.

If we laugh at 'inelasticity', then his theory may explain why we do so at certain goings-on in a Theatre of the Absurd. Writers working within this tradition drag the audience onto the stage to see themselves as part of the absurdities, challenging them to "make sense of non-sense, to face the situation consciously rather than feel it vaguely, and perceive, with laughter, the fundamental absurdity" (Hinchliffe 12). There is a clear semblance between the Absurd and Charlie Chaplin's Comedy in their balancing of entertainment, artistic form, and socio-political criticism. As Arnold Hinchliffe points out, in the Absurd, Humankind is hopelessly committed to "making sense of the world" (16) to rationalise what is irrational, to quantify what cannot be quantified, to impose meaning on that which has none, and to insist on the logical of the illogical. As a technique, Comedy within the Absurd forces us to confront the contradiction between this commitment to logical imposition and the reality of human existence. Bergson believes that Laughter acts as a 'correction' in that "it makes us at once endeavour to appear what we ought to be, what someday we shall perhaps end in being" (17). Furthermore, and significantly for the present argument, Hinchliffe contends that Western Man denies a chaotic universe and refuses to yield to the irrational, whereas the Asian and African, may give in to it (16). As we will see in what follows, this is a fitting observation regarding the use of Laughter in *Burma Boy* since the contradiction and friction between western colonialists, the military command and the African soldiers' deep cultural consciousness forms the basis of many instances of Comedy. Thus, as correction to the adversities of western

modernity, rooted in extreme adherence to rationality and logicality, and disregard for the relational dimension of life, Bergson's theory appears an appropriate framework through which to view the Comic in this African narrative of World War Two.

So far, we have seen Bergson's over-riding thesis — the lack of 'pliableness' or 'elasticity' when circumstances require and its relationship to his critique of modernity. Moreover, within this general assertion, he had several key observations: The first is that although it can be a coping mechanism, "laughter has no greater foe than emotion" (4). If we feel pity, fear or horror then we do not laugh — Laughter needs the emotional distance of a "disinterested spectator" (5). Second, it is "strictly *human*" (3). For example, we do not laugh at objects or animals unless they are given human characteristics. Third, it is social and belongs "to a group" (6). By this, he means that Laughter needs mutual cultural understanding and "certain requirements of life in common" (8). In what follows, we will discuss some key scenes and characters in the novel within the light of these observations.

Let us first consider the need for emotional distance. In her essay on Bergson's theory of the Comic, Emily Herring recalls the public condemnation of Comedy in the immediate wake of 09/11. She offers a fitting example of how the world, particularly the United States, still finds Comic representation of the event taboo. And yet Italian film director, Roberto Benigni in his award-winning film *Life Is Beautiful*, (1997) "dares to find humor and tenderness in the midst of the Holocaust" (Maslin n.pg.). Benigni's courage may arise from the temporal distance of the post-generation, allowing for a more critical view of events through irony, satire and Comedy without abandoning pathos. Bandele's rendering of the plight of these young Africans in Burma similarly reveals a post-generational and post-colonial consciousness that neither abandons pathos. Indeed, it is the subtle use of Comedy that creates affect. Perhaps, then, temporal distance allows "a momentary anaesthesia of the heart" as Bergson puts it (5-6). But it also allows a reconsideration and a fresh view of historical events. He suggests that [Comedy's] appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple […], [and] is the laughter of a group" (5-6). Bandele's group comprises of post-generational and post-colonial readership.

This leads us to our second point, that Laughter is *human*. It needs, in his words, "complicity" (Bergson 6). The aesthetic response of a novel depends on the complicity between the writer and implied reader, without which Comedy would fail. In *Burma Boy*, this complicity relies not only on temporal distance with its historical hindsight and postcolonial cognizance, but also a sensitivity to deep

cultural differences between a western and African consciousness, and between diverse Nigerian cultures. We laugh, for example, at the innocence of these boy soldiers' reverence of King George, whose name they pronounce 'King Joji', and who Banana innocently equates with an African chief. Banana's humorous attempt to disguise his age to join the army poignantly reveals his naivety regarding the truth of war, colonialism and the workings of the military. Yet, although the British Army may be accused of complacency and double standards in enforcing the legal minimum recruiting age of sixteen, Bandele unveils deeply challenging cultural differences at the heart of its practical implementation. After all, the age in which an individual reaches maturity is not necessarily quantifiable nor so precisely age specific. And it is the African commander, Damisa — having been a child apprentice executioner — who ultimately concedes to Banana: "A boy is a man when he feels a man. A man at forty can remain a child if he hasn't decided to be a man" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 51). Given the efforts by Human Rights organizations today to put an end to child recruitment around the world, such as Afghanistan (Becker n. pg.), it seems nothing less than an immoral aberration to justify the recruitment of children in the army, or as executioners, albeit unwittingly. Bandele certainly raises this issue. But Banana's comic attempts to trick the recruiters into believing him of age not only reveals the cultural ravine between the recruiters and recruits, but also the former's lack of elasticity and adhesion to rationality in their unyielding military and cultural perspective in contrast to the Africans'.

Something similar occurs with the comic anecdote of the regulation boots. The boys were not used to wearing shoes and, "finding bare-footing much more comfortable" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 44) hung them around their necks. This 'barrack necklace', as it was known, became a symbol of pride and honour for those "who had been specially invited to Boma by King Joji" (44). It is not only the mismatch between the boys' African village upbringing and the inelasticity of the army that creates Laughter here, but also the soldiers' unpredictability, from a western viewpoint, in their use of the boots.

The characterization of General Wingate provides another example of inelasticity and the failure to adapt to circumstances or environment. He represents what Bergson terms "the professional comic" (177), so set in his military professional mentality that he manifests "professional callousness" (177), having "no room to move or be moved like other men" (177). The 'professional comic' confines themselves within their jargon, professional habits and logic to the extent that they are incapable of "talking like ordinary people" (179). The army is a clear

case in point and its members often archetypical of such behaviour. Much like Chaplin in *Modern Times,* we laugh at these characters because they often "lack awareness of their surroundings and themselves" (Herring n. pg.), and according to Bergson, Laughter serves as correction to such deficiencies.

In the opening scenes of the novel, with Wingate in a state of debilitating malarial fever in Cairo, Bandele immediately establishes a sharp cultural contrast between the dogged military rationality, western colonial mindset and local culture. He is confined within his own logical world. Furthermore, Bergson suggests we laugh at eccentricity as an instance of inflexibility that disallows evolution. Wingate was indeed well-known for his eccentricities, such as eating an onion as if it were an apple, or his dishevelled appearance. In this scene, however, he also behaves outside of expected social norms, even being rude to the Colonel, who asks after his ill-health in the hotel. But when we first meet Wingate, "a strange man dressed in a British Army uniform" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 3), he appears out-of-synch with the chaos of the Cairo Street scene, "looking, he said, for a chemist", which "existed only in his fever-sapped imagination" (3). But his malarial state betrays his professional status by manifesting a bodily limitation that he desperately wishes to control by obtaining some Atabrine.

With an appearance and behaviour that does not conform to the efficiency and logicality of a military commander, the readers' impression is of someone whose body is out-of-control, recalling bodily materiality and the uncontrollable chaotic nature of human existence. His malarial state lies in opposition to his usual mechanical functioning. We see the man in all his humanity under the military armour, revealing the absurdity of this rigidity. And despite his stubborn determination to find a non-existent chemist, he only receives "curses and insults", according to the local custom of insulting one's parents, and is further "palmed off to the concierge [of the Continental Hotel] like an unwanted gift" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 4). This comic scene highlights both Wingate's, and thus Colonialists', lack of cultural and circumstantial adaptability and, equally, the Egyptians' inability to understand the Whiteman's lack of versatility. His quintessential 'Englishness', inelasticity at odds with his surroundings and his attempt to control his illness renders him a comic figure at the same time as pitiable.

Furthermore, Wingate's inflexibility also extends to his strict Christian beliefs. He fails to see other viewpoints, further exposing the absurdity of religious dogmatisms. This is staged in a scene in which he attempts to raise his men's morale through a rallying cry to the Scottish Cameronians. He states that the soldiers would be "armed with the sword of justice and protected by the

Breastplate of Righteousness" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 169), to which a Scots soldier opines "[y]ou and God can f...ing well do without me, sir" (169). We find this comic not only for the Scotsman's blunt honesty but because of Wingate's inelasticity, awakening us to the absurdity of dogmatic religion and the assumption that others should conform to these beliefs. Finally, in addition to his professional persona, Wingate's cultural inadaptability, his personal vaingloriousness and narcissism mean a fundamental lack of awareness of others. Thus, laughing at these rigid traits serves as a corrective of such attitudes which Bergson considered as inconvenient to society.

Similarly, we also find comic the Colonel who, having met a sick Wingate in the hotel, rather than adapting to the latter's mental or physical state, rigidly confines himself to military rules. He remarks, "you look as pale as death. I want to make sure you are all right. Then I'm going to have you arrested for rudeness to a superior officer" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 12). This incongruence causes Laughter precisely because the first part shows awareness of others, but it is neutralized with his ultimate persistence of rigid mechanical social norms and military rules over human need. Thus, it serves as a correction to this hypocrisy.

Yet the British are not the only objects of Comedy. Despite his likeability, we smile at Banana for similar reasons as Wingate — his inadaptability. And he is just as eccentric. Thus, viewed within Bergson's framework, he represents a threat to society, and we laugh at him to counter the threat. Banana's inelasticity, however, is due to his childlike innocence and outsiderness. Bergson points out that Laughter arises from 'not belonging' just as much as 'belonging' (135; 177). In Banana's case, more education, worldliness and inter-cultural insight would help him to "figure out what it was about him that was […] so laughable" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 97) and the reason for him being "the unwitting butt" (99) of jokes. He remains in 'un-evolving' child-like state and, thus, the joke about the man who lost a ring inside his house but looked for it outside because there was more light, illustrates this state. He fails to understand the joke, and when asking if he found the ring, he "was baffled by the raucous laughter that greeted his question" (97-8). He had only asked because he had also lost a ring and thus thought that he should have also looked for it outside. We laugh at the joke because of its incongruence, but also because his naivety situates him as an outsider. Banana, however, personifies the very incongruence that causes us to laugh in the first place.

Within a Bergson's framework, then, laughing at his inadaptability and innocence is punitive. After all, in the theatre of war, these traits could cost him his life. But drawing our attention to his innocence also underscores the

scrupulousness of the army in their use of such innocent recruits. Banana remains ignorant of his own absentmindedness and difference, and thus, resembles Bergson's notion of a comic character who is "invisible to himself while remaining visible to the world" (17) and therein partly lies his tragic status. Unlike the Scotsman mentioned earlier, Banana is like a "simpleton who is hoaxed" (Bergson 17). And Laughter draws attention to this hoax.

Thus, Banana contrasts with the army's rigidity and insensitivity. His innocence and cultural idiosyncrasies clash with the military world — his convoluted comparison of himself to the pot in the "tale of the scorpion and the pot" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 40), for example, only irritates the captain, who merely wants Banana for a mule driver. But Banana, through a convoluted elaboration on family ancestry, insists that is it beneath the social standing expected in his culture. The officer, however, in his 'mechanical inelasticity' cares nothing about family linage nor Banana's cultural mindset. But, whilst Banana remains ignorant of western thinking and machinistic mentality of the military, the latter makes no effort to adapt to local circumstances either. This mutual inadaptability not only creates Comic affect but serves as corrective, exposing the tragic drama of these innocent young African boys vis-a-vis the merciless rigidity of the colonial forces.

Bandele leverages, moreover, his contemporary multicultural and plurilingual cognizance, creating comic scenes, often reassembling classic slapstick, whilst alluding to the need for intercultural understanding. From a Bergsonian standpoint, this is "comic *created* by language" rather than "the comic *expressed* by language" (103). He makes use of translations between different African languages, and from these to English, to comic effect. Consider, for example, the scene in which the Gambian Non-commissioned Officer (NCO) with scant understanding of Hausa heard the phrase 'dan kilaki' and wondered what was said about "the chief's clerk", to which a Nigerian explained that "'[it] means son-of-a-clerk […] a Hausa term of abuse. It means son-of-a-woman-who-trades-her-body-for-money,'" prompting the Gambian to ask if "'Nigerian clerks [were] prostitutes'" (36). Absurdity arises because of the Gambian's lack of creativity, literal thinking and lack of cultural awareness. Also, as Bergson notes, "language only attains laughable results because it is a human product" (129). It is as organic and flexible as the human mind. Literal translations abound throughout the novel, reminiscent of those automatically generated on YouTube, revealing a mechanical rigidity inconsonant with the adaptability of life and requirements of social life.

Yet Banana ultimately shows a great deal of flexibility when confronted with the chaotic nature of the natural world. In the denouement, having shed his army uniform, he appears a "naked African" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 211) in harmony with nature, in sharp contrast to the military's disregard for the environment. Bandele also creates a sense of mutual dependency between humans and nature — Banana needs the leeches that feed off his body as much as they need him. He expresses his gratitude to a snake whose "home" he had requisitioned for the night: "Come back my friend […] There's room enough for both of us. It's your home after all. There's room enough for every one of us" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 207). There may indeed be 'room' enough for humankind to exist in harmony with nature, but he leaves the "generous snake" with "two pistols, a Bren rifle, some ammunition and quite a few grenades" (209). Confronted not only by the war, but by western modernity, it will need to defend its 'home'.

Whilst these closing scenes convey a serious note, Bandele's technique remains light. Bergson suggests that we only laugh at animals if we impose upon them some human characteristic. We smile at Banana talking to the snake, the monkeys who 'boo' at the follies of human beings, and the leeches who fall "to the ground in a happy swoon […] with a dance of ecstasy and gratitude" (Bandele, *Burma Boy* 208). Personification draws attention to what needs correcting: anthropocentric modernity. As I have argued elsewhere, the change in Banana is not so much from a boy to man, a common trope in war literature, but of his state of awareness of the connectedness between nature, and humankind (Howes). And, having confronted death closely, he becomes more acutely aware of mortality. After the horrors of war, as he stumbles into the stronghold, it is as if he has discovered the truth of existence — Relationality and love for others. This what brings him meaning and resilience and, thus, his euphoria.

Finally, we may be left with a sense of the madness of the Burma Campaign, the suffering of these very young African soldiers, and the tragedy of war. But, while for Sonntag science fiction extends the boundaries of science, *Burma Boy* extends its immediate subject boundaries by offering an indictment of western anthropocentric modernity and machinistic mindset that led the world into the disaster of World War Two. The novel forwards the humanist, ecological viewpoint that the disaster of war and conflict remain absurd confronted with the reality of the world. The machinistic, Cartesian mentalité of the western world remains at odds with the chaotic, ever-evolving universe with which Banana finally becomes integrated, offsetting the deeper African cultural mindset against White, western values. There may be other reasons for Laughter, and the novel

may proffer examples, but since Bergson upholds that Laughter stands to correct a society entrenched in 'mechanical inelasticity' and a machinistic worldview that rides roughshod over nature, and our embeddedness in it, *Burma Boy* illustrates how Comedy may function to warn the post-generation of the deep root of human-made disasters of which war forms part. And, ultimately, Bandele's comic technique opens our eyes to a reconsideration of Relationality and to view life as creative, chaotic and unpredictable as an alternative way forward.

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Yuko Yoshida[*]

WHEN MEMORY BECOMES DEBRIS: AESTHETIC MODES OF REPRESENTING DISASTER LOSS

Abstract: The concept of public forgetting by Bradford Vivian explains how acts of forgetting are utilized to enhance selective and normative public remembrance. One common example is when tons of debris caused by a natural disaster that once functioned as material memory either on a personal or collective levels were taken away. How do people respond to this kind of loss when such memory has to be disposed of as waste? Japanese disaster memory discourse aims to disseminate knowledge of disaster prevention, preparedness, and commemoration of victims, while the ways disaster survivors make sense of their losses individually have yet to be examined. The Kobe City's monument and the annual commemorative service of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake bring about chronological post-disaster temporality among the general public. However, three different survivor testimonies this article analyzes show that individual kins of the deceased called izoku continue to nurture their memories of the deceased relevant to their current lives; their memories are related to the past trauma, but they are simultaneously interrelated memories in the present. James E. Young's concept of texture of memory, Giuliana Bruno's concept of fabrics of the visual, and Ernst van Alphen's concept of reintegration of subjectivity and body are examined to consider the way a survivor/izoku connects lost material memory with the present living memory. The series of earthenware works crafted by a survivor/izoku are analyzed to consider how she makes sense of absence and presence of the deceased in her present everyday life. The author proposes decomposed memory as a concept of processing memory as debris, where memory needs to be appropriately decomposed and transformed by individuals into interrelated memory.
Keywords: *interrelated memory; act of witnessing; decomposing memory; texture of memory; reintegration.*

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Collective Memorialization of Disaster

The devastating power of a natural disaster strongly affects those who inhabit the area. Anyone who survived the initial massive destruction gains the social right to declare their position as first-hand eyewitnesses to the catastrophe. Despite the assumed value of first-hand eyewitness of a disaster, there is no guarantee that all first-hand survivor testimony will be selected as the component of the collective public memory. How does the selection of preferred survivor narratives shape the collective memory of the 1995 earthquake and its aftermath? James E. Young, scholar of English and Judaic Studies once expressed his surprise at "how little critical attention was being devoted to the forms and meanings of remembrance engendered by memorials and museums constructed expressly to deepen the memory of the Holocaust. . . . no single work has explored the literal process—the construction—of memory in its memorials" (*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* 172-3). Young calls the ways memorials and museums construct memory of the Holocaust with political, cultural and ideological reflections as "texture of memory" (Young 172). Concretely, he explains that meanings of memorials of historical events emerge for the first time when viewers/visitors make sense of the memorials by relating themselves in their own way to memorials and the past events:

> The usual aim in any nation's monuments, however, is not solely to displace memory or to remake it in one's own image: it is also to invite the collaboration of the community in acts of remembrance. To the extent that the myths or ideals embodied in a nation's monuments are the people's own, they are given substance and weight by such reification and will appear natural and true; hence, an inescapable partnership grows between people and its monuments. . . . It is not to Holocaust monuments as such that we turn for remembrance, but to ourselves within the reflective space they [events, icons, and ourselves] both occupy and open up. In effect, there can be no self-critical monuments, but only critical viewers. (Young 189)

When substance and weight of embodied myths or ideals belong to the acts of remembrance of the viewers or participants, people can make sense of relating to the monuments of historical events regardless of their status as first-hand, second-

hand eyewitness, or non-witness. The cultural value of memory is not judged by the position of the survivor-eyewitness in relation to a historical event, but by the degree to which the viewers of the embodiment of historical memory (such as monuments) can make sense of the texture of memory in their own living contexts of self-reflective acts of remembrance.

Regarding the official site of commemoration and the monument of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which exists at the East Park in Kobe City, two survivors testify to the reasons why they won't go to the site for the annual commemoration ceremony. Ms. Sachiko Matsumoto, a survivor/*izoku* says that there is no "truth" there:

> What on earth does the East Park mean? I know that (victims') names are inscribed (on the stones) in the underground space. It does not matter to me. I do not feel like going to see them. It is out of the question that I would go to the East Park on the commemoration day. I have no idea about what journalists think about what January 17th means…. I was forced to go there…. I do not understand…. Why does it have to be there? It was not the place where my younger sister was killed…It was not the place where her life ended. There is not truth there…. It is not such a monument (that contains the truth). It does not contain individuals' feelings. Maybe those who go there are not *izoku*, I suppose?

Matsumoto once agreed to go to the East Park on the commemoration day at the request of a journalist who insisted in taking pictures of her posing to commemorate her late sister in front of candles, with eyes closed and hands put together in a gesture of praying. Obviously, she has no emotional connection to either the commemoration site or the monument because this ceremony and the monument have nothing to do with her individual memory of how her late sister was killed. The public commemoration site and the monument that are supposed to function to maintain disaster memory of the victims do not bear any truths. Likewise, another survivor/*izoku* Mr. Yoshinori Kamisho testifies that he would never go to the commemoration site because he feels distanced from it.

> I have never been there. I do not know much about it… It is called the East Park. It is on the corner of Sannomiya intersection. Although I know its presence, … They say that (victims') names are inscribed on the wall. Every year, on the commemoration day, people gather in the morning to light candles and commemorate… they do it every year… I suppose some people go there routinely,

> but I do not go there… I imagine some people go there… it appears so distant, looking from my viewpoint. I feel very (distant).

Kamisho recognizes the location and has superficial knowledge of what the monument looks like. Yet, it is very clear from this testimony that he is emotionally detached from the site, the monuments, the visitors/participants and their acts of remembrance embodied by lighting candles and praying. These two survivor/*izoku* testimonies illustrate the extreme opposite of Young's explanation about how "an inescapable partnership grows between people and its monuments" when the myths or ideals of the monuments belong to people so that they can feel the monuments embody something "natural and true" (189). The attempt of constructing a texture of memory of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake through the commemoration site, the monument, and the act of remembrance do not collaborate with these survivor/*izoku*'s emotions, even though the names of their lost loved ones are inscribed on the monument wall. Consequently, it does not make any sense for them to go there. These two survivors' testimonies suggest that collective memorialization of the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, even while inscribing the names of victims on the memorial, do not give weight to the survivor/*izoku*'s feelings. Likewise, the monument site does not represent the singularity of each victim or each *izoku*. Thus, what remains at the collective memorial site is an ambiguous void of an object, which is difficult to encapsulate either in meanings or feelings.

Bearable Weight

Substance and weight of monuments embodied by myths or ideals of the people's own, not of a nation's, generate collaboration between monuments and people. The "inescapable partnership", as Young calls it, between monuments and ourselves grows from this embodied weight. The weight implies both conceptual and literal materials. The destruction of an earthquake encompasses both material and abstract elements. The loss of material objects that represents one's life history and memory without a doubt damages the frame and substance of an individual's internal world. Survivor/*izoku* Ms. Tomiyo Nakakita testifies that she lost all porcelain and earthenware that she had collected for years before the disaster. Six months prior to the earthquake, she started taking pottery classes. The quake killed the oldest and the only daughter of her three children. For about two months afterwards, she made an effort to behave as calmly and normally as possible in

front of others. After she carried out a farewell service for the late daughter, she says she "fell into a hole":

> I fell into a hole. I could not meet anyone. I could not speak (to anyone). I stayed in an evacuation shelter… . Every morning, I put my hands together to pray for her (late daughter), … and I heard her voice saying to me that 'why don't you start making pottery again?'… (at that time) I used to use plates supplied for evacuees from the city government, even if I disliked them (there was no other choice). I wanted to return to the same place with the four of us to live together, so that Yuri's remains could also come back to this place, … I thought I will make earthenware so that the four of us could use them when we come back. … I thought there is meaning to serve food in a plate, hold it, and dine with it. … There would be Yuri's photograph. …(In) the house designed by my husband, (there would be) plates I made, and we dine … . that is the household.

Instead of purchasing what was lost, she made all of them by herself. She designed her plates using either white or black glaze in order to highlight food served on them to prevent distracting from the original food color. The flower base is approximately sixty centimeters tall so that lilies, which represent her late daughter's name in Japanese (Yuri literally means lily), can stand straight inside the base. All earthenware has a clear purpose to be used in her present life, and each work embodies an inexplicit relation to her late daughter.

The largest difference between the inscribed monument wall of the 1995 earthquake and Nakakita's pottery series is that one represents the "reminder" (Young 8) of the past historical event, the other embodies day-to-day connection with the past. Young explains this paradoxical function of national monuments:

> . . . the memorial operation remains self-contained and detached from our daily lives. Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience. To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. In effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them. (Young 5)

The monument wall is supposed to function as a reminder of the specific time and day of the earthquake because people tend to forget such events, so when the memorial day comes they are reminded of what happened. Contrarily, Nakakita's

pottery mobilizes the continuing present life practices connected with past memory, so the pottery does not bear the function of forgetting the past.

As an obvious contrast to the function of government monuments, Nakakita's earthenware work is neither a memorial object nor a reminder of her daughter's death. These plates and the flower vase provide substance and weight she can bear to grasp and hold. She emphasized: "I added various feelings into the clay while kneading: the indescribable pain, resentment of not being able to see Yuri's growth, and anger … I put (all of them) into the clay and kneaded it". The life of food is set in the plates and the life of flowers is poured into the vase as she uses them in her present life. However, the weight of these vessels reflects her indescribable pain and resentment.

The parallel photographic images of pottery before and after they are used provide the viewers with a new channel from which they are allowed to know how the survivor/*izoku* creates a source of post-disaster everyday life differently each time. Because of this juxtaposition of before and after the use of pottery, the viewer can recognize that this earthenware are vessels that support the bearable weight of life. The viewers can imagine her actions of holding plates and bowls. These motions of using them and setting them aside for a next use are recurrently a part of her present life. Each time these vases, plates, pots are used, they take a new appearance and meaning for her. Pottery is open to new engagement with new objects that fill these containers. The action of holding a plate, or a vase, or a bowl, is a bodily movement that activates bearable memory.

Closed Form

Young defines the "texture of memory" as the substance and weight embodied in the historical monuments through collaborative acts of remembrance of the event, the monuments, and people. Giuliana Bruno, a scholar of visual arts and media develops the concept of "the fabrics of the visual" (4) to underline the effect of sensation of the surface that creates a public intimacy. Bruno claims that: "The reciprocal *contact* between us and objects or environments indeed occurs on the surface. It is by way of such tangible, 'superficial' contact that we apprehend the art object and the space of art, turning contact into the communicative interface of a public intimacy" (3). For her, the surface of objects or environments does not mean a mere superficial image of objects or environments, or even translucent filter or medium that conveys to viewers some information or sensation. The

surface is the material site of contact where we and objects or environments communicate to build a public intimacy. Therefore, when the surface of objects becomes a tangible interface, it can be sensed as fabrics that make us feel its texture and intimacy. Through the tangible fabrics of the surface, we can communicate with the visual appearance of objects or environments around us, and then collaborate with acts of meaning-making. She further adds that the surface of a visual text can bear a history of affects and emotions:

> One can say that a visual text can even *wear* its own history, inscribed as an imprint onto its textual surface. It can also show affects in this way. After all, the motion of an emotion can itself be drafted onto the surface, in the shape of a line or in the haptic thickness of pigment, and it can be tracked down with tracking shots. An affect is actually 'worn' on the surface as it is threaded through time in the form of residual stains, traces, and textures. In visual culture, surface matters, and it has depth. (5)

As Bruno argues, the surface of materials carries history, culture, and thus the depth of transactive reflections. Thus, it would be intriguing to think how one's mind is stimulated by the surface, as well as by substance and weight in order to be affected in a certain imaginative way by the closed, unseen space. Japanese American artist and ceramist, Toshiko Takaezu, created a series of works in the 1960s known as "closed forms". The series are bottles or pots with their lids sealed, obviously not supposed to be used in the usual manner. Takaezu left only a pinhole on top of the lids to release the air during firing. Pool J. Smith argues: "The poetry of the outside evokes the mystery of the inside, an aspect of these works that the artist considers vital. Their dark interiors remain a secret space" (16).

Later, Takaezu added a paper-wrapped wad of clay inside the closed forms, so that after firing, the clay remains separate from the inside surface of the pot and creates a clanging sound when someone holds it. Lee Nordress calls this technique a "private affair" (27). Critic Janet Koplos notes: "That very nice term suggests the modesty of the sound and the intimacy of the exchange between the pot and the individual who is not just looking at the vessel but handling it. . . . She is also said to have written poems on the inside of some works, but only breakage would reveal them to the world." (27-8). The hidden clay ball inside the closed forms or the poem inscribed inside the vessel emphasize both privacy and intimacy of the work. The sound created by the clay inside the closed pot underlines "the existence

of the interior" (28) and the motion connects human and the vessel itself. When a viewer holds a closed form in which a wad of clay is hidden, the contact through the surface of the work connects the viewer's body with the substance beyond the surface. Certainly, as Bruno asserts, "the surface holds what we project into it. It is an active site of exchange between subject and object. The surface, like the screen, is an architecture of relations. It is a mobile place of dwelling, a transitional space that activates cultural transits. It is a plane that makes possible forms of connectivity, relatedness, and exchange." (8). Yet, somehow, the meaning of the hidden poem inscribed on the other side of the surface of Takaezu's closed form, which can be seen as tangible only if the pot is broken, makes us consider that not only the texture of the surface of objects or environments, but also unseen, intangible forms beyond and behind such surfaces evoke the memories of others.

Interrelatedness

According to Ernst Van Alphen, memory is structurally different from trauma. He states that "[m]emories are representations of the past" (36). This is crucial to understand because this simple idea can be easily overlooked. Thus, he continues, memories are always memories of something, something is remembered. Structurally, memories have narrative structure, and in that sense, they have a constructive effect because they reconstruct and represent the past. On the other hand, trauma cannot be remembered. In the realm of trauma, "reality and representation are inseparable. There is no distinction: the representation *is* the event" (36). Van Alphen explains what it means to have "cultural responsibility" towards historical events, particularly, the Holocaust. He claims that it means to establish a connection to the past, which is part of the survivors in the present:

> Although the actual events are over and belong to the past, the experience of those events continues: many survivors live still inside them. This history, in other words, is at once in the past and in the present. The cultural responsibility that befalls those living now, therefore, is to establish contact with the 'past' part of the present survivors; to integrate them, with their past, into our present" (93-94).

Van Alphen explains how we relate to the past in the present by analyzing the projection effect of French artist Christian Boltanski's series of installations titled

Ombres (Shadows) (1984), *Bougies* (Candles) (1986), and *L'ange d' alliance* (Angel of accord) (1986). In order to "keep its memory alive" (175), he argues that Boltanski uses the technique of projecting images of models of death on the wall by the flame of candles or the lighting of a projector. This effect does not represent the dead or the death in the past, but presents the correspondence of the two subjects in the present. He argues:

> The subjects (figures) are not transformed into objects; rather, an interaction between two subjects occurs. The projection is not a dead object left behind in the past; it responds to its model all the time within the temporal dimension in which the viewer also is: the present … . Death—the power that organized the Holocaust — and those who were the victims of death are no longer overwhelmingly present in their confrontational absence. In *Shadows* and *Candles*, the figures of death and the dead are present in their immediate correspondence with their living projections. (173-5)

Keeping memory of the past alive in the present, as demonstrated by Boltanski's series of installations effectively helps us take a position in the present to relate to past events, rather than being drawn into secondary traumatization by said past events or, being overwhelmed by indifference or forgetfulness.

Tomiyo Nakakita created series of pottery in different forms and textures, and for different uses. Her action was evoked by the collaboration with her late daughter through interrelatedness in her present life, so that she could make sense of her life in the aftermath of the disaster. The interrelatedness referred to by the author points to the way in which a disaster survivor/*izoku* appropriately decomposes disaster memory by themselves. Thus, she transforms past traumatic memory into interrelated connection with the deceased, whose image keeps growing in her post-disaster life.

This concept is different from Bradford Vivian's concept of public forgetting. According to Vivian, "forgetting is desirable to, even necessary for, maintaining cultures of memory that serve the needs of the present as much as they conform to the shape of the past…" (9). The difference between the act of public forgetting and act of decomposing memory is that a survivor/*izoku* makes time for herself and takes time by herself in order to access what has been destroyed and lost and what material memory was taken away from her life. It is a totally different process than that of a survivor giving up what has been lost and adjusting her loss to other people's spatio-temporal discourse of recovery in exchange of forgetting what was

lost. An example of the act of decomposing memory is how Nakakita does not relate to her daughter in the past, but in her present life. Among the many vessels she made, she created urns for her late daughter in which she put her bones and ashes. The small urn preserves the daughter's Adam's apple and the larger urn contains the rest of her remains.

She testifies to the context in which she created these urns:

> The reason why I wanted to make the urn was . . . at the crematorium, (they put her bones and ashes) inside the readymade white porcelain urn . . . and then, it was wrapped by a white cloth, and I held it to go home . . . I thought one day . . . I want to kneed the clay by myself, hand-build it, form it . . . with the clay I knead, I wanted to cradle her, . . . I wanted to hold her …

Kneading clay to be used for hand-building a form is time-consuming. Nakakita says that, while kneading the clay, she did not need to talk to anyone, she kneaded the clay in silence, at her own tempo, and others did not bother to speak to her, so she could knead her feelings into the clay. She chose red clay and blew earth-colored glaze with her own breath instead of pouring the glaze onto the urn. She intentionally used natural color and natural form in response to a totally nonsensical cremation procedure, after which she had to bring back a readymade white porcelain urn. Making the late daughter's urn from scratch is another process during which she is trying to make sense of her late daughter's presence inside her rebuilt house.

Another Nakakita creation process exemplifies the way she strived to create meaning through pottery-making. All her earthenware have the sign, "TO" in Japanese (fig. 4). She says that most viewers mistake its meaning for an abbreviation of her first name, Tomiyo. Only to some select few, she explains the true meaning of the sign TO: the Japanese postpositional particle, "and". She always inscribed TO on the hidden surface of her pottery, as she said in her heart "Yuri *and* Mom." She testifies that:

> The plates are used to share food with people who get together. I made (plates) by thinking about fun times, which is the time that is to come in the future, and that is also the past time I made pottery with Yuri, linked with the past memory. I find the time making pottery fulfilling.

Van Alphen explains the way the survivor reintegrates his or her subjectivity and body in the presence of the listener during her act of testimony.

> During the testimony the survivor gains access to his or her self, to his or her own *body*. This reintegration of subjectivity and body is the result of the healing process. The survivor is 'reembodied' in several aspects. First, she reclaims the position of witness to the history she has lived through. But second, thanks to the externalization of the traumatic events, she has inserted herself into the historical dimension of the listener. No longer isolated within a past event, she now finds herself in the present dialogical situation with a listener. This being-in-the-present during testimony makes it possible to look back and tell, or testify to, her story—hence, to reclaim the past, but also to relate to other human beings in the present. The interhuman situation of testimony is in that sense not only a precondition for continuing to live, but also, because of the interrelatedness, emblematic for life after testimony. (153)

Van Alphen describes "the interrelatedness" of the act of testimony occurring between a testifier and a listener as a precondition to continue living in the present, which is characteristic of life after testimony (153). Nakakita's pottery-making practices elicit the interrelatedness between the survivor and the victim, as well as between the survivor and the others who dine with her using the plates she made. The meaning of "and" inscribed as the signature on her pottery—which is the interrelatedness between the two subjects (Nakakita and her daughter Yuri)—points to the way each pot is made and used through both the past and present memory, the latter represented by food and people who are welcomed to dine together. The urns, nevertheless, remain intangible to the viewers, filled as they are with the late daughter's remains, unseen due to the closed lids. These sealed lids make the viewer sense the weight of unretrievable life. Looking at this unique closed form, the viewer understands that pottery does not represent the absence of a daughter, but the presence of her living memory in the present.

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Shpëtim Madani[*]

DISASTER AND EMOTION IN RICHARD MATHESON'S NOVEL *I AM LEGEND*

Abstract: This article seeks to examine the emotional impact of disaster in the novel *I Am Legend* (1954) by Richard Matheson, one of the most celebrated writers of science fiction and horror genre in the 20th century. A global pandemic appears to have transformed all people into vampires, except for Robert Neville, the hero, who is immune to the virus. The only human survivor now, he is nightly faced with the massive threat of these infected living and undead vampires, whom the hero kills without mercy day by day, drastically reducing their numbers. While striving to survive at all costs, he tries hard to find a cure for the disease but is finally caught by the living vampires and condemned to death due to his unrestrained violence against them. As the last representative of the 'old society', he must relinquish the Earth to the 'new society', which is now able to keep the disease in check with a pill. Based on a qualitative research, the analysis begins with an introduction into the concepts of disaster and emotion. It subsequently elaborates on a range of emotions and feelings resulting from the catastrophe in the novel: fear and anxiety; sadness and grief; interest and anticipation, with a view to analyzing the hero's capability of managing and regulating his emotions and the others' emotions under psychologically and emotionally distressing circumstances. It is concluded that Neville is not particularly able to effectively manage his emotions, which translates into excessive violence against others. Becoming aware of the consequences of his destructive acts, he accepts his tragic end with courage.
Keywords*: disaster; emotion; pandemic; vampire; virus*.

Introduction

A disaster – natural or human-caused – can be highly consequential on a social, economic, physical and psychological level by adversely affecting a large

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area of land, destroying dwellings, leaving many people isolated, without resources, causing trauma, and often death. On a more personal plane, the extent of emotional harm varies with the individual's self-esteem and his/her resilience.

Disasters occurring on a massive scale, such as pandemics, are extremely destructive and disruptive. In particular, a pandemic, unlike a wildfire, hurricane, or earthquake, enforces segregation and alienation among its survivors, often further psychologically and emotionally aggravating the negative consequences of the catastrophe itself. Marcel Blanchot (1980), in his influential book *Writing about Disaster*, states:

> The disaster ruins everything, all the while leaving everything intact. It does not touch anyone in particular; "I" am not threatened by it, but spared, left aside. It is in this way that I am threatened by it. It is in this way that the disaster threatens in me that which is exterior to me – an other than I who passively become other. (1)

When it comes to man-made disasters, humanity has demonstrated that it is capable of the worst: the deaths and destruction of First and Second World Wars were indescribable. In particular, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, with the view to speeding up the end of the war, brought on devastation beyond imagination. The event led to the perennial nuclear threat rendering the destruction of the world a distinct possibility. In this context, in his article, *Dramatizing and De-Dramatizing the End,* Klaus Scherpe (2000) emphasizes:

> Not only has it [world destruction] become producible but, perhaps, even interchangeable: an ecological disaster and the catastrophic developments now underway in genetic engineering are both just as suitable for snuffing out human existence or making it unrecognizable. The producibility of the catastrophe *is* the catastrophe. (qtd. in Becker 2)

With the COVID-19 global pandemic just recently declared officially over, sci-fi fantasy genre seems more real than ever. In this light, in his article *Imagination in Times of Pandemic…A Mutation towards a "Second Reality"*, researcher R. Elidrissi (2021) poses some poignant questions:

> In these times of adversity, what does it take to survive when the world comes crashing down? How do humans stay resilient, manage their growing

> stress, and somehow navigate through the crisis? More specifically, how do humans cope with isolation and loneliness in the light of a global outbreak? (1)

Such concerns were raised by Matheson at the beginning of his literary career, with him stating: "My theme in those years [the early fifties] was of a man, isolated and alone, and assaulted on all sides by everything you could imagine" (Winter 42). This way, the vampires' uninterrupted attack against the only human survivor serves the writer's intent most effectively.

In raising such grave and topical concerns, *I am Legend* was an immediate success for 27-year-old Matheson. The book was made into three films, namely: *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Omega Man* (1971), and *I Am Legend* (2007). Matheson is also credited with being the first writer to have created the urban horror genre, thus removing it from outlandish and settings. In this regard, horror critic Douglas E. Winter (1990) considers Matheson "perhaps the most influential writer of horror fiction of his generation" (38).

A disaster, just like any event or situation, evokes different kinds of emotions in the experiencer. Defining emotions, or *pathê (passions)*, as "all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain [lupe] or pleasure [hedone]. Such are anger, pity, fear, and the like, with their opposites", (qtd.in Scarantino 14), Aristotle was among the first theoriticians to have formulated a definition of emotions. He attributed a practical objective to the *Rhetoric* in seeking to help orators with their political and judicial speeches, since public speakers would be more persuasive if they managed to control their own and audience's passions. In this context, Aristotle stated that "our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile" (qtd.in Scarantino 15). Elaborating on twelve different emotions, Aristotle examined the kinds of mental attitudes, personalities, and circumstances under which certain passions are felt.

Aristotle and other philosophers or psychologists, such as Descartes, Hume, James, and Freud belong to the traditional view in identifying emotion with conscious feeling, which differentiates emotion from other mental states. Freud (1950) stated: "It is surely of the essence of an emotion that we should feel it, i.e. that it should enter consciousness" (109-10).

Other more modern theory highlights the implicit or unconscious nature of emotion, which entails a lack of awareness of both the stimulus evoking the

emotion and of the produced emotion itself. Kihlstrom (1999) makes the following distinction:

> Paralleling the usage of these descriptors in the cognitive unconscious, "explicit emotion" refers to the person's conscious awareness of an emotion, feeling, or mood state; "implicit emotion", by contrast, refers to changes in experience, thought, or action that are attributable to one's emotional state, independent of his or her conscious awareness of that state. (432)

According to this approach, the generation of a certain emotion depends on the individual interpretation of the stimulus. For example, if a person interprets a situation as threatening, then fear is probably aroused. If disapproval is involved, the person is likely to experience shame.

Emotions are complex and varied. Based on stimuli, people experience and elicit numerous emotional feelings such as love, anger, excitement, and the like every day. Emotions can be short-term (e.g. disgust) or long-term (e.g. hatred); noticeable to the observer (e.g. anger) or hidden from them (e.g. anxiety); socially acceptable (e.g. happiness) or unacceptable (e.g. sadness); culturally generally encouraged (e.g. enthusiasm in Western culture and satisfaction in Eastern culture) or generally discouraged (e.g. grief in Western culture and fear in Eastern culture).

Regarding the importance of emotions, in their chapter *Emotion and Adaption,* Lazarus & Smith (1990) emphasize that:

> Subjectively, there are few psychological phenomena that compare with emotion. Emotions punctuate almost all the significant events in our lives: We feel proud when we receive a promotion; we become angry when we learn that our homes have been burglarized; we are joyful at the births of our children; and we experience profound grief at the death of someone we love. Furthermore, the emotions we experience seem to strongly influence how we act in response to these events: The joy and pride encourage renewed commitment to advance and protect career and family; the anger motivates us to seek justice and retribution; and the sadness pushes us to seek aid and comfort while coming to terms with our loss. (609)

Researchers generally agree on a list of six primary emotions, namely: happiness, fear, anger, sadness, surprise, and disgust. They are universally experienced and

easily recognized across all human cultures. These basic emotions, in turn, can evoke secondary emotions. For example, anger can evoke shame or elicit fear (if someone gets punished for being angry). Secondary emotions are generally harder to interpret because they relate to an internal, private experience.

The purpose of this article is to examine the generation of various (primary and secondary) emotions, such as: fear and anxiety; sadness and grief; interest and anticipation, elicited by the occurrence of the disastrous pandemic in the novel *I Am Legend*, hypothesizing that emotional regulation by the protagonist is not achieved.

Fear and anxiety

Fear and anxiety are interrelated emotions. While the former is evoked from real danger and can cause anxiety, the latter is elicited from an imagined threat and may also cause fear. Both fear and anxiety are adaptive behaviors which help people to identify threats, ensure their safety and survival. The major difference between fear and anxiety is related to time references. Fear is a response to an imminent or observable danger occurring in the present moment of time, whereas anxiety refers to a possible danger or threat that may or may not occur in the future. Anxiety is considered normal and useful when it helps us stay vigilant, renders us conscious of risks, and encourages us to solve problems. However, if anxiety is intense, frequent, and long-lasting then it can become pathological and maladaptive, turning into a disorder.

Fear can be innate or learned. Two forms of fear that humans are born with are: fear of falling and fear of loud sounds. According to translational neuroscientist S. Norrholm, when people hear loud sounds, they are most likely to adopt a fight or flight response due to "the acoustic startle reflex". He explained that due to a loud sound "you're going to duck down your head. Loud noises typically means startling. That circuitry is innate" (qtd. in Kounang, Web). This response signals danger around us.

Fear can be learned through observation, verbal warnings or direct experience, for example when one is attacked by an aggressive dog. By observing others, young children learn to be afraid of snakes, spiders, and the dark. Norrholm associates this kind of fear with evolution: "Back in our ancestral age (…) young children learned not to pick up snakes and spiders

because they're venomous" (qtd. in Kounang, Web). At a later stage, there appear social fears concerning interaction or rejection in different settings, and ultimately fear of death of loved ones and one's own.

In ancient times, people primarily attributed fear of natural disasters to the wrath of gods directed at human beings. Nowadays, though these phenomena are scientifically explained, fear of the elements is still present due to the overall distress and destruction they may cause. Matheson conveys in *I Am Legend* his fear of a biological and nuclear war, which is also highlighted by the novel's protagonist in flashback, as his wife and he speculate that the pandemic could have been brought on by the bombings, resulting into dust storms and mutated insects.

Another type of fear is fear of the Other, which has been salient since time immemorial. It primarily derives from a superiority of *us* or in-group toward *them* or out-group. Belonging to another group, culture or race, the Other is regarded as strange and repulsive, thus to be avoided or fought mercilessly. Fear of the Other is essentially related the fear of the unknown, which, according to the highly influential horror writer H.P. Lovecraft (1927), is: "(…) the oldest and strongest kind of fear (…)" (qtd. in Carleton 11). The reader of the novel *I am Legend* is introduced to this kind of fear from the very beginning. The narrator relates that Neville is protecting himself against *them*. It later becomes clear that *they* are vampires, a byproduct of the catastrophe. Unaware that some of these blood-sucking creatures are comatose infected humans, Neville does not differentiate in his daily slaughter. The nadir is reached with him killing his own wife, Virginia, who returns from the dead as a vampire to kill him. (We learn from the narrator that, following her death from the plague, Neville went against the law which stated that burning the dead prevented the spread of the disease, and secretly buried her body instead).

The incessant nightly attacks by vampires imbue the hero with terror, while rendering his existence literally impossible. While Neville is able to roam around the deserted city by day, once he loses track of time and returns home after sunset, to be met with the crowd of vampires at his front door. Particularly terrifying is the fierce fight initiated by Ben Cortman – his former much-beloved neighbor:

> Cortman's body drove into his and almost knocked him down. He fell the cold, powerful hands clamp on his throat and smelled the fetid breath clouding over his face. The two of them went reeling back toward the sidewalk and the whitefanged mouth went darting down at Neville's throat.

> Abruptly he jerked up his right fist and felt it drive into Cortman's throat. He heard the choking sound in Cortman's throat. Up the block the first of them came rushing and screaming around the corner.
> With a violent movement, Neville grabbed Cortman by his long, greasy hair and sent him hurtling down the driveway until he rammed head on into the side of the station wagon. (39)

Cortman is the one of the many of his kind who bangs on the fortified door of Neville every night, asking him to come out. Female vampires also try to get him out by sexually luring him.

In what it seems to be a moment of compassion, Neville draws a parallel between these deranged creatures and unscrupulous individuals in politics, unsure who to be more afraid of:

> At one time, the Dark and Middle Ages, to be succinct, the vampire's power was great, the fear of him tremendous. He was anathema and still remains anathema. Society hates him without ration. But are his needs any more shocking than the needs of other animals and men? Are his deeds more outrageous than the deeds of the parent who drained the spirit from his child? The vampire may foster quickened heartbeats and levitated hair. But is he worse than the parent who gave to society a neurotic child who became a politician? (26)

Although, by the end, Neville's fear of vampires has abated, he keeps killing them mostly for entertainment. Greatly reduced in numbers, the vampires of the new society fear him immensely and seek his extermination.

Sadness and grief

Sadness is a basic emotion evoked by loss or separation, such as that of an object, job, friend, loved one, or a previous lifestyle. Just like any emotion, sadness can vary in intensity. If the sorrow is deep or intense, then it is commonly identified with grief, especially at the death of someone. Grief is also more commonly connected with heavy failures or losses. While often used interchangeably, sadness is less obvious than grief. "Sadness is characterized by low physiological arousal, whereas grief is characterized by higher physiological arousal and a propensity to weep" (Huron 59). On the other hand, grief itself can

become traumatic if caused by a trauma or catastrophe. In this regard, Abi-Hashem (1999) states that:

> when a significant loss occurs as the result of a severe trauma, violence, tragedy, accident, or natural disaster, the survivor's reaction tends to be an amalgam of symptoms. Depending on the situation, the pre-existing conditions, and the nature of the traumatic event, the cluster of symptoms experienced by the traumatized bereaved includes usually elements of post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, acute stress disorder, generalized anxiety, panic disorder, and complicated bereavement reactions. (316)

As the only human survivor, Neville grieves his own situation, the loss of human race, and his family. Through flashbacks, the reader is informed that he first lost his daughter, Kathy, and then Virginia, to the virus. Experiencing the death of his wife twice under catastrophic circumstances, Neville displays a clear condition of traumatic grief when he visits her grave: "[I am] still alive, he thought, heart beating senselessly, veins running without point, bones and muscle and tissue all alive and functioning with no purpose at all" (32). Regarded as a condition of persistent sadness, or mood disorder, depression is typically associated with feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and self-hostility:

> He swallowed the whole glassful at once, head thrown back, whisky running out the edges of his mouth. I'm an animal! he exulted. I'm a dumb, stupid animal and I'm going to drink!
> "I'll choke myself!" he stormed. "I'll strangle myself, I'll drown myself in whisky! Like Clarence in his malmsey, I'll die, die, die!" (86)

Depression is particularly aggravated as a result of loneliness. Deprived of human interaction, Neville finds his situation excruciating, with recovery virtually impossible. In their article, *Recovering emotionally from disaster*, Kevin Rowell and Rebecca Thomley (2013) emphasize the great importance of being supported by loved ones when a disaster occurs:

> Social support is a key component to disaster recovery. Family and friends can be an important resource. You can find support and common ground from those who've also survived the disaster. You may also want to reach out to others not involved who may be able to provide greater support and objectivity. (Web)

After about eight months of solitude, Neville's life is a "barren, cheerless trial" (89). While his sexual frustration seems to abate with time, longing for human interaction does not. He "always, in spite of reason (…) clung to the hope that someday he would find someone like himself – a man, a woman, a child, it didn't matter. Sex was fast losing its meaning without the endless prodding of mass hypnosis. Loneliness he still felt" (94).

There are a few distractions that seem to alleviate the killing effect of loneliness and despair: music and intensive reading for the disease; putting graphic artwork on the walls; the appearance of a dog and later of Ruth, an infected female human sent by the 'new society' to spy on Neville's activity. Upon seeing her, his hope of restarting human race revives. However, having been alone for a long time, Neville has become uncomfortable of human presence and cannot create a real bond with her. While Neville is aware that the total lack of human interaction has taken a toll on him, Ruth informs him that, through his mass slaughter, he has transformed himself into a monster.

Interest and anticipation

Interest and anticipation are interconnected emotions. The American psychologist Robert Plutchik, in his wheel of emotions, includes anticipation in the list of eight primary emotions, with interest as its low intensity and vigilance its high intensity. Interest is an intrinsic human trait from the moment of one's birth. Once babies become aware of the environment, they are guided by the desire to explore it and learn. Relating interest to "learning, motivation, and development", Paul J. Silva (2008), in his article *Interest – The Curious Emotion*, emphasizes that: "By motivating people to learn for its own sake, interest ensures that people will develop a broad set of knowledge, skills, and experience" (57). In his previous studies (Silvia, 2005b; Silvia, 2006), he suggests that interest stems from two appraisals: *novelty-complexity* and *comprehensibility*. In other words, for a situation to be interesting, it has to be new, complex, and understandable. More specifically, the interest in an unfamiliar domain requires one to possess the necessary skills to cope with the challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This advancement of knowledge and skills occurs in the novel, too, as Robert's interest in vampires and the virus increases. The initial information he has about them is based on existing superstitions and B. Stoker's *Dracula*, whereby one is informed that vampires are horrible blood-sucking creatures afraid of sunlight, mirror, cross, garlic, and that

they meet death only by insertion of a stake into their heart. With a scientific background himself, Matheson suffuses the plot with technical savvy on vampires, disputing the above classic stereotypes. While in other works of fiction the reason why sunlight kills vampires is never properly explained, in *I Am Legend*, the vampire is a result of bacteria/germ – not magic – so it is logically destroyed by exposure to the sun. Roberts points out: "Strong sunlight kills many germs rapidly "…" (74).

The classic explanation that vampires were invisible in mirrors is untrue and magic for Neville. To him, rather, the mirror has a psychological impact by tremendously straining the vampires' mind once they see their image of the monster they have become. Also, concerning the belief that sight of cross helped repel vampires, Neville thinks that this could psychologically affect only those vampires that once believed in Jesus, not non-Christians or non-believers. Neville rightfully states:

> "Why should a Jew fear the cross?" he said. "Why should a vampire who had been a Jew fear it? Most people were afraid of becoming vampires. Most of them suffer from hysterical blindness before mirrors. But as far as the cross goes – well, neither a Jew nor a Hindu nor a Mohammedan nor an atheist, for that matter, would fear the cross." (126)

Likewise, as regards the role of garlic against vampires, Neville scientifically explains how it acts as an allergen to the infected vampires, causing an adverse response by their organism, unlike that of humans:

> He had learned over a year before that garlic was an allergen to any system infected with the *vampiris* bacillus. When the system was exposed to garlic, the stimulated tissues sensitized the cells, causing an abnormal reaction to any further contact with garlic. (120)

Neville also expands the classic idea of killing the vampires by insertion of stake into their heart. He tells Ruth that an open wound, anywhere in the body, causes death because "the bacillus is a facultative saprophyte. It lives with or without oxygen; but with a difference." (135). He further remarks that an open wound makes the germ become aerobic (i.e. it draws in oxygen), which disrupts the symbiosis with the system and eventually kills the vampire.

Anticipation is an emotion involving pleasure or anxiety, while expecting something to happen. In other words, anticipatory feelings can be positive (hope and excitement) and entail some form of expected reward. Or they may be negative (fear and anxiety) and foresee threat. While distrustful and vigilant of Ruth from the beginning, Neville eventually dashes her hopes when insisting on checking her blood in the absence of an effective cure. Fearing for her life, she knocks him out by hitting him with a wooden mallet on the head. However, feeling sympathetic of his situation, she leaves him a note after her escape, urging him to run away from his home because the members of her society are coming to execute him soon. Unable to cope with loneliness any longer, he fights the enemy in his house and, when incapable of overpowering them, prior to his public execution, he takes the deadly pill that Ruth had given to him.

Conclusion

A disaster is a catastrophe which affects many aspects of people's lives: their social and economic state of affairs; their marital and familial situation; and, in particular, their physical and mental health. Recovery from such distressful circumstances becomes especially hard when individuals are faced with total isolation and incessant threat, as it is the case in *I Am Legend.*

The calamitous event of the vampire pandemic evokes in Neville a multitude of emotions and responses: fear, anxiety, sadness, grief, depression, despair, and anger on the one hand, and interest, enthusiasm, and hope in trying to find a cure for the disease, on the other. Despite his predicament, the hero is determined to survive, while managing to establish a sort of daily routine. However, being exposed to uninterrupted violence and unending loneliness, Neville becomes excessively violent himself and can no longer regulate his emotions. By the novel's end, with his sanity greatly impaired and aware of his inhumanity and transformation into a monster, Neville anticipates his tragic end as the last representative of the legend that was once called the human race.

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"WHAT IS THE COST OF LIES?" HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A DISASTER AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET METANARRATIVE IN CRAIG MAZIN AND JOHAN RENCK'S HBO MINISERIES *CHERNOBYL*

Abstract: HBO's five-episode docudrama *Chernobyl* (2019) is an attempt to re-imagine the horrific nuclear explosion of 1986 in Pripyat, and what it was like to live through the catastrophic tragedy. Throughout the extent of the show, the creators are seen attempting to strike a balance between the dramatization required for televisual representation and the effort to maintain historical accuracy. Subsequently, *Chernobyl* successfully portrays (and juxtaposes) two conflicting responses to the disaster of 1986 — the state-sanctioned denial and distortion of the real events incorporated by a series of self-serving officials, and the "personal evaluation" of first-hand witnesses — such as Valery Legasov, Boris Scherbina, and Ulana Khomyuk — configured to establish a counter-narrative to a state-monopolized history. Hence, *Chernobyl* becomes what Agnes Heller calls an 'evaluative reconstruction' of the 1986 disaster, making way for a historiographical study. This article will also attempt to illustrate how Craig Mazin and Johan Renck's portrayal of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster opens up the possibility of critiquing the pre-existing unquestionability, and the imagined notions of power and perfection of the Soviet hierarchy, as is represented in the show by a set of corrupt government agents and servicemen working for the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Keywords*: Chernobyl; disaster; dramatization; historiography; evaluative reconstruction; unquestionability; invisibility; Soviet hierarchy.*

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Historiography

Craig Mazin and Johan Renck's HBO drama series *Chernobyl*, attempts to dramatically portray the nuclear disaster that occurred at the Chernobyl power plant in the city of Pripyat on the 26th of April in 1986. Consequently, one of the major points of controversy that remains predominant for the Chernobyl disaster, as for any kind of epistemic reinterpretation of a historical event that takes place through cultural or literary representations, is the question of accuracy or historical legitimacy (Sherlock 3).

Subsequently, therefore, given the nature of the drama, *Chernobyl* can be evaluated in terms of a historical retelling that problematizes the very notions of history, historiography, and the difference that lies between the two. That is, as an adaptation of a real-life tragedy and disaster that had included and impacted millions of people, albeit in varying degrees, across the social and political strata of Soviet Ukraine, *Chernobyl* (2019) moves away from being a narrativized event with a singular universalized perspective, and transforms into a pluralized occurrence that is portrayed as fundamentally multiple, heterogeneous, and hence an incident that remains internally inconsistent.

Extending upon this particular line of argument, this paper will focus specifically on the opposition between the representation of the official account of the Chernobyl tragedy as was sanctioned by the Soviet state apparatus; and the separate first-hand "molecular" (Deleuze & Guattari 11) narratives of the individuals that were directly experiencing the fallouts of the disaster, as is portrayed in Mazin and Renck's HBO drama.

As historiography emphasizes the way in which an event or occurrence is historicized rather than on the particular event itself, our work will perceive the Chernobyl nuclear disaster as an already politicized discourse that cannot be reduced to a linear framework and can only be approached through the lenses of the different individuals and institutions that had a stake, and hence were variously invested in the tragedy and its subsequent medical, environmental, and socio-political symptoms.

The Soviet State Apparatus, its major principles as stated in Mazin and Renck's *Chernobyl* (2019), and its Propagators

The first episode of Mazin and Renck's drama begins with an audio recording of Valery Legasov – one of the prime members of the management

committee[2] that was in charge of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl. The recorded voice opens with a refrain and then carries forward into the following:

> *"What is the cost of lies?" It's not that we'll mistake them for the truth. The real danger is that if we hear enough lies, then we no longer recognize the truth at all. What can we do then? What else is left but to abandon even the hope of truth, and content ourselves instead... with stories."* ("1:23:45" 00:40 – 01:03)

This negotiation between what constitutes lies and truths later becomes one of the driving forces of both the event of a disaster as well as the drama itself as we traverse into the heart of the catastrophe. In fact, the first major indication of an underlying politics of 'truth and deceit' is given by the creators when, just after the nuclear explosion at the power plant, Zharkov, a senior member of The Pripyat Communist Party Executive Committee is seen underlining the importance of the Soviet State, its sovereignty and its conspiracies and disguises at a meeting in an underground bunker. Retaliating against Petrov, another committee member who rebelliously enquires about the news of 'threatening radiation levels' that might be potentially fatal for the whole town, Zharkov asserts that instead of a mass evacuation the state and the committee should instead opt for a vigilant curfew and subsequently seal off the whole city to contain the spread of information or misinformation.

Hence, from the very beginning, the primary objective of the Soviet state apparatus remains evident: restriction of all fatal and dangerous information to the officers in power. Emphasizing precisely this monopolization of information regarding the Chernobyl explosion, Zharkov states that:

> *It is my experience that when the people ask questions that are not in their own best interest, they should simply be told to keep their minds on their labour -- and to leave matters of the State to the State*. ("1:23:45" 41:55–42:14)

This little address is then preceded by a more elaborate commentary on the principles of the Leninist State apparatus. Zharkov says:

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[2] Legasov was doctor in Chemistry at Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy. Although his specialty was not in nuclear reactors, he became a key member of the state commission formed to respond to the Chernobyl disaster and investigate its causes. https://legasovtapetranslation.blogspot.com/ – a blog dedicated to translating the text that comes from the audio tapes recorded by Legasov also confirms this.

> *For is that not the sole purpose of the apparatus of the State?*
> *From the Central Committee all the way down to each of us in this room-- we represent the perfect expression of the collective will of the Soviet proletariat. Sometimes, we forget. Sometimes, we fall prey to fear. But our faith in Soviet socialism will always be rewarded. Always. The State tells us the situation is not dangerous. Have faith. The State tells us they do not want a panic. Listen well*." ("1:23:45" 41:12-41:48)

This precedence of the State and the subsequent dehumanization of its individuals is again reiterated when Legasov asks for Gorbachev's permission in a meeting to willingly endanger the lives of the three plant workers who would have to manually open the water tanks that remain half submerged in contaminated water. Gorbachev's answer is quick, nonchalant, and emblematic of the 'matter of the factness' of the Soviet state apparatus:

> *Comrade Legasov. All victories inevitably come at a cost. Sometimes we count this cost in rubles. Sometimes we count it in lives.* ("Please Remain Calm" 53:05 – 53:26)

Secondly, the role of the KGB[3] (along with other national security agencies) is depicted in Mazin and Renck's drama as remaining instrumental in the dispensing of Soviet politics, especially through strategies of surveillance and regulation. In the third episode titled *Open Wide, O Earth*, Scherbina reveals to Legasov during a walk that they have been followed by agents of the government ever since they had taken up their investigation at Chernobyl.

Later, when Legasov confronts Charkov the deputy commissioner of the KGB regarding the matter of surveillance and the arrest of Khomyuk after a meeting with Gorbachev and the other central committee members, asking him: *"But you are bothering to have your people follow me"* he replies:

> *No, no, it's perfectly understandable. Comrade, I know you've heard the stories about us. When I hear them, even I am shocked. But we're not what people say. Yes, people are following you. People are following those people. And you see them? They follow me. The KGB is a circle of accountability. Nothing more*. ("Open Wide, O Earth" 49:00 – 49:30)

[3] The main security agency of the Soviet Union.

Ironically, this politics of accountability is shown throughout the show to be nothing but contributive to an already established discourse of lies, self-interest, corruption, and secret-keeping that both runs the Soviet state as well as undermines and contaminates the soviet social space, as Legasov's impassioned monologue at the end of the trial portrays. After finally revealing the major structural weakness of the Soviet RBMK reactors, exposing that instead of using purely boron control rods the Soviet nuclear stations use graphite[4] that endangers the whole power plant just because it is a cheaper option, he openly bashes the Soviet policies on national and international security:

> *I am not the only one who kept this secret. There are many. We were following orders. From the KGB, from the Central Committee. And right now, there are 16 reactors in the Soviet Union with this same fatal flaw. Three of them are still running less than 20 kilometres* away... at *Chernobyl… I've already trod on dangerous ground. We're on dangerous ground right now.*
> *Because of our secrets and our lies. They are practically what defines us. When the truth offends, we lie and lie until we cannot even remember it's there. But it is still there. Every lie we tell incurs a debt to the truth. And Sooner or later, the debt is paid.* ("Vichnaya Pamyat" 53:40–54:37)

Legasov, Shcherbina, Khomyuk, and other local narratives.

In the interview given to the British Academy of Film and Television Arts[5], Craig Mazin is discerned as talking about writing *Chernobyl* and the challenges associated with sourcing a story that comes out of the Soviet Union – a civil society where the State has always attempted to monopolize history and have never allowed the free flow of information. The other side of this restriction, however, is that the number of accounts that have come out of the country regarding Chernobyl, does not always match up to the official Soviet narratives surrounding the disaster.

The series portrays several such counter-narratives, mainly surrounding the three protagonists.

[4] This flawed reactor design was one of the causes of the Chernobyl accident of 1986.
[5] Craig Mazin on writing Chernobyl, the HBO/Sky Atlantic Miniseries.

Firstly, Valery Legasov, whose participation had helped restore order after the nuclear accident, was already a national hero at the time of his death. In fact, Legasov's suicide, a day after the second anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, is the starting point of Mazin and Renck's miniseries. It marked the day before the outcomes of the investigation into the causes of the disaster were released to the public. In the series, his recordings end with an attempt to answer these controversies.

Immediately after his inclusion in the committee formed by Gorbachev to manage the accident, Legasov warns the President about the extent of the fatality and the need to evacuate the city of Pripyat. His warnings, however, are met with denial and resistance by Soviet party officials, who despise him for engaging in a conjecture which is in direct contradiction to the official party accounts:

> *Yes, 3.6 roentgen, which by the way is not the equivalent of one chest x-ray, but rather four hundred chest x-rays. That number's been bothering me for a different reason, though. It's also the maximum reading on low-limit dosimeters. They gave us the number they had, but I think the true number is much, much higher. If I'm right, this fireman was holding the equivalent of four million x-rays. In his hand.*

And Gorbachev retorts:

> *I don't hear any facts at all. All I hear is a man I don't know engaging in conjecture – in direct contradiction of what has been reported by Party officials*. ("Please Remain Calm" 10:40 – 11:20)

Following Legasov's personal account, we discover not only the fatal flaws in the Soviet Nuclear industry that lead to the catastrophe, but also the state's denial and reluctance to either acknowledge it or protect the victims.

Secondly, the role of Boris Shcherbina – who describes himself as a "career party man," ("Open Wide, O Earth" 08:19) Shcherbina's inclusion in this list is unusual but not surprising. Throughout the course of the five episodes, it is probably Shcherbina whose disillusionment with the notion of power and perfection of the Soviet hierarchy is portrayed most vividly by Mazin and Renck. Initially in line with the party's command line and disciplinarian attitude, Shcherbina's first report[6] states that the situation at Chernobyl is "stable" ("Please

[6] There is no official record of this report. It might have been internally circulated among

Remain Calm" 08:51) with an exposure level of 3.6 Roentgen. It is also his ideological subscription to the Soviet state that contributes to his initial antagonism towards Legasov. Shcherbina's position changes when he is ordered to fly to Chernobyl, have a look at the reactor himself and report directly back to Gorbachev. It is found during his visit that the level of exposure is not 3.6 Roentgen as was officially reported by the state-controlled Soviet media, but rather 15,000 Roentgen. The other big blow comes when Legasov reveals the long-term consequence of their visiting Chernobyl after the accident – *"We're here and we'll be dead in five years*." ("Please Remain Calm" 38:33) A grim reminder of his mortality that changes Shcherbina's position in the controversy permanently.

Thirdly, Ulana Khomyuk, the only protagonist in Chernobyl (2019) who is not based on real life but was invented by the creators as a fictional composite[7] to represent the whole league of scientists who worked alongside Legasov in Chernobyl - many of whom were subjected to denunciation, arrest, and imprisonment for speaking out against the official accounts of events. It is through her investigations at the Moscow hospitals and the public archives, that the crafting of a counter-narrative is made possible inside the show. At the archives, Khomyuk finds that most of the documents are listed as 'Permission Only' and she is denied access – as most of the documents are classified by the state. However, she finds an article written ten years ago, warning about the fatal flaw in the RBMK reactors used by the Soviet Nuclear industry – which ignored the warnings owing to their imagined notions of faultless supremacy. It is Khomyuk's investigations which prove that the accident in Chernobyl was not solely the result of 'criminal mismanagement' by the operators and scientists, but also a result of the systemic negligence of the Soviet state.

The Disaster – the Mechanism, the Symptoms, and the Victims.

In the introduction to their seminal work *Critical Disaster Studies*, Horowitz and Remes argue that the meanings of disasters are socially constructed, and therefore further interrogation into the ideas and events associated with them, is necessary (Horowitz and Remes 2). This helps one understand its broader political

the party officials.

[7] Composite Characters are melding of one or more people into a single character in works of media adapted from real or fictional narratives.

and material significance. This paper has tried to interpret the disaster at Chernobyl following this particular form of argument.

The directors of Chernobyl place the explosion at Reactor No. 4 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant only seven minutes into the very first episode of the series. The explosion is not the entirety of the catastrophe at Chernobyl. The focus of the series is elsewhere in the following questions – What caused the explosion? What follows it? The series, therefore, is a retrospective investigation into both.

The Soviet clarification about the explosion is simple: Chernobyl is solely the result of an "operator error" ("Vichnaya Pamyat" 7:20). When Legasov is sent to testify for the Soviets at Vienna[8], he is instructed by the state to diplomatically legitimize this distorted history, which is required to 'satisfy the West'. But the narratives of first-hand witnesses uncover how the Soviet mechanism was responsible for the catastrophe – both before and after the explosion. This paper has already talked about how the protagonists Legasov, Shcherbina and Khomyuk's investigations expose the state's disregard for the inherent flaws in the Soviet Nuclear Industry that contribute to this. In the final episode of the series, Legasov lists these flaws in the trial again and dares to talk about the mechanism of secrets and lies which is fundamental to the Soviet state:

> *"When the truth offends, we lie and lie until we can no longer remember it is even there, but it is still there. Every lie we tell incurs a debt to the truth*." ("Vichnaya Pamyat" 53:40–54:37)

The Soviet priority is depicted by the creators of the show as misplaced from the start. When Victor Bryukanov, Director of the plant first hears about the accident, he does not enquire about the extent of the catastrophe, or the workers that might have been wounded from it. His first question is – *"Who else knows this?"* ("1:23:45" 26:20). He represents the Soviet priority in keeping the extent of the catastrophe a secret, to maintain its image of power and perfection. This misplaced

[8] An International Conference in Vienna held in August 1986 to discuss the major social, health and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl accident. It was organized by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and attended by more than 800 scientists and government officials, and government representatives from Belarus, Ukraine, and The Soviet Union.

priority further translates into the minimum protective equipment offered to the firefighters, medical personnel, and the other first-responders; and more fatally into the reluctance to evacuate the citizens of Pripyat at once.

The explosion at Chernobyl immediately results in the death of a few ground-level operators of the power plant. Other personnel who suffered horrific radioactive burns are seen dying at the hospital later. Contagion surrounding this exposure results in deaths in the medical workforce. Firefighter Ignatenko's wife, pregnant during the accident, loses her newborn child. There are harrowing scenes of dogs and other pets being shot dead to restrict the spread of contamination.

However, the actual extent of the loss incurred from the catastrophe has never been known, this is owing to the politics of invisibility[9] that largely surrounds Chernobyl. The explosion released enormous amounts of radioactivity into the environment which had reached Minsk, parts of Sweden, Scandinavia, and Germany within hours of the explosion; but radioactivity in the air cannot be seen; and the actual numbers relating to the level of exposure was never released to the public. The more lethal effects of a nuclear disaster are long-term – and spread across a wide variety of discourses like health, environment, agriculture, economy etc. The series does not contain a dramatic representation of all the long-term effects, but ends with the social and political disavowal of those that had attempted to bring those large-scale symptoms to light.

Conclusions

Chernobyl, thereby, ends in a note that is more pessimistic than hopeful in terms of what lies ahead of both the Soviet citizens that live inside a system that will do everything to escape responsibility, blame, the line of fire, and the oppressive regime of the Soviet state. But the historical consequence of the disaster at Chernobyl and its global recognition eventually became one of the major factors that led to the complete destabilization of the illusion of power that had kept the Soviet state intact, especially during a time and in a world that had slowly started to take up and embrace the two significant anti-socialist poles of Western political thought: capitalism and liberal democracy. And as history ends up revealing with

[9] This term is taken from Kuchinskaya, where she discusses the imperceptibility of damages caused by nuclear accidents, which can only be known through constructed representations.

the fall of the Soviet in the years following the disaster at Pripyat: no state, nation, or ideological institution can sustain itself for long, if it bases all its validity on an illusion that has lost all its power to legitimize itself within a public discourse that has become increasingly open, dynamic, and globalized beyond all possible scales.

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Horia Iova[*]

DIPLOMATIC GIFTS AS EXPRESSION OF THE COLONIAL TRAUMA. STORIES OF AFRICAN WOODEN AND IVORY SCULPTURES

Abstract: This article offers an analysis of a series of diplomatic gifts of African origin, part of the "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu Collection" of the ASTRA National Museum Complex in Sibiu, Romania, from the perspective of their capacity of evoking the trauma of the colonial oppression, in an international context. While the collection includes a high variety of objects, of different types and origins, this study will focus on a selection of black wood and ivory sculptures which explicitly refer to catastrophic aspects of the colonialist encounter, such as war and slavery, and belong to a particular kind of political objects offered by African leaders to their counterparts throughout the second half of the 20th century. Although the objects derive from the colonial interaction and may seem, at first sight, an alienation of local artistic traditions, made for an external audience, so as to satisfy foreign tastes and expectations, I argue for understanding them as expressions of the catastrophic realities of the colonial oppression, which belong to the local culture and serve two main purposes. Firstly, they act as parts of a form of cultural resistance, as commentaries upon the endured violence and humiliation. Secondly, they serve as political messages for an external audience, meant to raise sympathy and support for the cause of the people's liberation. The conceptual framework of performativity and cultural performance, as explained by anthropologist Victor Turner provides an understanding of the way in which social conflicts are memorized and communicated in artistic forms, while the works of Africanists such as Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Harry G. West and Nichole Bridges offer an overview of the aesthetics and functions of African sculpture as objects of communication, throughout the colonial and post-colonial eras. Comparative studies, referring to the contributions of Alexandre Girrard-Muscagorry and Alexander Bortolot, provide concrete example of African sculptures being offered to several state leaders in diplomatic context, hereby offering valuable

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insights for the interpretation of similar objects in the "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu" collection.
Keywords: *diplomatic gifts; African sculpture; colonialism; cultural performance*; *museum collections; Nicolae Ceauşescu*.

Interpreting and classifying diplomatic gifts of African origin

After the fall of the Romanian communist regime, a part of the diplomatic gifts received by the Ceaușescu couple which were in the custody of the National History Museum, were transferred to the Franz Binder Museum, part of the ASTRA National Museum Complex, as a manner of distancing the collection from the communist past and placing it in a more neutral context, as part of the collection of a universal ethnography museum. In 2018, a selection of the objects was featured in the "Gifts from the Golden Age" temporary exhibition, on display at the Franz Binder Universal Ethnography Museum. The exhibition narrative did not provide details regarding the significance of the objects in their culture of origin, or their intended message as diplomatic gifts, but it did place them in their original context, after several decades in which the artifacts have been exhibited as parts of ethnographic exhibitions or have not been exhibited at all.

The acts of interpreting African origin diplomatic gifts, classifying and exhibiting them in the most appropriate context raise a series of questions and conceptual tensions, related to their nature and provenance, which have been encountered by museum specialists throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. As a telling example, French researcher Alexandre Girrard-Muscagorry explains the difficulties posed by the integration of a set of regalia objects received by French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing into the collection of the National Museum of Arts of Africa and Oceania (Girrard-Muscagorry 13). The set, received by the French president during his visit to the Ivory Coast in 1978, consisted of several handcrafted objects associated to Akan chieftaincy, with high relevance and evoking power in their culture of origin but which, in view of the museum curators, hardly met the criteria of antiquity and authenticity applicable to ethnographic objects, or those of value and craftsmanship which would have made them suitable for an arts museum. Girrard-Muscagorry also offers examples of other attempts of reconversion of artifacts, from diplomatic gifts to ethnographic objects, including an Ethiopian ceremony costume, which has been featured in the *Ethiopia of today. The land and the men* exhibition, on display at the *Musee de l'Homme*

in 1975, and exhibited as an example of the Ethiopian mastery of crafts, rather than as an illustration of the long history of Ethiopia's diplomatic relations with Europe (13). Girrard-Muscagorry shows that such acts of assigning diplomatic gifts to ethnographic collections, as it was also the case for the Ivorian set of Akan regalia, may be perceived as a recognition of the objects' aesthetic and cultural worth, but suggests that their value should rather be assessed from a different perspective, explaining that "for the givers, diplomatic gifts are often a privileged medium for evoking their personal history, their political path, or their artistic tastes." (7).

The *Ujamaa* style sculpture offered by Samora Machel, president of the FRELIMO party (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) and of Mozambique, to Kim Il Sung, head of state of the Democratic Republic of Korea, is illustrative for the use of diplomatic gifts as a political statement and as an expression of a nation's experience of recent history. In December 1974, Samora Machel, a promoter of the socialist cause for Mozambique, led by Marxist-Leninist views, visited five socialist countries – the German Democratic Republic, the Socialist Republic of Romania, the Socialist Republic of Bulgaria, the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – in order to tighten collaboration relationships and to gain increased support for the independence of his country. As a picture published in Issue no. 61 of the *Mozambique Revolution* magazine shows, during his visit to North Korea, Samora Machel presented Kim Il Sung a blackwood tower-like sculpture, measuring over a meter ("Stronger links with socialist countries" 3). The *Ujamaa* sculptures, as anthropologist Harry G. West explains, derive from the Makonde sculptural traditions, manifest in Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya, and were "prominent among the stylistic innovations supported by the FRELIMO patronage" (West 46). Starting with the mid 1960's, Makonde sculptors, organized in cooperatives by FRELIMO, produced sculptures illustrating, among others, the hardship of the colonial oppression, which would often be marketed internationally and "drew attention and sympathy to the Mozambican Nationalist Cause", while "those expressing opposition to Portuguese rule would become images of popular resistance and, eventually, part of a Mozambican national consciousness." (West 36). As West points out, The *Ujamaa* sculptures, deriving their name from the Swahili word for "family", which was also often used to designate African socialism, were "intended to symbolize national unity and reflected the politics of the time." (36). The structure of entwined bodies, often sustaining a larger, prominent figure, which defines the *Ujamaa* towers, constitutes an illustration of the burden of colonialism and the struggle against it.

Other *Ujamaa* style sculptures, which express variations of the same theme, can also be found in the Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu collection of the ASTRA National Museum Complex (Inv. No 1384, 1386, 1387). Representing different aspects of the fight against colonialism, they all serve the same purpose – to communicate about the trauma of colonialism, to express the people's adhesion to the socialist cause and to raise support and sympathy in the fight for independence. Along with other objects from the collection, they will be explained and analysed throughout this article, from the perspective of their message-bearing capacity as diplomatic gifts.

The colonial encounter and the messages of African sculptures

Since the earliest encounters between Europeans and the inhabitants of Sub-Saharan Africa, the sculptures resulted from the skill of the local artisans have been described and presented to European audiences in a variety of perspectives, and have been referred to "primitive art", as fetishes used in magic rituals, or even as complex works, similar to European high art, following the new ideas introduced by Carl Einstein's work on "negro sculpture". Contemporary scholars, such as Suzanne Vogel, have rejected the term "primitive art", stating that African art is not „an older ancestral version of Western art, lagging behind on the evolutionary scale" (6) and suggesting, instead, that „like much of the world's art, African art is conceptual" (9) and it therefore represents a deliberate commentary upon reality, rather than an attempt of realistic reproduction. Other researchers, focusing on the study of the „Afro-Portuguese Ivories" such as Kathy Curnow, referred to their objects of study as „hybrid art" (4), developed by effect of repetitive and close contacts between locals and Europeans. The term of art itself, was, however, also put into question, by thinkers such as V.Y. Mundimbe, stating that "what is called African Art covers a wide range of objects introduced into a historicizing perspective of European values since the eighteenth century. These various «objects» which, perhaps, were not art at all, became art by being given, simultaneously, an aesthetic character and a potentiality for producing and possibly reproducing artistic forms." (4).

However, regardless of their relation to the concept of art, the most relevant aspect of African artifacts in the context of diplomatic gifts is their narrative potential, as explained by Benetta Jules-Rosette, who states that "African art is an object of exchange and communication and, as such, is an important vehicle for

examining cultural change. Although popular graphic arts do not involve the same order of didactic and dramatic display as do theatre and oratory, they do contain a performative element. Each object is like an utterance – a communication between producers and consumers both within and across cultures." (217). Jules-Rosette argues that an object emerged from the mechanics of souvenir market, as in the case of Makonde sculpture, should not be seen merely as a simplified and reductive versions of "true" African art, but as a new medium with its own language and aesthetics, while also pointing out that their meaning essentially belongs to the logic of representation and communication.

African sculptures featuring human characters caught in precise actions, often related to a more complex narrative context, are, based on their performative character, suitable to be interpreted in a perspective similar to that applied to other performative cultural structures, as Jules-Rosette's argument implies. As narrative expressions, commentaries and representations of a given social situation, the sculptures of this kind – which includes, but is not limited to, black wood Makonde sculpture and incrusted ivory – can be seen as serving the same purpose which anthropologist Victor Turner attributes to cultural performances, to the point to which they could themselves be regarded as cultural performances. Victor Turner refers to ritual, but also to oral and literary narrative as forms of cultural performance, while also pointing out that "there is an interdependent, perhaps dialectic relationship between social dramas and genres of cultural performances in perhaps all societies." (153). Social dramas, regarded as antagonizing situations occurring in social groups, generate symbolic types in the form of "traitors, renegades, villains martyrs, heroes, faithfuls, infidels, deceivers, scape-goats" (Turner 155) which are memorized and perpetuated within the group, by power of cultural performances.

Although the authorship of the cultural performances is usually attributed to those who come out as "winners" of the social dramas, or, at least, the content of the cultural performances tends to be dominated by the version of the story promoted by the party which has the upper hand, in the case of the African sculpture which illustrate the encounters between locals and Europeans, the narratives represented in the artifacts involve a high degree of participation and agency on the side of the oppressed. Nichole Bridges explains that Loango Ivories, which developed in the 15th and 16th century, under the effect of intense interaction between the locals and the Portuguese traders, and illustrate commercial activities or aspect of daily life, often include scenes of violence and oppression against

Africans, such as chained captives or porters carrying foreign officials in palanquins (Bridges 54, 62). In most of the cases, such objects, which are to be regarded as a form of hybrid art, were commissioned by the Portuguese travellers, as souvenirs or as gifts to the royal courts, and were the result of European stories translated into a sculptural language which combined African and European aesthetics. However, Bridges argues that "Loango coast ivory carvers expressed subversive criticism through selected imagery, making Loango ivories elaborate forms of political disguise that use both elementary and elaborate methods." (64) The "colonial hybrids", resulted from the interaction of the colonizer and the colonized are, consequently to be seen not as a victory of the former, but as a form of resistance of the latter, and even though the imagery depicting oppression and physical violence against the locals "may have fulfilled Western narcissism, the same imagery may also capture the artists' cool gaze or protest against catastrophic social realities." (Bridges 64)

Makonde black wood sculptures, which also emerged as a result of the souvenir and curio market and usually illustrated an idyllic perspective over life in Africa, so as to meet the demands and tastes of European commissioners, gradually changed their content, throughout the 19th and the 20th century, so as to express the sufferance of the people at the hand of the colonial oppressor, as the quality of life of the locals kept depreciating. The typical scenes of the *binadamu* style, featuring villagers at work, praying or enjoying life, were replaced by a new series of scenes, such as the punishment of slaves or various illustrations of the burden of colonialism, which gained in prominence as the struggle for independence took shape. Historian Edward Alpers explains that "one of the most important popular expressions of the resistance to the brutality and humiliation of colonialism in Mozambique was cultural" (143) and that wooden sculpture, along with song, music and dance, stories and proverbs, acted as forms of protest. Stranger to the nuances of the local culture, the Europeans did not grasp the intentions of mockery behind the sculptures and, as Michael Stephen remarks, they even "appreciated the apparently subordinate attitude of the figures they carved." (110)

However, far from being merely representations of various fragments of a violent and humiliating reality, expressing an apparently subordinate attitude, the wooden carvings played a subtle role in a particular form of cultural resistance which contributed to the maintenance of the locals' identity in the face of the de-humanizing colonial oppression and eventually provided ideological resources for

the struggle for liberation. Edward Alpers identified three levels on which African cultural expressions acted as forms of resistance, with the "process of diagnosis" (144) being the first one. Following the principles of cultural performances, as explained by Victor Turner, the wooden carvings show who the villains are and who the victims are, in a reflective act of identification and assignment of roles, which brings, in front of the people, in a narrative and expressive form, what it is that they should fight against. The Portuguese officials, the *cipaio* (local soldiers working for the colonial administration), the plantation owners and other enforcing agents of the colonial system became symbolic types represented in the scenes of the wooden sculptures, disfigured and mocked so as to better express the evil of their acts. The function of the sculptures as cultural performances hereby goes beyond that of memorizing the unfolding and outcome of a conflict and gains an active component, as commentaries upon the present, which require a response in the present.

The process which turned the realistic African sculptures from a medium meant to represent the European perspectives and biases, into a medium used by the locals to express their own experience of the colonial encounter, could, therefore, be seen as the emergence of a counter – narrative to that of the colonial imperialism, expressed and actualized in a figurative form, which had significant impact on both internal and external audiences. Internally, the stories expressed by the Makonde sculpture, regarded as cultural performances resulted directly from the colonial conflict, were recuperated into the narratives of resistance and, eventually, into the post-colonial national narrative. As Alpers explains referring to the case of Mozambique

> for the Africans, then, cultural expressions of protest and resistance provided a bond of solidarity with the members of that culture, as victims of the colonial rule…And although it is important to recognize that these artistic expressions did not give rise to an immediate national conscience …they created a tradition of popular resistance which eventually became part of such a consciousness when the liberation struggle began in earnest of 1962. (144)

A picture of an Ujamaa style sculpture form the National Museum of Art in Maputo, published in the 1978 issue of the *Tempo* magazine (qtd. by Bortolot, ch. 10) is a telling example of the integration of the Makonde sculpture into the

Mozambican national narrative. The sculpture features several tangled human bodies, supporting each other and holding several objects used in various pursuits, with a notable figure holding a gun, in the upper register, while the caption reads "*As ideias que as mãos conseguem / de uma vida que o povo tem*" – ("The ideas that the hands obtain/ of a life that the people have").

In what concerns the external audience, the stories of the wooden sculptures could be seen as counter-narratives to the colonialist discourse, distributed on an international political stage, so as to relate to the analogous socialist discourses against imperialism. Pointing to the hardship of the people's struggle and sacrifice for freedom, the offering of these sculptures as diplomatic gifts may be regarded as statements of their nation's valour, worth and legitimacy, made by the ones who offer them. As a Makonde artist, who worked under the FRELIMO patronage during the independence war explains "all art works that showed the action of war or the suffering of the people were meant for the nations and organizations that supported the struggle for liberation." (Bortolot, ch. 10)

Sculptures from the "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu" collection. Making sense of diplomatic gifts.

The "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu" Collection of diplomatic gifts, currently in the custody of the ASTRA National Museum Complex in Sibiu, Romania, features several black wood sculptures in the style of Modern Makonde, originating, according to the museum's registry, from Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The sculptures illustrate, to a different degree, the hardships of the colonial oppression suffered by the respective populations. The artifacts can be as simple as that representing a local women worker breastfeeding a child while carrying a heavy load, which makes her body collapse, in front of a dominant male figure (Inv. no. 1734), or as complex as the two large *Ujamaa* sculptures, one originating from Tanzania and featuring a woman with a tattooed face holding a baby, while other smaller figures holding elements of modern and traditional material culture attach to her body (Inv. No. 1387), and the other one originating from Kenya (Inv. No. 1384, see figure 2), featuring several small intertwined bodies and a larger male figure, holding an axe and a bunch of bananas, which, according to the metal plate attached to its support, was offered by president Daniel arap Moi, in his 1987 visit to Romania. Apart from the black wood sculptures, the collection also includes other objects illustrating the trauma

of the colonial encounter and the struggle for liberation, such as an ivory carving, depicting scenes of war and massacre, involving military and civilian population alike, armed with machine guns and machetes (Inv. no. 1723, see figure 3). Based on the presence of the MPLA's flag (*Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*), the subject of the scenes could be identified as the Angolan War of Independence. While scenes of violence and oppression against local population are a frequent presence on earlier ivory carvings, such as in the case of the Afro - Portuguese Kongo Ivories, representations a 20th century conflict, along with its respective material culture (e.g. modern uniforms and machine guns) are rather uncommon, offering the artifact in question a high degree of specificity as a diplomatic gift.

Since neither the museum registry, nor the labels in the "Gifts from the golden Age" exhibition provided details regarding the circumstances in which the objects were received or the message they were meant to convey, the interpretation of the artifacts relies on additional sources, such as articles from the *Scânteia* newspaper accounting Ceaușescu's "friendships visits", photographic albums from the Romanian National Archives, illustrating the highlights of each visit abroad, or articles which discuss similar objects with political connotations from other collections.

The sculpture featuring two natives carrying a colonist, with the formers reproduced in black wood, and the latter in ivory, so as to highlight the difference in colour (Inv. No. 1762, see figure 1), which, according to the museum's registry, originates from Tanzania, finds a counterpart in a Mozambican sculpture described by Alexander Bortolot (ch.10), and seems to be part of a typical scene of the FRELIMO promoted modern Makonde sculpture, showing an extract of the colonial oppression. The naturalistic body proportions are adapted to the European sculptural standards, leaving out the enlargements and exaggerations, which were commonly used in Makonde sculpture to emphasize different traits of the characters, while the entire composition is rather austere, omitting details such as the tattoos typically found on the figures of the locals.

This simplifying approach to the sculpture indicates a focus on the clarity of the message, on the narrative aspect of the object and on the relationship between the characters, which ultimately expresses the humiliation and suffering of the locals at the hands of the colonial oppressors. The white character's relaxed while also defying attitude, smoking a cigar at the shade of the palanquin, contrasts with the tense posture of the porters, with the bent knees and the leaning head of the leader expressing pain and effort. Bortolot's description of the Mozambican

sculpture featured on the back cover of the 45th issue of the *Mozambique Revolution* Magazine is highly applicable to the sculpture in the Ceaușescu collection, with slight exceptions given by the fact that the former figure rests closer to the typical Makonde aesthetics and expressivity:

> Materials and scale are employed to contrast the hard work of the bearers to the leisure of their passenger ...The casualness of his position, with both legs dangling limply from the sling, as well as the shade that protects him from the heat of the sun overhead, is juxtaposed to the stooped, straining bodies of the men who carry him. The slitted eyes of the leader convey a sense of fatigue, while the gesture of his arm, reaching outward for balance or to brush aside vegetation obstructing his path, communicates the work involved in bearing this human load. (Bortolot, ch. 10)

It is also noteworthy that, apart from its self-explanatory figurative meaning, the object can also be read as a metaphor of the entire oppressive colonial system, pushing on the shoulders of the locals, a connotation which becomes all the more significant when the object is offered as a political gift to a leader with socialist affiliations.

Other objects received as diplomatic gifts and integrated into the "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu" collection, such as the carved ivory from Angola (see figure 3), express the trauma of the colonial oppression and the sacrifices for liberation in a stronger manner, graphically reproducing bloody scenes of war and massacre. The war of independence made Angola the site of several clashes between the Portuguese army and the local nationalist movements, many of which involved retaliation actions and atrocities against civilians. Therefore, the scene illustrated in the upper register, depicting a man and woman waving working tools instead of weapons, supported by an armed character, is the representation of part of the essence of this war. The fighter in the lower register of the sculpture is holding a machete, as a symbol of agricultural work, but also as an iconic object of the struggle for independence, which was eventually featured on the Angolan national flag, after extensive use in guerilla wars, as various accounts of the events show: "In the early hours of 4 February 1961, the prisons in Luanda were stormed with machetes and guns, some of them captured during an earlier attack on a police jeep." (Davidson 21).

Apart from the characters featured on the visible side, the object also depicts, on the other side of the upper register, a woman fleeing with her children, which also stands as quintessential representation of the 1961 repression: "Villages were bombed and fleeing villagers strafed and napalmed. The total number of those killed has been variously estimated at between 20,000 and 30,000. It may well have been more, since the colonialists never bothered to keep any accurate census of the African population." (Davidson 23). Although the numbers cannot be verified, the account stands as a proof of the perceived impact of the violence against the local population and of the relevance of such representations.

The contrast between the modern, Western origin objects, such as the rifles, the uniforms of the soldiers and the flag, on the one hand, and the objects associated with the traditional African culture, such as the clothing of the peasants and the vegetal landscape, one the other hand, is also part of the symbolic violence of the representation. As Bennetta Jules-Rosette points out, images of modernity "reflect ambivalence and a sense of anxiety about the present and future… Man-made objects disrupt the tranquil symbiosis between humans and nature and the peaceful past of the idealized village setting." (55)

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of theories regarding the development of modern African sculpture, as objects of communication and interaction, this study has demonstrated the significance and purpose of a series of sculptures belonging to a particular type, made by African carvers to express the hardship and violence of life under the colonial rule. Instead of being regarded as adaptations to foreign expectations and tastes, with questionable aesthetic and memorial value, the discussed artifacts should be understood as cultural performances whose authorship and agency belong to their makers, created with the specific purpose of expressing messages of resistance in front of both local and international audiences, when recuperated as diplomatic gifts. While this study focused on a limited number of artifacts, its methods and arguments could be effectively applied to other similar objects in the "Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu" collection or to other collections containing diplomatic gifts of the same type, which relate to various conflicts and catastrophic social events.

Fig. 1: Wooden sculpture, "Africans with Palanquin", black wood, 45 x 28 x 6,5 cm, Sibiu, ASTRA National Museum Complex, Franz Binder Museum, Inv. No. 1761, Author's Photograph

Fig. 2: *Ujamaa* style sculpture, "Ebony column with sculpted scenes", 122 x 17 cm, Sibiu, ASTRA National Museum Complex, Franz Binder Museum, Inv. No. 1384, detail, Author's Photograph

Fig. 3: Carved ivory tusk, 25 x 10 cm, Sibiu, ASTRA National Museum Complex, Franz Binder Museum, Inv. No. 1723, Author's Photograph

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David Livingstone[*]

CALLING OUT TO THE HEAVENS FOR AID: DISASTER SONGS IN AMERICAN FOLK MUSIC

Abstract: This article will explore American folk songs dealing with disasters, mostly from the first half of the twentieth century. These songs dealt with shipwrecks, train-wrecks, fires, tornadoes and drought and even the so-called Dust Bowl. Along with murder ballads, these songs functioned as a kind of oral newspaper providing information to even illiterate people in rural America. The songs also served as a stimulus to imagination, opening up exotic worlds to people often isolated and sedentary. The songs provided an opportunity for the listener/singer/musician to experience vicarious pain and catharsis in relation to the particular disaster. Finally, there was often a religious dimension to the songs and disasters which were being memorialised in song. The paper will conclude with a demonstration of how the disaster song finally became politicized with the example of Woody Guthrie. The primary source for the songs was the anthology of disaster songs entitled *People Take Warning* released in 2007. The artists included in the collection and discussed in this paper range from well-known figures such as the Carter Family and Charlie Poole to lesser known musicians who are practically forgotten. There will also be a discussion of the predecessors to these songs as well as the successors.
Keywords: *disaster songs; accidents; natural disasters; catharsis; folk music; murder ballads, Woody Guthrie.*

Misery loves company and never more so than when it comes to disaster songs. These kinds of songs have existed from time immemorial with arguably the high point in the popularity of the genre being the first third of the twentieth century in the United States, which of course coincided with the beginnings of field recordings of country/folk/old-time music by musicologists and sound engineers such as John Lomax, Ralph Peer, etc.

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I have been inspired by, and made extensive use of, the compilation of disaster songs from this period of time entitled *People Take Warning*, released in 2007. Unless otherwise referenced, I will be using the texts of the songs from this anthology. Tom Waits provides the liner notes to the collection, which he introduces aptly as "tragic chronicles of the perils of being human" (Waits). The genres of disaster songs include: floods, fires, shipwrecks, train-wrecks and tornadoes. The disaster genre also has affinities with so-called murder ballads and songs about assassinations. Brian Braiker in a review for *Newsweek* of the anthology comments on the ongoing relevance of songs of this kind.

Amazingly, almost every song in this collection commemorates (if that's the right word) something terrible that actually happened, each tune an ancestor of the cable-television news crawl. 'If it bleeds, it leads,' is the news business's oldest mantra. And, boy, do these old 78s bleed. (Braiker)

Prior to this period, of course, disaster songs and narratives were also extremely common, but were not recorded for posterity, although we do have a number of preserved texts. Edith E. Cutting and and Harold W. Thompson discuss the situation in the early nineteenth century in *A Pioneer Songster*, specifically in relation to the song *Loss of the Albion* about a shipwreck from 1822: "A murder, a shipwreck, a fire or any catastrophe that occurred before the time of the Civil War was almost sure to be celebrated in a ballad." (Cutting, 153)

Additional precursors to those focused on this paper included Irish folk songs about the Potato Famine of 1845-1849. Although undoubtedly of interest, they do not focus on a description of the actual natural disaster per se, but more on the political ramifications, in this case the exploitation of Ireland by the English. A typical example would be *Skibbereen*/*Dear Old Skibbereen*, which takes the form of a dialogue between a father and son, seemingly in America. The father reminisces about his life in his native village *Skibbereen* in county Cork and the reasons why he was forced to leave it behind.

> O son, I loved my native land with energy and pride
> 'Til a blight came o'er my crops, my sheep and cattle died
> My rent and taxes were too high, I could not them redeem
> And that's the cruel reason that I left old Skibbereen. (Romer)

One of the most famous disaster narratives of the late nineteenth century lives in infamy for its disastrous literary quality. The poem *The Tay Bridge Disaster*

by the Scottish poet William McGonagall (1825-1902) was written in 1880 commemorating a tragic incident from a year earlier in Scotland involving the collapse of a bridge when a train was passing over it with all the persons aboard dying (from 60 to 75 casualties). McGonagall's reputation as the world's worst poet is exemplified with this, his most famous/infamous poem. The poem's beginning exemplifies his 'talent' for forced and fumbling verse. McGonagall's doggerel is brilliant in its badness and much of what followed also lacked artistic merit.

Beautiful Railway Bridge of the Silv'ry Tay!
Alas! I am very sorry to say
That ninety lives have been taken away
On the last Sabbath day of 1879,
Which will be remember'd for a very long time.

The final moral is hammered home with very little subtlety and unintentional humour. "For the stronger we our houses do build / The less chance we have of being killed." (Gutoskey) McGonagall's collected works contain a number of unreadable similar poems (*Grace Darling or The Wreck of the "Forfarshire"*, *The Albion Battleship Calamity*, *The Wreck Of The Steamer "London"*), to name but a few. Shipwrecks, as is apparent, were one of his specialities.

With the rise of professional recordings at the beginning of the twentieth century, with money to be made by songwriters with an ear for a hit, entrepreneurial songwriters began to glean the newspapers for suitable material. Carl Wilson describes the process as follows:

There were professional songwriters who made a speciality of news-set-to-music, such as Carson J. Robison of Kansas, who in 1929 described his method: 'First I read all the newspaper stories of, say, a disaster. Then I get to work on the old typewriter. There's a formula, of course. You start by painting everything in gay colors. … Then you ring in the tragedy—make it as morbid and gruesome as you can. Then you wind up with a moral.' (Wilson)

Charles Wolfe discusses this kind of so-called 'fakelore', elaborating on how Robison and others of his ilk wrote songs for artists like Vernon Dalhart, whose *Wreck of the Old 97* was the first gold record in country music in 1924 (Wolfe 190).

The most famous shipwreck of all time, the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, generated a number of folk songs. The most successful by far was *The Great Titanic/The Titanic/It Was Sad When That Great Ship Went Down/Titanic (Husbands*

and Wives). The plethora of names makes it apparent that a number of versions came into existence. As with many folk songs, there is no consensus as to the original author of the song. A. E. Perkins discusses the origin: "The 'Titanic' sank on Sunday, April 14, 1912. The following Sunday I saw on a train a blind preacher selling a ballad he had composed on the disaster. The title was 'Didn't that ship go down?'" (Perkins 223)

Ernest Stoneman's version from 1924, which apparently sold two million copies, is the most well-known and deservedly so. The African-American husband and wife blues duo, William and Versey Smith also recorded a version of the song which was included on the ground-breaking collection of folk songs by Harry Smith, *Anthology of American Folk Music*, from 1952. The first verse and the chorus should provide a sense of the song.

It was on one Monday morning just about one o'clock
When that great Titanic began to reel and rock;
People began to scream and cry,
Saying, "Lord, am I going to die?"

It was sad when that great ship went down,
It was sad when that great ship went down,
Husbands and wives and little children lost their lives,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

In an ironic twist of fate, this song became a classic so-called campfire song bellowed out by millions of children at summer camps around the United States, who seemingly found no discrepancy between the sadness of the disaster and their own 'high and dry' state of being.

Fires were also a popular topic for folk songs. The *People Take Warning* anthology includes the macabre *Ohio Prison Fire* from 1930 by Bob Miller which includes a bizarre conversation between a prison warden and a mourning mother identifying the body of her convict son. This surreal interchange is preceded by the following lines, all sung in a happy-go-lucky singing voice.

Picture an old lady there
Climbing up the smoldering stair
Looking for her boy, a victim of the flames

Now her tears are falling fast
And she finds her son at last
All a tremble she looks on his charred remains

Burning of the Cleveland School is an upbeat song from 1923 by J.H. Howell's Carolina Hillbillies, with the catchy chorus sung with great verve in two-part harmony.

You could hear the children screaming
As the flames were rolling high.
'Daddy come and get your baby,'
Would you stand and see him die?

Baltimore Fire recorded by Charlie Poole in 1930 has a great deal more to it both lyrically and artistically. It tells the story of the Great Baltimore Fire of 1904 which was one of the worst disasters of its kind in American history and which led to much-needed reforms in fire safety. The song captures the frustration of the firefighters, helpless to combat the rising flames.

"Fire, fire," I heard the cry, from every breeze that passes by;
All the world was one sad cry of pity.
Strong men in anguish prayed, and calling loud to heaven for aid,
While the fire in ruin was layin' fair Baltimore, the beautiful city.

Amid an awful struggle of commotion,
The wind blew a gale from the ocean.
Brave firemen struggled with devotion,
But their efforts all proved in vain.

While the disaster songs about fires called for the development of improved technology to prevent further tragedy, train-wreck songs warned of the dangers of a novel mode of transport and were very much of interest as the subject of folk songs. One of the most popular was *Casey Jones/The Ballad of Casey Jones/Casey Jones, the Brave Engineer* about a train engineer who wrecked his vehicle in 1900, supposedly sacrificing his own life through his bravery and saving the passengers. The song, in various versions, has been covered by a wide range of performers.

There are also completely different songs with similar names, such as the Grateful Dead's drug-addled, but catchy and amusing version: "driving that train, high on cocaine, Casey Jones, you better watch your speed." (Grateful Dead)

An equally popular railway song was *The Wreck of the Old 97* by once again a range of artists, but arguably recorded in its classic version by Vernon Delhart in 1924. It provides an account of a famed railway disaster from 1903.

They give him his orders at Monroe, Virginia
Sayin', "Steve, you're way behind time
This is not '38, this is old '97
Put her into Spencer on time"

The song begins with an upbeat reference to a challenge presented to the often lauded at the time profession of the train engineer. The lines describing the actual wreck are described with a great deal of verve and vim, providing obvious titillation to the listeners of the song.

He was going down the grade makin' 90 miles an hour
His whistle broke into a scream
He was found in the wreck, with his hand on the throttle
Scalded to death by the steam

As is often the case with these songs, it ends with a pithy, moralistic lesson to be taken from the tale, in this case an absurd reprimand for less-than-loving wives of heroic train engineers.

Now all you ladies you better take a warning
From this time on and learn
Never speak harsh words to your true lovin' husband
He may leave you and never return

Mining disaster songs were particularly popular during this period and were arguably one of the few sub-genres which actually packed a critical punch, as they often pointed out the insufficient safety standards of the mining companies which led to the tragedies. The songs make reference to actual historical mining disasters in West Virginia (not coincidentally one of the centres of country music): *Explosion*

in the Fairmount Mine, *McBeth Mine Explosion*, *West Virginia Mine Disaster*. One of the most poignant, *Dream of a Miner's Child*, was covered by bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley among others. Although the origins of the song are murky, with some arguing an older British origin, its sentiments obviously struck a rich vein in the coal-mining regions of the Appalachians. Stanley's version runs as follows, providing an account of a child's dream foreshadowing a coming disaster.

Oh, daddy my daddy, oh don't go away
For dreams have so often come true
Oh, daddy my daddy, oh don't go away
I never could live without you
I dreamed that the mine was all covered with flame
The men all fought for their lives
Just then the scene changed, and the mouth of the mine
Was covered with sweethearts and wives (Stanley)

Less common, but nevertheless, popular were songs about tornadoes, windstorms, cyclones and earthquakes. These are again very much topical in nature and would have served as a way of spreading news to the rest of the nation. The *People Take Warning* anthology includes wide-ranging songs such as *Ryecove Cyclone*, *Santa Barbara Earthquake* and *Tennessee Tornado*. Arguably the most famous of these types of songs, *My Oklahoma Home* (*It Blowed Away)* was actually written as late as 1961 by Sis Cunningham and her brother Bill, but was based on their own first-hand experience of the Dust Bowl disaster in the 1930s. The song relates of the hopes and dreams of a young farmer and the abrupt loss of everything he had worked so hard for.

It blowed away
It blowed away
My Oklahoma home it blown away
Well it looked so green and fair
When I built my shanty there
Now my Oklahoma home is blown away (Cunningham)

Floods, in particular, were often connected with biblical imagery from Noah's flood and the theme of cleansing or punishment for the sins of humanity; there was also the related notion of renewal and creating a new, better, world.

Examples from the afore-mentioned anthology include: *High Water Everywhere*, *Mississippi Heavy Water Blues*, *Alabama Flood* and *Flood of 1927*. Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie composed and recorded *When the Levee Breaks* in 1929 about the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, which was covered most famously by Led Zeppelin for their fourth classic album in 1971.

If it keeps on rainin', levee's goin' to break
If it keeps on rainin', levee's goin' to break
And the water gonnna come in and we'll have no place to stay

Well all last night I sat on the levee and moan
Well all last night I sat on the levee and moan
Thinkin' 'bout my baby and my happy home

If it keeps on rainin' levee's goin' to break
If it keeps on rainin' levee's goin' to break
And all these people will have no place to stay

The blues feel of the song is very much apparent and explains its attraction for Led Zeppelin.

Sow 'Em on the Mountain, covered by the Carter Family amongst others, is yet another folk song which references both floods and fires. It is very much charged with biblical references to the final days, with the implication being that these disasters might be interpreted as punishments for human iniquity and decadence.

Sowing on the mountain
Reaping in the valley
You're gonna reap
Just what you sow

God gave Noah
That rainbow sign
God gave Noah
That rainbow sign

God gave Noah
That rainbow sign

Won't be water
But fire next time (Carter Family)

While the traditional songs from the Interwar period are more or less presented without personal commentary or any political ramifications, Woody Guthrie, a proud Okie, who experienced the cyclones, windstorms and the consequent tragedy of the Dust Bowl first-hand, practically single-handedly transformed the genre to not only generate compassion and sympathy (which the earlier songs did as well), but also to provide a critique of the government, the capitalist system and the lack of opportunities for the working-class people who were obviously most impacted by these disasters. Guthrie's autobiographical novel *Bound for Glory*, published in 1943, powerfully describes where his interest in the disaster song might have been born.

'Sing to me,' I whispered to Mama.
She had already been rocking me back and forth, humming the tune to an old song. 'What do you want me to sing?'

'That. That song.'
'The name of that song is The Sherman Cyclone.'
'Sing that.'
And so she sang it (Guthrie, *Bound For Glory* 88)

This movingly demonstrates how Guthrie as a child, in the 1910s and 1920s, would have been exposed to the genre and how it captured his imagination. An excerpt from his mother's rendition of the song, referencing once again an actual disaster in Texas in 1896, follows:

You could see the storm approaching
And its cloud looked deathlike black
And it was through
Our little city
That it left
Its deathly track. (Guthrie, *Bound For Glory* 88)

The song, through the voice of the beloved tragic figure of his mother[10], provides food for thought, but also triggers his social conscience. "And I drifted off to sleep thinking about all of the people in the world that have worked hard and had somebody else come along and take their life away from them." (Guthrie, *Bound For Glory* 88)

Later in the book, Guthrie describes how he began to use folk songs as a method for not only spreading news, but as a way of making a living and spreading notions about social justice.

> If you think of something new to say, if a cyclone comes, or a flood wrecks the country, or a bus load of school children freeze to death along the road, if a big ship goes down, and an airplane falls in your neighborhood, an outlaw shoots it out with the deputies, or the working people go out to win a war, yes, you'll find a train load of things you can set down and make up a song about. You'll hear people singing your words around over the country, and you'll sing their songs everywhere you travel or everywhere you live; and these are the only kind of songs my head or my memory or my guitar has got any room for." (Guthrie, *Bound For Glory* 254)

This new novel approach to songwriting and performing is exemplified by one of his first compositions *So Long, It's Been Good To Know Yuh/Dusty Old Dust* from arguably the first concept album *Dust Bowl Ballads* from 1940.

> I've sung this song, but I'll sing it again,
> Of the place that I lived on the wild windy plains,
> In the month called April, county called Gray,
> And here's what all of the people there say: (Guthrie, *Woody Guthrie*)

Unlike the earlier disaster songs, almost inevitably described with deadpan objectivity and indifference, this account is very much in first person, related by someone who lived through the disaster, which is about to be described in vivid detail. The chorus captures not only the atmosphere as the storm hits, with the

[10] For more on Woody Guthrie and Huntington's disease which ravaged both his family and ended his own life prematurely, see David Livingstone. "Pastures of Plenty: the Profound Cultural Legacy of Woody Guthrie." forthcoming.

victims wondering if the end of the world had arrived, but also the aftermath as the survivors often had no choice but to pack up their belongings and head west for a new life.

> So long, it's been good to know yuh;
> So long, it's been good to know yuh;
> So long, it's been good to know yuh.
> This dusty old dust is a-gettin' my home,
> And I got to be driftin' along. (Guthrie, *Woody Guthrie)*

The song continues with the thoughts of Guthrie's family and friends concerning the implications of the disaster, "We talked of the end of the world" or "Instead of marriage, they talked like this" (Guthrie, *Woody Guthrie)*, but also includes a critique of the local church and its preacher who still finds time to take collection in the midst of the dust storm. "He said, 'Kind friend, this may the end;/ An' you got your last chance of salvation of sin!'" (Guthrie, *Woody Guthrie)*. Guthrie's account makes use of this disaster to punch home barbed criticisms of not only the government which has failed the working people, but also of institutionalized religion which provides little but "pie in the sky"[11] solace. Guthrie wrote, of course, hundreds of songs, many of them concerned with disasters both natural and man-made. Near the end of his tragically prematurely shortened career, he penned a song concerned with a plane crash, which was only recorded posthumously, *Deportee/Plane Wreck at Los Gatos*. He was led to write the song upon reading the news of a plane crash carrying Mexican itinerant labourers back home. Only the American pilot and airplane staff were listed by name while the illegal immigrants or deportees were anonymous. This gave rise to a tribute to these unsung heroes, which is still very much relevant to the present.

> Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita,
> Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria;
> You won't have your names when you ride the big airplane,
> All they will call you will be 'deportees' (Guthrie, *Woody Guthrie*)

[11] Term coined apparently by the labour activist and folk singer Joe Hill, see David Livingstone. "Dreaming of Joe Hill: Folk Songs by and about the Greatest Hero of the American Labour Movement." forthcoming.

The People Take Warning anthology is divided into three categories and records: man versus machine, in other words, disaster songs about train wrecks and shipwrecks; man versus nature, floods, fires, mining collapses, earthquakes and the like; man versus man (and woman, too), involving murder ballads and political assassinations. I would like to briefly make reference to the last third category. Just as Guthrie politicized and personalized the disaster song, Dylan did something similar with the genre of the murder ballad, which dates back to the Middle Ages if not even earlier (Cain and Abel).

One of the most widely covered and known songs of this kind is *Tom Dooley*, inspired by an actual 'sweetheart' murder in North Carolina in 1866. The song told in an amoral, matter-of-fact voice, provides no substantial explanation for the wicked deed. Dooley sees to do it on a whim, only to realise the consequences of his actions when it is too late.

I met her on the mountain
There I took her life
Met her on the mountain
Stabbed her with my knife

Numerous other examples could be provided along similar lines: *Pretty Polly*, *Banks of the Ohio*, *Stagger Lee*, *Long Black Veil*, etc.

Bob Dylan, Guthrie's self avowed disciple, at least at the beginning of his musical career, performed a similar act as his mentor, not with the disaster song, however, but with the murder ballad. Songs such as *The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll* or *Hurricane* about the wrongly accused boxer Ruben 'Hurricane' Carter make use of the tradition to call society to task for injustice and racism. A short excerpt from the first song, which relates of the murder of an African-American woman by a young white man in Maryland in 1963 should serve to exemplify the accomplishment.

William Zanzinger killed poor Hattie Carroll,
With a cane that he twirled around his diamond ring finger
…
But you who philosophize, disgrace and criticize all fears,
Take the rag away from your face, now ain't the time for
Your tears. (Dylan)

Paige Hernandez in a recording made for the Kennedy Center on the disaster song tradition makes an apt comparison between rap and hip hop in the African American community, often spreading the word about atrocities and topical issues and the disaster song in the early twentieth century. (Hernandez). This educational aspect of the songs is certainly valid, but the songs also provided a form of catharsis which we could seemingly learn a great deal from here in the twenty-first century. Living in an age being over-inundated with news about war, murder and tragedy has led to a great deal of mental stress. Perhaps the singing of these tunes provided a healthier form of pain relief. Creating a song and singing it also made for a form of community and solidarity, with a kind of protection in numbers. Tom Waits in the liner notes to *People Take Warning!* eloquently explains the partly contradictory attraction of the songs.

> If there's an overriding moral point to all of these old songs, that might be it. Take warning, but don't stop dancing as long as the fiddles are still playing. ... It may be dour and morbid on the surface, full of floods, shipwrecks, hurricanes, suicides, murders, and uncountable disasters, but it is somehow strangely redemptive, too, reminding us that we are all survivors even as it also reminds us that when the music stops, we all have to sit down. (Waits)

These songs provide a pleasure of gawking and titillation, but also involve an expanding of consciousness and acquired compassion. The listener not only realizes his or her own good fortune, "There but for the grace of God go I." but is all called to repent: "Where you gonna run to when the world's on fire?" (Carter Family)

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"THE DREAMS OF MEN, THE SEED OF COMMONWEALTHS, THE GERMS OF EMPIRES". THE IMPACT OF COLONIALISM IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

"My task which I am trying to achieve is,
by the power of the written word,
to make you hear, to make you feel —
it is, before all, to make you see. (…)
If I succeed, you shall find there according
to your deserts (…) all you demand;
and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth
for which you have forgotten to ask."
– Joseph Conrad

"Our language determines our view of reality,
because we see things through it."
– Ludwig Wittgenstein

Abstract: Despite accusations of racism and of upholding colonialism, *Heart of Darkness* reveals the problematic nature of the imperial enterprise. The dichotomy between superior versus inferior, us versus them, self versus other, embedded in colonial discourse, becomes challenging when considering that the foray into the Dark Continent reveals more about the character of Europeans. The outward journey of exploration of the still partially unknown Africa is mirrored by an inward journey that reveals the degenerate nature of the European identity. The geographical journey is doubled by an anthropological one, towards our earliest origins, as well as a psychological one, towards the primitive self.
***Keywords**:* Heart of Darkness; *colonialism; disaster; degeneration; self; alienation.*

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Joseph Conrad strove to make his readers see through his written words, hoping to encourage them to glimpse and grasp the truth. Given that language determines how we view reality, he employed the ironic mode in *Heart of Darkness*, to reveal the problematic nature of colonial discourse. On the surface, his novel is an adventure tale, influenced by the travel writings of his times. Instead of its mere geographical or anthropological facets, what makes *Heart of Darkness* remarkable is what it reveals about the degeneration of Europeans heading into the uncharted territory of Africa. Conrad chose a title that underscores the power as well as the ambiguity of language. *Heart of Darkness* may suggest the heart of Africa (referring to the centre of the continent), but it may also refer to the human heart, to a place of evil as well as a place of corruption. It might be a heart corrupted by evil, but darkness also has connotations such as madness or the unknown, which may also be applied to the text. Marlow's voyage gives us an account of the blackness of Africa perceived as otherness for Kurtz who ultimately perishes there. Even the title requires further elucidation due to the versatility of language.

Heart of Darkness is a story of revelation in terms of the moral and mental corruption visited upon the Europeans heading into the depths of the African continent. In "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited", J. Hillis Miller investigates whether there is something apocalyptic about Conrad's novella in itself. The word apocalypse arrived in old English via Old French and ecclesiastical Latin from the Greek *apokalupsis* meaning to uncover / reveal, similarly to its use in the Bible, such as in the case of Paul in Romans, echoing Mathew's "revelation of the mystery". Thus, for Hillis Miller (207) "Apocalypse means unveiling (…) a narrative of unveiling or revelation". As he puts it, it becomes a narrative that tries to pierce the darkness and clarify:

> As Marlow says of his experience in the heart of darkness: 'It was sombre enough too—. . . *not very clear either. No, not very clear*. And yet *it seemed to throw a kind of light'* (51). A narrative that *sheds light, that penetrates darkness, that clarifies and illuminates* – this is one definition of that mode of discourse called 'parabolic or apocalyptic', but it might also serve to define the work of criticism or interpretation. (Hillis Miller 207, my italics)

Joseph Conrad has his mouthpiece Marlow utter words aimed at this goal of unveiling the reality of colonialism. But throughout the text and in the aftermath of Marlow's story, the events narrated remain shrouded in mystery to a certain

extent. The attempt at elucidating the meaning behind both Marlow's and Kurtz's experiences in Africa does not yield a definite answer. When Marlow tells his story on board the Nellie, he is still trying to make sense of events, but as he does that, he becomes a guide for his listeners and is shown to be a somewhat enlightened figure, who has suffered for the knowledge attained: "Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had *sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion*, a straight back, an *ascetic aspect*, and with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, *resembled an idol*, the *pose of a Buddha preaching* in European clothes". (Conrad 3; 6, my italics) The mental anguish and moral qualms posed by the imperial project are reflected through physical distress once the subject starts seeing reality for what it is.

As Joseph Conrad puts it, he sought to make us "see" – what we, the readers, are meant to see is not related simply to external reality. Conrad sought to make us see ourselves, as well as the world. At the very beginning of the novella, Marlow sounds nostalgic when he talks about colonialism and empire: "The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires" (Conrad 5). However, throughout the text, the dreams of men are revealed to be those of greed and of yearnings for power, while the jungle becomes a claustrophobic, labyrinthine space that hinders rather than supports the attainment of one's dreams. Thus, a space where middle-class men went to achieve their lives' ambition to improve their station by gaining wealth, becomes nightmarish. The seed of commonwealths becomes even more problematic, since the colonists are revealed to live in isolation and to become alienated from humanity in general and from their culture in particular. Additionally, the 'noble cause' of imperialism is supposedly meant to bring people closer together by bridging the gap between the civilised Europeans and the barbaric Africans, but since imperialism merely paid lip-service to that so-called noble cause, nothing of the sort occurs. Finally, the germs of empires can be understood in two ways: either as the fountainhead of empires, or as a microbe that infects others. Even if the reference is to the starting point of an empire, it still leads to suffering and oppression in the long run, whereas in the case of an infection, it might refer to the corruption of those that start out as idealists, but who succumb to greed and a desire for power.

Many of the interpretations generated by *Heart of Darkness* are rooted in feminism, racism, postcolonialism and psychology. Conrad was denounced as a "bloody racist" by Chinua Achebe and as an enforcer of patriarchy by Elaine Showalter, while Edward Said criticized him for silencing the voices of those

oppressed by imperialism. Other critics have looked towards psychological readings that turn Marlow's voyage into a journey of self-discovery and Kurtz into Marlow's shadow or double. In 1975, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe claimed that Conrad's story was "bloody racist." Achebe stated the Africans were merely used as props and that Conrad did not bother to flesh out the African characters. In Achebe's view, Conrad failed to provide his characters with a voice and he focused on describing them as uncivilized in order to contrast them to the civilized Europeans. While right in essence, Achebe's view might be an oversimplification, given that he does not take into account Conrad's distance from Marlow, the narrator, unless it is as an accusation of creating a "*cordon sanitaire*" and the narrator is said to suffer from a "moral and psychological malaise". (Achebe 342) Furthermore, Achebe does not consider the change in mentality from the 1890s to the 1970s when he levels his accusation of racism at Conrad. The focus of *Heart of Darkness* is on the European discourses of power which end up being exposed as hypocritical through Kurtz's moral disintegration. Moreover, Conrad does not speak for colonial subjects and his target audience was one made up of middle- and upper-class readers "secure in the conviction" that they belonged to "an invincible power and a superior race". (Parry 1) Conrad could not afford to become alienated from his readers who were either civil servants or involved with the imperial project in the colonies. Furthermore, Conrad was writing a work of fiction rather than a sociological or anthropological account of colonialism. Conrad's mouthpiece, Marlow, still manages to reveal the worst transgressions of the hypocrisy and cruelty of imperialism.

Racist stereotypes provide a justification for colonial oppression in *Heart of Darkness*. The African characters are depicted as savages and Marlow does not make any effort in comprehending their behaviour or customs, which are regarded as utterly irrational. Marlow suggests that the only way to control the natives is through the use of violence, therefore, any European colonist who goes to Africa will have to resort to brutality. It seems as if the author indulges in a justification of this violence, since the colonists engage in cruelty, they starve and mutilate, they kill and they enslave. This self-serving behaviour is meant to increase the yield of the natural resources of the Congo, which goes against the rhetoric of the 'noble cause': the only desire of the Europeans is "to tear treasure from the bowels of the land…with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe." (Conrad 30) Conrad's portrayal of Belgian colonialism in the Congo does not glorify the violence, but shows it to be the result of moral

corruption and degradation. Similarly to other sources from the 19th century, Conrad seems to suggest that Belgian imperialism is damnable, but it needs to be distinguished from British imperialism, which seems to be superior. Despite Marlow's lack of interest in understanding the natives, he still regards them as human, though as less developed in accordance to Darwinian theory. The way the African characters are constructed was part of the reason why Conrad was accused of racism: their language is incomprehensible and there is no effort on Marlow's part to delve into tribal culture and rituals. On the other hand, the natives' primitiveness is seen as vibrant. The same type of liveliness seems to be imbued in Kurtz, who has gone native. In effect, Conrad is not focused on the portrayal of the natives because their savagery is not the point of interest in his text; what Conrad is concerned about is the atavism of the Europeans, the latent savagery within those who claim to be civilised and civilisers.

In addition, Achebe's own words when he talks about the "desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (Achebe 337) can be used to argue that if Africa is Europe's foil, it is actually Europe that comes off worse in the comparison. The Europeans are meant to be civilised and superior, yet they fail in upholding their standards as seen through Kurtz's degeneration. When Conrad was writing *Heart of Darkness*, "the word racism did not exist," while the word race denoted something different, a meaning that would now be "replaced by terms like *nation* and *ethnic group*" (Firchow 4; 5) and it mostly referred to culture. In Edward Said's view culture has the power "to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too." (Said 9) The superior civilization sets the rules of engagement and controls the inferior one. Despite indictments of pro-imperialism from critics, at the time of publication Conrad was delighted to find out that "his good friend, R. B. Cunninghame Graham, not only liked it but read it as anti-imperialist." (Collits 105) Therefore, readings of the text are steeped both in the time when it was written and published and anchored in the time when it was read.

Marlow thinks of his journey as "travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (Conrad 35) when it is in fact a voyage into the dark recesses of the self. The move beyond the boundaries of Western civilization allows Marlow to better

understand the degenerate self of Europeans driven by greed and a desire for power. Since he is away from civilization, the world he encounters and the people he meets are not restrained by law or moral norms. Additionally, to some extent, they cannot be said to be part of a community. This solitary existence is grounded in the need for competition in the colonial territories, but this leads to disaster and destruction, at least in terms of identity. Kurtz's ambition: "I had immense plans", "the colossal scale of his vile desires" (Conrad 65, 73), is not achieved in the end, instead he transforms into someone unrecognizable. In part, the responsibility for this transformation could be assigned to the isolation and lack of contact with civilization, as Conrad states "We live, as we dream, alone." (Conrad 27) The solitary existence has taken a toll on Kurtz, since he is removed from any humanizing influences. Moreover, Kurtz has been stripped of the limitations of reason and conscience. The freedom and solitude of the jungle allow Kurtz's primitive instincts to gain the upper hand.

Throughout the text, Marlow is doing his duty as the captain of a ship and in the process becomes an observer of the cruelty and unfairness of colonialism. His participation in the imperial project is limited and marginal at best. He observes and offers some comments that indicate he is not entirely behind the way the subjects of colonialism are treated in the Congo. Nevertheless, this does not impede him from believing in the civilizing mission of imperialism. Western civilization's assumptions of moral superiority translate into a rationale for dominating others in the interest of so-called civilizing values. The novel starts with a parallel between London and Africa and the claim that London was once too an unexplored, dark, primitive wilderness, representing the unknown for the Roman colonists. Conrad had spent six months in the Congo, in miserable conditions, and felt that this time had "enormous physical and moral impact". (Najder 250) As a witness to European exploitation, Conrad creates a mouthpiece that reveals the ruthlessness and hypocrisy of the imperial enterprise. *Heart of Darkness* characterizes Belgian colonialism in opposition to the British and the Roman ones.

The colonial enterprise stands at the core of *Heart of Darkness*, the text gravitates towards a negative view of colonialism. But it oscillates between descriptions of Roman and Belgian colonialism, skirting around mentions of British colonialism. The Belgian colony of the Congo and the colonial practices of King Leopold II are specifically indicted, but no mention is made of British colonies in particular, yet there are subtle mentions of British explorers and of the Thames

becoming the source of enlightenment and religion, but also of violence and greed: "*Hunters for gold* or *pursuers of fame* they all had gone out on that stream, *bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might* within the land, *bearers of a spark from the sacred fire*." (Conrad 5, my italics) So British imperial practices are also implied, yet a positive spin is put upon them, as an attempt for Conrad to retain his readership. Conrad took colonialism with a grain of salt, while Marlow seems to be distrustful of the so-called civilizing mission, given that the colonisers are devoid of the necessary qualities to achieve it.

Conrad revealed that the religious and moral justifications used in support of the imperial project were employed to conceal the reality: namely, that colonialism was rooted in greed and that the oppressed were controlled through brutality. He hoped to reveal the miserable situation in the Congo: "*Heart of Darkness* thus has its important public side, as an angry document on absurd and brutal exploitation." (Guerard 326) The deception used to place greed and exploitation under the guise of a so-called 'noble cause' of educating, civilizing and christianising the natives was endemic. But the natives were in fact starved, mutilated or even murdered in the Congo.

These justifications were grounded on the assumption that the African race was inferior to the white race, which led to the construction of a discourse of power that provided Europeans with a rationale for their incursions into colonial territories: "Such an obviously inferior culture as the Europeans found in Africa must result from an inferior race, and such an innate inferiority justified imperial intrusion." (White 30) To further validate the imperial project of a variety of Western nations, imperialism turns supposedly benevolent and paternalistic:

> The image of the white man (…) is of a benign, even benevolent father figure and agent of improvement. (…) The moral superiority [Speke] attributes to the imperial endeavor and its hero justifies, even necessitates, their incursion into Africa, for while being commercially advantageous to the British, it is morally beneficial to the African, an extremely convenient equation. (White 33-4)

Supposedly creating a win-win situation, the imperial project is pushed forth since the British Empire had something to gain financially, while the situation of the Africans would improve from the perspective of education and civilization. However, the negative aspects of Africans were exaggerated so as to gain more

support on the home front: "missionaries were strongly tempted to exaggerate 'savagery' and 'darkness' in order to rationalize their presence in Africa, to explain the frustrations they experienced in making converts, and to win support from mission societies at home." (Brantlinger 60) Thus, the discourse of colonialism and imperialism becomes destructive in that it polarizes the Africans and Europeans. However, *Heart of Darkness* partly subverts this dichotomy, since the European colonisers suffer and degenerate.

The discourse employed by Conrad does not make use of the term imperialism and it barely mentions the word colonists as a contrast to conquerors in the discussion of the Roman conquest of Britain: "They were no *colonists,* their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were *conquerors,* and for that you want only brute force" *(*Conrad 6-7, my italics). Here 'colonists' is clearly meant to be thought of favourably and 'conquerors' unfavourably. Ironically, of course, the very word *colonist* is of Roman derivation." (Firchow 14) Conrad's discourse, like any imperial discourse of power, establishes Africa as a place of darkness, savagery and lack of knowledge, which serves "the extension of empire, [given that] the African needed the white man's help if he was to progress towards a more civilized and truly liberated state." (White 29) But there was no true exchange of knowledge, since the Victorians did not feel they had anything to learn from the Africans. (White 29) Moreover, in imperialist discourse, it is only the dominant culture that is expressed: "in imperialist discourse the voices of the dominated are represented almost entirely by their silence, their absence." (Said 9)

Thus, the establishment of the dichotomy is the purview of the Europeans, without any input from the Africans. Lopsided though the construction of the discourse of power may be, there is a purpose to it, since it reveals the desire to make the Africans invisible and easily controlled. According to Patrick Brantlinger, "Discourse – that most subtle yet also inescapable form of power – in its imperial guise persists, for example, in the most recent assumptions about the antithesis between 'primitive' or 'backward' and 'civilized' or 'advanced' societies." (Brantlinger 81) Aside from this persistence, the imperial discourse in *Heart of Darkness* is also imbued with irony and it reveals the hypocrisy of the imperial project:

> The French ship was conducting one of their wars by shelling enemies; the natives of the chain-gang are *criminals*; a debased native is *one of the reclaimed*;

> the workers are generally destructive rather than constructive, and often slothful as well; Kurtz's victims are *rebels*; and Kurtz's megalomaniac depravity is, according to the manager, the *vigorous action* for which the time was not ripe: *an unsound method*. If the Europeans were presented as consciously hypocritical, the tale would be less disturbing, for conscious hypocrisy entails the recognition of the truth. But what we see is a credited lie, a sincerity in the use of purposive jargon for destructive action. (…) repeatedly we are shown men for whom the world is re-created in the image of the falsehoods that sanction destruction and callousness, and whose falsehoods cohere in a logical structure. (Watts *Darkness* 112)

Cedric Watts reveals that the hypocrisy of spin doctoring the discourse related to imperialism demonstrates that colonialism was a morally bankrupt project. It was grounded in falsehoods and exaggerations and it led to oppression and brutality. This is further shown in the use of phrases such as "'weaning those ignorant millions', 'enemies criminals, workers ... rebels', 'unsound method' or 'leader of an extreme party' [which] are invested with sardonic irony." (Watts *Heart* 57) The use of such language in the 19th century however was not usually invested with irony, it is Conrad who is ahead of his time in revealing the transgressions of colonialism through language. In general, the discourse of power in the 19th century was purposefully employed to validate and consolidate the position of empires. The claim of the imperial power was bolstered by privileging one pole of the dichotomy at the expense of the other:

> The discursive power here, as well as its proliferation, works to manufacture attitudes but also, as Said argues, to render the machinery itself invisible. Speke's imagery promotes his readers' acceptance, silently; as covering nakedness is a commendable action to this discourse's Victorian audience, so must be opening markets and clearing the way for those unquestionably privileged goals of civilization and enlightenment. (White 33)

The mechanisms of power are concealed through discourse with the aim of attaining new colonial territories. The objective was to obtain power under the guise of the noble cause of educating and christianising the natives. Kurtz's eloquence uses this same strategy, but he undermines himself when concluding the pamphlet with the exclamation: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Conrad 50) The

power of discourse goes both ways, yet in a text written in the 19th century, the dominated are never given a voice, as opposed to the representatives of the colonial centre, such as Marlow and Kurtz.

Taking a steamer up the Congo to the Inner Station, Marlow had hoped to soon meet up with Kurtz, of whom he had heard before reaching Africa. Rumours regarding Kurtz's plans to civilize the natives had reached even Marlow. But the encounter with Kurtz is constantly postponed and it feels as if the readers are taken along on a quest, creating a portrait of Kurtz out of the textual clues provided prior to the meeting. Marlow's reluctance to meet Kurtz might be due to his own fears since Marlow recognizes in Kurtz certain impulses towards savagery that he himself has. Both Marlow's and the readers' expectations are set up, enhanced and subsequently disappointed when it comes to meeting Kurtz. Marlow expects to meet a powerful, charismatic figure, but that is not the case. If initially Kurtz was in fact such a figure, once he loses ground in terms of morality and civilization, it seems he is also physically diminished, as if his mental state has an impact in physical realm. When the meeting finally occurs, Kurtz is described a mere shadow of himself, as a result of an ailment.

The information about Kurtz, collected by Marlow along the way, is scarce and scattered and it is a difficult endeavour to imagine Kurtz: "The thing to know was what he belonged to, how many *powers of darkness* claimed him for their own. That was a reflection that *made you creepy all over*. It was impossible—not good for one either—trying to imagine." (Conrad 48-9, my italics) Kurtz is seen as belonging to the darkness after years spent in Africa, which creates a feeling of uneasiness in those who encounter him. The powers of darkness seem to be able to sink their hooks into Kurtz as a result of his alienation from his culture. The isolation of the self from one's culture becomes paramount in the telling of the story of a civilised man who arrives at a disillusioned discovery in terms of the brutality that lies beneath the thin layer of civilization.

Newly arrived in Africa, Marlow feels that uneasiness, since he is still grounded in the culture he hails from, whereas Kurtz has severed that connection through his degeneration: "There was nothing either above or below him—and I knew it. *He had kicked himself loose of the earth*. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone – and *I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air*." (Conrad 66, my italics) In Kurtz's case it feels as if he is no longer anchored in Western civilization, but given Conrad's word choice it sounds as if he had excised it voluntarily. On the other hand, Marlow seems to

be unable to get his bearings as a result of Kurtz's influence. For Kurtz, the colonial territory represents a space of freedom, of absolute power and of control over those he oppresses. Thus, his self-discovery is partly due to a lack of restraint and an atavistic desire for a more primitive self. Kurtz reverts to a more barbaric self, partly through his 'going native', in other words, his constant contact with the Africans.

Going back, for the Victorians, would mean abandoning "the cultural acquisition of 'civilization'", risking degeneration. (Griffith 4) The journey towards primitivism is not only a geographical one, but rather a psychological one. As Michael Levenson puts it, the movement through physical space is not as important as "the journey into self", the "introspective plunge", the "night journey into the unconscious" and what is found at the center of it, namely Kurtz "as a suppressed avatar lurking at the core of the self." (Levenson 56) Victorians were rather anxious about any contact they had with those they regarded as inferior, due to their fears of "degeneration and atavism [which] inevitable accompanied colonization." (Griffith 5) The most prevalent fear was that due to such contact, they would devolve in a manner similar to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, being unable "to maintain their cultural identities". (Griffith 6) Kurtz's devolution is understandable since he has most contact with the natives, few interactions with other Europeans and seems to be involved in a relationship with an African mistress, which indicates miscegenation.

By the time the encounter occurs, Marlow understands that Marlow has fallen short of his ideals and has come to commit barbarous acts. Before this realization, Marlow had believed Kurtz to be remarkable due to his idealism, learning and eloquence and had hoped to witness the latter's achievements. When Marlow reaches Kurtz, nothing is left of that idealism: Kurtz is now insatiable in his greed for ivory and power, so much so that he has "taken a high seat among the devils of the land." (Conrad 49) Kurtz, who was initially an idealist, was described as well-educated, charismatic and eloquent. For the natives, he becomes godlike, but in light of Victorian morality, he turns demonic. He embodies the process of transformation undergone by civilized men as they delve into the heart of darkness. Conrad tells us that "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz." (Conrad 49) He is constructed as a paragon of European virtue, through the words of those who describe him to Marlow. In the novella, Kurtz reverts to primitivism, failing to uphold his European customs and ideals. This "reversion to savagery" (McClure 132) marks Kurtz's metamorphosis as "a strange and ominous transformation had taken place in Mr. Kurtz's personality; like a snake shedding

its skin, he had cast off all his fine European habits and ideals, revealing a creature whose condition of moral degradation and animal primitivism made him indistinguishable from the savages for whom he had once expressed such touching concern." (Meyer 156) The discrepancy between the Kurtz described by his European acquaintances and his Intended, in other words between the Kurtz prior to his African experiences and the one Marlow encounters, is blatant and compelling in understanding just how far the degeneration of the civilised European may go when he is uprooted from his native soil and left rudderless.

According to Cedric Watts, Max Nordau, in his essay "Rabies Africana, and the Degeneracy of Europeans in Africa" (1891),

> distinguishes between two opposed European attitudes toward Africa, which he identifies as either that of the 'Hypocrites' or the 'Cynics:' 'The former say: 'We take Africa in order to improve the condition of the natives;' the latter state, 'We pocket Africa for our own profit.' The Cynics have at least the merit of sincerity' (Nordau 70). Nordau's Hypocrites are Conrad's shams; and his cynics are Conrad's madmen. (Watts *Darkness* 112)

Kurtz turns from hypocrite to cynic within the pages of *Heart of Darkness*, though his hypocrisy is not intentional initially. Later in the text he focuses on profit to the exclusion of everything else. The initial idea of Kurtz's psychology might have been prompted by a section of Max Nordau's *Degeneration.* Conrad was in contact with Nordau, having received a written tribute to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* in 1898. Nordau's work had already been in print for three years. (Watts *Darkness* 113-4) Nordau sought "lingering survivals of the savage, primitive and pre-moral within the natures of civilised men". (Nordau 261n) This is prevalent in the way Kurtz's character is constructed. The latent primitivism is revealed once Kurtz is immersed in the wilderness of Africa, as if a previously hidden aspect of his personality emerges. According to Cedric Watts, Kurtz fits the typology of the highly gifted degenerate, which seems to be the psychological basis for the character of Kurtz

Conrad emphasises an atavistic response to man's evolutionary heritage (rather than some complex resulting from traumas in his upbringing) as the key to Kurtz's decline. Kurtz, true to type, has the traits of meanness and pettiness, co-existing with brilliant qualities; he has the salient quality of genius without moral stability; and he even appears to have the gigantic bodily stature that Nordau mentions, for, to Marlow, he looked at least seven feet long. (Watts *Darkness* 115)

Max Nordau discusses this typology and there are evident parallels with Kurtz, especially in the way he is able to use his faculties in service of the imperial project and how he manages to corrupt and delude those he interacts with. Kurtz is initially an active force in the so-called progress of mankind, until his insanity makes itself known when he turns into a "will-of-the-wisps" guiding his followers into a wasteland. (Nordau 22-4) Ultimately, Kurtz turns into a corrupting influence: "Nordau, for instance, claimed that civilization was being corrupted by the influence of people who were morally degenerate; and his account of the 'highly gifted degenerate', the charismatic yet depraved genius, may have influenced Conrad's depiction of Kurtz." (Watts *Heart* 46) From the idealist believing in the noble cause of imperialism and trying to civilise the savages, Kurtz turns into the cynic focused on profit, who reveals the truth about the imperial enterprise's true purpose. Kurtz turns away from civilization and reverts to primitivism; his transformation is evocative of the existence of a latent primitive self within civilised men. The primitive self is revealed within a setting that is marked by darkness, savagery and wilderness, suggesting the importance of the environment and of those one interacts with. Kurtz's corrupting influence is, however, limited since he does not interact with other European agents sufficiently.

Kurtz's arrival in Africa is marked by his yearning to assist in the spread of civilization. At the very beginning of his stay, he is asked to write a report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs. Kurtz's discourse on civilization and on redeeming the savages is quite eloquent, but his eloquence is meant to control and manipulate and hides his own savagery. The report on savage customs, which sounds promising and compelling initially, is undermined by Kurtz's note at the end: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Conrad 50) The bluntness and callousness of the exclamation reveal Kurtz's devolution and indifference. The journey into the unknown, away from everything that is familiar, can lead to a loss of identity since the self is no longer firmly planted in the native soil, but rather seems to float or be set loose:

> the stability of an individual's sense of identity depends directly on the 'innumerable identifications' he has established with the familiar, personal and impersonal, concrete and abstract, animate and inanimate objects of his past and present existence. When these many identifications are threatened, as for example when an individual's social or physical environment changes rapidly, his sense of identity will be challenged. (Wengle 153)

The Europeans travelling to Africa are spatially displaced and alienated from their culture. In fact, travelling to faraway, unknown lands gave shape to fears related to the loss of self and to becoming decivilized, fears that were connected to the unfamiliarity of the colonial territories and to the belief that the colonial subjects were "inherently debased". (Griffith 20; 72)

Kurtz has an undeserved reputation of striving to redeem the colonial enterprise and civilize the savages, in accordance to his moral ideals. Yet Marlow discovers there is nothing noble in Kurtz's interactions with the natives. Indeed, such ideals were part of Kurtz's mission initially, yet he soon casts them aside: partly, to compete with the other agents and become the one who sends in more ivory than all the others put together, and partly because he comes to enjoy his sense of superiority. Once he becomes accustomed to power, he discards his mission and even his morals fade away. Primitivism takes root and he devolves in committing casual cruelty:

> "But," as Marlow says, "*the wilderness had found him out early* and taken on him a terrible vengeance for *the fantastic invasion*. I think *it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude*—and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was *hollow at the core*..." (Conrad 57-8, my italics)

In a sense, Marlow seems to suggest that the so-called wilderness had taken revenge on Kurtz for the fact that he dared to invade the wild geographical space of Africa. This idea that the personified wilderness might take revenge on the invaders is further supported by Marlow's words, when later reflecting on the moment of Kurtz's death, reminiscing of "*the heart of a conquering darkness*. It was *a moment of triumph for the wilderness*, an *invading and vengeful rush* which it seemed to me I would have to keep back alone for the *salvation of another soul*." (Conrad 73, my italics) Therefore Kurtz's intrusion, as an embodiment of European interference, condemns him to live in the wilderness, in isolation and that solitariness turns Kurtz introspective, which in turn allows him to make certain self-discoveries and attain self-knowledge. Additionally, the transformation revealed to Kurtz things he did not know about himself, including the fact that he was a hollow man, lacking a moral/spiritual core. It is implied that Kurtz gained a terrible self-knowledge. In interacting with Kurtz, Marlow also gains that same

knowledge and, perhaps, Conrad hopes for his contemporaries, the Victorian readers to reach the same understanding without undergoing the same experiences.

The way Kurtz is constructed as a character suggests that he is an epitome of virtue, yet he becomes corrupted. But if someone with Kurtz's qualifications fails to uphold morality, then who would not succumb to temptation? The duration of his stay in the jungle and the constant contact with the natives have taken a toll, since his individuality is predicated on his desire for power and on his greed, as well as the adulation and terror of those he oppresses. This, in turn, leads to his insanity. Without restraints to weigh him down, either in terms of law or in terms of conscience, Kurtz is free to act as he likes. Kurtz confers himself the status of a god to emphasise his superior standing and, perhaps, feels that mere constraints in terms of social and moral norms no longer apply to him. His madness reveals itself through his violence as well as his obsession with possessing everything: "my ivory…my intended…my river…my station". (Conrad 48) The insane arrogance displayed by Kurtz becomes a symbol for European colonisers and their degeneration: moving from a supposed desire to improve the backward territories and their population to their exploitation and destruction. Kurtz's savagery implicitly indicts the imperial project and questions the assumption that a supposedly superior, more civilised nation is capable of civilising less fortunate people.

Running amok in a lawless land, Kurtz is consumed by his primitive instincts, which is reflected in the brutality with which he suppresses the natives. Accordingly, he has the natives make sacrifices to him and kills them off in great numbers, as evinced by the row of impaled human heads surrounding his hut:

> *I had been struck at the distance by certain attempts at ornamentation*, rather remarkable in the ruinous aspect of the place. Now I had suddenly a nearer view and its first result was *to make me throw my head back as if before a blow*. (…) These round knobs were *not ornamental but symbolic*; *they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing – food for thought* and also for vultures (…). Only one, the first I had made out, was facing my way. *I was not so shocked as you may think. The start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise.* I had expected to see a knob of wood there, you know. I returned deliberately to the first I had seen – and there it was black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids – a head that seemed to sleep at the top of that pole, and *with the shrunken dry lips showing a narrow white line of the teeth, was smiling*

> *too, smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber*. (Conrad 57)

Marlow's expectations of meeting a cultured European, a leader among the other agents, a symbol of successful imperialism, a man he was there to save, are revealed to be delusions the moment he sets his eyes on what Kurtz chooses to use as decorations for the enclosure of his cabin. He can no longer regard Kurtz as someone to be admired or followed as a leader, and, perhaps, he might also realize that though he might be able to save Kurtz's body by taking him away from the wilderness, the mind and soul have already been corrupted. Marlow's illusions of imperialism as a force of positive influence are also shattered. Conrad's choice of words – "throw my head back as if before a blow", "expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing" – are a sincere revelation of Marlow's reactions to what he perceives as a mark of Kurtz's degeneration, and by implication, a stain on the positive image of the imperial enterprise. Marlow then tries to mitigate the strength of the initial reaction "not as shocked as you may think", "the start back I had given was really nothing but a movement of surprise" suggesting that Marlow's surprise was only due to his mundane expectations of seeing inanimate, wooden ornaments, when in fact what he was seeing were fleshy ornaments, albeit still inanimate in the stillness of death. Marlow closely observes one head in particular, which seems to be smiling because of the shrunken lips: "smiling continuously at some endless and jocose dream of that eternal slumber", that smile seems to make a mockery of Marlow's shattered illusions, of the tarnished reputation of European imperialism, of Marlow's disappointment in Kurtz. Whether the natives can be regarded as inferior to the Europeans and can be regarded as needful of the latter's 'civilising' influence no longer has a bearing on how Marlow regards the 'noble cause' or Kurtz as an incarnation of it. The rotting flesh becomes symbolic of the decaying morals and ideals behind the imperial enterprise. No matter how degenerate the native, the degeneration of Europeans that Marlow glimpses in that moment of revelation is far more worrying.

The degenerate nature of the Africans "provided (…) a perfect excuse for the rehabilitating influence of Europe," since they were incapable of governing themselves and this justified the need for foreign domination; however, it was also a double-edged sword, since "the ability of Europeans to rule was founded upon their resistance to degeneration." (Griffith 73) Thus, if Europeans fell prey to degeneracy, they would no longer be fit for the role they had assigned to

themselves. Marlow comes to the realization that Kurtz's degeneration makes him unfit to lead, to civilise others and to take responsibility for the lives and improvement of the natives. As an embodiment of Empire, Kurtz's degeneration becomes a warning that even those who are educated, civilised, and cultured can revert to primitivism, barbarity and savagery. Even more problematic was the belief that the so-called savages had been civilised in the past and that they had reverted to a state of barbarism, as this could provide a warning for what might happen to Western civilization as well: "Contrary to the impression of the Victorian era as confident and melioristic, the exploration of other cultures such as Africa mirrored back to the Victorians disturbing images of recidivism that sometimes shook their faith in the very idea of progress." (Griffith 77) This preyed upon Victorian anxieties prevalent in the 1890s and the belief that civilizations are cyclic.

Unrestrained by law or conscience, Kurtz's behaviour culminates in evil and appalling acts. His madness and his moral corruption are caused partly by alienation and isolation, but also by primitive instincts that can be found in all men. It is only at the time of his death that Kurtz realizes how degraded he has become. His death scene marked by his last words: "The horror! The horror!" provides a clue to the fact that Kurtz has come to realize his moral depravity:

> *It was as though a veil had been rent*. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of *craven terror – of an intense and hopeless despair*. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during *that supreme moment of complete knowledge*? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: *'The horror! The horror!'* (Conrad 68, my italics)

The metaphor of unveiling or shedding light or illuminating appears several times in *Heart of Darkness*. The very darkness of the title could refer to the reality of colonialism which needs to be unveiled. As stated earlier, however, things remain shrouded in mystery in terms of the meaning of Marlow's and Kurtz's experiences in Africa. In this instance, too, there is no conclusive explanation. What was hidden behind the veil that is rent is still unclear. Why Kurtz feels craven terror and intense and hopeless despair is never revealed fully. Even in his storytelling, Marlow is clearly groping in the dark. He tells the story in order to make sense of his experience, but the account is convoluted and it includes pauses and gaps. It

feels as if Marlow has a hard time grasping the full meaning of either Kurtz's words or his own experiences in Africa. Marlow also has a hard time accepting that his illusions have been shattered. It appears that Kurtz attains some profound knowledge at his time of death and the way to react to that is to utter the words "The horror! The horror!" But the meaning is never explained, therefore readers and critics can only make assumptions about the possible meaning of the complete knowledge Kurtz has reached. The interpretations of Kurtz's final words are varied – they might refer to Kurtz's degeneration and corruption, or to a life poorly lived or to a meaningless universe: "Perhaps they refer to Kurtz's corruption, perhaps to the horror of a senseless universe. But there may be another meaning: no final resolution is offered." (Watts *Heart* 57) It is possible that, while Kurtz never gets the chance to reveal what knowledge he has attained, the knowledge is, in a sense, transferred to Marlow who has witnessed Kurtz's utterance.

Marlow feels a sense of kinship with Kurtz and grasps the similarities between the two of them. Perhaps he understands that living under the same conditions as Kurtz, he too might succumb to moral corruption and might become degenerate. In a sense, Kurtz's realisation becomes universal for the colonisers. Living in the wilderness and dealing with the darkness, primitiveness and savagery of both land and people, Marlow believes that his own savage nature might emerge. Kurtz's death occurs as Marlow tries to bring him back to civilization. Marlow is unable to rescue Kurtz, especially since the latter tries to resist and the two wrestle. Marlow's mission, to return Kurtz to civilisation, can be understood both literally – bringing him out of the jungle – and metaphorically – trying to make him shed his corruption and degeneration. But Kurtz's death suggests that once degeneration and corruption occur, a return to normality, to civilization, is impossible. There seems to be no protection against corruption and degeneration. The primordial journey into the jungle reveals the thin veneer formed by civilization, whereas greed and the desire for power break through that veneer to reveal the savagery and cruelty beneath.

Marlow recognises himself in Kurtz, turning the latter into a possible double for Marlow. Thus, Kurtz is set up as a symbolic double. Marlow's initial admiration for Kurtz is predicated on the latter's quest to civilize the savages. Kurtz's current madness serves as a final warning for Marlow in terms of the effects of the wilderness on European colonisers. The impact of colonialism on those who are alienated from their culture as a result of the isolation involved in the work undertaken in the colonial territories is one that cannot be easily

forestalled or impeded. His expectations regarding civilization are shattered beyond redemption, despite his hopeful ideals at the onset. The effect emerges from within the heart, soul and mind, though there are physical effects as well. The doctor's words at the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* can be recalled at this point, since he mentions that "moreover the *changes* take place *inside*". (Conrad 11, my italics) The statement comes right before asking Marlow if there "'Ever [was] any madness in your family?'" (Conrad 12) Another warning comes in the form of an account of Captain Fresleven's death and the recounting of the change from a gentle creature to one who reacts with extreme violence at the slightest provocation. Even before Marlow's departure towards Africa, Conrad foreshadows the possible changes that might occur on the level of the psyche and of identity.

However, the first signal that something might go wrong during the journey to Africa is represented by the women at the company's headquarters, who seem to stand in for the Fates (*Moirae*/*Parcae*) who control the thread of destiny:

> *uncanny and fateful*. Often far away there I thought of these two, *guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall*, one introducing, *introducing continuously to the unknown*, the other scrutinising the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. *'Ave! Old knitter of black wool. Morituri te salutant.' Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again – not half* – by a long way. (Conrad 11, my italics)

The warnings abound in this short excerpt, since the women use black wool to knit a pall, preparing for the deaths of more than half of those who depart. Additionally, the women introduce the potential agents into the unknown by guarding the door of Darkness, and those who pass through the door salute them saying: those who are about to die salute you, as the gladiators did the Roman emperor. The knitting women become the mythic references that universalize Marlow's individual journey, turning it into a descent into the underworld. The underworld is represented by the wilderness, on the one hand, and by the primitive self and its capacity for savagery and evil, on the other. We can assume that other agents travelling to the Congo had gone through the same ritual of being invited into the unknown by the knitting women, Kurtz included. Despite the descent into the underworld of both Marlow and Kurtz, neither is reborn or redeemed in a strict sense, and they both suffer physically and mentally. Marlow, however, is lucky enough to return from his ordeal, whereas Kurtz, who had not

retained his moral/spiritual integrity and his civilized identity pays the ultimate price. Thus, the mythic references become ironic.

In the aftermath of having his illusions shattered, Marlow returns to civilization and renders Kurtz a final service, by visiting his acquaintances and his Intended. At this point, the realization he has come to is not fully articulated and therefore it is unspeakable. It is only later, by telling the story of his adventures in Africa, that Marlow can start to make sense of the events that transpired. His visits reveal a lionized Kurtz in the words of his friends – they all believe Kurtz to have been a noble man, devoted to christianising and civilizing the savages. The Intended harbours the same delusions about Kurtz's character. Marlow is appalled by the conflicting images of Kurtz, who was in fact unfaithful, violent, lustful and arrogant. However, he feels that revealing all of this to her would serve no purpose and would be hurtful so he reassures her and lies about Kurtz's last words. The Intended stands in for civilization: "The ending of the novel and Marlow's infamous lie to the Intended, who is metonymic of 'civilization', is a typically Conradian attempt to shore up the fragile edifice that is the false concept of civilization or culture." (Griffith 94) The young woman's fragility is echoed by Marlow's realization that civilization, too, is fragile, easily shattered. Marlow's delusions regarding the true meaning of being civilised are also effortlessly crushed. So, Marlow is in part rejoicing that he has been able to return to civilization, but he is also aware of the hypocrisy of his position in bowing his head to social convention and upholding the lies believed by the Intended:

> Having witnessed the horrible truth of an 'uncivilized' Kurtz in the root sense of a man isolated from society, Marlow returns to the *civis*, the 'sepulchral city', to cast flowers at the foot of the tomb of civilized lies: 'bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her from which I could not even have defended myself' (Conrad 75). In an obviously sexist formulation, women are the upholders of the beautiful lies of civilization because so few of them have been acquainted with the worlds where such lies are exposed the world of colonialism. (Griffith 94)

The Intended remains a symbol of civilization, that, in its fragility, needs to be protected. Marlow tells his lie since he realizes that his repressing the truth will allow her to not suffer the same disillusion he did. Marlow now knows that

beneath the veneer of civilization lies darkness and feels compelled to protect the Intended from that darkness and the knowledge of it. Moreover, to be civilised is to repress savage instincts and primitive behaviours and to adhere to norms of conduct, meaning that civilization, in a sense, means to lie to oneself, too. In believing Marlow's words and continuing her delusion regarding Kurtz's supposed nobility, the Intended embraces the righteousness of Western imperialism and she can remain a symbol of civilization.

In conclusion, the journey into the Dark Continent, and implicitly, into the heart of darkness becomes a test for the Europeans who dare to venture there. Conrad had looked into the darkness, was unsettled by what he saw there and tried to bring that awareness to others. Conrad chronicles the mental degeneration and moral corruption that breaks down identity and that makes Europeans unfit to civilise others. In *Heart of Darkness*, the self comes apart, when subjected to sufficient stress and insufficient restraint. Another factor that participates in the loss of identity is the isolation and distance from one's own culture. Additionally, the contact with primitive cultures can lead to a devolution. The lack of connection to civilization and the immersion into primitive culture creates an initial anguish, which later turns into a pursuit of a life without restraints. Without rules and laws, the identity of the European slowly melts away, revealing what lies beneath, perhaps the real identity that had been repressed. In Kurtz's case, underlying the cultured European persona, there is corruption, madness and degeneration. Yet, Kurtz stands for the whole of Europe, since it was the whole of Europe that contributed to his existence. Thus, the degenerate Kurtz, as the embodiment of Western civilisation and of European imperialism, essentially reveals Europe's own heart of darkness.

The text speaks to prevalent fears in the Victorian Age regarding the cyclicity of civilizations, fears of degeneration and the dissolution of the self. As Conrad aptly reminds his readers, Britain too had been one of the dark places of the earth, during the Roman subjugation. Thus, from the savagery and wilderness of Britain as a Roman colony, to a time when the British Empire was at its peak, Britain had evolved. However, the fall of the Roman Empire functions as a warning: "This is a rebuke to empire-builders and to believers in the durability of civilization; it invokes a humiliating chronological perspective; and it may jolt the reader into circumspection." (Watts *Heart* 58) Britain was to the Romans in the past, what Africa was to the Europeans in the present. From the peak, the only way to go is down, towards a decline of the British Empire, hence, anxieties regarding moral

corruption and degeneration ran rampant at the time. The 1890s reveal such anxieties and other similar ones regarding the menace of science, reversed colonialism, inner demons of the primitive self, effeminate masculinity, masculine femininity, devolution, degeneration and the like – all posing a threat to the British Empire and its future prosperity – through a plethora of gothic novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and Herbert George Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Time Machine*, to name but a few. In a sense, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* inscribes itself in this trend of locating the perils and threats not in the geographical space (in the aforementioned texts it is not the physical landscape that makes them gothic) but within the human mind and body, which are revealed to be mutating and decaying leading to corruption and degeneration, which has further implications on the possibility that civilization might be in a state of decline.

Marlow had embarked upon this journey beyond the limits of Western civilization with a sense of wonder, hoping for a chance to explore the formerly "blank spaces" on the map of the Dark Continent, only to discover that "it had become *a place of darkness*." (Conrad 8, my italics) Therefore, what he discovers in Africa is terror, cruelty and savagery, and it is not the natives who perpetuate it, but the so-called civilisers. Marlow embodies Victorian values and tries to preserve them, but in encountering those who have flouted the rules of society and civilization, he also undergoes a spiritual crisis. Marlow becomes mentally aware of the (im)moral implications of the imperial project and starts to better understand the discourse propounded as well as the impact of colonialism not only on the natives, but also on those who venture into the unknown: "I couldn't have felt more of *lonely desolation* somehow, had I been *robbed of a belief* or had *missed my destiny* in life". (Conrad 47, my italics) This newly acquired awareness makes him feel desolate and isolated as well as unsettled. The wilderness affects those who live in it and turns them into *deracinés* who have lost their bearings. The darkness of Africa is predicated on the presumed light of Western cultures: "Africa grew 'dark' as Victorian explorers, missionaries, and scientists flooded it with light, because the light was refracted through an imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of 'savage customs' in the name of civilization." (Brantlinger 43) This darkness is grounded on the imperialist discourse and the dichotomies it sets up.

Heart of Darkness deals with the economic exploitation and, ultimately, the power, that are intrinsic aspects of colonialism and imperialism. Kurtz, the idealist,

did not yearn for power, but Kurtz, the competitive agent of Empire, who had gone native, lives for it. His story is steeped in the discourse of colonial power, which privileges those who have power at the expense of those who do not. So, *Heart of Darkness* posits "the adoption of a demeaning attitude to colonized people in the attempt to vindicate the exploitative actions of the colonizer." (Watts *Heart* 57) The very yearning for power at the expense of what makes one civilised is alarming. The imperial discourse of power favours the view that advanced nations can take on the responsibility to educate, christianise and civilise the backward peoples of the colonial territories. But first, the natives of those territories have to be revealed to be inferior, and to have a need to be guided towards 'the light' of civilization. In this insidious manner, they are shown to require the help of Western civilization, and the Europeans are eager to take on this endeavour. It is after all in their interest to gain access to the colonial territories for their resources, but the rhetoric used for this to be accomplished is one that reveals the Europeans' hypocrisy, making colonialism a morally bankrupt project.

As it is defining itself over and against the savagery and inferiority of the primitives, civilization becomes preoccupied with its frenzied acquisition of wealth. With their focus on profit, the Europeans develop a blind spot – they fail to notice when the primitiveness and savagery insidiously permeate civilization and their moral sense. Secure in their belief of their own superiority, they cannot conceive of the possibility that the contact with the wilderness can influence their sense of self and their identities and that the boundary is a shifting and porous one. The aggrandizing discourse of power and the condescending view of the primitive enhance Kurtz's confidence in his abilities to attain wealth, imparting to him a restless drive towards expansion and conquest. Yet in the end they prove to be not only his *hubris*, but also that of the European civilization he incarnates. Just like Kurtz, who is "hollow at the core" (Conrad 58), Western civilization proves itself to have an inner emptiness – there is a void where their core values should be located. The West/Occident proves to be the source of darkness, especially considering the etymology of the word occident (> Lat. *occido* – to fall, to kill, to slay, to torture, to ruin). The city Marlow returns to is described as sepulchral, suggestive of death – if not a literal, then a metaphorical demise. Kurtz's hollowness substantiates the Western crisis of identity rooted in alienation from core values and in irrational anxieties. Kurtz's demise is meant to preclude his return to civilization as he was contaminated by the degeneration and primitiveness of the wilderness. If he were to return, he could turn into a source of

contagion, and this threat needs to be dispelled. Thus, the impact of colonialism can be regarded as a mirror Caliban holds up to see his own reflection. But the mirror does not reveal what is expected (Europe's superiority and prosperity), and what *is* reflected can be appalling (European cruelty, hypocrisy, degeneration and primitiveness). *Heart of Darkness* reveals an image of colonialism that is difficult to bear since it becomes a comment on European civilization and its imperfections.

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Miscellanea

Bogdan Ştefănescu[*]

THE DISCOURSE OF COUNTER-MODERNIZATION. CONSTANTIN NOICA'S REACTIVE NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Abstract: Nationalist philosopher Constantin Noica (1909-1987), like many other public intellectuals in Romania, felt that modernization and modern civilization were traumatic to his culture. In this article, I mean to address the discursive templates he used to formulate his version of a traumatized Romanian identity. These templates are structured by master tropes (cf. Kenneth Burke's "Appendix" to *A Grammar of Motives* and Hayden White's "Introduction" to *Metahistory*) and are ideologically charged. Relying on suggestions from François Hartog (*The Mirror of Herodotus*) and from Ruth Wodak et al. (*The Discursive Construction of National Identity*), I propose alternative master tropes which are generally used in shaping national identities, as well as in dealing with the particular situation of cultures that feel threatened and traumatized by modernization.

Keywords: national identity; discursive constructs; master tropes; ideology; nationalism.

Nationalism and Ideology

Nationalism is currently presented as an ideology in respectable reference books such as, for instance, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Kohn, "Nationalism") or *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (Barry 352). In this article I will offer

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an alternative view, in keeping with the reservations of Benedict Anderson (5) or Terrence Ball and Richard Dagger (Ball et al. 7 and passim), and claim that while nationalist discourse is ideologically loaded, it is not a fully formed ideology itself, rather it makes use of various templates of ideological discourse in order to formulate its political statements. To substantiate and clarify the reasons for my theoretical stance, I must first provide brief accounts and working definitions of both ideology and nationalism.

(Political) ideologies are alternative, shared discursive constructs that provide extensive explanations and evaluations of social and political realities with the intention to propose general attitudes and sweeping projects for managing and improving such realities. On the one hand, an ideology verges on political philosophy given its elucidatory ambitions, on the other, it offers grounds for parties and movements to articulate their various political platforms and action programs. Ideologies may be understood as either concrete or abstract, that is, they can be viewed either as collections of actual related texts or as the shared tenets and perspectives, be they explicit or implicit, that one can detach from such concrete formulations. It is the latter understanding of ideology that I find more productive and even more accurate, as ideological canons are subjective selections, whereas the reconstructed generic framework of an ideology is more stable and provides the basis for selecting relevant texts and ideas.

I take ideology to be the common *manner* in which various political representations are organized, it is a generic discursive style of formulating explanations and envisaging action plans for societies or social groups. An ideology is not so much the inventory of ideas and topics it proposes as the way in which it addresses and confers discursive coherence to such ideas and topics. Liberty, justice, progress, democracy, social cohesion or dissension etc. are approached by almost all ideologies, yet these ideologies remain distinct in how they understand the nature and imagine the solution of, such issues that are inherently contestable (Gallie passim, Connolly passim, Eccleshall 7).

Nationalism is a political discursive construct that shapes the identity of a nation by focusing on its history and its putative political agenda, and as such it is ideologically charged. The predominance of the theme of a nation's identity and historical evolution does not, however, generate a new or different political ideology to be listed alongside liberalism, conservatism, or socialism—not even a "thin" ideology as Freeden calls it (*Ideology* 97-100). Nationalism is rather ideologically opportunistic—it applies liberal, conservative, socialist etc. formulas to approach relevant nation-centered issues. Nationalism makes the nation its

predilect theme, but extant, bona fide political ideologies are the ones that furnish it with modes and styles of broaching the theme of the nation. In other words, the nation is the topic of nationalist discourse (*what* it talks about), while ideology is the manner of discoursing on it (*how* it talks about the nation as its main topic). As a result, nationalism is more specific and restrictive in terms of its scope, whereas ideologies approach a much broader array of topics (Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory* 749 and foll., Alan Finlayson in Eccleshall 100-1).

Categorically, nationalism is a reflexive and consistently structured cultural-identitarian species of discourse, unlike the rather incidental verbalizing of non-conceptual, un- or pre-conscious emotional states and experiences such as, for instance, patriotism or xenophobia (Ștefănescu, *Patrii din cuvinte* 43-6). Other species of discourse on collective identity, like ethnicism or racism, are generically related to nationalism, but they differ in that they do not concentrate on a collective history (their predilect categories are trans-historical) or on a common, unitary political strategy (since ethnie and race are mostly seen as perennial and inescapable realities, beyond human control). Given its political interest, nationalist discourse is therefore more prone to resort to the stylistic matrices of existing ideologies.

The Tropology of Nationalist Discourse

When looking at genuine ideologies, one may find a noticeable set of basic and recurrent discursive patterns (Freeden, *Ideology* 32 and *Ideologies and Political Theory* 77 and passim, Kettler 235, Eccleshall 12), or, as Hayden White put it, "general ideological preferences"/"positions" (*Metahistory* 22-4) that pressure ideological pronouncements into repetitive molds and provide a core structure for ideological discourses. As I have shown elsewhere (see, for instance, *Patrii din cuvinte*, "Peace Talks"), nationalism may employ any of these discursive patterns and consequently should not be regarded as an ideologically uniform manifestation of discursive collective identity. The relationship between the national self and its cultural other is constructed by means of four master tropes (antithesis, simile, metaphor, and irony) that operate as generative, structuring principles within four alternative paradigms for discoursing on national identity (cf. Ștefănescu *Patrii din cuvinte*, "Peace Talks"). These four figurative modes correspond to the four "basic ideological positions" that Hayden White singles out in the wake of Karl Mannheim: Anarchism, Radicalism, Liberalism, and Conservatism (22-29). White talks of "four principal modes of historical

consciousness" that rely on these discursive strategies (xi); similarly, I think we can identify *four principal modes of national(ist) consciousness* that obtain from the operation of the four master tropes and the corresponding ideological positions.

White's four ideological matrices relate to one another in a cross-polarity as they form pairs in sharing one similar feature and opposing each other in one respect. Thus, in White's account, Liberalism and Conservatism both desire to preserve the *continuity* of the existing order and only accept slow and gradual changes, but Conservatism relies on an *irrationalist*, intuitive knowledge of the natural order and evolution of society, while Liberalism envisages them in a *rational* manner and aspires to manage them by means of political structures and legislation. Anarchism and Radicalism, on the other hand, share an attraction for social *discontinuity* both as a cataclysmic transformation of the extant order and as an interest in the particular profile and interests of individuals or groups, but while Anarchism shares with Conservatism an *irrationalist* belief in the natural sense of humanity of the individuals associating by virtue of empathy, Radicalism shares with Liberalism a *rational*, scientific approach of the concrete conditions of social progress (White 24-6). Consequently, both Radicalism and Liberalism seem more realistic and intuitive than Anarchism and Conservatism. Elsewhere, I have described extensively these four discursive matrices of nationalist discourse: Radical-Antithetical, Liberal-Analogical, Anarchist-Metaphorical, and Conservative-Ironic (*Patrii din cuvinte*, "Peace Talks"). Here, I will be focusing on the first and last of the four to describe and explain Noica's nationalist discourse on Romania's cultural traumas.

Radical-Antithetic Nationalism

The Radical version of nationalism is perhaps the most frequent which has misled many into reducing nationalism to the more excessive or even extremist pronouncements that employ a Radical framework. The most common intuitive master tropes used to construct the images of self and other are Antithesis and Simile. In his imagological study of Herodotus, François Hartog concluded, for instance, that inversion and analogy are the basic „figures" or „schemata" used in the rhetorical construction of alterity (210 and passim). Critical Discourse Analysis experts have confirmed Hartog's intuition as they identified two discursive mechanisms used to shape national identities, namely 'assimilation' and 'dissimilation'. Wodak, Reisigl, De Cillia, and Liebhart explain them as strategies by which similarities and differences are heightened (Wodak et al. 33-42).

Of these two more common schemata, the Radical imagination relies on inversion/dissimilation to create antagonistic representations of self *against* other. The underlying master trope that structures this type of discourse is Antithesis. In this ideological pattern social change comes from the clash between benign and malignant groups, or between new and old regimes. Radicalism works by antagonistic representations of societal change. Synchronically, it pictures society as divided by conflicts between totally incompatible individuals or groups: from the *homo homini lupus* grounding of capitalist competition to the "class struggle" of anti-capitalist critique. Diachronically, it preaches the need for cataclysmic transformations (White, *Metahistory* 24) as the only valid option for transforming society by discarding a totally objectionable old order and replacing it with an entirely new and opposing one. (See, for instance, the universal suffrage proposal of Ch. James Fox in 1797 and the pre-1848 French radicals, or the sweeping social reforms upheld by Clemenceau and the Radical Party in end of nineteenth century France).

While many critics take the antithetical representations of in-groups versus out-groups to be a sign of tribalism or sociopathology, it may just as well be that this is simply a basic mechanism of the human psyche. This would explain why the Radical-Antithetic pattern of social representations sailed intact throughout the modern era from the British radical philosophers who founded the so-called classical liberalism to the most virulent critics of capitalism, and it even partly informed the postmodern mentality which according to scholars like David Hawkes is radical and oppositional (8-9). Wendy Brown finds that exclusionary rhetoric is the essential ingredient in delineating the "oppositional political formations" in late modernity (211-219) while Fredric Jameson defines culture as "the ensemble of stigmata one group bears in the eyes of the other group" (271). John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith even identify the classical Greek modeling of the polis and of civil liberties on "the ideological *contrast* between Greek liberties and barbarian servitude [*my emphasis*]" as the source for the modern political humanism inaugurated by the Northern Italian cities of the Renaissance (5-6). All this seems to point to the conclusion that the Radical-Antithetical form of representation has accompanied modern social and political consciousness from its inception.

The discourse on national identity in its Radical version is structured by the oppositional dynamic of a continuous confrontation with alterity in the epic mode. The resulting nationalist action stories, quite likely taking Napoleon as the heroic model, envisage nations as similarly possessed by the sense of a "historical mission" (Kohn, "Napoleon and the Age of Nationalism" 111-2). One finds that

the theme of an elect nation that is perceived as exceptional in opposition to all others and meant to perform a divine or historic mission was widely embraced by the more advanced Western nations and empires. In his pamphlet *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton called England "this Nation chosen before any other [for] reforming all our neighbours" (Snyder 81). With imperial fervor, Charles Wentworth Dilke proclaimed in 1868 that "Saxondom will rise triumphant" against the "cheaper races" (Snyder 90). In 1900, J. A. Cramb invoked the classical distinction between the Greeks and the barbarians to support his belief in Britain's "world mission" (Snyder 96). Ironically, the United States, while trying to define itself in stark opposition from its British oppressor, resorted to the very same missionary rhetoric. This discursive pattern runs from John Winthrop's "City upon a Hill" and J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur's definition of the American as a "new race of men" through John O'Sullivan belief in Uncle Sam's "manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence" and Lincoln's belief that America's mission was to ensure "that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" to the "outward-looking" foreign policy and president McKinley's interventionism or the more recent forms of unilateralism and exceptionalism. The excesses of this sense of a mission were diagnosed with bitter premonition by William James at the turn of the nineteenth century:

> ...we have to deal with a factor peculiar with our belief, namely, in a national destiny which must be 'big' at any cost, and which for some inscrutable reason it has become infamous for us to disbelieve in or refuse. We are to be missionaries of civilization, and to bear the white man's burden, painful as it often is. We must sow our ideals, plant our order, impose our God. The individual lives are nothing. Our duty and our destiny call, and civilization must go on. (Kohn and Walden 108)

But the "less advanced" nations that felt dominated by more powerful ones and threatened by the onslaught of modernization also found the Radical-Antithetic vision handy in creating their antagonistic "defensive" or reactive scenarios. Theirs are no longer stories of victorious and redeeming heroism, but of martyrdom and tragic victimhood at the hands of an alien force (Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism* 117, 128). And they seem to fit well the colonial frame of mind: Edward Said claims they are typical anti- and postcolonial narratives of resistance against imperial occupation (Deane 74), Terry Eagleton finds colonized nations to develop "negative collective identities" opposing the forceful foreign political

order (Deane 37), Seamus Deane proposes a "vengeful virtuosity" of the Irish in using the language of the English conqueror (10), and Michael Hechter and Margaret Levi argue that even the "internal colonies" of Western Europe, such as Ireland, Wales, Brittany, Corsica, Galicia, or Frisia, suffer from a "reactive" formation of group identity because they were deprived of their own history (Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism* 185).

Romania fits perfectly in this category. Attempts to introduce modernizing social structures met with cultural resistance and adversity from traditionalist and autochthonist intellectual circles. One of the reasons for such opposition was the fear that modernization ran contrary to the local cultural profile and lifestyle, and that it would adulterate Romanian identity. Philosopher Constantin Noica proposed that from the very first encounters with Western style modernization, Romanian elites adopted a negative collective identity. Noica thought he found a tradition of such damaged self-images from the erudite prince Dimitrie Cantemir to Noica's contemporary and friend, Emil Cioran (Noica, *Istoricitate și modernitate* 29-33, cf. also Ștefănescu, "Romanian Modernity and the Trope of Vacuity" 262-4). He shared this cultural frustration and felt compelled to address it in his philosophical essays. The trauma of understanding oneself as a marginal European, belated and poorly equipped for modernization is arguably the most recurrent theme in Noica's entire writing career, which he announced in his first published book, *Mathesis sau bucuriile simple* (*Mathesis or the simple joys*, 1934), and on which he was still ruminating in his last published volume, *Modelul cultural european* (*The European Cultural Model*, 1993).

Having been sidelined on the outskirts of the continent, the marginalized (East) Europeans feel ostracized, marginalized, and disregarded. The Western gaze which they internalize forces upon them an unflattering portrait as the late and inadequate distant relative. A heartbroken old Noica bemoans his lot in *Modelul cultural european*:

> I wrote these pages with the feeling of a disregarded brother (as are all of us here), who begs an embrace for himself and for the world. If you think a new embrace in the European spirit is not possible, then either your books are a mere *bye-bye* to the world and to culture or the world of tomorrow will toss them into the fire, as your father of skepticism, Hume, required for all bad books[12] (10).

[12] All translations are mine.

He blames it all on minor cultures like Romania's being possessed with a "fever of modernization" according to the standards of modern European civilization. The self-loathing that starts, according to Noica, with Cantemir's *Descriptio Moldaviae* (1714-1716), was still the "drama of my generation" in the early 1940s (*Istoricitate și modernitate* 21). Noica felt his negative national identity was the result of getting the short end of the stick in the process of European colonization which rendered Romania a victim of both the capitalist and communist versions of modernization. In *Pray for Brother Alexandru*, Noica finds that Western and Soviet colonialism were joined at the hip by their "unleashing of reason, that plans and orders, under whose hysteria we also find ourselves now" (*Rugați-vă pentru fratele Alexandru* 64). As a result, for Noica Romanian identity is forever alienated and doomed to see itself as a deficient colonial periphery:

> What makes our conflict painful is that, theoretically, at least, it is insoluble. To keep on cultivating predominantly the values of our folk spirit has become impossible (*Istoricitate și modernitate* 21).

Conservative-Ironic Nationalism

So far, it looks like Noica's identitarian discourse is captive in a Radical-Antithetical frame of mind. However, he manages to modulate his grief at the tragic fate of Romania with the help of another template: Conservative-Ironic nationalist discourse. This is a counter-intuitive, "irrationalist" discursive matrix which joins and harmonizes irreconcilable contraries, converting the positive into negative and viceversa (Ștefănescu, "Peace Talks" 23-6).

Conservative nationalism disregards rational explanations based on the material aspects of a nation's real life. Instead, it reflects on the nation's organic development as a spiritual whole and explains it by resorting to a secret dialectic of opposing principles which it purports to intuit. The best example of Conservative nationalism is that of Herder's theory of the *Volkgeist*, the spirit of a nation, seen as an organic growth, both highly particularistic and a self-revelation of the universal Divine (Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* 31-2). The master trope of Conservatism is Irony which plays opposites one against the other and teases us with their paradoxical identity.

There has always been a conservative streak in the Romanian sense of nationhood. The desperate fight for national self-preservation against the many

empires imposed paradoxical strategies, ironic conversions of appearances into their opposites. For instance, historian Vlad Georgescu talks of a theory of capitulation common among the Romanian princes, by which the country was both vassal and autonomous (apud Caragea 12, 19 and passim). After 47 years on the throne of Moldova during which time he fought and kept at bay the Poles, the Hungarians, and, most importantly, the Turks, after defeating the glorious conqueror of Constantinople and being called "Christ's Athlete" by the Pope, Prince Stephen the Great was reported to have left a surprising political legacy. As he lay dying, Stephen supposedly called his successor and his courtiers and asked them to capitulate to the Turk and accept Ottoman sovereignty by paying a tribute.

In this view, it became the strategy of Romanian principalities to identify the auspicious moments when the enemy was less fortified and fight bitterly. Then offer a conditional capitulation to a relieved opponent by which they could maintain their social, political, economic and cultural freedom. Evacuation was the main strategy of Romanian resistance throughout its history. The Romanian military doctrine of defense, devised in the millenary confrontation with sweeping migrations and empires, consisted in scorching the lands and the crops, poisoning the wells and the springs, burning their own houses and retreating into the central region of mountains and forests. The backbone of this strategy was the mental reflex of vacating the external or peripheral and withdrawing towards an elusive, ungraspable center. It was this attitude that helped Romanians survive even when the mountainous and woody retreats were no longer accessible. Historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) invoked the Romanian retreat from the "terror of history", poet-philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) spoke of the Romanians' "boycotting of history" as a cultivation of a sense of permanence through their cultural traditions rather than through engaging openly in a direct fight for territorial supremacy. Folk wisdom also cherishes this lore with proverbs such as "water passes, stones remain" (*apa trece, pietrele rămîn*) or "once a wave, you pass like a wave" (*ce e val, ca valul trece*).

In recent history, Romanians switched to a more sophisticated defense: they resisted their inauspicious history through culture. Resistance through culture (see "The Joke Is on You") was particularly favored by parts of the Romanian intelligentsia during communist dictatorship, but is commonly associated with the recluse figure of Constantin Noica. Noica was imprisoned for 6 years and was confined to a forced domicile for another 9 years and was denied for most of this time the right to publish. During the so-called "thaw" starting in the late 1960s, he was once more allowed to publish translations and original work. After serving in

an obscure research position, he retired to a remote village in the center of the country (Păltiniș, near Sibiu) and into the world of culture. Gabriel Liiceanu, one of Noica's disciples, describes Noica's self-inflicted exile and resistance through culture, thus:

> In Cimpulung he was found in his room, dressed in his overcoat, his rubber galoshes on, reading from St. Augustine; the water in the pot had frozen. 'The God of culture'... had no doubt blinded him, turned him into a medium, rather than a man, and giving him the right (like all those who intrigued their contemporaries, pushing a community forward) to be measured by different standards. (263)

Paraphrasing Noica's beliefs, Liiceanu talks of this paradoxical resistance as of a "will to culture" that prompts

> a lateral, discreet and unspectacular liberation, maybe even guilty in its intellectual egotism, but which always has been the form in which the best of Romanian spirit survived to the present day... If by history we understand the series of events happening to us, but also without and beyond us, then culture for Noica meant, no doubt, a withdrawal from history... (271).

Noica performed an ironic hermeneutic in his many philosophical essays on Romanian cultural identity. He would turn words upside down, he derived unexpected connotations, found contrary meanings in one and the same word, or turned it on itself to produce spectacular fireworks of philosophical nuances. One of the typical ways in which Noica wields Irony is by paradoxically yielding to the conquering discourse of the alien colonist. In *Modelul cultural european*, Noica appears to have succumbed to Western expansionist drives and to identify himself with the European colonist: "We are still pirates, conquistadors, and corsairs, but now we are spiritual corsairs – and that changes everything" (9). Here, too, his last pronouncement on Europe, Noica seems to have appropriated the apologetic vocabulary of colonialism and he solemnly proclaims that "the European cultural model alone may be valid for other cultures as well" (29). But, in an ironic twist, conceding to the apparent victor only allows the vanquished marginal to imaginatively replace the conquering center. Indeed, this is more that wishful thinking. Noica feels that in defeating marginal, minor cultures like the Romanian,

only meant that Europe put down its own spirit and in alienating the peripheries and the subalterns, it in fact became alienated from itself.

The marginal Noica aimed to decenter Europe itself and claimed that it is precisely in marginal Romania (and in marginalized Romanian intellectuals like himself) that the true spirit of Europe is still kept alive. "Since you [Westerners] will not say this, shall we, marginals, say it for you?" Noica rhetorically asks in the preface to *Modelul cultural European* (9), reiterating an intriguing leitmotif: the heart of European culture took refuge in the marginal culture of Romania. In 1940, Noica was proclaiming the superiority of spiritual culture to the Western civilization of motorways, oil drills, and hospitals ("Fiți înfricoșetor de buni!," apud Laignel-Lavastine 215). In the early 1980s, he was still preaching that "the Germany of culture" was to be found in Romania, as the capitalist West was left with the superficial and obtuse "Germany of butter", that is, of civilization and comfort (Liiceanu 136).

Noica similarly adopts the deceitful strategy of admitting defeat and allowing oneself to become contaminated by the other's colonizing discourse when faced with the indomitable Soviet Conquista. In *Rugați-vă pentru fratele Alexandru* and elsewhere in his post WWII writing, Noica seems willing to accept communist ideas and vocabulary. This only allows him to publish his non-conventional, idealist texts, and to subvert the ideology from within, like a genuine *eiron*. In such passages as the following, Noica conflates two ideological dialects: by apparently embracing the vocabulary of Marxist dialectic, he in fact reverses Marx's prophetic revolutionarism:

> Anyone who has kept an open mind and, above all has remained uninvolved under a communist regime, will have realized that the results of such a regime are strange. The revolution is eventually in favour of the rich, not the poor, because the rich have been deprived of their wealth, which means little, whereas the poor are deprived of their idealised objective of becoming rich. A man deprived of his ideal – which, at this level gives a meaning to life – is, in a certain way, annihilated. On the other hand, he who once had possessions and through them became alienated, could find himself rehabilitated, or even reinvested as a human being. (*Pray for Brother Alexander* 42-3)

In ironically dealing with both colonial victors, capitalism and communism, Noica accepts the stigma of defeat only to win a surprising victory: that of converting his cultural marginality into centrality, of turning inferiority into

superiority. Irony is the master trope which can perform these transmogrifications which baffle binary thought and zero-sum confrontations. The historical catastrophe of Soviet-driven communism and the historical stigma of being an inadequate European which are encoded in Noica's Radical-Antithetical nationalist discourse are also reconfigured by his adoption of the Conservative-Ironic rhetorical strategy which helps him cope with these identity traumas and find some form of comfort. Noica wielded the weapon of paradoxical irony to rewrite historical calamities. In one of his radio talks on Ardeal, a long-time tragic motif in Romanian cultural history, Noica pleads for this shocking form of spiritual reconversion:

> […] to translate Romanian passiveness into activism; to turn even our expectancy, even our coming to terms into a form of fighting. In other words, to turn the Romanian negative into the Romanian positive (*Pagini despre sufletul românesc* 111).

It was through paradoxes such as these that Noica hoped that a marginal intellectual like himself could ironically turn the tables on historical adversity and re-encode Romanian identity as central and respectable. This analysis, which tries to highlight the discursive patterns of culturally traumatized identity formations may offer a working tool to address identity (re)constructions in other cultures that have encoded historical catastrophes and stigmata in their collective self-images.

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