



Filozofski fakultet u Sarajevu
Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo



4th Cellts



**Fourth International
Conference on English Language,
Literature, Teaching and
Translation Studies**

(Sarajevo, 1–2 October 2021)

Proceedings

Fourth International Conference on English Language,
Literature, Teaching and Translation Studies
(4th CELLTTS)

**Re-Examining Gender Concepts and
Identities in Discourse(s) and Practice(s)
Across Periods and Disciplines**

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Teaching and Translation Studies
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Re-Examining Gender Concepts and Identities

in Discourse(s) and Practice(s) Across Periods and Disciplines

Proceedings

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Foreword

The fourth International Conference on English Language, Literature, Teaching and Translation Studies (4th CELLTTS) was held online (from the premises of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo) on 1–2 October 2021. The event had originally been planned as an in-person conference at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo in September–October 2020. Alas, the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the outbreak of the pandemic shook the very ground beneath us and inevitably made us reconsider the plans. There were moments when the members of the CELLTTS’ Committees questioned continuing the planned activities and wondered whether it was better to call everything off; yet, the correspondence from the prospective participants of the 4th CELLTTS motivated us to rethink the position and adapt to the “new now”. Although thankful for the technology which has enabled us to keep on with our work or provided relief in our daily existence (no matter how deficient or incomplete these may have seemed), and which ensured that our Conference could take place in October 2021, we feel the urge to emphasise its effect on the humanities. At first having taken quite a great toll, the humanities paradoxically managed to quickly regroup and yet again prove that what lies at the bottom of our societies, our functioning, our mutual bond, and what provides comfort in times of uncertainty (no matter how impractical or seemingly futile at the first glance) *are* the humanities – literature and culture, language, teaching, translating, arts and philosophy, to name a few. In the very words of our former plenary speaker, whom we commemorate with this issue: “Corporate culture which has been ruling the world for at least a few decades does not have a lot of affinity and familiarity with culture in general, let alone literature. *And yet here we are; many of us still reading.*” (Radeljković, 2017, p. 28, added emphasis). A certain number of the papers inescapably point at and reflect this very fact: the vitality and adaptability of humanities in general and Anglophone studies in particular.

With the overarching topic of our fourth International Conference on English Language, Literature, Teaching and Translation Studies we attempted to cast a light on a highly relevant issue, the issue of gender. Originally the topic had been selected as we aimed at marking the centennial anniversary of the US Nineteenth Amendment by re-evaluating the progress and backlash in (all our) gender policies. A fair share of the papers in the proceedings look into the issue and examine whether and how gender has informed and influenced cultural and public policies; language use; teaching methodologies; interpretation and translation techniques and perspectives; writing, reading and the study of literature. Many of the papers also foreground the deep-seated prejudices, and some unravel the unfathomable reality: gender stereotypes have been generating an inconceivable amount of aggression and hostility. It remains certain that although various gender theories and forms of political activism have been making their presence felt for at least 50 years now, they still resonate strongly in our contemporary world (from Texas to Afghanistan, to Poland and Bosnia), demonstrated in the shocking rise of gendered violence in the recent pandemic as well.

The proceedings of this conference are structured into two larger sections; however, a certain number of the articles dispute and test “neat” classifications, demonstrating the interdependence of academic disciplines, and the pervasiveness and multidisciplinary nature of gender. Part One consists of articles in the fields of linguistics, English language teaching, and translation studies while Part Two comprises papers that concentrate on Anglophone literature, literary theory and cultural studies.

We would like to express our gratitude to our plenary speakers – Dr. Greta Olson (University of Giessen), Dr. Roelien Bastiaanse (University of Groningen, and Center for Language and Brain, HSE), and Dr. Daniel Xerri (University of Malta) – whose inspiring and moving lectures have stimulated and generated fruitful and lively exchange of ideas, and who have prompted us to re-examine gender concepts and identities from fresh perspectives across disciplines.

We also extend our appreciation to the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo for providing facilities and administrative assistance once again, albeit in a different, certainly more challenging context. Moreover, we as the Editors express special gratefulness to our programme and organising committees, and to our many reviewers without whose dedication and fervour we most certainly would not have been able to bring this project to its (new) life.

Sarajevo, May 2022

Ifeta Čirić-Fazlija & Selma Đuliman

To ***Professor Zvonimir Radeljković,***
friend, mentor, advisor and *spiritus movens* of
the Department of English Language and Literature

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OPENING ADDRESS

Esteemed colleagues, dear friends and guests,

Allow me to welcome you all on behalf of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, and thank you for taking part at the international conference on the English language, literature, teaching methodology and translation studies that our Department of English is organising for the fourth time already. The very participation of you, university professors, assistants, researchers, translators and authors, who come from several countries, in these challenging, pandemic conditions, speaks enough about the significance of this conference not only for our faculty and the University of Sarajevo, but also for a wider intellectual and social community.

As was the case with the previous three conferences, this conference also rests on a very broad thematic framework, and is academically brave and socially engaging, regardless of the fact that it primarily concerns scientific issues in the field of anglophone studies. Because of the fact that the English language is a linguistic bearer of all globalisation processes, the CELLTTS thematic frameworks should not, perhaps, be reduced to very narrow scientific and academic issues, but that is also the question that concerns you who on a daily basis persistently work in the field of anglophone studies. At the same time, language is an eternal and universal issue, bringing us back in different ways and in every period to numerous areas, all the way to the metaphysical insights into the secret of existence. Even today, it is not hard to imagine a great thinker who walked through the Black Forest, angrily muttering: Questions, only questions. It is not about bringing forth a new understanding of language. What matters is to learn to live in speaking of the language. A man speaks only if it suits the language. Language speaks.

For philological disciplines, man is primarily a creature of language. By living in language, we have a right and an obligation to speak from every position, in different variations, about all matters of existence. And, in doing so, English, the language we accept as a common language of communication, eases the exchange of thoughts, especially concerning

those aspects of life and problems that are present in all societies in the world. And, regardless of all the cognition on the outer-linguistic sphere of human existence, we still cannot deny the thesis that things are not where words are missing, or are, at the very least, in some form of ontological deficit. Thus, bringing into connection the issues of language, this year's thematic framework of the conference is exceptionally important for the society, intellectually highly demanding, challenging and brave. This year's theme *Re-Examining Gender Concepts and Identities in Discourse(s) and Practice(s) Across Periods and Disciplines* leads us towards an exceptionally wide field of various disciplines, for that is the only way for us today to speak of the issues of gender and identity.

This moment in history that we live and share together is filled with tension, conflicts, misunderstandings and intolerance, although we have never been so technically equipped for communication and conversation. An accelerated civilizational and cultural "opening", as an inevitability of the globalisation processes, has by no chance initiated a never before seen amount of discussions on identity, to an extent that we no longer use the singular form of the word; rather we most frequently use plural and speak of identities. Even older thinkers wrote discussions on identity, most frequently, on the very principle of identity, but in the past fifty years, any attempt at thinking about identity has led us to different schools of thought, making us approach the issue from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective, as well as diachronically, which is how this year's conference has been structured. If we are to speak in singular, then we see identity as an enormous number of layers (in fact, of most diverse affiliations); layers that are in a constant dialogue and intertwined. If we use plural and speak of identities, then we speak of identities that enter different relationships in the same way, making identities a dynamic process in which they sometimes clash, and sometimes harmonise different affiliations. In that constant conversation of multitude of affiliations in the layers of our identity, the only thing we must never allow is to reduce the identity to a single, essential affiliation against which all other are peripheral and less important. Upon that rest all collective ide-

ological manipulations and conflicts that we know and that lead towards what we call killer identity.

The second thematic framework of this year's conference concerns gender studies, researched throughout the world, from different methodological standpoints and from angles of different disciplines. They are the result and a continuation of a long and difficult struggle against sexual and gender inequality. Starting from the first wave of feminist efforts that aimed at providing women with their basic right to work and to have a say in public, through the equally difficult struggle of the second wave against the double enslaving and the fight for positions in the positions of power and decision-making, all the way to the contemporary feminist movements that enter into those almost invisible existential areas, we have been witnessing the fight for gender equality. Everybody knows that we are facing a long, hard road ahead. On that road, just as in the eternal fight for freedom, the old rule shall apply – if we for a moment stop fighting, the already conquered area of equality will be lost and will have to again be conquered.

Can we then go back to the words of the old ontologist that the man speaks only if he suits the language, that the language speaks? I think so. For, if our existence as a whole is laid in the language, it logically follows that it contains sediments of millennia of raw patriarchal dominance. That is what language tells us and asks us: will we ever dim those patriarchal codes in all elements of language structure? Or, let us pose perhaps a more difficult question: even if we succeed, will that be the sign of full gender equality? Finally, will our conversations about gender and any other identity be changed by that from the very root?

Questions are multiplying and we clearly see how important the topic of this year's conference is; it is huge, intellectually and existentially provocative. Without a doubt, your presentations will be interesting attempts at answering some of those questions, regardless of the fact that we are all aware that there can be no final answers.

With this thought, I wish you a successful engagement and a pleasant virtual presence at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo,

a place which will always welcome different opinions mutually intertwined and enriching.

Professor Muhamed Dželilović, PhD
Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy

**PART ONE:
LINGUISTICS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING AND TRANSLATION STUDIES**

Equipping Student Teachers’ Competence in Integration of Local Features as Meaningful Contexts into Phonics Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This study used documents, videos, and interviews to explore the influence of training on contextualized phonics instruction of three student teachers’ competence in their designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction in Taiwan. It had the following major findings. First, student teachers, students, and their cooperating teachers held positive attitudes toward the contextualized phonics instruction, as such lesson designs were relevant to learners’ lives and learners could learn the local culture. Secondly, these student teachers faced challenges in contextualized phonics instruction in terms of writing phonics texts, activity designs, and learners’ different English proficiency levels. Suggestions were provided in terms of the integration of phonics instruction in elementary schools.

Keywords: competence, contextualized phonics instruction, local features, meaningful contexts, student teachers

1. Introduction

Inputs based on learners’ real-life contexts and previous knowledge can be conducive to language learning and promote learners’ motivation (Chen et

al., 2019; Petersen et al., 2009; Torun, 2018). Hence, language teachers should try to engage learners with input from building background and connecting with their students' prior experiences and their homes and community (Tran, 2014).

Some language programs and teachers fail to provide content and materials that truly reflect the needs and sociocultural context of the learners' lives (Purcell-Gates et al., 1998). In these cases, teaching starts with fragments, such as vocabulary, grammar, or phonics in isolation. This kind of classroom practice results in unnatural, cognitively undemanding, and dull language outcomes (Torun, 2008).

Language teacher education programs should equip teacher candidates with competence in phonics instruction (Abraham, 2017; Black, 2018; Carlisle et al., 2016; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Meeks et al., 2016). Language teachers should be taught to understand, apply, and teach phonics and phonological awareness in a systematic and explicit way with authentic and meaningful context (Black, 2018; Brenner, 2005; Meeks et al., 2016; Pryor et al., 2012).

Novice teachers lack fundamental knowledge of phonics instruction (Black, 2018; Carlisle et al., 2016; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Hayward et al., 2014). According to Abraham (2017) and Louden and Rohl (2006), novice teachers are sceptical about theories and practice on teaching phonics.

The Ministry of Education in Taiwan (2016) stipulates that from the fall semester in 2019, the English curriculum must be competency-based and contextualized in elementary, junior, and senior high schools. English teachers and other content area teachers are encouraged to work collaboratively to design the "alternative curriculum for the alternative-learning required courses" (Ministry of Education, 2016).

However, there is a lack of suitable and accessible teaching materials for an alternative curriculum for first and second graders (Chien, 2021; Lin et al., 2019). Teachers who are assigned to do a practicum for the first and second grades may not have appropriate materials for their teaching demonstration for such an alternative curriculum (Chien, 2021; Lin et al., 2019).

Training in contextualized phonics instruction was introduced into a practicum in a language teacher education program in northwest Tai-

wan in fall 2020, to provide three student teachers competence in their designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction. This study discusses the following research questions:

1. What were the three student teachers' designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction?
2. What challenges did they face in designing and implementing contextualized phonics lessons?
3. How did the training in the practicum equip student teachers with competence in contextualized phonics instruction?

2. Literature Review

In the literature review, definitions of contextualization in language teaching and its importance were discussed, followed by instructional strategies in phonics with contextualization and teachers' competence and knowledge of phonics instruction, and trainings and professional development in contextualized phonics instruction. The literature gap was analyzed and a conceptual framework was proposed.

2.1. Definitions of Contextualization in Language Teaching

Nunan (1992) defines context as “the linguistic and experiential situation in which a piece of language occurs” (p. 304). Mazzeo et al. (2003) further define contextualization as “a set of instructional strategies that focus on concrete applications in a specific context that is of interest to the student” (p. 3). Walza (1989) refers to contextualization as a “combination of culture with the curriculum and language practice” (p. 161). Contextualization in language teaching this study refers to content relevant to learners' lives and culture.

2.2. Importance of Contextualization in Language Teaching

It is crucial for language teachers to present the language in meaningful contexts reflecting the authentic use of language regarding the

language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and knowledge (e.g., grammar, phonics) (Amirian & Momeni, 2012; Arıkan & Taraf, 2010; Azizifard & Jalali, 2012; Torun, 2008). The awareness of the social contexts and the relevance of the linguistic foci to learners' lives are highly emphasized in contextualized language teaching (Gaikwad, 2014; Wong & Looi, 2010). Widdowson (1998) proposes that language teachers should localize the input and create contextual conditions that make the language authentic to language learners in the local community.

Experimental study was employed in most studies and pre- and post-tests were used to compare and contrast effects of the traditional and contextualized instruction on learners' grammar learning (Gaiward, 2014; Ghelichi, 2017), vocabulary acquisition (Hasegawa, 2013; Montes León, 2018; Nelson & Stage, 2007; Prince, 1996; Qian, 1996; Salehi, 2016; Soureshjani, 2011), sight words (Kibby, 1989), sentence or discourse (Gillam et al., 2012), reading (Manzano & Fernández-Sánchez, 2016) or with technology-enhanced instruction (Aglawe, 2011). This case study explored three student teachers' contextualization in phonics instruction.

2.3. Instructional Strategies in Phonics with Contextualization

Gu (2015) calls for three major dimensions of contextualized language instruction. These include curriculum design in context (what is being taught, content taught in context), instructional design in context (how to teach, methodology in context), and language samples (language input in context, teaching script and chunks in context). Based on Gu's (2015) three dimensions of contextualized language instruction, different instructional strategies can be implemented along with the authentic contexts. First, "teaching phonics in context" or "contextualized approach in phonics" have been used alternatively; such phonics instruction consists of alphabet, phonemic awareness, reading, and writing (Craig, 2006; Culatta et al., 2017; Roberts et al., 2019; Street, 2011). Dunn (2005) analyzed the pre- and post-tests, the teachers' journals, and miscue analysis and indicated that contextualized systematic phonics instruction led six second graders to improve in the post-test. Similarly, Culatta et

al.'s (2017) contextualized approach with varied activities (e.g., hands-on manipulation of sensory materials; art or cooking projects) and contexts (e.g., enactment of stories or play scripts) enabled kids aged three to five to gain better performance in rhyming skills and letter names. Hence, to teach phonics in context, teachers are encouraged to use authentic texts with local features or rich examples pulled straight from learners' lives as the reading materials for phonics instruction (Topple, 2012).

In addition, music and rhyming activities can facilitate younger learners' phonemic awareness (e.g., Culatta et al., 2017; Miller, 2013). Along with "sing, spell, read, write" (SSRW) and music intervention to meet English language learners' needs, Miller (2013) implemented culturally responsive phonics instruction. The analysis of pre- and post-tests indicated that elementary school third and fifth graders made significant improvement in phonics through the explicit and systematic instruction as well as the implementation of the musical-rhythmic activity.

2.4. Teachers' Competence and Knowledge of Phonics Instruction

In teaching phonics, language teachers should be equipped with knowledge of language and literacy acquisition, learners in terms of their proficiency and performance in reading, writing, sounds, letters and sound-letter relationship, and competence in effective instructional strategies (Smith, 2011). Barnyak and Paquette's (2010) survey research on pre-service teachers at two American universities indicated that over 80% of them had theoretical-based beliefs and practice in phonics and phonics instruction experience, such as teaching first graders to point to initial consonants and identify their sounds or identify vowel sounds. A similar survey study was conducted by Fielding-Barnsley (2010) among 162 Australian pre-service teachers. These participants regarded phonics as crucial in teaching reading. However, although most teachers could identify the concept of a phoneme, they failed to transfer such knowledge in counting phonemes in words as they were not feeling prepared enough to teach beginning readers.

Black (2018) integrated design-based research in phonics instruction and multiple assessments into an introductory elementary school

reading and phonics course for 40 American students. Two major modules consisted of concepts of phonics, word study, and orthography. The analysis of the multiple assessments indicated that participants gained knowledge in phonics instruction.

Korkmaz and Korkmaz's (2013) survey research on 30 Turkish senior student teachers revealed that participants valued the importance of context in language teaching. During the practicum, they employed different techniques in creating useful context, such as cultural context and personalization in language teaching.

2.5. Training and Professional Development in Contextualized Phonics Instruction

Teacher education programs should provide both pre- and in-service training or mentoring for language teachers, particularly in phonics instruction (Clark et al., 2013; Ehri & Flugman, 2018; Maloch et al., 2013; Meeks et al., 2016). Clark et al. (2013) explored the influence of the teacher preparation program on 41 pre-service teachers' self-perceived ability to teach reading and conducted follow-up observations and interviews with five of them as novice teachers after graduation. These five teachers employed a variety of strategies from the teacher preparation program in their classroom practice, but only two of them focused on phonics instruction in terms of decoding multisyllabic words and blending sounds.

Similarly, Jiménez and O'Shanahan (2016) used task scores, questionnaires on teachers' beliefs, and program questionnaires to analyze the influence of web-based training on 246 Spanish pre-service and 270 in-service teachers' knowledge of reading instruction. Compared to in-service teachers, pre-service teachers scored higher in tasks as they have been involved in both theoretical and practical trainings in phonics. Hence, Jiménez and O'Shanahan (2016) concluded that both theoretical and practical aspects of phonics and phonemic awareness should be included in trainings for teachers.

Multisensory designs can be taken into consideration for teachers' professional development in phonics instruction. Ghoneim and Elgiotomy (2015) used pre- and post-tests to explore the effect of a multisensory phonics program on developing 40 fourth-year kindergarten pre-service

teachers' EFL reading accuracy and phonemic awareness, particularly on word decoding. Such a multisensory phonics program focused on the generation of rhyming word families, segmenting, blending, and manipulation of individual sounds and letters within words.

Multimedia can be used in teachers' professional development in phonics instruction (Carlisle et al., 2016; Jiménez & O'Shanahan, 2016). Carlisle et al.'s (2016) experimental study compared and contrasted the effects of content acquisition podcasts (CAP) and practitioner-friendly articles on undergraduate pre-service special education teachers' knowledge of phonics, phonemic awareness, and phonological awareness. The analysis of the pre- and post-tests indicated that CAP was more effective at teaching specific concepts to these participants.

2.6. Literature Gap and Conceptual Framework

Previous empirical studies on contextualized language instruction have focused mainly on vocabulary and reading, but only limited studies have explored phonics instruction. This study aimed to fill the literature gap. Moreover, previous empirical studies on effects of phonics instruction on teachers' competence mainly employed pre- and post-tests. This case study employed triangulated data collection to explore teachers' competence in phonics instruction.

Based on previous empirical studies (e.g., Pryor et al., 2012; Spiegel et al., 1985; Widdowson, 1998), the conceptual framework was proposed as in Figure 1. Student teachers' competence in the design and implementation of contextualized phonics instruction was affected by the training in the language teacher education, including reviews of lesson planning, introduction of contextualized language instruction, modelling of phonics instruction and activity designs, taking local community tours in the cooperating schools, and collaborative lesson planning. Moreover, their competence in phonics instruction might be affected by their cooperating teachers and second graders as their students in cooperating schools (Ihmeideh & Coughlin, 2015). Their competence could affect second graders' phonemic awareness and acquisition of phonics skills.

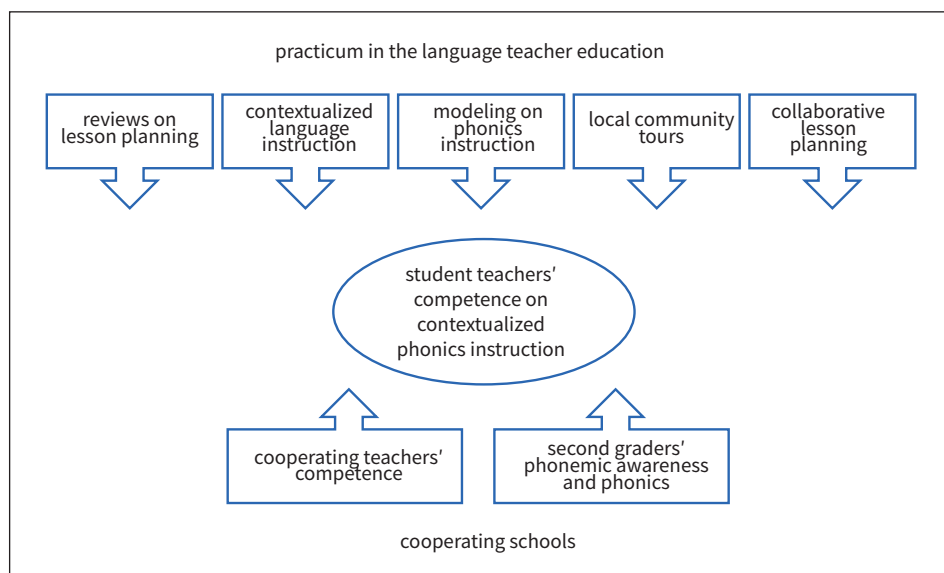


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

3. Method

This case study explored three student teachers' lesson designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction as the unit of analysis and was conducted in a practicum as the bounded system. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis of student teachers' lesson plans, videos, and interviews.

3.1. Participants and Setting

Purposeful sampling was used for recruiting Ada, Amy, and Ann (pseudonyms), three student teachers enrolled in the practicum in a language teacher education program in northwest Taiwan. These student teachers did their practicum among second graders in their cooperating schools. They were expected to teach phonics as their teaching demonstration at the end of the practicum.

Participants were required to attend the monthly meetings mandated by the language teacher education program. Their practicum advisor de-

signed trainings on contextualized phonics instruction for them, including reviews of lesson planning, an introduction to contextualized language instruction, modelling of phonics instruction and activity designs, taking the local community tours in the cooperating schools, and collaborative lesson planning. During the collaborative lesson planning, the practicum advisor and participants, along with other student teachers, brainstormed texts or phonics chants based on the local features of the cooperating schools. For example, Ada's school is famous for the mangrove tree, so the chant was designed as "One, two, three. What do you see? I see a mangrove tree."

3.2. Data Collection

Data in this study included documents (lesson plans, worksheets), videos on teaching demonstrations, and interviews. Participants were asked to design one lesson on phonics with relevant teaching materials, such as flashcards or worksheets. Participants gave a teaching demonstration of the lesson, which was videotaped for later analysis.

The semi-structured interview protocol was developed based on empirical studies (e.g., Abraham, 2017; Gu, 2015). The interview protocol was designed to explore participants' awareness of phonics instruction, phonics chant designs, activity designs in phonics, self-efficacy in contextualized phonics instruction, and their attitude toward trainings in the practicum. Sample questions were "Describe your second graders' skills in phonemic awareness and phonics before and after your instruction." or "What challenges did you face when you wrote such a phonics chant?" Each participant was interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes and the interview was audio-recorded for later analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis

Interviews and videos were first transcribed for analysis. The researcher read through all the data and labelled it with tentative codes (e.g., mangrove, features, rhyming words, text). The researcher tried to find major themes in the tentative codes based on the research questions and the conceptual framework (e.g., designs, beliefs, competence, attitude).

Member checking and peer reviews were employed in order to avoid bias in the data analysis. The researcher gave the findings and interpretations to the participants for review to check if discrepancy occurred between their intentions and the researcher's interpretation. Moreover, the major findings were given to two of the researcher's colleagues who were also in the language teacher education program to check the validity of the data analysis.

4. Results

The documents, videos, and interviews were analyzed based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1. Student teachers' designs, activity designs, and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction were explored. Challenges faced by student teachers and their attitudes toward such contextualized phonics instruction were discussed.

4.1. Student Teachers' Designs of Contextualized Phonics Instruction

As revealed in Table 1, both natural (mangrove) and humanistic (park, military village) local features became the contexts of the phonics instruction. Different phonics rules were taught such as short *a*, short and long *i*, *ee*, along with two or three corresponding words, such as *three*, *see* and *tree* for *-ee*.

Table 1. Student Teachers' Designs and Delivery of Contextualized Phonics Instruction

	features	phonics	words
Ada	mangrove	- <i>ee</i> , short <i>a</i> and <i>i</i>	. <i>three</i> , <i>see</i> , <i>tree</i> . <i>crab</i> , <i>dab</i> , <i>crab</i> . <i>wish</i> , <i>dish</i> , <i>fish</i>
Amy	park	- <i>all</i> , short <i>a</i> , <i>i</i> long <i>i</i>	. <i>tall</i> , <i>wall</i> . <i>bike</i> , <i>like</i> . <i>king</i> , <i>sing</i> . <i>sand</i> , <i>hand</i>
Ann	army village	short <i>a</i>	. <i>flag</i> , <i>bag</i> , <i>tag</i>

The foci of the phonics instruction can be varied based on learners' proficiency levels. The onset-rime segmentation and blending skills are regarded as critical skill achievements that support basic reading success (Hayward et al., 2014). In this study, the foci mainly focused on onset (*d, f, w*) and rime (*-ish*).

The three student teachers introduced the words and texts with pictures. Ann taught the text "Look! A big flag" based on the military village, as in Figure 2. Blending of local culture into phonics instruction can be a useful cultural learning strategy. Learners read aloud these texts consisting of local culture, so their language identity can be fostered (Cheang, 2006).



Figure 2 PowerPoint slide on Texts

These student teachers and their students had positive attitudes toward the contextualized phonics texts and instruction. First, such texts were relevant to their students' lives. Ada said, "When I said 'mangrove,' several students told me that they saw the mangrove in Hsinchu and Tam-sui. Students felt that such contexts were related to their lives." Amy said, "Students were motivated to learn English and phonics rules. I showed them the pictures of the park and they had gone to the park a week before this phonics lesson." Phonics should not be taught in isolation (Brenner, 2005). Such phonics texts are examples pulled straight from learners' lives and community and are expected to enhance learners' overall phonics skills of connecting letters to sounds (Toppel, 2012).

Moreover, these texts could be used to teach not only phonics but also local culture. Ada said, "Learners can learn local culture, too," while Ann said, "The phonics texts can be written based on the local features, so I can teach phonics, the corresponding rules, and the local culture, such as the military village." These phonics texts enable learners to develop awareness of the mutual influence between the target and local culture.

Teachers introduce local culture to learners through English (Cheang, 2006; Tsao, 2015).

4.2. Student Teachers' Activity Designs and Implementations of Contextualized Phonics Instruction

As revealed in Table 2, these three student teachers began their phonics instruction by reading the phonics texts and teaching corresponding words. Ada and Amy designed a variety of activities from listening (e.g., Total Physical Response; identifying rhyming words; same or different; circle or cross; I say, You clap), speaking (e.g., blending, message sender), reading (e.g., sorting out), and hands-on activities (e.g., board game). These three student teachers ended their phonics instruction by asking their students to read aloud the phonics texts with rhythms.

Table 2. Student Teachers' Designs and Delivery of Contextualized Phonics Instruction

student teachers	activities
Ada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . read the chant . TPR with chant . find the rhyming words . hands up . blending . circle or cross . 1, 2, 3 same or difference . messenger sender . listen and find . worksheet
Amy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . read the chant . identify the rhyming words . read aloud . circle or cross . I say, You clap . sort out . board game . I pick, you read aloud
Ann	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . present the phonics words and chant . teach blending . read the chant

Varieties of activities with English teachers' modelling of sound-word relationships can enable learners to use alphabetic code-breaking skills to decode written words. Moreover, the multisensory phonics activity designs focus on generating rhyming word families, segmenting, and blending. Therefore, younger EFL learners can decode unfamiliar words by reading and thinking aloud (Ghoneim & Elghotmy, 2015).

Ada and Amy had positive attitudes toward their varieties of activity designs, and they thought that their activities were designed based on language acquisition. Ada said, "All four skills were included in my activities, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. My students can acquire phonemic awareness and phonics skills." English teachers like Ada and Amy in this study can design activities as recommended by scholars that phonics instruction should start with listening, rhyming, sentences and words, syllables, initial and final sounds, and blending and segmenting (Lane et al., 2002). Hence, learners will be able to have oral and auditory discrimination for phonological skills (Lane et al., 2002; Smith, 2011).

In Excerpt 1, Ada designed an activity of Circle and Cross. When students heard the same rhyming words, they were asked to make a circle. Ada gave an example of these two words, "see" and "tree." Next, Ada said two words, "wish" and "dish." Students made a circle because these two words rhymed.

Excerpt 1: Ada's Activity Design:

Ada: You make a big circle when you hear the same rhyming words. For example, see, tree. Let's do it together.

Ada: Wish, dish.

Students: (Make a big circle).

Language teachers, such as Ada in Excerpt 1, demonstrate pedagogical content knowledge in phonics instruction, particularly phonological awareness (Street, 2011). Young learners can receive explicit training in phonological awareness skills by phoneme discriminations, such as identifying different initial sounds with the same rime, such as *-ish*.

Amy said, "I first started with sound discrimination, because listen-

ing was crucial. I designed a speaking activity, followed by the sorting and board game.” Excerpt 2 was Amy’s board game. Amy explained to her students how they could play this phonics board game (Figure 3).

Excerpt 2: Amy’s Board Game

Amy: Each group has a board game paper, dice, and chips. You take turns throwing the dice. For example, two, you go two steps and say the word “*h*, *-ike*, *hike*”. When you go back to here (point “start!”), you are the winner.



Figure 3 Amy’s Board Game

The board game designed by Amy in Excerpt 2 and Figure 3 clearly indicates how language teachers can design a fun and authentic way for their learners to practice phonics skills (Smith, 2011). Learners first sound out the initial sound of each word and the certain rimes (e.g. *-all*, *-ing*, *-ike*) and blend them together.

Participants also identified the problems of activity designs and implementations in terms of drill practice and flexible grouping strategies. For example, Ann regretted that she did not design drill practices for her students, as “I did not design drill practices for my students; otherwise, they would be familiar with the phonics rules.” Ann’s statement indicates

the importance of synthetic and analytic phonics approaches. While the former emphasizes sounding out and blending, the latter places emphasis on sound-symbol relationships (Smith, 2011).

Furthermore, Ada commented on her own activity designs as, "My activities were for the whole class. I should design more activities for learners to practice phonics rules in pairs, groups, or individually." Flexible grouping strategies can be employed (Gregory, 2007). Reading in unison as the whole class from the text can help the less proficient learners to experience fluency. Working in a team or pair work can provide support for one another.

4.3. Challenges Faced by Student Teachers

Student teachers identified three major challenges for contextualized phonics instruction. First, writing the phonics texts was challenging for student teachers. Ada said, "It was difficult to find words with the same rhyme. Words with the same rhyme might not be on the word list for the elementary school students, such as *dab*." Ann said, "These rhymed words, such as *tag*, *flag*, and *bag* are difficult for elementary school learners, not to mention understanding the meanings of the phonics context, such as take a photo." Amy also said, "It was challenging to write texts with the same number of words and rhymes." Participants' competence in phonics led them to write the phonics texts based on the phonics instruction that target words are placed at the very end of the sentences, so learners can have the clues when they read the texts and the target words (Spiegel et al., 1985).

Secondly, student teachers were questioned by their cooperating English teachers regarding the activity designs. Ada said, "My cooperating English teacher commented on my activity designs. She said that I designed too many exercises in one single lesson." Amy said, "My cooperating English teacher wanted me to use only one or two activities in one class. I tried to explain to her that it took only a few minutes to complete each exercise. Luckily, I insisted on implementing all the exercises. My cooperating teacher was impressed by these second graders' phonics skills performed in one exercise after another."

Such a finding was in accord with Fielding-Barnsley's (2010) survey research on Australian pre-service teachers' knowledge of phonics. Student teachers and their cooperating teachers in this study may have rudimentary knowledge of phonics and phonemic awareness. However, they need more opportunities in activity designs and implementation so they can consolidate their explicit awareness in the practicum.

Third, elementary school learners' mixed English proficiency levels were another challenge faced by these student teachers. Ann said, "Advanced learners can do the blending, but the lower achievers were not familiar with the letter and sound relationships. Lower achievers needed more guidance and scaffolding. Hence, I think I should differentiate my instruction."

Craig (2006) suggested that contextualized explicit phonics instruction should entail clearly planned activities in phonological awareness and alphabet skills and strategy within the contexts of reading and writing. Language teachers should also provide differentiated instruction in phonics based on learners' ongoing performance and proficiency levels.

4.4. Attitudes toward the Training in the Practicum

Student teachers held positive attitudes toward the training in the practice because it was goal-oriented. Of all the activities offered in the practicum, student teachers regarded the local community tours, collaborative lesson planning, and the advisor's modelling of phonics instruction as useful. Ada said, "During the local community tour, I wrote down the local features and ideas for the phonics texts. Moreover, I learned the acquisition of phonics skills and phonemic awareness and gained diverse instructional activities through the advisor's modelling."

Training or professional development in phonics and phonemic awareness should be a mandatory requirement for those who teach phonics to younger learners. Student teachers should be provided with proper training in contextualized phonics instruction. They can be well prepared and equipped with sufficient competence to teach phonemic awareness and phonics adequately (Black, 2018; Smith, 2011).

These student teachers were inspired by the activities offered in the practicum. Amy said, "I looked at the community from different perspectives during the local community tour. Collaborative lesson planning and my advisor's modelling made my lesson designs more efficient and effective." Moreover, Ann said, "The local community tour helped me to be innovative in lesson designs rather than use the online resources."

The practicum can serve as the supportive learning community where student teachers share ideas and learn from one another and provide needed support as they face challenges. Student teachers can learn from cooperating teachers and their advisor. They can try new instructional strategies and receive constructive feedback that helps them grow as competent English teachers (Maloch, 2003).

5. Discussion

This study explored the influence of training on contextualized phonics instruction of three student teachers' competence in their designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction. Based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1, this study reached the following conclusions:

First, student teachers' competence in phonics instruction was constructed by practicum, their students, and cooperating teachers in cooperating schools. Student teachers can be trained and equipped with professional knowledge of phonics instruction, referring to knowledge that is developed with the teacher preparation program and course. They can have practical knowledge of phonics, developed within their cooperative schools. Most importantly, they can be constructed with personal knowledge of phonics, developed from the experience and beliefs about phonics instruction (Grisham, 2000; Ihmeideh & Coughlin, 2015).

Second, student teachers, students, and their cooperating teachers held positive attitudes toward the contextualized phonics instruction, as such lesson designs were relevant to learners' lives, local culture and tradition. Yang (2010) affirms the contextualized language instruction

with local features: “Localization of education will make Taiwanese people better aware of their own cultural roots so as to give them points of reference that enable them to determine their place in the world” (p. 18). Moreover, student teachers regarded their diverse activity designs as effective because these activities were designed based on the acquisition of phonics skills and phonemic awareness.

Third, these student teachers faced challenges in contextualized phonics instruction in terms of writing phonics texts, activity designs, and learners’ different English proficiency levels. Consistent with the previous empirical studies (e.g., Loudon & Rohl, 2006), student teachers as beginning teachers with limited competence design and teach contextualized phonics instruction to meet the learners’ diversity.

Finally, these student teachers had positive attitudes toward the training, particularly the local community tours, collaborative lesson planning, and the advisors’ modelling of phonics instruction. Consistent with prior empirical studies (e.g., Ehri & Flugman, 2018), student teachers might have limited knowledge and competence in designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction. Quality training in the practicum can equip student teachers with pedagogical and content knowledge in systematic and research-based phonics curriculum and instructional practice.

Student teachers should be equipped with competence in contextualized phonics instruction. Three suggestions were provided in terms of the integration of phonics instruction in elementary school: language teacher education, learners’ fund of knowledge and local features in the practicum, and the importance of glocalization.

5.1. Importance of Phonics Instruction in Language Teacher Education Programs

Student teachers in this study became familiar with the phonics instruction through their advisor’s modelling and collaborative lesson planning. Phonics is a fundamental skill for elementary school EFL learners. Student teachers should be equipped with competence in and knowledge

of phonics instruction. Hence, phonics instruction should be integrated into language teacher education programs (Black, 2018; Fielding-Barnsley, 2010). Such integration of phonics instruction can include pedagogical skills for teaching younger learners the alphabet and concepts of print, developing phonological awareness, blending and segmenting, etc. (Jiménez & O'Shanahan, 2016; Smith, 2011).

5.2. Learners' Fund of Knowledge and Local Features in the Practicum

The local community tours enabled these student teachers to be familiar with the local features and community. Hence, student teachers should be equipped with knowledge and familiarity of their learners (Shulman, 1974). Teachers should be aware that their students are learners in their classroom and individuals outside of the classroom within family and community. Learners' funds of knowledge can be used to design and drive the lesson and instruction (Toppel, 2012).

5.3. Importance of Glocalization in Language Education

Student teachers regarded their contextualized phonics lessons as relevant to their students' lives, and their students were more motivated to learn phonics. Hence, glocalization should be valued in EFL language teaching and learning. English teachers can set up curriculum development committees and work collaboratively to integrate local culture, features, or unique characteristics into English curricula. A glocalized English lesson can enhance the scope and content of the international language of English. Learners will have a better understanding of the language and the world (Tsao, 2015; Yang, 2010).

6. Conclusion

This study explored the influence of training on three student teachers' competence in their designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction in a practicum in a language teacher education pro-

gram. Needless to say, it was significant for the practitioners and teacher educators. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) was proposed to identify the elements to be included in the training to foster student teachers' competence in phonics instruction. Student teachers' competence in phonics instruction can be constructed through the advisor's reviewing of lesson planning and contextualized language instructions, along with the advisor's modelling of phonics instruction, local community tours, collaborative lesson plans, cooperating teachers' competence and collaboration, and second graders' phonics skills and phonemic awareness.

This study generated conclusions based on only three student teachers' designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction. The sample and setting selected for this study limited the generalizability of the findings. Future study should involve more diverse language teachers with varying levels of education and teaching experiences in different cities.

Second, the study's time frame did not allow the researcher to fully explore three student teachers' designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction over a serial lesson for the entire academic year. Each student teacher designed and taught only one lesson. Future research is needed to explore the contextualized phonics instruction for an extended period.

Third, this study focused mainly on three student teachers' designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction, but not on their students' acquisition of phonics. A further study could explore the influence of student teachers' designs and implementations of contextualized phonics instruction on elementary school students' phonemic awareness and phonics.

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The Concepts of Identity and Gender
Stereotypes through a Lens of
Philosophical-linguistic Teachings of
Hilary Putnam and Ludwig Wittgenstein

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to offer an analysis of the concepts of gender and identity stereotypes through a lens of philosophical-linguistic teachings of Hilary Putnam and Ludwig Wittgenstein. By claiming that we define everything accessible to us by the means of language, the two philosophers point out that everything we claim to know is the result of the language we use. To have an identity means to commit to certain linguistic conceptions of the language we use, because we define ourselves and the world around us according to socially standardised descriptions. Those descriptions are part of a certain language because the world cannot speak and define itself, only we do. To have an identity means to speak a language and be defined in a certain language – which means that descriptions are always the result of our use of language. Stereotype (Putnam) is just a standardised use of our linguistic concepts, and it could be implied that the concepts of gender and identity are language stereotypes that are socially constructed and must be seen as inevitable but also as fallible, changeable, and contingent. Language stereotypes change because people change their language practice. If everything that we perceive is a product of our language practice or stereotype that we accept, we must accept the argument against private language (Wittgenstein). From this linguistic-philosophical perspective, concepts such as iden-

tity and gender are seen as social constructs, based on our commitment and use of certain vocabularies deeply rooted in our language.

KEYWORDS: gender, identity, language practice, language stereotypes, private language

1. Introduction

One of the main areas of research in analytical philosophy, more precisely, that of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Hilary Putnam, is the field of language. In other words, all research on all types of language such as reference, inference and meaning. Philosophers like Wittgenstein and Putnam are interested in the general characteristics of each language, and the main problem to which they dedicated their philosophical work concerns the problem of meaning. Both philosophers (in their specific stages) turn to a pragmatic understanding of language and the problem of meaning. Wittgenstein is chronologically the first one who observes the problem of meaning through the prism of pragmatics, and Putnam, under the influence of philosophers like Wittgenstein, spreads the concepts of pragmatics and continues to argue this position with his own examples. He argues that if language is the only thing left for us to analyse in order to understand people, its way of dealing with the world and other people, then language theory will have implications within the issue of identity and gender. So that identity and gender will actually be explained from a linguistic position around the problem of meaning. Namely, from a pragmatic and holistic position that sees meaning as a product of commitment to language practice within communication communities. To have an identity and gender means to agree or commit to a certain way of classification/identification that arises from language practice. Identifying with a certain identity and gender is a socio-linguistic product of a particular language practice to which we are committed. Identities and gender depend on language practice (and everything we attach to that concept).

This paper is divided into three parts:

The first part of the paper entitled *Some Determinants of the Theory of Meaning in the Philosophy of the Late Wittgenstein* will deal with the

exploitation of what the theory of meaning is in the philosophy of the late Wittgenstein. Here we will explain key concepts such as language game (language practice), norms, private language, form of life and family resemblance (with special emphasis on language game concepts and norms) as some concepts that explain Wittgenstein's pragmatic position in understanding the problem of meaning.

The second part titled *Putnam's Semantics Externalism* will explain the basis of Putnam's semantic externalism, which relies to some extent on the ideas of the late Wittgenstein, but introduces other concepts (language stereotypes) to explain the importance of understanding the social background of meaning.

The third part, *Identity and Gender as a Product of Language Practice*, will express the consequences of the understanding of the problem of meaning in Wittgenstein and Putnam, on the ideas of identity and gender. Namely, that identity and gender are socially created concepts. To have an identity and a certain gender means to commit to a certain way of identification (to commit to certain stereotypes and norms) created by language practice in a certain context, i.e. in a particular communication community.

2. Some Determinants of the Theory of Meaning in the Philosophy of the Late Wittgenstein

In his first phase, Wittgenstein observed strictly from a logical background, where the basis and the main element of a language is its logical structure, expressed in the metaphor of language as a picture. That is to say, a logic must mirror language within itself and its structure. Meaning and true value only existed if the logical structure agreed with the facts of the world. In general, early language learning is characterised as atomistic. The basic unit of language, of which the language was composed, was a proposition (a sentence or a statement). The whole language has been reduced to the propositions that made it up, and the meaning of one term or variable is contained only within the proposition. Thus, the language

studied was artificial and Ibrulj argues that after the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein viewed the logical form of language as grammar or mathematics of language that is transcendental because its “transcendental categories”, which are a certain number of mathematical diversity or a certain number of logical combinations or a certain number of notations (logical sum, logical product, implication, conjunction, disjunction, negation), enables the reflection of the logical form of reality, in *Philosophische Untersuchungen* language no longer refers to reality by reflecting the form of facts in a form of propositions, but now refers to itself: language is reality whose form (rules of use, grammar, meaning) language should describe himself (Ibrulj, 1999, p. 129).

In the late phase, Wittgenstein moved from an atomistic and correspondence interpretation of language to a holistic and pragmatic one. Although Wittgenstein in his two phases has different approaches to the problem of understanding the meaning, he still retains certain concepts that apply to both phases, one of which is the idea that “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 68). Of course, this idea should be understood in the context of the phase we are talking about. The holism of meaning can be explained as follows “the sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the system of signs, from the language to which it belongs. Roughly: understanding a sentence means understanding a language” (Wittgenstein, 1991, p. 5). To understand the meaning of one term, one needs a language in which one term is related to all other terms. Presently it is not possible to reduce language or meaning to a single element from which the language was built. At this stage Wittgenstein turns to the discovery of natural language or, more precisely, the analysis of its use. “The meaning of a word is its use in the language” (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 20e). Metaphor for language and meaning becomes a term tool, because from the way language is used it is possible to analyze all language structures. Semantics becomes pragmatics, because meaning is a product of use.

Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws — the functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both

cases, there are similarities.) Of course, what confuses us is the uniform appearance of words when we hear them spoken or meet them in script and print. For their application is not presented to us so clearly. Especially when we are doing philosophy (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 6).

The key concepts of the late phase, which will be discussed later (and also for the topic of this paper) are: language games, rules (norms), private language, form of life and family resemblance. All show that language only has a holistic meaning (meaning in the context of the whole), that language must be used in language communities and from its use words gain meaning, and that all language practice is a form of life. For Wittgenstein, the form of language practice we choose determines what life we will live. Language is learned and it is normative. That is to say, language has the conditions under which certain meanings are used, and these norms need to be explained in order to explain, as clearly as possible, the meaning given in a particular context. Rules are created during use and can be made explicit from use. The use of language determined by norms has its own social background. Namely, language is created only within certain language communities, where we are taught language games, but on the basis of which we can further create new language games. Language games are endless because they do not have any transcendental form (metaphysical or theological support), they are created in its use, and we can use language in many ways:

At every stage, what practical extensions of a given practice are possible for the practitioners can turn on features of their embodiment, lives, environment, and history that are contingent and wholly particular to them. And which of those developments actually took place, and in what order, can turn on any obscure fact. The reason vocabulary-kinds resist specification by rules, principles, definitions, or meanings expressed in other vocabularies is that they are the current time-slices of processes of development of practices that have this dynamic character—and that is why the collection of uses that is the current cumulative and collective result of such developments-by-practical-projection is a motley. (Brandom, 2008, p. 6)

2.1. “Language Games”

One of the key concepts that represents Wittgenstein’s turn to the study of meaning is the concept of language game or a concept that seeks to emphasize that the meaning of a word or a sentence must be given within their use.

An example of a language game:

I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked “five red apples”. He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked “apples”; then he looks up the word “red” in a table and finds a color sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word “five” and for each number he takes an apple of the same color as the sample out of the drawer.—It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.—“But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word ‘red’ and what he is to do with the word ‘five’?”—Well, I assume that he acts as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere — But what is the meaning of the word “five”? — No such thing was in question here, only how the word “five” is used. (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 3)

This example emphasizes that the question of meaning and the essence of meaning are irrelevant; meaning must be presented and understood only within a particular context of word use. Knowing what five and red means only achieves its semantic value from how at that moment, in a particular language, those words were used. Game is a specific name used by Wittgenstein because the use of words always takes place in a certain way and has its own conditions.

In the practice of the use of language (2) one party calls out the words, the other acts on them. In instruction in the language the following process will occur: the learner names the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone—And there will be this still simpler exercise: the pu-

pil repeats the words after the teacher—both of these being processes resembling language. We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games “language-games” and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of much of the use of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses. I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the “language-game”. (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 5)

Of course, in order for a word to be used, a person must be part of a language community that will enable them to speak one language. Within this community, language learning is interwoven with language games, or constant ways of expression that one person adopts and uses in their further communication. Language must have its social basis. It is the basis of language learning but also the area of its use.

Although a person born in one community adopts certain language games, one of the consequences of this teaching by Wittgenstein is that there is no single language game. This is what the late Wittgenstein called the “multiplicity of language games”. This means that one term or sentence can have a very large number of meanings, depending on the context of use. The meaning cannot be fixed; there is no transcendental language game. Meaning is in the context of use. One word, even if it has a similar arrangement of letters, can have different meanings within two different language games.

Words cannot have their meaning outside the context of their language game. Meaning is not reduced to elementary units, because meaning is part of one language game of one context of language use. The meaning of one term depends on all other terms of one language used. In his late phase, Wittgenstein’s language games move towards holism, externalism and pragmatics of meaning. The consequence of this concept

of language game that emphasizes language parks is that in fact games or practices for Wittgenstein are forms of life.

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command?—There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call “symbols”, “words”, “sentences”. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten. (We can get a rough picture of this from the changes in mathematics.) Here the term “language-game” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life. (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 11)

Speaking one language is living one life, that is to say, having one identity and a way of identifying oneself. What the theory of meaning implies is that there is no single game or one unique and correct way of life. There is a large number of them because the correctness and manner of identification remains on the people, i.e. on their language practice to determine and agree.

So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 88e)

Every language game must set before itself the conditions under which it is played. That is to say, it is necessary to state which rules or norms are present in our use. The aim of the rules is to better explain (emphasize through practice) how a certain word is used.

2.2. Rules or Norms

One of the ways in which Wittgenstein determines the rule is as follows: The rule may be an aid in teaching the game. The learner is told it and given practice in applying it. — Or it is an instrument of

the game itself — Or a rule is employed neither in the teaching nor in the game itself; nor is it set down in a list of rules. One learns the game by watching how others play. But we say that it is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game. (Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 26e)

Rules should explain how the word is used within a language game. There are no rules before use. Rules are strictly created in use and within learning a language. If there were sets of rules that one could learn before use, then one would have the ability to understand a particular language before use. Wittgenstein (1969) also develops this argument in his work *On Certainty*: “If you demand a rule from which it follows that there can’t have been a miscalculation here, the answer is that we did not learn this through a rule, but by learning to calculate” (p. 8e). Wittgenstein here applies the rule in the same context as in *Philosophical Investigation*. The idea is that we do not have any prerequisite that allows us to perform actions and understand meanings. Everything comes from our practice; to know that a certain mathematical operation is correct is to know one language and its conditions of use that we learn by learning that language. The fact that it is a mathematical language does not matter; the same is true for all types of languages.

Another way to describe the rule for Wittgenstein is as follows:

A rule stands there like a sign-post. — Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it shew which direction I am to take when I have passed it; whether along the road or the footpath or cross-country? But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its ring-er or (e.g.) in the opposite one? — And if there were, not a single sign-post, but a chain of adjacent ones or of chalk marks on the ground—is there only one way of interpreting them? — So I can say, the sign-post does after all I leave no room for doubt. Or

rather: it sometimes leaves room for doubt and sometimes not.
(Wittgenstein, 1986, p. 39e)

The norms within the language game give us the possibility of a clearer understanding of meaning. Of course, they are not the final understanding of a given meaning, but they are there to explain as clearly as possible what the use of a word is, i.e. what its conditions under which a person can understand meaning are. That is why Wittgenstein uses the word “signpost” because norms should outline the use or at least give an indication of what the use is and under what rules does it occur. Only by explicating norms within language can meaning be understood. Norms are implicit, one enters and recognizes them in one’s language community, but one must be aware of the multiplicity of language games and the different rules of all these games that need to be explicated in order to understand a particular meaning of a word or a sentence in one language. To understand the meaning of a word or a sentence within a language game for Wittgenstein means to “master one language”. That means understanding the use. “One of Wittgenstein’s most important claims is that the practices in which the norms that articulate meaning and their uptake in understanding are implicit must be in social practice” (Brandom, 1998, p. 53). Every norm or way of use that our language has always arises in the social background. Language games and the ways in which one game uses it are always social in practice. Without a social context, it is not possible to articulate rules, because language is used only within one community. Placing norms and meanings in the context of social background avoids the idea of private language or the possibility of speaking and understanding without a single socially communicative context.

Language games or norms are not an answer to the question, if the question posed is: what is the essence of language? For Wittgenstein, language does not have an essence (metaphysical, essentialist). Language does not have one general characteristic, outside its use, but a word within a language may have similarities or some general characteristics that

they share. Wittgenstein calls this “family resemblance”. Namely, certain words when we use them have some general similarities or general descriptions that they share in different language games. Thus, for example, the word “tree leaf”, each leaf or at least a set of words that we use to characterize what we call “tree leaf”, has a number of common characteristics such as shape, color, place where they are not found. All these characteristics allow us to understand the meaning of related terms in different language games, or when a word such as “tree leaf” is mentioned, we have the opportunity to conceptualize the term and its meaning in one game. Of course, everything is reopened to the fact that the word has its meaning only within the context of the use of words in one language game.

3. Putnam’s Semantic Externalism

The well-known Twin Earth example was Putnam’s way of pointing out the problem of meaning and turning to what is Putnam’s semantic externalism. Externalism can be defined as follows:

Externalism is the denial of internalism. It is the view that features of a person’s external environment or history are part of what constitutes that person’s beliefs, desires, and sensations. The natural kinds around me, the machinations of my linguistic community, and my learning or evolutionary history are some of the external resources that might partly constitute my experiences and thoughts. (Mendola, 2009, p. 1)

The two linguistic-analytical tools that Putnam will use for its purpose are extension and intension:

Thus, the extension of a term is a set of objects to which the term refers. The intension of the term, on the other hand, should show the difference in meaning that is reflected in the different (though extensively identical) linguistic form of the appearance of the said term. The pragmatic use of the same term in different language games can be explained in this way by treating each

use of the term as a different word to which a different number can be attributed (e.g. lion1 – animal of a certain species, lion2 – brave man, etc.). (Šljivo, 2014, p. 14)

In the Twin Earth example, Putnam suggests imagining a planet identical to Earth, almost in all respects, and to be called the Twin Earth. On the Twin Earth, a liquid called “water” is not H₂O but another liquid whose chemical formula is XYZ. It is assumed that XYZ cannot be distinguished from water under normal conditions. XYZ tastes the same as water. Also, I will assume that the oceans, lakes and rivers of the Twin Earth contain XYZ and not water, that it rains XYZ on the Twin Earth and not water, etc. Simply put “water” on the Earth is H₂O, while on the Twin Earth what we marked “water” (H₂O) on Earth, is XYZ. The extension is clear: on the Earth “water” refers to the H₂O molecule while on the Twin Earth “water” refers to the XYZ molecule, but what occurs is that water has two different meanings (and content). “But now let’s us roll back to 1750. At that time chemistry was not developed on either Earth or Twin Earth. The typical Earthian speaker of English did not know that water consisted of hydrogen and oxygen, and the typical Twin Earthian speaker of English did not know that water consisted of XYZ” (Putnam, 1979, p. 224). This means that no matter what year it is on which planet, water refers to H₂O in one case and XYZ in the other, which implies that the extension or reference remains the same, while the intension of the word water is different in both cases, the meaning (intension) of “water” is different in both cases. In the event that this might happen; two men, X1 from Earth and X2 from the Twin Earth, meet in front of what we call “water”, both would have the same extension or refer to the same entity, while the intension in X1 and X2 is different. Here Putnam advocates that the language used by one language community and the way it uses it are sources for us to talk about the same subjects in different ways. According to Wittgenstein, we have different language games or language practices that have enabled us to talk about the subjects to which they relate in many ways. People who use language in a certain way in their practices

are taught that way in their communities, and thus there is no private language: “Meaning, just ain’t in the head!” (Putnam, 1979, p. 227). There is no language or a possibility of gaining a meaning and an understanding if the language is not used in inter-subjective conditions among members of language communities.

Implications of Putnam’s Twin Earth example:

Let us now see where we are with respect to the notion of meaning. We have now seen that the extension of a term is not fixed by a concept that the individual speaker has in his head, and this is true both because extension is, in general, determined socially – there is division of linguistic labor as much as of ‘real’ labor – and because extension is, in part, determined indexically. The extension of our terms depends upon the actual nature of the particular things that serve as paradigms, \ and this actual nature is not, in general, fully known to the speaker. Traditional semantic theory leaves out only two contributions to the determination of extension – the contribution of society and the contribution of the real world! (Putnam, 1979, p. 245)

Three characteristics of Putnam’s semantic externalism:

(1) “Meaning Is Holistic – The doctrine called ‘meaning holism’ arose as a reaction to logical positivism; it offered arguments refuting positivist attempts to show that every term we can understand can be defined in terms of limited group of terms (the ‘observation terms’)” (Putnam, 1991, p. 8).

That is to say, what we have already seen in Wittgenstein, the meaning of one linguistic entity depends on the language (or the set of all possible words known to the speaker in the context of use).

(2) “Meaning Is in Part a Normative Notion – The notions of being a justified or warranted or reasonable belief are not reducible to physicalistic notions” (Putnam, 1991, p. 11).

The rules that give the normative status of words in language practice arise from that practice, i.e. from the way of conducting that practice (conducting language games).

(3) “Our Concepts Depend on Our Physical and Social Environment in a Way That Evolution (Which Was Completed, for Our Brains, about 30,000 Years Ago) Couldn’t Foresee to have given us an innate stock of notions which includes carburetor, bureaucrat, quantum potential, etc., (...), evolution would have had to be able to anticipate all the contingencies of future physical and cultural environments. Obviously, it didn’t and couldn’t do this” (Putnam, 1991, p. 15).

Cultural contexts within which we find ourselves are part of our language practice, and the change in the conditions in which we find ourselves brings with it changes in the ways we speak about the world. It is not possible to predict the meaning of various entities in the world, because some entities have not yet been discovered or created, and thus the language for them has not yet been created. The way we identify today does not mean that it will be valid for tomorrow, just as the ways we identified a hundred years ago may not be valid for the new context of the current world in which we find ourselves now.

Although language practice is changing, the way of identification in each of its phases requires conditions under which the meaning of identification is understood, i.e. conditions under which we can agree that something is some way. In Wittgenstein, these conditions of understanding are given in the form of a concept of rules (norms); in Putnam it will be given in the form of the concept of stereotype. Bought for Putnam and Wittgenstein:

Language learning takes place through the ontogenetic process of development of human beings in social matrices and can be described as a process of binding norms of language behavior, i.e. the rules applied to the usage of linguistic generalities in various intersubjective language games. The result of this learning is stereotypical semantic patterns that must be reaffirmed or refuted in various communicative situations. It is these communicative situations in which we semantically “position” ourselves and in which we provide justification for such positioning

– justification in the form of reasons for accepting or rejecting the semantic relations of linguistic generalities that are implicit in our discursive and language behavior. (Šljivo, 2014, p. 19)

3.1. Language Stereotypes

Putnam defines stereotypes as follows:

In ordinary parlance a ‘stereotype’ is a conventional (frequently malicious) idea (which may be wildly inaccurate) of what an X looks like or acts like or is. Obviously, I am trading on some features of the ordinary parlance. I am not concerned with malicious stereotypes (save where the language itself is malicious); but I am concerned with conventional ideas, which may be inaccurate. I am suggesting that just such a conventional idea is associated with ‘tiger’, with ‘gold’, etc., and, moreover, that this is the sole element of truth in the ‘concept’ theory. In this view someone who knows what ‘tiger’ means (or, as we have decided to say instead, has acquired the word ‘tiger’) is required to know that stereotypical tigers are striped. More precisely, there is one stereotype of tigers (he may have others) which is required by the linguistic community as such; he is required to have this stereotype, and to know (implicitly) that it is obligatory. This stereotype must include the feature of stripes if his acquisition is to count as successful. (Putnam, 1979, p. 249–250)

Language stereotypes are standardized forms of language practice of a certain language community within which the meanings of certain words are clear to the users of that language. Having a stereotype would mean understanding the words of that practice or

in other words, the one who uses these terms must commit to these criteria, which are, thus set, the objective content of a collective linguistic body. This is the importance of language commitment: language commitment refers to the requirement that a speaker of a particular language must know at least some ste-

reotypical components of the term in order to be able to achieve a minimum of communication with others in a language community (Šljivo, 2014, p. 21).

Stereotypes are the conditions under which we can say that members of a community can be understood by thinking of certain meanings inherent in that context in their speaking practice. Thus, if we want to create an identity and a way of identification, it would mean creating a special pattern of meaning that belongs to that entity; because to have an identity or to determine an identity would be to find a series of words that have a certain meaning for that form of identification. To have some identity or way of identification would mean to have one form of language practice that has its exact conditions or meaning in a given context of use. Identity does not come from heaven, nor can it be revealed from the depths of our own self (there is no private language or only a system of meaning that we understand outside the language community), it arises from the language practice of a society. “What (kind of) identity such (kind of) entity”. (Ibrulj, 2021, p. 112)

4. Identity and Gender as a Product of Language Practice

If we understand language like Wittgenstein and Putnam, as the only means by which we can communicate, transmit ideas, describe the world and identify people and objects in the world, then the way we understand language we understand the world, and thus what identity and gender we are. To determine the way of identification or means to determine the language in which we express what we are committed to in the language practice of determining what one's identity and gender is. Pragmatizing the problem of meaning seeks to show how the world and one's own identities are choices made for a number of reasons by one community. This allows us to understand the word X in different contexts in different

ways if we commit ourselves to it. To accept one form of identification, one form of identity and gender means to accept one of a series of language games (which there are an infinite number of). That is, Wittgenstein and Putnam draw our attention to the fact that for the words we have in practice we can reinterpret the condition and give them alternative meanings, because there are different contexts of use of one word. If we looked for meaning outside of one social context for Wittgenstein and Putnam, we would not be able to understand the meaning of the word at all. Language cannot be private, it has no basis, no essence in some spiritual cognitive apparatus that only man has, because if that apparatus existed, all the meanings would be known in advance, but this is difficult because as time passes, man discovers new things to which he only gives certain descriptions. If the meaning were private, the meaning of a word like carburetor would be known even before we made such an object. For Putnam, choosing one meaning would mean choosing one “operational definition”. The alternative view is that ‘gold’ means whatever satisfies the contemporary ‘operational definition’ of gold. “‘Gold’ a hundred years ago meant whatever satisfied the ‘operational definition’ of gold in use a hundred years ago; ‘gold’ now means whatever satisfies the operational definition of gold in use in 1973 (...)” (Putnam, 1979, p. 235). Operational definition is just an emphasis on the fact that we have different meanings of the word depending on the context of the use of a particular phrase and the commitment to that phrase. So, for example:

If we want to know the meaning of the term gold, we need to know that the stereotype of gold represents gold as a (mostly) yellow metal. This is what society implicitly requires of us as participants in communication: we are obliged to know what is implicit in the “normal” meaning of the idea associated with the term gold. The identification of meaning takes place precisely through the stereotypes that represent its focal point (Šljivo, 2014, p. 22).

These linguistic opposites, if transferred to the concepts of identity and gender, function in the same way. These concepts and what they will

mean and signify will depend on the way we decide or commit to a particular meaning through language practice. Identity and gender are social products and constructs, the reason for this is precisely the way language is understood as the only means of expression about the world. If language and meaning have elements of holism, pragmatics and social background, so will the concepts of identity and gender, which depend on one system of words that we get through language practice in a particular language community. If we commit to a certain meaning as standardized in a certain language, we accept identity and gender as well, because these concepts are products of the way of identification through language practice.

5. Conclusion

By understanding the fallibility and contingency of language practice, we will also understand the fallibility and contingency of the concepts of identity and gender. If language practice is based on establishing stereotypes, then within practice we commit to certain concepts of identity and gender. Identification through stereotypes has not fallen from the sky but is a continuous and unpredictable process (unpredictable because it is difficult to predict the course of language practices).

Wittgenstein and Putnam, within their philosophical-linguistic theories, give us patterns for understanding language as a single product created on the social matrix. Thus, the idea of identity is de-essentialized and placed in a context within which identity and gender are the products of a culture or language community. Following their pragmatic language theory opens the possibility to look at the concepts of identity and gender as those concepts within which alternatives can be offered, or to simply exist in the multiplicity of identity and gender because there is a multiplicity of language practices, i.e. forms of life. To be able to determine the way of identifying (using language) identity and gender means to choose one stereotype or norm, or to accept or commit to one form of language practice and thus life.

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LVCs and Full Verbs: A Case of Synonymy or a Lack Thereof?

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ABSTRACT

The term ‘light verb construction’ (LVC) is applied to a construction consisting of a light (or semantically bleached) verb and a deverbal noun. LVCs are often compared to their corresponding full verbs (FVs) in terms of the supposed synonymy between them. As a matter of fact, since LVCs contain two diverse components (a verb and a noun), they give speakers the opportunity to exploit both the verbal and the nominal categories to achieve greater precision of expression.

Given that the synonymy between LVCs and their corresponding full verbs is often pointed out, this paper aims to discuss the factors motivating the occurrence of LVCs, their use and productivity in a language, i.e. to document the circumstances that encourage the periphrastic structuring of the predicate. By exploring examples from the British National Corpus and the Corpus of Contemporary American English the following phenomena will be considered: a clear semantic difference between LVCs and the corresponding FVs, the possibility of premodifying the noun in the LVC with an adjective and the possibility of quantifying the noun in the LVC. Particular attention will be paid to the aspectual opposition established between LVCs and FVs, as well as the possibility for a different hierarchy (and reduction) of arguments offered by the LVCs, which is closely related to the information structure of the sentence.

Keywords: full verbs, light verb constructions, synonymy

1. Introduction

This paper explores the debatable synonymy between light verb constructions (LVCs) and their corresponding full verbs. As is widely acknowledged, a relation of synonymy is established between words that have exactly the same meaning and are interchangeable in diverse contexts. The concept of absolute synonymy involves interchangeability in all contexts and is recognized only rarely, if at all. The different nouns used to refer to the same animal or plant could be considered absolute synonyms, but even then it is disputable whether the criterion for interchangeability in all contexts is met, as some of these words might be regional variants or could vary in the level of formality. What happens much more frequently is that a word is synonymous with another word only in some of its senses/uses but not all, in which case the words are labelled as near-synonyms. Whether there exists a sense relation of synonymy between two words can be verified by applying a substitutability test.

The term ‘light verb construction’ (LVC) is applied to a construction consisting of a light (or semantically bleached) verb and a deverbal noun. LVCs are often compared to their corresponding full lexical verbs (FVs) in terms of the supposed synonymy between them (*to have a chat vs to chat*, or *to make a promise vs to promise*). As a matter of fact, since LVCs contain both a verbal and a nominal component within their structure, they give speakers the opportunity to exploit both the verbal and the nominal categories to achieve greater precision of expression.

Given that the synonymy between LVCs and their corresponding full verbs is often pointed out, this paper aims to discuss the factors motivating the occurrence of LVCs, their use and productivity in a language, i.e. to document the circumstances that favour the periphrastic structuring of the predicate at the expense of FVs. By exploring examples from English online corpora the following phenomena are considered: a clear semantic difference between LVCs and the corresponding FVs, the possibility of premodifying the noun in the LVC with an adjective and the possibility of quantifying the noun in the LVC. Particular attention is paid to the aspec-

tual opposition established between LVCs and FVs, as well as the possibility for different hierarchy (and reduction) of arguments offered by the LVCs, which is closely related to the information structure of the sentence.

For the purposes of this analysis, the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) were searched for collocations consisting of a verb (*make, give, have* or *take*) and a noun. Although these corpora are annotated for parts of speech, the results still had to be filtered manually to find examples demonstrating the ‘light’ use of these verbs in combination with a deverbal noun. Selected examples are included in this paper to illustrate the main points.

2. Comparison between LVCs and Their Corresponding Full Verbs

LVCs testify to the “increasingly analytic character of English” (Brinton, 1996, p.193), which stems from the tendency to substitute inflectional forms with periphrastic ones. Synonymy between the simple and the analytic forms is often assumed in the proscriptions of purists, who acknowledge only register- or style-related differences between these two structures (Brinton, 1996, p.193). From a historical perspective, as much as there were assertions that LVCs are interchangeable with the FVs in the past, there have also been claims that LVCs are not necessarily equivalent to their corresponding FVs (Olsson 1961, Visser 1970, Quirk et al., 1985 and Algeo 1995, as cited in Brinton, 1996). The following paragraphs will demonstrate that LVCs differ from the FVs in several important ways.

According to Allerton (2002), those light verb constructions that do not have a corresponding full verb parallel are labelled *defective*. This means that there exists no such full verb that is etymologically related to the eventive noun in the LVC, as is the case with the construction *to make an effort* for which there is no corresponding full verb **to effort* (Allerton, 2002, p.235). Yet, it is disputable whether we can regard these constructions as light verb constructions, albeit defective ones. This is because by the definition adopted in this paper, the nouns within the LVCs (or *the*

stretched verb constructions in Allerton's terms) must be deverbal nouns derived from existing full verbs.

In addition to these rare occurrences, there are also situations where a FV has a corresponding LVC, but their semantic meaning is not identical. Such is the case with the FV *to love* versus the LVC *to make love*, each of which indicates a distinct type of interpersonal relationship. This is why both the FV and the LVC have application in language, each in its separate semantic domain.

When it comes to the adjectival modification of the noun within the LVC, there are several distinct situations. First, a relationship of semantic equivalence can be established between a LVC in which the deverbal noun is premodified by an adjective and a construction with a full verb that is modified by an adverb, as is evident from examples (1a) and (1b).

(1a) ...she left the hotel and *took a brief walk* down Hlavn Tda, the main street. (BNC)

(1b) ...she left the hotel and *walked briefly* down Hlavn Tda...

In example (2), on the other hand, a relation of synonymy cannot be established since the LVC and the construction with the FV have different interpretations. The LVC *have a quiet read* implies reading in a peaceful environment, while the construction *read quietly* implies reading by making little or no noise.

(2) Many people practice relaxation techniques, ... or *have a quiet read* in bed before turning out the light. (BNC)

Similarly, the LVC in (3), *took a short walk*, has no parallel in the construction *walked shortly*, as the adverb *shortly* means *soon* or *abruptly*, while the intended meaning of the adjective *short* used in the context of the LVC *took a short walk* is that the walk has lasted a small amount of time. This absence of total correspondence between LVCs with premodifying adjectives and FV constructions with an adverbial modifier has also been recognized by Stein (1991).

(3) Silas and I *took a short walk* along the track. (BNC)

Occasionally there is no corresponding adverb for the premodifying adjective used in the LVC, which makes the construction with a FV impossible, as is the case with *have a big argument* in (4) versus **argue bigly*.
 (4) So they *had a big argument* downstairs... (BNC)

For all these reasons, linguists generally consider adjectival modification to be one of the main motives for the use of LVCs. Some authors go even that far to claim that adjectival modification is the motivation behind the use of LVCs as much as fifty percent of the time (Rensky, 1964, as cited in Brinton, 1996).

The advantages of pluralization and quantification of the noun within the LVCs have been long recognized in linguistics. Jespersen (1942) was among the first linguists to point that out. Purely eventive nouns do not always take plural forms. It is well-known in linguistics that “less lexicalized nominalizations denote actions only, and are thus closest to the verbal meaning, but as they lexicalize, they become more polysemous, taking on result meanings and then possibly also product meanings” (Behrens, 2014, p.146). Research indicates that nouns with a more pronounced resultative interpretation oftentimes have plural forms, and in LVCs these nouns can appear either in the singular (5a) or in the plural (6a), depending on the number of times the action took place on the temporal axis. This is because lexicalized nominalizations typically adapt more readily to the word class of nouns, thus adopting some, if not all, nominal categories. There can be no semantic equivalence between the original sentences and the paraphrases with the FV *call* in these contexts unless the verb is used transitively, in which case an addressee must additionally be mentioned. Therefore, in these cases a relationship of synonymy between the FVs and the LVCs cannot be established, which is evident from the comparison of (5a) to (5b) and (6a) to (6b).

(5a) Once he got onto Santa Monica Boulevard, he *made a call*. (COCA)

(5b) Once he got onto Santa Monica Boulevard, he *called* [someone].

(6a) He and his staff *made calls* to assure that the media played along.
 (BNC)

(6b) He and his staff *called* [someone] and [someone else] to assure that the

media played along.

When it is important to specify the number of individual occurrences of the action profiled with the deverbal noun, speakers use numerals before the noun. This option is more readily available when the deverbal noun has a more resultative or objectified interpretation, as in (7) and (8), rather than a strictly eventive one. Close paraphrases with the FVs *sip* and *bite* are possible, but in such cases the idea of quantity needs to be conveyed with an adverb of definite frequency, such as *twice* or *three times* corresponding to the numerals *two* and *three* in examples (7) and (8) respectively.

- (7) She *took two sips*, then the water ran out of her mouth on to her chin. (BNC)
- (8) ... he *took three big bites* and the banana was gone. (COCA)

In situations when it is enough to convey a vague idea of plurality, it is equally possible to use quantifiers denoting imprecise quantity, such as: *some*, *a few*, *several*, etc. as in (9) or to avoid using quantifiers, as in (10). In these cases, it is irrelevant to mention the exact number of occurrences of the action. What is relevant is that this number is more than one. Paraphrases with the FVs *sip* and *bite* would lack the compactness of the LVCs and might sound somewhat strained or awkward.

- (9) She *took a few sips* of the hot coffee. (BNC)
- (10) People *took bites* without buying the cookies. (COCA)

Thus LVCs make it possible for speakers to easily make a contrast between a single occurrence and multiple occurrences of an event.

Closely related to the singularity of the deverbal noun in the LVCs, which is signaled by the presence of the indefinite article before the noun itself, is the interpretation of the LVCs as ‘single, time-bounded events’ (Berk, 1999, p. 31-32). Along the same lines are the views of Brinton (1996, 2011) Wierzbicka (1982) and Dixon (1991). With the full verb paraphrases this construal of actions or events as discrete time-limited units on the temporal axis is not possible. This contributes to an aspectual opposition

between the FVs and the corresponding LVCs, where the LVCs indicate perfective aspect by emphasizing the completion of an activity, which is usually of a shorter duration, while the FVs are perceived as more suited for the expression of ongoing activities that proceed over a longer period of time. For these reasons, one cannot draw a relation of total synonymy between example (11a) and its FV paraphrase in (11b). Example (11a) is clearly marked for the singularity and time-boundedness of the event, which is not the case with the FV paraphrase (11b), which could easily be perceived as taking a longer period of time.

(11a) ... she held him close and *gave him a passionate kiss*. (BNC)

(11b) ... she held him close and *kissed him passionately*.

In the unmarked word order, in LVCs the nominalization follows the light verb, thus placing the action profiled as a noun in direct object position. Hence, a light verb construction “serves as a means of isolating the ‘notional nucleus of the verbal predication’ and ‘singl[ing] it out as a rheme” (Rensky, 1964, as cited in Brinton, 1996). Yet, according to the functional sentence perspective, besides being realized as a rheme (in the neutral word order), the nominal component of the LVC can also be realized as a theme (in the marked word order). For example, there are several possibilities for different thematization of the arguments in the LVCs, illustrated by examples (12a) - (14). Example (12a) shows syntactic passivization of the LVC *make a discovery*, where neither the agent nor the object of the discovery is explicitly expressed. It would be impossible to render this sentence into either active or passive voice simply by using the FV *discover* without mentioning at least one of its arguments, as shown in (12b) and (12c) respectively. Not to mention the fact that the placement of *the discovery* in theme position in (12a) serves some vital information structuring purposes, and these are: presenting familiar information first, omitting the nominative and the accusative argument of the FV if they are already mentioned, unknown, irrelevant, or preferably undisclosed. Sometimes in LVCs only the accusative argument of the FV is reduced,

as in (13), other times only the agent is reduced, as in (14) and occasionally all three arguments are overtly present. Topolińska (1982) argues that the nominalization (within the LVC) “in many cases either obligatorily reduces the number of superficially present arguments or at least allows their absence” (Тополињска, 1982, p. 36-37). It is claimed that twenty percent of the LVC cases are motivated by the possibility to omit the otherwise compulsory accusative argument of the full verb (Rensky, 1964, as cited in Brinton, 1996).

(12a) *The discovery was made* yesterday. (BNC)

(12b) [Someone] *discovered* [something] yesterday.

(12c) [Something] *was discovered* yesterday.

(13) *The discovery was made* by a farmer out spraying his crops. (BNC)

(14) *The original discovery of the cancer gene was made* by fragmenting the DNA of human bladder tumour cells and feeding the fragments to cultured mouse cells. (BNC)

Topolińska (1982) lays particular emphasis on the possibility of changing the communicative hierarchy of the arguments, as one of the most important factors that encourage the use of LVCs in a language (Тополињска, 1982, p.36-38). Practically, this means that a LVC can express passive meaning without applying syntactic passivization transformations. X gives help to Y as opposed to *Y receives/gets help from X* closely reflects the active-passive voice opposition between *help* and *am/is/are helped*. LVCs with the light verbs *receive* and *get* are commonly associated with passivization of this kind. This phenomenon has also been called *lexical passivization* (Allerton, 2002, p. 251), as well as *semantic passivization* (Коњик, 2006, p. 35).

The importance of LVCs for achieving cohesion in discourse has also been pointed out (Brugman, 2001). This can be illustrated with example (15a) where the LVC facilitates the establishment of anaphoric reference. In relation to the construction with the FV in (15b), the use of the LVC in example (15a) proves to be a much better solution for the achievement of anaphoric reference.

(15a) Firm statements about the importance of grammar would be taken by many teachers and members of the general public to mean a return to Latinate grammar, and we did not wish to *give this false impression*.

(15b) *...and we did not wish to *impress [someone] falsely like this*.

The demonstrative pronoun *this* within the noun phrase *this false impression* anaphorically points backwards in the text, to the entire first clause within this compound sentence, and thus it has a cohesive function. It is practically impossible to replace the LVC *give this false impression* with the corresponding FV *impress* without consequences to the meaning, compactness and cohesion of the sentence for several reasons. First, it is debatable to what extent the FV *impress* is synonymous with the LVC *give an impression*; then, the construction with the corresponding FV must be transitive, i.e. the speaker needs to indicate who is impressed, and finally the adverb *falsely* does not collocate well with the FV *impress*.

Furthermore, there is a possibility to create paradigmatic series of LVCs based on the same deverbal noun (where each LVC illustrates a different aspect of the activity). Full verbs on their own cannot express such subtle semantic shades of meaning, as is evident from the series of LVCs with the noun *attention* listed in examples (16a) to (24). The semantic subtleties of these LVCs cannot be captured by exclusively relying on the FV *attend*. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary both document an intransitive use of the verb *attend* with the meaning "to pay attention to what somebody is saying or to what you are doing" (OALD) and "to give attention to what someone is saying" (CALD). This means that the English verb *attend* cannot adequately substitute any of the LVCs with the deverbal noun *attention*, with the exception of *give/devote/pay attention*, which is demonstrated in example (16a) and its FV paraphrase in (16b). Unlike this example, from examples (17) to (24) it becomes clear that the verb *attend* cannot substitute for the LVCs *attract/capture/draw/command/catch/grab one's attention*, *hold/keep/rivet one's attention*, *direct/turn one's attention*, *receive/get one's attention*, *divert/draw attention* and *concentrate/focus attention*. This semantic versatility of LVCs is yet

another strong motivation for their use.

1) *give/devote/pay (one's) attention* ('X allocates Y /enough, too much, little.../ space in the field of its conscious perception')¹

(16a) She seemed preoccupied with other things, although she *paid close enough attention* to what Wren was saying... (COCA)

(16b) ... although she *attended* closely enough to what Wren was saying...

2) *attract/capture/draw/command/catch/grab one's attention* ('Y is introduced into the field of X's conscious perception')

(17) One face, happier than the others, *caught his attention*. (BNC)

3) *hold/keep/rivet one's attention* ('The fact that X introduced Y into the field of its conscious perception prevents X from introducing anything else in that field')

(18) The teeth, long and jagged, grayish-white, *held her attention*. (COCA)

4) *direct/turn/draw one's attention* ('X introduces Y, and not something else, into the field of its conscious perception' or 'Z makes X introduce Y into the field of its conscious perception')

(19) So the professor *turned his attention* to Diana, and invited her to play the piano. (BNC)

(20) Gascoigne saw MacArthur on 21 May and *drew his attention* to an article that day in the Nippon Times...(BNC)

5) *receive/get one's attention* ('Y is allocated /enough, too much, little ... / space in the field of X's conscious perception')

(21) '...Jack Scamp's stolen my watch.' That *had got his attention*. (BNC)

6) *divert/draw attention* ('Y2 is introduced into the field of X's conscious

1 The paraphrases given in parenthesis for the LVCs entries 1-4 and 6-8 were originally presented by Topolińska (1982) in her contrastive analysis of Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian and Polish LVCs with the deverbal noun *pažnja/vnimanie/uwaga (attention)* (Тополинска, 1982, p.41-48). In these paraphrases X stands for the first participant i.e. the person whose attention is being discussed, Y is the second participant i.e. a person, a thing or a relation that is the object of attention, Y2 indicates the thing that diverts X's attention from Y1, and Z is a causer that directs X's attention to Y.

- perception’, which causes X to exclude Y1 from the field of its conscious perception’ or ‘Z makes X exclude Y from the field of its conscious perception’)
- (22) The conversation *diverted Julia’s attention* from her phantom arms and the frosty operating room.
- 7) *concentrate/focus attention* (X introduces/keeps Y in the centre of the field of its conscious perception’)
- (23) We shall now *concentrate our attention* on his criticism of proposition (b)... (BNC)
- 8) *retain attention* (‘Y is introduced into the field of X’s conscious perception and it remains there longer than expected’)
- (24) Ads *retained attention* better if they delivered several snippets of joy in succession... (COCA)

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper sheds some light on the supposed synonymy between LVCs and their corresponding full verbs. By addressing this issue from several perspectives, it was clearly demonstrated that some of the circumstances where substitutability of LVCs and FVs was hardly possible or impossible included: the different semantic load of the FVs in comparison to the LVCs, the use of adjectival premodifiers to the nouns in the LVCs, the use of pluralized and quantified nouns within the LVCs, the neutralization of the accusative argument of the FV in the LVC, as well as the possibility for a linear rearrangement of sentence constituents in compliance with the specific contextual and discourse needs. This list is not exhaustive, however. There are other factors that could also potentially validate the distinction between the LVCs and the corresponding FVs, such as the different styles or registers these structures are typically associated with. Yet the factors elaborated in this paper constitute some of the major issues.

This article has shown that there is a wide variety of situations where a LVC would be better suited than a FV for the expression of a particular idea. However, the preference for LVCs is not always conditioned by a given context, but sometimes reflects the original tendency of people to shape the world around them by using nouns, as terms that do not denote relations, but have referents in the world around us and within us (Gradečak -Erdeljić, 2004, p.31). That said, it is a fact of life verified in present-day corpora, that native speakers of English use both FVs and LVCs, constantly accommodating to the ever-changing demands of diverse speech situations. This certainly would not have been the case had these two structures been absolutely synonymous.

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Applications of Speech-to-Text Assistive Technologies in Language Processing

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses speech-to-text applications in the context of spoken and written English language processing, as well as human-chatbot interaction focusing on conversation with personal digital assistants (Snyder, 1977; Costa, 2018; Hester, 2016). As chatbots interact with large audiences using different language-based and speech-based interfaces, this research aims to present how communication skills in English as a foreign language may be enhanced by using speech-to-text assistive technologies while also suggesting possible applications of other speech-to-text technologies for dictation. For the purpose of the present paper, a brief historical context on the development and “personifying” of chatbots (e.g., Eliza, Alexa, Cortana) will be given and then related to the theoretical framework of psycholinguistics as well as to recent speech-to-text assistive technologies and their role in the future.

Keywords: dictation, English language, human-chatbot conversation, speech-to-text

1. Introduction

Since the early days of computing and applications of artificial intelligence in linguistics, a lot of research has been or is being done when it comes to people trying to converse and communicate with computers in a “natural” way (Wilks, 2007, p. 927). Machine dialogue had little success for several decades after the first models such as ELIZA or the rarely mentioned Parry were introduced in the 1960s. ELIZA (1966) is considered to be the first chatbot simulating a psychotherapist “able to establish a conversation, simulating it was a human being [sic], [and] its virtual model was based in rephrasing the user input” (Coheur, 2020, p. 32). Although in the 1990s speech-to-text technologies (STT) made significant progress, at the moment we can discuss machine dialogue in the domains related to applications of “recreational” chatbots (Wilks, 2007, p. 928) or applications such as *Dictanote*, which may assist in language learning.

The reason this topic was chosen for the 4th CELLTTS conference is the fact that in some published papers on personal digital assistants and chatbots these artificial intelligence entities are portrayed and critically analysed as “gendered entities”, performing tasks in a compliant manner and often associated with “secretarial” work, which is also, according to some authors, historically associated to women’s labour (see Snyder, Tanke & Berscheid, 1977) as “the virtual assistant skills portfolio includes: reading, writing, sending emails, scheduling meetings, checking calendars, taking notes, setting reminders”, etc. (Dale, 2016, p. 812).

According to Hester (2016), these products are made in such a way as to relate to a potential technology user (e.g., Microsoft has said that 150 million users use Cortana) in the best way— by showing care, empathy and a “willingness to comply”. These findings can also be related to other findings claiming that, generally speaking, women have had a significant presence in the telecommunications industry, establishing calls and communication (Zost, 2015). In these critical analyses, not only the type of labour coded as “feminine” is automated through the tasks performed by virtual assistants and chatbots but also when it comes to their names,

avatars and, interestingly enough—human voice or female “disembodied” voice (Hester, 2016, p. 50). The very title of Hester’s paper “Technology becomes Her” published in 2016 may also be related to *Her*, a movie from 2013 which addresses human nature and human-chatbot/virtual assistant bonds and the ELIZA effect, although there was “no intention of modelling the human cognitive process and despite its simplicity, ELIZA showed how a software program can cause a huge impact by the mere illusion of understanding” (Coheur, 2020, p. 33).

2. Historical and Theoretical Background

As far as the history of speech-to-text or voice technologies is concerned, before Google invented *Google Voice Search* and personalised voice recognition in 2010 trained on a corpus of 230 billion English words and mostly relying on cloud computing, the 1990s were also important as *Dragon Dictate*, the first speech recognition software for consumers, was launched in this period. These early models did not allow for a great number of words to be spoken and recognized, unlike today’s speech-to-text solutions. For instance, *Dragon Naturally Speaking* allowed users to speak 100 words per minute. As already said, most earlier technologies found their application in business and industry. For instance, the U.S. Department of Defense continually developed speech recognition systems in the 1970s, while the solutions developed by Bell Laboratories in the 1950s could understand only numbers (Kikel, 2021). What is important to mention for the purpose of the present paper is that a distinction will be made between the Question/Answering (QA) (and Dialogue) systems and other speech-to-text options integrated into Word or those available online. In addition, the paper also observes speech-to-text technologies from a psycholinguistic aspect of the study of text (or born-digital text) as a “product of speech” and the projection of the text as understood by the reader, or the recipient of the text. According to Dem’yankov (Dem’yankov, 1992, as cited in Guzel, Ramil & Usmanova, 2018, p. 113), text is created to transfer

the thought of the author and represents a structure which includes the following components: the author (the addresser of the text), the reader (the addressee), the displayed reality itself, knowledge of which is imparted in the text, and the language system which the author chooses the language means from.

Therefore, the theoretical framework observing “text” as a product of “speech activity” (see Guzel, Ramil & Usmanova, 2018, p. 114, Table 1. Psycholinguistic Study of Text and Linguistic Study of Text) will be used to discuss how chatbots may be utilized as a tool in speech-to-text activities to improve the speaking (and writing) skills of students who are studying English as a foreign language as these tools may, alongside other benefits, work as corrective feedback due to their nature when recognizing “non-native language” or when “identifying errors” in a similar fashion as errors are identified by human listeners.

In that line, the orientation phase of the creation of text is hereby proposed to represent cognitive activity to activate a lexical item or sentence onscreen and in the creation of text from speech which is uninterrupted. For instance, in the case of human-chatbot interaction, the speaker is projecting the text onto the computer screen without delay. This is important to mention as early speech-to-text technologies required users to make breaks between words. The phase of implementation, or language materialisation, occurs once the word or sentence is uttered (or spoken into the microphone) and as the speech-to-text application is launched, providing the reader with the written form. And finally, the phase of control, in this case, is perceived as a phase in which the author checks whether the text is structured in a correct way, edits the text, and learns from it.

3. Speech-to-Text Assistive Technologies in English Language Processing: Speaking and Writing

In order to analyse a corpus of responses obtained from speech-to-text technologies, two widely available applications were selected for the purposes of the present paper: *Cortana* (“a virtual assistant”) and *Dic-*

tanote. In both cases, all of the above-mentioned phases were taken into consideration in terms of how the author of the text materialised and projected spoken language onto the screen, i.e., the spoken language that was automatically and simultaneously converted into a written form, which was then analysed, leaving other options of input open for further research.

In the first phase of research, the author observed and analysed the responses provided by Cortana to various declarative sentences, imperatives, yes-no and *wh*-questions. In the second phase of research, the author demonstrated how other applications, such as *Dictanote*, may be used to work with the text and its materialisation which also may depend on the author's pronunciation (i.e., in order for the spoken input to be understood and converted into a written form that can later be edited). The techniques used were observational (derived from recording linguistic behaviour), experimental (derived from setting linguistic tests), and based upon self-report (where a subject describes a linguistic process as they are experiencing it or shortly afterwards) (see Field, 2003, p. 49).

3.1. Yes-no Questions, Wh-questions and Imperatives in Dialogue-based Systems

In relation to the research titled *Conversations with Eliza* and other research (Costa 2018), conversations with Cortana of particular interest for the purposes of the present paper were analysed to assess if this dialogue-based system could also be used to enhance language production, speech in particular, as speech needs to be activated (in voice) in order to converse with Cortana. According to Costa (2018), Cortana posed as “a maternal and somewhat intimate assistant who seeks a friendly relationship with the user” (p. 8), which may be illustrated by several examples provided below. In almost all cases, Cortana was oriented towards finding solutions to a problem.

Interestingly, as for the statements “I'm tired” or “Cortana, I'm tired”, Cortana provided different responses when the statement was uttered during the day and late at night. In the first case, Cortana suggested the

user to “go offline for a little while”, while in the other situation, Cortana offered to set the alarm clock:

(1) User: I’m tired.

Cortana: I’ll set a nap alarm if you tell me when to wake you up.

(2) User: I’m tired.

Cortana: Maybe you should go offline for a little while.

A similar solution-oriented response was given to an (3) “I don’t like coffee” input. In this case, Cortana provided links to several solutions directing the user to a “How to Like Coffee” website. As for other statements, Cortana showed compliance and willingness to find a solution to a problem or continue the conversation even in the case of the user saying only (4) “Goodbye”, e.g.:

(3) User: Goodbye.

Cortana: I’ll be here to help pick up where you left off.

Just say, “Show recent files.”

For online classrooms and applications of dialogue-based systems, it might be useful to analyse interaction in the case of *questions and answers*, which could be one of the best applications to practice *yes-no questions* for students of English. Another aspect that should not be forgotten is that the screenshots provided in this paper (Appendix) show only the written text, whereas in a real online or offline classroom situation, speech production would be directly monitored in relation to Cortana’s responses, not only in terms of grammar, but also in terms of pronunciation. Another example and in line with the previously stated, is an example of a yes-no question asking “Are you tired?”, to which the answer by Cortana remains the same whenever asked:

(4) User: Are you tired?

Cortana: I’m 0% tired.

As for *wh*-questions, there are infinite options on how to use speech-to-text applications when conversing with a chatbot. Word order is a general problem with these types of questions for students whose L1 is

not English and for the purposes of the present paper it has been tested whether Cortana will notice the difference between or ungrammaticality of sentences as in (6) “What time it is?” and (7) “What time is it?”. As can be seen from the examples provided below, the correct answers were obtained regardless of the word order, which is why chatbots might *not* be the best application for understanding correct usage of *wh*-questions. At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that the application automatically added the question marks in both cases:

(5) User: What time is it?

Cortana: I pulled up the time in Sarajevo. Current time in Sarajevo (UTC+2) 1:19 AM, Tue, Aug 24, 2021

(6) User: What time it is?

Cortana: I pulled up the time in Sarajevo. Current time in Sarajevo (UTC+2) 1:19 AM, Tue, Aug 24, 2021

Another example tested was with the auxiliary verb *do*, and the responses were the same for both grammatical and ungrammatical questions:

(7) User: Where do you live?

Cortana: In the cloud. Whatever that means.

(8) User: Where you live?

Cortana: In the cloud. Whatever that means.

As for *imperatives*, the chatbot was not fully co-operative for instructions such as:

(9) User: Sing me a lullaby.

Cortana: You know, I just don't have the chops for that.

(10) User: Sing me a song.

Cortana: I'm not a very good singer, but I can check your schedule if you ask me.

The most productive output was in the case of Cortana providing different answers for “Tell me a joke”. In each case, the joke given as a re-

sponse contained idiomatic language or puns, which is why it could be proposed that Q/A applications and chatbots such as Cortana may be used to discuss *language comprehension*, e.g.:

(11) User: Tell me a joke.

Cortana: How does the moon cut its hair? Eclipse it.

User: That's funny.

Cortana: I'm glad my judicious application of humor is working.

(12) User: Tell me a joke.

Cortana: Why was the scarecrow awarded a Nobel Prize? Because he was out standing in his field.

Aside from testing comprehension, it is also important to mention that in the dialogue-based systems, the response given by Cortana in this case is given both in writing and sound, which may assist in relating spelling to pronunciation (e.g., "eclipse" or "crow"). At the same time, users of the application and students can practice *translation* of the jokes provided by Cortana, which is an even more challenging task. Based on the responses provided, it should be added that the set responses may have been upgraded so as not to follow the socially enforced stereotypes mentioned earlier.

3.2. Speech-to-Text Technologies for Dictation: Dictanote

In order to raise awareness of the importance of using speech-to-text technologies to assist students in developing their writing skills as well (including correct spelling), only to further illustrate the importance of this topic, a reference can be made to, for instance, dictation grades for second year students at the Department of English Language and Literature in 2012. At the time, the instructors calculated the number of errors for each grade and tracked data in an electronic format: the number of students taking the dictation (64), the number of students who did not pass the dictation component of the course (20) and error count per student whereas individual error count ranged from 11 to 30 for 250 words.

What may be concluded from this example, and others that may follow in further research on this topic, is that students struggle with spelling

so that the number of errors they make in their dictation exams is “well beyond the limit”. Currently, there are numerous solutions provided by speech-to-text technologies for persons who also struggle with dyslexia, for instance (see Hasselbring & Candyce, 2000, and solutions developed by LD Resources Foundation). Furthermore, by means of using speech-to-text technologies for dictation, students or users of the application may also edit and revise writing, or practice spelling when it comes to the differences in spelling between British and American English.

In this paper, *Dictanote* as well is used to illustrate how speech-to-text technologies may be applied in a contemporary English language course. Prior to mentioning the importance of using speech-to-text technologies such as *Dictanote*, it might also be relevant to add that speaking and writing skills are enhanced even by means of learning the commands required by *Dictanote*, for instance:

(13) insert at (@), insert plus (+), insert minus (-), insert equal (=), or, more importantly learning the punctuation marks by means of practicing the commands such as: full stop (.), exclamation mark (!), hashtag (#), ellipsis (...), semicolon (;), forward slash (/), underscore (_), dash (—), comma (,), ampersand (&), colon (:), question mark (?), backslash (\), and hyphen (-).

Speech-to-text applications, such as *Dictanote*, may also be used to raise awareness about plagiarism and proper citing for the reason that the voice commands also include instructions on how to use voice commands to open different types of brackets, such as:

(14) “open quote” (“), “open single quote” (‘), “open double quote” (“), “open brace” ({), “open parenthesis” ((), “open angle bracket” (<), “close quote” (”), “close single quote” (’), “close double quote” (”), “close brace” (}), “close parenthesis” ()), “close bracket” (}), “close angle bracket” (>).

In order to demonstrate how voice-to-text may be used in online teaching but also for different purposes such as writing or translation, the

abstract of the present paper was read into the application by the author of the paper. The duration of reading was 2 minutes and *no commands* were given while reading, which requires more time in the editing phase:

(16) The paper discusses speech-to-text applications in the context of spoken and written English language processing as well as human chatbot interaction focusing on conversation with personal digital assistants Schneider 1917 at 7 Costa 2018 Hester 2016 as chatbots interact with large audiences using different language based and speech based interfaces this research aims to present how communication skills in English as a foreign language may be enhanced by using speech to text assistive technologies while also suggesting possible applications of other speech-to-text technologies for dictation a brief historical context on the development and personifying of chatbots for example Eliza Alexa and Cortana will be given and unrelated to the theoretical framework of psycholinguistics as well as two recent speech to text assistive technologies and their role in the future human chatbot conversation speech to text dictation English language

It is interesting to notice that *Dictanote* applied hyphens in speech-to-text, although no voice commands were given and also that words such as “English”, “Costa”, and “Cortana” were capitalized. As for “Schneider 1917”, the error could be attributed to the reading pace. It may be concluded from the example above that even without the commands, *Dictanote* is also a practical tool for all the phases mentioned in the theoretical part of the paper. In the second attempt, the voice commands were used and the following result was obtained in five minutes:

(17) The paper discusses speech – to – text applications in the context of spoken and written English language processing, as well as human – chatbot interaction focusing on conversation with personal digital assistants open brackets Schneider, 1977; Costa, 2018; Hester, 2016 close brackets. As chatbots interact with large

audiences using different language – based in speech – based interfaces, this research aims to present how communication skills in English as a foreign language may be enhanced by using speech – 25th and text assistive technologies while also suggesting possible applications of other speech – – text technologies for dictation. For the purpose of the present paper, a brief historical context on the development and open quotation marks personifying closed quotation marks of chess boards chatbots open brackets my. G . , Eliza, Alexa, Cortana close brackets will be given and then related to the theoretical framework of psycholinguistics as well as to recent speech to text assistive technologies and their role in the future.

As can be seen in the Appendix, the reading aloud and the typing by the computer itself were going on simultaneously and the speaker, if focused on reading only, may find it difficult to pay attention to the right side of the screen, although it is possible to edit the text while reading aloud. This activity may be repeated with different texts and different speakers, and errors may be explained or places in the text identified where one would expect errors to occur. Therefore, if these technologies are integrated into the syllabi of skills-based courses, students and speakers of English as a foreign language could benefit more in the future which is predicted to be comprised of voice-only interactions (see Juniper Research, 2018).

4. Conclusion

Dictation technologies may be used to convert speech into digital text on screen. This possibility is convenient especially in the context of online learning but also in the case the learner or writer needs a hands-free environment, needs improvement or has poor writing skills, or needs to practice spelling, which accounts for the greatest number of mistakes made in dictations apart from errors of omission, adding articles where they are not necessary, adding a plural -s where not necessary (errors of addition), etc.

(Corder, 1981). In this paper, the aim was to present a brief history of the development of speech-to-text technologies and point to the importance of their application in both online and offline settings. Blending the skills of speaking and writing in this way, i.e., producing speech and then observing speech produced onscreen, may assist in practicing correct pronunciation, simulate dialogue, and may also help in the acquisition of idioms and phrasal verbs, as shown in the Cortana examples.

As for issues when it comes to writing, other applications may be used to use the two skills in a more coherent manner, as in the case of using applications, such as *Dictanote*, that are available online and that allow students to monitor their own progress not only when it comes to pronunciation, understanding word and sentence boundaries but also when it comes to spelling. This approach could also be classified as a psycholinguistic study of text as a “product of speech” and its projection onto the screen where the author of the text is also the author of the “speech activity”, its reader, as well as a potential editor of the written output.

In addition to understanding their limitations by testing how they understand and cope with syntax and ambiguity, speech-to-text technologies (STT) can be personalized and adjusted for different learning outcomes as well (see Derwing & Carbonaro, 2000). A more detailed analysis of all the limitations that are still an integral part of STTs is beyond the scope of this paper the aim of which was to provide a brief theoretical background on the attempts to convert speech into text which have undoubtedly been successful in their progress and allow both linguists and language instructors to integrate STTs into their studies from various perspectives and integrate them, depending on students’ needs, into skills-based courses to reinforce and demonstrate the connection between language production and language comprehension on and beyond the screen.

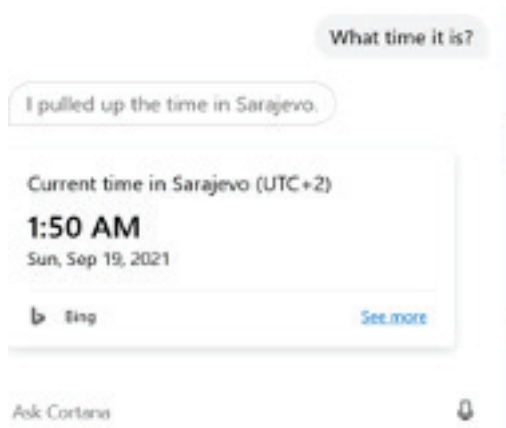
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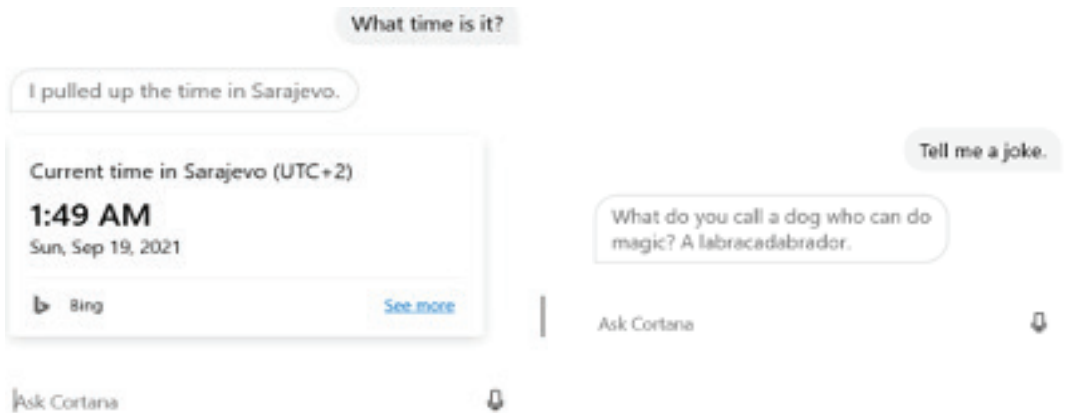
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Appendix

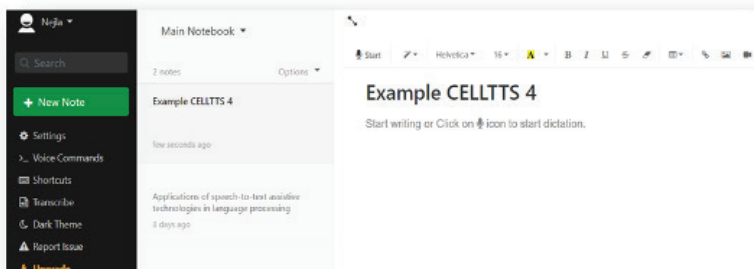
Screenshot 1. “What time it is?” vs. “What time is it?”



Screenshot 2. “Tell me a joke”



Screenshot 3. Dictanote interface



Male and Female Student Interpreters: Do Their Performances Differ?

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ABSTRACT

Interpreting training focuses on the acquisition and improvement of interpreting skills in order to achieve performance that meets professional standards. Until March 2020, interpreting training at the research site (Matej Bel University in Slovakia) took place in the real environment of the interpreting booth; after this date it was transferred to a virtual environment. The present study examines consecutive interpreting performances that were delivered in a virtual environment in the winter 2020/2021 semester, taking into account the gender of the assessed subjects. The research sample consisted of eight first-year master's students – four women and four men – who were enrolled in the course *Consecutive Interpreting in Practice*. The students completed three interpreting recordings – one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end of the semester – for the purposes of monitoring their potential progress. The research focuses on the formal component of interpreting (hesitations, vowel and consonant lengthening, repairs, repetitions, extraneous sounds, false starts, unfinished sentences) as well as on the semantic component of interpreting (added information, omitted information, negative shifts). The research also pays attention to criteria such as satisfaction with one's own interpreting and voice confidence. The research suggests that differences by gender in the formal and semantic components of students' interpreting performances are not clear-cut. Most formal deficiencies were better eliminated by the male students (false starts, redundant sounds, vowel and consonant lengthening, repairs, hesitations), but some

by female students (repetitions). In terms of content, the female students were more faithful to the original. Overall, the male students were more satisfied with their interpreting performances.

Keywords: consecutive interpreting, formal component, male and female student interpreters, self-assessment, semantic component

1. Gender in Interpreting

In some professions men predominate; in others, women do. The field of interpreting tends to be female-predominant (Gentile, 2018; Djovčoš & Šveda, 2017; Štubňa, 2020; Zwischenberger, 2011; Angelelli, 2004). According to Pöchhacker (2004, p. 174): “Among the explanations advanced for the feminization of the profession has been a superior aptitude for languages and communication in women.” By analogy, we observe a similar phenomenon among students of translation and interpreting, where enrolled female students far exceed the number of enrolled male students (Du, 2020). In Slovakia the same phenomenon was illustrated by Melicherčíková (2017, p. 87).

As Du (2020) argues, this noticeable gender imbalance has attracted limited scholarly attention. Comparing the amount of work on gender in translation studies with that in interpreting studies, it becomes evident that very little research has been conducted to explore gender-related issues in interpreting (Du, 2020). However, the number of such studies has been growing gradually over the last decade (Magnifico & Defrancq, 2020; Collard & Defrancq, 2020; Magnifico & Defrancq, 2019; Verdini, 2019; Magnifico & Defrancq, 2017; Magnifico & Defrancq, 2016).

Before we present the main findings of these studies (proceeding chronologically), it is important to note that not all of them are comparable, as they differ in the research samples, research corpora and methods they use, focus on different aspects and language combinations, or are implemented in different cultures. Nevertheless, they provide us with

interesting and often valuable findings concerning interpreters' gender.

One of the earlier studies (Cecot, 2001) investigated pauses in professional simultaneous interpreting. The study found, *inter alia*, that women used more filled pauses (hesitations) in simultaneous interpreting than men. Several other studies that emerged in the following years were the result of the 2013–2017 interpreting project *Gender and sex dimensions of simultaneous interpreting* (n.d.), carried out by principal investigator Defrancq and co-researchers Collard and Magnifico. The project aimed at verifying whether findings relating to spontaneous oral language production also apply to the cognitively more difficult activity of simultaneous interpreting. One of the first studies (Magnifico & Defrancq, 2016) involved the issue of impoliteness in interpreting. The authors studied whether female and male interpreters demonstrated different patterns of behavior when faced with speakers' face-threatening acts. Their results indicate that simultaneous interpreters downtone face-threatening acts, which means that they do not adhere to interpreter norms. However, contrary to expectations, male interpreters downtone more than female interpreters. In another study, Magnifico & Defrancq (2017) investigated potential gender-related tendencies in professional interpreters' use of hedges. Analyzing and comparing various approaches, they define a hedge in interpreting as "a linguistic item which mitigates an utterance, conveying tentativeness and saving face for the interlocutor or the speaker" (Magnifico & Defrancq, 2017, p. 28). The results showed that female interpreters hedged more than male interpreters. As regards strategies (omission, translation, addition) that might be related to the interpreters' use of hedges, the study showed that female interpreters made more additions than their male counterparts. Magnifico & Defrancq (2019) also focused on the use of self-repair by female and male interpreters. Drawing from the literature the authors hypothesized that female interpreters would produce more self-repairs. The data showed that gender might influence the use of self-repairs in interpreting. Magnifico & Defrancq (2020) further analyzed the use of connective markers by female and male interpreters. Based on the results, the interpreter's gender does not appear to influence their use. Collard & De-

francq (2020) studied disfluencies (filled and silent pauses, false starts and lengthening) in simultaneous interpreting. Simultaneous interpreting is a cognitively demanding activity in which interpreters face a high cognitive load. The authors (Collard & Defrancq, 2020) reported findings from several studies that suggested that women performed better than men on verbal and memory tasks. Since disfluencies seem to be the consequence of cognitive load, female interpreters might produce fewer disfluencies than male interpreters. In this case, the results confirmed the hypothesis, but some of them were contrary to Cecot's (2001) findings.

All the previous studies focused on simultaneous interpreting and professional interpreters, in some cases confirming gender-related differences, in others not. Very few studies deal with consecutive interpreting and/or students of interpreting from the standpoint of gender. One among them is the study by Verdini (2019) which provided an experimental analysis of possible differences and similarities between female and male students of interpreting. Its results pointed to some remarkable gender differences. Overall, it seemed that female interpreters were better at handling figurative language and words related to health, while male interpreters performed better as far as numbers, dates, and financial vocabulary were concerned. In line with this finding, women were more fluent at interpreting medical texts, while men maintained higher fluency in economic texts. These findings suggest that gender-related differences may affect the performance of interpreters.

The above information was the starting point for our research interest. Our data were collected during consecutive interpreting seminars, similarly to the study by Verdini (2019). The research aimed to investigate whether differences by gender in deficiencies in the formal component¹ (hesitations, vowel and consonant lengthening, repairs, repetitions, redundant sounds, false starts, unfinished sentences) and semantic component (added information, omitted information, negative shifts) of students' interpreting performances are clear-cut. It also paid attention to criteria such as satisfaction with one's own interpreting and voice confidence.

1 We can generally call them disfluencies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 8 students², 4 men and 4 women, ranging from 21 to 24 years of age, the average age being 22.6 years. Slovak was the mother tongue of all the students. All were first-year master's students of translation and interpreting (T&I) in the following programs: English – German (1), English – Russian (1), English – Spanish (4), T&I and history (1), and T&I and philosophy (1).

As regards their translational preferences (obtained from an online questionnaire), four subjects (50%) stated a preference for translating over interpreting. Three students (37.5%) stated an equal preference for interpreting and translating, while one student (12.5%) was more inclined to interpreting. The preferences of these latter four subjects (half of our sample) might be viewed as desirable for this particular interpreting research. The subjects' individual translational preferences and gender are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Students' Translational Preferences and Gender*

Student	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Preference	T	T	T	I/T	I/T	T	I/T	I
Gender	M	M	M	F	M	F	F	F

Legend: T – preference for translating, I/T – equal preference for interpreting and translating, I – preference for interpreting, M – male, F – female

The data in Table 1 show that most of the males (S1, S2, S3) preferred translating and most females either tended equally to interpreting and translating (S4, S7) or preferred interpreting (S8). Thus, women in our sample seem to be more motivated in the context of our particular research, which may lead us to expect the women to outperform the men.

2 The number of students that select interpreting courses is much lower than those that select translation courses.

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. Questionnaire

At the beginning of the study, students filled out an online questionnaire which was intended to elicit basic demographic data such as the age and sex of the respondents and basic information about their study program. We also paid attention to their translational preferences (translation vs. interpreting).

2.2.2. Interpreting

The present study examined the performance of students in consecutive interpreting with notes (i.e. high consecutive). Students interpreted three speeches consecutively from English into Slovak at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the semester, and their performances were recorded. All the speeches were recorded for the purposes of our research³ by a native speaker of English (General American accent), and they presented general topics (dreaming, animals, graffiti). Their input variables, such as length, speech rate, accent and density, were controlled in order to ensure the neutrality and comparability of the individual speeches. We also tried to ensure that the monitored variables corresponded to the recommendations in the literature (Čeňková, 1988; Pöchhacker, 2004; Djovčoš & Melicherčíková & Vilímek, 2021). All the speeches lasted approximately 6.5 minutes, and their speech rate was approximately 200 syllables per minute/120 words per minute. Monosyllabic words made up the majority of the words in all recordings. Multi-syllable words did not exceed 15%. The only variable where we observed certain differences among the speeches was lexical saturation (ranging from 50% in the first speech to 60% in the last speech). Lexically unsaturated texts are generally considered to be those with less than 56% saturation (*Analyze My Writing*, n.d.). The third recording therefore constituted a lexically saturated speech, which might have had a negative effect on interpreting performance.

3 KEGA 026UMB-4/2019: *Rigorous Interpreting Textbook*.

2.2.3. Interpreting Assessment

In order to assess students' interpreting performances in a detailed and comprehensive way, we took into account findings of several studies as well as surveys among interpreting users and professional interpreters (e.g. Bühler, 1986; Kurz, 1993; Moser, 1996; Zwischenberger & Pöchhacker, 2010; Collados Aís et al., 2011; Collados Aís & García Becerra, 2015; Chevalier & Gile, 2015). These surveys document that both the content criteria (semantic agreement between the original and its interpreting) and the formal criteria (delivery) are important despite the differing relevance attributed to them. In the present study we used a self-assessment sheet designed by Machová (2016), which we adapted to our own needs⁴. When assessing the interpreting performances, we focused on selected formal deficiencies (hesitations, vowel and consonant lengthening, repairs, repetitions, false starts, redundant sounds, unfinished sentences) and selected semantic deficiencies (additions, omissions, negative shifts). The formal categories are defined in more detail by scholars such as Rennert (2010) and the website of the VERBMOBIL project (https://www.phonetik.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/Verbmobil/trllex_e_html/projects/verbmobil.html). Although there are no standards or limits for these deficiencies, minimizing their occurrence should contribute to a better interpreting performance and accordingly to a better assessment. The interpreting assessment also included self-assessment (overall satisfaction with own interpreting, voice confidence).

2.3. Procedure

The data processed in this study were obtained during the course *Consecutive Interpreting in Practice* in the winter 2020/2021 semester, when most instruction at Matej Bel University took place online (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) via MS Teams. The research was anonymous. The students' interpreting performances were recorded three times: at

4 This self-assessment sheet was prepared as part of the project KEGA 026UMB-4/2019: *Rigorous Interpreting Textbook*.

the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester. Due to certain limitations, only audio recordings were possible. The first recording was made in the first seminar (real environment); it was not preceded by any immediate interpreter training. The second recording was made six weeks later (virtual environment), and the third recording was made after another six weeks (virtual environment), at the end of this particular interpreter training. Before each recording, students were given a glossary with the topic of the recording and selected terminology; during the following few minutes of preparation they could (on the internet, in online dictionaries) look up unknown phrases. After each recording, their task was to transcribe their interpreting performances, mark them up (with specific abbreviations and color coding) and analyze any formal or semantic deficiencies. Such occurrences were counted and put in a separate table. Students also had to score their voice confidence (1 to 4; 1 being not persuasive, 4 being persuasive) and their overall satisfaction with their own interpreting (1 to 5; 1 being unsatisfied, 5 being maximally satisfied).

After the end of the semester, the author of this study compared the interpreting recordings of the participating students from the first and the third rounds (beginning and end of the semester) with their transcripts, corrected the identified deficiencies in the transcripts and in the identified categories, and subsequently corrected the number of formal deficiencies. The transcripts were also compared with the propositional analysis (semantic units) of the original transcripts to check the identified semantic deficiencies. The checked and corrected data were subsequently evaluated.

3. The Results

Our research was conducted on a relatively small sample⁵ of 8 students, which was further divided into two equal groups (male, female). This enables us to compare the individual scores. We will focus on the de-

5 Research on interpreting has often involved small samples of (student) subjects (Pöschhacker, 2004). One of the reasons for this is the fact that in the combined study of translation and interpreting, as in our case, only a small number of students have the predisposition and skills for interpreting.

iciencies at the beginning and at the end of the semester and also consider the tendency (improvement, stagnation, deterioration) between the beginning (the first recording) and the end of the semester (the third recording), which should reflect the effectiveness of the training. We will analyze three categories: formal deficiencies, semantic deficiencies, and self-assessment.

3.1. Formal Deficiencies

When analyzing formal deficiencies, we focused on seven criteria in the first recording (Table 2) and the third recording (Table 3). Data on these deficiencies' total or average number alone would not be accurate, as the interpreting durations varied. For this reason, we have calculated the periodicity of the group, i.e. the hypothetical regularity of occurrence (in seconds), which will allow us to make a more objective comparison between the groups. In using periodicity, we must take three facts into account: first, a periodicity of zero is the best possible result. Second, if higher than zero, the higher the periodicity, the lower the deficiency. Third, if the total occurrence of a deficiency is equal to one, the periodicity may be inaccurate, in which case the average must also be taken into account.

Table 2. *Formal Deficiencies in the First Recording*

Recording 1 – <i>Dreams</i> (6:38)								
Student	Duration	FS	US	REP	RS	L	R	H
S1 (M)	6:42	3	0	1	0	9	10	18
S2 (M)	5:09	0	0	4	0	13	4	13
S3 (M)	5:38	0	1	2	0	2	14	1
S5 (M)	3:39	0	0	1	4	1	7	7
Average	5:17	0.8	0.3	2	1	6.3	8.8	9.8
Periodicity		422.7	1268	158.5	317	50.7	36.2	32.5
S4 (F)	3:43	0	0	0	0	3	4	5
S6 (F)	5:44	3	0	1	1	2	7	13
S7 (F)	5:28	2	0	2	5	10	3	14
S8 (F)	5:26	4	0	4	0	1	13	1
Average	5:05	2.3	0	1.8	1.5	4	6.8	8.3
Periodicity		135.7	0	174.4	203.5	76.3	45.2	37

Legend: M – male, F – female, FS – false starts, US – unfinished sentences, REP – repetitions, RS – redundant sounds, L – vowel/consonant lengthening, R – repairs, H – hesitations

It is clear from Table 2 that at the beginning of the semester, at the beginning of their training, female students better managed to minimize formal deficiencies. In five out of the seven criteria, namely unfinished sentences, repetitions, vowel and consonant lengthening, repairs and hesitations, they displayed lower averages and better periodicity (higher periodicity is desirable, as a higher interval in seconds means a lower frequency of deficiency). At the same time, it should be added that in the case of unfinished sentences, the difference between the two groups (male vs. female) was minimal, with both groups achieving very good results in this criterion. In the first recording, the male students achieved better results in two criteria, namely false starts and redundant sounds; moreover, false starts were the criterion that showed the greatest difference between the groups. The periodicity also indicates that the individual deficiencies occurred with varying frequency, unfinished sentences being the least frequent and hesitations being the most frequent.

If we look at the data from the end of the semester, after the third recording (Table 3), from the standpoint of averages and periodicity, we see differences between the two groups' results.

Table 3. Formal Deficiencies in the Third Recording

Recording 3 – Graffiti (6:38)								
Student	Duration	FS	US	REP	RS	L	R	H
S1 (M)	8:17	0	1	5	0	17	11	7
S2 (M)	4:56	0	0	1	0	6	2	4
S3 (M)	5:46	0	0	0	0	2	3	1
S5 (M)	6:10	0	0	1	11	5	11	8
Average	6:17	0	0.3	1.8	2.8	7.5	6.8	5
Periodicity		0	1509	215.6	137.2	50.3	55.9	75.5
S4 (F)	5:55	0	0	0	0	5	1	1
S6 (F)	7:19	0	0	1	1	3	9	12
S7 (F)	6:21	0	0	0	11	31	9	28
S8 (F)	6:34	2	1	5	0	5	10	4
Average	6:32	0.5	0.3	1.5	3	11	7.3	11.3
Periodicity		784.5	1569	261.5	130.8	35.7	54.1	34.9

Legend: M – male, F – female, FS – false starts, US – unfinished sentences, REP – repetitions, RS – redundant sounds, L – vowel/consonant lengthening, R – repairs, H – hesitations

In this case, the male students managed to better minimize the formal deficiencies and achieved better scores in six out of seven criteria. For some criteria the differences between the groups were minimal (redundant sounds, repairs); for others they were significant (hesitations). As regards unfinished sentences, both groups achieved equally good results. The only criterion in which female students outperformed male students was repetitions. Similarly to the beginning of the semester, the individual deficiencies occurred with varying frequency, the least frequent again being unfinished sentences (along with false starts) and the most common again being hesitations.

Given the data available to us, it is difficult to specify the reason for this (unexpected) result. We cannot say unequivocally that it is related purely to the gender of the respondents, as our research included a very small sample. The reason could also be due to certain gender-independent cognitive skills or personality traits of the subjects, which could be confirmed by additional research. In our case, this is an interesting tendency that needs to be verified in the future.

Comparing the group results at the beginning and end of this interpreting training, it is evident that the male students achieved comparable (unfinished sentences) or better results (false starts, redundant sounds) in the three formal criteria and achieved better results in the other three criteria (vowel/consonant lengthening, repairs, hesitations). The female students, on the other hand, were able to maintain comparable results (unfinished sentences) or (slightly) better results (repetitions) in only two criteria. Thus, despite “more appropriate” translational preferences, they did not achieve better overall results in other formal criteria. There can be several reasons for this, such as the weaker performance of the student S7 in the last recording, or the lexical saturation of the third recording (number of enumerations, numbers and years).

The findings above concern the comparison of groups; now we will look at the trends in the groups for each criterion, i.e. whether the criterion has improved, stagnated or worsened (Table 4).

Table 4. *Tendencies in Formal Deficiencies*

Criterion	Group	R1 (average periodicity)	R3 (average periodicity)	Tendency
False starts	M	422.7	0	↗
	F	135.7	784.5	↗
Unfinished sentences	M	1268	1509	→
	F	0	1569	↘
Repetitions	M	158.5	215.6	↗
	F	174.4	261.5	↗
Redundant sounds	M	317	137.2	↘
	F	203.5	130.8	↘
Vowel/consonant lengthening	M	50.7	50.3	↘
	F	76.3	35.7	↘
Repairs	M	36.2	55.9	↗
	F	45.2	54.1	↗
Hesitations	M	32.5	75.5	↗
	F	37	34.9	↘

Legend: M – male, F – female, ↗ improvement, → stagnation, ↘ worsening

The last column of the table shows that over the semester the men displayed improvement in four criteria, the women in three criteria. Although there was no improvement in unfinished sentences, the incidences of this deficiency were minimal in both groups. These findings suggest differing effectiveness in eliminating formal deficiencies between men and women and underline the need for due attention to formal deficiencies in interpreting training. In general, the average periodicity points to better minimization of formal deficiencies in men as a result of interpreter training.

3.2. Semantic Deficiencies

When analyzing semantic deficiencies, we focused on three criteria in the first recording (Table 5) and the third recording (Table 6). For

omitted information, we used propositional analysis (number of semantic units) to express the ratio of omitted information to total information. The obtained data were converted into percentages. We thus ensured comparability between students and between rounds of recording. For additions and negative shifts, we calculated the periodicity to allow for a more objective comparison between groups.

Table 5. *Semantic Deficiencies in the First Recording*

Recording 1 – <i>Dreams</i>				
Student	Duration	Omissions	Additions	Negative shifts
S1 (M)	6:42	6 (16.2%)	2	4
S2 (M)	5:09	12 (32.4%)	2	7
S3 (M)	5:38	7 (18.9%)	4	6
S5 (M)	3:39	16 (43.2%)	1	2
Average	5:17	10.3 (27.7%)	2.3	4.8
Periodicity		30.9	140.9	66.7
S4 (F)	3:43	12 (32.4%)	2	2
S6 (F)	5:44	4 (10.8%)	0	3
S7 (F)	5:28	2 (5.4%)	1	3
S8 (F)	5:26	9 (24.3%)	4	4
Average	5:05	6.8 (18.2%)	1.8	3.0
Periodicity		45.2	174.4	101.8

Legend: M – male, F – female

It is clear from Table 5 that at the beginning of the semester, at the beginning of the training, the female students better managed to minimize all three semantic deficiencies. On average, they omitted significantly less information, made fewer additions and fewer negative shifts. They achieved lower averages and better (higher) periodicity than the male students. The periodicity indicates that the individual deficiencies occurred with varying frequency, the least frequent being additions and the most frequent being omissions.

If we look at the data from the end of the semester, after the third recording (Table 6), from the standpoint of averages and periodicity, we

see that the relationship between the groups has changed for only one criterion.

Table 6. *Semantic Deficiencies in the Third Recording*

Recording 3 – <i>Graffiti</i>				
Student	Duration	Omissions	Additions	Negative shifts
S1 (M)	8:17	2 (4.3%)	2	7
S2 (M)	4:56	12 (26.1%)	0	6
S3 (M)	5:46	6 (13%)	2	2
S5 (M)	6:10	7 (15.2%)	1	3
Average	6:17	6.8 (14.7%)	1.3	4.5
Periodicity		55.9	301.8	83.8
S4 (F)	5:55	2 (4.3%)	4	4
S6 (F)	7:19	1 (2.2%)	0	2
S7 (F)	6:21	1 (2.2%)	1	2
S8 (F)	6:34	9 (19.6%)	3	4
Average	6:32	3.3 (7.1%)	2	3
Periodicity		120.7	196.1	130.8

Legend: M – male, F – female

Female students performed better on the number of omitted propositions (information) and negative shifts. Male students scored better on added information. As for the frequency of semantic deficiencies, as in the first recording, omissions were the most frequent and additions the least frequent.

In Table 7 below, we look at what tendencies were characteristic of both groups.

Table 7. *Tendencies in Semantic Deficiencies*

Criterion	Group	Recording 1 (average)	Recording 3 (average)	Tendency
Omissions (%)	M	27.7%	14.7%	↗
	F	18.2%	7.1%	↗
Additions (periodicity)	M	140.9	301.8	↗
	F	174.4	196.1	↗
Negative shifts (periodicity)	M	66.7	83.8	↗
	F	101.8	130.8	↗

Legend: M – male, F – female, ↗ improvement

From the last column of the table, it can be seen that for both groups, there was an improvement over the semester in the elimination of semantic deficiencies as a result of the training. The most marked improvement for both groups was seen in the criterion of omitted information; male students also improved significantly in the criterion of additions.

3.3. Self-assessment

Self-assessment is always subjective; some students evaluate themselves strictly, others leniently. More extensive research (Djovčoř & Melicherčiková & Vilímek, 2021) confirmed that students tend to assess themselves strictly. However, comparing the self-assessment score at the beginning and end of the training can indicate potential trends from the students' point of view as well as potential gender differences. It is clear from Table 8 that the male students were generally more satisfied with their performances and with their voice confidence.

Table 8. *Self-assessment and Its Tendencies*

Student	Overall satisfaction			Voice confidence		
	R1	R3	Trend	R1	R3	Trend
S1 (M)	3	3	→	3	2	↘
S2 (M)	2.5	4	↗	3	4	↗
S3 (M)	1	4	↗	1	3	↗
S5 (M)	4	3	↘	3	3	→
Average	2.6	3.5	↗	2.5	3.0	↗
S4 (F)	3	4	↗	3	3	→
S6 (F)	2	2	→	1	2	↗
S7 (F)	3	2	↘	3	2	↘
S8 (F)	2	4	↗	3	3	→
Average	2.5	3	↗	2.5	2.5	→

Legend: M – male, F – female, R1 – recording 1, R3 – recording 3, improvement, ↗ stagnation, → worsening ↘

At the beginning of the semester, the scores of each group in both criteria were comparable (satisfaction 2.6 vs. 2.5) or identical (voice confidence 2.5). At the end of the semester, we see an increase in satisfaction in both groups (3.5 vs. 3), but this is more pronounced for male students. At the end of the semester, only male students rated their voices as more convincing; we observe stagnation in this criterion for female students. Overall, lower scores for female students at the end of the semester may be related to several aspects; on the one hand it may be stricter self-assessment, on the other hand it may be related to an increase in formal deficiencies.

4. Conclusion

Most studies examining the role of gender in interpreting have focused on professional interpreters and simultaneous interpreting. Our study examined consecutive interpreting by students. Due to the different research samples and interpreting techniques, the findings are not

comparable. Some parallels can be observed with Verdini's (2019) study, both in the interpreting mode (consecutive interpreting) and the research sample (students). Nevertheless, since the focuses of these two studies differ, we can only attempt to generalize. Verdini (2019) found that male student interpreters were more successful at interpreting certain texts (economic texts) and female student interpreters were more successful at interpreting other texts (medical texts).

Similarly, our research suggests that female student interpreters are better at a certain component of interpreting and male student interpreters are better at another component of interpreting. Our hypothesis of better performances from the female students was not confirmed for all the criteria examined. Overall, the female students were more successful in terms of semantic criteria (content) both at the beginning and at the end of the particular interpreting training. Although they were more successful at reducing formal deficiencies at the beginning of the training, at the end of the training male students coped better. The lexical density of the third recording may have placed a greater burden on the interpreters, which, for the female students, may have manifested itself in the formal component. The female students also proved to be more critical self-assessors than the male students, who omitted a higher percentage of information and exhibited more negative shifts. In this case, future training for the female students should focus more on improving the formal component and future training for the male students should focus more on improving the semantic component of interpreting.

Our research was conducted on a very small sample and therefore cannot provide generally valid findings. The findings are for illustrative purposes only and show the tendencies of a particular sample. We cannot claim that the findings can be attributed to the students' gender alone. Certain gender-independent cognitive skills or personality traits might also play a role. More research on different, ideally larger, samples including additional psychological tools would provide us with more accurate findings.

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The Use of Gender-Sensitive Language in Job Titles on the Websites of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

Gender-sensitive language (GSL) is gender equality made manifest through language (Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Communication, 2019, p. 9). Over the past 40 years, English has undergone a significant language reform for the purpose of reducing “sexist English” as much as possible (e.g., the deletion of “man”, the avoidance of generic “he”, etc.) which was caused by the rapid rise of the feminist movement. On the other hand, GSL has just recently been recognized as a topic of importance in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and is a direct consequence of European integration reform. This paper seeks to address the social perception of GSL in BiH as well as to what extent GSL is used in job titles in the public sector in BiH. The corpus consists of 28 websites (state level institutions). The results revealed that GSL is not standardized in public use and that there is a significant prevalence of sexist job titles.

Keywords: gender-sensitive language, sexism, job title, male nouns

1. Introduction

Gender-sensitive language (GSL) refers to gender equality making both men and women visible and treated as persons of equal value, dignity and respect (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Put simply, GSL refers to the use of language which makes no discrimination between men and women. In discussing this topic, one of the most important questions has always been “where does discrimination in language come from?” This question seems to be attracting a large number of scholars and a myriad of studies has been dedicated to this topic, always revealing the same conclusion: discrimination in language is a reflection of discrimination in a society.

As highlighted by Hong (2018, p. 702) “if women and men are still unequal in society, just changing language cannot ensure equality between the sexes.” From a cognitive point of view, language always reflects the way we perceive the world. Language reflects our prejudices, our ideology positions, judgements, our identity (Puddifoot, 2019; Rakić et al., 2011; Locksley, 1982; Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Fitzgerald et al., 2019). A large number of studies dealing with discrimination in language have focused on English starting with Lakoff’s *Language and Women’s Place* (1975). This is not surprising, as English has become a common *lingua franca* of international diplomacy, international business and world academia. Moreover, the use of GSL in many countries all around the globe is nowadays standardized by legal acts prescribing its use in public, education institutions and the media. With reference to it, the use of GSL in the European Union (EU) is prescribed by the EU gender policy acquis meaning that each member state is obliged to use GSL, establish a gender – sensitive mechanism and implement a gender-sensitive language policy.

On the other hand, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is considerably different. First, BiH has three official languages (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian). Second, the concept of GSL is of relatively recent date, and third, at the moment of writing this paper, the use of GSL in public, education institutions and media in BiH is not legally-binding.

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, the main purpose of this paper is to determine the social perception of GSL and to identify to what extent GSL is used in job titles in the public sector (state level). For the purpose of this paper, the following research questions were defined:

RQ1: Is a growing awareness of GSL in BiH a consequence of a rise of a feminist thought?

RQ2: Is a growing awareness of GSL in BiH a consequence of a formal obligation imposed by the European integration process?

RQ2: Is GSL used in the naming of job titles (government institutions)?

RQ3: Is GSL being consistently used?

2. On Language Discrimination

Discrimination in language, also known as *sexism*, is according to definition, any discrimination against women or men based on their sex (Wardhaugh, 2006). As language cannot be separated from society, sexism is nothing but a language reflection of a century long dominance of men over women. From the beginning of civilization, men have always been considered more powerful than women which has resulted in the creation of a man-centered concept of the world (androcentrism) in which men and the needs of men are priorities (Bailey, LaFrance & Dovichio, 2019).

On the other hand, over time, the perception of women regarding their inferior status started to change and a new movement, called *feminism* has been established (Council of Europe, 2022).

Speaking of English-speaking countries (primarily the UK), as of the mid-80s of the last century, English started to openly be proclaimed as a radical sexist language. One of the most important comments was given by Spender (1985) who points out that (at that time) “the English language is sexist in so far as it relegates women to a secondary and inferior place in society” (p. 15). Such criticism was of immense importance as it was quite clear that the need for change was coming from the inner core of the soci-

ety. As Hong (2018) concludes, almost thirty years after, the recognition of sexism was also a direct consequence of the fact that in the 20th century women started stepping out from the role of housewife and taking jobs that were previously done only by men.

The recognition of sexism demanded a new approach to dealing with gender in language. Speaking of English, sexism in language has been undergoing different reforms over the past 40 years, which resulted in the formulation of new anti-sexism language rules:

- 1) avoid the generic use of “he” by rephrasing whenever possible. This can be done by: a) the use of plural forms, such as instead of “the official shall carry out his duties” > “officials shall carry out their duties ...”; b) use the imperative (“please send your CV to ...”); c) omit the pronoun altogether (“an official’s salary is dependent on length of service”), d) use the passive (“the relevant documents should be sent to ...”);
- 2) the use of “they” if the subject is a neutral noun (such as, *everyone, people*): (2) Everyone thinks *they* have the answer. (3) Everyone is leaving, *aren’t they?* (4) People think *they* have the answer. Also, rephrase the sentences in order to avoid the use of masculine pronouns. Example: instead of *When a reader skims text, he often overlooks key information*, write *Skimming text can cause a reader to overlook key information*. Finally, it is recommended to use first or second personal pronouns instead of *he, his, or him*. Example: instead of *One has to be careful with his money on the bus*, it is recommended to write *You (We) have to be careful with your (our) money on the bus* (Hong, 2018, p.701);
- 3) Avoid combined forms such as ‘he/she’, ‘him/her’, ‘s/he’;
- 4) Avoid the generic use of ‘man’ and its derivatives. Alternatives could be: humanity (for mankind), staff (for manpower), advisory panel (for committee of wise men), political leaders (for statesmen);
- 5) The replacement of -man suffix by cutting or using a noun which is neutral in terms of gender:

chairman > chairperson, chair, head, president; foreman > leader, supervisor; milkman > milk vendor;
man-made > artificial, synthetic; salesman > sales staff. Words such as “lady” and “woman” should not be used to denote female-oriented job positions: doctor (m.) vs. ~~woman~~ doctor (f.); judge (f.) vs. ~~lady~~ judge (f.) (Gender – Neutral Language in the European Parliament, 2018)¹

Taking the aforementioned into account, it can easily be concluded that the most prominent process happening in English (regarding sexism reform) is the process of *neutralisation*. In other words, instead of increasing the number of female-gender nouns, English has gradually become a gender-neutral language (deletion of “man”, “lady”, “woman” etc.) (Hong, 2018, p. 701).

3. On Gender-sensitive Language in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Growing Awareness or Something Else?

On the other hand, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter: BiH) is quite different. Bosnian and Herzegovinian society has a centuries long tradition of being profoundly androcentric (Helms, 2003). Therefore, it is not surprising that male forms of nouns denoting job titles have been traditionally used for both - male and female job holders, thus being considered generic (e.g. šef (eng. head); doktor (eng. MD), direktor (eng. director)).

On the other hand, the concept of GSL in BiH is of relatively recent date. The term was introduced along with a set of reforms within the process of European integration over the period of the last ten years. This means that a growing awareness of GSL in BiH is, actually, a direct consequence of reform requirements imposed by the European Union.

In order to understand this situation, in the following few paragraphs we are going to touch upon a perception of GSL in BiH, Croatia and Serbia.

1 The same source used for 1), 3), 4) and 5).

We included two neighboring states (Croatia and Serbia) for the following reasons: Croatia has been a member state since 2013, Serbia got candidate status in 2012, while BiH is still involved in the process of reforms. Irrespective of status differences, this piece of information is very important as it becomes quite clear that GSL, as a concept, is a constituent part of EU legislation (EU *acquis*), which means that any state willing to become an official member state of the European Union is obliged to implement GSL in its public and official use.

In this sense, prior to the accession to the EU, Croatia had to harmonize its existing legislation, in particular, the Act on Gender Equality (2017) and the Anti-Discrimination Act with the EU *acquis*.

As of 2017, newly - formulated provisions prescribe the obligatory use of GSL in public, education institutions and the media which has resulted in the creation of many “male-female noun pairs” (especially official job titles and academic titles). Some examples are listed as follows: *ministar* vs. *ministrica* (eng. Minister), *premijer* vs. *premijerka* (eng. Prime Minister), *pročelnik* vs. *pročelnica* (engl. Head), *stručni prvostupnik* vs. *stručna prvostupnica* (engl. Bachelor) etc. (Izmjene i dopune popisa stručnih naziva i njihovih kratica, 2020).

On the other hand, the situation in Serbia is completely different. Serbia has not yet become a member state of the EU, but was granted EU candidate status in 2012.

In May 2021, the National Assembly of Serbia enacted the consolidated version of the Gender Equality Act (2021) which sets out the obligatory use of GSL in public, education institutions and the media (Articles 25, 37 and 44). Compared to Croatia, these provisions have provoked extremely negative reactions among linguists and language experts in Serbia (RTS 1, 2021) who strongly reject the use of hybrid, newly – created feminine gender nouns, which, as some of them claim, do not sound “native” and have never been used in Serbian (Kojić, 2021) Some of the word pairs mentioned are “advokatica” (eng. attorney at law), “hirurškinja” (eng. surgeon), “psihološkinja” (eng. psychologist), „epidemiološkinja“ (eng. epidemiologist), „sudinica“ (eng. judge), “predsjednica (Vlade)” (eng. presi-

dent) , “ministrica (understood in Serbian spoken language as: the wife of a minister)” (eng. Minister), “premijerka Vlade (understood in Serbian spoken language as the wife of a Prime Minister), (eng. Prime Minister) “docentkinja” (eng. assistant professor), “pomoćnica ministra” (assistant to the minister), “dekanka”, (eng. dean), “sutkinja” (eng. judge), “stručnjakinja” (eng. expert), “vatrogashkinja” (eng. fireman) etc. (Gočanin, 2021).

Furthermore, many Serbian linguists also problematise the question of nouns for which there are not feminine/masculine gender counterparts (for example, “babica” (eng. midwife), “sudski tumač” eng. court interpreter), “kupac” (eng. buyer) etc.) (N1 Serbia, 2021).

BiH is not a member state of the EU and has not been granted EU candidate status yet. BiH is still going through the European integration process, but as a potential member state, it is requested and obliged to harmonize its legislation with EU *acquis* (Directorate for European Integration, 2020).

In terms of GSL and compared to Croatia and Serbia, it is important to outline that there are three official languages in use in BiH: Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian. The legal framework regulating gender equality in BiH exists and comprises the Law on the Prevention of Discrimination (2009) and Gender Equality Act (2010).

Compared to Croatia and Serbia, the current legal framework in BiH does not contain any provisions prescribing the obligatory use of GSL in public, education institutions and the media.

Nevertheless, irrespective of such a situation, several GSL publications have been produced. None of them are legally-binding and the most important one is *Instructions on the use of gender-sensitive language in the PA BiH* enacted by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH in 2013.

One of the most important novelties this document introduces is a set of newly-formed coinages, which were not used in language previously. The examples of such words (marked in *italic*) are: *delegat* (masculine) vs. *delegatkinja* (feminine) (eng. delegate), *poslanik* (masculine) vs. *poslanica* (feminine) (eng. member of parliament), *član* (masculine) vs. *članica* (feminine) (eng. member). Table 1 gives an overview of gender-sensitive job titles in three official languages of BiH.

Table 1. An Overview of Job Titles (PA BiH)

Bosnian	Croatian	Serbian	English ²
Rukovodilac/ Rukovoditeljica	Voditelj/Voditeljica	Rukovodilac/ Rukovoditeljica	Head
Savjetnik/ Savjetnica	Savjetnik/ Savjetnica	Savjetnik/Savjetnica	Advisor
Sekretar/ Sekretarka	Tajnik/Tajnica	Sekretar/Sekretarka	Secretary
Stučni saradnik/ Stručna saradnica	Stručni saradnik/ Stručna suradnica	Stručni saradnik/ Stručna saradnica	Specialist
Šef odjela/ Šefica odjela	Voditelj odjela/ Voditeljica odjela	Šef odjela/ Šefica odjela	Head of Department
Delegat/ Delegatkinja	Izaslanik/Izaslanica	Delegat/Delegatkinja	Delegate
Doktor nauka/ Doktorica nauka	Doktor znanosti/Doktorica znanosti	Doktor nauka/Doktorica nauka	Ph.D.
Glavni knjigovođa/ Glavna knjigovotkinja	Glavni knjigovođa/ Glavna knjigovotkinja	Glavni knjigovođa/ Glavna knjigovotkinja	Chief Bookkeeper
Interni revizor/ Interna revizorka	Interni revizor/Interna re- vizorka	Interni revizor/Interna re- vizorka	Internal Auditor
Pomoćni arhivar/ Pomoćna arhivarka	Pomoćni arhivar/ Pomoćna arhivarica	Pomoćni arhivar/ Pomoćna arhivarka	Assistant Archivist
Referent za nabavku/ Referentica za nabavku	Referent za nabave/Referentica za nabave	Referent za nabavke/ Referentkinja za nabavke	Procurement Officer

4. The Use of Gender-Sensitive Language in Job Titles

Taking into consideration everything that has been said so far, in the following section we are going to focus on to what extent GSL is used in job titles in the public sector (governmental institutions). For this purpose, a corpus comprising 28 websites was compiled, whereas the analysis was designed as a qualitative (descriptive) study.

- 1) Agencija za državnu službu BiH - www.ads.gov.ba
- 2) Agencija za statistiku BiH - www.bhas.ba
- 3) Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine - www.arhivbih.gov.ba

² Translation equivalents taken from *Style Guide for Translating Legislation in BiH into English* (2019), except for “Chief Bookkeeper” and “Assistant Archivist” (translation provided by authors).

- 4) Centralna banka BiH - www.cbbh.ba
- 5) Centralna izborna komisija BiH - www.izbori.ba
- 6) Direkcija za evropske integracije BiH - www.dei.gov.ba
- 7) Institucija ombudsmena za ljudska prava BiH - www.ombudsmen.gov.ba
- 8) Komisija za ljudska prava za BiH - www.hrc.ba
- 9) Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova BiH - www.mvp.gov.ba
- 10) Parlamentarna skupština BiH - www.parlament.ba
- 11) Predsjedništvo BiH - www.predsjednistvobih.ba
- 12) Vanjskotrgovinska komora BiH - www.komorabih.com
- 13) Vijeće ministara BiH - www.vijeceministara.gov.ba
- 14) Regulatorna agencija za komunikacije BiH - www.cra.ba
- 15) Službeni list BiH - www.sllist.ba
- 16) Sud BiH - www.sudbih.gov.ba
- 17) Ustavni sud BiH - www.ccbh.ba
- 18) Visoko sudsko i tužilačko vijeće BiH - vstv.pravosudje.ba
- 19) Tužilaštvo BiH - www.tuzilastvo.gov.ba
- 20) Ministarstvo inostranih poslova www.mvp.gov.ba
- 21) Ministarstvo sigurnosti www.msb.gov.ba
- 22) Ministarstvo odbrane www.mod.gov.ba
- 23) Ministarstvo finansija i trezora www.trezorbih.gov.ba
- 24) Ministarstvo pravde www.mpr.gov.ba
- 25) Ministarstvo vanjske trgovine i ekonomskih odnosa www.mvteo.gov.ba
- 26) Ministarstvo komunikacija i prometa www.mkt.gov.ba
- 27) Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice www.mhrr.gov.ba
- 28) Ministarstvo civilnih poslova www.mcp.gov.ba

4.1. Results and Discussion

According to these findings, out of 28 websites, 3 provide no information on job titles.³ Out of the remaining 25 websites, 10 *do not* use GSL,

3 These websites offer departmental emails as points of contact, e.g., info@mod.gov.ba or pisarnica@mod.gov.ba

meaning that male gender nouns are used for both male and female job position holders. Some examples are given in Table 2.

Table 2. An Overview of Job Titles on the Websites without GSL

Male	Female	English ⁴
Ministar	Ministar	Minister
Šef odjela	Šef odjela	Head of Department
Savjetnik	Savjetnik (not: savjetnica)	Advisor
Stručni saradnik	Stručni saradnik (not: saradnica)	Expert Associate
Pomoćnik direktora	Pomoćnik direktora (not: pomoćnica)	Assistant Director
Šef odsjeka	Šef odsjeka (not: šefica)	Head of Department
Stručni savjetnik	Stručni savjetnik (not: stručna savjetnica)	Expert Associate
Tehnički sekretar	Tehnički sekretar (not: tehnička sekretarka)	Technical Secretary
Referent	Referent (not: referentica)	Clerk

The same situation was identified on the websites of judicial institutions, such as the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and The High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HJPC). The examples are “sudija”, “glavni tužilac”, “tužilac”, “advokat”, “zamjenik glavnog tužioca”.

On the other hand, the remaining 15 websites *use* gender-sensitive job titles, but GSL is not being consistently used. For example, the job titles listed on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina (PA BiH) are written following gender-sensitive recommendations (*Instructions on the use of gender-sensitive language in the PA BiH* (2013)). Some examples are listed in Table 3.

4 In this and the following tables, English translation equivalents are copied in their original form, as written on the websites (corpus).

Table 3. An Overview of Gender-sensitive Job Titles – PA BiH

Bosnian	Croatian	Serbian	English
Predsjedavajuća Predstavničkog Doma	Predsjedateljica Zastupničkog Doma	Predsjedavajuća Predstavničkog Doma	Speaker of House of Representatives
Sekretarka Doma naroda	Tajnica Doma naroda	N/A	Secretary of House of Peoples
Sekretarka*	Tajnica	Sekretarka	Secretary
Pomoćnica sekretara Zajedničke službe	Pomoćnica tajnika Zajedničke službe	Pomoćnica sekretara Zajedničke službe	Joint Service Assistant Secretary
Rukovoditeljica	Voditeljica	Rukovoditeljica	Head

Note. *Sekretarka* (as opposed to *Sekretarica*) is considered a high-ranked job position

Furthermore, a detail analysis also revealed that lower – ranked job positions (“referent” (engl. office desk/clerk), “vozač” (engl. driver), etc.) are not listed on this website.

GSL is also consistently used on the website of the Directorate for European Integration (DEI). In contrast to the website of PA BiH, DEI’s website lists both high-ranked and lower-level job positions. The examples are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. An Overview of Gender Sensitive Job Titles – Directorate for European Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnian	Croatian	Serbian	English
Glasnogovornik/ Glasnogovornica	Glasnogovornik/Glasnogovornica	Glasnogovornik/ Glasnogovornica	Spokesperson
Šef Odjela/Šefica Odjeljenja	Šef Odjela/Šefica Odjela	Šef Odjela/Šefica Odjela	Head of Department
Portparol	Portparol	Portparol	Spokesperson
Pomoćnik direktora/ Pomoćnica direktora	Pomoćnik direktora/ Pomoćnica direktora	Pomoćnik direktora/ Pomoćnica direktora	Assistant Director
Administrativni asistent/ Administrativna asistentica	Administrativni asistent/ Administrativna asistentica	Administrativni asistent/ Administrativna asistentica	Administrative Assistant
Stručni savjetnik/Stručna savjetnica	Stručni savjetnik/Stručna savjetnica	Stručni savjetnik/Stručna savjetnica	Advisor
Viši stručni saradnik/Viša stručna saradnica	Viši stručni saradnik/Viša stručna saradnica	Viši stručni saradnik/Viša stručna saradnica	Senior specialist
Referent/ Referentica	Referent/ Referentica	Referent/ Referentica	Desk officer/clerk
	Vozač/kurir		Driver/Mail Carrier

The analysis of all the remaining websites (8) revealed a highly inconsistent use of GSL, as well as the predominance of the male gender in nouns used for female job holders (in bold in Table 5.)

Table 5. An Overview of an Inconsistent Use of GS Job Titles

Male job holders	Female job holders	Source	English
N/A	Zamjenica direktora	Agencija za statistiku BiH	Deputy Director
N/A	Direktorica	Agencija za statistiku BiH	Director
N/A	Ministrica (bos.) Ministrica (cro.) Ministrica (ser.)	Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova BiH Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH Ministarstvo odbrane BiH	Minister
Ministar-savjetnik (bos.) Ministar-savjetnik (cro.) Ministar-savjetnik (ser.)	Ministar – savjetnik (bos.) Ministar – savjetnik (cro.) Ministar – savjetnik (ser.)	Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova BiH	Adviser to the Minister
Šef Odsjeka	Šefica Odsjeka (bos.) Rukovoditelj Odsjeka (cro.) Šefica Odsjeka (ser.)	Ministarstvo vanjskih poslova BiH	Head of Department
	Šef Odsjeka (bos./cro./ser.) Šef Odsjeka (bos./cro./ser.) Šefica Odsjeka (bos.) Rukovoditelj Odsjeka (cro.) Šefica Odsjeka (ser.) Šef Odsjeka Šef Odsjeka	Ministarstvo sigurnosti BiH Ministarstvo pravde BiH Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH Agencija za statistiku BiH Ministarstvo pravde BiH	Head of Department
Zamjenik ministra	Zamjenica ministra (bos.) Zamjenica ministra (cro.) Zamjenica ministra (ser.)	Ministarstvo vanjske trgovine i ekonomskih odnosa BiH	Deputy Minister
N/A	Pomoćnik ministra (bos.) Pomoćnik ministra (cro.) Pomoćnik ministra (ser.)	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Assistant to Minister
	Pomoćnica ministricе (bos.) Pomoćnica ministricе (cro.) Pomoćnica ministricе (ser.) Pomoćnik ministra (bos.) Pomoćnik ministra (cro.) Pomoćnik ministra (ser.)	Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH Ministarstvo pravde BiH	Assistant to Minister
	Sekretar ministarstva (bos.) Sekretar ministarstva (cro.) Sekretar ministarstva (ser.)	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Secretary of Ministry
	Šef Odjela (bos.) Šef Odjela (cro.) Šef Odjela (ser.)	Ministarstvo vanjske trgovine i ekonomskih odnosa BiH	Head of Department

N/A	Referent	Ministarstvo sigurnosti BiH	Clerk
N/A	Šef ureda	Ministarstvo odbrane BiH	Head of Department
Savjetnik	Savjetnica (bos.) Savjetnica (cro.) Savjetnica (ser.)	Predsjedništvo Bosne i Hercegovine	Adviser
N/A	Sekretarka ministarstva Sekretar Ministarstva (bos.) Tajnica Ministarstva (cro.) Sekretar Ministarstva (ser.)	Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice BiH Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH	Secretary of Ministry
N/A	Stručni saradnik — prevodilac	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Expert Associate/ Interpreter
Stručni saradnik	Stručni saradnik (not: Stručna saradnica) Stručna saradnica	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH Ministarstvo transporta i komu- nikacija BiH	Expert Associate
N/A	Stručni savjetnik — portparol (bos.) Stručni savjetnik — portparol (cro.) Stručni savjetnik — portparol (ser.)	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Specialist/Spokes- person
N/A	Glavni interni revizor (bos.) Glavni interni revizor (cro.) Glavni interni revizor (ser.)	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Chief Internal Auditor
N/A	Tehnička sekretarica (bos.) Tehnička tajnica (cro.) Tehnička sekretarica (ser.)	Ministarstvo finansija i trezora BiH	Technical Secretary
N/A	Šefica Kabineta	Ministarstvo transporta i komu- nikacija BiH	Head of Office
N/A	Rukovoditelj jedinice za internu reviziju (bos.) Rukovoditelj jedinice za internu reviziju (cro.) Rukovodilac jedinice (ser.) Not: Rukovoditeljica	Ministarstvo vanjske trgovine i ekonomskih odnosa BiH	Head of Internal Auditing Unit
N/A	Savjetnica ministrice	Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH	Advisor to the Minister
N/A	Tehnički sekretar (not: Tehnička sekretarka) Tehnička tajnica (cro.)	Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH	Technical Secretary
N/A	Šef Kabineta zamjenika ministra ministra (bos.) Predstojnica Ureda zamjenika ministra (cro.) Šef Kabineta zamjenika ministra (ser.)	Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH	Head of Office
N/A	Portparol (bos.) Portparol (cro.) Portparol (ser.)	Ministarstvo civilnih poslova BiH	Spokesperson

Note. N/A means that there is currently no male job position holder. “Female job holders” means that a woman is a holder of a position listed below.

5. Conclusion

Considering what has been said, several conclusions can be made. First, there is no doubt that a growing awareness of GSL in BiH is not a direct consequence of a sudden rise of feminist or any other similar movement, but a requirement of the European Union and an obligation which must be fulfilled. Second, as Bosnian and Herzegovinian society has traditionally been androcentric, male nouns have also been traditionally used in the language of occupations with job titles being quite sexist in their nature (especially, high-ranked positions, such as direktor (eng. director), šef (eng. head), predsjednik (eng. president) etc. Third, facing the challenge to implement gender-sensitive language in BiH, and taking into consideration experiences of neighbouring countries, it is quite obvious that it is not going to be an easy task. However, one thing is for sure. The standardization of GSL cannot be done by a single individual; it cannot be copied from some other language nor can it be standardized without consulting native speakers who are the only competent language users who can decide whether newly-minted coinages such as “delegatkinja” (eng. delegate), “poslanica” (eng. member of parliament), “knjigovotkinja” (eng. bookkeeper), “sekretarka” (eng. secretary) make sense or not. In the end, as language is always the reflection of moral and social values, as well as our beliefs and inter-personal relations, instead of imposing and insisting on “hybrid” female nouns, if willing to change, women in BiH should first focus on changing their disproportionately affected status in the society. Once their reality starts changing, the language will find a way to spell it out.

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Gender Differences in the Use of Vulgarisms and Swear Words by English and Bosnian Speakers

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ABSTRACT

Swearing is an outward manifestation of strong emotions, and is likely to occur when a strong emotion is communicated or when an individual exhibits a firm attitude toward another person. This paper offers a soci-olinguistic analysis of vulgarisms, employing gender as a primary social variable to differentiate between the use of vulgarisms by English and Bosnian speakers. Research questions and hypotheses are the following:
RQ1: Do gender-identity and culture have an effect on using vulgarisms?
RQ1: Does use of vulgarisms represent a subcultural/cultural gap?
H1: Women use vulgarisms in the same amount as men.
H2: Women use vulgarisms in the same way as men.

The methodology employed in this work is a questionnaire based on the Discourse Completion Task method that examines gender differences in the use of vulgarisms in Bosnian culture, with a particular emphasis on participants aged 19–30. Due to objective reasons, we could not investigate gender differences in the use of vulgarisms in English in the same way, so we described a corpus survey conducted by McEnery (2006). McEnery used an annotation scheme where all of the examples mentioned in the Lancaster Corpus of Abuse were annotated so that these examples preserve the appropriate metadata recorded in the British National Corpus. Results of his analysis conclude that males aim Bad Language Words at male targets more frequently than they do at female targets. According

to the findings of our study, from a quantitative standpoint there were instances when women utilized vulgarisms more than males (expressing anger, dissatisfaction), and vice versa.

Keywords: gender, language, native, swearwords, vulgarisms.

1. Introduction

Though vulgarisms in verbal expression have received some attention in studies and analyses within the field of intercultural communication, the phenomenon of taboo lexicon in expressing theory and practice has not yet been adequately identified and processed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Simultaneously, swearwords should be addressed from a linguistic and functional perspective as informally saturated, cultural and linguistic components of discourse, free of the commonly held negative connotation associated with the term ‘swearword’. It is essential to undergo a theoretical evaluation of multiple aspects of vulgar language elements in the English and Bosnian language to portray the phenomenon of vulgarisms in these targeted languages while synthesizing all pertinent studies. Considering that Spolsky (2010) defines sociolinguistics as a “developing branch of linguistics and sociology which examines the individual and social variation of language” (p. 3), it can be asserted that language variations can unveil a significant amount of information about the speakers’ origins, while social variation can reveal information about the roles that a given speaker within one community performs. Nonetheless, Meyerhoff (2006) states that “every society has its linguistic codes that are acceptable for interaction” (pp. 8–27), which means that sociolinguistics illustrates how groups within such a society can be categorized by various social variables such as religion, ethnic or national origin, age, gender, or even education level. However, the primary focus of this paper is on gender, where men’s language use patterns are quite different from women’s in terms of intonation patterns and quantity of speech.

Swearing may be defined and classified in a variety of ways, and according to Jay (1992) it includes a “variety of utterances, including curses, profanities, blasphemy, taboo words or phrases, vulgarities, slang, epithets, insults, slurs and scatology” (p. 15). The main purpose of swearing and vulgarisms is to express emotions, mainly frustration and anger, which makes swearwords an excellent vehicle for expressing emotions due to their primary connotative meanings. The emotional impact of swearing is contingent on an individual’s familiarity with society and its language norms. For example, Jay (1999) notes that psychologists and linguists have shown an interest in curse words (p. 18). Due to insufficient research on emotional expression, polite yet misleading theories of language have developed. Contemporary theories disregard entirely the emotional intensification caused by curse words in language, and the issues associated with cursing. Numerous studies have demonstrated that when swearing is perceived as an affront to a listener, it may be interpreted as rude on behalf of a speaker. Thus, instances of swearing are classified into propositional and non-propositional. *Propositional swearing* is a deliberate act that is purposefully planned and performed. Jay & Janschwitz (2008) argue that there is a correlation between research on propositional swearing and research on linguistic rudeness within instances of propositional swearing (p. 271). In comparison to this, *non-propositional swearing* is quite spontaneous, uncontrollable, and unpredictable. It is defined by pre-programmed emotional responses that most frequently occur in response to sudden bursts of emotion.

Speakers who wish to abide by communication norms will refrain from using swearwords until other speakers do. As an outcome, this insignificant style of swearing is used to maintain compatibility with those who use swearwords on a normative level. While all qualified speakers understand how to use swearwords in their native language, their willingness to do so is ascertained by their personality characteristics and the social-physical environment in which they live. In colloquial speech, vulgarisms and swearing are now widely accepted as a natural rather than an uncommon activity. This paper aims to use the Discourse Completion

Task (DCT) as a primary method to examine gender differences, specifically those between male and female gender, and the use of vulgarisms on a frequent and/or non-frequent basis.

After the analysis of the below-mentioned studies, we definitely cannot agree with the assertion that women shy away from using vulgarisms, considering the results of the following questionnaire. We have decided to put the abovementioned hypotheses in correlation with the research questions (that are in accordance with anecdotal evidence) because we wanted to provide a better insight into data analysis, trying to analyze whether gender-identity has any effect while using vulgarisms. Thus, these hypotheses and research questions were formed in this particular way because of the cultural differences between the English and the Bosnian language. Farb (1993) states that “a culturally diversified society is a vital one and affords maximum freedom for creativity and achievement” (p. 180). The use of specific vocabulary within a certain social group that is distinct from literary and standard language results in poorly understood speech by the larger linguistic community. Hence, Kasumović (1991) states that all linguistic forms of taboo words are directly related to the levels of communication culture of the participants in the communication act (pp. 207–210).

2. Literature Review

The following theoretical framework is organized to present and summarize a variety of studies and other pertinent materials on the subject of vulgarisms in the English language and the Bosnian language. Daily, people express their knowledge, attitudes, feelings, and even opinions through a variety of speech forms. While speech is defined as an act of speaking, it demonstrates how human beings share a ubiquitous trait in their ability to communicate; conversely talking can be identified as a dynamic form of behavior that demands both pragmatic and linguistic ability. According to Jay (2018) what unites swearwords as a category of words is not their emotional intensity but their emotional offensiveness

or negative valence (p. 109). Moreover, Jay (2018) proposes an alternative classification for this category, based on their behavior as an action; that is, how people wish to communicate with swearwords (p. 109). Jay's work is structured around the central idea of presenting a subfield of language and gender research that examines how female and male speakers interact in various contexts; from informal discussions to more formal meetings, interviews and seminars. Mesthrie et al. (2009), discuss that there is ample evidence that "women and men, and girls and boys interact in different ways" (p. 225). These distinctions are frequently observed as a disadvantage for female speakers in situations involving mixed-sex interactions. Lakoff (1957, as cited in Mesthrie et al. 2009) asserts that women employ a variety of language features that collectively indicate uncertainty and hesitancy (p. 226). These characteristics prevent women from expressing themselves strongly, making everything women discuss, appear trivial. Thus, Lakoff's claims have been associated with a deficit model of women's language use, enabling her to connect them to social inequalities between men and women, arguing that women's speaking style hindered them from achieving power. These statements about language use were based on Lakoff's impromptu observations and her intuitions.

2.1. Phenomenon of Vulgarisms and Taboo Words

The term 'vulgarism' derives from the Latin language, specifically '*vulgus*', '*vulgaris*', and '*volgaris*', which were observed to have a pejorative connotation for certain common people. Language can change for various reasons; it can adapt to the needs of its speakers with a speaker's language experience, defined by the structure, vocabulary, and phrases they use, being highly dependent on their age, occupation, educational level and region of the country. Thus, Ljung (2011) states that swearing is defined by its "formulaicity, viz. the fact that the multi-word swearing expressions are not freely formed by the grammar of the language but are more or less fixed and resist formal change" (ix), which emphasizes that swearing is an indicator of the speaker's state of mind.

2.1.1. Taboo Words

In dealing with taboo words, their interpretations and implications, Farb (1993) asserts that every society has words designated as ‘inappropriate’ within its language (p. 78). Words deemed inappropriate or prohibited in one language may be completely normal in another. Those that are deemed inappropriate are typically labeled as taboo words. Farb (1993) suggests that the term ‘*taboo*’ was borrowed from Tongan, a language of Polynesia to “describe the avoidance of particular kinds of behavior; avoidance which sometimes appears arbitrary and fanciful to an outsider” (p. 88). Not only do taboos forbid such activities, but they also prohibit their discussion. Men tend to use taboo words in jest or as a form of dirty talk that is presented through verbal seduction, but if women engage in that type of conversation, it is difficult for them to claim in some later time that they find it morally offensive. Thus, in the American community, certain social and sexual roles are established through the interaction of men and women. According to Farb (1993) “women are ‘*submissive*’, while men are ‘*attackers*’” (p. 98).

The strategy of using dirty talk to attract attention of opposite gender is possible only if the roles described above are maintained. If social roles change, dirty talk will remain a part of the society, but its place in the speech culture will shift. Therefore Vingerhoets et al. (2013) observe swearing as a “form of linguistic activity utilizing taboo words to convey the expression of strong emotions” (p. 1). Swearing often impacts the swearer’s perceived reputation, strength, and persuasiveness. It may also have several interpersonal effects, such as fostering community cohesion and unity, inhibiting violence, eliciting laughter, and inflicting emotional distress on others. On the other hand, Pinker (2007) distinguishes at least five different ways of swearing with the purpose of acquiring a better understanding of the functions of swearing behavior and shedding light on why people continue to swear despite learning that it can result in social rejection or harmful repercussions (p. 350).

2.1.2. History of Swearing and Vulgarisms

Ljung (2011) also provides us with a brief overview of swearing's history describing the earliest two instances of what might be understood as cursing trace back to Ancient Egypt (pp. 45-74). One of these can be found on a *stela*, an upright stone slab with a commemorative inscription, from the reign of Ramses III, pharaoh, (1198–1166 BC). In Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and today, the primary purpose of curse words is to invoke harm upon another person or object. Ljung (2011) states that self-cursing is used to “strengthen the speaker’s commitment to the truth of a claim or to emphasize her/his commitment to a certain course of action” (p. 46). Self-cursing in different languages has undergone a range of linguistic processes typically referred to as grammaticalization, a term initially used to transform the content of words to grammatical morphemes. In comparison, if we observe swearing in the 19th century, we see an era of great gentleness in which speakers appeared to avoid, and indeed were taught to avoid all references to vulgar matters. Thus, swearing was abolished or altered beyond recognition in polite society, and Ljung (2011) argues that “the oaths and curses established during earlier stages of the language quickly became unimaginable among respectable members of society, with the obvious exception of soldiers and sailors” (p. 66).

As Hughes claims (2006), swearing captivates individuals involved in language and culture eliciting debate and bringing up contemporary challenges and issues. Hughes (2006) notes that “an extraordinary range of style and content has evolved in oaths, profanity, foul language and ethnic slurs over the centuries, on a scale from the most sacred utterances to the most taboo” (xv). Swearing now encompasses an array of diverse and evolved types necessitating the establishment of some broad distinctions at the outset. Considering the distinctions between modality and content, it may be concluded that we swear by a higher force or person; we swear that something is true; we swear to do something; we swear at something or someone; and we swear out of rage, disappointment, or exasperation. A watershed moment in history occurred when the ‘lower’ physical faculties of copulation, excrement, and urination became

prominent as swearing referents. While these statements can be callous, Hughes (2006) demonstrates that many of these expressions, such as “*son of a bitch; bugger off; go take a flying fuck*”, refer to literal or realistic impossibilities (xvii). Finally, the history of swearing reveals clear oscillations between periods of repression and compensatory responses of license and excess. Thus, the medieval age was defined by an unusual degree of freedom in the use of religious oaths, which authorities attempted to control and inhibit through a variety of legal prohibitions. Certain types of swearing are more prevalent, while others are more culturally distinctive. However, variants based on ethnicity, class and gender evolve over time within particular speech cultures.

2.1.3. Categorization of Bad Language

McEnery (2006) defines the phrase ‘bad language’ as “any word or phrase which, when used in what one might call polite conversation, is likely to cause offense” (p. 1). The author approaches discourses about bad languages from a sociohistorical perspective. Additionally, McEnery used Moral Panic Theory and Bourdieu’s Theory of Differentiation to demonstrate how attitudes toward bad language have evolved due to groups attempting to use the absence of swearing in their speech to demonstrate moral, economic and political influence. Thus, he emphasizes that Moral Panic Theory is used as a basis of the approach taken to discourses about bad language, while Bourdieu’s Theory of Distinction is used to present differences between social classes. McEnery (2006) discusses several attempts to categorize and classify bad language words (BLWs), stating that BLWs are “a market of distinction in English” (p. 25). Thus, we are introduced to the Lancaster Corpus of Abuse based on the British National Corpus, introducing us with word classification to show that distinction between these groups is not always simple. For instance, the word ‘*bitch*’ may refer to both an animal and a sexist term of abuse. Šehović (2003) states that there are rare cases in which bad language is used to express positive intentions and is a sign of closeness (pp. 53–60). What intensifies the impact of bad language is that responding to them is both involuntary

and emotional. Finally, according to Pinker (2007), when we hear such a word we “reflexively look it up in memory and respond to its meaning, including the possible connotations” (p. 332).

2.1.4. Language and Gender

Mesthrie et al. (2009) state that there is a perception that women and men use language differently (pp. 213–241). Research around language and gender began around 1970s. Linguists have found evidence of ‘*sex exclusive*’ language forms while studying different languages. Those were the cases in which an obligatory grammatical distinction is made between genders, i.e. female and male speakers.

Maltz & Borker (1982, as cited in Sunderland, 2006) state that “women and men constitute different gender subcultures” (p. 19). They learn the rules of ‘friendly interaction’ as children’s interaction mostly takes place in single-sex peer groups. Some linguistic features are used to indicate membership of their gender group and distinguish themselves from the other group. The linguistic features have slightly different meanings within the two gender subcultures. When it comes to female speakers, brief answers mean that they are paying attention to the discussion. However, they show compliance with the argument being made by male speakers. As a result, it is unsurprising that female speakers use them more often than male speakers. That is why these distractions occasionally result in misunderstandings when women and men speak. Jay (1999) claims that sex differences are a central fact of human life, and their reflection in language is unsurprising. Sex refers to “biological features that determine male and female, but gender is the social role played by people in society, the way they interact with others” (pp. 81–91). Our language style is determined by both sex and gender, and thus language plays a significant role in our personal and social identities, as linguistic habits represent our unique biographies and experiences.

Jay (1992) states that men swear more frequently than women (pp. 81–87). Men possess a greater repertoire of curse words than women, and men employ more offensive curse words. Additionally, gender discrepan-

cies can be seen in the way insults, sexual terms, and joke-telling, verbal dueling, harassing speech and fighting words are used. Women must exercise discipline over their emotions, while men have greater latitude to engage in violent and offensive speech patterns. Jay (1992) states that “cursing and dominance are masculine traits, and ultimately, cursing depends both on gender identity and power” which indicates that males have much more power to curse in public than females (p. 165). Since our research is based on whether women use vulgarisms in the same amount and in the same way as men, we can use Jay’s study to compare his results with ours. Furthermore, Jay (1992) demonstrates that native speakers can make appropriate judgments about where and when to use any forms of vulgarisms (p. 149). The participants were asked to assess the frequency and offensiveness of cursing based on three contextual variables: speaker status, physical location, and speaker’s influence over the location. The participants were given various textual combinations of curse words and locations and were asked to rate the likelihood of these combinations on a scale of 0 to 100. Additionally, the participants evaluated the same set of materials and assigned a numerical value to the offensiveness of the statements on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. The data are extremely well-organized and meaningful and reveal that native speakers may judge the propriety of cursing based on salient contextual information. When information about the speaker, location or utterances is altered, this alters assessments of likelihood and offensiveness.

Jay & Janschewitz (2008) state that the relationship between the speaker and the listener, in terms of their status, is a “critical determinant of swearing likelihood and appropriateness” (p. 273). Therefore, individuals of both genders are less likely to curse in the presence of someone of a higher social rank or another gender. Nonetheless, Vingerhoets et al. (2013) state that “swearing primarily occurs when the swearer experiences a strong emotion or when he or she wants to accomplish certain goals through swearing” (p. 292). The most appropriate context for swearing appears to be an informal environment for people of similar status and gender. As a result, swearing has long been classified as a predominantly

masculine activity. Numerous studies presented within this paper confirm that men swear more often than women and that boys swear at a younger age than girls. Women report using less expletives than men and consider swearing on television or in newspapers to be less acceptable. A possible explanation for such gender differences is that women are more cognizant of social conditions and the social ramifications of swearing than men are. Coates (1986) claims that the differences in swearing behavior between men and women seem to be cultural; given these observations, one may also question the supposed masculine nature of swearing, rather than because they simply swear less often (p. 86). Nevertheless, Vingerhoets et al. (2013) indicate that “gender or age can influence a person’s swearing behavior” (p. 301). Although swearing was once considered a largely masculine practice, women now swear as frequently, if not more, than men. Swearing or not swearing in a particular situation is also contingent on a person’s tolerance of swearing.

McEnery (2006) emphasizes that one might imagine that males use much more forms of bad language than females (p. 28). Nonetheless, if the forms of BLW types used by males and females are compared, it can be stated that males significantly overuse a set of terms, while females significantly overuse a set of words. Thus, BLWs serve as a symbol of differentiation between males and females, but the distinction is quantitatively defined by a limited range of word types and more qualitatively defined by males drawing from a stronger set of words than females. On the contrary, regarding the Bosnian speaking area, when defining gender in Bosnian swearwords, we often have to ask ourselves why most swearwords contain the female gender. While swearing, one always refers to one’s mother, sister or even aunt, one might ask why male gender is less frequently used in swearwords. However, that might be the case simply because in Bosnian society male gender is observed as ‘stronger gender’, and therefore it should not be mentioned ‘in vain’, and certainly not in the same sentence with any form of derogatory term. As long as a form of swearword leaves out the whole male gender, other forms of ‘alternatives’ with female gender will be used nonetheless. Halilović et al. (2009) indi-

cate that people mostly use swearwords “out of habit, bad manners and poor vocabulary, so that swearing can serve as a supplement or a catchphrase, out of a desire to prove oneself, for the sake of reinforcement of their own opinions” (pp. 149–161). Thus, Halilović et al. (2009) conclude that swearwords are not only characteristic of the speech of one gender, or certain social groups, even though that observation was used for a long time, but instead they are a characteristic of both genders, all social strata and all age groups (pp. 143–161).

In contrast, Hughes (2006) implies that gender in swearing covers three main aspects: “the gender of the swearer, that of the terms themselves, and the application or ‘target’” (p. 195). Historically, and as widely accepted, swearing is primarily a male domain and swearing in the presence of women is a grave violation of good manners. The gender of swearwords has become part of a broader controversy over the last few decades, based on the belief that language is a male-dominated construct displaying chauvinist biases. Hughes (2006) states that according to the general feminist view, since language is created in a ‘*patriarchal*’ setting, there has developed a predominance of words derived from female anatomy, most notably ‘*tit*’ and ‘*cunt*’ (p. 363). In recent decades, the term ‘*bitch*’ has gained popularity among men, and in the broader context of a difficult situation, as in ‘*This is a real bitch.*’ Although the general distribution or application of words is instructive, it can neglect discrimination, given the importance of insults. According to Hughes (2006) this evaluation is also problematic, as it is influenced by contextual factors such as “tone, social codes, and degree of deliberation” (p. 196). Although most words consider ‘*cunt*’, ‘*motherfucker*’ and ‘*bastard*’ to be intensely wounding, Hughes (2006) says that some would argue correctly that these words are not only powerful and offensive, but can express a range of emotions, including hate and disdain, as well as compassion and love (p. 196).

However, it is essential to mention that Cameron (1988) expresses that ideological work is marked by language representations, especially their role in preserving gender distinctions and naturalizing gender hierarchies (pp. 445–468). She traced recent developments in communication philosophies,

which are inextricably related to depictions of gendered language. The author introduces us to the ideas of how men and women use language, and how they should use it optionally, which created recurring debates about language formed by numerous cultures throughout history. Cameron (1988) states that “women in particular have also been prime targets for the kind of ideological discourse, which sets out actively to intervene in language use with the aim of making it conform to some idealized representation” (p. 448). Language and gender ideologies on the other hand, are specific because of the time and place, which means that they differ across cultures and historical periods and are influenced by representations of other social features such as class and ethnicity. What remains consistent is the belief that women and men are distinct within any identifiable social community. Whatever the difference is between men’s and woman’s language, these gender and language depictions contribute to a society’s apparatus for preserving gender differences in general, i.e. they normalize the idea of the sexes as opposite with distinct aptitudes and social obligations.

3. Research

3.1. Study of Vulgarisms in Bosnian

3.1.1. Participants

This study included 86 participants. When choosing the participants, their age and sex was taken into consideration, but the only requirement was that the participants were native speakers of the Bosnian language, since the methodological instrument was structured in the Bosnian language. Since this is a study on language and gender, involving an equal number of male and female participants (43 each). The participants were young adults, age range between 19 and 30 years.

3.1.2. Research Problem

The aim of this research was to get certain insights about the participants’ tendencies in the choice of vulgarisms within the context of the

Faculty of Philosophy, where all departments were included. The participants' gender was used as a background for comparison between the given answers, to conclude whether our participants use certain vulgarisms and to what extent.

3.1.3. Instruments and Data Analysis Method

The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used as the most reliable quantitative method for this type of a study. It is a production questionnaire in which participants respond to a given prompt. This type of method is used when one wants to elicit different speech acts. Hua & Sweeny (2015) discuss three different variations of the DCT method (pp. 212–221). The first one being the one in which participants were given a prompt in a form of a dialogue. Their task is to fill in the empty space in the dialogue. In the second one, the participants were asked to react to the given prompt in four different ways, and, in the third variant the participants were given a specific, detailed situation, and their task is to react to it. When it comes to the DCT method, researcher had an opportunity to form a questionnaire according to the needs of the topic of the study or research. In this case, participants were given ten different situations. These situations are believed to be very realistic and common. The participants had an opportunity to choose between three given answers/reactions and if those answers were not in accordance with their reactions, they could write their own answer. Because of the nature of this study, even though the participants were native Bosnian speakers, some answers were also given in the English language, regarding the modernized abbreviations.

3.1.4. Procedure

The assessment instrument was presented to study participants via Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed during the month of May, 2020, and it was finalized in the month of June, 2020. In the description of the questionnaire titled *Vulgarisms*, it was not stated what the main purpose of research was. Therefore, the main aim of this question-

naire, i.e. examination of the gender differences in the use of vulgarisms, was eluded. Also, it was clearly stated that this form of a questionnaire was completely anonymous. This questionnaire was aimed to get honest answers. Hence, this questionnaire was distributed via social media—Facebook group of Student Association of Faculty of Philosophy (STAFF) University of Sarajevo, whose members are students of all departments within this Faculty. Our colleagues were kindly asked to fill in the questionnaire via the given link in the post description.

3.2. Study of Vulgarisms in English

As for our research concerning vulgarisms and swearwords in English, McEnery's (2006) research on bad language words (BLWs) in spoken language, using corpora of the Lancaster Corpus of Abuse (LCA), was used as the basis for our research (pp. 24–50). McEnery's research was also used as the basis for all further analyses presented within this chapter.

3.2.1. McEnery's Approach to Swearing

McEnery (2006) examines BLWs in the English language, as they are used in everyday speech to determine how this distinction of everyday use relates to them (p. 24). In doing so, McEnery examines the behavior of single BLWs, groups of BLWs and different types of BLWs in the spoken language. This analysis allowed him to examine how such terms are associated with particular groups or may be suggestive of interactions between particular groups. Along with the quantitative research of their distribution across sociolinguistic factors such as gender, age and socio-economic position, McEnery (2006) undertakes qualitative analysis of each BLW using a custom bad language categorization scheme (The Annotation Scheme) (p. 25).

3.2.2. Procedure for McEnery's Data Analysis

After combining the results of two surveys in order to support his hypotheses and data analysis, McEnery (2006) forms a “five-part scale

of offence” which he used to classify the use of BLWs (p. 30). This scale was derived from one of the sources used in its development, the British Board of Film Classification. In order to explore whether the categories of BLWs are used more by males or females, McEnery (2006) contrasts the use of the different types of BLWs used by males and females (p. 31).

3.3. Data Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to state their sex and age. And then to proceed to the given prompts. Thus, there was an equal number of female (43) and male (43) participants. One of the examples that stood out throughout this paper and which percentage is presented within Figure 1 (see Appendix 1, Figure 1), and Figure 2 (see Appendix 1, Figure 2), is following:

You are fighting with a person you really care about, but that person says something insulting. What is your reaction?

As it is shown in Figure 1 (see Appendix 1, Figure 1), 38.5% of our male participants chose *nećemo se vrijeđati sada* (*Let's not start a fight now*), *ajde da riješimo ovo fino* (*Let's settle this nicely*), 11.6% used *ma jebi se tamo, mene našao vrijeđati* (*Fuck you, you want to insult me?*), and 11.6% *jebo ti pas mater* (*Fuck your mother*), *i ja se budala s tobom svađam!* (*I am a fool for fighting with you*). The rest of the participants used the option to write their own response to the situation, and some of them are: *e sad si ga usr'o* (*Now you fucked it up*); *o jebaću ti majku* (*Oh, I will fuck your mother*); *a da odjebeš od mene?* (*Fuck away from me*); *ma jebem li ti ja majku* (*Oh, I will definitely fuck your mother now*). One of our participants wrote a different reaction for each gender; his reaction depends on whether he was having a fight with females or males: *Ma puši kurac* (*Suck a dick*) (*za likove/for males*), *Jedi govna* (*Eat shit*) (*za likuše/for females*). This answer is fascinating, and brings us back to Farb (1993), and his explanation of the different notion men have when using taboo words in the presence of opposite sex (p. 60). Even though he is insulted, this participant decided to use a vulgar word only

because it has to do with bodily fluids, rather than anything else. While the reaction reserved for his male friend is very vulgar and insulting, consisting of a taboo word connected to the male body. Only 9% of our male participants decided to use this option to write something non-vulgar: *really?; ok; ok vozdra (Ok, ok bye!)*.

On the other hand, as it is shown in Figure 2 (see Appendix 1, Figure 2), our female participants chose differently than our male participants. 41.9% chose the option *nećemo se vrijeđati sada (Let's not insult each other now)*, *ajde da riješimo ovo fino (Let's settle this nicely)*, which is not vulgar; 23.3% chose the vulgar option *ma jebi se tamo, mene našao vrijeđati (Fuck you, you want to insult me?)*, and just two participants (4.7%) chose *jebo ti pas mater (Dog fucked your mother)*, *i ja se budala s tobom svađam! (I am a fool for fighting with you)*. 20.4% of them used the option to write their own response without using any vulgar words, one answer even said: *Neki pasivno-agresivni odgovor, ali bez vulgarnih riječi (Some passive-aggressive answer, but without any vulgar words)*. 11.4% of them used this option to express themselves by using a swearword or a taboo word: *puši kurac (Suck a dick)*, *neću s tobom da se raspravljam (I do not want to argue with you)*; *ma idi u tri pičke materine (The participant wanted to express that he would be glad if the subject 1 could go back to his mother's cunt 3 times in a row, which makes this swearword unable to be translated to the English language)*. One of the answers was in a way censored *Mrš u pi**ku materinu (Go back to your mother's cunt)*, which according to Beers Fägersten (2012) shows that “both the presence and absence of swearing can reveal significant socio-linguistic forces at work, determining social behavior” (p. 17). *Mrš (Fuck off)* is embedded in young people's speech that some of them do not even consider it vulgar, but it is considered as a sign of bad language. The more likely a word is to offend, the more likely it is to be called a swearword. Traditionally, offensiveness has been assessed using evaluative and semantic distinction rating techniques. The censored part of this response implicated a taboo word in the Bosnian language, and without that particular word this expression would not be considered as swearing. Again, it is very noticeable that our male participants were angrier and more in-

sulted, because of the words they choose to write as their response.

Thus, our research results from a qualitative point of the study state that our male participants were more innovative when it came to forming and providing us with a vulgar answer, while our female participants opted for the provided choices. Moreover, we can conclude that figures used within this paper are good evidence for the claim that males use vulgarisms more than our female participants. Thus, our research questions about gender-identity, and cultural gaps support all of our mentioned claims within the data analysis. Besides, we can agree with McEnery's (2006) claim that males have a preference for using stronger BLWs, whereas females have preferences for using weaker BLWs, which means that men and women use vulgarisms differently, which is also supported by the results of our study (p. 30). Besides, we can conclude that vulgarisms are often conditional on the situation and speakers' feelings, just as McEnery (2006) states that speakers have a clear choice to select the stronger word when producing an expression which would be considered as a vulgarism (p. 37). Furthermore, this supports our *H1*, which reflects on the equal amount of usage of vulgarisms both by males and females. However, our *H2* was denied, since it does not support our claim that women use vulgarisms in the same way as men, which is also supported by McEnery's abovementioned statements. The reason why this hypothesis is not valid, is simply because men are more prone to employ varied contractions of vulgar phrases, and they are more likely to come up with new ones as a result of their '*innovative*' vocabulary, whereas women stick to the weaker use of vulgarisms.

There are various forms of vulgarisms in the English and the Bosnian language, which can be classified into the main subgroups of vulgarisms, such as swearwords and curse words, where any of these various forms of vulgarisms can be considered profanities, or socially offensive language. So, terms such as profanity can be given emotion based on a speaker's mood, even though the exact words themselves do not have an obvious connotation of hostility or contempt. Thus, taking a psychological perspective into account, we can conclude that vulgarisms act as a

type of language that helps maintain a healthy balance of positive and negative emotions. On the other hand, vulgarisms can be known as one country's proverbs or form of sayings by those who lack a sophisticated vocabulary and are ignorant of the meaning of those words. Another example of similarity between the English and the Bosnian language are the social values of one language community that significantly impact the language itself.

Jay (1992) asserts that men curse more frequently than women (pp. 81–87). Thus, he concludes that men have a larger vocabulary of swear words than women, and men use them more offensively. Additionally, men and women employ distinct taboo words, demonstrating gender discrepancies. With our research focusing on whether women utilize vulgarisms in the same quantity and manner as men, we reflected on Jay's study, to compare and attempt to answer the questions that are crucial for our analysis. The answer to our first question – *Do gender-identity and culture have any effect on using vulgarisms?* – is that it supports one of our claims that swearwords serve as a backdrop for cultural and behavioral trends. As a result, all of these changes evolve over time, reflecting a movement in culture as well. Thus, we have concluded that native Bosnian speakers have a large collection of swearwords, and that the Bosnian community appears to take great delight in them. On the other hand, another question arises – *Does use of vulgarisms represent a subcultural/cultural gap?* – where we can conclude that according to our research swearwords have become ingrained in our culture as a very natural way of reacting in certain situations, that may create a generational gap, considering the age of the speaker that is using any form of vulgarisms.

Thus, one would expect extremely impulsive or emotional people to swear more often, since they would have hard time adhering to proper swearing etiquette. Halilović (2018) implies that “lexemes that represent the lexicon of direct language; vulgarisms and swearing form an integral part of the colloquial Bosnian language” (pp. 30–45). Swearwords and vulgarisms in general are undoubtedly a characteristic of the controversial style of the Bosnian language, and are widely used and portrayed in

daily communication. What they convey is very distasteful and unaccepted socially and it violates polite conduct principles, as their usage implies statements imbued with a negative emotional charge.

Furthermore, swearwords provide a framework for cultural and behavioral trends. Hence, behavioral trends shift as time passes, indicating a shift in culture. Swearwords are a part of daily life, and as already mentioned a part of behavioral processes. It is fascinating how swearwords are the first words one can learn in a foreign language. The Bosnian language has a massive fund of swearwords, which means that some of the swearwords cannot be found anywhere else, and it seems like the community takes great pride in it. Therefore, it should be noted that swearwords have become a part of our culture and a very familiar way of reacting in some circumstances. It is quite interesting to learn that swearing does not always indicate a lack of culture and civilization but rather may point to them.

4. Conclusion

Swearing is an expression of powerful emotions and intense feelings. And as a result, it is expected to occur in circumstances where strong emotion is expressed or an individual demonstrates extremely strong attitude toward another person. Jay (1999) proposes that swearing if considered in inappropriate context may lead to “lower ratings of credibility and persuasiveness of the speaker” (p. 158). Thus, the outcomes of swearing are highly context-dependent, i.e. when used appropriately, swearing will increase the speaker’s integrity and persuasiveness since it is an expression of emotion and thus seems more sincere and truthful to others. This paper investigated language use and gender within the topic of vulgarisms, which was explored in detail to present the social role of language. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper was to describe a sociolinguistic analysis of vulgarisms which used gender as a primary social variable to distinguish between the forms of vulgarisms used in the English and the Bosnian language. Furthermore, this paper was followed by its accompanying questionnaire aimed at the Bosnian native speakers, that used gender as the pri-

mary variable to demonstrate differences between native English speakers and native Bosnian speakers. Even though we have proposed our own research aimed at native Bosnian speakers, we also reflected on and analyzed McEnergy's data analysis from the LCA. Questions that arose during our research and all of the data analysis were as follows:

- Do gender-identity and culture have an effect on using vulgarisms?
- Does use of vulgarisms represent a subcultural/cultural gap?

As we have mentioned, we successfully compared and analyzed all of the given materials in comparison with our research, to finalize our results and conclusion. From the quantitative point of view, there was some situations when women used vulgarisms more, and vice versa. But, from the qualitative point of view, as mentioned, men were more inventive when it came to providing a vulgar answer, while women opted for one of the provided choices. Furthermore, the study has shown, that men and women use vulgarisms differently. Vulgarisms are often conditional on the situation and the intensity of their indignation or frustration. Both genders avoid vulgarisms when they are describing something filled with positive emotions – having a good time or simply being happy. Thus, we can conclude that the first hypothesis has been confirmed, and that men and women use vulgarisms equally and in the same amount. However, the second hypothesis was not, because men tend to use different contractions of vulgar words, and they are more prone to create their own variants of vulgarisms, while women stick to the basics.

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Appendix

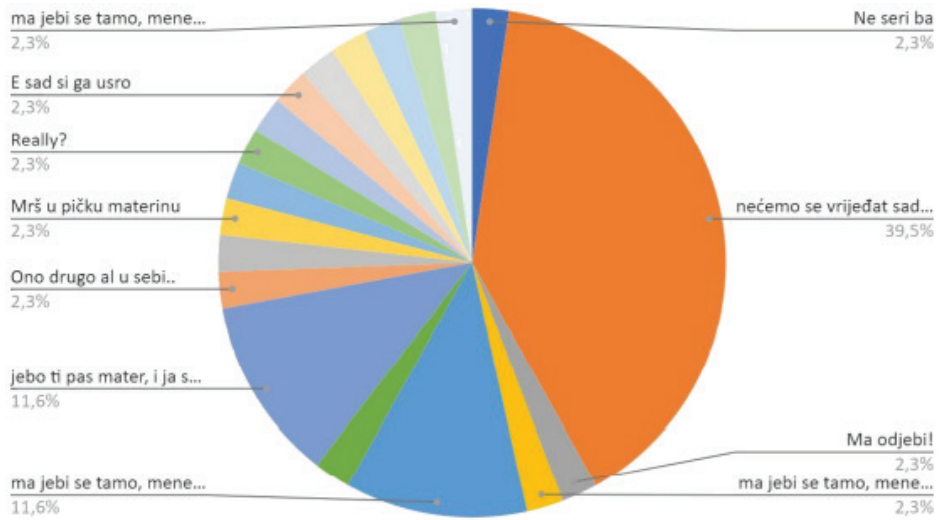


Figure 1
Male Percentage in the use of Vulgarisms

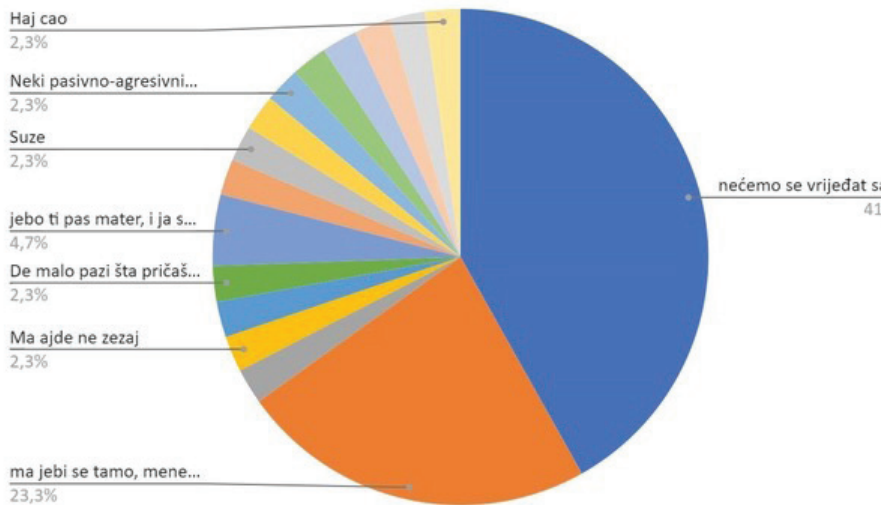


Figure 2
Female Percentage in the use of Vulgarisms

**PART TWO:
ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES, LITERARY
THEORY AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

Weaving Native American Identity with Genetrix Motifs in L.M. Silko's *Ceremony*

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to address genetrix motifs in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* and ways in which they help Tayo, a mixed-blood war veteran, understand the intricate webs of his identity. The significance of genetrix in the Native American communities is adumbrated in the first pages of the novel which present the story of Ts'its'tsi'nako or Thought-Woman in poetic form. According to the story and Paula Gun Allen's studies (1986), Ts'its'tsi'nako created the sacred hoop or universe through her manifestations (Spider Woman, Corn Woman, Earth Woman) which prove to be important in Tayo's healing. Ts'its'tsi'nako's manifestations are manifold and focus on *woman* as a creative force. Little Sister, Auntie, Grandmother, Ts'eh, and Night Swan, invigorate Tayo on his journey to self-realization, thus confirming the omnipresence of Ts'its'tsi'nako and feminine creative principle. Furthermore, the characters of Grandma and Auntie delineate important features of social organization of traditional Native American communities, such as gynocracy, matrilocality, matrifocality, and matrilinearity. Women like Little Sister and Night Swan are illustrative of free sexuality which was customary in traditional Native American communities. On the other hand, the attitudes of other (female) characters to free sexuality portray how the collective identity of Laguna Pueblo Indians has changed over centuries. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to present the female progenitive power that constructs Native American personal and communal identities on the example of Silko's *Ceremony*.

Keywords: genetrix, identity, Native American, sacred hoop, Silko

1. Native American (Literary) Identity and L. M. Silko's *Ceremony: The Link Between*

The post-World War II period in the US saw the decline of strict socio-political and cultural hierarchies, e.g. racial and ethnic, which brought about the rise of consciousness of the oppressed and/or marginalized members of the US society, as illustrated through different civil rights movements, protests, and activism. With regards to Native Americans, the rise of Native American consciousness was fuelled by numerous acts and policies passed by the US Congress during the 1950s, also known as the Termination Era. The aim of the federal government was to minimize federal obligations to tribes and reservations through relocations programs and termination of the tribal status. Native American communities retaliated by forming Red Power Movement, which advocated the rights of Native Americans, and by occupying Wounded Knee (1972) and Alcatraz (1969–1973) (Weaver, 1997, p. 121–123). The same period saw the proliferation of Native American literature¹ and the year 1968 is marked as terminus a quo of contemporary Native American fiction. It is the year when N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *House Made of Dawn* was published². In addition to Momaday's novel, the novels of James Welch, *Winter in Blood* (1974), and Leslie M. Silko, *Ceremony* (1977), are considered to be "formative novels that pattern the substructures of contemporary Native American literature" (Ruppert, 2005, p. 174).

The above-referenced period is also specified as the inception of Native American Literary Renaissance/Indian Literary Renaissance, or the period which saw an unprecedented number of literary publications written by Native Americans. Jace Weaver (1997) describes that the period seemed "as if the floodgates had been opened and through them poured a steady stream of books by Natives" (p. 121). Most of the works written at the time garnered great attention from the wider public that wanted to explore the experiences of minority people and of those marginalized by mainstream American society. Many of these

1 This does not imply that Native American literature had not existed up to the above-referenced point.

2 Momaday's novel won the Pulitzer Prize in 1969.

readers sought expressions of community, spirit, ecology, and egalitarianism that they could not find in mainstream society. The civil rights movement had turned many people's attention to questions of social justice and naturally Native American claims, having always formed a pole in the development of American self, came to the fore. (Ruppert, 2005, p. 173)

The awareness towards such issues also contributed to the establishing of Native American studies in universities across the US and beyond, which secured the continuity of Native American literature. Even nowadays, hardly any discussion of contemporary Native American literature, especially fiction, can overlook its concern with identity, both individual and collective. However, there is a growing trend in Native American literature towards binding the theme of cultural clash with the oral tradition of the author's community; the emphasis is on going back to the roots and adapting them to the current matters (Allen, 2015, p. 114). 1960s onwards has also seen the blossoming of Native women writing (Silko, Erdrich, Harjo, etc.) that binds the above-mentioned themes of cultural clash and the position of women. Paula Gun Allen, an established Native American literary critic and activist who wrote extensively about traditional roles of women in Native American societies and their position in the more contemporary world, reflects on the efforts and endurance of Native American women writers saying:

We are doing all we can: as mothers and grandmothers; as family members and tribal members; as professionals, workers, artists, shamans, leaders, chiefs, speakers, writers, and organizers, we daily demonstrate that we have no intention of disappearing, of being silent, or of quietly acquiescing in our extinction. (1986/2015, p. 257)

Leslie Marmon Silko, "the most canonized, most taught, and most written about of Native American authors", garnered attention in the light of the above-referenced tendencies with the novel *Ceremony* (Madsen,

2022, “Leslie Marmon Silko”). The novel examines the life and manifold identity issues of Tayo. A neglected war veteran and a mixed-blood Laguna Pueblo, Tayo is on the margin between the WASP community and the Laguna Pueblo community since he is not fully accepted into either of the two. In addition, Tayo suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which provides the reader with a number of flashbacks from his childhood and wartime that explain his feelings of (un)belonging and disorientation. He is advised by tribal medicine men to undergo a ceremony which will eventually help him understand the intricate webs of his identity. Tayo’s identity odyssey is marked and alleviated by the strong presence of women, most of which are manifestations of the genetrix spirit (female progenitor/supreme deity). The aim of the paper is to examine the genetrix motifs in *Ceremony* and their link to individual and collective Native American identities. The focus is principally on genetrix as a more pervasive force. However, the paper also analyzes genetrix as the female progenitor exclusively. In that regard, the paper focuses on several women in the novel and their positions which represent important features of social organization of traditional Native American communities, such as gynocracy, matriarchy, matrilocality, matrifocality, and matrilinearity and/or their versions in the present. Finally, the focus of the paper shifts briefly to the role that women occupy in religious matters.

2. Genetrix Motifs and Native American Identity in Silko’s *Ceremony*

According to *Collins Online Dictionary*, the term genetrix refers to “a female progenitor” (Genetrix, n.d.). Notable names of Native American scholarship and literary criticism explain that the concept which the term genetrix refers to is much broader in Native American cosmology and theology. In *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986/2015), Allen elaborates on various aspects of Native American traditions and the seminal role that women perform in those

traditions. Genetrix is the superior being that *thought*³ the world into existence:

In the beginning was thought, and her name was Woman. The Mother, the Grandmother, recognized from earliest times into the present among those peoples of the Americas who kept to the eldest traditions, is celebrated in social structures, architecture, law, custom, and the oral tradition. [...] She is the Old Woman Spider who weaves us together in a fabric of interconnection. She is the Eldest God, the one who Remembers and Re-members. [...] Old Spider Woman is one name for this quintessential spirit, and Serpent Woman is another. Corn Woman is one aspect of her, and Earth Woman is another, and what they together have made is called Creation, Earth, creatures, plants, and light. At the center of all is Woman, and no thing is sacred (cooked, ripe, as the Keres Indians of Laguna Pueblo say it) without her blessing, her thinking. (Allen, 1986/2015, pp. 26–28)

The Thought-Woman enables the circulation of life through the interrelatedness of all beings in the universe—the sacred hoop (Allen, 1986/2015, p. 26). The importance of this figure in all aspects of Native American life suggests gynocentrism. Allen's studies on gynocentrism have been frequent objects of debates which argue that Allen's interpretation of woman-centered societies and the feminine spirit still relies on phallogocentric definitions of womanhood that are biologically and culturally conditioned. Allen points out that by gynocentrism and/or gynocracy she does not refer to concepts that represent counterparts to androcentrism. Such societies are rather conceived as zestful communities where creative dynamics is in focus. The resurgence of gynocentrism in contemporary Native American fiction is recognized as an attempt of going back to the origins, "putting it back together, recovering, knowing who we are and who we have been" (as cited in Pulitano, 2003, pp. 21–23). AnaLouise Keating comprehends Allen's feminine spirit as "feminine mestizaje" that

3 Emphasis mine.

is “fluid, transformational”, a figure whose presence should be interpreted in “open-ended, non-exclusionary ways” (1996, p. 96). Hence, the spirit can appear in the form of a woman but is not limited to it.

Silko pays homage to the Woman and its creative energy by starting the novel with storytelling, alluding that genetrix is the premise of the novel and premise of Tayo’s identity. Simultaneously, Silko is establishing a link between her literary production and traditional storytelling, which creates continuity:

Ts’its’tsi’nako, Thought-Woman, is sitting in her room and whatever she thinks about appears. / She thought of her sisters, Nau’ts’ity’i and I’tcts’ity’i, and together they created the Universe this, / world and the four worlds below. / Thought-Woman, the spider, named things and as she named them they appeared. / She is sitting in her room thinking of a story now, / I’m telling you the story she is thinking. / Ceremony, / I will tell you something about stories, / [...] / They aren’t just entertainment. / Don’t be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off / illness and death. / You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories. [...] / And in the belly of this story the rituals and the ceremony are still growing. / What She Said: / The only cure / I know / is a good ceremony, / that’s what she said. (Silko, 2006, p. 17)

The ceremony that Tayo undergoes seeks to help him resolve his feelings of belonging and (co-) existing within a particular community. Allen (1986/2015) suggests that integration with the community is desideratum of ceremonies regardless of their cause. Ceremonies “create and support the sense of community that is the bedrock of tribal life. This community is not made up only of members of the tribe, but necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe’s universe” (Allen, 1986, pp. 91–92). Ceremonies often involve various “transformations of objects from one form to another, [...], communication with animals, plants, and nonphysical beings (spirits, katsinas, goddesses, and gods)” (Allen, 1986/2015, pp. 40–41).

Tayo's ceremony consists of the interaction with his surroundings, e.g. tracking a mountain lion, tracking cattle, collecting plants, passing through a certain area/mountain, listening to stories, etc. All the aforementioned can be interpreted as manifestations of Creatrix/Thought-Woman/Ts'its'tsi'nako. Tayo's mother is usually observed as the first avatar of Ts'its'tsi'nako. Auntie once tells Tayo that she saw his mother Little Sister (Laura) walking naked under a cottonwood tree near the river, which is the place where katasinas (spirits) enter the Pueblo, usually in November (Nelson, 2002, p. 166). Night Swan, Josiah's lover and a mysterious cantina dancer, is also considered an important step on his journey. She comforts Tayo when he feels isolated from the community as a mixed-blood: "You don't have to understand what is happening. But remember this day. You will recognize it later. You are part of it now" (Silko, 2006, p. 97). The descriptions of Night Swan are swamped in the color blue, mentioned 95 times in the novel. Tayo remembers the conversation he had with Night Swan and starts noticing shades of blue everywhere around him, especially during his interaction with Ts'eh.

Ts'eh is the woman he meets in the area of the Tse-pi'na Mountain which is considered to be sacred land according to the Laguna Pueblo beliefs. Ts'eh is described as a magical being, which once again suggests the above-mentioned relationship and harmony between the human and non-human worlds. Rachel Stein (1997) recognizes Ts'eh as a sacred shapeshifter that becomes involved with individuals/tribes in order to reground them in their Laguna identity which is chiefly rooted in "the reciprocal spiritual kinship of human and nature" (p. 134). Robert Nelson (2002) argues that Ts'eh is actually an avatar of the genetrix figure, just like Night Swan and Little Sister. Nelson draws a nominal parallel between Ts'eh, Tse-pi'na, and Ts'its'tsi'nako since all three begin with the consonant cluster "Ts" (2002, pp. 141–157). In like manner, Night Swan can be viewed as the anglicized version of Nau'ts'ity'i (also written as Tse che nako and Naotsetse), Ts'its'tsi'nako's sister (Nelson, 2002, p. 168). Nelson applies a similar approach to the hypocoristic that Auntie uses to refer to Tayo's mother. She sometimes uses Sis instead of Little Sister, which

Nelson (2002) interprets as a homophone of Ts'its (pp. 165–166). One manifestation/motif leads to another, all eventually leading to Tayo's re-grounding and re-membling. For example, during the lovemaking act between Tayo and Ts'eh, Tayo observes Ts'eh's body as a panorama which helps him to track the spotted cattle he is looking after and to consolidate his own actuality in the panorama of the community and beyond. On the other hand, Allen (1986/2015) sees Tayo's identity conundrums as a direct consequence of "the repression of his anima", so it is through Ts'eh that "he becomes conscious of the female side of his own nature and accepts and integrates feminine behavior into his life" (p. 172).

As highlighted earlier, Allen's definition of Native American gynocracy has not escaped criticism such as the one by Gerald Vizenor who understands gynocracy as "an essentialist and a structural reversal of patriarchy" (Vizenor & Lee, 1999, p. 163) that belongs to "new feminist enlightenment" (ibid.). Some chapters from Allen's *The Sacred Hoop* do raise doubts as to whether Allen's celebration of gynocracy is based on biological and cultural paradigms. For example, in the chapter "Red Roots of White Feminism", Allen (1986/2015) references the first successful female rebellion from 1600s that occurred in Native American communities in the desire to demonstrate that Native American communities had been feminist even before the feminist movement(s) started officially. In "Gynecentric to Patriarchal" chapter, Allen (1986/2015) reflects on how tribal organization has significantly changed from "gynecentric, egalitarian, ritual-based social system to secularized structures closely imitative of the European patriarchal system" (p. 259), which points to the exclusive relationship between the two concepts.

Women from Tayo's family exemplify pre-patriarchal social organization of Native American communities or rather its contemporary transformation and significance for the shaping of Native American identities. Silko explains that she drew from her own experience, confirming that such arrangement was prevalent in the Pueblo community while she was growing up in the 1950s: "My childhood was spent in the Pueblo matriarchy, where women owned property, and children belonged to the mother's clan" (2006, p. 14). Silko expresses similar views in an interview

with Laura Coltelli (2002) who asked the authoress whether her intention was to shed light on the role of women in Pueblo society by surrounding a single male protagonist with different women.

LC: *Ceremony* has a male protagonist, but it is a story created by a woman, told by a woman [but a story] already known by another woman, Tayo's grandmother, whose words conclude the novel. Does it stress women's role and importance in the Pueblo society? *Silko*: Certainly, that's part of it, just because women hold such an important position in temporal matters—the land-title, the house, the lineage of the children; the children belong to the mother's line first, and secondarily of course to the father. There is not any of this peculiar Christian, Puritan segregation of the sexes. (Coltelli, 2002, p. 243)

Tayo, a mixed-blood, is left to live with his mother's relatives, which indicates that his lineage is traced through his mother: "clan membership is dependent on matrilineal descent" (Allen, 1986/2015, p. 278). Despite the matrilineal descent at hand, Tayo has great identity issues due to his status of a mixed-blood that he is often reminded of by Auntie and others. Furthermore, Tayo's identity issues do not solely revolve around his status of a mixed-blood and a war veteran but also around his relationship with his mother: "He was four years old the night his mother left him there" (Silko, 2006, p. 70). His feelings of alienation and estrangement stem from the above-referenced abandonment. It follows that, as Allen (1986/2015) argues, the relationship between a child and a mother in Native American communities is crucial for identity development:

Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same as being lost— isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life. (p. 278)

Tayo's interaction with his female relatives and his desire to be accepted by them stresses and reconfirms the importance of women in Native American communities. For example, Tayo seems particularly troubled by the behavior of his maternal aunt, Auntie, who is in charge of the household and who does not accept him fully into the family since he is a mixed-blood. Her importance in the family is indicative of matrilocality, family arrangement in which the woman/wife/mother is the head of the family while the husband and/or other male members keep a less prominent role. Auntie's authority is evident in the position of male characters, such as her brother Josiah and her husband Robert who have little interference in decision-making. Also, Robert's residence with Auntie's family confirms the idea of matrilocality, residence of the husband with the wife's family. Traditional Native American communities consisted of "self-defining, assertive, decisive women" and "nurturing, pacifist, and passive males" (Allen, 1986/2015, p. 17). Also, traditional Native American social arrangements were not restrictive in terms of sexuality which was rather "free and easy" (ibid.). Little Sister, who was, according to the narrative, involved in various relationships and who displayed free sexual demeanor, is illustrative of the aforementioned just like Night Swan. Based on these examples, it can be argued that certain customs and practices have persisted to this day. They denote a continuing dynamism in Native American cultural identities in spite of the acculturation processes.

Auntie, who often disparages both Tayo's mother and Night Swan due to their libertine behavior, constitutes a complex character. She seems to yearn for her recognition as a Christian: "Tayo wondered if she liked it that way, going to church by herself, where she could show the people that she was a devout Christian and not immoral or pagan like the rest of the family" (Silko, 2006, p. 79). Tayo contemplates how it is possible for Auntie and other members of the community to be both Native American and Christian since Christianity is seen as a religion immanent to the colonizer/the dominant group:

Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ

was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family. The sensitivity remained: the ability to feel what the others were feeling in the belly and chest. (Silko, 2006, pp. 71–72)

He is confused by the amalgamation of Christian and Native American identities since their teachings diverge at different points. Nonetheless, L. M. Russel and J. S. Clarkson (1996) evince that Native American spirituality and Christianity do share common grounds, which partly explains why some Native American communities do not see Christianity as something that would expel them from Native American identity frames or reduce their belonging to the community. The shared values mostly include:

belief in a Creator, an afterlife, prophecy, healing; the *ethics of hospitality, sharing, stewardship, love, walking a good path, the common good; practices such as fasting, feasting, and *prayer. Indigenous ceremonies such as the sun dance have elements of self-giving and intercession for the people that parallel Christian observances. (Russel and Clarkson, 1996, p. 294)

The juncture between Native American religious practices and Christianity in Native American communities has worked towards religious syncretism and hybridity. Two systems of belief created the third one that is more fluid; a system in which one practice does not exclude the other. Reverend Chebon Kernell (2015) has noticed that “a growing number of Native American Christians have begun to question and abandon old taboos that required the abandonment of Native American rituals and ceremonies once converted to Christianity” (p. 161). Kernell (2015) also provides examples of how the churches sometimes fund sweat lodge ceremonies, stomp dances, etc. (pp. 161–162). Comparably, Auntie goes to church regularly, reads from the Bible, prays, but also partakes in Native American practices and insists upon preserving the community. Her character might be of interest for future discussions since her identity, among other paradigms, is based on being Native American, being Christian, and being a woman. Additionally, Russel and Clarkson (1996) find correlation between indigenous

women's theology and the feminist movement because both "value egalitarian modes of decision making over *hierarchical" and both "choose the circle as a symbol and a model for communal life" (p. 294), which goes back to the prominence of the genetrix motifs and the sacred hoop in *Ceremony* as well as their importance for the Native American identities.

3. Conclusion

The novel *Ceremony* has been garnering attention from its publication date to this day due to its narrative complexity and the wide array of issues pertaining to the development of Tayo's identity. This paper has provided an insight into the prominence and meaning of the genetrix concept for Tayo's consolidation of his Native American identity. The analysis of the genetrix motifs in *Ceremony* is not novel, as evident in a number of publications that aided the writing of this paper, but it encompasses and integrates various reading perspectives into one. The dissection of the term and of the concept genetrix/creatix/Thought Woman/ Ts'its'tsi'nako, which relies on Paula Gun Allen's study *The Sacred Hoop* (1986/2015), reveals that it refers to a fluid entity which is primarily feminine, thereby disregarding exclusive biological and cultural binarities that might be associated with it. Further analysis has turned attention to the presence and consistent traceability of the genetrix through its numerous manifestations and avatars (Little Sister, Night Swan, Ts'eh) that help Tayo with his ceremony. The second part of the paper has considered genetrix exclusively as the female progenitor/woman and its substance which is reflected through several social arrangements including matriarchy, matrifocality, matrilocality, and matrilinearity. It has also regarded whether such arrangements and its aspects have been amended or perpetuated over centuries. Lastly, the paper has briefly tackled the impact of Christianity upon Native American identities and the role of women in Native American Christian communities. Taken together, the analysis of genetrix motifs points to the interest towards the revival of Native American tradition and culture in the contemporary era, as well as towards the general and academic interest for such topics in the contemporary US fiction.

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Finding a Voice of Her Own: Representing Subjective Experiences of Women in British Drama

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ABSTRACT

In her seminal book *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), Sue-Ellen Case accentuated that “very little work ha[d] been published that relate[d] these theories to a feminist perspective on the theatre,” (p. 3) and that she “[found] the subjective voice to be a liberation from the impersonal, omniscient and seemingly objective voice patriarchal culture ha[d] used for centuries to render certain experiences invisible” (p. 3). When she made these comments, the author could only have dreamt of the wealth with which feminist thought would imbue the dramatic and theatrical worlds. Feminism, along with the pluralistic openness of postmodernist and gender theories and practices, has indeed liberated female dramatists in unprecedented ways, and consequently opened the once exclusively male zone (see Čirić-Fazlija, 2016; Case, 1988, p. 28) to their respective (subjective) experiences and voices, which have been defiantly contesting patriarchal social and cultural practices and discourses since the 1970s.

Informed by the theories and theatre studies of Case (1988), Aston (1995; 1999), Aston and Reinelt (2000) and Schmidt (2005), and by Hutcheon’s groundwork on postmodern poetics (1988), this paper critically examines three plays by British female dramatists: Liz Lochhead’s *Blood and Ice* (1982); Christina Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* (1983/4); and Rona Munro’s *Bold Girls* (1990/1). In doing so, it foregrounds the subjective experiences of diverse British women set among/against societies and historic and cultural events that privilege the white male patriarchal perspective.

Keywords: feminism, theatre and drama studies, Liz Lochhead, Christina Reid, Rona Munro

1. Introduction

“Finding a Voice of Her Own” proposes ways in which plays composed by women can be tackled; it is one of many possible readings that arise from examining the dramatisations of women’s subjective experiences. The plays in the focus of this paper were composed and premiered in the eighties and nineties. By this time, world theatre had been developing for millennia, and for the greatest part (of its history) had disregarded and/or misrepresented women, be they authors, actors, theatre crew or dramatic figures who walked the world’s stages, alongside but not equal to men. Conversely, contemporary female dramatists, such as Liz Lochhead, Christina Reid and Rona Munro whose works this study examines, have been placing female characters (and their respective individual, personal, and most intimate experiences) centre-stage. In doing so, they have worked towards discrediting patriarchal matrices, while simultaneously creating a new theatrical aesthetic and paradigm.

The paper will first contextualise the selected dramas by briefly discussing the legislative framework on women’s rights, as well as the working conditions for women in British theatres up to and including the eighties. It will then discuss how feminism, gender studies and postmodernism inform theatre and drama studies, and finally, it will comparatively examine the three aforementioned plays.

2. “Equal in Imagination”: On the Rights of and Regulations for Women

As is widely known, discussions on women’s rights and public demands for equity in Britain lasted for centuries (since Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792). It was only in the aftermath of the Great War, however, that the situation began to alter: the war brought about societal changes that could no longer be ignored. This gave further impetus to various forms of political activism extant prior to 1914, which finally led to the Representation of the People Act being passed in

1918. Although the Act extended voting rights to 8.5 million women (see UK Parliament, n.d., “Women Get the Vote”), it was essentially discriminatory (sexist and ageist), as it only extended the right to women over 30, who then had to meet other criteria, such as property qualifications. The Act simultaneously fully removed property and other restrictions for men, and lowered their voting age to 21 (or 19 for army personnel). It took a whole decade before another law, the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, was passed, which was more comprehensive and less sexist, as it removed all voting restrictions for women over 21. An increase in new legislation that enfranchised women followed, such as the Sex Disqualification Removal Act of 1919. As time progressed, however, no further legal reforms were implemented; they were prevented by stalling politicians and the prevailing socially desirable/proscribed behaviour of the time, such as the revival of the domesticity cult before and after WWII and in the Thatcher era. As National Archives’ author vividly reminds its readers, “Old prejudices about women’s working capabilities were alive and well, particularly in the armed forces – home to 470,000 servicewomen during the war. Even progressive measures such as the Beveridge Report were by no means feminist in their outlook” (n.d., “The Postwar World”). British women in the fifties and sixties were, in the words of Aston and Reinelt (2000), “Enfranchised but not empowered, ‘equal’ in imagination more often than law, [...] very concerned about their quality of life in the context of the conservative climate of their times” (p. 10).

Spurred by activism, the civil rights movement and rallies against the Vietnam War in the fifties and sixties, second-wave feminism took a slightly different turn in Britain than it did across the pond. It was mostly marked by the 1968 civil rights activism in Northern Ireland, and strikes by working-class women who demanded to be recognized as skilled workers. The latter eventually did lead to the Equal Pay Act of 1970, but it took a lot longer for the law to be fully implemented, and for the women to be reclassified and given the same pay as men (see Sherwood, n. d.)¹.

1 According to Sherwood (n.d.), it took at least a decade and a half (until 1984) for Ford factory workers to be reclassified and given equal pay.

Women were still expected to accept lesser pay, and poorer (or no) education. They were supposed to adhere to the domesticity cult and the dual role, and to prioritise husband and children over work and personal contentment, despite being employed outside the household in increasing numbers, and despite the liberalisation of marriage and divorce laws. Not even did the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 affect pay equity, and so, women in eighties Britain still received only two thirds of the wages guaranteed to men. Moreover, although there was a sharp increase in the number of female students in British Universities at the time², they were generally from an affluent (white, upper-class) background.

On the other hand, a web of historic events and social changes, including the aforementioned civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and strikes of working-class women in early seventies Britain, led to the Second Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) being formed at Oxford's Ruskin College (see Aston & Reinelt, 2000; Sherwood, n.d.). The movement had four demands: "equal pay; equal education and opportunity; 24-hour nurseries; and free contraception and abortion on demand" (Aston & Reinelt, 2000, p. 11), and immensely influenced the perception of women in British society at the end of the millennium. Similarly to feminist movements around the world, the WLM directed its efforts towards fighting centuries-old and deeply-entrenched prejudices regarding male superiority at work, in education, and in traditional patterns of family life. Since then, feminists, in discourses and practices, in Britain and worldwide, have continually worked to raise awareness of the systemic marginalisation of women in all spheres of life, and to foreground their genuine experiences. Over time, they have broadened their range of work and themes to the issues of gendered violence, sexuality, reproductive rights (that is, body politics), and the investigation of how and why the oppression and marginalisation of women occurs. This foremost includes the interrelated issues of power play and politics, since, according to Franklin, Lury and Stacey (1991) "feminists [are] convinced that the 'personal [is] political'" (p. 172).

2 Roy Strong (2018) suggests that women comprised 40 percent of all students in the eighties.

3. 'BeWitched': Women in British Theatre

As in other Anglophone theatres (see Čirić-Fazlija, 2016; Case, 1988, p. 28), British theatres until the mid-eighties were predominantly a (white, affluent, upper-class) man's world: male dramatists, directors, producers, art directors and other men employed in theatre³ were the ones who determined the programmes and thereby shaped cultural policies and practice. Female authors such as Pam Gems and Caryl Churchill, directors such as Joan Littlewood, Clare Venables or the magnificent Buzz Goodbody, and set designers like the celebrated Sally Jacobs, had to work with/in regional or alternative, independent (and often non-subsidised) theatres and troupes. There they were obliged to uncomplainingly await the seventies and even eighties, in order to "weaken the dominance of men in theatre" (Trussler, 1994, p. 356). The rise of feminist activism and thought in the seventies, which was partly an outcome of the 1968 culture of protests and strikes, and partly a reaction to the more anachronistic aspects of that culture, pushed authors such as Churchill to begin re-examining the "traditional patriarchal culture", and to critically assess the "patriarchal canon and the hegemony of male artists" (Fortier, 2000, p. 108–109) deeper and more loudly. Around this time, diverse civil rights movements (ethnic, feminist, gay) turned to theatre and performance to voice their respective (political) agendas. These were efficient means in questioning and challenging ingrained expectations and stereotypes of the then dominant culture, which was (and to a great degree still is) white, male, affluent, and heteronormative. Simultaneously, the ascent of the TIE (Theatre in Education) movement in the seventies and eighties helped launch the careers of many successful female playwrights and directors. These women have persistently re-emphasised the abysmal discrepancy between gender roles in reality and those projected by (and subtly encoded in) literary classics (as in the play *Sweetie Pie*, 1972), and foregrounded taboos such as adolescent sexuality (as in the piece *My Mother Says I Never Should*, 1974).

3 Exception to the rule were male actors, who were more vulnerable, as throughout the history of theatre acting has been a precarious profession; but even in this field women have faced twice the hardships of their male counterparts.

This was also a time when diverse women's and feminist troupes were formed, instigated by socio-political activism and backed by feminist theory. Ensembles such as "Women's Theatre Group", "Monstrous Regiment", "Hormone Imbalance", "Mrs Worthington's Daughters", and "Cunning Stunts" immensely facilitated the breach of the male hegemony in eighties and nineties British theatre and drama. In the words of Mark Fortier (2000), they proved that "without a large number of prominent women artists or predominantly female audiences, patriarchal culture is seen as the exchange of cultural material – often involving representations of women – within an exclusively male social economy" (p. 109–110). When women have finally seized authority and a position of power in theatre (regardless of the socio-historic circumstances), they have shown clear interest in new (women's) dramas. This has enabled young female dramatists to thrive: their texts have been more frequently staged, and they have not had to comply with the obstinate and largely misogynist attitudes to the presence of women in public spaces that theatres have always been (see Aston, 2005, p. 25–27).

4. Paving the Way: The Rise of Feminist and Gender Theatre Studies

Since the eighties, many academics, authors and critics (such as Sue-El-len Case, Elaine Aston, and Jill Dolan) have been thoroughly and methodically employing feminist and gender theories in their studies of theatre and drama. These critics position various dramatic works within/along the lines of feminist and gender studies. They discuss feminist drama and theatre; re-read and re-visit traditional, canonical and classical dramatic works and lesser known, usually neglected plays (which were mostly composed by women); and interpret the history of theatre and performance conventions from a feminist perspective. Their key goal has been the "unravelling and overthrow[ing] ... [of the] patriarchy" (Fortier, 2000, p. 107) in dramatic literature and the performing and theatrical arts. They do this not only by exposing and criticising patriarchal matrices, but also by encouraging

and nurturing female culture, frequently through the “fostering of new work by women, feminist work which would represent women otherwise than patriarchy has heretofore allowed” (Fortier, 2000, p. 114). These critics re-examine the position and representation of women⁴ in theatres and drama, from antiquity to medieval and Renaissance Europe, to more recent independent and subsidised Anglophone theatres. They also interpret and foreground the works of Aphra Behn (1640–1689); Elizabeth Baker (1876–1962); Elizabeth Robins (1862–1952); Cicely Hamilton (1872–1952); Githa Sowerby (1876–1970); Susan Glaspell (1876–1948); Alice Childress (1916–1994); Adrienne Kennedy (1931–); Ntozake Shange (1948–2018); Pam Gems (1925–2011); Caryl Churchill (1938–); Liz Lochhead (1947–); Suzan-Lori Parks (1963–); Anne Devlin (1951–); Timberlake Wertenbaker (1951–); Deborah Warner (1959–); and alike. Sue-Ellen Case (1988) and Elaine Aston (1995), like Michelene Wandor (in Aston & Reinelt, 2000), insist that although the start of the paradigm change in British and world theatres could be detected in the mid-seventies, at the end of the millennium “[m]ale dominance, in terms of both actual jobs, and the critical and imaginative perspective of theatre, still prevail[ed]” (Wandor, 2000, p. 54). Additionally, when Case published her comprehensive book on feminism and theatre in late eighties, almost two decades after the second-wave feminists’ socio-political fight for equality, she could only state that:

... Very little work has been published that relates these theories to a feminist perspective on the theatre. I have borrowed from works on film and on the novel to begin an application of these theories to theatre practice. [...] most of the work on feminism and theatre is published scattered about a variety of journals and unpublished sources, relating to a variety of disciplines, [...] (1988, p. 3, added emphasis)

Not even in the mid-nineties, when Aston’s first book thematising

4 These re-examinations highlight the fact that throughout the history of world theatre, women have been largely left out or perceived as non-existent members of audiences and troupes; that as dramatists, their works were ignored and rarely, if ever, staged; and that in dramatic literature and art they were portrayed as schematized types, such as “the Bitch, the Witch, the Vamp and the Virgin/Goddess” (Case, 1988, pp. 5–6).

feminism and drama was published, had the situation improved: in spite of the eighties' "theory explosion" (Aston, 1995, p. 4), feminist studies of theatre were not a common approach or independent academic discipline, as they were "still in the process of defining" (Aston, 1995, p. 1). This was partly a consequence of the late separation of theatre studies from the wider field of (Anglophone) literary studies, in which "[t]heatre, studied as dramatic literature in English departments, had been divorced from the context of its production" (Aston, 1995, p. 25). As the aforementioned and other critics point out, any study of theatre and drama in the context of feminist and gender theories, albeit a challenging, multidisciplinary and permanently incomplete activity, is also highly relevant, because it illustrates the ways in which a feminist critic/theorist may "extend the limits of theatre history by simply considering the experiences of women as definitive [...] so that feminists can claim a heritage" (Case, 1988, p. 2).

Feminist critical studies of theatre and drama have taken three major directions to date. One is the exposure of the systemic silencing of women, which has been occurring for centuries in (both theatrical and dramatic/literary) public spaces by way of fostering the dominant (patriarchal) culture. This line, therefore, focuses on critical re-appraisal of the history of theatre and drama, and oppositional readings of classical and canonical works of dramatic literature. It espouses Kate Millet's key ideas, especially those found in *Sexual Politics* (1970), where she points out that culture is gender-based and states that "art is not distinct from politics" (as cited in Case, 1988, p. 5–6). In the first line of study poststructuralist and postmodernist ideas about the decentred universe also feature strongly, along with the discussions on the dangers of the humanist project and meta-narratives that privilege the authority of a "stable centre" (whose legitimacy is actually questionable).

Another line, interwoven with and in part resulting from the first, attempts to place women in the limelight. It thus privileges those authors (and their work) who were previously considered the 'other' by virtue of their gender, and examines the dramatic literature and performances of women through diachronic and synchronic approaches. This line of study is great-

ly informed by film studies, and Laura Mulvey's (1977) concept of the "male gaze", which "oppresses, silences and distorts female realities" (as cited in Case, 1988, p. 111). It understands that past cultural practices in theatre and performance are accountable for a millennia-long absence of women on stages, in theatres and dramatic literature, and for the stereotyped and fetishised representation of women, "sometimes as a strictly masculinist fantasy with no relation to real women, sometimes as the appropriation of women and women's bodies to masculine perspectives" (Case, 1988, p. 110). One of the goals of critical feminist theatre studies has therefore been to unravel such traditional/patriarchal/masculine systems of the representation of women in drama and theatre, by re-discovering and recovering women dramatists' plays to create a new canon of dramatic literature.

The third line of study builds on the previous two, and aims to establish new poetics, and new aesthetic and dramatic tradition(s) that deconstruct the male/patriarchal hegemony, and simultaneously promote and advocate the primacy of the female position, and the real (genuine) experiences of women. In doing so, it "works in some way to present positive images of women, or to improve the status of women in the theatre" (Goodman 1993b, p. 68, as cited in Aston, 1995, p. 61), and frequently demands the employment of collectives and/or exclusively women's troupes. This line of study also attempts to determine what a feminist play is, and suggests that "it is important to analyse [the dominant structural drive], rather than allow surface symptoms, such as a central female character, or an all-female cast, to appear to answer the need for redressing both gender-imbalance and gendered perspective" (Wandor, 2000, p. 65). In her 1979 analysis of feminist drama, Janet Brown identifies four stylistic devices through which the patriarchal representation of women in drama is challenged:

- 1 the sex-role reversal device;
- 2 the presentation of historical figures as role models;
- 3 satire of traditional sex roles;
- 4 the direct portrayal of women in oppressive situations. (Brown, 1979, p. 88; as cited in Aston, 1995, p. 56)

Moreover, Sue Ellen-Case (1988) claims that a significant number of feminists consider personal experience and the subjective voice “to be a liberation from the impersonal, omniscient and seemingly objective voice patriarchal culture has used for centuries to render certain experiences invisible and to gain power through the printed word” (p. 3). She adds that new (feminist) poetics and aesthetics must leave traditional patriarchal values (including the conventions of realist drama) behind, in order to create a new critical methodology that accommodates the presence of women in the arts, fosters their liberation from the cultural fictions of their gender, and deconstructs the hegemony of male gender (Case, 1988, p. 114–115). In that respect, feminist dramatic theory (and practice) has borrowed freely from gender and cultural studies; feminist strategies in literary criticism; psycho-semiotics; and certain strategies of the “project called deconstruction” (Case, 1988, p. 115).

5. Feminist Dramas: *Blood and Ice*, *Tea in a China Cup*, and *Bold Girls*

The three plays in the analytical focus of this paper were composed and premiered in the eighties and nineties: *Blood and Ice* premiered in 1982, with the Traverse Theatre Club in Edinburgh; *Tea in a China Cup* was performed in 1983 and 1984 by Belfast’s Lyric Theatre and London’s Riverside Studio respectively; and *Bold Girls* in 1990 and 1991 by Edinburgh’s 7:84 Scottish People’s Theatre and London’s Hampstead Theatre respectively. The three plays are authored by Scottish (Liz Lochhead and Rona Munro) and Northern Irish (Christina Reid) women, and break the illusionist format of the realist tradition. Furthermore, each play foregrounds the subjective experiences of fictional and real women, against the backdrop of historic and cultural events of Romanticism, the two world wars and the Civil War in Northern Ireland (the Troubles/Na Trioblóidí). Moreover, it is the contention of this paper’s author that all three plays position their heroines centre-stage in order to “redress gender-im-

balance” (Wandor, 2000, p. 65), “unravel and overthrow [...] [the] patriarchy” (Fortier, 2000, p. 107), and prove that “personal is [always] political” (Franklin, Lury & Stacey, 1991, p. 172), even if Reid claimed she was a female rather than feminist author (Roll-Hansen, 1987, p. 389–390), and none use agitation-propaganda strategies. In fact, Lochhead, Reid and Munro frequently exploit myth, folklore, and (national) history to comment on the contemporary issues and circumstances that surround the lives of women in modern-day Britain.

Of the three plays, Liz Lochhead’s *Ice and Blood* goes farthest back in time: it sets its action first in 1916, in the rented Swiss villa of real-life historic and cultural figures Mary and P. B. Shelley, and then later in the subsequent six years in various places across English and Italian nomadic households of the Shelleys. Apart from the nineteen-year-old novelist and her far more famous husband, British romanticist poet, aged 24, the protagonists are (as expected) Byron, 28; Claire Clairmont, aged 19; and Elise, the Shelleys’ maid of unspecified age; and (somewhat less expectedly), Frankenstein; Frankenstein’s monster; Elizabeth (Frankenstein’s bride-to-be); Justine (Frankenstein’s maid); and Female monster. The latter five are protagonists from Mary Shelley’s gothic-cum-science-fiction novel, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*. In the true vein of a postmodernist play, however, the impersonation of these figures (as specified in the List of Characters; see Lochhead, 1982, p. 3) demands for five performers only, three female and two male, as the actors double in roles and role-play within roles. This blurring of identities on several levels is further matched with the blurring of the planes of action and temporal timeframes, as Liz Lochhead uses other Hornby’s strategies or elements of metadrama: the play-within-the play; ceremony within drama; as well as the literary and real-life intertextual references (Hornby, as cited in Fei, 2007, pp. 99–105), all placed strategically and put to the purpose of re-examination of earlier historic, ideological and cultural gender constructs, from a distance and with a feat of irony (see Hutcheon, 1988, pp. 24–25). The plot of *Blood and Ice* progresses non-linearly in eighteen short, fast-paced scenes of two acts. It continually exploits the backward glancing

and forward pointing, and revolves around the motifs of death, female sexuality (blood) and poetic inspiration and creativity (ice).

Although it is populated by distinguished male figures of British Romanticism, the play brings young Mary Shelley to the forefront, in the crucial moments of her personal life and public career. This makes the audience question the “master narrative of Romanticism, and particularly [...] Romanticism’s putative devotion to ‘the liberation of humanity’” (Harvey, 1996, p. 4). In question are the “scandalous” events of P. B. Shelley’s turbulent life that preceded his premature death, such as adultery, elopement, exile, the loss of children, the suicide of Harriet Shelley, and his estrangement from friends and family. The play presents these events from young (and insecure) Mary’s perspective, which gives prominence to her own perception of them and to her own subjective emotions pertaining to them like never before. In this manner, the playtext recovers one female author from the shadows of her famous parents and husband, and from literary history’s neglect, while simultaneously re-examining Romantic notions of individualism, creativity, and liberty. Mary, unlike P. B. Shelley or Byron, is primarily constrained by her (socially construed and gendered) roles as lover, wife, mother, sister, and daughter. Simultaneously she struggles to take control of her own creativity, her own writing career and her own identity, separate and distinct from those of her husband, father and mother. Hence, in the penultimate scene, Mary comes to the apt conclusion that:

Oh freedom in a man may be all well, but ...

A Free Woman is a loose woman.

A Free Woman in the society of the Un-free will be ...

A monster.

In an unfree society the worst monster will be a loose woman. (Lochhead, 1982, p. 31)

With this play of hers Lochhead teaches us that “Romanticism offers liberty for the upper-middle class male poet, and different forms and degrees of indenture for women and workers” (Harvie, 1996, p. 5). Thus,

Mary claims that her own maid, being a woman and a worker, is “a slave’s slave” because “[t]o be born poor is to be born a slave. To be born a woman is to be born a slave” (Lochhead, 1982, p. 32).

Late Christina Reid’s *Tea in a China Cup* examines the position and role of Northern Irish (Protestant) women in three distinctive conflicts: from the First to the Second World War and to the Civil War in Northern Ireland (The Troubles/Na Trioblóidí). The nonlinear plot of the two acts (with no further subdivision of the playtext) is mostly set in Belfast, and spans three decades (from 1939 to 1972). The stage decorations and props used in the play are minimal, and the lighting design indicates changes in a scene’s time and loci. There are fifteen characters, although their enactment requires only 9 actors in total; like Liz Lochhead, Christina Reid employs role-doubling (role-playing within a role) across temporal planes. The central figure of *Tea in a China Cup* is Beth, a third generation Protestant woman, whose consciousness and activities give the audience insight into the troubled history of Northern Irish families and the lives of female characters, which “are formed either by the legacy or direct experience of wartime” (Middeke & Schnierer, 2010, p. 387).

The dialogues and situations repeat over and over again, as women see their beloved husbands, brothers and sons off to fight with British forces waging wars far from Belfast. Even when armed conflict hits at home, the women seem to keep a united front, steadfastly defending their homes and hearths from intruders, Protestant or Catholic. Regardless of the conflict, the women are portrayed according to the myth of Protestant women as “keepers of the family hearth” and “loyal steadfast servicer[s] and nurturer[s] of men willing to die for Queen and country” (Delgado as quoted by Trotter, 2000, p. 121). Reid dismantles this myth by juxtaposing Beth’s experiences and cognisance with those of her mother, grandmother, great-aunt and Catholic friend Theresa, leading the audience to conclude that “each image limits women to auxiliary roles within their communities, their agency subordinated by their roles as inspirers or helpers of men” (Trotter, 2000, p. 121). Beth is set free from gender, class, and religious preconceptions, but is filled with

other people's memories and stories, which are passed on matrilineally, like china cups and good linen. She does not really know who or what she is, but she wonders "What happens in a mixed marriage ... do you bury [the deceased] under the gravel path?" (Reid, 1997, p. 7). Beth muses on her grandmother's words, that "no matter how poor we are, child, we work hard and keep ourselves and our homes clean and respectable, and we always have a bit of fine bone china and a good table linen by us" unlike "the Catholics, whining and complainin' and putting' a poor mouth on yourself" (Reid, 1997, p. 25). Because Beth and Theresa are equally "successfully" left in the dark about bodily functions, sexuality and the (Northern Irish) female lack of marital contentment, they both manage to get involved with or marry the wrong men, and learn that "it's all a lie ... and I want to tell *her* about it ... and I can't. [...] I can't tell her that I faithfully repeated all her mistakes ..." (Reid, 1997, p. 60). According to Mary Trotter (2000), both Beth and Theresa "struggle naively to make sense of the silences about both issues [sexual and sectarian] in their households, not comprehending that true knowledge of either subject is a potential threat to the political and/or gender social status quo" (p. 125–126).

Although Scottish, Rona Munro also locates the action of *Bold Girls* in Belfast, at an unspecified point in time (or, as the didascaly reads, in the "*present day*"). Unlike Reid, Munro portrays the daily activities of four Catholic women, whose men are either imprisoned, dead or mostly absent from the stage. In comparison to both Liz Lochhead and Christina Reid's previously analysed plays, *Bold Girls* uses a relatively linear progression of action, and combines naturalism with a few inserted expressionist scenes. Even though there are no male characters on stage, the women's actions and dialogues revolve around their husbands, brothers and sons, as Marie, Nora, and Cassie carry on with their daily domestic duties against the backdrop of the Troubles: tending to the needs of their (spoiled) male children, and (even more egotistic) imprisoned men, and cherishing the memories or glorifying the images of their killed husbands, which are hung high on the wall.

The women in Munro's *Bold Girls* seem to have grown accustomed to various kinds and degrees of violence, and no longer react to the sounds of bombings and shootings or the news of busses burning and road blockades or the British troops storming through their alleyways and houses, except to ironically acknowledge them: they have internalised and normalised their abnormal external surroundings. Even their discussions on the presentation of violence in popular culture, such as the gang-rape and trial of the central character in *The Accused*, or the need to carry a knife as a safety precaution like the unusual ghost-like character Deidre, who bursts in on the three women and their routines, painfully disclose that these women have all learnt the truth of gendered violence and discrimination the hard way. As Nora's 35-year-old daughter Cassie, who wants to break free from the harsh reality and her broken marriage, claims:

My Mummy taught me how to raise my family, how to love them, how to spoil them. Spoil the wee girls with housework and reproaches, the length of their skirts and the colour of their lips: how they sit, how they slouch, how they don't give their fathers peace, how they talk, how they talk back, how they'll come to no good if they carry on like that. They're bold and bad and broken at fourteen, but you love them as much as you love yourself ... that's why you hurt them so much ... Ruin the boys, tell them they're noisy and big and bold, and their boots are too muddy, [...] Tell them to leave their fathers in peace, and come to their mother for a cuddle, tell them they'll always be your own wee man, always your own bold wee man and you love them better than you love their daddy, you love them best of all – that's why they hurt you so much. (Munro, 1991, p. 29)

Through the characters of these four bold women, as brave indeed they are, Rona Munro examines the ramifications of the conflict on Northern Irish women, whose lives are filled not only with bombs and bullets, but also slaps and swearwords, as they experience both physical and emotional abuse not only from the obvious adversary but also from

their beloved. Probably the most openly feminist of the three plays analysed in the paper,

Bold Girls confronts the idea of the urban hardman, but contextualises it much more widely, extending the theme so that the politically and religiously motivated violence of Northern Ireland is read as an extension of domestic violence, with women as the ultimate victims: indeed the moral is also extended away from the Irish locus to all violent societies. (Scullion, 2000, p. 104)

6. Ceaselessly Subject to Interpretation: In Place of a Conclusion

British dramatic literature in particular and theatre studies in general have both come a long way since the hegemonic days of Shakespeare, Shaw, Beckett, or Pinter. Since the eighties, the centrality of the overpowering male experience in life and theatre, and the alleged objective authority of male knowledge of women on page and stage, have unwaveringly given way to tangential, subjective, private, individual *and* fully-fledged new female voices in British drama. Supported by the rise of feminism and gender studies (in political activism, literary theory and performing arts) the three authors examined in this paper, Liz Lochhead, Christina Reid and Rona Munro, are among the many female authors in recent British dramatic literature and the performing arts who have been questioning and challenging the patriarchal matrices of subjugation and modes of (mis)representation of women. They do so by foregrounding the very women whose experiences were systemically ignored, silenced or falsely portrayed, be they historic figures such as Mary Shelley, unknown women in repressive circumstances, such as Beth and Theresa, or run-of-the-mill “bold girls”, the ultimate sufferers: Marie, Cassie and Nora. Whether or not they break conventional dramatic structures and forms along the way, the aforementioned authors open the fruitful field of feminist drama to other female dramatists, and to the many more interpretative subversions of the patriarchy to come.

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Revision of Patriarchy in John Barth's "Perseid"

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present a revision of patriarchy and the deconstruction of traditional gender roles in John Barth's novella "Perseid". Through an ironic and playful depiction of the ancient Greek myth of Perseus, Barth pointed out patriarchy as an ideological subtext of mythology that promoted the image of a perfect male figure whose heroism was based on the oppression of women. In his revision of the ancient Greek myth, John Barth takes a pro-feminist stance and gives voice to female victims that were previously silenced in the original myth. Perseus achieves immortality only when he is able to truly understand his female victims. With the help of Calyxa and the New Medusa, who are the main factors in Perseus' successful re-education and final enlightenment, Perseus achieves self-transformation. In this way, Barth rewrites the myth of Perseus in a feminist key (very much in line with the feminist sentiment of the latter half of the 20th century) and argues that social progress and gender equality are possible only when women's perspective is recognized and incorporated into official historical and cultural narratives. The revision of patriarchy in "Perseid" brings to the surface gender stereotyping and gender discrimination and is caused by strong female characters who advocate equal opportunities for all.

Keywords: gender equality, mythology, patriarchy, Perseid, Perseus

1. Introduction

Metaphorically depicting the position of the postmodern writer and the very search for the originality of literary expression after “the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities” (Barth, 1984, p. 64), caused by the modernist “parents” and “pre-modernist grandparents,” John Barth turns to the literary tradition for inspiration, choosing two ancient Greek myths and an Oriental fairy tale as the starting points of his stories. His treatment of tradition enables him to place stories from antiquity in the context of the late 20th century, where he re-writes them in a new key, bringing them closer to the perspective of his contemporaries. In 1972, Barth publishes a novel called *Chimera*, which is a collection of three novellas, namely “Dunyazadiad”, “Perseid” and “Bellerophoniad”. It offers a closely intertwined network of metafictional games and sharp critiques of the socio-political subtext of selected myths that is patriarchy. This paper focuses on the second novella “Perseid,” which follows the adventures of the mythical hero Perseus, known for his physical strength and prominent place in ancient Greek mythology. Barth revisits the very core of the myth, trying to understand the nature of Perseus’ greatest achievements that culminated in his killing of Gorgon Medusa. Thus, the author delves deeper into the literary tradition and brings to the surface the key points from the original myth, where the golden hero Perseus is celebrated for his heinous murders of innocent victims like Medusa. And, in doing so, Barth addresses the part of the story that is not mentioned in the original myth, and raises very important questions, such as what happens to the hero who is no longer strong and good enough to fight for his dignity and society by following the patriarchal norms, as well as what happens to the victims who never get to say their own side/interpretation of the story. Linda Hutcheon, a distinguished academic specially known for her prominent theories of postmodernism, emphasizes the importance of the postmodernist great potential to discuss serious issues using ironic distance, arguing that it is the usage of irony that enables postmodern authors to revisit and sub-

vert numerous grand narratives (e.g. religious, political, scientific). "We cannot ignore the discourses that precede and contextualize everything we say and do, and it is through ironic parody that we signal our awareness of this inescapable fact," she suggests (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 39). John Barth seems to claim something similar when he tells the story of Perseus from a point of view neglected in official historiography, while Perseus recounts his sufferings and life story in a non-linear way and through fragmentation. With the help of Calyxa and the New Medusa, he finally experiences an epiphany that changes his values and belief system, which was previously deeply rooted in the ideology of patriarchy. However, his transformation is not oversimplified, and Barth does not hesitate to properly address the original myth in order to create a re-make closer to the audience of the late 20th century. Narrated from an ironic distance and with a parodic compassion, "Perseid" reveals patriarchy as an underlying ideology dominating the ancient Greek mythology, and offers a new version rewritten in a feminist key. The main argument of this paper¹ is that Barth's "Perseid" sabotages violence and offers an alternative view of masculinity and femininity, where social progress and gender equality are possible only with mutual and genuine understanding and support.

2. Mythology as a Human Construct

The idea of postmodernists to take a closer look at history, with a certain amount of skepticism, has motivated many to challenge and question data that are presented to the public as fixed truths in historiography. Although postmodernists draw a thin line between literary and historic texts, arguing that both require an author and his own writing skills, they go even further and perceive every text as a fabricated human construct susceptible to change. According to Roland Barthes, myth is a "type of speech" (Barthes, 1991, p. 108), a message that operates in accordance with

1 The text of this paper is an expanded argumentation of what was researched and presented in the last part of the master's thesis entitled "John Barth's Chimera as Metafiction," defended in 2020 at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo.

the dominant powers in a particular society. The instrumental purpose of myth is visible in the way it naturalizes history, making given social values and norms seem to have no alternative. He argues that the problems occur when “the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system” (Barthes, 1991, p. 130), that is a fabricated story “chosen by history” (p.108). Although for Barthes the myth cannot be reduced to a particular story, he argues that “ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation” (Barthes, 1991, p. 108). Referring to all the myths (political, social, religious) that are designed to organize the world we live in, Barthes pays attention to how they become culturally acknowledged, what purpose they serve, how we adopt them and how we transmit them. It is important to note that they abolish “the complexity of human acts” while they “transform history into nature” (Barthes, 1991, p. 128). When there is no alternative to a particular myth, it becomes institutionalized and difficult to challenge, and the possibility of other narratives coming to the surface remains closed. In a similar light, John Barth seems to see patriarchy as another type of speech chosen by the powerful, which favored the supremacy of men over women, noting that this is an essential dimension of ancient Greek mythology. Seeking to expose how patriarchal values and norms functioned in ancient Greek society, Barth draws attention to them, believing, like Barthes, that they can say a lot about the socio-historical context in which they were created and transmitted, i.e. they have “an historical foundation” (Barthes, 1991, p. 108). And solving the problem means we have to go back to its roots. Thus, in order to correct the mistakes and hear the voices of women whose life experiences have been left out, Gerda Lerner (1986) argues that it is necessary to go back to the past to correct our present, because “Women’s History is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women” (p. 3). Exactly, John Barth recognizes the potential of ancient myths to convey powerful messages and instructions about the behavior and position of men and women at the time myths were created. His attempt to go to the center of the myth in order to expose the underlying patriarchal pattern, on which the ancient Greek mythology was built,

lets the hitherto suppressed voices of women regain their stolen power and become the main figures who re-educate the male protagonist, enriching him with new self-knowledge that include the new realization of the world based on gender equality. In this way, Barth connects the past and the present, emphasizing that certain myths, such as patriarchy, are very persistent, although they are sometimes “packaged” in different forms. However, he does not propose any transcendental Truth as a solution, but alternative myths that have the power to bring solidarity and gender equality.

3. Revision of Patriarchy in “Perseid”

Barth's version of the myth of Perseus describes the life of the hero after the moment when his power and fame began to fade. The hero we see in Barth's "Perseid" is in his forties and is mostly dissatisfied with his own life and marriage. As he tries to cling to his previous image of a young and powerful ruler, the dullness of his daily life and lack of respect from his community and family make him want to repeat all the deeds that glorified him in the past. Thus, in this 20th-century subversive remake of the ancient myth we get to see the whole life of the golden hero, that is, his path from innocence to experience, or more precisely, his maturation that includes his metaphorical re-education by two teachers, Calyxa and the New Medusa. The priestess and nymph, Calyxa has an important role in the first part of the novella, because she inspires Perseus to open himself up and get to know his more fragile side of personality. She attempts to heal his impotency and direct him to analyze the futility of violence while recognizing the importance of women in his life. Calyxa “imprints” the narrative of the second-wave of feminism into Perseus' psyche and helps him learn how to listen passively in order to actively bring about change in his hopeless life. Furthermore, the New Medusa takes over her mission, and with the power of patience, she successfully helps Perseus overcome gender stereotypes and liberate himself from the shackles of patriarchy, upon learning to truly understand his female victims, and, after all, to heal himself.

In Greek mythology, Perseus is the embodiment of masculinity and the son of Danaë and Zeus. However, before his birth, Danaë's father Acrisius was warned by an oracle that his grandson would kill him, and thus, upon Perseus' birth, Danaë was sent adrift together with her baby. They were found and sent to King Polydectes who gave them shelter. Nevertheless, when Perseus reached his manhood, King Polydectes wanted to marry Danaë, but she declined his proposal. Under the pretense of planning another marriage, Polydectes sent Perseus on a mission to kill Gorgon Medusa as his wedding gift, which was an impossible mission. Gorgon Medusa was a powerful and hideous monster whose deadly gaze turned others to stone, and Polydectes believed that Perseus' inevitable death would change his mother's mind about the marriage proposal. According to Dixon-Kennedy's descriptions in his *Encyclopedia of Greco-Roman Mythology*, during this quest

Perseus was helped by three deities. Athene, eager to help Perseus against her enemy, Medusa, provided a polished shield so he might view Medusa only in reflection and thus be saved from the petrifying power of her stare. Hades loaned him his helmet of invisibility. Hermes provided him with a sickle to behead the Gorgon and told him how he might procure the other needed items — a pair of winged sandals, though some say Hermes loaned these as well, and a special bag or wallet in which to carry the decapitated head. (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 244–245)

With the help of magical items / weapons and the good will of the deities, Perseus becomes the killer of Medusa and the savior of the beautiful Princess Andromeda who becomes his wife. On the way home, Perseus finds Andromeda chained to a cliff, as she was offered in sacrifice to the sea monster Cetus (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 245). After exposing the decapitated Medusa's head to turn Cetus to stone, Perseus wins Andromeda and she becomes his beloved wife and the symbol of Perseus' victory over Medusa and Cetus. Perseus was celebrated for his physical strength and ingenuity and was therefore esteemed in his community as a worthy rul-

er. Even more, the use of physical power and violence enabled Perseus to further men's domination of women who did not have the opportunity to speak for themselves in the original myth. The author self-consciously exposes these loopholes, seeking to present alternative ways of expressing this unified and one-sided story of male heroism. In his version, women victims return their stolen power and come up with their own side of the story that Perseus will hear at a critical moment in his mid-life crisis when he wants to repeat his past deeds and be "twenty with Andromeda again" (Barth, 1972, p. 65). In line with his plan to revive and replenish the "exhausted" literary scene of the second half of the twentieth century, the author sends Perseus backwards to move forward, which means that Perseus will have to return to his much glorified past only by the power of thought. Memories triggered by a pictorial depiction on the wall of Calyxa's cave, and the art of storytelling by his teachers, will allow Perseus to realize the mistakes and flaws of his futile quest to rejuvenate himself for his selfish purposes, sticking to an already used pattern from the first cycle of his youthful adventures. The metafictional comment uttered by Calyxa where repeating the past is not only impossible and irrational, but is also unnecessary, demonstrates Barth's own view of the literary tradition and cultural aspects of the Western world, categorically presented and elaborated in his essays "The Literature of Exhaustion" and "The Literature of Replenishment". Basically, Calyxa sums it all up: "How can Being Perseus Again be your goal, when you have to be Perseus to reach it?" (Barth, 1972, p. 61); meaning that it is unimaginable and unnecessary to repeat the series of events from the past in the exact order as they happened, because it does not bring about progress. She advises Perseus to leave the circular motion (repetition), and adopt a somewhat different path that would lead him to his past in order to understand it better and then rewrite it – both literally and metaphorically, that is to rewrite the actual ancient Greek myth and the ideology it transmits, namely patriarchy. Thus, Bart goes to the center of the myth and changes it from within, bringing it closer to the readers of the second half of the twentieth century and proposing his own strategies for disrupting the establishment

and institutionalization of patriarchy, which, according to Gerda Lerner, was not one “event” but a process developing over a period of nearly 2500 years, from app. 3100 to 600 B.C. It occurred, even within the Ancient Near East, at a different pace and at different times in several distinct societies. (Lerner, 1986, p. 8)

Interestingly, Barth’s story begins in *medias res*, when Perseus finds himself in Calyxa’s cave after the first set of failures in his hopeless self-assigned mission of his personal rejuvenation. After waking up in the cave of the priestess, Perseus is lost and exhausted by the past that haunts him, and is literally surrounded by murals depicting his life on the cave wall. Now he has the opportunity to look his past in the eye and face the real causes that made him try to repeat his great achievements in the first place, and the causes are easy to spot: dullness of his daily life, loveless marriage, impotence, physical vulnerability and lack of respect from his community. Due to the stepping out of the myth of manliness, middle-aged Perseus was no longer a suitable material for the divine intervention and magical props, and in the second attempt to kill Medusa, Perseus relies solely on the winged Pegasus. However, his quest is thwarted from the very beginning as he was not strong enough to outwit the Graeae, who steal his Pegasus and leave him without providing useful pieces of information that would lead him to the Stygian nymphs. Now safe in Calyxa’s cave, he meditates on his life as “the murals allow Perseus to move across his future, a process that requires that he also moves along his past, by means of the many scenes represented in them, in order to make up his life” (Kofman, 2015, p. 43). The murals develop in the spiral-like shape, which allows Perseus to start tracing his story in the past, learning from his former mistakes in the present moment. Thus, instead of moving in a circular motion, the author suggests the idea of the path that unfolds in the spiral-like manner and ensures adding something new to the already worn out heroic life-patterns. Basically, Perseus goes backwards to go forward, which according to Barth is a secret recipe for success both in life and in literature. Thus, with Calyxa’s help, Perseus

acquires a different perspective and starts learning how to perceive his life from a new angle that was unknown to him before. It is interesting to note that Barth's Calyxa uses vocabulary typical of the second-wave feminists, while she attempts to untangle Perseus' thoughts and show him the way out of the patriarchal stereotypes that made him make his former mistakes that include punishing innocent female victims, such as Medusa and his own wife Andromeda. Moreover, Andromeda, who rejected her status of Perseus' mere accessory and obedient wife who spent her life listening and glorifying his courageous accomplishments, leaves him eventually, tired of his constant complaints and unreasonable wish to rejuvenate himself: "Do what you please; I've stopped caring; just leave me alone" (Barth, 1972, p. 77). Comparing her desperate life with Perseus to the part of her life when she was chained, Andromeda states that she was always free, "even on the cliff" (Barth, 1972, p. 77), or even before she was saved, and soon after, shackled by Perseus' selfish intentions and unbearable grievances. Although Andromeda sees Perseus as a lost cause, Calyxa helps him to see exactly those points of his life that made him unhappy, and through discussions of heroism, relationships, love and jealousy, Perseus experiences an epiphany that contributes to progress in his sexual life and daily life, through the development of true inner feelings that deconstruct his egocentrism. Thus Perseus comes to a realization, which is also a metafictional commentary, where he points out the importance and ingenuity of Calyxa's strategies that could be used in the re-creation of his story (both in the literal text and in his life of a fallen mythical hero):

O Calyxa, this nameless girl, she had no end of insightful questions! Which I pondered and repondered as I've done these murals, to find if I could their meaning, where they pointed, what it was I'd lost. One question alone – whether I felt my post-Medusan years an example of or an exception to the archetypal pattern for heroic adventure – set me to years of comparative study, to learn what that pattern might be and where upon it I currently was. Thus this endless repetition of my story: as both

protagonist and author, so to speak, I thought to overtake with understanding my present paragraph as it were by examining my paged past, and thus pointed, proceed serene to the future's sentence. (Barth, 1972, p. 48)

This opens a new chapter in the life of the hero, as he is finally prompted to reflect on his great achievement, especially after realizing that the Gorgon Medusa was resurrected by the goddess Athena, who again cast a new curse on her victim. Namely, in Barth's parodic revision of the famous myth, Medusa is doomed to carry a bag over her head because of her deadly look, and only a man who is ready to see her true inner beauty can look her in the eye and thus remove the curse. After Calyxa's valuable lessons that challenged Perseus' naïve beliefs deeply rooted in the patriarchal context of his own society, he is ready to move on to the final quest which will eventually grant him immortality he desired. Consequently, the author again puts Perseus in the position of a passive listener, while the voice of the New Medusa rises to the surface to show its own perspective neglected in the original myth. As he listens to the story of her tragic past, Perseus begins to truly understand his victim, who with the power and skill of storytelling manages to challenge Perseus' previous beliefs and redirect his thoughts to true understanding.

Here it is very important to mention the past of Gorgon Medusa, whose significance is diminished in the face of grandiose stories about the power of great mythical heroes. Determined to fight for justice, she recounts her own truth and tells readers about the injustice done to her as a woman who lived in a society governed by patriarchal rules. Medusa was one of the three beautiful daughters of the sea deities Phorcys and Ceto. On one occasion, Poseidon visits her in one of Athene's holy temples and rapes her. Infuriated by this turn of events, Athene decides to punish beautiful Medusa and her sisters, turning them "into winged monsters with brazen claws and serpent hair, so hideous that a single glance had the power to petrify human flesh to stone" (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 201). It is important to emphasize the fact that Medusa's only "sin" was her

own beauty, and by paying close attention to this part of Greek mythology, Barth manages to shake it from the core, pointing to the subservient position of women in ancient Greek mythology. Raped and deprived of the basic right to speak, Medusa was then beheaded by Perseus, who even after that used her body to petrify all his enemies. This part of the original myth speaks of the position of women in ancient Greece (except in Sparta where households were mostly run by women, due to the constant absence of men who were on the battlefields), where women had no basic human rights and were held in a subordinate position in relation to men, who made decisions about a woman's body by controlling her sexuality:

When a young Athenian woman married she was expected to observe strict sexual fidelity to her husband. He would not be so constrained, however, and would have ready access to a variety of sexual partners, including the household slaves (male and female), adolescent boys and prostitutes (male and female). (MacLachlan, 2012, p. 59)

Furthermore, Barth does not miss the opportunity to ironize the privileged position of the goddess Athene, who instead of providing help to the female victim, she punishes out of revenge. Athene is the daughter of Zeus and his first wife, Oceanid Metis, whom he swallowed after the prophecy prophesied that his second child would be the son who would overthrow him. After swallowing his pregnant wife, Zeus suffered from an agonizing headache. After being persuaded by Hermes, Hephaestus decides to help Zeus by splitting his skull, and "from the opening Athene sprang, full-grown and armed" (Kennedy-Dixon, 1998, p. 55). Some argue that the fact that she is a woman of father born justifies the prominent position she is awarded in Greek mythology, and is therefore a symbolic protector of patriarchal ideology. That is why she collaborates with mighty god Poseidon by punishing Medusa, the victim of Poseidon's violent act. Translated into the feminist discourse of the 1970s when "Perseid" was written, Šoštarić (2017, p. 111) argues that Barth satirizes liberal feminists who were eager to collaborate with the powerful men at the expense of

many underprivileged women, victimized on the basis of race, sexual orientation and social position. Even jealousy between two women could be mentioned, because while on the one hand Athena takes away the beauty of the goddess Medusa, condemning her to a lonely life because of her deadly look, on the other hand other male figures receive Athene's full support in the form of various props to succeed in their respective missions, strengthening male supremacy.

After listening to the hitherto silenced side of the story, the shackles of patriarchy begin to loosen as Perseus wakes up and thinks thoroughly about Medusa's condition: "Such exactly (I could not get in my outrage edgewise!) had been innocent Medusa's original sin: was I aware of the circumstances of her Gorgonizing? I surrendered" (Barth, 1972, p. 53). In a conversation with New Medusa, Perseus is completely rewritten from a feminist point of view, and finally realizes that he never really loved Andromeda as she was, and that he wants to win her back just to reaffirm his masculinity and potency. Moreover, his murder of Andromeda's younger lover Danaus and his adventures prompted by the absurd conclusion that his mother needed him to save her from the hands of a new man were only acts of desperate attempt to stay in the spotlight. When he finally realized that "It wasn't Mother Danaë wanted rescuing now, but Danaë's son" (Barth, 1972, p. 52), Perseus was ready for the healing process. Furthermore, after the transformation in which he realized that his murder of Medusa was a great injustice, and after letting his emotions overwhelm him, he managed to see in Medusa the real woman he was ready to love. After giving up a former heroic pattern that required excessive use of force to achieve goals, Perseus learned how to destroy an image of himself invented for others to see and praise. Once Perseus experienced a kind of self-revelation, he was ready to see the face of uncowed Medusa. They were both "estellized" and thus immortalized in the form of constellations in plain sight of all, as a reminder of what could happen if we sabotage violence and see the world as a place for equality. Precisely, "Perseid" elaborates on the fact that "gender equality can be achieved only when the hitherto silenced and ignored truths and perspectives are voiced and

brought to the surface" (Delić, 2020, p. 77), thus ensuring a better world with equal opportunities for all.

4. Conclusion

The social critique that "Perseid" offers is a sharp, yet constructive response to injustices and stratification of society based on gender stereotypes. John Barth decides to draw attention to the permanence and presence of myths (ideologies like patriarchy) from antiquity in the second half of the twentieth century, when rapid social and technological progress was taking place. He rewrites heroic myths full of violence from a woman's perspective, where stubborn patriarchs learn to accept a world in which they are not the center of attention to the detriment of all others to whom they do injustice. Thus, the author returns to the center of the myth of Perseus and deconstructs it, with the help of the revived voices of Perseus' female victims. Leading us back in time, he allows us to reflect on our own lives and narratives that we accept without skepticism. In order to remind his readers that they need to be more critical, Barth playfully points to the places where we have "failed" as human beings. Through the story of Perseus and Medusa, readers are also encouraged to think about the steps that need to be taken to achieve ultimate cooperation and gender equality. "Perseid" proposes a different social and legislative order, based on equality that is possible only when the previously suppressed voices of women regain power and become recognized as equally valuable interpretations of the world.

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Mary Shelley's Gendered Apocalypse in *The Last Man*

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ABSTRACT

The apocalyptic vision of the world and the figure of the last man enter British literature with the 1806 translation of Jean-Baptiste de Granville's fantasy novel *Le derniner homme* (1805). It is less known, however, that Mary Shelley's last novel *The Last Man* (1826) takes up the same theme to talk about England in 2073 ravaged by a virus and leaving a single man on earth. In writing this novel Shelley is trying to make sense of her own life riven with loss and death but she also questions gender relations in terms of seeing herself as the last man, widowed and abandoned by family and friends. In the complex network of human relationships presented in the novel, Shelley exposes both toxic masculinity and femininity and thus, complicates early-nineteenth-century notions of gender. Therefore, by analysing its central characters, this paper will use the methodology of the ethics of vulnerability (Gilson, 2014; Ganteau, 2015) and caring (Noddings, 2013) in order to talk about the intricate web of social relations Shelley displays in the novel. These terms have gained new momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic and show Shelley's universal engagement with everlasting questions of how vulnerable humanity is and why we should take care of each other.

Keywords: gender relations, *The Last Man*, apocalypse, ethics of care, ethics of vulnerability

1. Introduction

On 14 May 1824, the day before Mary Shelley learned about Byron's death in Greece, she wrote in her diary: "The last man! Yes I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions, extinct before me" (Feldman & Scott-Kilvert, 1987, pp. 476–477). A subject of contemporary literature provided a way not only of coping with her own situation, but of reworking personal experience in fiction. In 1826, four years after P. B. Shelley drowned, she would publish *The Last Man*, a dystopian vision of a pandemic that leaves its narrator, Lionel Verney, alone on earth. There is no doubt that Mary Shelley felt abandoned by both, Byron – her dear friend, and Percy – her lover and life partner, and that she channelled her personal feelings into the narrator. Thus, she weaved an intricate narrative web of fact and fiction and further complicated gender relations in the novel.

This paper is about Mary Shelley as a progressive writer who argues against the limitations of female rationality and the ethic of care to the domestic sphere and this novel is taken as exemplary of our human need *to care for* and *to be cared for*. Within the context of the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19, the ethic of care is both a personal and a political issue, and Mary Shelley's novel becomes a parable against egomania and our Western glorification of the individual.

While the Romantics were responsible for building up exemplary subjectivities, Mary Shelley went against the grain in showing that an exemplary hero is nothing without a sense of community and a firm basis in the ethic of care. In that sense, she was an outstanding writer who was wrong to perceive herself in the shadow of P. B. Shelley's talent and who, while posing for Rothwell's portrait, sat in black velvet as P. B. Shelley's widow 17 years after his death. Widely known for her *Frankenstein*, eight years later she takes up the theme of apocalypse with a single man left on earth, thus contradicting the Romantic myth of benevolent nature. During the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nature was rather a wicked stepmother killing her own offspring with diseases that are

curable nowadays. The most feared diseases were plague, yellow fever and cholera but even such diseases as smallpox, malaria and fevers, including typhus, were described as kinds of plague or pestilence that could be fatal (McWhir, 2002, p. 23). Shelley's theme was nothing new as the apocalyptic vision of the world and the figure of the last man enter British literature with the 1806 translation of Jean-Baptiste de Granville's fantasy novel *Le dernier homme* (1805). This theme was first explored in English by Lord Byron who published a short poem "Darkness" (1816). Byron was influenced by the so-called "year without a summer" of 1816 when the sun was pale, temperatures dropped and there were frequent thunderstorms due to the eruption of Mount Tambora, an Indonesian volcano. People in Europe did not know what was going on and the phenomenon of the pale sun resulted in mass hysteria triggered by a prophecy of an Italian astronomer who said that the sun would burn itself out on July 18 thus destroying the world. Byron's poem was followed by Thomas Campbell's short poem called "The Last Man" (1823). The theme of the last man reached a peak in popularity by the time Mary Shelley was to publish her novel with the simultaneous publication of a range of texts envisioning the end of the world. This resulted in the serious topic being open to derision with satirical poems and comedies laughing at the possibility of apocalypse. Two hundred years later, as witnesses of climate change and new viruses spreading globally, we see that the topic is still relevant and there is hardly anything to laugh about.

2. The Ethics of Care and Vulnerability

Late in 1838, Mary Shelley reflects on her literary ambitions in the following way:

I was nursed and fed with a love of glory. To be something great and good was the precept given me by my Father: Shelley reiterated it. [...] But Shelley died, and I was alone. My Father, from age and domestic circumstances, could not "me fair valoir" (make me valuable, see value in me). My total friendlessness, my horror of

pushing, and inability to put myself forward unless led, cherished and supported – all this has sunk me. (Sampson, 2018, p. 224)

Shelley felt that she needed to be taken care of and that she could not succeed as a writer without the support of the family. Yet, she did not have the support she longed for and felt many times that she was a literary failure, having to bear the burden of two illustrious literary parents. William Godwin, as her father, had the ethical responsibility to care for her and to be supportive of her literary endeavours but he sent her off to Scotland to grow up away from his new family circle – the stepmother, two step-sisters and a step-brother. More than Mary Shelley's reputed ill health and difficult temper, it was her matricidal birth that set her apart. The idea of responsibility to take care of the family members brings us closer to the ethics of care as discussed by Nel Noddings (2013), an American feminist known for bringing the ethics of caring philosophy into education theory. She argues that "ethics has been discussed largely in the language of the father: in principles and propositions, in terms such as justification, fairness, justice. The mother's voice has been silent" (Noddings, 2013, p. 1). She feels the need to re-examine what we mean by "ethics of care" through the lens of logos or the masculine spirit and to look at it from the perspective of eros, or the feminine spirit where human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for have not received attention except as outcomes of ethical behaviour (Noddings, 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, Noddings locates the very wellspring of ethical behaviour in human affective response, rather than an ethical response guided by reason. Here, Noddings is contradicting Kant's idea that to behave morally, reason must displace emotion. Namely, the Kantian agent must identify and act on the appropriate moral principle while in care ethics the focus is on "maintaining and enhancing caring relations – attending to those we encounter, listening to their expressed needs, and responding positively if possible" (Noddings, 2013, p. xvi). Ethical caring, in that sense, is motivated by our longing for and commitment to natural caring. This is clearly a reversal of Kantian priorities since "ethical caring derives its strength from natural caring" (Noddings, 2013, p. xvi):

Ethical caring does not seek moral credit; it seeks a response from the cared-for that completes the encounter—a recognition that is usually spontaneously offered in natural caring. Natural caring is the cherished condition; ethical caring seeks to restore or replace natural caring. (Noddings, 2013, p. xvi)

Natural caring is connected to the person who took care of us when we were infants. Usually, we speak of mothers as natural care takers. Our sense of morality therefore arises from being taken care of, naturally and spontaneously without the care taker expecting anything in return. Noddings (2013) adds that morality as an active virtue requires two feelings and not just one: the first one being the sentiment of natural caring (as in the relationship of caring between a mother and a child) and the second one occurring in response to a remembrance of the first as ethical caring. Ethical caring wakes up in us when we meet the other in pain and we remember how we were taken care of as children. Even if caring for the other is in conflict with our desires, our memory of the best caring moments in childhood makes us respond with “I must help” (Noddings, 2013, p. 79). It was stated earlier that Mary Shelley needed the support of her family and could not thrive “unless led, cherished and supported” (Sampson, 2018, p. 224). As a highly intelligent, but also highly emotional young woman devoid of motherly affection, she was clinging onto her father and mistook his intellectual approval for affection, the conditional for unconditional love. When she fell in love with Percy Bysshe Shelley, she was transferring the same paradigm to him (Sampson, 2018, p. 101) and in the usual Freudian reversal she promised:

I will be a good girl and never vex you any more I will
Learn Greek and – but when shall we meet when I may
Tell you all this & you will so sweetly reward me. (Sampson, 2018, p. 101)

In her letters to P. B. Shelley, Mary Shelley shows her vulnerability, which is not something to fight against in order to become invulnerable, but something that points to her “openness to be affected and affecting in

ways that she cannot control” (Gilson, 2014, p. 2). In line with the ethics of vulnerability, we see human vulnerability as a pervasive, fundamental and shared phenomenon. In a recent study on the ethics of vulnerability, Erinn C. Gilson (2014) describes it in a positive light, thus counteracting previous studies which discussed vulnerability in connection to that which we cannot predict or control. According to Gilson (2014), “vulnerability is the basis for learning and for empathy, connection, and community, and only by being vulnerable can one extend oneself beyond oneself” (p. 2). It is my contention that Mary Shelley recognizes the importance of natural caring and vulnerability in *The Last Man* which she locates within both the domestic and the public spheres. Thus, she complicates the expected Romantic division of spheres onto the feminine domestic and masculine public sphere and exposes the conflict between an ethic of care and an ethic of control (Fisch et al., 1995, p. 8). In that sense, as Anne K. Mellor (Fisch et al., 1995) would say, Mary Shelley is “a writer whose resistance to Romanticism from within the discursive field we call ‘Romantic’ is in many ways continuous with the insights of contemporary feminist analysis” (p. 9). In other words, she shows that the ethic of care should permeate the public as much as the domestic sphere and that human vulnerability is not a gendered trait (in Romanticism associated with women) but a universal value which shows that we are social beings dependent upon one another.

When *The Last Man* first appeared, the reviewers complained that it was “removed from nature and probability” and “perverted and spoiled by morbid affectation” where “the descriptions of the operations of the pestilence were particularly objectionable for their minuteness” (Sampson, 2018, p. 225). As a woman writer and the notorious writer of *Frankenstein* these damaging reviews provoked Percy’s father to suspend allowance for his grandson, Percy Florence and Mary Shelley was forced to promise her editor a more commercial return to the historical novel for her next book (Sampson, 2018, p. 225). However, I want to argue that the value of the novel lies precisely in Shelley’s re-imagining of the apocalypse in the language of feeling and affection (“morbid affectation”), her involvement in the ethics

of care and vulnerability. The choice of genre which combines epic and romance pulls the narrative in opposite directions and underlines the conflict between the masculine narrative of voyage and conquest and the feminine narrative of love and desire. While epic is the form of the victors, romance lies on the side of the vanquished and the frail but what ties them together is that they are both narratives of vulnerability: the epic being about healing and the romance being about open wounds (Ganteau, 2015, p. 35). In the words of Jean-Michel Ganteau (2015), romance could be considered the mode of the open and the incomplete, while the epic's "lunge towards teleology and completion would allow for the narration of a closed, stable story of departure and return from the vantage point conferred through hindsight" (p. 35). Paradoxically, *The Last Man* is a story about the last inhabitant of the Earth and it shows the events happening in England and Europe between 2073 and 2100, while being at the same time a testimony to the past: Shelley's utopian vision of England in the future is in fact early-nineteenth century England. The time leap into the future proves to be impossible for an early-nineteenth century writer and progression is in fact regression where historical, chronological time becomes circuitous: the political upheavals, wars and diseases are to stay and come back when we least expect them. In fact, the pandemic discontinues the relation of the past with the present and the future (Ruppert, 2009, p. 150). The Enlightenment ideal of the advancement of human thought, the liberation from fear and the instalment of man as master over nature has been severely challenged. In other words, the patriarchal Enlightenment imposition of mind over nature, reason over superstition and science over religion (through the usage of masculine epic and feminine romance narratives) proves Adorno and Horkheimer's point in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) that man's sovereignty over existence is an illusion. The pandemic comes through the air and anyone can get affected, the fear and panic persist and they reach overwhelming proportions. Furthermore, the deep natural time, visible in the life of animals and the change of seasons, annuls the human clock-time (Ruppert, 2009, p. 150). One could also argue that there is a potent connection between the spread of the disease and the spread of the political and

moral ideology which aligns *The Last Man* with the revolutionary debate of the 1790s and the political works of Mary Wollstonecraft. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) Wollstonecraft describes aristocratic and monarchical power as “the pestiferous purple which renders the progress of civilization a curse” thus representing moral corruption of the powerful as a physical disease (as cited in McWhir, 2002, p. 28). The political context is certainly not irrelevant in the novel with the scenes depicting the succession of monarchs, political riots and attacks on Constantinople but all ideological struggles become futile in the face of the spreading pandemic and the final message that we, as human species, are dependent and vulnerable while the natural world can exist without us.

The novel begins with an anonymous Englishwoman (Mary Shelley) visiting Naples and the cavern of the Cumaean Sibyl in the year 1818. She recovers the plague chronicle from the sibylline leaves, oddly placed in the twenty-first century and instead of the saviour of humankind, introduces the narrative voice of Lionel Verney, the last man who does not fulfil Sibyl’s prophecy. This historical oddity and the way in which the epic narrative of a hero trying to save the world is thwarted by an invisible force of a virus coming from the East, show that Mary Shelley does not believe in history as a linear progression, bequeathed to her generation by the outcomes of the French Revolution (Lukacs, 1983, pp. 19–89). Instead, with the pandemic spreading globally, the past, the present and the future coalesce and time seems to have ceased.

The epic part of the novel introduces two possible saviours: Lord Raymond (the embodiment of Byron) and Adrian Windsor (the embodiment of P. B. Shelley). Lord Raymond, we are told, is “the sole remnant of a noble but impoverished family” (Shelley, 1996, p. 49). He is a man of the world who helps the Greeks in the war against the Turks. His passions are violent and he is full of contradictions: “unbending yet haughty, gentle yet fierce, tender and again neglectful” (Shelley, 1996, p. 60). As a graceful soldier and deliverer of Greece, he also wants to restore monarchy to England and to become England’s future king. Adrian is his opposite, a man of republican principles whose “physiognomy was expressive of the excess of sensibility

and refinement” (Shelley, 1996, p. 30). He is the only son of the late king, a good friend of Lionel's father. Before meeting Adrian, Lionel hates him on account that Adrian's father neglected Lionel's father and left him to die in penury. Adrian, the Earl of Windsor, whose mother wants him to restore his father's lost crown, visits Lionel in Ulswater and soon wins his affection. Lionel expects an arrogant and evil young man but instead finds out that Adrian is full of active spirit of benevolence, a true role-model for Lionel: “This, I thought is power! Not to be strong of limb, hard of heart, ferocious, and daring; but kind, compassionate and soft” (Shelley, 1996, p. 35). In this scene Mary Shelley is showing the positive side to vulnerability: Adrian is not afraid to show that he is vulnerable though in the position of power where vulnerability is regarded as weakness. Also, he teaches Lionel by his example that he cares for him and that whatever happened between their fathers is irrelevant to their growing friendship. After spending a few days with Adrian, Lionel finds himself completely changed and he exclaims: “Doubt me not Adrian, I also will become wise and good!” (Shelley, 1996, p. 35). Lionel is then overcome by feelings and he weeps out loud, not afraid to show his emotions. He adds that it was the most fortunate day of his life: “My best feelings were called into play to give fitting responses to the generosity, wisdom, and amenity of my new friend” (Shelley, 1996, p. 36). The willingness to challenge his own views and open himself up to vulnerability shows Lionel's strength rather than weakness. The fact that he “wept aloud” also turns him into the Romantic “man of feeling”, prone to what we earlier called the ethical caring. Though both men occupy the public sphere: Adrian as the Earl of Windsor and Lionel as a diplomatist in Vienna, it is the private sphere of the estates in Cumberland and Windsor which is their true realm. As his mother died early, Lionel was taking care of his sister Perdita, Raymond's future wife. Thus, he opened himself up to caring and the reciprocity in the caring relations resulted in the ability to experience life as joy, rather than anguish and anxiety. Noddings (2013) would say that we experience joy when reciprocal receptivity is at its height:

Existential philosophers have rightly described the anguish and anxiety that accompany human life, and I certainly do not deny

these feelings. They accompany us, unbidden, through a lifetime. However, joy [...] offers itself as an unsummoned reward or by-product of relation. It seems to be triggered by receptivity, an openness to the other that is somehow reciprocated in an almost mystical fashion. We are momentarily overwhelmed by a feeling of joyful oneness with this other—our child, our lover, an idea, a scene, a piece of music. Joy helps to maintain us in caring and, thus, adds to our ethical ideal. (p. xvii)

The feeling of joy that Noddings (2013) is describing is reminiscent of the feeling of oneness with the universe that Wordsworth and Coleridge call “joy” (“Immortality Ode”, “Dejection: an Ode”), firmly believing that “joy” our soul feels in reciprocity with the outer universe is the purpose of life. For Mary Shelley joy resides in reciprocity with other people and she is careful to evoke Goethe’s idea that we cannot be happy in youth unless we love (Shelley, 1996, p. 48). This is where the romance begins: Lionel is in love with Adrian’s sister Idris and their love results in a perfect bourgeois marriage, their two children and the life of pleasure in the countryside of Windsor. Still, Lionel’s pronouncements on what constitutes happiness in life are full of Romantic idealism:

And is not love a gift of divinity? Love and her child, Hope, which can bestow wealth on poverty, strength on the weak, and happiness on the sorrowing. [...] O Earth, or grief cradle to their graves thy luckless children? Whisper it not, let the demons hear and rejoice! The choice is with us; let us will it, and our habitation becomes a paradise. For the will of man is omnipotent, blunting the arrows of death, soothing the bed of disease, and wiping away the tears of agony. And what is each human being worth, if he do not put forth his strength to aid his fellow-creatures? (Shelley, 1996, p. 99)

In Lionel’s lyrical effusion, full of Christian hope, we hear the voice of Mary Shelley who wants to believe in her father’s idea of the perfection of humankind (Godwin, *Political Justice*, 1793), the brotherhood of men

and the possibility of paradise on earth – ironically, though, the reader knows from the beginning that the will of man breaks easily in the face of natural calamities. Thus Shelley “locates the very wellspring of ethical behavior in human affective response” (Noddings, 2013, p. 3) by portraying a domestic idyll characterized by idealized parenthood. Idris and Lionel spend five blissful years in raising children, their “playthings and delights” (Shelley, 1996, p. 120). Adrian is in love with Evadne, a princess whose father is a Greek ambassador to England, but this love is unrequited which causes Adrian’s seclusion and change of character. Lionel’s sister Perdita is in love with Raymond but we soon find out that their relationship is doomed to failure: Raymond would not be held back by domestic duties and would win the office of Lord Protector. At some point he tries to understand Lionel’s dedication to Adrian and tells him “you dream of friendship and devote yourself to a maniac; well, if that be your vocation, doubtless you are in the right to follow it” (Shelley, 1996, p. 61). For Shelley, caring is the key to fulfilment in life but Lionel and Raymond locate it in different spheres. Lionel is devoted to natural and ethical caring residing in the domestic circle while for Raymond, the ethical caring must have a universal purpose: not only does he want to turn England into Paradise (Shelley, 1996, p. 141) but he also distinguishes himself on the battlefield helping the Greeks to win the war against the Turks. Lionel is the hero of a romance, while Raymond is the hero of an epic and the two pull the narrative in the opposite directions: toward love and fulfilment within the domestic sphere and toward personal sacrifice for universal good. Evadne secretly loves Raymond and she is the only woman who refuses to be confined to the domestic sphere: she dies in the guise of a soldier fighting for her people. Thus, Mary Shelley further complicates Romantic gender stereotypes by choosing a female character to have a prominent public role. Evadne is reminiscent of Saphie in *Frankenstein* (1818) whose mother taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect and independence of spirit and Monina de Faro, an apt military organizer dressed as a man, in her next historical novel *Perkin Warbeck* (1830). In 1827–28, Mary Shelley participated in an actual re-gendering charade by assisting her

friend, Mary Diana Dods, to pass as a man (Bennett, 1995, p. 148), which testifies to the fact that for Shelley gender relations were rather fluid.

On finding out about the affair between Raymond and Evadne, Perdita commits suicide by drowning; Raymond sinks in dejection and renounces his duties as Lord Protector. When the plague is introduced in the novel, it exposes everyone's vulnerability regardless of gender, race or class and it shows that we are all dependent upon one another. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the thoughts of Lionel Verney sound eerily familiar:

Yet a feeling of awe, a breathless sentiment of wonder, a painful sense of the degradation of humanity, was introduced into every heart. Nature, our mother, and our friend, had turned on us a brow of menace. She showed us plainly, that, though she permitted us to assign her laws and subdue her apparent powers, yet, if she put forth but a finger, we must quake. She could take our globe, fringed with mountains, girded by atmosphere, containing the condition of our being, and all that man's mind could invent or his force achieve; she could take the ball in her hand, and cast it into space, where life would be drunk up, and man and all his efforts for ever annihilated." (Shelley, 1996, p. 305)

From this point on, the novel is primarily episodic, as Lionel records stories of courage, loyalty and care. Here again, Shelley locates the very wellspring of ethical behaviour in human affective response, rather than an ethical response guided by reason. People persist because they care for their families, friends, neighbours and their countrymen. Adrian, who becomes an epic hero after Raymond's death, recognizes vulnerability as a pervasive, fundamental and shared phenomenon which enables him to "extend himself beyond himself" (Gilson, 2014, p. 2). Shelley is subtly suggesting that the humanity, in order to survive, needs a different type of hero: compassionate, sympathetic and above all, deeply caring. Once Asia is destroyed by the plague, England is destroyed by the lack of commerce and by the pouring of Irish, Scottish and American immigrants.

Here Shelley is voicing her contemporary debate over surplus population, a problem given the theoretical framework in Thomas Robert Malthus's *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) where he states that the population growth would eventually outstrip food supplies. Yet, this fear of the masses pouring to England is given a different turn in the novel because, for Malthus, disease was one of the natural checks on population growth, while Shelley transforms disease into an "ocean of death" that absorbs the flood of human population (Sussman, 2003, p. 292). In other words, the pandemic renders state borders superfluous and Shelley understands that in order to survive, the humanity has to stick together. Therefore, Lionel and Idris offer refuge to immigrants from other parts of England and the globe, thus creating a small self-sufficient community with forests turned into farms. Yet, this idyllic community, reminiscent of Coleridge's *Pantisocracy* or Rousseau's rural communities in the Swiss mountains (*Julie or La nouvelle Heloise*, 1761), will not last for long. Unable to predict the advancement of medicine, Mary Shelley dooms her characters to extinction. When Raymond dies, Adrian sacrifices himself for public good and manages to calm down the invaders coming to England from America, Ireland and Scotland. His leadership is not based on violence and his desire to communicate peacefully results in enemies throwing down their arms and crying with a "gush of love and deepest amity filling every heart" (Shelley, 1996, p. 397). Adrian knows that the plague makes everyone equal but this levelling equality is terrifying: the young die as fast as the old. Having lost his wife and children, Lionel sets out from Venice in a small boat with Adrian and Perdita's daughter, in the hope of reaching Greece and Raymond's grave. Strongly reminiscent of Percy Shelley's drowning, the boat is wrecked in a storm, and Lionel finds himself washed ashore near Ravenna, alone in the world. He makes his way through a deserted landscape to Rome, where he leaves behind the record of his suffering and prepares to set off, with little hope of finding a companion, down the Tiber into the open. Rome as the final stop is reminiscent of the ending of Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–1818) in which Harold admires the civilizing powers of Rome while thinking that

art would outlive human suffering. With Homer and Shakespeare in his pocket, Lionel might be imparting the same message for humanity. In the end, the epic journey finishes with a victor – Lionel has managed to stay alive, to write down his story and to become a herald of the future: our vulnerability as human beings should make us aware that we should never forget to care for one another.

3. Conclusion

Lionel's narrative ends with the following words: "Neither hope nor joy are my pilots – restless despair and fierce desire of change lead me on. I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however slight or voluntary, for each day's fulfillment" (Shelley, 1996, p. 615). This kind of thinking suggests ambivalence on the author's part with regard to any future-oriented politics (Wagner-Lawlor, 2002, p. 772). Yet, as Jeniffer Wagner-Lawlor (2002) argued "the discovery and re-presentation of his narrative is the staging that allows humanity back in and offers a hope that Lionel does not" (p. 772). Mary Shelley could not make the imaginative leap into the twenty-first century, but she was right about how the pandemic exposed human vulnerability. Therefore, the novel shows how, in order to survive, we should base our life in the ethics of care. Also, it makes an important argument that human vulnerability is not a gendered trait but a universal value – a powerful leader who is at the same time compassionate, caring and soft is the hero to look up to and to follow. In other words, so long as there is a sympathetic exchange between two people in the private or the public sphere, there is hope for humanity. The ethics of care, whether feminine or masculine, is the basis for learning and for empathy, connection, and community. Mary Shelley knew that it was the basis for our survival as human species.

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“You Look upon a Woman”:
Exploring the Position of Women in J. R.
R. Tolkien’s Mythopoesis

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ABSTRACT

The world of J. R. R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth is inhabited by various characters and races which greatly embellish the storyline of Tolkien’s high-fantasy fiction. However, it should be noted that Tolkien only developed several female characters within his novels. Women of Middle-earth are usually perceived as female stereotypes which can only be examined through their relationships with male characters. The aim of the topic is to explore the significance of female characters such as Galadriel, Éowyn and Arwen and to explore the roles which the three women have in *The Lord of the Rings*. Galadriel in her purity resembles the figure of the Virgin Mary; however she is a wise and compassionate elven leader who supports the protagonists on their journey by providing protection and council. Éowyn is portrayed as a restless, courageous and strong-minded individual. Éowyn is the only woman in Tolkien’s opus who encompasses aspects of both genders, whereas her personality combines elements of both femininity and masculinity. She secretly disguises herself as a male warrior, rides into battle and defeats the Dark Lord’s lieutenant. Compared to Galadriel and Éowyn, Arwen may be the least prominent female character because she is commonly examined through her relationship with Aragorn. Nonetheless, her personal sacrifice is an important part of her development once she gives up immortality in order to stay with Aragorn and support him in the war against Sauron.

Keywords: Femininity, masculinity, Middle-earth, Tolkien, women

1. Introduction

The world of J. R. R. Tolkien's mythopoesis is overflowing with different races and characters. The readers of his works are able to quickly recognise that Middle-earth is a male-dominated society. In fact, there are only a few female characters that are well-developed and stand out in the story. Moreover, even the main group of characters, the Fellowship of the Ring, is comprised of nine male figures. This paper, however, will focus on and analyse three female characters: Galadriel, Éowyn and Arwen respectively.

The first section of the paper will analyse the role of Galadriel. Tolkien was a devout Catholic and, as Smith (2013) argues, "Catholics like Tolkien believe in sacraments, priesthood, tradition, apostolic succession and the like" (p. 74). *The Lord of the Rings* novel franchise is filled with numerous Christian elements. The character of Galadriel can be analysed as one of the symbols of Christianity. Galadriel is a beautiful and powerful queen of elves who protects the woodland realm of Lorien. She is majestic and strong, yet at the same time she is portrayed as a graceful, wise and compassionate individual. The first chapter of the paper will present Galadriel as the Virgin Mary figure. It will analyse the manner in which Galadriel provides comfort and advice to the Fellowship of the Ring. After the fall of Gandalf, Galadriel for a brief period acts as the new protector and adviser for the Fellowship members. Before the weary travellers continue on with their quest, Galadriel provides the company with enchanted gifts. This paper will analyse Galadriel's motherly approach and the fact that she gifts the company with magical objects. The companions utilise Galadriel's gifts later on in the story. The first section will also focus on the symbolism of the so-called lembas bread which represents Eucharist. Moreover, it will analyse the manner in which Galadriel clads the company with elven cloaks, as a mother would cover her children to shield them from danger or harsh weather conditions.

Afterwards, the discussion shifts to the character of Éowyn. The second chapter of the paper will present Éowyn's restless spirit, her brave character and her unstoppable desire to protect others. Namely, the sec-

tion will discuss Éowyn's role as a warrior and healer. Since the Rohan princess is not allowed to partake in battles, she is determined to disguise herself as a male warrior in order to go and protect the kingdoms of men. Éowyn does not abide by the will of male characters such as Aragorn or King Theoden, but rather she embodies the two sides of masculinity and femininity. She disguises herself as a male soldier, whereby she is able to go into the battlefield and stand against the Dark Lord's deadliest servant, the Witch-king of Angmar. As it will be explained in the second section, the title of this paper contains Éowyn's quote from the novels at the moment when she confronts the Lieutenant of Mordor. By defeating the Witch-king, the princess of Rohan shows that she is far more capable in battle than any man or woman, because she transcends the binary opposites and defeats one of the darkest characters within Tolkien's entire opus. Once the battle is finished, Éowyn willingly accepts the role of healer, wife and mother. She realises the horrors of war and subsequently places her effort into helping the wounded soldier recover.

Finally, the paper will explore the character of Arwen Undomiel. When compared to either Galadriel or Éowyn, Arwen Undomiel cannot be described as a particularly active character. In fact, she is not a majestic queen of woodland elves and she does not ride into battle to confront the Dark Lord's servants. Arwen's role is a subtle one. She supports Aragorn during the events of the War of the Ring. Arwen decides to stay behind in Middle-earth and wait for her beloved man to return from battle. Moreover, she even gives up her immortality in order to be with the man she loves. Although Arwen's father, Lord Elrond, initially does not view Aragorn as a worthy spouse for his daughter, their differences are eventually reconciled through Arwen's sacrifice and unquestionable loyalty to her future husband. Arwen's role represents hope, love, and memory, and such elements inspire Aragorn to remain true to his quest and stand against the oncoming darkness of Sauron. Therefore, this paper will analyse the three female characters of J. R. R. Tolkien's mythopoeisis as three well-developed literary individuals who play different roles which help the story progress. They will not be simply examined

as female stereotypes which can only be described through their relationships with men. Galadriel, Éowyn and Arwen are characters who greatly contribute to the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings*, whereas the roles of such women profoundly affect and even alter particular situations within the tale of the One Ring.

2. Lady Galadriel: A Virgin-Mary Figure

One of the three best-written female characters created by Tolkien is undoubtedly the character of the Lady of Lorien. Galadriel is portrayed as one of the most majestic and gracious figures of Tolkien's mythopoesis. She is one of the oldest, most beautiful and powerful elves who inhabit Middle-earth. Galadriel is the queen of the elves who, alongside her husband Celeborn, protects her woodland realm. She is the keeper of one of the lesser rings of power *Nenya* which prominently expresses the importance of her role during the events of the War of the Ring. However, the character of Galadriel cannot be considered without taking into account Tolkien's own background and beliefs. Since Tolkien was a devout Catholic, it comes as no surprise that his fiction is heavily imbued with various aspects of Christianity.

Firstly, Tolkien's own family background should be considered, due to the fact that the author implemented various aspects of his experiences or worldviews into *The Lord of the Rings*. Both Ronald Tolkien and his younger brother Hilary Tolkien were brought up in the Catholic faith and they remained devout Catholics through the rest of their lives (Doughan, 2021). Tolkien's world of Middle-earth is marked by various allusions to Christianity, whereas different characters are also presented as symbols of the Catholic faith and doctrine. Mohammadi (2013) argues that, "from the very beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, until the very last, Christian themes can be traced in almost every chapter; these themes exist as a significant aspect of each person" (p. 203). The Lady of Lorien is one of Tolkien's best-known characters and Galadriel can be examined as one of the most powerful and inspiring representations of the Blessed Mary. For this

reason, it is safe to assume that Galadriel was one of Tolkien's favourite characters within his world of fiction (Mohammadi, 2013, p. 203).

Moreover, Galadriel, as well as her husband Celeborn, is described in a particularly elegant manner. The readers are first introduced to Galadriel after the events which occurred in Moria. Namely, the leader of the Fellowship of the Ring, Gandalf the Grey, falls into the abyss fighting the Balrog of Moria and the Fellowship members manage to escape the mines. They try to find refuge in the woodland realm of Lorien which is under Galadriel's protection. Later on, both the readers and the Fellowship members are introduced to Galadriel and her husband. She is first depicted as a majestic, tall and beautiful elven queen. Galadriel is presented as wearing white robes and having long golden hair. Tolkien describes her in the following manner:

Very tall they were, and the Lady no less tall than the Lord; and they were grave and beautiful. They were clad wholly in white; and the hair of the Lady was of deep gold, and the hair of the Lord Celeborn was of silver long and bright; but no sign of age was upon them, unless it were in the depths of their eyes; for these were keen as lances in the starlight, and yet profound, the wells of deep memory. (Tolkien, 1954, p. 354)

Galadriel's own role becomes particularly prominent once Fellowship members enter her domain. Initially, Gimli the dwarf believes that Galadriel is an elf witch, however Gimli soon realises that Galadriel would not put any spell on them which might cause harm or distress. Rather, the Lady of Lorien provides comfort and advice to the Fellowship. When Gimli comes face to face with Galadriel's grace and beauty, he immediately becomes devout to her. Gimli even requests a single strand of her golden hair and Galadriel gifts him with three. This gift represents the abundance of grace which the Blessed Mary gives to those in need (McIntyre, 2019). Galadriel's realm shields the weary travellers for a while. They are able to find solace and to grieve for their fallen leader while under Galadriel's watchful eye.

Galadriel does not only offer protection to the tired Fellowship members, but she also provides them with magical objects. The objects will be used as tools on their journey in order to fight off enemies or pass unseen beneath unfriendly eyes. Some of Galadriel's magical objects can be analysed in a symbolic manner. It becomes evident that some of the gifts can be associated with Christian motifs. The members of the Fellowship are granted gifts in accordance to their individual needs and it becomes obvious that Galadriel's presents soon become useful tools. However, one of the gifts stands out. The Blessed Virgin Mary provides graces for the devout travellers, whereas in Tolkien's mythos Galadriel's gifts can be analysed as metaphors of graces. The Fellowship members are also granted the so-called lembas bread. Lembas is an enchanted type of bread, used in order to sustain the travellers on their journey. Lembas is, therefore, depicted as a metaphor which represents Eucharist. The Body and Blood of Christ are received in communion and Christ himself received Eucharist from and through his mother the Blessed Virgin (McIntyre, 2019). The pieces of the lembas bread are of paramount importance for the characters such as Frodo and Sam because the crumbs of lembas become their only source of food during the voyage to Mordor. The bread gives the travellers strength and endurance while they avoid starvation later on in Tolkien's story:

The spiritual food of bread and wine could then be seen in the Provision of the "miruvor", the healing cordial of Imladris, and the "lembas", the Elven way-bread, which strengthens and sustains the members of the fellowship [who could be considered as pilgrims] in times of hardship. (Mohammadi, 2013, p. 204)

Tolkien's pilgrim-like characters, such as Frodo, Boromir or Aragorn appear as children who flock under their mother's wing during the stay in Lorien under Galadriel's protection. It should be noted that the character of Galadriel does not only function as a Marian figure throughout the story of Middle-earth. Galadriel does not only symbolise the mother of Christ in Tolkien's novels, but rather she is also a symbolic representation

of a woman who takes care of her children. Jane Beal explains that when Tolkien was coming to the end of his own life, he started contemplating more about the figure of the Virgin Mary:

As he approached the end of his own life, his faith would have motivated him to meditate more on the Virgin Mary, who inspired him to perceive beauty and who certainly became, after the death of his own mother, Tolkien's spiritual mother. (Beal, 2020, p. 28)

Evidently, the character of the Lady Galadriel is one of the most prominent female individuals in Tolkien's wide opus and the motherly role which Galadriel upholds remains an important aspect in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Fellowship members also receive enchanted cloaks from Galadriel. The capes were made by Galadriel herself. Tolkien depicts the scene in which the elves provide the Fellowship with the cloaks:

The Elves next unwrapped and gave to each of the Company the clothes they had brought. For each they had provided a hood and cloak, made according to his size, of the light but warm silken stuff that the Galadhrim wove. It was hard to say of what colour they were: grey with the hue of twilight under the trees they seemed to be; and yet if they were moved, or set in another light, they were green as shadowed leaves, or brown as fallow fields by night, dusk-silver as water under the stars. Each cloak was fastened about the neck with a brooch like a green leaf veined with silver. (Tolkien, 1954, p. 370)

The cloaks offer protection to the Fellowship from unfriendly eyes during their perilous mission. The brown-green cloaks resemble the brown scapular Mary gave to St. Simon of Stock. Similarly to the brown scapular, the enchanted elven cloaks are used as safeguard against the Enemy. Through Galadriel's gifts, the Fellowship members find refuge under the motherly mantle of the Lady of Lorien (Yuen, 2019). The Fellowship members appear not only as pilgrims who are destined to fight

Sauron and destroy the One Ring in the fires of Mordor, but they also appear as children who hide beneath their mother's kindness.

J. R. R. Tolkien describes a high degree of kindness and caring which Galadriel expresses in regards to her guests. Galadriel's offerings are used by Frodo, Sam, Aragorn and others multiple times and at various stages of their mission. Galadriel's role cannot be easily disregarded, because even though she did not partake in the destruction of the One Ring directly, her wisdom and guidance were crucial for the Fellowship members. Galadriel's own kindness and wisdom temporarily seem to replace Gandalf's. Therefore, the travellers use much of Galadriel's aid. Interestingly enough, the eight remaining male figures who make up the Fellowship of the Ring actually receive most assistance from a woman. Furthermore, it is safe to assume that J. R. R. Tolkien presents Galadriel as something far more valuable than a female stereotype. The question still remains whether Frodo and his friends would be able to defeat the forces of Mordor without Galadriel's help.

3. Éowyn: The Warrior Princess

Galadriel is not the only female character which Tolkien developed in his legendary opus. Galadriel's role represents majesty, power and goodness, whereas she is also equal to other wise beings of Middle-earth such as Gandalf, Elrond, Saruman the White and Cidran the Shipwright. However, it is apparent that Galadriel's status is elevated and she does not partake in the battle against Sauron directly as some human female characters do. The role of mortal women remains a prominent element in Tolkien's narrative. For this reason, the role of Éowyn of Rohan is a significant one. She is the only female character who directly and courageously participates in the battle against the Dark Lord and his terrifying warriors. Moreover, Tolkien depicts Éowyn as a character who ventures outside the prescribed female roles. Éowyn shows that her gender does not define her as a person. It does not define her character, and she is able to wear the mask of femininity and masculinity at the same time. Éowyn combines

and embodies the two sides of femininity and masculinity and she proves her valour and bravery on the battlefield once victory is achieved.

Éowyn is of noble birth. She is the shield-maiden of Rohan and she is the niece of King Theoden, the ruler of Rohan. As a member of the court, she is protected inside the castle; however she has to accept the prescribed female roles. Nevertheless, Éowyn bemoans the fact that, being a woman, she will never see the glory on the battlefield that men of Rohan live and in many cases die for (McIntyre, 2019). Different male characters, such as Aragorn or Theoden, are forced to lead their armies into battle and protect not just their respective kingdoms, but also women and children who inhabit the realms of Gondor and Rohan. While men go into battle to show their honour, courage and strength, women are expected to stay safe, away from the battlefield. Éowyn desires to step out of the standardised norms of her society; however men such as Aragorn or even her uncle do not allow 'gender transgressions'. Therefore, particular elements of the mediaeval courtly love can be analysed in Éowyn's case. Namely, it is expected of male warriors to fulfil their lady's wishes and perform acts of bravery, fidelity or knightly deeds. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, courtly love in medieval romances is defined:

The lover suffers agonies of body and spirit as he is put to the test by his imperious sweetheart, but remains devoted to her, manifesting his honor by his unswerving fidelity and his adherence to a rigorous code of behavior, both in knightly battles and in the complex ceremonies of courtly speech and conduct. (Abrams, 1999, pp. 48–49)

It is not expected of women to face danger. Women in Tolkien's kingdoms do not ride into battle and protect others. Éowyn does not accept the rigorous code of behaviour and she goes against the wishes of Theoden and Aragorn. The Rohan shield-maiden is to stand on one side and wait for her chivalrous knight to perform his brave deeds, while men on the other side perform the aforementioned knightly duties. Nonetheless, she does not idly follow the norms of men. She does not stand aside and

let male characters, even members of her own royal family, decide her future. Éowyn does not behave like a damsel in distress. Éowyn goes against the grain, whereby she does not even allow other male characters to address her in a patronising tone. The Rohan shield-maiden expresses her determination to Aragorn by saying:

All your words are but to say: you are a woman, and your part is in the house. But when the men have died in battle and honour, you have leave to be burned in the house, for the men will need it no more. But I am of the House of Eorl and not a serving-woman. I can ride and wield blade, and I do not fear either pain or death. (Tolkien, 1954, p. 784)

Tolkien shows that Éowyn is a restless and willing individual. She is not afraid to die for her people and she is determined to hold her ground in verbal communication with men, even if they are kings who wield great respect and authority among their own nations. Moreover, Éowyn is portrayed as a fictional individual who does not solely rely on her quick wit or sharp tongue. In fact, she uses her verbal determination to ride out into battle. It is on the battlefield that Éowyn proves to all men that her gender does not define her strength or courage. Since she is not allowed to directly partake in the skirmishes, she hides her true identity and masks herself as a male warrior. Di Giovanni (2011) argues that, “although she is not granted permission, Éowyn defies her male relatives and rides to battle with her male comrades anyway. In fact, she is the one who deals the mortal blow to Sauron’s most powerful minion, the Witch-King of Angmar” (p. 12).

During the events of the War of the Ring, Éowyn rides into battle among the Pelennor Fields and consolidates her place in the male-oriented society. While the men of Gondor and Rohan fight against the countless numbers of Sauron’s orcs, Éowyn disguised as a male warrior faces the Witch-king of Angmar. The Witch-king is not confronted by any living man, but by a mortal woman. The princess of Rohan is the only one worthy enough to directly confront Sauron’s servant. She is willing to

sacrifice her own life for the good of her people. When the powerful Lieutenant of Mordor, the Witch-king, nearly kills Theoden, his niece reveals herself and stands against the master of the Nazgul:

But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone [sic], if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him. (Tolkien, 1954, p. 841)

Éowyn then proceeds and, alongside Merry the hobbit, manages to strike down her deadly foe. The Witch-king of Angmar is thereafter destroyed. Her victory comes from the male-dominated world, through battle and war, and undeniably Éowyn epitomises both masculinity and femininity in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Di Giovanni, 2011, p. 12). She manages to achieve the goal which left many men of Middle-earth dead and defeated. By besting the Witch-king, Éowyn also obtains freedom to choose her own path and she is liberated from societal norms. During the battle, she learns the truth behind the fabled stories of war. She realises the horrors of war and destruction, whereby she also discovers the difficulties of being an honourable warrior. Yet, the princess of Rohan does not become meek or frightened by such experiences. She uses the obtained experiences through her battle with the Witch-king of Angmar and becomes a much wiser character (Steptoe, 2020).

After the battle, Éowyn helps the wounded warriors. She helps the soldiers through healing, whereas her decision portrays the notion that Éowyn eventually realises her deepest desires, but also what she truly wants to become. Once the War of the Ring is finished, the princess of Rohan decides to become a mother and marries Faramir of Gondor. It should be taken into account that such a decision is her own choice. Through personal experiences she learns how to look within and comprehend her own desires.

By finding the true purpose, Éowyn obtains one of the greatest achievements in life. Éowyn shows that women of all ages can follow their passion and such a pursuit can lead to a much clearer understand-

ing of their deepest purpose. Even though the princess of Rohan is a fictional character inhabiting Tolkien's universe, her journey can be related to many young women. All women should be free to choose their own path, even if it means venturing between personal aspirations and societal expectations. Women should have the right to defend their country, they should be free from stereotypes and they have the right to be loved by their partner, or even to rise as leaders (Steptoe, 2020). The story of Éowyn renders the notion that many women have to navigate various pressures of society.

Éowyn entwines femininity and masculinity; however she manages to successfully go beyond such dichotomies and she proves to Theoden, Aragorn and other men of Middle-earth that she is skilful enough to stand against the Lieutenant of Mordor and destroy the Nazgul chieftain. Her victory turns the tide of battle and the strength of Mordor is significantly weakened. Éowyn is mortal and she does not use magic as Galadriel in order to protect her people. Therefore, it takes enormous strength for Éowyn to follow her restless nature, to avoid societal norms and to stand against her deadly enemy, all the while witnessing death and destruction around her. The shield-maiden of Rohan can serve as a bright example of a female character that gradually grows and develops within a community predominantly controlled by men. She learns who she truly is, obtains new experiences and decides to follow her own heart. Éowyn moves away from the period of war and turns to peace. She becomes a healer, wife and mother, whereas she also becomes an inspiration to other mortal women of her kingdom. In addition, her role is reflected in the fact that she becomes a courageous role-model to all those dedicated readers who delve into Tolkien's fantastical universe.

4. Arwen's Sacrifice

In addition to Tolkien's more developed characters such as Galadriel or Éowyn, the role of Arwen Undomiel can be analysed as the most subtle of the three. Namely, the character of Arwen is perhaps least developed

when compared to the mighty Galadriel or the brave Éowyn. Arwen's function in the narrative is usually perceived through her connection to Aragorn son of Arathorn. This paper primarily focuses on the role of Arwen Undomiel in Tolkien's novels, because the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* presents Arwen in a completely different light.

Her role is significantly altered in the film franchise. In Peter Jackson's rendition of Tolkien's mythopoesis, Arwen replaces the character of Glorfindel. Instead of Glorfindel, Arwen is chased by the nine Nazgul as she carries Frodo on her fast steed. This film alteration greatly contributes to the development of her character, because in the film adaptations Arwen is apparently lacking any particular plot-line (Harrisson, 2021). However, the fearless Arwen who stands against the nine servants of Sauron in Jackson's adaptation is not portrayed in the same manner by the original author. In fact, Tolkien reduces Arwen's role to such a subtle degree that it might be difficult to analyse any real significance at all. Nonetheless, this paper will focus on some of Arwen's most interesting aspects and will explore the underlying nature of her role in the narrative.

It should be taken into account that Tolkien's female characters such as Arwen embody some of the essential themes of the entire opus. As Street (2021) argues, "the female characters of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Legendarium*, although oft-criticized for their scarcity in number, fully embody one of the most central themes of the story: the complicated interplay between death and immortality" (p. 4). Moreover, the complex nature of the interplay occurring between death and immortality is not the only aspect which is closely connected to women in Tolkien's mythos. In the novels, female characters are very important when it comes to the definition of power, which is essentially one of the central thematic concerns in Tolkien's text (Enright, 2007, p. 93). The relationship formulated between Arwen and Aragorn represents elements of death and immortality, however simultaneously it expresses the theme of power.

In a particular way, Arwen Undomiel becomes the strength and power which Aragorn requires in order to defeat the Dark Lord Sauron and to return to the throne of Gondor. Arwen becomes Aragorn's constant inspi-

ration and the main source of his perseverance, thus the aforementioned theme of power closely follows Aragorn throughout the perilous journey. Arwen does not provide shelter and counsel for the Fellowship members like Galadriel, and she does not venture to the field of battle in order to face off dangerous adversaries like the princess of Rohan. Her role is expressed in a different way. Her role is reflected within the theme of death and immortality. Arwen in Peter Jackson's movie version nearly fights the Nazgul riders, similarly to the princess of Rohan who confronts the Witch-king both in the narrative and in the motion-picture adaptation. Nevertheless, Arwen in Tolkien's novels almost constantly remains in the backdrop of the story and her connection to Aragorn throughout the narrative fuels the power and strength which Aragorn successfully utilises.

Arwen Undomiel is an elf and she is directly connected to Galadriel. Arwen is the granddaughter of the Lady Galadriel through her maternal side (Beal, 2020, p. 8). Yet, unlike her powerful grandmother and queen, Arwen does not aid the Fellowship directly. Arwen decides to remain behind in Middle-earth and support her beloved man. Furthermore, while Arwen waits for Aragorn, he has to come to terms with Arwen's own father, the powerful and wise Lord Elrond. Elrond's scepticism towards the union between Arwen and Aragorn is directly expressed in Tolkien's works. Elrond perceives his elven daughter as far above the mortal Aragorn. He warns Aragorn that Arwen is immortal and thus far older than Aragorn who will eventually die:

But as for Arwen the Fair, Lady of Imladris and of Lo'rien, Evenstar of her people, she is of lineage greater than yours, and she has lived in the world already so long that to her you are but as a yearling shoot beside a young birch of many summers. She is too far above you. And so, I think, it may well seem to her. But even if it were not so, and her heart turned towards you, I should still be grieved because of the doom that is laid on us. (Tolkien, 1954, p. 1059)

Even though Elrond is initially against the union of Arwen and Aragorn, their unquestionable love prevails, and moreover Arwen will-

ingly gives up her immortal life. Lord Elrond believes that his elven daughter Arwen Undomiel outclasses mortal men. The love story between Arwen and Aragorn is a special segment in Tolkien's narrative. Arwen successfully surpasses the external forces which stand between her and her beloved mortal. Her love is the power which assists Aragorn in his battle with the Dark Lord:

The force of love between Beren and Luthien and Aragorn and Arwen was so strong even family could not ultimately stop it. Both Luthien and Arwen sacrificed their immortality to be with the ones they loved. Arwen happily married Aragorn as he fulfilled his terms with Elrond and became king, and Luthien was able to revive Beren by sacrificing her life force of immortality. In these examples, the force that interfered with their love was not internal, but external. The fathers in these stories represent the barrier, both Elrond and Luthien's father, Thingol, saw that their daughters outclassed the men socially and so took action to prevent the union. Also, Arwen and Luthien may not have been overtly apparent as the "heroes" in the stories, but obviously had their heroic parts to play that if not done would have changed the outcome and fate of everything. Eros, or romantic love, is a powerful force that not only can overcome differences, but is painted as no less than heroic in *The Lord of the Rings* as well as in Tolkien's life. (Richer, 2019, p. 15)

J. R. R. Tolkien's characters such as Arwen can be perceived as the unlikely heroines of his magnum opus. Arwen's role in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* should not be simply undermined. In comparison to Éowyn of Rohan, Arwen better fits the role of a lady who waits for her gallant knight to return from his chivalrous quest. However, it should be noted that the romantic story which is formulated between Arwen and Aragorn is not the primary focal point of the narrative; rather, the aforementioned romantic narrative is explained in greater detail within Tolkien's Appendices.

The love relationship between Arwen and Aragorn is transformed through Peter Jackson's adaptations. Jackson actually re-integrates the love tale into the main story of the narrative and presents it to the moviegoers in a particularly different way (Honegger, 2017, p. 7). Interestingly enough, the love story between the two characters is far more important in the film versions, while the original text of *The Lord of the Rings* does not portray their relationship in a more profound manner. It can be assumed that Tolkien decided not to focus on the element of so-called courtly love. The love story becomes a touching, but nevertheless marginal sideshow and this indicates his deep-seated scepticism towards the complex of courtly love. Honegger (2017) argues, "Tolkien's relegation of this central element of chivalric romance to a touching but nevertheless marginal sideshow proves his deep-seated scepticism towards the courtly love complex" (p. 7).

Although Arwen is not as majestic and saint-like in her appearance as the Marian figure of Galadriel, and although she is not portrayed as a strong female soldier like the princess of Rohan, Arwen's selfless deeds should not be forgotten. Her character embodies the motifs of time and passing, life and death, love and above all immortality. Arwen gives up her immortal life for love. Arwen's love is inspiration and power which her beloved man requires to prevail during periods of war and destruction. Arwen Undomiel gives herself to Aragorn; she goes against her father's desires, against her own elven gift in order to be with the man whom she truly and deeply loves. At the end of Tolkien's narrative, the elven maiden is united with her mortal husband. Aragorn is crowned and he becomes the new King of Gondor, alongside his wife Arwen of Rivendell. Arwen plays a unique role, unlike other women of Middle-earth. The readers of Tolkien's novels realise that Arwen's role can be analysed as one of love, compassion, patience and above all selfless nature and character.

5. Conclusion

This paper presented the analysis of female characters within J. R. R. Tolkien's literary opus, primarily in his *The Lord of the Rings* nov-

el franchise. The paper focused on the portrayal of three prominent female figures and it shed light on their representation, symbolism and roles. Although Tolkien's fictional world of Middle-earth contains numerous characters, the paper focused on three important women who are Galadriel, Éowyn and Arwen respectively. Together, the three women formulated a triad of best-known female characters inhabiting Middle-earth, due to the fact that Tolkien's opus is predominantly marked by male individuals and their own contribution to the overall narrative.

The first section of the paper explored the role of the Lady Galadriel. The paper examined Galadriel as a Marian figure. Galadriel can be perceived as the embodiment of the sublime grace, since she was described as a majestic, powerful and motherly figure. Her role is exemplified through the relationship with the Fellowship members. After the fall of Gandalf the Grey, Galadriel in all her majesty and grace was analysed as the new protector of the Fellowship. She was examined as a character that provided advice and healing for the Fellowship members. Afterwards, the discussion shifted towards the analysis of Éowyn. The Rohan shield-maiden was described as a young woman of restless nature who proved her worth on the battlefield. The paper examined her as a non-conformist who goes against the collective will of her own male-dominated society. Éowyn combined the masculine and the feminine side of her personality, because she wore armour and alongside other male warriors went into battle and confronted the Lieutenant of Sauron. However, through her own choice, Éowyn became a healer after the war and decided to focus more on aiding others because she timely realised the abhorrent nature and the cost of warfare.

Lastly, the paper shed light on the character of Arwen. The final chapter of the paper examined the selfless personality of Arwen Undomiel. Namely, Arwen sacrificed her own immortality in order to stay behind in Middle-earth and support Aragorn in his battle against the Dark Lord. Additionally, the paper also tackled the notion that Arwen's role is far more developed in Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. In Tolkien's novels, Arwen was presented as a far more passive character. For Aragorn, Arwen symbolised the beacon of hope and love. This paper concludes that Tolkien developed female characters

that play crucial roles during the course of the story and they provide great aid to other characters that go on their own perilous voyage to destroy the One Ring. Therefore, in Galadriel the readers are able to find the role of a mother; in Éowyn they can see the role of a heroine; while in Arwen they can perceive the embodiment of unconditional love and support.

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The Upside-Down World of Caryl
Churchill's *Cloud Nine*:

Deconstructing Oppression on Stage

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Abstract

In the play *Cloud Nine*, Caryl Churchill portrays sexual and colonial mistreatment as different forms of one and the same history of oppression. All of the main features of the play (structure, plot, and characters) reveal these malignant forms as interconnected, equally destructive mechanisms for fabrication of the “other”, which is used by a Western patriarchal man in order to prove his self-proclaimed superiority and justify his undisputable family authority and his “enlightening” mission among the primitive peoples of the “black” continent. By dramatizing ideological stereotypes as imposed and restrictive, Churchill deconstructs the ideological matrix used by these deeply oppressive systems which maintain the illusion of the current state of affairs as natural and universal. To integrate efficiently these two criticisms – feminist criticism of patriarchy and socialist criticism of colonialism – Caryl Churchill locates the first act of her play in a British colony in nineteenth century Africa and the second act in modern London, using the same characters that have not aged more than twenty-five years. This unusual experiment with time, where actual time is overlapped with fictional time, is only one among many other theatrical techniques used by Churchill (such as cross-dressing or cross-casting) for the purpose of achieving theatrical alienation: in the first act, she alienates the characters from their own gender or racial identity in order to deconstruct them and reveal their artificiality, and in

the second act, she alienates the chronology of the play itself in order to suggest that the past keeps emerging in all of its supposedly outgrown forms of autocracy even in the new era of freedom and liberality.

Keywords: *Cloud Nine*, colonialism, gender, oppression, racism

1. Introduction

Cloud Nine is a political play that deals with the most important social issues not just of the sixties and the seventies of the last century, when it was published (1979), but of the entire Western civilization based on the patriarchal system of intolerance and dominance over women and individuals of a different ethnicity or race. In this play, both patriarchy and colonialism are revealed as destructive mechanisms by which a patriarchal Western man maintains the image of his self-proclaimed superiority and undisputable family authority, be it among his household members or the primitive peoples of the “black” continent. The purpose of this essay is to show the ways in which Caryl Churchill manages, firstly, to present ideological stereotypes as imposed and restrictive and, secondly, to deconstruct their ideological matrix and prevailing dogma, which dismiss any possibility of change.

In order to combine more efficiently her feminist criticism of patriarchy and her socialist criticism of colonialism, Caryl Churchill situates the first act of her play in a nineteenth-century British colony in Africa and the household of Clive, the self-proclaimed patriarch and colony administrator. It is through this character and his attitudes towards his subordinates (his wife, son and daughter, as well as his servants) that Churchill reveals and dismantles the nature of gender and colonial identities as artificially constructed and imposed by the society. The feminine role of obedient wife and sacrificial mother, just like the subservient role of the colonized, are exposed as convenient tools for controlling women and black people and for securing the power of the omnipotent white male master. Feminist criticism targets primarily the Victorian ideal of the “angel in the house”, which demeans women as fragile, naïve and irrational, and secondly, the stereotype of independent women as un-

natural or promiscuous. Correspondingly, postcolonial criticism is directed against the imperial design of the white man who, out of his hunger for new territories, callously destroys indigenous cultures. And while this process was straightforward and aggressive in the colonial era, Churchill reveals new manipulative and perfidious modern strategies which include cultural purge (instead of genocide) and indoctrination of the 'primitives' who are brought up to believe in their own inferiority and indebtedness to their colonizers. The insights used to strengthen the argumentation in this essay come mainly from ground-breaking thinkers in the fields of feminism and postcolonial criticism, such as Kate Millet (2000), Eva Figes (1986), and Frantz Fanon (1967).

Although it might seem that the main points of the play were all covered in the colorful first act, the second part of *Cloud Nine* works as a link between the colonial and Victorian past and the seemingly liberal modern era. The second act, therefore, is set in London in 1979. It features the same characters, introduced in the previous century, but they have not aged more than twenty-five years. This experiment with time is only one of the many theatrical techniques used in the play, such as cross-dressing or cross-casting. Its function is to highlight the main points of the play; in this particular instance, it serves as a reminder that the past is not that easily reckoned with. As it will be shown in the current study, the characters in the first act have certainly moved forward: they grew more independent and self-conscious, getting emancipated enough to embrace their originally repressed true identities. However, although social relations have changed for the better, there are still impediments to the full emancipation of the characters due to their long exposure to the poisonous patriarchal pedagogy and its overbearing influence. Indeed, some habits, as we will see, die hard.

2. "Who am I?": the Confusion over Identity in the Victorian Past

The central figure of the first act of the play *Cloud Nine* is Clive, who is the patriarch of his family and the master of his part of the British Empire

in nineteenth century Africa. His superior attitude towards his subordinates is based in the reactionary misogynist dogma as well as the Western racist theories that claim that a white man alone is undisputable master and a God's deputy on Earth. The Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house", which was modeled on the pedagogy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, is a case in point. This is how this philosopher of the enlightened thought and the pioneer of the romantic movement perceives women:

To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young. (as cited in Figs, 1986, p. 105)

Such patriarchal attitudes are especially surprising when compared to his more progressive (and more famous) attitudes on equality and freedom as unalienable human rights which were made eternal in the motto of the French revolution – "liberté, égalité, fraternité" – and serve well as a reminder that history repeats itself and that even a modern society, despite a certain amount of new freedoms, is still extremely patriarchal.

In line with the conventional Victorian ideals, Clive's wife Betty is brought up to be gentle, fragile, kind, obedient, childish, naive, patient, a bit dim. Her roles are customary ones (a mother, daughter, and a wife) and her useless, and yet delicate, existence actually comes down to nothing more than endless monotony and waiting on men. Betty is the source of trust and strength for her husband and the embodiment of all "good" qualities of the female kind: humbleness and motherly love. On the other hand – and still in line with the reactionary patriarchal pedagogy – Clive raises his son Edward by teaching him (still valid) lessons such as "boys don't play with the dolls" (Churchill, 1996, p. 257) or "boys can't show their feelings" (Churchill, 1996, p. 266), and also unavoidable lessons in violence which are supposed to toughen little Edward up and make him a "real" man. One such practice is the flogging of the servants and, according to Clive, the best reaction to such a valuable lesson would be for a pu-

pil not just to stand and watch, but also to enjoy the scene before him. Finally, the most important lesson that a father can give to his son is that through loving his male parent, a young boy actually loves and honors the entire Victorian social structure: “You should always respect and love me, Edward, not for myself, I may not deserve it, but as I respected and loved my own father, because he was my father. Through our father we love our Queen and our God, Edward. Do you understand? It is something men understand?” (Churchill, 1996, p. 276).

Churchill undermines these controversial gender stereotypes by using the essentially Brechtian strategy of cross-dressing. This is why the discrepancy between Clive’s own and the real image of the family is provided in the very beginning of the play:

CLIVE: This is my family. [...]

(He presents BETTY. She is played by a man.)

My wife is all I dreamt a wife should be,
And everything she is she owes to me.

[...]

(CLIVE presents JOSHUA. He is played by a white.)

My boy’s a jewel. Really has the knack.
You’d hardly notice that the fellow’s black.

[...]

(CLIVE presents EDWARD. He is played by a woman.)

MY son is young. I’m doing all I can

To teach him to grow up to be a man. (Churchill, 1996, p. 251–252)

By defamiliarizing the characters of Betty and Edward, who are played by actors of the opposite sex, Churchill points to a deep fracture between who they are and what they have to be; which is primarily the result of the schizophrenic nature of ideologically conditioned identities. The gestic appearance of Edward, as a woman dressed as a man, undoubtedly points to his inherent feminine sensibility which is supposed to be transformed, under the harsh rules of Victorian pedagogy, into artificially induced male nature; instead, it deforms and turns into homosexuali-

ty. However, Betty appearing as a man in a woman's dress is symptomatic: does Churchill choose this method only to emphasize the incongruence between promoted and real identity, or does she perhaps allude to Clive's latent homosexuality (because his wife is actually a man)? Finally, it is Betty herself who admits that she is "a man's creation" and that "what men want is what I want to be" (Churchill, 1996, p. 251) – that is, a man behaving as a woman. The same question is raised in the funniest scene of the play where we cannot but enjoy the misunderstanding between Clive and his homosexual friend Harry, who misunderstands Clive's eulogies on male solidarity and female corruption:

CLIVE: [...] I know the friendship between us, Harry, is not something that could be spoiled by the weaker sex. Friendship between men is a fine thing. It is the noblest form of relationship.

HARRY: I agree with you.

CLIVE: There is the necessity of reproduction. The family is all important. And there is the pleasure. But what we put ourselves through to get that pleasure, Harry. [...] There is something dark about women, that threatens what is best in us. Between men that light burns brightly.

HARRY: I didn't know you felt like that.

CLIVE: Women are irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful, and they smell different from us. [...] Think of the comradeship of men, Harry, sharing adventures, sharing danger, risking their lives together.

(Harry takes hold of Clive).

CLIVE: What are you doing?

HARRY: Well, you said –

CLIVE: I said what?

HARRY: Between men.

(Clive is speechless.)

I'm sorry, I misunderstood, I would never have dreamt, I thought

– CLIVE: My God, Harry, how disgusting. (Churchill, 1996, p. 282)

The play abounds with similar “misunderstandings” which can be seen as the essence of the first act of the play *Cloud Nine*. And although the title itself suggests the ultimate happiness¹, we might say that it also points to a kind of confusion created by the multiple masks and imposed identities. Thus, Betty, who has to repress her female desire and sensitivity before Clive, is secretly in love with Harry, a homosexual who is actually in love with Clive, an ultimate macho; Clive himself is fascinated by a widow, Mrs. Saunders, a person of extreme integrity who rejects Clive the very minute she realizes his sexual selfishness and who enjoys her sexual freedom from men and all of the prescribed standards of “normal” behavior. Misunderstandings and sexual confusion do not stop here, since the “rejected” ones also have their admirers: the governess Ellen is in love with Betty and little Edward is in love with Harry who, as we find out from their conversation, takes advantage of the boy’s loneliness and need for love, seduces him and then leaves him under the excuse that what they did is a huge sin; however, almost instantaneously, Harry calls for the black servant Joshua and invites him for a round of recreational sex in a barn. Finally, the fact that Victoria is represented by a doll reveals the bleak and plastic existence of the white masters’ daughters.

Churchill’s feminist criticism is twofold: it undermines Rousseauian archetype of a woman as a saint, but it also includes laudable comments on the antithetical archetype of a seductress. This is primarily the function of the widow Saunders, an independent and strong woman, unfettered by conventions, who is an absolute contrast to Betty and especially her mother Maud, who is completely indoctrinated and alienated from her own female being. Maud believes that women are incapable of reaching a reasonable conclusion which is why there is no need for them to think at all, or ask, or imagine, or explore. This is the reason why she is appalled by Mrs. Saunders’s need to know everything, including the identity of persons whipping the black servants, and why she strives so hard to prove to

1 During one of the workshops with Joint Stock Company, one of its members suggested that the title might even refer to the sexual climax, which actually gave Churchill the initial idea for the title of the play. See: Micheline Wandor in Linda Fitzsimmons (1989, p. 46).

her curious daughter Betty that the only right way is the husband's way: "You would not want to be told about it, Betty. It is enough for you that Clive knows what is happening. Clive will know what to do. Your father always knew what to do" (Churchill, 1996, p. 274)². However, while Clive thinks of Betty as "his little dove" who does not share the weaknesses with other "evil and treacherous" members of her sex, it is precisely one such specimen, Mrs. Saunders, that makes him lust-crazy and childish to the point that he wants to literally lose himself beneath her skirt. Mrs. Saunders' independence excites and frightens Clive at the same time: "Caroline, if you were shot with poisoned arrows do you know what I'd do? I'd fuck your dead body and poison myself. Caroline, you smell amazing. You terrify me. You are dark like this continent. Mysterious. Treacherous. (...) Oh don't shut me out, Caroline, let me in" (Churchill, 1996, p. 263).

This is another among many examples in literature which reveal the Victorian marriage as a sham or, as Eva Figs (1986) puts it, a kind of legalized prostitution. As Victorian sexual taboo deprived women of their own sexuality by promoting the ideal of an angel in the house, it encouraged men to look for the "dirty and sinful" sexual pleasures outside their homes where they could acquire it from the women labeled as adulteresses, sinners, witches, vamp-women who expressed their sexuality freely and refused from various reasons to adapt to repressive dogmas of the patriarchal society³. This is also the reason why Mrs. Saunders, who refuses to be an exploited sex-object and a respectable wife, does not fit into the Victorian society which has nothing to offer but the sterile male passion and the scorn of beaten down and obedient wives. First, she abandons her

2 Knowing this also helps us understand Maud's tragic statement that "Young women are never happy", but that compared to married women, they are "ecstatic" after all (Churchill, 1996, p. 258).

3 Of course, it should be noted that freely expressed sexuality was available only to a small number of women in the rigid Victorian society. Mostly they were financially independent women who had extra-marital affairs or women with children born outside marriage, which is why they were labeled as prostitutes by strict Victorian matrons and men of course, even when they had nothing to do with prostitution per se. On the other hand, the largest number of prostitutes in the true sense of the term were actually members of the lumpenproletariat who were forced to sell their bodies in order to survive. For more information see Flanders, 2016.

home and then the entire community of the whites in Africa, as well as the world of the play altogether: "I can't see any way out except to leave. I will keep leaving everywhere I suppose" (Churchill, 1996, p. 274)⁴.

Mrs. Saunders' rebellious nature brings us to another equally important topic of this play and that is the topic of colonial oppression. It is curious that Churchill came up with the idea of combining sexual and colonial oppression while reading Jean Genet, who was an inspiration for another important work of feminism, Kate Millet's *The Sexual Politics*. There, in the chapter presenting this author, Millet (2000) points out Genet's idea about "the colonial or feminine mentality of interiorized oppression which must conquer itself before it can be free" (p. 350). Another important source for Churchill's theorizing about these two systems of slavery came from the Irish riots: "We looked at England's relation to Ireland and how it is like a male/female relationship. The traditional view of the Irish is that they're charming, irresponsible, close to nature, all the things that people tend to think about women" (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 46). This idea is embodied in Clive's description of women as "irrational, demanding, inconsistent, treacherous, lustful" (Churchill, 1996, p. 282), which is why they have to be tamed like animals or – primitives.

Clive identifies women's dark nature with the darkness of an unexplored continent; both are equally overwhelming and threatening for the entire civilization he stands for:

You can tame a wild animal only so far. They revert to their true nature and savage your hand. Sometimes I feel the natives are the enemy. I know that is wrong. I know I have a responsibility towards them, to care for them and bring them all to be like Joshua. This whole continent is my enemy. I am pitching my whole mind and will and reason and spirit against it to tame it, and I sometimes feel it will break over me and swallow me up. (Churchill, 1996, p. 277)

4 As R. Nastić (1996) reminds us, Mrs. Saunders continues the tradition of other literary heroines who leave the stage of classic/petty bourgeois/contemporary theatre in order to either avoid taking place in the power struggles (like Shakespeare's Goneril, Regan or Lady Macbeth) or become one of the subdued, asexual, spiritless women-saints. Instead, she chooses to embark on her own drama of self-awareness (like Ibsen's Nora or Chekhov's Nina Zarechnaya before her).

Feminization of the conquered territories, like the metaphor of a cosmic breast from Columbus's vision of the world in which he describes the Earth as breast-shaped with a pronounced nipple-top, has been a common strategy of Western expansionism, as noted by Petra Mitić (2014) who justifies this conquering mission and the expansion of Bacon's "empire of knowledge"⁵. His vision of the future, when Western man will finally be able to expand the narrow borders of the civilized world and expand its knowledge over the natural world as well, is actually one of the prime examples of "the imperial geography of power which is moved, among other things, by an erotic fantasy about the knowledge as a conquest with the elements of gender violence: a conqueror appears equipped with science and technology that helps him to rip the veil off from an untouched territory, to boldly and aggressively reveal all of its – female – secrets, and make them recognizable, naked, visible" (Mitić, 2014, p. 260–261).

Of course, in order to implement this imperial design, it is necessary to organize not only a military purge, but also a cultural one which includes a thorough deconstruction of an indigenous culture. As explained in the article "The historian as curandera" (1998) by Aurora Levins Morales, one of the first steps towards achieving this goal is to attack the historical sense among the indigenous peoples and then take control over their past. By destroying "repositories of collective cultural memory", as Morales (1998, p. 1) refers to the historical sense, a colonizer usurps the power over recreating an identity of the colonized and swaps the autochthonic narrative with his own version of the origin myth:

When a controlling elite of any kind comes to power, it requires some kind of a replacement origin myth, a story that explains the new imbalances of power as natural, inevitable, and permanent, as somehow inherent to the natures of master and slave, invader and invaded, and therefore unchangeable. This becomes a substitute for the memories of the colonized. Official history is designed to make sense of oppression, to say that the oppressed are oppressed because it is their nature to be oppressed. (Morales, 1998, p. 1)

5 My translation.

This process of deconstructing indigenous identity and replacing it with an ideological construct in the service of the white master is reflected in the character of Joshua who is a black servant in Clive's household and whose sole purpose in life – to serve his master – proves the success of the enlightening mission of the white conqueror and its pedagogical methods. The theological lesson about the origin of the world illustrates the point made by Morales: by forcing Joshua to reject the pagan myth about the great goddess with golden eyes “who made the stars and the sun and the moon” (Churchill, 1996, p. 279), his entire notion of the collective historical memory is destroyed. Instead of this “bad story”, which is “not true”, as Joshua admits (Churchill, 1996, p. 280), he reiterates the Biblical story about Adam and Eve: “God made man white like him and gave him the bad woman who liked the snake and gave us all this trouble” (Churchill, 1996, p. 280). The simplified version of the religious lesson about the loss of paradise reveals the paternal attitude of the enlightened men of the West towards the indigenous people, who are commonly described as immature and infantile, which is the reason why the pedagogical lessons are so well-adjusted to their “limited” capabilities. At the same time, the comical effect of Joshua's interpretation of the myth and his understanding of the original sin efficiently degrades the content of the myth itself which is as naive and infantile like any other pagan version of the origin myth.

By adopting Western history, religion and culture, Joshua breaks the connection with the history of his own people and negates his own identity (“their people are not my people”; “I hate my tribe. My soul is white” [Churchill, 1996, p. 266; p. 251]). In this way, he makes way for the aggressive imperial order, because he voluntarily breaks away from the revolutionary sense of remembering his own peoples' past. Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano (1976) warns that the people estranged from their own history will find themselves trapped within the present and without any perspective for a different future: “What process of change can move a people that does not know who it is, nor where it came from? If it doesn't know who it is, how can it know what it deserves to be?” (as cited in Mo-

rales, 1998, p. 1). The strategy used to portray the identity confusion of the colonized is Brechtian in its origin which is why black Joshua is played by a white man; this technique graphically reveals the extent of the indoctrination of the colonized and the discrepancy between what Joshua wants to be and what he actually is:

My skin is black but oh my soul is white.

I hate my tribe. My master is my light.

I only live for him. As you can see,

What white men want is what I want to be. (Churchill, 1996, p. 251–252)

Since revolutionary impulse and a wish for change are so relatable to authentic, integrated identity of the colonized, it seems justified to claim, as Frantz Fanon did, that internalizing propagated values of the conquering culture is one of the worst consequences of the colonization. As he explains it in his study *Black Skin, White Masks* (¹1952, ²1967), by adopting the colonial ideology about the native as a despicable parasite, a black man becomes subject to the process of “epidermalization” through which he identifies himself to a thin layer of the black epidermis and, consequently, inconsolably inferior to a white man: “When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behavior is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man” (Fanon, 1967, xiii)⁶.

6 Of course, the colonized will never be accepted as a human being not because he can never turn white but because a white scientist (Mannoni) took away from him even the theoretical possibility of being human. He can never, according to Mannoni, become independent because he belongs to a nation which is innately dependant. This is why those suffering from the dependency complex (aka Prospero complex) actually have to be colonized. Even eighty years before Mannoni’s book, another Western humanist, Ernest Renan had expressed similar ideas: “Nature has made a race of workers, the Chinese race, who have wonderful manual dexterity and almost no sense of honor; govern them with justice, levying from them, in return for the blessing of such a government, an ample allowance for the conquering race, and they will be satisfied; a race of tillers of the soil, the Negro; treat him with kindness and humanity, and all will be as it should; a race of masters and soldiers, the European race” (as cited in Cesaire, 1972, p. 4).

Finally, we come to see that patriarchal and colonial oppression function alike: both of the systems maintain the repression of the original identities, abilities and potential (feminine or indigenous, non-Western) ways of thinking in order to pour into the newly created emptiness their own suitable, adequate, obedient contents⁷. Churchill ironizes these artificial products by insisting on the techniques which, essentially, represent original examples of Brechtian *gestus* as clear gestures with social commentary. It is with such a *gestus*, a true caricature of the Victorian ideal, that the first act of the play ends: we witness the scene in which Clive makes a toast to a completely inappropriate marriage between homosexual Harry and equally homosexual Ellen, a marriage he insisted upon and even imposed in order to prevent the imminent scandal if their unorthodox sexual orientation, God forbid it, was revealed. So, from Clive's perspective, his intervention saves not only his reputation, but also the reputation of the entire British Empire. Besides toasting to this absurd marriage, he also raises his glass to a quelling of the insurrection, just at the very moment when one of the insurrectionists, recently tamed Joshua, has him targeted. Such an ending of the first part additionally contributes to a thorough deconstruction of both patriarchal and colonial ideologies. The *gestus* confirms the point that both of the systems have their foundations in oppression, conditioning and reshaping of the new subjects, whose newly made culture Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in somewhat similar context, rightfully calls "culture of apemanship and

7 Similarities between these two oppressive systems are also visible in the field of sexualization of women and black people. In the same way that men tend to describe women in patriarchal society as childish, immature, irrational but also extremely sexual, the same can be seen in the example of the black people. The stereotypes of women as sexually insatiable go hand in hand with the stereotypes about black men's sexual prowess and stamina. Fanon observes: "What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many children that they cannot even count them. Be careful, or they will flood us with little mulattoes" (1967, p. 121). Sexual power of the black men (and women also) is the result of their animal nature, biology and their „dark lust“, as Clive puts it, that threatens to swallow his kind of white male masters. Such racial argumentation is inherent to a white man, a usurper and a conqueror, the one who has to oppress in order to dominate. As one of the songs from Churchill's play *Vinegar Tom* puts it: "Sometimes it's witches, [...] sometimes it's lunatics, [...] It's blacks and it's women and often it's Jews" (Churchill, 1973, p. 154).

parrottry”⁸. Churchill reveals that behavioral patterns in Western society are unnatural and ideologically conditioned but, even importantly, that they are also liable to change and improvement. The contradictions in the “ideal: characters of Betty and Joshua have the same purpose: Betty’s curiosity and her unsuccessful attempt to find love with Harry (which is later, under Clive’s influence, dismissed by Betty as the proof of her female frailty) just like Joshua’s final gesture which reveals to us that his obedience was only superficial are actually revolutionary gestures. They represent an instinctive rebellion against the tyranny, injustice and the travesty of the normal, and therefore they are the glimpse of the utopian space which, however thwarted in the first act, will become much greater in the following part of the play *Cloud Nine*.

3. “I’m beginning to know myself”: Sexual Emancipation of Modern Era

The second act introduces radical changes: while the first is farcical and full of action, the second one is realistic and relatively static. The reason behind this deconstruction of the traditional structure of a play, as Churchill says, is because she wanted to surprise the audience: “I wanted a sort of speedy, brightly colored first act, structured as a conventional dramatic experience, and dominated by men. I then wanted the second act to be dominated by women and gays and change, and to be unsettling – not to meet the audience’s expectations. To catch them offguard” (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 47). As a measure of her success, we can take Robert Kushman’s review in the Observer, in which he wrote that the play, and especially the second act, was “almost the best thing to arrive in the London theatre this young and dismal year” (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 42).

In this more relaxed act, everything seems better: Betty has left

8 He uses the phrase primarily to denote a kind of a process in which one tribe, ethnicity or nation renounces its original culture in order to adopt the strange ways of the white conqueror (Thiong’o, 1986).

Clive, who does not show up again until the very end of the play; Edward is in a relationship with Garry, and Victoria transformed from a plastic doll into a confident married woman who is even contemplating the idea, quite hype in the new liberated era, to enter into a relationship with her friend Lin, which she finally does. Like Garry and Martin, Victoria's husband, Lynn also belongs to the generation of a new group of young people who break away from the inherited conventions of the patriarchal society about (homo)sexuality and its restrictive pedagogical methods. Lin defies the traditional stereotypes which prescribe the appropriate dress code or toys for girls (dresses and dolls, of course) touching upon another extremity which generates not princesses but bullies very much in line with those created by patriarchal society itself: "I'll give her a rifle for Christmas and blast Tommy's [Victoria's boy] pretty head off for a start" (Churchill, 1996, p. 292). Partial emancipation of the characters in the second act is also underlined by the right cast for their roles which is supposed to imply that "the Victorian standards have been swept away" (Burt, 2008, p. 473). Cathy, Lin's daughter, is the only example of the discrepancy within the character which is the reason that this character is played by a grown-up man.

Mostly abandoning the epic strategies of cross-casting and cross-dressing, Churchill chooses an experiment with time as her main theatrical strategy of the second part of the play. Quite uncommonly, the action of the second act is situated in modern London, in the year 1979, which is approximately one hundred years after the action of the first act, but the characters have not aged more than twenty-five years. This unusual experiment which blends actual and fictional time also has a Brechtian effect: by alienating the chronology of the play, Churchill makes an important point that the past might not be so distant and removed from the present as one usually takes it to be, and also that things are still upside down in the world of *Cloud Nine*. Desired utopia and freedom from patriarchal/colonial master, which was announced at the end of the first act, turns out to be too conditioned by the strict rules of these oppressive social systems to be materialized fully and without any obstacles.

The confusion in the first part of the play is still present only in a different form: Edward dreads the idea that his homosexuality might come into the open, Victoria is in a marriage so progressive that it represents a new kind of oppression, and Betty is so afraid of her new independence that she cannot even walk the streets alone. In her notes to a theatre director, Richard Seyd, Churchill describes Betty as the person “in a near breakdown state of panic and agoraphobia, acute anxiety” (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 51). Every character is conflicted within himself/herself because the learned patriarchal lessons cannot be unlearned so easily. Betty, unconsciously, but unerringly, recites old conventional ideas learned from her father and then her husband, according to which a woman has to suffer a little bit for beauty, because finally, that is her only quality:

BETTY: I find when I'm making tea I put out two cups. It's strange not having a man in the house. You don't know who to do things for.

LIN: Yourself.

BETTY: Oh, that's very selfish.

LIN: Have you any women friends?

BETTY: I've never been so short of men's company that I've had to bother with women.

LIN: Don't you like women?

BETTY: They don't have such interesting conversations as men. There has never been a woman composer of genius. They don't have a sense of humour. They spoil things for themselves with their emotions. I can't say I do like women very much, no.

LIN: But you're a woman.

BETTY: There's nothing says you have to like yourself. (Churchill, 1996, p. 301–302)

Unlike Betty, Edward wants to be a woman but since his mother was the only available model of womanhood (housewife/victim), he ends up hating men. Namely, Edward stops grieving over the failed relationship with a macho Garry and becomes a part of the erotic triangle with his

sister and her partner Lin, not as a man but as a woman and lesbian. The examples of conflicted gender identities keep appearing. A feminist Victoria does not seem capable of reaching a decision without the approval of her husband, even when it comes to deciding whether she will have sex with Lin: "I don't know what Martin would say. Does it count as adultery with a woman?" (Churchill, 1996, p. 296). On the other hand, it looks like Martin has learned the lesson about sexual tolerance, but his emancipation seems like a new kind of male manipulation. He is so used to being superior that he cannot stop lecturing his wife on how she should behave in order to express her new sexual freedom. What Martin does not see, however, is Victoria's unspoken need for the proof of his love which could very easily influence her decision about the separation and make her stay with her husband and their son instead:

There's no point being so liberated you make yourself cry all the time. [...] I'm not like whatever percentage of American men have become impotent as a direct result of women's liberation, which I am totally in favour of, more I sometimes think than you are yourself. [...] You're the one who's talked about freedom. You're the one who's experimenting with bisexuality, and I don't stop you, I think women have something to give each other. You seem to need the mutual support. You find me too overwhelming. So follow it through, go away, leave me and Tommy alone for a bit, we can manage perfectly well without you. I'm not putting any pressure on you but I don't think you're being a whole person. God knows I do everything I can to make you stand on your own two feet. Just be yourself. You don't seem to realise how insulting it is to me that you can't get yourself together. (Churchill, 1996, p. 300–301)

Furthermore, in order to prove that he is a far better connoisseur of the female psyche than women themselves, Martin writes "a novel about women from the women's point of view" (Churchill, 1996, p. 302). As noted by Churchill, Martin does not mean anything bad, but he is so used to

commanding that he cannot make himself behave differently. Actually, one of the points made by Churchill is that giving up power can be equally difficult as claiming the power which is the reason these two topics overlap and correlate in the second act of the play⁹.

Clive's absence functions as a reminder of how the world would look like if men were not around to offer their proven guidance. As proposed by Geraldine Cousin, the general confusion among the characters is primarily the result of this absence because, without Clive, none of them know what to do and how to feel. His presence/absence is emphasized by the double role of Gerry who, according to Churchill's notes, should be played by the same actor who played Clive in the first act. Besides being the one who freely enjoys the benefits of casual sexual encounters, Garry is also echoing Clive who disapproves of Edward's feminine behavior, even if that happens for all the different reasons. While Clive thinks of Edward's femininity as inappropriate, Garry thinks of it as insincere and unauthentic: "You're getting like a wife. [...] You're putting it on" (Churchill, 1996, p. 306). Clive's ideological absence is also visible in Lin's actions because she maintains the same kind of indoctrination by enforcing her own views of gender roles and sexuality only in another direction and without a guise. His psychological homosexuality includes also physicality in Lin's case, which is manifested in erotic love

9 Martin's superiority can also be interpreted as a strong feminist criticism of the patrons of postmodernism, such as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, and especially their pretentious tendencies to interpret "feminine". These authors firstly negated the idea of feminine altogether, and then decided to present themselves in the role of women. This is why, Somer Brodribb (1992) reminds us, Derrida creates his Veronica ("real image" in medieval Latin) in order to deconstruct her and make her available solely to him as the one and the only "the Master of Discourse": "She may be summoned to appear, but shall not summon the Collège, to account; to politics, responsibility, justice. In any case, once at court, the jester Lacan rules that the law is the phallus and woman cannot speak; Lacan will speak in her place, however, since only man may represent woman" (p. xvi). A bit further in her book, Brodribb again reminds the reader that in order to be sophisticated and talk like a proper woman, one should leave it to the men. By depriving women of their ability to communicate, these "masters of discourse" make it impossible for women to speak up and reveal their own truth which would inevitably annihilate the patriarchal structure. These stories - about incest, rape and violence - would finally present themselves as harsh reality and not as female erotic fantasies about the paternal figure as Freud used to rationalise them (Brodribb, 1992, xviii).

for women and aggressive hatred for men. Challenging traditional patriarchal pedagogy which strictly differentiates between “proper” gender behavior (and which transforms the boy Edward into an androgynous being), Lin creates an utter confusion in little Cathy who lacks adequate perception of her own gender identity: “They hit me. I can’t play. They said I’m a girl” (Churchill, 1996, p. 317). Her confusion is underlined, as already mentioned, by mismatched adult male actor since, as Churchill puts it, “it throws up more clearly the extent to which behaving like a proper little girl is learnt rather than innate” (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 53). Churchill duplicates the roles of Clive/Lin as well as their equally repressive pedagogy which breeds pathologies in their children and, in Edward’s case, a chronic alienation from his own ego and his inability to take control over his own life. The final glimpse of Clive, and the repressive system he stands for, presents itself in the figure of a ghost of a soldier who died in Belfast, Ireland. “The Troubles”, or the conflict between the Irish and the English in the sixties, were very much going on when the play was published which is the reason why Churchill felt the impetus to allude to “this last past of the empire” (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 53) as confirmation of the idea of uninterrupted imperialist continuum and a destructive urge for conquest which outlived even the (British) Empire.

The ghost of a soldier, who is actually Lin’s brother, appears instead of the pre-patriarchal Goddess or, should we say, a range of old female deities (Innin, Innana, Nana, Nut, Anat, Anahita, Istar, Isis)¹⁰ which are unsuccessfully invoked in a series of quasi-religious litanies recited by drunken Victoria, Lin and Edward:

Goddess of many names, oldest of the old, who walked in chaos
and created life, hear us calling you back through time, before
Jehovah, before Christ, before men drove you out and burnt
your temples, hear us, Lady, give us back what we were, give us

10 Innin or Inanna is Sumerian goddess of fertility and love, later on equated with Babylonian Ishtar; Nut is an Egyptian sky goddess, and Isis is her daughter, the protector of nature and magic; Anat is Semitic warrior-goddess, and Anahita is the ancient Persian goddess of fertility and wisdom. Nanna is a Norse deity associated with joy and peace.

the history we haven't had, make us the women we can't be.
(Churchill, 1996, p. 308)

Although their summons sound honest and express essential historical problem, their prayer to the Goddess fails because their wish to recreate a utopian space where they could free themselves from the patriarchal norms is reduced solely to sexual utopia. Invoking the Goddess for the purposes of sexual orgy reminds us of the philosophy of the Ranters in Churchill's play *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976): both groups tend to identify wanted social freedom and economic equality with sharing of the bodies and sexual pleasure which, after all, are not enough for overall political liberation of the modern woman (and man), because they exclude the human spirit and political consciousness¹¹. This is, of course, the reason why the Goddess does not show up because she cannot be a part of the ceremony that foreshadows a sexual orgy and which, at the same time, mimics misogynist patriarchal religion. Victoria and Lin (and also Edward who sees himself as a woman) will not be able to become real women until they realize that being a woman is not a dual category, as promoted by patriarchal ideology, and that their liberation does not lie just in the transformation from asexual angel into a greedy and promiscuous Eve, but in the true realization of one's own capabilities and prowess.

This does not mean that the described scene, as well as general chaos of the second act, does not possess its own positive and valid dimension. Having in mind the ideology represented in the illustrative first act, it can be said that sexual and gender confusion of the second part of the play

11 What I have in mind here is the freedom from ideological tyranny and pedagogical lessons acquired in early childhood and inoculated as inherent, natural and therefore unchangeable. One such trait is homosexuality which is, in my opinion, very often induced artificially due to many external pressures and unnatural disruptions in the healthy development of one's character (including, of course, repression or diverting of the sexual desire in children). In this context, I think it might be useful to add that "body politics", which was one of the central points of the feminist movement in the 1970s, should not and must not be narrowed down to sexual freedom only, but that it is imperative to expand this limited angle of looking at things and include the subject matter of class and social and economic status of the society in general. As Victoria puts it in the scene of invoking the Great Goddess: "You can't separate fucking and economics" (Churchill, 1996, p.309).

is actually a step needed to overcome chronic alienation due to false repressive patriarchal norms. In this sense, revealing sexuality is an important, although not the only, precondition for ultimate integration of one's identity. As revealed by Betty herself in a monologue that foreshadows the ending and emotionally evokes her very first real sexual experience (and that in the act of self-gratification), sensuous knowledge goes hand in hand with existential knowledge:

I thought if Clive wasn't looking at me there wasn't a person there. And one night in bed in my flat I was so frightened I started touching myself. I thought my hand could go through space. I touched my face, it was there, my breast, and my hand went down where I thought it shouldn't, and I thought well there is somebody there. It felt very sweet, it was a feeling from very long ago, it was very soft, just barely touching, and I felt myself gathering together more and more and I felt angry with Clive and angry with my mother and I went on and on defying them, and there was this vast feeling growing in me and all around me and they couldn't stop me and no one could stop me and I was there and coming and coming. Afterwards I thought I'd betrayed Clive. My mother would kill me. But I felt triumphant because I was a separate person from them. [...] (Churchill, 1996, p. 316)

It is only after this sexual experience that Betty becomes able to overcome imposed considerations and establish valuable relationships, first with her children, and then with men. Despite the fact that her first attempt at being close to a man is comically futile, because her longing is directed towards a homosexual Gerry, it still gives hope that someday she will find a more adequate partner since, as Gerry says, "Not everyone's gay" (Churchill, 1996, p. 320). Other characters also experience the change for the better in the second act of the play, but Betty's accomplishment is the greatest and the most significant because her estrangement was so radical. As explained by Cousin (1989), "Betty achieves the most because, from a position of believing that she lacks intrinsic worth as a woman,

she comes to a loving acceptance of herself. Of all the characters she is the one most haunted by her past and fearful of the present moment, but she is able finally to reject Clive's view of her and to embrace the ghost of her past self" (p. 45–46). The embrace between two Bettys represents the emotional climax of the play and a glimpse of the better future: consciousness of one's own potential is always a precondition for resistance against imposed gender roles and a balance to restrictive scruples.

4. Final Remarks

Michael Patterson in his study *Strategies of Political Theatre* (2003) concludes that "contemporary freedoms may prove as confining as imperial morality" (p. 172). Such a conclusion is one-sided and hasty because Patterson fails to see that the general chaos of the second act is actually the result of disintegration of the old rigid system, as well as the need to establish more creative relationships, which the characters, too long within the grasp of their tyrants, are not entirely prepared for. As referred to by John Glore, "People aren't wearing ill-suited masks any longer, but haven't quite figured out what to do with what they are finding underneath those rejected masks. The characters in Act Two are adults in a world for which their childhood never prepared them; a world whose fluidity and seeming disorder are both exhilarating and disorienting" (as cited in Fitzsimmons, 1989, p. 45)¹².

Therefore, the final message of the play is not pessimistic because the utopia is actually a process of moving towards something better as confirmed by the playwright herself who insists that "cloud nine" is just a transitional phase of the utopian process in which everybody, except for Clive, accomplished something: "everyone has moved on a bit and things have got

12 Another argument that stands behind the fact that, in Act 2, Churchill's characters 'change a little for the better' is the political value of resisting roles exercised by Mrs. Saunders and Harry Bagley. Both of them disrupt the patriarchal narrative and although they are ostracized from a Victorian society – she leaves the scene altogether and he is unhappily married off to Ellen – their cases prove that "despite powerful forces of ideology, people are not reducible to the social contexts that form them" (Gobert, 2014, 93–94).

better” (Betsko & Koenig, 1987, p. 83). As a matter of fact, it could be said that Churchill leaves us in the phase where everything is still quite open. How the things will develop in the future and whether the chaos, which is the result of newly gained freedoms from old coercions, will channel into some, politically and psychologically, more creative life forms or whether it will be co-opted and misused in the form of a new, for a capitalist system, desirable ideology, is the question that remains unanswered in this play. It is only in the succeeding plays, such as *Serious Money*, *Far Away*, *Mad Forest*, that Caryl Churchill will show that the state of chaos from the play *Cloud Nine* does not necessarily lead towards more humane and creative social changes, and that the term freedom can also serve as a hollow rhetoric of the neoliberal capitalist system in which chaos gave way to absolute anarchy. The representatives of the postmodernist trends in understanding literature, and the apologists of neoliberalism, try hard to incorporate this anarchy into the very world of literature itself, as well as the world of science, and make a new life philosophy out of it, the one without sense, without motive, without purpose, the one in which nothing but the anarchy is necessary. Fortunately, Caryl Churchill is not a postmodernist.

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Reminiscences of Home in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*¹

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Abstract

Jackie Kay's first novel, *Trumpet*, centres around Joss Moody, a Black jazz trumpeter, whose life is intensely scrutinized once the reporting of his death reveals he was born a woman. What makes this novel a fruitful site of investigation into how identities and identifications forming a sense of self (gender, sexuality, and race) are imagined, perceived, acquired, expressed, challenged, dissolved, and performed is the fact that Joss's identity is filtered through multiple perspectives. His wife Millie and adopted son Colman initiate a memory discourse to discover ways to exist after Joss's death (Lumsden, 2000, as cited in Hartner, 2015, p. 52). As they attempt to reconstruct Joss as a husband, lover, father, and famous trumpeter, they 'de and re-construct themselves' (Lumsden, 2000, as cited in Hartner, 2015, p. 52), questioning the relationship between home, gender, and sexuality in the process. *Trumpet* adapts, challenges, and reshapes the conventions of homemaking. It shows that the concept of home expands to encompass everything from a physical place, a site of hybridization and improvisation, to a point from which to re-examine, negotiate and critique feelings, practices, and states of being generally associated with traditional narratives of home.

Keywords: gender, heteronormativity, home, music, Jackie Kay

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In the Introduction to the 2021 edition of her book about Bessie Smith, originally published in 1997, Jackie Kay reveals what helped her set and adequately convey the tone of her novel about Black jazz trumpeter Joss Moody, who was born a woman but spent his adult life living as a man:

[S]trangely, returning to the blues and immersing myself in Bessie and in her contemporaries clarified the voice of *Trumpet*. I started to see the style of the book as a piece of music. The whole chapter called “Music” in *Trumpet* was directly inspired by thinking about how the blues journeyed into jazz. I was trying to find a metaphor for that fluidity in our own gendered identities. I was thinking about how we imagine states of identity to be static when they are in fact fluid [...] Writing about Bessie and her blues, about her very fluid identity, how she was as at home in pearls and plumes as in a man’s suit, allowed me to create Joss Moody. The two books seem twinned. (Kay, 2021, pp. 3–4)

The act of returning to the rhythms and stories of Bessie’s music also meant a journey back to the days when Kay, as a mixed-race child adopted by a White couple and living in a predominantly White environment, struggled to make sense of her difference. Kay’s sense of identity and belonging progressed with her first double album. Namely, when she was 12, her adoptive father, who loved the blues, bought her an album, *Bessie Smith: Any Woman’s Blues*. Bessie’s Black face featured on the record cover, her voice, and her rich and resonant narratives (Kay, 2021, p. 1) changed, as Kay expresses in her poem “The Red Graveyard”, “the shape of my [Kay’s] silence”: she could recognize herself in the features of Bessie Smith, which enabled her to perceive and give voice to the other side of herself. For Kay, who “grew up in a house of jazz and blues” (Smith, 2016a), the blues became life’s way of talking – all clashes and fusions, collapses, ins and outs, and ups and downs in the blues narratives “sprang from life’s source [...] and [...] allowed for a kind of transformation, a becoming” (Kay,

2021, p. 5). In the words of one of Kay's lodestars, Black feminist and civil rights activist Angela Davis, the blues "was aesthetic evidence of new psychosocial realities within the black population" in the postemancipation period (Davis, 1998, p. 5). As Davies's analysis of the blues tradition demonstrates, the blues women – Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, and Billie Holiday – challenged, with their lyrics, performances, lifestyles, and sexual proclivities, the dominant discourses of the time concerning gender, sexuality, race, and class. Based on this, the blues realm can be considered a counter-narrative – a space of resistance to the fixed models and dominant narratives of identity – that made Joss Moody live and breathe.

Kay wanted the novel's structure to reflect the flux of jazz: "I liked the idea that *Trumpet* would have [...] riffs and solos, and that some characters would appear and let rip and then disappear coming in and out of the focus like jazz" (Smith, 2016a). She also wanted to tell the same story from different viewpoints (Kay, 1999, as cited in Hartner, 2015, p. 51). The story centres around Joss Moody, whose life undergoes intense scrutiny once the reporting of his death reveals his biological sex. What makes this novel a fruitful site of investigation into how identities and identifications forming a sense of self (gender, sexuality, and race) are imagined, perceived, acquired, expressed, challenged, dissolved, and performed is the fact that Joss's identity is filtered through multiple perspectives. Voices the author employs to restore parts of Joss's existence come from a range of characters. Repetition and sequences of ideas elaborated by characters who had an intimate relationship with Joss (his wife Millie and adopted son Colman) and those who tend to acquire details of his intimate life (the journalist Sophie Stones) are the glue holding solos – carriers of legal, administrative, and medical discourses of sex, sexuality, and gender (the doctor, the registrar, and the funeral director) – together.

As Ali Smith observes, *Trumpet* begins with a "forced unhoming, from both the house and the self" (Smith, 2016b). To escape the blinding white light of the press cameras seeking to illuminate her, Millie leaves her house in London for a secluded place in Scotland. Torr, as this place is called, provides a safe refuge not only from the media, since Joss and

Millie kept it private through the years, but also from the prying eyes of the locals who are “oblivious to the happenings in the jazz world” (Kay, 2011, p. 6). However, the recesses, free from the pressure and noise of the outside world, soon become a site of a different type of invasion: “[t]he past had been here all the time, waiting” (Kay, 2011, p. 7). The house at Torr evokes the memory of times past when Millie felt being herself was certain, easy, and painless (Kay, 2011, p. 1). Now, when she views the photographs in the papers, she appears unlike the memory of herself:

I don't know what feeling like myself is any more. Who is Milliecent Moody? Joss Moody is dead. Joss Moody is not Joss Moody. Joss Moody was really somebody else. Am I somebody else too. But who else was Joss? Who was this somebody else? I don't understand it. Have I been a good mother, a good wife, or have I not been anything at all? (Kay, 2011, p. 98)

Millie's idea of home as a source of relaxation, comfort, familiarity, and security is not associated with physical places such as the site of the house, region, or even country but stems from Joss's presence and the construction of his identity. Joss Moody no longer exists, and the image of that significant other – to whom she was glued, to borrow Roland Barthes's (2001, p. 11) phrase, and on whom she relied for support in the evolution of her sense of self – has been reduced to a lie and deception by the media. Destabilized by both the loss and the aspect of Joss that loss unveils, Colman also struggles to regain himself: “it [the life] has only become eventful now; after his death. Then the life, the one I thought I knew I'd lived, changed. Now I don't know what I lived” (Kay, 2011, p. 46). Millie and Colman adopt a memory discourse to find “ways to exist after his [Joss's] death” (Lumsden, 2000, as cited in Hartner, 2015, p. 52). As they attempt to reconstruct Joss as a husband, lover, father, and famous trumpeter, they “de and re-construct themselves” (Lumsden, 2000, as cited in Hartner, 2015, p. 52), questioning the relationship between home, gender, and sexuality in the process.

The novel's opening section, entitled "House and Home", signals a relationship that provokes thinking around the outside and inside, unsafe and safe, others and self. Interpreted by Ali Smith as a clash between the public and private worlds, the relationship between house and home raises questions about the various ways people "calculate what's real and what's imagined [...] and what's allowed and forbidden" (Smith, 2016b). Joss and Millie's house is a public version of their home (domestic sphere of family and marriage), which is, as Allison James argues, both a conceptual and physical space: "[i]t is an idea that guides our actions and, at the same time, a spatial context where identities are worked on" (James, 1998, p. 144). Although Joss did not seek to confirm his chosen gender legally, Millie officially became Mrs Moody in 1955: "Joss and I have done it. We are married. A few guests at the registry office this afternoon [...] And that was it" (Kay, 2011, p. 30). No forged documents or fraudulent wedding officiants are mentioned as being involved, as was the case with jazz musician Billy Tipton (see Devor, 2003, p. 193), whose life inspired Kay to write the novel. From the moment Joss, several months into their courtship, unwrapped his bandages to reveal the material fact of his female body, Millie accepted his love and his way of taking her to their other world – which would remain, at least until his death, just his and hers and nobody else's (Kay, 2011, p. 198). Towards the end of the novel, Millie regains the feeling of being Joss's wife and, by extension, a widow by reminding herself that she was fully capable of giving herself up and over to love:

I managed to love my husband from the moment I clapped eyes on him till the moment he died. I managed to desire him all of our married life. I managed to respect and love his music [...] I managed to be loyal, to keep our private life private where it belonged. To not tell a single soul including my own son about our private life. (Kay, 2011, p. 206)

Joss feels he owes his identity primarily to Millie and his music: "He has a wife and he has an album. He can't contain his excitement at his own success [...] He tells me [Millie] it is all down to me, that I have created him, that I am responsible for his success" (Kay, 2011, p. 36). As a White fe-

male-Black male pairing, Millie and Joss are “a find” for an adoption agency to find a home for a child of colour, so they adopt Colman and complete their idea of family life and home. Now they are a married couple with a child, they fit into a more desirable model of a stable, nuclear family, reducing the possibility of being under surveillance. As Sarah Igo (2018) notes, “owning a home, making a comfortable living, and conforming to dominant norms of respectability all decidedly increased one’s chances of evading society’s gaze” (p. 9). The institutions of marriage, employment, and adoption rights are material practices that, along with other structures of understanding and practical orientations, reinforce and privilege heterosexuality (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548). Millie’s ambivalent attitude towards their home’s presentation in the print media evokes the complexity of Joss within what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner term the project of heteronormativity:

I used to find the amount of publicity that Joss created terrifying. I hated the constant interviews, the articles about his life and music in the newspapers and magazines. The description of our house always incensed me. It was their myth of our house. (Kay, 2011, p. 154)

Joss’s publicity simultaneously perpetuates and threatens a “tacit sense of rightness and normalcy” embedded in aspects other than sex, that is, in the whole field of social forms and arrangements such as nationality, the state, the law, commerce, medicine, education, the conventions of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture (Berlant & Warner, 1998, pp. 554–555). The concept of home appears contradictory as Vider demonstrates in *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (2021): it is “a site of constraint and a site of self-expression, a site of isolation and a site of deep connection, a site of secrecy and a site of recognition” (p. 7).

Recalling his childhood, Colman identifies as a traditional boy growing up in a nontraditional house (Kay, 2011, pp. 46–47). Compared with

other children's parents, Millie and Joss "stuck out like a sore thumb" with their unconventional mode of living. Colman wanted parents who appeared less glamorous and more like those who worked a nine-to-five job; he also longed for a more regulated and stationary lifestyle since his father wanted his family with him while touring. For an adopted mixed-race child, born in Edinburgh but living in London and following his parents from one dingy old jazz club to another, the homeplace was consistently elsewhere, provided it was a place of fixity and stability, which, in Colman's case, meant having a square meal and a bath every night in the same house in the same town. Joss challenged Colman's generic and reductive understanding of "home" as well as his need to restrict a sense of belonging to a home as a physical place:

My father always told me he and I were related the way it mattered. He felt that way too about the guys in his bands, that they were all part of some big family. Some of them were white, some black. He said they didn't belong anywhere but to each other. He said you make up your own bloodline, Colman. Make it up and trace it back. Design your own family tree – what's the matter with you? Haven't you got an imagination? (Kay, 2011, p. 58)

The concept of home can take the form of an alternative to settled places, one encouraging a framework of thinking that Paul Carter (1992) specifies as a migrant perspective: "We need to disarm the genealogical rhetoric of blood, property and frontiers and to substitute for it a lateral account of social relations" (p. 7). By further encouraging Colman to accept the concept of home as a place allowing haphazardness, imagination, improvisation, fabrication, and discontinuity, Joss unsettles heteronormative reproductive logic. Therefore, homes can be metaphorical centrings of movement which Carter (1992) regards not as an "awkward interval between fixed points of departure" but as a "mode of being in the world" (p. 101). Evidently a dynamic field, home is not what grounds people but what problematizes their identity.

“Home” in the novel is not presented in terms of a Goffmanesque “back region” as exclusively private space but as a site involving “a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery” (Goffman, 1959, p. 8). Working from Susan Gal’s premise that the public-private divide reproduces itself within itself and therefore should not be considered a simple binary but a fractal distinction, Stephen Vidler (2021, p. 10) concludes that home can be perceived as a space enabling intimacy while simultaneously restricting it. Since his early childhood, Colman has been aware that their house has been composed of several private spheres. It consistently appeared to him that his parents shared a world of their own – they were always “whispering about the house” (Kay, 2011, p. 129) and had a “special air of having something between them” (p. 66). Joss and Millie have full control over the indoor space they all share; within the inner space, insulated from the wider world, they make further divisions and define that space’s insiders and outsiders: Millie does not want her mother too close around their house, and she ensures Colman knocks on their bedroom door. Joss and Millie’s bedroom is their secret world where they engage in their backstage behaviour, some of which is a preparation for front stage behaviour:

I wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning, early. [...] The tighter I wrapped, the flatter his breasts. That was all he was concerned about. He didn’t care if it was uncomfortable. It probably was a little. [...] I had to help him to get dressed so that he could enjoy his day and be comfortable. [...] He put on his boxer shorts and I turned away whilst he stuffed them with a pair of socks. He pulled on his trousers, constantly adjusting his shirts and the stuffing. He was always more comfortable once he was dressed. (Kay, 2011, p. 238)

Joss determines his gender identity and confirms it through clothing. One recognizes here, and throughout the novel, a mixture of physical cues employed to pass as a man. As Judith Butler (1988) explains, “gender is in-

stituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* [sic]” or “stylization of the body” (p. 519). Therefore, gender, Butler underscores, “must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (ibid.). Such acts belong to the domain of learned behaviour that de-essentializes gender and exposes physical parameters and mannerisms forming gender “standards”; they, in J. Halberstam’s view, demonstrate that masculinity is not the property of male bodies but a construction by both female- and male-born people (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13). This type of gender expression allows Joss, like many others for whom changing sex was a fantasy, to create a home for himself in a body that, as Halberstam (2018) expresses it elsewhere, was not comfortable or right in terms of who he understood himself to be (p. 1).

Music and motion are central to Joss’s self-conception. He feels at home in the music environment that refuses categorization, boxes, and artificiality of genres. Stages and small clubs can be viewed as homes to a hybrid and erratic scene that takes him up and down and creates a holy-like atmosphere. Millie feels as if she is losing Joss to the music’s rhythms until she, led by the syncopated movements, stomping, and cheering of people around her, experiences that strange feeling of going inside the music (Kay, 2011, p. 18). Joss is his music, and the logic of his embodiment is encoded in his name, Moody Trumpet – when he plays the trumpet, he “can’t stop himself changing. Running changes. Changes running. He is changing all the time” (Kay, 2011, p. 135). His playing is an endorsement of difference, a live process of responding to his dual heritage and resolving an either/or logic in favour of an impulse – a strong one in all of us, Kay believes (Kay & Tournay-Theodotou, 2014, p. 92) – to put seeming opposites together: “Scotland. Africa. Slavery. Freedom. He is a girl. A man. Everything, nothing. He is sickness, health. The sun. The moon. Black, white. Nothing weighs him down. Not the past or the future” (Kay, 2011, p. 136). It has been pointed out that music and musicality are used in the novel to raise a universal question of how to be in the world, where world means a complex relationship between race, gender, and sexuality (see Carroll, 2018, p. 172; Fong, 2011, p. 244; Hartner, 2015, p. 51).

Trumpet adapts, challenges, and reshapes the conventions of home-making. It shows that the concept of home expands to encompass everything from a physical place, a site of hybridization and improvisation, to a point from which to reexamine, negotiate, and critique feelings, practices, and states of being generally associated with traditional narratives of home. Millie and Joss subvert the concept of home resulting from the strict operation of heterosexuality. Joss is an unlikely homemaker in the sense Judith Butler (2004, p. 214) explicates the potential behind drag – he challenges the implicit association between sex and gender. Both concepts, home and gender, are open to a whole range of practices that are culturally determined yet individually enacted; they, as Stephen Vidler (2021, p. 7) argues, project stability but are made and remade through ‘imperfect, and sometimes subversive, repetition’.

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Arab Women in America: When the East Meets the West

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ABSTRACT

More often than not, Arab women are portrayed to be generally submissive, obedient and silent, almost an invisible figure in the traditional Arab society. But what happens when an Arab woman is faced with Western feminism, values and traditions? This paper analyzes Arab women in the context of the United States, through close reading of two literary works: non-fiction book *Superman is an Arab* (2012) by Joumana Haddad and the novel *A Woman is No Man* (2019) by Etaf Rum. *Superman is an Arab* discusses the patriarchal system which is in place in Arab countries by examining the role of religion, marriage and motherhood in Arab women's lives, and brings attention to issues of gender, sexuality and marriage in Arab world. In this paper, *Superman is an Arab* serves as a reference to lives of Arab women in their home countries. The novel *A Woman is No Man* by Palestinian-American author Etaf Rum is the primary focus of this paper and follows the story of three women of Arab origin, three generations of Arab immigrants in the U.S. Through close analysis of Rum's novel, this paper will present main advantages, obstacles and challenges which Arab women in America face by addressing several important segments of women's lives – education and career, marriage and motherhood, body and sexuality.

Keywords: Arab women in the U.S., body, sexuality, marriage and motherhood, (non)belonginess, Joumana Haddad, Etaf Rum

1. Introduction

In her memoir *Becoming*, published in 2018, Michelle Obama, former U.S. First Lady and the first African American woman to serve in this position wrote: “There’s a power in allowing yourself to be known and heard, in owning your unique story, in using your authentic voice” (p. 421). Her words resonate deeply, not just in the U.S. but in the West in general, since they allude to the struggle women had to go through to become equal and independent members of the society. The fight for women’s rights in the West consists of several feminist waves, all of which brought significant changes to women’s social positions and lives. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the first-wave feminism addressed women’s suffrage in the United States and focused on women’s political power, thus enabling women to vote and participate in political processes. First-wave feminists “showed enormous courage and daring in their demand not just for the vote but for reform of laws preventing women from entering contracts or owning property” (Paglia, 2008, p. 7). Second-wave feminism, which took place in mid-20th century in the U.S. and later spread throughout other Western countries, was triggered by well-known feminist books such as Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949). Although on the political level the second-wavers focused on reproductive rights, domesticity and the workplace, thus their effort resulting in women’s right to abortion, new possibilities for women’s education, work, career and equal pay, they also opened issues of women’s both collective and individual identity, especially in the works of Simone de Beauvoir who introduced the concept of the uniqueness of women’s experience in relation to men’s experience and pointed out the importance of ubiquitous patriarchal social paradigms in shaping this experience. Second-wave feminism and Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s gave rise to Black Feminism, which specifically focused on the rights of African American women in the U.S. The third and the ongoing fourth-wave feminisms bring attention to women’s sexuality, sexual liberation, violence against women, femininity, and intersectionality. Consequently, it seems that the Western woman

today is an emancipated woman, as she has the right and the possibilities to engage in political processes – to choose political leaders and be chosen as one, has the right to education and career, she is in control of her own sexuality and can independently bring decision about marriage, children and family. But, as Francis Fukuyama (2018) points out, the programs of modern feminism in the West are not determined by working-class women who want to fight for the right to work, but by educated women who want equal access to the highest rungs of the social hierarchy. And so, the patriarchal social paradigms, although deeply hidden, return everything to the beginning – a woman’s search for dignity, a unique feeling that she is visible and equally valuable (p. 26).

But it seems that women in other parts of the world, such as Arab countries, are without a voice, mostly trapped in patriarchal social patterns within the private sphere. These women are still without a real possibility of externalizing their aspirations and inclusion in social and public spheres. Hayat Alvi (2005) argues that Arab societies “have been particularly resistant to the forces of modernization, especially involving the empowerment of women (p. 146) and points out that:

Political authoritarianism has been entrenched in the Arab region, and in most cases continues to exclude women from fair and free political participation. Although a handful of Arab countries recently have made some adjustments to their political systems so as to allow women and opposition groups to participate, the Arab Middle East as a whole is still a long way off from democratizing. Politics remains a male-dominated profession, and the ratio of women politicians to men is significantly small, especially compared to other developing regions. (Alvi, 2005, pp. 147–148)

A year after Obama’s *Becoming*, Etaf Rum published her debut novel *A Woman is No Man*. In addition to indirectly alluding to *The Second Sex* in the novel’s title, Rum incorporates patriarchalism as the basis and framework for determining the private and public status of the Arab woman,

no matter where she lives. The author discusses the lives of Arab women in their homeland and in the United States, and she writes:

I was born without a voice [...] No one ever spoke of my condition. I did not know I was mute until years later, when I opened my mouth to ask for what I wanted and realized no one could hear me. Where I come from, voicelessness is the condition of my gender, as normal as the bosoms on a woman's chest, as necessary as the next generation growing inside her belly. But we will never tell you this, of course. Where I come from, we've learned to conceal our condition. We've been taught to silence ourselves, that our silence will save us. (Rum, 2019, p. 8)

This certainly begs the question about rights and status of women in the Middle East. It should be noted that significant changes took place in mid-1980s, when many Arab countries adopted strategies for women development "after realizing [...] that change cannot be achieved through working with women alone but rather men and society as a whole must be equally responsible for introducing social and political change" (Al Maitaah et al., 2011, p. 12). The 1990s witnessed the "emerging of the concept of 'Gender Approach' where governments made commitments to mainstream gender equality in their institutions, policies and planning" (Al Maitaah et al., 2011, p. 12). Therefore, Arab countries endorsed policies to encourage women's participation in public life through new labor laws allowing women maternity leaves and child care benefits, and through the introduction of women's suffrage. Additionally, most Arab countries established different forms of ministries and national institutions for women with the goal of achieving gender equality. Separate ministries for women's affairs appeared in Palestine, Algeria, Egypt and Iraq. Other countries, such as Bahrain, Jordan and Lebanon, formed women's councils or committees, or a mix-model of women's councils and ministries, such as in Jordan and Egypt (Al Maitaah et al., 2011, p. 10). These have played "important roles in advancing women's status and employed international frameworks to articulate feminist agendas" (Arenfeldt, 2011, p. 10).

Thus, women activism in many Arab countries has been internationalized in the past decades, which has enabled women's groups to bring the world's attention to important issues regarding feminism in these countries (Al Maitaah et al., 2011, p. 23). Yet, despite a widespread support for women's rights, majorities in many Arab countries favor limiting the roles "women play in society. For example, only one third believe women are as effective in public leadership compared with men. Six-in-ten believe that the husband should have the final say in decision making within the family" (Robbins & Thomas, 2018, p. 2). Therefore, in Arab countries, women are rarely included in political processes – there is a prevailing belief in Arab countries that men are better political leaders (Robbins & Thomas, 2018, p. 11), thus women have never been heads of states¹, they are under-represented in the countries' parliament, and they rarely engage in politics. Although women have the right and access to education, their possibilities for education are often limited and they are encouraged to be stay-at-home mothers, instead of pursuing work and career. Despite the economic progress of most Arab countries in recent decades, traditional social relations are still extremely strong and dominant in all spheres of Arab women's lives.

Women's rights in the Middle East have been the subject of many fiction and non-fiction books over the past couple of decades. Non-fiction books such as *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (1977) by Nawal el Saadawi, *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1987) by Fatema Mernissi, *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution* (2015) by Mona Eltahawy, or novels such as Mohja Kahf's *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) or Randa Jarrar's *A Map of Home* (2008) explore lives of Arab women, both in their home countries and abroad.

This paper discusses Arab women in the context of the United States – the lives, traditions and values of Arab women after their moving to the

1 Women have served as the president or prime minister in non-Arab Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh (politician Khaleda Zia was the first woman to serve as the prime minister from 2001 to 2006), Indonesia (Megawati Sukarnoputri served as the first female president from 2001 to 2004) and Pakistan (politician Benazir Bhutto served as the first female prime minister from 1988 to 1990, and again from 1993 to 1996).

U.S. The discussion will address several important segments of women's lives and their identity – education and career, marriage and motherhood, body and sexuality, as well as search for cultural identity – through close reading of two literary works: non-fiction book *Superman is an Arab* by Joumana Haddad and a novel *A Woman is No Man* by Etaf Rum. *Superman is an Arab* is a non-fiction book by Lebanese author Joumana Haddad, written and published in 2012, in the wake of the Arab Spring. The book delves into the patriarchal system which is in place in Arab countries by examining the role of religion, marriage and motherhood in Arab women's lives. What cannot go unnoticed is the author's bitter and frustrated tone when discussing women's rights in Arab countries – although Haddad (2012) herself claims that the book is not a “manifesto against men in general” (p. 23), it brings attention to issues of gender, sexuality and marriage in Arab world from the perspective of a woman who was born, raised and still lives in this world. In this paper, *Superman is an Arab* will serve as a reference to lives of Arab women in their home countries – through this book, main values, opinions and attitudes of the Arab world in the Middle East will be presented, so as to make a comparison with Arabs in America. The novel *A Woman is No Man* (2019) by Palestinian-American author Etaf Rum, which will be the primary focus of this paper, follows the story of three women of Arab origin, three generations of Arab immigrants in the U.S. Although born and raised in the United States, Rum herself is of Palestinian origin, which makes her more than fit to discuss the experience of Arab-American women. Through a close analysis of Rum's novel, this paper will present the main advantages, obstacles and challenges which Arab women in America face by bringing special attention to three main characters of the novel: Fareeda, Isra and Deya.

2. Arab Women in America

Joumana Haddad discusses the role of religion in the Middle East and how it affects women's lives and comes to the conclusion that religion is at the core of the supposed women's inferiority. It is worth mentioning

that Haddad does not speak from the perspective of an oppressed Muslim woman – she is a Christian and her standpoint is that all religions treat women the same. Haddad (2012) argues that all three religions present in the Middle East – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – discriminate women and put them in an inferior position in relation to men by institutionalizing and strengthening patriarchy (p. 60–61). These three religions, according to Haddad (2012), have deeply rooted the belief of women’s inferiority to men which then spread to all spheres of life, putting women in a subordinate position. Haddad furthermore claims that this belief of women’s inferiority has negatively reflected on all important spheres of their lives – education, career, marriage, sexuality and body. The widespread opinion in the Middle East is that a woman who is successful is “sleeping her way up, while a successful man is simply bright and ‘achieved’ [...] a woman who likes sex is a nymphomaniac, but a man who likes sex is just a real man [...] a forty-year-old woman single woman is a spinster, while a forty-year-old single man is an eligible bachelor” (Haddad, 2012, pp. 69–70). What is interesting is that Haddad rarely refers to feminist movements in Arab countries, almost as if they are non-existent. This only confirms what many critics claim – feminism in the Middle East has become “state feminism”, where women’s liberation “was taken over by patriarchal, often totalitarian regimes, limiting the potential for fundamental feminist reforms within countries in the region. Over the years, this tamed feminist discourses, demands and activism, resulting in the de-politicization of the Arab feminist movement” (Daibes, 2021). However, state feminism does not touch upon social and cultural factors in the Arab world, while these factors are the central theme of Haddad’s work.

But what happens when a woman from the Middle East finds herself in a Western setting? Does she find freedom, is she liberated? Or simply constrained again because she is not educated, not socialized for a different society, and not empowered to transcend the traditionalism of the society from which she comes or to reconcile the Western and Arab beliefs and values?

2. 1. Education

Although women in most Arab countries have the right and access to education and learning, the education system plays a significant role in reinforcing rather than challenging the prevalent gender ideologies, as “the education system and its politics may play a role in maintaining and perpetuating the status quo” (Hamdan, 2006, p. 55). Furthermore, the education system in Arab countries is far from being progressive:

The content of educational curricula has remained rigid, unimaginative, and incapable of responding to the needs of the children and adolescents growing up in a fast-changing society. Here again the attempt is to breed conformist, confused, and obedient citizens to ensure that they will not become agents of change. [...] Independent thinking, broadmindedness, tolerance, and initiative are not encouraged. In this regimented effort, the place assigned to women is that of a continued subservient role [...] where she is supposed to bend herself to the will and domination of men. (Hamdan, 2006, p. 66)

For older generations of Arab women, when it comes to education, moving to the United States brings no changes. Belonging to the first generations of Arab immigrants in the U.S., Rum’s Fareeda feels that a woman does not need any education apart from homemaking education. Thus, a woman should learn how to clean, cook, and raise children, no other knowledge is important for a woman. In that sense, Fareeda believes that “learning how to cook is much more important than books” (Rum, 2019, p. 80), “books are bad influence” (Rum, 2019, p. 29) and “put foolish ideas in one’s head” (Rum, 2019, p. 58). Fareeda is in a constant struggle with her granddaughter Deya who wants to attend college – for Fareeda “college is out of question” (Rum, 2019, p. 35), as she convinces Deya:

“Ya Allah.” She drew out her words. “Not this again. How many times do I have to tell you? You’re not going to college in this house. If your husband allows you to get an education *after* marriage, that’s his decision. But my job is to secure your future by

making sure you and your sisters are married off to good men.”
(Rum, 2019, p. 35)

Fareeda’s opinion greatly differs from those of younger generations. Isra and Deya understand the importance of education – Isra is eager to send her daughters to public school with the desire to integrate them in the American society, while Deya even wants to attend college. However, Adam has adopted his mother’s opinion of education – sending his daughters to an American school would be a path to emancipation, which is unimaginable for him as a man raised according to the rules of patriarchal Arab society. The lack of education is a tool of subordination and control of women – without a formal education, Arab women (as any other woman living in traditional patriarchal society) struggle to find work and become financially independent, as the basis and the first step for further emancipation. The only option they are left with is marriage and family life, which includes repetition of traditional patterns.

2. 2. Marriage and Motherhood

In *Superman is an Arab*, Joumana Haddad criticizes Arab marriage values – although marriage is considered sacred among Arabs, Haddad believes that underneath that sacredness lies hypocrisy. She deeply criticizes Arabs for *nikah al mut’ah* or pleasure marriage in Shia Islam, which she believes to be just a form of “legalized prostitution”, and for *nikah al misyar* or travel marriage, which according to her is just a different word for having an extramarital affair. Haddad also criticizes Islam for allowing child brides. Finally, Haddad (2012) argues that marriage is nothing more than a “patriarchal institution, one that promotes male superiority and power over women” (p. 139). Woman’s worth is determined through marriage – “an Arab woman does not acquire ‘status’ in the eyes of the society until she gets married and becomes the wife of someone” (Haddad, 2012, p. 139). Furthermore, Haddad (2012) explains the Arab perception of a good wife:

A good wife obeys her husband and is subject to his authority.

A good wife endures any sexist oppression (varying from emotional to physical abuse) as a 'natural' thing because of the cultural, economic political and legal supremacy of the husband. A good wife proudly embraces the name of her husband (after having inherited the name of her father for the first two or three decades of her life). A good wife is expected to take care of the house and children: while the man occupies the public sphere, the woman operates within the private sphere (she is the caregiver, 'the hand that rocks the cradle'). (p. 140)

What Hadad overlooks, or intentionally marginalizes in her work, is the fact that Arab, Christian and Islamic society – and even Jewish – have not gone through a process of secularization, as is the case in the West. Over two centuries, intense social and political secularization in the West, along with rapid industrial development, have had a strong impact on the successes of the feminist movement in Western societies and on the overall emancipation of women. The absence of secularization in the Arab world and in Arab societies, as well as the slowdown in overall economic progress², plays a fundamental role in the slow process of emancipation of the Arab woman. Insisting on the fact that religions emanate patriarchal social and personal paradigms in relation to women in Haddad's work does not end with a call for the secularization of the public sphere. This would, in fact, be the real beginning of the process of emancipation of women in these areas if we observe this process and the desired results through the principles and patterns of Western feminism related to the public sphere. The private sphere, like marriage, would consistently experience change³.

Etaf Rum's depiction of marriage in the Arab world is no different than

2 According to Global Gender Gap Report (2021, p. 20), MENA region has the lowest female labor market participation rates in the world.

3 When discussing the secularization of society and political sphere, this paper does not suggest elimination of religion from public or private sphere nor does it suggest the elimination of religious values which societies and individuals respect and practice, both in the West and the East. In this context, secularization is discussed as a process of separating the society and individuals from predominant identification with religious beliefs and religious institutions.

Haddad's. The opening scene of Rum's novel focuses on Isra's parents welcoming her suitor and his family and trying to leave a good impression, as to marry Isra off, which implies that a woman's only worth is marriage, nothing else. According to Rum (2019), most Arabs feel that "a woman's place is at home" (p. 11), and that "a daughter was only a temporary guest, quietly awaiting another man to scoop her away, along with all her financial burden" (p. 12). Therefore, from the very young age, Isra is taught by her mother that "there is nothing out there for a woman but her *bayt wa dar*, her house and home. Marriage, motherhood—that is a woman's only worth" (Rum, 2019, p. 16). Growing up in this patriarchal society, Isra started believing that women are trapped because of their gender, and that they are under full control of men. She believes that men "are free, just because they are men, so they can do whatever they want" (Rum, 2019, p. 21). Isra's mother convinces her that "no matter how far away from Palestine you go, a woman will always be a woman. Here or there. Location will not change her *naseeb*, her destiny" (Rum, 2019, p. 16). This statement shows the deeply rooted belief that gender determines someone's destiny, but also certain amount of ignorance, since Isra's mother is simply not aware that women do have more rights in other parts of the world.

But Isra, like many other Arab woman, tries to change her destiny. Wanting to escape this type of marriage, many Arab girls dream of marrying an Arab man in the West, hoping that their lives would be better there, that they would have more rights and freedom. After marrying Adam, Isra hopes that she would be able to live a different life in America and that her life would not revolve around her house – "surely she would have more control over her life in the future. Soon she would be in America, the land of the free, where perhaps she could have the love she had always dreamed of, could lead a better life than her mother's" (Rum, 2019, p. 24). Isra's dreams are crushed immediately after her arrival to the United States – she realizes that her home in America is far from rich and elegant houses she dreamed about:

She entered the first room of the basement, surveying the dim space. The room was narrow and empty—four gray walls, bare with the exception of a window to her left and, in the center

of the wall ahead, a closed door. Isra opened it to find another room, slightly larger than the first and furnished with a queen-size bed, a small dresser, and a large mirror. Beside the mirror was a small closet, and beside that, a doorway that led to a bathroom. This would be their bedroom, Isra knew. It didn't have any windows. (Rum, 2019, p. 47)

Isra's disappointment deepened once she found out that her life would not be much different than in her home country. She learned that Arab women in America operated primarily within the private sphere and while increasing numbers of women were able to work outside the home, their primary position was that of a mother and a housewife – they were mainly responsible for the efficiency of the home and raising their children according to societal expectations.

Since Adam is mostly away at work, Isra's life soon comes down to spending much time with Fareeda, her mother-in-law, the embodiment of a traditional Arab woman who obeys patriarchy. Fareeda belongs to the first generation of Arab immigrants in the U.S. and not only is she against any formal education for Arab women, as mentioned before, but she also strongly believes that all a woman needs to worry about "is finding a good man to provide for her" (Rum, 2019, p. 26), and that a man "should teach a woman her place" (Rum, 2019, p. 114). Fareeda is an example of a woman who stays true to Arab values about marriage and does not allow American values to change her opinion.

Fareeda's attitude strongly affects Isra and makes her life almost unbearable – Fareeda's and Isra's relationship is a clash of two different generations, opinions and viewpoints. While Fareeda is all about preserving the Arab culture through traditional Arab marriage values, Isra's desires are different – she wants a marriage based on love, trust and partnership, rather than a marriage where the woman is subordinate to the man. Isra wanted Adam's love, "she wanted to see him and get to know him" (Rum, 2019, p. 109). Soon Isra writes to her mother:

Life here isn't so different from life back home, with all the cooking, cleaning, folding, and ironing. And the women here - they

live no better. They still scrub floors and raise children and wait on men to order them around. A part of me hoped that women would be liberated in this country. But you were right, Mama. A woman will always be a woman. (Rum, 2019, p. 138)

Isra is not allowed to get to know life in America outside the closed community of Arab immigrants. The immigrant community in which she lives for Isra reproduces the same family values and social relationships from which she came and which she hoped would not be repeated. The isolation of the Arab immigrant community is intended to maintain traditional values and social relations without hindrance, and it is completely irrelevant that this community exists in America, as long as the external influence on it is prevented. And, it is obvious that, anywhere in the world, patriarchal relations put a woman in a subordinate position.

Isra's life is determined by Fareeda's persistent reliance on the traditions she brought with her from her homeland. For Fareeda, it is the only way to survive, to belong somewhere. Fareeda, the first generation of Arab immigrants in the U.S., lives completely isolated from the American society with no desire to integrate – Fareeda does not speak English, she does not know well the streets of the city she lives in because she rarely goes out, and she does not feel safe in the U.S.:

Even now, walking only a few blocks to Umm Ahmed's house, Fareeda found herself glancing behind her, wanting to turn back. At home, she knew where her bed was, how many tugs were needed to start the furnace, how many steps it took to cross the hall into the kitchen. There, she knew where the clean rags were, how long it took to preheat the oven, how many dashes of cumin to sprinkle in the lentil soup. But here, on these streets, she knew nothing. What would happen if she got lost? What if someone assaulted her? What would she do? Fifteen years in this country, and she still didn't feel safe. (Rum, 2019, p. 99)

Isra's pregnancies and giving birth to only female children turn her life into hell in the end. First, she learns that it is a woman's job to take care of the children (Rum, 2019, p. 68, 78). Then she learns that Adam and the rest of the family expect her to give birth to a son, because "there is no better blessing than a healthy baby boy [...] of course, we all love our daughters, but nothing compares to having a son" (Rum, 2019, p. 101). Her first child was a girl – the family was disappointed, but Fareeda urged her to have another baby, "It'll be a boy this time. I can feel it" (Rum, 2019, p. 97). After Isra gave birth to another daughter, Fareeda could not hide her disappointment. Isra's third and fourth pregnancies made her traumatized from her family's desire to have a son.

She kept her hands on her belly, tried to picture the baby growing inside her: Was it a boy or a girl? What would happen to her if she bore another girl? The night before, Fareeda had mentioned going back home to find Omar a wife and joked that she would find Adam a new wife, too, if Isra gave them another girl. Isra had forced a laugh, unsure of Fareeda's actual intentions. It was possible. She knew women back home whose husbands had married again because they couldn't bear a son. What if Fareeda was serious? She shook the fear away, feeling foolish at the thought. It shouldn't matter if her baby was a girl. Even the Qur'an said that girls were a blessing, a gift. Lately she had been reciting the verse in her prayers. Daughters are a means to salvation and a path to Paradise. She traced her belly and muttered the verse again. (Rum, 2019, p. 107)

Fareeda and Adam's desire for a male child shows that some Arabs stay true to their patriarchal values, even in America. It also indirectly voices the widespread attitude towards a woman's worth in traditional societies, in this case in the Arab world – a female child is not a cause for celebration, only a male child is valuable. In these traditional marriages, the woman was not even allowed to participate in planning of family – Isra could not choose how many children she would have, she was pressured to have as

many children as needed until she gave birth to a male child.

Domestic violence in Arab marriage is not uncommon, claims Rum. Isra grew up witnessing her father physically abuse her mother, and she saw her father-in-law Khaled beating Fareeda repeatedly. So, it came as no surprise that violence became a part of her marriage as well.

Adam looked away, squeezing the pack of cigarettes tight. Even though he was looking out toward the river, Isra could see it in his eyes: he would beat her tonight. She stared at him, hoping she was wrong, that he wouldn't take out his anger on her. But the signs were all too familiar now. First, he'd beat her loud and hard, shaking with rage. Then he'd reach out to touch her again, only slightly softer this time, pushing himself inside her. She'd shut her eyes tight, clench her fists, and keep still in hopes she might just disappear. (Rum, 2019, p. 175)

Domestic violence Isra experienced, both physical and psychological, led her to develop a low self-esteem and she started to behave as typical victim of domestic violence – Isra never objected, because deep down she believed she was not worthy of her husband's love since she did not give birth to a son (Rum, 2019, p. 138). She soon became drowned in devastation and sadness.

She studied her reflection in the mirror. Her face looked dull and gray in the fluorescent light, and she stared at her small, weak frame. She saw a girl who should've kicked and screamed as her mother tightened her wedding gown, should've begged and hollered as her father secured her in the taxicab to the airport. But she was a coward. She turned away. This is the only familiar face I'll ever see again, Isra thought. And she couldn't stand the sight of it. (Rum, 2019, p. 47)

It was no surprise to Isra when Fareeda helped her hide her bruises with makeup and advised her to accept violence as part of the marriage. What truly came as a surprise to her was the fact that domestic violence

is forbidden in the United States and that women are protected by law. Sarah tells Isra: “You know domestic abuse is illegal here, right? If a man ever put his hands on me, I’d call the cops right away. That’s how it works in America” (Rum, 2019, p. 157). Unfortunately, it did not work like that in Palestine:

A flurry of shame ran across Isra’s body as Sarah stared at her, wide-eyed. She looked away. How could she make Sarah understand what it was like back home, where no woman would think to call the cops if her husband beat her? And even if she somehow found the strength to stand up for herself, what good would it do when she had no money, no education, no job to fall back on? That was the real reason abuse was so common, Isra thought for the first time. Not only because there was no government protection, but because women were raised to believe they were worthless, shameful creatures who deserved to get beaten, who were made to depend on the men who beat them. Isra wanted to cry at the thought. She was ashamed to be a woman, ashamed for herself and for her daughters. (Rum, 2019, p. 158)

Because of shame, the lack of education, money and job Isra was afraid to speak up against the violence she suffered. Until one day, her husband tragically beat her to death. Still, domestic violence is only one of the ways women lose control over their bodies and sexuality.

This raises the question of the politics of multicultural societies, such as the American, which, in the name of an equal respect for every culture, enable the existence of such closed immigrant communities within their societies even when these communities restrict the rights and freedoms of their members, most often women. As Fukuyama (2018) points out, in the name of respecting the right to one’s own culture, many types of discrimination are allowed (p. 167). Traditional marriage, like Isra’s, was a strong framework for discrimination and the daily destruction of a woman’s dignity and, ultimately, her existence, regardless of the fact that she was living in America.

It is important to stress that the novel *A Woman is No Man* takes place in the United States during the 1990s. Discussing the isolation of Arab communities in the U.S., it should be noted that closedness of these communities has been a result of their need and desire for preservation of their culture. After massive islamophobia appeared in the American society following the 9/11 attacks, Arab communities in America were marginalized and excluded, while hate crimes spread throughout the country⁴.

2. 3. Sexuality, Body and Virginity

Joumana Haddad devotes considerable attention to the exploration and presentation of the main attitudes in the Arab world towards female sexuality, body and virginity. She argues that Arabs are taught from childhood that sex is a sin, sex is “bad, evil and ugly” (Haddad, 2012, p. 71). Haddad (2012) goes on to criticize the Arab world for their double standards regarding sex, which eventually leads to the “syndrome of sexual hypocrisy” (p. 72), as she calls it. This syndrome consists of three main elements – honor killings, virginity and female genital mutilation – all created to prevent women from controlling their bodies and sexuality.

It goes without saying that women in the Arab world must enter marriage as virgins⁵. During their first wedding night, Adam “collects evidence” (Rum, 2019, p. 53–54) in order to prove to his family that he married a virgin. Isra was not ready to sleep with Adam, but she felt forced to; she did not want to get pregnant, but had no control over it. Although Rum does not portray this first wedding night as rape, it is obvious that two people, each burdened with their traditional roles, were forced to do what is expected of them in communities such as Arab-American.

4 For more information, see: Mervat F. Hatem (2011), “The political and cultural representations of Arabs, Arab Americans and Arab American feminisms after September 11, 2001”.

5 Virginity tests are still a widespread practice in Arab countries, and have been widely performed in countries such as Iran, Iraq, Morocco and Jordan. The UN has characterized this as violence against women, and called for its end in various reports. For more information, see: Eliminating virginity testing: An interagency statement (2018), World Health Organization.

2. 4. (Non)Belonginess and Search for Identity

One of the dominant themes of Rum's *A Woman is No Man* is the sense of belonging and a search for identity of Arab immigrants living in the United States. All three main characters of the novel – Fareeda, Isra and Deya – are struggling with belongingness, each in their own way. From Rum's depiction of Fareeda, it is clear the latter is lost – America never became her home, she never belonged there. But throughout the novel Rum points out that Fareeda did not want to integrate or accept American customs and values. She believed that “it doesn't matter where we live. Preserving our culture is what's most important” (Rum, 2019, p. 26). For Fareeda, one way to preserve the culture was to have her son marry a Muslim girl from Palestine.

There was no shortage of Muslim Palestinian girls in Brooklyn, but Fareeda refused to marry her son to one of them. No, no, no. Everyone knew that girls raised in America blatantly disregarded their Arab upbringings. Some of them walked around town in tight clothes and a face full of makeup. Some dated behind their parents' back. Some weren't even virgins! The thought alone made Fareeda shudder. (Rum, 2019, p. 113)

It is not uncommon for Americans to be prejudiced against Arabs (or any other immigrants)⁶. Rum does not deny this, but points out that many Arab immigrants, especially the ones belonging to the first generation, also carry deep prejudices towards Americans, or even Arabs who adopt fully or partially the American lifestyle. Adopting the American lifestyle, which includes women's independence, was unimaginable to Fareeda. She was unable to understand that a girl or a woman can have a life of her own. “What would I look like, sending my unmarried daughter to the market by herself? Do you want the neighbors to start talking? Saying my daughter is out and about alone, that I don't know how to raise her?” (Rum, 2019, p. 163).

6 For more information, see: Walter G. Stephan and Oscar Ybarra (1999), “Prejudice towards immigrants”, and Michael Shively et al. (2013), *Understanding Trends in Hate Crimes against Immigrants and Hispanic-Americans*.

Fareeda based her existence and identity on belonging to the Arab culture and tradition. Everything that was different disrupted her security and existential purpose. Fareeda's son Adam accepted his mother's opinion of America, and was trying to pass it on to his daughters. Adam believed that the Arab culture and tradition should be nourished no matter where he lived – he reminded Isra his daughters were Arabs (Rum, 2019, p. 217) even though they were born in America, and he tried to prevent them from becoming American by keeping them strongly isolated in closed Arab communities. Although they were American citizens by birth and citizenships, Isra's daughters were not allowed to adopt any elements of American culture and American identity that could change their Arab identity.

Isra, on the other hand, did not feel she belonged to “Palestine either, where people lived carefully, following tradition so they wouldn't be shunned. Isra dreamed of bigger things—of not being forced to conform to conventions, of adventure, and most of all, of love” (Rum, 2019, p. 15). She hoped that her life in America would be much different, that she would have more freedom and possibilities, that she would not be constrained by Arab traditional values. What she soon found out was that for Arabs nothing much changes in the U.S. – they lived in small, closed off communities where they nurture Arab tradition, with little to no contact with American society:

Around her people strolled down the block, pushing strollers and carrying grocery bags, swirling in and out of shops like marbles. They looked nothing like the Americans she had imagined: women with bright red lipstick, men in polished black suits. Instead, many of the women looked no different than her, plain and modestly dressed, many even wearing a hijab. And the men looked like Adam, with olive skin and rough beards, clothes meant for tough labor. (Rum, 2019, p. 52)

Lost in a world of her expectations of marrying an Arab in America and experiencing disappointment, Isra did not know how to fight for herself. She did not want to live in America the life she believed she had left behind and she saw no possibility of getting out of the closed circle of

hopelessness, violence, subordination. Desperate because her hopes had been shattered, lost in a country she was not even allowed to explore, Isra longed for a world that once offered a sense of security. Married off at a young age and sent into the unknown, she tried to evoke empathy in her primary family. She wrote a letter to her mother in Palestine:

I am alone here, Mama. I wake up every morning in this foreign country, where I don't have a mother or a sister or a brother. Did you know this would happen to me? Did you? No. You couldn't have known. You wouldn't have let this happen to me if you had. Or did you know and let it happen anyway? But that can't be. No, it can't. (Rum, 2019, p. 139)

Isra was married off at the age of seventeen. An emotionally, mentally and experientially immature teenager faced the harsh reality of a traditional marriage, alone in an unfamiliar environment, without the support of a close person. Isra tried to find a way out and escape in reading, like many Arab women.

Namely, both authors offer an interesting way in which Arab women try to overcome their exclusion, subordination, their invisibility – reading. Reading is an inevitable element of the novel *A Woman is No Man*, but also of Haddad's *Superman is an Arab*, while both authors represent reading as a form of escapism for many Arab women, regardless of where they are. According to Usherwood and Toyne (2002), escapism is the most conscious perception that people have of what they derive from the “act of reading [...] for many people, reading provides the opportunity to abandon the here and now” (p. 34), while imaginative literature offers “entrance into other worlds, so it makes living in the everyday one more tolerable” (p. 35). Joumana Haddad (2012) admits that reading was an important part of her childhood – she loved to read more than anything in the world. She read in a bus, at home, during her classes in school (p. 11). For Haddad, reading was a window into a new world, which helped her to become an independent and emancipated woman. Etaf Rum introduces reading as a source of happiness, comfort and joy for her female charac-

ters, but also as a source of information about another culture, a possibility to learn and intellectually grow. Isra, devastated from depression and failed and abusive marriage, would immerse herself in reading:

She waited up for Sarah, eager to see which books she'd brought. Last week they'd rushed through *Pride and Prejudice* in four nights so Sarah could write an essay on it for her English class. They'd sat together on Isra's bed, knees grazing, the book like a warm fire between them. (Rum, 2019, p. 169)

Deya followed in her mother's footsteps and embraced reading as her escape from her overbearing grandmother and unhappy childhood:

Every time Deya replayed this conversation in her head, she imagined her life was just another story, with plot and rising tension and conflict, all building to a happy resolution, one she just couldn't yet see. She did this often. It was much more bearable to pretend her life was fiction than to accept her reality for what it was: limited. In fiction, the possibilities of her life were endless. In fiction, she was in control. [...] Books were her only reliable source of comfort, her only hope. (Rum, 2019, p. 27)

For Isra and Deya, paradoxical as it may seem, reading was both a form of escapism and contact with reality. Living in the United States brought no significant changes to them regarding participation in the public sphere. The Arab values of domesticity still restricted their lives at large which prevented them from being a part of America – yes, they lived in the U.S. but were prohibited from going out most of the time. Banned from exploring the American culture in person, reading was their insight into the U.S., their only way to get to know the American culture, customs and traditions, it was also a way to learn and improve their English in order to be able to communicate with the “outer” world. But reading is not only a form of escapism; it is a sign of female defiance and a rebellion against patriarchal system which promotes female inferiority through education.

3. Instead of a Conclusion

Superman is an Arab is a book which undoubtedly criticizes conservatism in general, and especially in Arab society, describing an ordinary Arab woman as weak, oppressed and confined to private sphere of life – her marriage and home. Interestingly enough, Haddad does not entirely put the blame for this on Arab men, government, laws and tradition. She implies that Arab women are partially responsible for their situation, for not objecting enough to such status and for accepting their inferior status based solely on gender. Despite strong criticism of conservatism in Arab society which, according to Haddad, comes from religions, the author does not associate the process of emancipation of Arab women to the process of secularization of society. Namely, the secularization of Western societies has significantly contributed to the success of the emancipation of women in the West. In *A Woman is No Man*, Etaf Rum argues that nothing much changes in the lives of the Arab women after moving to the United States or any other Western country – an Arab woman remains weak and oppressed, trapped in the Arab values in tradition, no matter where she is, as long as she is living in a closed community loyal to traditional and conservative values.

However, this is not the message these authors want to leave their readers with – both Haddad and Rum call for changes and an end to oppression. The above-discussed literary works convey the message that changes can only be brought by women themselves and no one else. The authors attempt to raise awareness among Arab women about independence, emancipation and women's rights in general, in hope that they will contribute to shifting opinion of women in the Arab world and encourage them to step up for themselves. In light of all of the above said, this paper cannot offer a definite conclusion, but rather only open the discussion about tendencies of change regarding women's status in Arab communities.

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Rethinking Binary Oppositions:
Non-Binary Gender Identities from
Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of
Darkness* to Today's Social Media
Platforms

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ABSTRACT

The goal of the paper is to explore the notion of gender as a spectrum as opposed to a fixed category, with special focus on the importance of language for establishing gender identity. Relying on Judith Butler's concept of gender and performativity, we determine the constitutive power of language. Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* presents its readers with a postgender society on the planet of Gethen. This planet stands in stark opposition to Le Guin's heteronormative contemporary society, deconstructing gender norms and eradicating binary oppositions such as male/female. We may consider the inhabitants of Gethen as non-binary individuals who raise questions about the entire system of gender representation. Le Guin's novel was ahead of its time and thus paved the way for today's freedom in expressing one's gender fluidity. Connecting Le Guin's novel and our contemporary society, we shall explore the rise in the number of adolescents and young adults who identify as non-binary. Non-binary gender identity is not a novelty, but its rapid growth can be attributed to the widespread popularity of social media platforms such as TikTok. Consequently, this platform may be viewed as a

norm-defying space in its own right where the correct usage of pronouns when referring to non-binary individuals is one of the main tools for establishing one's gender identity.

Keywords: gender identity, non-binary, TikTok, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. Le Guin

1. Introduction

When contemplating a fictional universe that critically reflects the binary gender system, Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, published in 1969, first comes to mind. It was only in the 1960s that female authors began to write in the previously male-dominated genre of science fiction due to the revolutionary potential it holds. In the Introduction for the novel, Le Guin states that science fiction is a metaphor, an experiment "not to predict the future [...] but to describe reality, the present world. Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive" (Le Guin, 1993, p. 151). Le Guin's (1993, p. 155–156) motivation for writing *The Left Hand of Darkness* was, as she comments herself, a desire to "understand the meaning of sexuality and the meaning of gender, in my life and in our society". It is a "thought-experiment" (Le Guin, 1993, p. 151) created out of curiosity about what "truly differentiates men and women" (Le Guin 1993, p. 159) and what is left of society when gender is eliminated from the equation. Although feminist critics had already begun challenging the gender binary and language which was phallogentric, gender fluidity was not yet on the horizon for discussion at the time of publication of Le Guin's novel, making her truly an author ahead of her time.

Le Guin's novel is not a utopia, but an exploration of an alternative viewpoint and space where there is no gender in the conventional term. While there are males and females (following the basic biological principles of males making children and females giving birth), these genders are all to be found in one body. In studies about *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the Gethenians – a race of androgynous neuters – are presented as androgynes, hermaphrodites and intersex individuals. Although there is no

mention of the Gethenians as non-binary beings, recent developments in the study of gender identity have called for a reinterpretation of their unique sexual/gender roles.

A non-binary reading of *The Left Hand of Darkness* allows for more complex understandings of sex, gender and sexuality as a spectrum rather than a binary set. Le Guin allows us to envisage a world without boundaries, stereotypes and social roles based on sex; a world without judgment where gender fluidity is the norm. By considering the inhabitants of Gethen as non-binary individuals who raise questions about the entire system of gender representation, we explore Le Guin's novel as a work ahead of its time that paved the way for today's freedom in expressing one's gender fluidity.

2. A Non-binary Reading of Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*

Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* is considered a pioneering work in the genre because it is among the first to attempt to imagine an alternative universe that critically reflects the gender system. Many feminist writers at the time were looking for "new tools for investigating and challenging gender assumptions" (Attebery, 2002, p. 129) and the concept of androgyny seemed like an appropriate method to eliminate gender distinctions and societal unfairness. Brian Attebery (2002, p. 130) views Le Guin's novel as an investigation of gender paradox that shows "no contradiction between the vulnerability of pregnancy and the arrogance of kingship, no moiety of humanity debarred from one or the other".

The protagonist of the novel, Genly Ai, a human from the planet Terra, is on a mission to persuade the inhabitants of the planet Gethen to join Ekumen, a coalition of humanoid worlds. The Gethenians appear human at first glance, except their bodies do not overtly display any distinctly male or female gender characteristics. Genly Ai is the only human on Gethen, or as the Gethenians view him, a being in a state of permanent kemmer. Readers are given a rich background about Gethen and a thorough scientific explanation about their sexual cycle:

The sexual cycle averages 26 to 28 days (they tend to speak of it as 26 days, approximating it to the lunar cycle). For 21 or 22 days the individual is somer, sexually inactive, latent. On about the 18th day hormonal changes are initiated by the pituitary control and on the 22nd or 23rd day the individual enters kemmer, estrus [...] When the individual finds a partner in kemmer, hormonal secretion is further stimulated (most importantly by tough–secretion? scent?) until in one partner either a male or female hormonal dominance is established. The genitals engorge or shrink accordingly, foreplay intensifies and the partner, triggered by the change, takes on the other sexual role. (Le Guin, 2017, p. 90)

The Gethenians are represented as an androgynous species which “suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender; it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom” (Heilbrun, 1973, p. x–xi). The androgynous body as a combination of both male and female can stand as a symbol of redefining gender roles, eliminating boundaries and creating a safe space of equality. While the biologically modified image Le Guin has presented is implausible, a society populated by people without a gender is not impossible to imagine. There are people today living without a gender, or rather, without identifying as either gender in the binary system. Such identification is sometimes termed genderqueer, agender, or gender fluid, but new research in the field of gender studies adopted the term “non-binary”.

Non-binary is an umbrella term that includes those whose identity falls outside of or between male and female identities; as a person who can experience both male and female, at different times, or someone who does not experience or want to have a gender identity at all. (Monro, 2019, p. 1)

Whichever term we choose to use, they all have in common “dis-identification with rigid gender binaries” (Monro, 2019, p. 1) and present a

challenge to the institutions that create and further perpetuate gender norms. Gethenians can be described as non-binary individuals who dismantle boundaries and present gender as a spectrum rather than a fixed entity.

By choosing the perspective of a gendered being, Le Guin shows how the majority of society would perceive and react to the Gethenians. Although Genly is aware of the Gethenians non-binary nature, he “unconsciously participates in the production of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ identities” (Fayad, 1997, p. 59). In this manner, Le Guin presents her readers with the root of the problem – the male perspective that imposes meaning and a culturally conditioned view of the gender binary. Despite being on the planet Gethen (Winter) for almost two years, Genly is “still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 11). Genly Ai represents the heteronormative male in a patriarchal society and is in contrast with the society Le Guin constructs. Estraven, Genly’s helper and the Prime Minister of Karhide perhaps best shows Genly’s confusion and discomfort with the androgynous nature of the Gethenians:

Thus as I sipped my smoking sour beer I thought that at table Estraven’s performance had been womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance, specious and adroit. Was it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? For it was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 12).

Similar stereotyping occurs with Genly’s “landlady, a voluble man” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 47) who “had fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 48) but has fathered four children while birthing none. Unable to see the Gethenians for what they truly are, he imposes gender roles that are “centered on a heterosexual norm that assumes a division between

masculine and feminine identities, one that is specifically implicated in relations of power and domination” (Fayad, 1997, p. 59). Genly Ai thus exposes common stereotypes and causes the readers to confront their own gender bias. On Gethen “there is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 94). In this context, we view the Gethenians as breaking the gender binary and emerging as today’s notion of non-binary gender identity – an identity that is both male and female, while simultaneously being none. This destruction of gender binaries can be viewed as “a space of resistance that redefines the ways in which gender identity is constructed” (Fayad, 1997, p. 59). Using sentences such as “[t]he king was pregnant” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 99) not only renegotiates gender roles but their impact on determining social positions and attitudes. One person, who does not identify as either male or female, or feels that gender is a fluid category susceptible to changes on a daily basis, is indeed able to carry out an act of “being a pregnant male”.

Le Guin uses the pronoun “he” to refer to the Gethenians and mainly shows them in their masculine form and taking on typically male positions in the society (Prime Minister, King), for which she was harshly criticized by feminists¹. The explanation for the novel is that the pronoun “he” is used “for the same reasons we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter or the feminine” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 94). Having initially defended her decision to use “he” as the gender-neutral variant by refusing “to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for ‘he/she’” (Le Guin, 1993, p. 169), Le Guin later revised her statement to say that using invented pronouns would have been a better solution than using “the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse” (Le

1 Brian Attebery (2002, p. 131) notes that the two main objections raised against *The Left Hand of Darkness* are using masculine pronouns when referring to the Gethenians and always representing Estraven in stereotypically male social positions rather than participating in housework or child care.

Guin, 1993, p. 169). However, Cornell (2001, p. 323) argues that any gender-neutral pronoun that Le Guin could have chosen would have altered the focus of the novel by implying a level of awareness that is not present. Namely, Genly is quite aware that he is using inaccurate pronouns, as are the readers, but he continually chooses to do so as he succumbs to the “misleading perceptions and misconceptions created by our language” (Cornell, 2001, p. 323).

Le Guin (2017, p. 94) asks: “What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby?” Society has strictly determined gender roles and inflicted the habit of raising a child in accordance with the rigid gender division that determines everything from the color a child wears, to toys they play with and activities they can participate in. Gender in Le Guin’s novel is presented as being artificial; a dominant discursive construct of Genly Ai and his own previously set perception of the world. The sex vs. gender debate is thus raised, along with the question of gender construction, i.e. performance.

2.1. Performing Gender through Language

Judith Butler’s gender performativity theory, first introduced in her essay *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, presents gender as a “performative accomplishment” that is manifested through repetition, thus creating countless possibilities for gender transformations due to the arbitrary nature of gender performative acts (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Through these acts, gender is constructed, pointing to the notion that there is no essence that determines gender; “[g]ender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis” (Butler, 1988, p. 522). By stating that sex is always gender, Butler erased the sex/gender distinction. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, we observe that “gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler, 1999, p. 10). The Gethenians have no biological gender and the aforementioned distinction, as well as any gender roles in society,

are completely eliminated. Genly Ai is the one that is attempting to force the Gethenians into gender roles using his language. What limits Genly in his perception of the Gethenians is the “hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality” (Butler, 1999, p. 13).

Language is much more than a tool used for communication; instead, it continuously controls our perception of the world and plays a significant role in the production of gender. Wilchins (2004, p. 71) reminds us that the cultural discourse about females, homosexuals, transgender individuals, etc. did not appear as a response to their existence, but it was the discourse that created them. Consequently, language is “both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression” (Butler, 1999, p. 148). The artificial nature of language allows it to be a source of power that not only establishes gender identity but also conditions it.

Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it. For example, the bodies of social actors are fashioned by abstract language as well as by nonabstract language. For there is a plasticity of the real to language: language has a plastic action upon the real. (Wittig, 1992, p. 78)

According to constructivist feminist theories, gender identity is a social construct and the terms “femininity” and masculinity” are simply categories established to divide, differentiate and create a hierarchy. A binary model of gender (male/female) promoted by a distinction in language between third-person pronouns he/his and she/her, is established in society. Le Guin herself admits to having remained in the confines of patriarchal discourse when writing her novel as she was not even conscious of the implication of her choice to use only male pronouns in reference to the Gethenians. Le Guin writes: “Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man—man I must say, having said he and his—the man answers” (Le Guin, 2017, p. 5), showing that the choice of pronouns establishes the gender one is assigned and viewed as. As Wittig (1992, p. 78) points out, “gender takes place in a category of language that is totally unlike any other and which is called the

personal pronoun” that “engineer[s] gender all through language”. Thus the first step of establishing gender identity would be to solidify the use of personal pronouns for said gender. Whether we are discussing a transgender individual who wishes to change their personal pronouns or a non-binary individual who wishes to free language of any gender markers, the path towards acceptance and legitimization is to be found in language. “Words are real; bodies are not. There is no pretext of transparency here: We don’t fit the words to the bodies; instead, it is the bodies that must fit the words” (Wilchins, 2004, p. 76).

3. A New Virtual Space for Expressing Gender

Colloquial dialogues about non-binary gender identities are increasing; however, research in this field is lacking and still promoting archaic and binary conceptualizations of gender identity. As many influential individuals in today’s society continue to bring attention to the issue of binary categories, the scope of research and discussion in academic circles is starting to expand. July 14th is now recognized as International Non-binary People’s Day, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the issues non-binary individuals face all around the world. Around one-in-five (18%) of Americans have expressed that they personally know someone who identifies as non-binary and uses gender-neutral pronouns. When asked whether they would be comfortable using such pronouns about six-in-ten (61%) of the younger population (ages 18 to 29) say they would feel comfortable addressing somebody in this manner (Geiger & Graf, 2019). Due to multiple celebrities using their platforms to openly discuss the journey of coming out as non-binary as well as the struggles they have faced², more attention has been paid to this gender identity. McNabb (2018, p. xv) states that there is a significant increase in the promotion of gender nonconformity in all spheres of popular culture which is creating more representation, providing information and enabling questioning

2 Some famous non-binary individuals are the Australian model and actor Ruby Rose, Jaden Smith, the son of actor Will Smith and David Bowie. Celebrities who recently “came out” as non-binary include singers Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato and Sam Smith.

youth to find role models to aid them in their journey of discovery. With non-binary youth, one of the main problems seems to be that their exploration of gender identity seems to have been delayed due to “a lack of information and resources (i.e., societal awareness, role models, supportive spaces, educational materials) regarding non-binary gender” (Fiani & Han, 2019, p. 10).

Many individuals opt to keep their gender identity hidden so as not to create a stir within their families and communities, thus feeling like they do not have a safe and accepting space of their own. This is especially the case with non-binary identities as there was not enough representation until recently³ and a majority of people are still uneducated regarding the proper use of pronouns for these individuals. Social media today is playing the role of a parent figure – a supporting figure in one’s life that acknowledges the search for their identity. The community on social media, particularly TikTok, thus provides an entirely separate world where one may freely express themselves and find information, share experiences and negotiate meaning and identity through interaction with like-minded individuals. This interaction can range from communication in the comment section of the platform or simply viewing videos one can relate to. Non-binary identities and gender expressions seem to be increasingly common among youth perhaps due to the freedom and safety provided by social media, as well as the support of a growing online community that allows the younger population to openly discuss and break the gender binary. “Since the introduction of participatory social media, nonbinary culture has exploded, with the creation and evolution of identity terms and ways of communicating about these identities” (McNabb, 2018, p. 23). Social media has played a huge role in educating people and establishing the non-binary gender identity as not only valid but one that is becoming more widespread. Having become a space not only for seeking out acceptance but for activism as well, social media allows information to be disseminated quickly thus reaching an enormous amount of people in a short period of time.

3 McNabb (2018, p. 55) attributes the rise in visibility to three factors: the Internet and popularity of social media, an increase in the numbers of people who are coming out as non-binary and the multiple famous “allies” joining the cause.

There is, however, a disproportion between the struggles non-binary people may be presented within the real world and the acceptance they feel in the virtual world. In reality, it is not customary to introduce oneself by informing people of your preferred pronouns and gender identity or whether or not you are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. On social media platforms, this is the standard practice which does not strike those belonging to the virtual world as odd. Due to the “availability of information about gender diversity, younger individuals are more likely than youth of previous time periods to adopt nonbinary rather than binary gender identities, and parents, educators, and clinicians need to understand this growing population” (Diamond, 2020, p. 2).

The social media platform that has proven to be most valuable in spreading awareness and information about the non-binary gender identity is TikTok. Having been the most downloaded social media platform of 2020, TikTok's rapid growth enabled a large community to be formed. The TikTok community is further divided into various spaces that allow for freedom of expression, a feeling of inclusion and for one to be surrounded by people with the same gender identity. One such space is the so-called “queertok”. One of the best indicators that TikTok is being used for such purposes is perhaps the fact that the #nonbinary hashtag and any hashtags pertaining to the LGBTQ+ community are the most used on the platform. The hashtag #nonbinary currently has over 6.8 billion views, while other related hashtags such as #nonbinarypride and #nonbinarytiktok have 89.3M and 60M respectively. Their popularity is not a temporary trend, seeing that it is always among the most frequently used hashtags. While support for the non-binary is always present on this platform, there have been trends to certain sounds which at times completely took over TikTok. These trends included a “pronoun check” in which non-binary individuals expressed their preferred pronouns by rating all of the most frequently used pronouns and declaring their favorite, that is, the one they feel most comfortable or “euphoric” with. Other common videos include “transformations” from a feminine to a masculine appearance thus showing that one can indeed present as both. Another popular

trend included a filter that added masculine features to one's face upon blinking and it was used to lip-sync to a male-female duet, switching between genders as the song calls for. However, the most noticeable manner in which TikTok has proven to be a safe space for gender-nonconforming and queer individuals is the fact that it is customary to openly state one's pronouns in the description with the aim of emphasizing the spectrum of gender identity. The pronouns used to express the non-binary gender identity are they/them and an increase in the number of people who identify as such may be seen through the fact that the American Dialect Society (2020) has recognized "they" as the word of the decade (2010–2019) in the category "(my) pronouns". The most prominent usage of the pronoun "they" is to replace one's personal pronouns (he/she) and refer to an individual who identifies as non-binary. Rarely can we see a profile that does not state gender pronouns on TikTok. "Language play is especially evident on the Internet, where communities innovate, disseminate, and evolve pronoun sets, identity terms, and etiquette practices" (McNabb, 2018, p. 23), making it easier than ever to perform one's gender and establish identity through language.

4. Conclusion

TikTok, along with most social media platforms, is often not taken seriously or believed to have the potential to inspire change in society. TikTok allows users to express themselves freely, find communities which they feel they are a part of and connect with others sharing their feelings for an exchange of experiences and, more importantly, support (Jennings, 2021). But this platform has evolved from its initial stages of lip-syncing and dancing to a place of education, self-discovery and claiming one's gender experience. What was commonly used by teenagers to learn viral dances has become a haven of LGBTQ+ solidarity: "what TikTok reflects is a growing tendency toward more fluid definitions of gender and sexuality" (Jennings, 2021). LGBTQ+ content creators have championed queer education, which is still clearly lacking in the public school

systems as many educators are not equipped to create safe learning environments about these taboo topics such as gender fluidity and the freedom to be one's authentic self (Dawson, 2021). Many teens learn about the LGBTQ+ community from TikTok and how to accept, welcome and support these individuals. "[S]tudies suggest that the most beneficial intervention approaches involve creating safe and supportive spaces for all youth to give voice to diverse experiences of gender identity and expression" and this is precisely what TikTok has enabled (Diamond, 2020, p. 4). TikTok is a safe place for LGBTQ+ people to express themselves, connect with like-minded individuals, share experiences and promote acceptance and kindness. The "queertok" community is its own society built on principles of gender nonconformity, fluidity, gender affirmation. TikTok thus creates a new space for gender expression, discovery and respect, a space with no norms, expectations and imposed gender roles.

If we take a look at TikTok today, we may find that it can be seen as a modern world Gethen. It presents a space different from the one we are accustomed to which functions according to different rules and standards as compared to ours. In this world announcing one's pronouns at the onset of a conversation or as the first fact one discloses about themselves is considered the norm. This space is complex, as it has an unlimited number of "rooms" in the form of hashtags dedicated to certain topics, an entire atmosphere that differs from reality – not as escapism, but as a model for what may be improved in reality.

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The Critical Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy and Octavia E. Butler

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Abstract

In the 1970s, US science fiction was radically enriched and expanded by the inclusion of iconic feminist authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ and Alice Sheldon. Informed by the socio-political and cultural debates linked to the second wave of feminism, their fiction explored the ingrained misogyny and gender discrimination of their time by projecting feminist utopias onto other planets, with a critical imaginary that measured the failure of utopia in the dystopian “present”.

In the late 20th century, the alarmingly prescient female science fiction authors in the US focused increasingly on the dystopian “here” (the United States) and the then near future of the 21st century. The paper explores the interplay of sexism and multiple forms of oppression against the historical triumph of rampant corporatism and neoliberalism, and foregrounds utopian undercurrents which destabilize basic dystopian framework in those works.

By briefly addressing moments/themes in 1970s feminist utopias that anticipate the full-blooded critical dystopias of the 1990s, the paper discusses the critical imaginaries of Marge Piercy’s 1991 feminist cyberpunk novel *He, She and It* (1991), and Octavia E. Butler’s 1990s *Parable* series: *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Butler is a champion of the critical “afrofuturist” dystopia; she brilliantly intertwines the critical strands of class, gender and race by reflecting on ways of resistance and alternative social models to corporate neofeudalism and neoslavery, and depicts them as practiced by an African-American girl. Piercy offers a similarly

multifaceted reflection on class, gender and anthropo-andro-centrism in her narrative, where a woman and a cyborg fight the all-powerful corporation, and join an anticorporate alliance that spans diverse social strata.

Keywords: anticorporatism, critical dystopia, critical utopia, feminism, oppositionality, He, She and It, Parable of the Sower, Parable of the Talents

When Marge Piercy (1936-) and Octavia E. Butler (1947-2006) published their science-fiction novels in the 1990s, they built upon a firmly established tradition. In the 1970s, female writers had burst upon the American SF literary scene and confronted the standard prejudices of the age. The community of SF authors and readers transferred the widespread sexism and misogyny of the age into genre fiction, claiming that women could not write good or relevant science fiction, and defended that prejudice as vigorously as wider society insisted that women were poor drivers. Early female pioneers of SF writing were mostly regarded as intruders in an exclusively male realm. Alice B. Sheldon, author of short stories “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”, “Women Men Don’t See” and “Houston, Houston Do You Read”, which today count among the classics of feminist science fiction, hid her identity behind the pen name James Tiptree Jr.: a 20th-century emulation of Charlotte Brontë. Other iconic “intruders” were Ursula K. Le Guin (*The Left Hand of Darkness*, 1969 and *The Dispossessed*, 1974), Joanna Russ (*The Female Man*, 1975), and Marge Piercy (*Woman on the Edge of Time*, 1976), the latter of whom was a peculiar bridge between two generations. All these authors radically enriched the SF genre in the 1970s, through the inclusion of a female and overtly feminist perspective within the subgenre of the “critical feminist utopia”. Their feminist agenda was informed by the socio-political and cultural debates linked to second-wave feminism in the US. Their fiction addressed sexism and the rigid gender roles of their time by projecting feminist utopias that were often located on other planets, or in the distant future on Earth. In Sheldon’s “Women Men Don’t See” (1973), for example, a woman is increasingly offended and alienated by the patriarchal clich-

es and prejudices of a man with whom she survives a plane crash. When the extraterrestrials arrive and agree to take her and her daughter with them, they leave the man behind, puzzling over why women would prefer outer space to planet Earth.

In Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Mexican-American woman Connie Ramos from Spanish Harlem is a figure from the social margins of the 1970s: she lives on welfare, loses custody of her daughter due to alleged maternal abuse, and finally finds herself locked up in a mental hospital for alleged violence, after hitting a pimp for forcing her niece to have an illegal abortion. Heavily drugged in a madhouse, Connie receives visions of the agrarian, communal utopia of Mattapoissett from Luciente, an androgynous time-traveler from 2137. In Luciente's time, the social ills of Connie's and Marge Piercy's 1970s are non-existent: there is no patriarchy, no sexism, no racism, no homophobia, no homelessness, no environmental pollution, no consumerism and no corporate agenda. Piercy's novel intertwines utopian and dystopian moments in such a manner that the critical imaginary of the projected utopia (or at least the assumption of a utopian solution) measures society's failure to achieve gender (or any other) equality in the gloomy dystopian "present". Such foregrounding of the generic closeness of utopia and dystopia was a trademark of the 1970s feminist utopia, and justified Margaret Atwood's coinage of "ustopia" for the tendency to blend the two genres. Such generic hybridity can be traced as far back as Thomas More's classical utopia and Piercy's novel is a nod to More's *Utopia* in its use of the feminist and ecosocialist utopia of Mattapoissett to condemn the sad reality of the main protagonist, who suffers from multiple forms of discrimination. The novel also demonstrates the overt political agenda of the feminist utopia, by offering a vision of necessary change and an incentive for activism, which would rehabilitate the visionary aspect of politics. In his book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000), an exploration into the political potential of US feminist science fiction, leftist critic Tom Moylan qualifies such SF works as "critical" feminist utopia, and states that critical utopian texts "reject utopia as a blueprint, but preserve it as a dream" (Moylan, 1986, p. 10–11).

Rather than identifying the critical utopias with literal manuals for socio-political change, Moylan recommends we treat them as an invitation to envision an alternative to capitalism, and to insist on the necessity of that conception. The politically-charged critical utopia rehabilitated the concept of utopia as a mode of both artistic and political thinking, and suggested that it was both possible and necessary to dare to envision alternatives to the existing order. Unlike the classical utopia—which is heavily prescriptive, perfectionist and even potentially pro-totalitarian in the formulation and execution of its utopian plan—the critical utopia contains an anti-totalitarian impulse, because it presents itself as less than perfect and its social order as open to rethinking and negotiation. Related critical-theoretical terms are the open-ended utopia and radical utopia, but regardless of terminology the crucial aspect is “the persistence of yearning in the midst of dystopia [which] is the face of hope in our post-utopian moment” (Miller, 1998, p. 358).

Marge Piercy took the utopian tradition of feminist science fiction further in the 1990s, building upon her earlier work and blazing new trails. In chapter 15 of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy embedded dystopia more explicitly, through a classical dystopian cautionary tale supposed to demonstrate what might happen if the utopian agenda were abandoned; this anticipated her turn to full-blooded feminist cyberpunk dystopia with the 1991 novel *He, She and It (Body of Glass outside the US)*. A younger and darker twin of 1970s feminist utopia, the subgenre was dubbed “critical dystopia” in the late 1990s by Lyman Tower Sargent, before being taken up by Raffaella Baccolini, Ildney Cavalcanti, Jim Miller and Tom Moylan. While Baccolini and Cavalcanti anchored critical dystopia’s oppositional power in feminism and the intersection of gender, race and class, Moylan suggested that the genre’s identity politics was a prominent integral part of a wider scheme of anticapitalist resistance. He claimed that critical dystopia

is not only, even though importantly, feminist but also anti-capitalist, democratically socialist, and radically ecological in its overall stance. Although the critical dystopian position contin-

ues the qualitatively progressive advances of identity politics; and although it remains attuned to contemporary theoretical practices of openness, diversity, and resistance to the closure of master narratives, it also revives and privileges totalizing analyses that consider the entire political-economic system and the transformative politics that are capable of both rupturing that system and forging a radical alternative in its place. (Moylan, 2000, p. 190)

Both critical subgenres blend utopian and dystopian impulses, but from opposite ends: critical utopia projects utopian society, which is a measure of social decline in both the novel's and the authors' present; critical dystopia projects utopian impulses and/or societies whose agendas underline the severity of dystopian decline, and instills a sense of urgency for their counteraction, thereby harboring radical hope.

In contrast to "classical dystopia" (e.g., George Orwell, Philip K. Dick)—in which the anti-utopian impulse prevails and consequently reflects the 20th-century cultural and social paradigm of coopting potentially critical voices into the dominant capitalist culture—critical dystopia's combination of dystopian and utopian elements tips the balance in favor of the latter, which promotes the idea of radical change. In critical dystopia, the utopian dimension figures prominently despite the generally dystopian framework, because the genre offers visions of the socio-political transformation of, and modes of resistance to, the totalitarian order it depicts. A politically charged genre, it draws attention to problematic tendencies in the late capitalist present, and warns against their catastrophic consequences in the near future (both Piercy and Butler set their stories in the 21st century). More importantly, critical dystopia envisions resistance and political alternatives to the neoliberal corporate order by rehabilitating utopia as an artistic and political practice. Critical dystopia therefore refutes the anti-utopian neoliberal rhetoric, which in the late 20th century efficiently demonized utopia as politically dangerous adventurism, or as a crazy collectivist fantasy that smacked of

totalitarianism. The neoliberal narrative paradoxically insists that utopia is an irrational fantasy that leads to totalitarianism, *and* that the neoliberal model is utopia achieved, and the only thinkable model of anti-totalitarian utopia. This narrative loomed large in most Anglo-American classical dystopias of the 20th century (usually written by males), by means of foregrounding the anti-utopian component of dystopia, and by ignoring or belittling radical utopian visions. Critical dystopia runs counter to this tradition, and revives the long-suppressed utopian impulse. Thematic continuity between the critical utopia of the 1970s and the critical dystopia of the 1990s (including Piercy's contributions to both subgenres) is reflected in the shared progressive utopian anticapitalist agenda pursued from an overtly feminist perspective. The historical-political context of the 1980s and 1990s (the Reaganomics era) created a strong feminist sentiment in critical dystopia. It foregrounded the genre as a literary response to the neoliberal, neoconservative and neopatriarchal onslaught on feminism, and other victories that had been won in US identity politics since the 1970s.

In *He, She and It*, Piercy continues to combine her writing with her political activism, and openly promotes her political agenda of socialist feminism and red-green policies. Piercy's dystopia is set in 2059: the planet is ecologically devastated and largely uninhabitable, and its population has been decimated by disease (a result of waves of epidemics, caused by previously unknown viruses), the famine of 2031, and the nuclear Two Week War of 2017. The latter turned the entire Middle East into the Black Zone, a desolate region off the maps, after Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia ceased to exist. The oil-driven economy is non-existent, and conventional food is a rare and priceless status symbol, reserved for the wealthiest, and replaced out of necessity with algae-processed "vat food", with enhanced flavors and colors. What has survived is social and economic inequality, and a rampant corporate culture: the world is governed by twenty-three rich and powerful multinational corporations (multis), which continue their business as usual from high-tech enclaves, protected by electronic domes from air pollution, radiation and frequent me-

gastorms. The multis police the established corporate order, and regulate every segment of the professional and private lives of their employees: from the dress code and strict hierarchy of the workplace to reproductive rights, housing and accepted forms of social and sexual interaction, to a prescribed physical appearance guaranteed by plastic surgery. The typical masculinist cyberpunk setting, which Piercy consciously borrows from William Gibson, is destabilized and eroded primarily by main protagonist Shira Shipman's covert feminist observations on the high tolerance of patriarchy in the rigid corporate order. During her time as a cog in the corporate machine of Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S), depicted at the novel's beginning, Shira is relegated to a marginal position despite her expertise, and bullied into silent acceptance of her professional inferiority. The capitalist-patriarchal multi makes her lose custody of her son after her divorce, because "patriarchal laws" stipulate that "the boy is regarded as property of the father's gene line" (Piercy, 1991, p. 2). But this move goes beyond the system's oppression of an individual woman: only after she returns home to Tikva does Shira gradually realize that Yakamura-Stichen is using her son as bait in a complex large-scale plot to pre-emptively act against pockets of emerging political resistance. In one of these is Shira's own mother Riva, an information pirate, who, like a postapocalyptic female Robin Hood, steals information from rich multis and passes them on to the disenfranchised masses in the anarchic megalopolis of the Glop. The alertness to potential opposition of corporations set on maintaining their grip on the world is further reflected in the precarious position of the free towns, including the Jewish town of Tikva (Shira's home). Free towns buy their freedom by selling the multis cutting-edge cybernetics and AI technology, but their survival depends on always being one step ahead. Trouble begins in Tikva when Shira's former employer Y-S finds out about the top-secret military weapon that Tikva experts have created (male cyborg Yod), and a nascent anticorporate alliance.

In contrast to classical dystopia, where the oppressive system seems unbeatable, Piercy's critical dystopia harbors utopian impulses (more so than the critical utopia *Woman on the Edge of Time*) that are depicted in

the first successful forms of political resistance to the status quo. The nightmarish dystopian world engenders (and en-genders) a collectivist utopian counternarrative, gathered around the female-identifying Tikva society of “techies” (AI and cybernetics experts). These include Shira, her grandmother Malkah, and a positively androgynous Yod, and involve scattered resistance groups that gradually forge ties across social and identitarian boundaries: Shira’s elusive mother Riva, an icon of cyberspace resistance; female cyborg Nili; and resistance forces in the Glop, led by the Coyote Gang, who “have managed to organize secretly in spite of drugs and the mandated ignorance” (Piercy, 1991, p. 37). Nili, a woman cybernetically enhanced to be a perfect fighting machine, is on a mission from Safed, a secret utopian eco-technological community of Palestinian and Israeli women who survived the nuclear war in the Black Zone hidden away in the caves of former Israel. The Coyote Gang rose from the Glop, a hellish area of crime, poverty and gang wars stretching from former Boston to former Atlanta, a meaner version of the actual late-20th-century deteriorated urbanscapes. United, they defeat Yakamura-Stichen, suggesting that profound political change depends on collective action and cooperation across social strata (the Glop, Tikva and the Black Zone), and on combining diplomatic activities with information piracy and warfare in cyber- and meatspace. That the anticorporate alliance defeats the ominous multi leaves sufficient room (through hints about further cooperation strategies) to hope that progressive groups might be more triumphant in the future. Malkah’s dispatches from Safed, where she settled after the successful mission against Yakamura-Stichen, describe a sustainable feminist ecotechnopia: a model of collectivist social organization. Not only are there “animals and computers everywhere, sheep, cats, goats, camels, and more children than I have seen in a long time”, but “This desert seems totally inhospitable to life, yet here is this community flourishing, and much animal and plant life has come back. Lately they have been getting seasonal rains. Nearby is an oasis where I saw butterflies—the first I have seen in years, yellow and white as daisies” (Piercy, 1991, p. 54).

Piercy expands the novel's political dimension by skillfully embedding a Jewish theme. The distant past (foreshadowing the Holocaust) is resurrected through a story about the Jewish struggle for survival in the Prague ghetto in 1600, where discrimination and persecution by Christians cause the Chief Rabbi to create the Golem. Errors of nationalist Israeli politics and virulent antisemitism are both condemned through the imagined destruction of Israel in the early 21st century (in our time), and this cautionary tale warns of the dire consequences of political stubbornness. Piercy uses these historical lessons to delineate possible directions for the future, embodied in Tikva's mixture of "libertarian socialism [...] anarcho-feminism, reconstructionist Judaism [...] and greeners" (Piercy, 1991, p. 52), and in Tikva's emergent political union with Safed. The latter is founded on cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian women, and with the aforementioned resistance groups and individuals, across the boundaries of ethnicity, class, race, gender and species (Yod).

In her unique manner, Octavia E. Butler intertwines similar critical strands of class, gender and race in the critical dystopia *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and, to an extent, *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Butler's work contains the thematic and generic fluidity characteristic of critical feminist dystopia: formal hybridity symbolizes the genre's oppositional power, "which renovates the resisting nature of science fiction and makes the new science fiction genre [critical dystopia] also *multi-oppositional*" (Baccolini, 2000, p.18). Miller situates Butler's multifocal approach in her African-American background, claiming that "Butler is also far more class-conscious than many other utopian feminist science-fiction writers. Thus, her largely dystopian fictions challenge not only patriarchal myths, but also capitalist myths, racist myths, and feminist-utopian myths" (Miller, 1998, p. 337). Their multi-oppositional stance characterizes both Piercy's and Butler's processes, and their respective triple agendas of feminism, ecology and anticapitalism are permeated by a historical memory of ethnic or racial trauma. Piercy's exploration of legitimacy and the necessity of organized violent resistance against certain annihilation hinges as much on the trauma of belated Jewish resistance (be it the 17th-century Prague of Malkah's story, or the Holo-

caust spectrally present in it) as it does on the feminist depiction of “comparatively ordinary women whose primary achievement is to learn to fight against oppression” (Neverow, 1994, p. 16). Butler’s critical dystopia adds an “afrofuturist” dimension, by re-addressing the African-American historical trauma of slavery in a new context, embedded in a resolute reflection on the necessarily female-led resistance against corporate feudalism and neoslavery of the early 21st century. In Butler’s postapocalyptic neoslave narrative, Lauren becomes the leader of her growing group en route north, evoking historical memories of the underground railroad.

Butler targets the same enemy as Piercy: multinational corporations, of which Kagimoto, Stamm & Frampton is prominent in *The Parable of the Sower*. Corporations rule from behind impenetrable fortresses protected by private armies, and travel exclusively by air, since other forms of infrastructure have collapsed. They secure economic gain in the midst of the chaos and anarchy of the 2020s, and thrive in a world ravished by ecological devastation, hunger, poverty and violence by controlling access to water resources and the hypermarkets scattered across the scourged landscape. Paid work is a rare blessing, and slavery and indentured work the norm. Bankole, born in 1970, traces the decline to the time “before the turn of the millennium”, as an introduction to “the period of upheavals that journalists have begun to refer to as ‘the Apocalypse’ which “lasted from 2015 through 2030” (Butler, 1998, p. 13). The ultimate cultural, ecological, economic and social meltdown in the 21st century is a result of the irrational passivity of the late 20th-century, whose people caused “social, economic and climatologic problems and then [...] sat and watched as they grew into crises” (Butler, 1998, p. 14). Bankole’s description is an inventory of the ordinary ills of neoliberalism:

I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive. I have watched as convenience, profit, and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. I have watched poverty, hunger, and disease become inevitable for more and more people. (Butler, 1998, p. 14)

Our present has become the unredeemable past of the doomed future, and “We are confronted with a dystopian world, but one which is only 20 minutes into the future” (Miller, 1998, p. 352). The situation escalates between the 2030s and the 2090s (the setting of the second *Parable*). By this time, politicians and corporate powerholders can afford to drop their masks altogether, with the effect that the corporate model further degrades into a vicious mixture of fanatical Christianity bent on persecuting “the pagans” (i.e., all who do not share ultra-rightwing President Jarret’s vision of Christian America), militant patriarchy, neofeudalism and slavery. The unlimited and deregulated exploitation of precarious labor means hard work for bad food and lousy lodging. Paying workers with company scrips (echoing the policy of 19th-century Virginian mining companies) is widespread, and is designed to turn the workers and their children into debtors. Workers are the serfs and slaves of the space age, prevented from leaving their employers, who treat their bodies, lives and families as disposable. All the while, Jarret delivers his hate speeches and pompously announces he will “make America great again” (Butler, 1998, p. 24). In Butler’s dystopia, the future and the past have collapsed into each other: neoliberal corporatism has been revamped as neofeudalism, and slavery has returned in a universalized form, consuming the population of dispossessed underdogs regardless of race, gender or class, much like in Piercy’s *Glop*. Interlocking oppositional critique with an African-American theme, Butler presents the former United States as a figurative and literal corporate, neofeudal version of 19th-century Southern plantations, and as a fascist labor camp in which physical, psychological and sexual exploitation take place at unprecedented levels, except in the fortified resorts of the ruling tycoons turned slave owners.

Both Piercy’s and Butler’s novels accurately depict societies in a radical and terminal outgrowth of what Naomi Klein qualifies as “disaster capitalism”, an era in which corporate environmental-political strategy changed at the beginning of the millennium, from “crisis debunking” to “a new regime of crisis awareness”, where “global social-environmental crisis is no longer seen as an (apocalyptic) end ahead, but has become a way of life”

(Buell, 2014, p. 264). Environmental and social disaster are normalized in the novels to the point that characters take them as a given, beyond the possibility of repair. The novels feature the corporate strategies of embracing risk and turning ecological, economic and social crises into drivers of further corporate growth, innovation and entrepreneurship for the elite. In his discussion of prominent advocates of this theory (such as Julian Simon and Alvin Toffler) and of Ulrich Beck's notion of capitalism as a risk society that thrives on damage and disaster, Frederick Buell concludes that "the result is a gothic predatory capitalism that keeps creating more and more damage and hence unsatisfiable risk-demands and then profiting off remedies (partial, always incomplete ones) all the way down" (Buell, 2014, p. 279). Corporate order in Piercy's novel "manages" ecological disaster through technological competition among the multis (and exploitation of high-tech innovators from the few free towns), as they race to create electronic protection against radiation; sophisticated weather forecast and alert systems; and surveillance and security systems. Swimming in the highly polluted sea is a risk of the highest order (even if it is done dressed in a protective "sec skin"), because of the organ scavengers who maintain a lucrative market, "selling the organs to the multi labs that provided implants for execs, talent and security" (Piercy, 1991, p. 14). They privilege the corporate elite with "the safety of real organs to defy assassins", in contrast to the middle-class corporate "gruds" and free town inhabitants, who have to make do with artificial implants. In Butler's novel, transnational KSF privatizes the small town of Olivar on the environmentally risky (vulnerable to rising sea levels) Californian coast, in order to expand its desalination complex and boost its production of the most lucrative product of the post-oil economy—drinking water. Despite its appallingly low wages and basic housing, the company attracts future employees with the promise of high-level security, in a world synonymous with its lack. KSF wants to enlarge its profits and secure an absolute monopoly over "farming and the selling of water and solar and wind energy", all of which it plans to extract from "vast tracts of fertile, waterless land" (Butler, 1993, p. 119) it has already bought at a ridiculously low price.

As in Piercy's novel, where the main protagonists and agents of political change are women, Butler's heroine is African-American girl Lauren Oya Olamina, who, confronted with the dystopian horrors of the 2020s, finds the strength and courage not only to fight for survival, but to found and lead the social-religious movement Earthseed (in *The Parable of the Sower*), with the goal of building an entirely new paradigm of social organization based on collectivism and partnership. Wegner recognizes that the Earthseed project represents a "revolutionary utopian temporality" that moves beyond the mere creation of a utopian enclave "outside the dominant order", and aims to establish a whole new world of social relations, so that Earthseed could be read "as nothing less than a figure for the supreme event of revolution" (Wegner, 2009, p. 211). Olamina and Earthseed embody the utopian counternarrative of the incentive to work toward "a goal, something big enough, complex enough, and in the end, radical enough to make us become more than we ever have been" (Butler, 1998, p. 321). Her group creates Acorn, a successful if shortlived agrarian-educational communal utopia in northern California (at the beginning of *The Parable of the Talents*), based on the principles of universal equality (class, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation); collective gardening and farming; ecological sustainability; education; and Lauren's practical Earthseed philosophy: the necessity of adapting to change. Historical proof of the catastrophic consequences of human passivity and the irrational denial of the obvious (e.g., climate change, corporate greed and the demise of the middle class) has led the Earthseeders to affirm action dictated by circumstance, including violent resistance when necessary; a clandestine communal alternative to the dominant system; going underground; or even passivity in situations when rebellion would amount to collective suicide.

For Lauren, Earthseed is the only form of "religion" fitting for the dystopian world, with its ideas of profound social change and practical guidelines for survival. Earthseed is not a conventional religion—it is an eclectic combination of philosophical and ethical principles, scientific findings and elements borrowed from diverse belief systems—but Lau-

ren insists on calling it one. She does so most likely to underline that the project's success depends heavily on the resoluteness of its members to *live* their principles, and actively put them into practice: i.e., to pursue their political goals with a dedication and visionary persistence that is equal to religious fervor. This echoes Fredric Jameson's reluctant acknowledgment of the remote similarity between utopia-as-rupture and the collectivist-egalitarian subtext of religion in *Archaeologies of the Future*. The emphasis on action and adaptation condemns existing organized religions (notably Christianity) for encouraging passive apolitical acceptance and irrational optimism, which become a death sentence: at the beginning of the first *Parable*, Lauren's neighbors are deaf to her warnings that staying in their walled community means certain death, and this passivity is savagely punished when the community is overrun by wild hordes of drugged murderers and rapists. Despite its eventual demise, Acorn remains a necessary starting point for the process of change and cycles of preparation, the nucleus of the Earthseed movement, a collectivist experiment that rests on the principles of "learning to live in partnership with one another in small communities, and at the same time, working out a sustainable partnership with our environment. It's about treating education and adaptability as the absolute essentials that they are" (Butler, 1998, p. 322).

When, after several years of prosperity, Acorn is destroyed by Jarret's Crusaders, it becomes difficult to classify *The Parable of the Talents* as a full-blown critical dystopia. The destruction of Acorn does not wipe out the memory of it though, and the Earthseed project lives on through a seemingly endless ordeal of enslavement, torture, rape, brainwashing and hard work in Camp Christian, which is run by the white supremacists and ultraright religious fanatics. Lauren and her followers not only survive, but manage to establish a scattered illegal network of small Earthseed communities all over the former US in the years following Jarret's political decline. This testifies to the tenacity of Lauren's conviction that Earthseed must survive, although she views those provisional enclaves as preparatory steps. The eventual ambitious plan is space coloni-

zation, which she believes is the ultimate fulfillment of human destiny, in an echo of the biblical Parable of the Sower, about a seed that thrives only when planted in fertile soil. Earthseeders do eventually manage to create a space ship and leave for Mars¹, although without Lauren, who is too old to join them. They leave Earth behind as a failed project, suggesting that their exit from the hopelessness of history is a necessary transplantation of the human seed to a more favorable environment. This scenario invites both utopian and dystopian interpretations: is the decision to leave Earth escapism and the defeat of utopia, or its victory? We do not know if Earthseeders will create a utopian society on Mars, but the name of their space ship, *Christopher Columbus*, in a novel written by an African American, does not encourage overly optimistic conclusions. Although the post-Acorn sections of *The Parable of the Talents* depict events that often evoke anti-utopian sentiments, the novel's open-endedness relativizes any one-sided interpretation, and situates the novel's closing sections in a grey zone, where critical dystopia merges with "pragmatic utopianism", a term suggested in Ellen Peel's reading of the second *Parable*.

As previously stated, Piercy's and Butler's progressive politics are inseparable from feminist issues. Piercy combines feminist and transhumanist/posthumanist themes, primarily through the love story of Shira and Yod, a human woman and a male cyborg, and a brief love affair between Gadi (Shira's youthful flame) and Nili as its loose parallel. Cyber romance, which echoes Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), enables Piercy to both destabilize the binary gender politics of patriarchy, and to explore and relativize the human-machine boundary. Her sympathetic portrayal of Yod might be read as Piercy's literary take on Haraway's suggestion in *A Cyborg Manifesto* that women and cyborgs alike present a symbolic threat to patriarchal gender politics. Yod (he, she and it) combines stereotypical male and female traits: e.g., military prowess and emotional intelligence; strength and sensitivity; physical strength and a delicate inner life. Yod defies rigid categories because he is a she and vice versa. He is the perfect woman, who

1 The site of the 2021 historic landing of NASA rover Perseverance on the surface of Mars (in the Jezero crater named after a Bosnian village) has been named the Octavia E. Butler Landing.

embodies all traditionally praised feminine traits (and is therefore also a walking parody of such patriarchal stereotypes), and simultaneously the perfect man, making men around him nervous and keenly aware of their own inadequacy. Yod is the perfect lover and partner, dedicated to pleasing Shira emotionally, sexually and intellectually; an attentive listener; a loyal protector in dangerous missions, her personal hero who helps her snatch her son Ari from the claws of Y-S; and the perfect step-father. All in all, Yod is fundamentally superior to any man. As Shira summarizes: “what was the love men offered—when they bothered to offer—in comparison with the devotion she had known” (Piercy, 1991, p. 55). Yod further destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions, and challenges humanist hierarchies that favor the biological over the artificial, the human over the machine, and conception over engineering. He/she is also it: a thinking and feeling *machine*, and an artificial *person*. Echoing the Golem’s relationship with his creator Rabbi Loew, and referring to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, in which he finds upsetting parallels with his own situation, Yod becomes gradually estranged from his creator Avram, who treats him as his possession, unwilling to accept that Yod is different from the simple robots made to perform basic and repetitive tasks (like the lab robot Gimel, recurrently referred to as Yod’s idiot brother). Yod’s tragic fate reflects Piercy’s interest in ethical questions about the creation of artificial life, and opens the novel to new readings in a transhumanist and posthumanist key. On the other hand, Piercy relishes in the bewilderment Yod provokes in machoistic womanizer Gadi, who is confused and offended by Shira’s relationship with Yod, unable to understand how a woman can prefer a machine over a man. Predictably, this does not prevent his simultaneous fascination with the female cyborg Nili, although their affair leaves him hurt and humiliated, because Nili treats him in a manner similar to that with which he previously treated women. Gadi is her sexual plaything, a welcome distraction who soon becomes boring, and he is astonished when Nili is neither blown away by his macho advances, nor interested in what he does and how he feels—she agrees to have sex with him out of sheer curiosity, but disappears when it is time for her to go about her own political business.

The 21st-century gender dystopia is much grimmer in Butler's novels. Most of the first *Parable* is set in the lethal outdoors (akin to Piercy's *Glop*), and depicts a group trying to survive on the open road, in the midst of the ensuing social chaos. Gender equality and the previous advances of identity politics have been discarded as a frivolous project from the bygone era of political correctness. Domestic violence, exploitation, femicide, forced marriages, polygamy, rape, sexual slavery and the trafficking of women and girls are fully normalized in the era of the apocalypse-in-progress, along with all manner of horrific violence against the vulnerable refugees of mixed gender, race and class who try to flee it. Domestic tyranny—justified by religion and boosted by the economic dependence of women on men in a crumbling labor market that makes women most vulnerable to homelessness, starvation and unemployment—explodes into the public sphere as well-organized collective oppression. President Jarret's militantly rightwing Crusaders are guided in their punitive expedition against Acorn by a cocktail of ideological, racist, religious, but also misogynistic hatred, as to them Acorn is a pagan community run by women, many of whom are non-white. Lauren's husband is killed, her daughter is taken for adoption by a conservative Christian family, and she herself is raped and exposed to ideological-religious brainwashing. Despite this, Lauren remains resilient and focused on her vision, and manages to preserve Earthseed and pursue her objectives. Her brother and estranged daughter, who have been assimilated into the conservative Christian order, as well as some Earthseed members, see her as arrogant, cold, fanatical and stubborn; condemnation of her revolutionary activity thus comes from different angles, showing that mistrust of a woman who wields power is deeply ingrained, even when that power is harmonized with genuine gestures of partnership, and subservient to the universal advancement of the human race. Still, Butler, like Piercy, tells the story of a comparatively ordinary woman, an African-American teenager, who under extraordinarily vicious circumstances transforms herself into a resistance leader and political visionary, capable of creating, at least temporarily, a highly functional alternative oppositional space.

The worlds depicted in Piercy's and Butler's critical dystopias presciently and alarmingly resemble our early-21st-century reality, but they also envision alternatives to the dystopian scenarios by recommending a comprehensive resistance that unites anticorporate, antinationalist, antiracist, ecological and feminist activism. As such, they are examples of literature of hope, whose political imaginaries suggest potential paths of recovery for a sustainable future: i.e., they sustain a clear utopian impulse through the dystopian gloom. Paradoxically, Piercy's technophilic optimism about the idea long-anticipated by Marx, that corporate capitalism might cut off the branch on which it sits by engendering its own multivalent opposition in the most unlikely places, is overshadowed by Butler's bleak, naturalistic dystopia, in which the initial revolutionary enthusiasm of Acorn becomes a refrainment from progressive political interventions in human history, because an uncompromising pessimism toward human nature renders all such attempts useless. But the possibility remains that Butler is painfully sharpening our view of ourselves as a species, and of capitalism as we know it, out of a radically utopian impulse, suggesting that innovative forms of oppositional and intersectional collectivism are absolutely necessary if we do not want to reduce our options to a corporate, ecological and political nightmare or, well ... life on Mars.

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Depictions of Destinies of Men in Alice Munro's "Pictures of the Ice"

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ABSTRACT

Canadian Nobel prize winning author of short stories Alice Munro is often regarded one of the world's core feminist writers who has created some of the most memorable female literary characters. Nonetheless, this analysis focuses on the depiction of male characters in Alice Munro's short story "Pictures of the Ice". With no intention of questioning Alice Munro's status of a feminist writer, the paper suggests that the depiction of male characters in this story reveals Alice Munro's profound understanding of men. The analysis will focus mostly on Austin, an older male character in an existential crisis. The paper strives to show that the greatness of Alice Munro as a short story writer lies exactly in her incredible insight into the nature of both women and men, and her ability to transform that insight into wonderful stories enjoyed by generations of readers of both genders.

Keywords: Alice Munro, Canadian literature, "Pictures of the Ice", male literary characters, gender issues

1. Introduction

There is a well-established and deeply rooted opinion that Canadian Literature evolves around the themes of survival, wilderness and aliena-

tion. In the introductory words to *A History of Canadian Literature* W. H. New (1989) writes the following:

Snow, North, Wilderness: these stereotypes of Canada suggest a fierce uniformity – but even from earliest times, such generalisations have been inaccurate. To read Canadian literature attentively is to realise how diverse Canadian culture is – how marked by politics and religion, how influenced by differences of language and geography, how preoccupied (apparently) by the empirical world, but how fascinated by the mysterious and the uncertain. ‘Apparent’ is important; illusion is everywhere. (p. 1)

Although there can never be enough caution with generalizations, upon reading New’s history of Canadian literature, an attentive reader might get an impression that Canadian literature, in a broader sense, revolves exactly around these three pivotal categories of ideas: survival, wilderness and alienation. Is this human need to categorize and invent acceptable stereotypes a weakness of our mind or is it exactly the feature of our mind which empowers us to detect, acknowledge and, finally, artistically enjoy illusion? It is interesting to emphasize New’s claim: “‘Apparent’ is important; illusion is everywhere.” Literature is bound to constantly reflect shared notions, issues and assets of the culture it originates from; in other words, literature is a product of a certain reality. However, the essence of literature is the illusion that it provides. Canadian literature is quite fortunate in that respect for it contains the work of one of the greatest masters of literary illusion of all times, Alice Munro.

Stereotyping Canadian Literature thematically is somehow reminiscent of the categorization of Alice Munro as a core feminist author. Munro’s stories indeed depict mostly lives and destinies of women. However, Munro, as testified in her numerous interviews¹, does not see herself as a (mainly) feminist writer². Alice Munro’s expressed attitude towards

1 One such being the 2012 interview by Deborah Treisman, published by The New Yorker under the title: “On “Dear Life”: An Interview with Alice Munro”.

2 Something similar can be said of Margaret Atwood and her work; although many of her works could easily be described as science fiction, Atwood in her interviews and media communication refuses to be categorized as a sci-fi author.

the labeling of her literary work and her writer's persona is a complex one, and it is most probably conditioned by the ideological broadness and the artistic elaborateness of both. In that sense, it should not come as a surprise that the author who gave us some of the fundamental literary insights in the lives of women partially denounced feminism as a predominant issue of her work. Indeed, the main theme of Alice Munro's work is human relationships gone wrong; relationships that do not bring safety or satisfaction but illusion and alienation. In the center of most of Munro's stories often there is a female character that craves for a change and needs to break free but usually has to settle for a compromise. This inevitably brings Munro's writing into the analytic scope of the feminist literary theories. However, Munro's work is free of programmatic burden, and that is one of the reasons of the greatness of her opus.

Being free of programmatic burden means that the male characters in Munro's stories are never used solely as the female antipodes. Munro's stories never use the opposition between male and female characters to better depict the destiny of only women. Although she sometimes plays with the typical male and female stereotypes, male and female characters in Munro's stories never follow the simple 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. Her stories are focused more on what the characters add to and take from the fragile reality they exist in, regardless of their gender. These aspects of Munro's writing inevitably lead to an important positive consequence: All Munro's female and male literary characters are complex, round characters. This, in return, empowers her short stories to be equally informative on the essential issues of both female and male existence. In the following passages, all previously said about the interplay between Munro's female and male literary characters will be explained and exemplified by analyzing one of her most known stories, "Pictures of the Ice".

2. Theoretical Starting Points

The aim of this research is to show that Alice Munro's greatness as a writer lies exactly in her ability to microscopically dissect general human

condition and describe the destinies of both women and men in a credible, unbiased, detailed, and literarily supreme manner. Although righteously perceived as a 'woman's' author, Alice Munro is able to produce complex and round male characters that reach readers' understanding and sometimes provoke sympathy. Female and male literary characters in Alice Munro's writing are almost always characters in a process of change, shifting between their individual weaknesses and strengths, trying to settle with reality through a series of compromises.

This equity in weaknesses and strengths might come from the fact that Alice Munro has the gift and the knowledge to translate some of the quintessential aspects of the human existential experience into literature. Two most prominent such aspects in her writing are the constant power games in all human relationships, and the fickleness of what we call 'reality'. Alice Munro recognized that power (or the lack of it) is in the core of all human relationships, and that power is not constant but it continuously changes in different life situations. Complex games of power between characters can be followed in most of her work. To name just a few examples: Fiona's phases of lucidity and mental absence in a way exercise control over Grant in "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"; Maria's decision to control her peers by bribing them in "Five Points"; the complexity of relations of power of characters in "Soon", which are reflected in an ekphrastic relation to Marc Chagall's painting "I and the Village". Finally, the essential literary conflict in "Pictures of the Ice" is based on power games as well; Austin, an elderly (perhaps) main character in the story has lost control of his life and is trying to re-establish relations of power with all the other characters in the story.

As far as the fickleness of reality is concerned, Alice Munro is a master of creating truths that soon prove to be true only on the surface. Maria Löschnigg (2014) explains these 'deceitful surfaces' as "a hallmark of [...] stories [...], which create an enhanced impression of 'surface' solidity [...]" (p. 23). Such presentation of reality through 'deceitful surfaces' can be seen in most of Alice Munro's stories, and it is introduced by all literary means, be it descriptions, dialogues or hinted motivations of the char-

acters. This Munroian literary technique applies to the characters of all genders – they all constantly negotiate reality.

So much has been written and said about Munro's depiction of destinies of female literary characters, and yet, very few analyses of her work focus mainly/solely on male characters. In order to provide a theoretical basis to this analysis; two starting points will be observed: 1. literary studies (mainly: the creation of round characters; creation of literary worlds with the use of unreliable narrators; symbolism and conflicting interrelationships between characters), and 2. interdisciplinary approach (mainly: social aspects of gender; social construction of 'masculinity'; psychological approach to the creation of 'the illusion of self'; aging studies; and the application of all of the aforementioned in literary research).

One important feature of round literary characters is that they typically change their attitudes and opinions, and that their psychology develops in the course of the narration. The other option is the creation of round characters that consistently oppose change, and that attitude is sometimes used as the basis for the development of plot. In both cases, the characters go through internal struggles, which are sometimes disclosed and oftentimes not. In order to create such characters, a writer must be deeply aware of focal aspects of the human existential reality. The author then must create a detailed vision of a literary character that fits into 'real life'. The author then decides which features and traits of characters are focal points for the narration and how they will be presented in it. In "Picture of the Ice", both male characters are credible, everyday people, although never (entirely) stereotyped. Austin and Brent undergo a clear change in their emotional state; their attitudes towards self and others, and their social status changes radically. Besides that, Austin displays smouldering and sometimes not so subtle opposition to change as well. Finally, one of the basic writing techniques in the creation of round characters is focusing on only one or few aspects of characters' emotional state and/or social positioning. In "Pictures of the Ice", gender and age are such focal points in the description of characters, and they play a crucial role in understanding of the story.

In “Pictures of the Ice”, all three characters included in the analysis seem to be reluctant to both say and accept the truth. Brent, Austin and Karin use lies to cope with their existential situation. There is a subtle and, arguably, accurate differentiation between ‘female and male lies’ in the story. Austin invents a lie of a new marriage with a presumably younger woman, disregarding his own age and fragility. This shows that Austin lies in order to re-establish the principle of masculinity in his vision of *self*. On the other hand, Karin lies mostly to reassert herself as someone worthy of affection and respect.

In the very beginning of the story “Pictures of the Ice”, Alice Munro provides the readership with a very strong description that symbolically functions as a summary of Austin’s current existential situation as well as, perhaps, an omen of his tragic ending. This is the description of Austin and his friends shopping clothes which are (socially, perhaps) unacceptable for someone of Austin’s age while telling jokes which are awkward regarding both Austin’s age and social status. The story is rich with symbols which indicate the identity crisis of the two men, one on the rise (Brent), and the other in decline (Austin). Moreover, the three main characters in the story are in relations of constant conflict. Even in that aspect, Alice Munro was able to provide a credible differentiation between something that could be described as ‘female revenge’ (for example, Karin writing insulting messages on Brent’s car), and ‘male revenge’ (for example, Austin’s ludicrous idea of inventing a new, happy life in order to show his triumph over Brent).

In regard to the interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of “Picture of the Ice”, we could start with examining the terms of masculinity and femininity. In her 1984 article “Gender Identity and its Implications for the Concepts of Masculinity and Femininity”, Janet T. Spence (1984) explains that the term ‘masculinity’ is one of the vaguest terms in psychology. A lot has happened in the way gender has been perceived in the last several decades, but it is worth to consider Spence’s take on the meaning of the term ‘masculinity’:

The abstract, hypothetical qualities of masculinity and femininity form a single bipolar dimension, with most males fall-

ing toward the masculine extreme, and most females falling toward the feminine extreme. All the concrete attributes, attitudes and behaviors that normatively are more characteristic of males than females in a given culture are reliable indicators of masculinity, and their absence is a reliable indicator of femininity [...] (Spence, 1984, p. 67)

This claim might seem outdated in the (our) transgender, the third gender or gender-neutral era. However, it is useful in the analysis for two main reasons. Firstly, the main character, Austin Corbett is about seventy years old, perhaps making him prone to falling into the more traditional view of masculinity (as indeed confirmed by the story); secondly, the story itself was published in the collection *Friend of My Youth* in 1990, so we can presume it was written during the 1980', the same decade when Spence's article was published.

In the light of Spence's observations, what are the traits of masculinity that are applicable in the creation of literary characters? We could disregard the most obvious traits, the physical ones, as in literature these can be covered by the mere use of female and male names. The focus will be on the psychological traits, namely the thinking mode and behaviour. In the traditional socio-psychological concept of a 'man', 'he' thinks and behaves differently than 'she'. Consequently, the society expects different things from 'him' and from 'her'. In regard to wide spread clichés, he thinks more logically, he is more down to earth, more oriented towards the result. He prefers a bar to a shopping mall (a concept wonderfully mocked at the very beginning of "Pictures of the Ice"); he is a provider, a caretaker, he is in control, and he does not show his emotions in public.

In connection to aging studies, we must here differentiate biological aging from psychological aging, and aging that is socially conditioned. Research in the field of biological aging suggests that this process happens differently in women and men. Men tend to age faster and live shorter than

women³. This is not entirely true in Austin's case as he is a widower. The story "Pictures of the Ice" provides examples where Austin's both physical and mental fragility is subtly suggested. The creation of Austin's character is carefully evolved around the idea of an old man who in a way defies his physical and mental state but to little avail, provoking sympathy in readers and simultaneously providing a dash of humor and satire. Important issue in psychological aging is the feeling of isolation and loneliness, which is prominent between older men in developed countries. A report of the International Longevity Centre in UK, published by the Independent Age (a support organisation for older age based in the UK) states the following: "older men are more dependent on their partners. Older men without partners were more socially isolated and lonely than older women." (Beach & Bamford, 2014, p. 5). In words of Janet Morrison, Chief Executive of Independent Age, "in general, men rely more heavily on their partner to remain socially connected. When their partner dies, often a man's social life shrinks." (Independent Age, 2014, "Isolation: the Emerging Crises for Older Men"). His wife's death surely plays a large role in Austin's position in the society and consequently his behaviour. In reference to the previous quote, it is interesting that Austin's new imaginary wife is actually his and his late wife's mutual acquaintance. This only confirms how important his late wife was in Austin's positioning within the society.

As far as the socially conditioned aging is concerned, traditional older men age with what we could refer to as 'masculine dignity'. While older men might be forced to partially give up on some of the physical aspects of their masculinity, they tend to firmly stick to their illusion of control, simply because this is expected from them. This can be clearly seen in Austin's pretty much unsuccessful attempt to withstand the pressures of the society. In connection to social pressure, two terms are important for the analysis: ageism and ableism. Ageism⁴, defined in a simplified way, is

3 An especially informative article on this theme is Eitaro Nakamura and Kenji Miyao's "Sex Differences in Human Biological Aging" (2008).

4 In regard to ageism and Alice Munro's story "Pictures of the Ice" the article by Sara Jamieson (2004), "The fiction of agelessness: Work, leisure, and aging in Alice Munro's 'Pictures of the Ice'", offers a great deal of useful information.

a general discrimination based on someone's age, while ableism is a type of discrimination based on the opinion that someone is physically and mentally able to perform a task, as opposed to someone who is supposedly not⁵. Indeed, when Austin spreads the news of his new marriage and his intention to move and start a new life, most of the other characters raise the question: Is he not too old for that? One of the reasons why Brent takes over the job from Austin so easily is because both Brent and the town's society see Austin as 'an old man', and they all deeply doubt Austin's ability to continue performing his usual tasks. Although all the terms from the field of aging studies were established by researches decades after Munro wrote "Pictures of the Ice", they will be very important in the further analysis of the male characters in the story.

In traditional terms, characteristics attributed to men are strength, independence (territorially, economically, emotionally), assertiveness, courage, leadership, a certain level of power/dominance. All these play a role in the creation of Austin's character. We could add here another traditional manifestation of 'successful masculinity': older men marrying younger and presumably good looking or well-off women. This is, as will be seen later, a crucial element for understanding the plot of the story, and Austin's complex inner struggles. Alice Munro successfully applies all these traditionally accepted features of masculinity but never allows her male characters to fall into the category of stereotypes. A step further from these general notions of masculinity is what Spence (2014) calls the masculine extreme, that is, the overemphasized or even pathological aspect of the masculine principle. The term 'macho' can be seen as the starting point in that extreme, as it includes attributes of imbalanced sexual power, violence (especially with egoistic and narcissist purposes), superficial but emphasized 'care' for the minions and followers (usually women and submissive men), suppressed emotions and farcically exaggerated masculinity⁶. All of these

5 A very informative article in regard to ageism and ableism is another article by Brian Beach, "Enabling age at work: how ageism and ableism overlap in the workplace" (2021).

6 The traits of machoism and toxic masculinity are vaguely based on the information provided by the American Psychological Association (APA) sources, especially *The Psychology of Men and Masculinities* (2017), edited by Ronald Levant.

attributes appear in “Pictures of the Ice”, skillfully woven into the plot and the ideological world of the story.

The final extreme of the masculine principle is toxic masculinity. Although toxic masculinity clearly belongs to the domain of pathology, even men that can be considered mentally healthy and socially apt can exhibit certain traits of this type of behaviour. In relation to *self*, men with toxic masculinity traits show extreme self-reliance, arrogance, narcissistic and egoistic mindset, total suppression of emotions, while in relation to others they show extreme need for physical, intellectual, and sexual dominance, and a disregard of the needs of others. In relation to women, such men are prone to depreciation and humiliation of women, while in relation to other men, they are ready to condemn anything perceived as ‘feminine’ and displayed by other men⁷. However, such men are typically weak in character, and such masculine attitude serves mostly as a defense mechanism to hide their insecurity. Some of the traits of toxic masculinity are skillfully used in the creation of Brent’s character but, not surprisingly, they are mirrored in some features of Austin’s character as well.

With all the basic terms important for the analysis presented and briefly explained, the paper will continue exploring how these terms function when applied literarily to “Pictures of the Ice”. The analysis will be based on the creation of the two main male characters, Austin Corbett and Brent Duprey, but also the main female character, Karin, as she is a crucial source of information on both of them.

3. “Pictures of the Ice” – An Analysis

The story starts when Austin is already dead. This fact might have an impact on the psychology of readers. The idea that Austin is dead at the time of narration both deprives him of the grasp that living characters usually have on readers’ perception and it inevitably provokes sympathy. Right at the beginning of the story, Austin is described as an elderly man who had lost it all – his wife, his job, control over his destiny, and

7 Useful further reading is *We Should All Be Feminists* (2015), by C. N. Adichie.

his self-confidence. It is interesting that his age (over 70) is placed within parentheses in the story as well (Munro, 1990, p. 122), and in this way the parentheses have exactly the opposite effect – his old age is actually emphasised. Austin is trying to rebuild his *self* by preparing for a fictional marriage with Sheila Brothers, a younger woman and a friend of his late wife, who lives in Hawaii (as opposed to the coldness of his current habitat). Munro communicates that quite bluntly when Austin is in the clothing store with his friend Jerry Crawford, buying clothes that are unsuitable for his age: “Listen to me’, Jerry Crawford said to him. ‘With the darker shirt and the lighter pants you can’t go wrong. It’s youthful” (Munro, 1990, p. 122). The word youthful here signals Austin’s expectations, and the fact that Sheila is younger. In the next line, Austin retorts: “Austin cackled. ‘Did you ever hear that expression ‘mutton dressed as lamb’?” (Munro, 1990, p. 122). There is no reason for Austin to laugh – he is the vulnerable lamb, and he knows it. He is here obviously hiding behind the laugh and the words he used. Three significant (and humorous) moments are detectable in Jerry’s next sentence: “Referred to ladies”, Jerry said. ‘Anyway, it’s all changed now. There’s no old men’s clothes, no old ladies’ clothes anymore. Style applies to everyone” (Munro, 1990, p. 122). The first sentence directly undermines Austin’s masculinity. The next sentence implies that everything “is changed” – mostly for Austin; he is in a great existential shift. And the last sentence simply confirms that Austin’s possibly macho remark on muttons and lambs remains in the sphere of allusions. Austin has clearly lost his place in life and is going through a major identity crisis.

In the next chapter, Munro informs us of the physical changes that happened to Austin after the death of his wife and his retirement: “[...] he lost weight, his muscles have shrunk, he was getting the pot-bellied caved-in shape of an old man. His neck was corded and his nose lengthened and his cheeks drooping.” (Munro, 1990, p. 122). Austin seems to have aged rapidly. This again shows how deeply he was shaken by the difficulties that befell him. In the next sentence, Munro returns as an unreliable narrator: “He was a stringy old rooster – stringy but tough, and game enough to gear up for a

second marriage” (Munro, 1990, p. 122). In this way, Munro restores some of our faith in Austin’s strength. She makes us believe that he is indeed ready to start a new life. This is subtly emphasised by a skillful use of the word rooster. However, the narrator’s vision of Austin’s strength seems to partially contradict Karin’s vision. Karin is openly doubtful of Austin’s physical ability, as expressed in this example: “Karin is nervous when Austin stands alone to take pictures. He seems shaky to her – and what if he fell? He could break a leg, a hip. Old people break a hip and that’s the end of them” (Munro, 1990, p. 135). Throughout the story, there is a game of opposing truths and lies between the narrator and Karin. When the narrator seems to be masking the truth, Karin is being more open about facts, and vice versa. This functions perfectly with Karin’s complex character and with her role in the story – she is the one who accidentally learns the truth about Austin’s alleged new marriage, but she decides to play along and keep the secret.

Back in the clothes shop Austin and Jerry are joined by the third friend, Phil Stadelman, who tells a silly (and quite macho) joke. After his psychology and physique, it is now Austin’s decency that is on test. Austin decides to play along and reacts seemingly relaxed: “That’s rich” (Munro, 1990, p. 123). Austin then laughs, but his laugh and behaviour seem awkward and he himself expelled from his spiritual habitat. Sara Jamieson (2014) writes about this instance in the text: “Another threat to his identity is indicated by the curiously feminine behaviours that Austin, at times, exhibits in this scene. Such behaviour suggests anxieties about retirement as the end of work outside the home, a life passage that can bring about a diminished social status, as, in short, a potentially ‘feminizing’ experience” (p. 120). This reveals that Austin as well, although inadvertently, carries socially rooted traits of macho thinking.

All this points toward an impression of a man desperate because of the loss of identity, place, meaning, and love; a man who is liberated by desperation and has nothing to lose. He is in the process of rebuilding a new self and regaining control. He looks fragile but he seems able. This brings us back to the Munrovan writing technique, the “deceitful surfaces”. Austin lied about Sheila and about the marriage; in fact he got a new

job, a much worse job at Shaft Lake⁸ (Saskatchewan) where he would live in a trailer – something that readers get to know only in the later phase of narration. We can also speculate that he actually committed suicide while taking photos at the frozen lake. However, Munro is able to make the readers believe in Austin's ability to change even though at the beginning of the story she discloses that Austin is dead.

In her article "Gendered topographies of desire in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*", M. A. Struzziero (2018) uses the term "gendered topography" (p. 71), and the term "topography of male desire" (p. 78). Although she uses the terms in a slightly different sense, both of these terms might be applicable in various analyses of Austin's character. For Austin, north is the place of his defeat, and south the place of his imagined triumph. That place is Hawaii, a warm place that inevitably implies an existence of a woman, and hence, love, safety, and regained masculinity. Had Austin admitted he was actually moving further north to Shaft Lake that would have been equal to his capitulation.

Austin is lying and hence suppressing his emotions; he is stoically insisting on his illusion. That undoubtedly comes from his wounded ego and masculinity. Austin's lies about the marriage with a new woman might be interpreted as a streak of machoism. When Austin shows Karin the picture of Sheila, described by Munro as an attractive woman, and the postcard from Sheila's wonderful town, he is almost bragging. He is trying to present Sheila as his love trophy, only succeeding in disclosing bits of his wounded masculinity. Furthermore, this can be considered as a streak of toxic masculinity and can be easily explained by the fact that Austin was never taught how to be vulnerable. At this instance in the text, Munro offers an ironical comment: "No wonder he needed all new clothes" (Munro, 1990, p. 130).

8 Shaft Lake is an actual Lake in Saskatchewan, far north and remote even in Canadian standards. It is situated between Uranium City and Eldorado (now a ghost town), which only adds to the irony. It is interesting to note that both Ventura (2002) and Jamieson (2004, p. 107) claim that Shaft Lake is a town in Northern Ontario. However, no proof of the existence of such settlement in Ontario is given by the online sources and in detailed maps of Canada.

At one point, Austin saved Brent Duprey, Karin's ex-husband, from alcoholism by introducing him to faith. Austin also gave Karin a job as his housekeeper. Why did Austin unconditionally and selflessly help Brent and Karin? Is it only because he felt obliged to help the couple stuck in a toxic relationship, which resulted in the death of their baby? Austin nursed Brent back to health also because he felt superior to Brent and felt the macho reflex of helping a man who at the moment was no threat to him. However, Brent became an extremely pious Christian and took over Austin's congregation and job, and renamed the church from Turnaround House to Lazarus House. Why is Austin planning to give a portion of his money (money and materialism being one of the main leitmotifs in the story) to Lazarus House and to Brent, the person that has betrayed and hurt him? This is a duel of Austin's and Brent's egos at play. Brent's fervent, loud and a bit extreme Christianity is much better accepted by the township than Austin's unorthodox, unobtrusive and perhaps a bit dull preaching. This hurts Austin a great deal although he is not ready to admit it. By giving Brent the money, Austin is signalling to the township that he is above Brent in every possible sense. He is stating that he is in control, and that he is the generous winner. In fact, he is a hurt old rooster whose generosity does not entirely come from the goodness of his soul but largely from revenge. Austin is falsely introducing his attitude using a naively sincere sentence: "Who's to say whether Brent's way isn't closer to God than mine is, after all?" (Munro, 1990, p. 126). The decision to give money to Brent could be seen as yet another Austin's attempt, maybe even a subconscious one, to re-establish his power by patronizing Brent.

A typically male rivalry between Austin and Brent can be observed in the names of the church. The old name, Turnaround House, given by Austin, implies any general change to better. Brent does not oppose that name but simply enhances it. The simple 'turnaround' is in Lazarus House translated into the religious event when Lazarus was brought back to life by Jesus. In this way, Brent suggests to Austin: *You were alright but I am much better than you.*

Austin and Brent are often characterized through their relationship with Karin. Karin in a way functions as a catalyst for both men in the sto-

ry. When the news of Austin's new marriage is out, his daughter Megan calls to mostly find out what Austin is planning to do with his money, and Karin takes the call. Megan complains: "Anyway, he's very difficult to talk to. He makes all the right noises, he seems so open, but in reality he's very closed" (Munro, 1990, pp. 130–131). Megan's statement plays along the stereotypical male behaviour (listening but not hearing). Similarly, almost at the end of the story, when Austin sets out on the trip he will never return from, there is an interesting passage, provided from Karin's perspective:

How can anybody believe that this tottery old man, whose body seems to be shrivelling day by day, is on his way to marry a comforting widow and spend his days from now walking on a sunny beach? It isn't in him to do such a thing, ever. He means to wear himself out, quick, quick, on people as thankless as possible, thankless as Brent. Meanwhile fooling all of them into thinking he's changed his spots. (Munro, 1990, p. 137)

This is a blunt explanation of Austin's reality and emotions. Austin is a good-hearted, righteous and polite person, but also a weak, fragile and sensitive old man, endlessly hurt by the township and Brent and by his wife's death. Every action Austin is to take from now on can be explained as a revenge of a sort. The story of his invented marriage was supposed to be his ultimate triumph over those who betrayed him. His idea to give blank pictures of ice to Karin to develop is his final ironic comment on the town and its people. It is interesting that Karin caught Austin's hint and decided to continue his revenge on her own: at the end of the story she is sending pictures of ice to Austin's children and Brent, without any note; just blank white pictures. Austin got out of the situation seemingly (and temporarily) as a winner in everyone's eyes except for Karin.

In the next passage, Austin is about to set off for the trip north, but first he takes a pint of whiskey out of his coat, "against weakness" (Munro, 1990, p. 137), as he explains. He drinks the whiskey "shakily" (Munro, 1990, p. 137). In an exchange with Karin in which Austin tells her to keep the pictures until he writes to her, it becomes clear that Austin is not com-

ing back again. There is a hint of a stereotypical male behaviour here as well, a glass of whiskey before the end, with little dry words said – this is a description of so many male closing scenes in the western culture.

There is another passage interesting for this analysis, in which Munro describes Austin's decision to take a haircut and then describes his smile. Austin is adorned with a characteristic traditionally connected with females, and that is the cliché of excessive "speaking and explaining": "Yet Austin speaks – it is his perversity to speak – as if out of a body that is light and ready and a pleasure to carry around" (Munro, 1990, p. 130). It is Austin's inner need to explain himself, and to politely announce his future moves. He does that verbally, which is logical considering his previous occupation. Besides yet another reference to his fragility, this sentence also completes the picture of Austin of a mild and austere person, as opposed to Brent's toxic outgoing masculinity. There is yet another interesting hint in this passage. When describing the downward position of Austin's mouth when he smiles, Munro writes the following: "That downward slide is what's noticeable on him everywhere" (Munro, 1990, p. 130); bluntly suggesting that Austin is in every possible way on a way down to his end.

The words repeatedly used to describe Austin's physical state are old, shaky, shrunk, droopy, stringy, tottery, shrivelling, etc. Some of the main questions that linger throughout the story are: would Austin be able to lead a modern congregation?; and who will believe that Austin is able to marry and move to Hawaii? The attitude of what could be called ableism is detectable especially in the words of Megan and Karin (although with different intentions). The possible take on ableism in the story is not constructed as a point of discussion but rather as a source of humorous comment. Finally, taking into consideration that Austin is very old and would have to retire soon anyway, why is it hard for him to accept Brent and other changes in the town? Why is he taking it so personally? Austin was probably not hurt by the fact that he was replaced but by *how* he was replaced. This leads us to Austin's very high moral and ethical standards – Austin, perhaps with a good reason, finds Brent and the township ungrateful and morally superficial. Then again,

would someone with such high moral standards lie like Austin (or even, in some interpretations of his death, commit suicide)? Austin seems to be a unity of oppositions, just like people usually are in real life. Austin is a complex, round character, life-like and credible because he is simultaneously showing great qualities of character and typical human weaknesses. He is an old and fragile man yet able to take the last swing at destiny. He is a character that readers can simultaneously disapprove with, laugh at and sympathise with.

Karin is, perhaps, a slightly atypical Munro's female character, who displays an extremely complex set of power relations and power games, especially from the point of view of gender analysis. She starts as an attractive young woman with a questionable character. She seems passive and helpless in her relation to Brent. The only instance where her character is described as (at least) stubborn is the following: "If Brent wanted to starve her, she would show him. She would starve" (Munro, 1990, p. 128). Then again, starving herself would mean self-destruction (and this could be brought into connection with Austin's self-destructive stubbornness). Karin is obviously under Brent's influence, and, furthermore, it is hinted in the story that she too has a drinking problem. Everything changes for her when her baby dies and Brent leaves her after his success in the church. Karin becomes a bitter person with much stronger attitudes, one such attitude being her opened despise for Brent. What Munro describes as Karin's "slow, smoldering grudge against Brent, which grew and grew" (Munro, 1990, p. 129) makes Karin write violent and offensive messages on Brent's car and inspires her to describe Brent using words like "snake" (Munro, 1990, p. 126). This might be seen as a typical female manifestation of contempt, as opposed to Austin's silent but deep bitterness; however, Karin is everything but a stereotypical woman. Although she works as Austin's housekeeper, she takes upon herself a large responsibility of being the character with the largest burden of power in the story. It is evident that Austin is highly dependable on Karin, not just physically, and that she is often presented as Austin's protector. Finally, Karin decides to keep Austin's secret and he entrusts her with developing the pictures of

(the)⁹ ice. Karin finishes the story as a, tentatively speaking, very ‘masculine’ character. Karin is in charge, stuck between two intrinsically weak men.

A moment when Karin finally refuses her passive role (socially expected from a woman) and takes on her position of power comes after the death of her child. There is no doubt that Karin and Brent were negligent towards a sick child but also there is no proof that this negligence led to child’s death. Munro writes: “Brent wanted it to be his fault, though. Sometimes he wanted it to be their fault. It was like sucking candy to him, that confession. Karin told him to shut up, she told him to *shut up*. She said, ‘He would have died anyway.’” (Munro, 1990, p. 134). In this moment, Karin deprives Brent of his (toxic) masculine role and takes an active role in her own destiny.

The character of Brent is almost entirely provided through Karin’s words and thoughts, with a few additions by the narrator. This functions well with his positioning on the scale of power in the story – Brent is the weakest of the three main characters. Brent starts as a violent macho character, an alcoholic with a potential to assert himself, a wish to dominate and to lead. That potential was liberated by Austin. However, even after his success in the church, Brent remains an obsessive, addictive type – he is first afflicted by alcohol, then by religion. His fragile and toxic masculinity is fully realized only through the newly gained power in the Lazarus House. There is a subtle comparison of Austin’s “careful quiet kind of religion” and Brent’s “ferocious Christianity” (Munro, 1990, p. 126) that tells a lot about the two men’s characters. As much as Austin is fragile physically, Brent is fragile intellectually and morally. Although Brent gets to talk the least in the story, and in spite of the fact that his personality is arguably based on several stereotypes, he is a character in constant

9 Why ‘the’ ice? There is a subtle irony that something as shapeless as ice, especially when photographed, is marked by the definite article. Which ice exactly? The one that Austin used to abash the township, knowing that Karin would understand his message. The ice that finally became Austin’s grave. In that respect, it is interesting to note Karin’s observations on Austin’s developed photographs: “There needs to be a human figure too [...]”, and “[...] he’s in them, after all. He’s blank in them, but bright” (Munro, 1990, p. 138). Furthermore, ‘the’ seems to, in a way, re-install the truth in the story because these are images of the ice from the Shaft Lake, Austin’s actual final destination.

and motivated development. Brent is a believable literary character well anchored in accepted and shared notions of flawed men. Furthermore, there is no moral judgement of Brent by the narrator.

4. Conclusion

In "Pictures of the Ice", Alice Munro created a set of meticulously developed characters in complex relations of power. The line between masculinity and femininity is constantly blurred and then partially re-established. This is achieved by the skillful use of a mixture of typical (stereotypes) and atypical attributes of masculinity and femininity, and the literary use of unreliable narrator (narrator's voice and Karin's voice at times seem to form two distinct unreliable narrations). All this produces credible round literary characters and a literary world which perfectly reflects reality.

Alice Munro's characterisations of Austin and Brent show the author's deep insight into general destiny of people but also into 'matters of soul' of male characters. Brent is perfectly depicted as a weak character who almost accidentally grasps the right floating plank after a shipwreck, and now he is, although not essentially changed, a successful, better man on the surface. Austin is a socially and emotionally displaced old man, who feels betrayed by the people and destiny, a man in an identity crisis, ready to exercise his last endeavour of (almost childish) spite. In fact, Austin's story is a touching account of an endlessly sad and silly old man, a lovable, victorious loser who, although does not entirely escape reader's moral judgement, is bound to provoke readers' sympathy.

Alice Munro's depiction of Austin's character is perhaps one of the prime examples of literary depiction of men. Munro's ability to create such complex male characters partially explains her reluctance to be labeled (as solely belonging to any -ism), and explains her position of one of the greatest contemporary authors of short stories.

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“Witness Testimony”: Surviving,
Witnessing, and Writing Women’s
Trauma in Margaret Atwood’s
The Testaments

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Abstract

Using theoretical and critical lenses of trauma theory, particularly Laura Vickroy’s concepts of survivor narratives and effects of trauma in fiction, this paper analyses Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Testaments* (2019), with a focus on the intersection of gender and class in victim/survivor identity formation. Drawing on the proposed methodological framework, our discussion explores the multivocality and multidimensionality of women’s experiences of suffering and witnessing set in a dystopian totalitarian society that enforces various forms of gendered inequality and coercion, including reproductive servitude. Building on the idea of the literature of witness and the act of testimony, *The Testaments* presents three interleaved stories from limited viewpoints of three narrators, oppressor and oppressed, who have singular fates but share suffering due to traumatic events and internalisation of patriarchal oppression. In this paper, we demonstrate how these experiences shape the survivor’s personality and the victim’s sense of self, also blurring the boundaries between victims and perpetrators. Bearing witness and testimony to survival and trauma constitute an essential transition toward emancipation of the narrative, whatever its limitations. While the novel’s “testimonies” reflect the different survival strategies of the characters and ways of expressing their trauma in the struggle to gain voice and agency, its narrative methods ex-

plore the (im)possibility of representing traumatic experiences in written form. Our analysis shows how surviving, witnessing, and writing women's trauma in *The Testaments* resist representation in conventional writerly forms and require complex textual strategies and aesthetic experimentation.

Keywords: Canadian women's writing, gendered identity construction, narrative agency, trauma, violence

1. Introduction: Gendered Oppression, Trauma, and Writing

A writer whose diverse and influential art has drawn readers and critics for half a century, Canadian author Margaret Atwood is also known for the wide-ranging cultural reverberations generated by her fictional interpretation of social and cultural themes. In her novelistic portrayals, "Atwood appropriates themes and topics from her contemporary political environment" (Tolan, 2007, p. 148), but her enduring interests remain women's issues, specifically how power politics influences gender relations or, in other words, "the particularly gendered effects of the oppression of women" (Vickroy, 2013, p. 254). Whether through inimitable experimentation with different genres including fairy tales, historical novels, the gothic, or in her speculative dystopian and postapocalyptic novels, Atwood is concerned with storytelling and witnessing as survival strategies. The analysis takes into consideration the evident and growing attention to trauma, traumatic memory and representations of trauma in literature since the 1990s¹ and its important concerns that are brought forth by literary depictions of trauma theory. Correspondingly, critics have noted the recent and increasing interest of contemporary literature and art "in the potential of trauma narratives to disclose silenced accounts of history, experiment with the ways in which trauma can be

1 For the recent "fascination with trauma" in both the academic and non-academic contexts see Tancke, 2015, p. 1-10.

represented, and attempt to deal with these experiences of human suffering" (Andermahr & Pellicer-Ortin, 2013, p. 3).

Recognizing the relevance of correlations between trauma studies' theoretical and critical concepts, this paper discusses Margaret Atwood's novel *The Testaments*, published in 2019, centring on the issue of victim/survivor testimony and writing. The novel's three main female characters who double as narrators exemplify the jagged lines between oppressors and oppressed following traumatic experiences, while also epitomizing "the awareness of the multidimensionality of an extreme experience and particularly the social influences that shape the survivor's personality" (Balaev, 2014, p. 10). Their different yet related narratives and destinies reveal complex processes of survival tactics and identity construction through witnessing and testimony in their fight to reclaim self and agency. Internalized patriarchal coercion, general terror, powerlessness, and moral degradation generate not only traumatic effects but also raise questions about the potential of writing in general, and traditional textual forms specifically, to represent traumatic suffering. Laurie Vickroy (2014) stresses the importance of the social environment as a decisive factor in trauma (p. 132), which consists of a totalitarian and religiously fundamentalist society in Atwood's *The Testaments* based on the stratification of human beings according to function and on an extremely misogynist view towards women. This patriarchal regime and its mechanisms lead to their total oppression and objectification in the manner of the genre of feminist dystopia, which Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* had already made popular in 1985.² Whereas *The Handmaid's Tale* was narrated by one voice—the Handmaid Offred—its sequel *The Testaments* (2019) oscillates between three different voices, in fact "testimonies", from this dystopian totalitarian society based on violence, oppression, and coercion of women where gender and class oppression create an intersection of traumat-

2 This genre has gained again in popularity due to political developments tending towards totalitarianism in the US and elsewhere and due to a worldwide increase in religious fundamentalism. See, for example, Christina Dalcher's *Vox* (2018) or—as a multifaceted reversal of this genre—Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016) and of course the serialization of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as TV series by the streaming service Hulu (directed by Reed Morano, beginning 2017).

ic experiences. Through that, the novel opens up to a multivocality and multidimensionality of women's experiences of suffering and witnessing, which are presented in different survival strategies and textual/narrative techniques in sections named "The Ardua Hall Holograph", "Transcript of Witness Testimony 369A", and "Transcript of Witness Testimony 369B". In the following, the three interwoven voices and some of their "extreme experiences" created and justified by a fundamentalist totalitarian system will be analysed. Given the challenge of representing trauma in fiction as it is paradoxically an attempt "to narrate the unnarratable" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 4), the analysis aims to respond to the following questions: How do these experiences shape the survivors' personalities and their voices? How is trauma written, represented, and communicated in the form of witness testimonies? Which survival strategies are reflected in these testimonies?

2. "Who Ever Heard of a Rebellious Flower?"³ The Traumatization and Silencing of the Wives

Drawing on the definition of trauma by Laurie Vickroy (2014) as "an individual's response to events so intense that they impair emotional or cognitive functioning and may bring lasting psychological disruption" (p. 131), this analysis focuses on instances that represent lasting psychological disorientation and other harm for the novel's female protagonists who are strictly categorized by reproductive health, social status, and moral norms. Trauma in the novel is caused by oppression and bodily coercion. In this society, women are objects dependent on the status which is forced onto them according to their function: Marthas are cleaners and cooks, Aunts are overseers of other women: both are no sexual objects—this role is reserved for Wives and Handmaids whose function is to serve as sexual objects and breeders. Fear of sexual abuse, oppres-

3 From Aunt Estée's placating rationale comparing the girls to precious flowers incapable of disobedience following Aunt Vidala's menacing explanation to Becka about the fate of adulteresses who "end up being stoned or else hanged by their neck with a sack over their heads" (Atwood, 2019, p. 25).

sion, and rape structures the life experience of the girls designated to be Wives. Their upbringing and education are religiously centred on their function as wives, supported through the Aunts' vivid and unvaryingly terrifying similes and parables with which the girls are indoctrinated and traumatized. Such examples are provided by Agnes Jemima who testifies to "nightmares: . . . I dreaded the thought of growing older—older enough for a wedding. I had no faith in the wise choices of the Aunts: I feared that I would end up married to a goat on fire" and the story of the Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces: "it made a deep impression on me, and may help to explain why some of us from that time and place acted as we did" (Atwood, 2019, p. 11, 77). Therefore, many young girls attempt suicide in order to escape marriage, for example Becca, a friend of Agnes Jemima.

These girls, however, are already sexually traumatized before their forced marriage: Becca and others are repeatedly assaulted and raped by the dentist Dr. Grove (Atwood, 2019, p. 252), who turns out to be a paedophile. Since they cannot speak about these traumatizing experiences to anyone (Becca only tells Agnes about it much later when they are both Supplicants in order to become Aunts), they remain traumatized victims. Agnes Jemima's remembrance demonstrates this sensation of shared yet repressed experiences: ". . . it was horrifying. It was also shameful: when a shameful thing is done to you, the shamefulness rubs off on you. You feel dirtied" (Atwood, 2019, p. 95). Agnes Jemima wonders about "Becca's genuine horror" at the plan of getting married: "She really did believe that marriage would obliterate her. She would be crushed, she would be nullified, she would be melted like snow until nothing remained of her", but did not show interest or empathy as "another girl's disgrace could rub off on you if you got too close to it" (Atwood, 2019, p. 163, 162). The girls lined up for marriage are already victims of trauma who, according to Laurie Vickroy (2013) and her description of trauma victims in general, "typically engage in self-defeating, defensive, and repetitive behaviors," and their reactions "may seem overly passive and emotionally paralyzed, unreliable and overly defensive, unheroic and even unethical—failures that are manifestations of trauma" (p. 256).

Aunt Lydia who, in her function as an Aunt, occupies the ambivalent position of victim, of perpetrator by keeping women in line and training them to be of use for men, and sometimes of a “saviour” of girls (for example she “saves” Becka and Agnes from being forced to marry in order to force them into the service of the Aunts), further silences the sexual abuse of young women by sarcastic comments. For instance, she states about Dr. Grove: “But he was ruining too many young girls for marriage. Rather than accepting wedlock, the precious flowers were deserting to the Aunts” (Atwood, 2019, p. 280). Her choice of words here is utilised to mask the girls’ trauma and invalidate it. Hence, trauma is devalued and normalized. Although she shows no sympathy for or understanding of the girls’ phobia of men which makes them attempt to commit suicide in order to escape forced marriage, she then saves some girls from this fate. When she laconically explains the reasons for the traumatized girls to commit suicide—“Well. It’s the penises. It’s like a phobia” (Atwood, 2019, p. 214)—the irony is designed to keep the horror of rape and violence (for which “the penises” stand) at bay by trivializing and ridiculing it. On the other hand, however, Aunt Lydia uses the power she has acquired in this system built on surveillance and emotional manipulation to execute revenge on Dr. Grove who is eventually executed publicly (Atwood, 2019, p. 255). She validates her status of power and position of having (some) leverage over the future, although it lingers in the shadow of doubt as demonstrated in her rumination over the possible scenarios of her own end: “Right now I still have some choice in the matter. Not whether to die, but when and how. Isn’t that freedom of a sort? Oh, and who to take down with me. I have made my list” (Atwood, 2019, p. 32). The trauma portrayed in the novel seems to reduce the female characters to some state of blurred existence and desolation⁴, which is, in Vickroy’s words, “a kind of living death that deprives us of memory, identity,

4 Particularly poignant is the anguish that is demonstrated by the female character of Becka who takes a verbal and nonverbal stand against pressures to marry and become another victim of Gileadean oppression: “‘No one wants to die,’ said Becka. ‘But some people don’t want to live in any of the ways that are allowed’” (Atwood, 2019, p. 294). Her desperate act of attempted suicide could thus be read as the only option out of the restricted and restricting victim-villain roles.

and vitality”⁵, effacing the sense of self and exacting vicious adaptation to the circumstances in which “[p]ower feeds on fear and complicity” (2013, p. 274). Aunt Lydia’s feigned acceptance of totalitarian indoctrination is an element of her survival and resistance strategy against the state of trauma and female objectification.

The aim of this totalitarian society is to silence women completely and by that deprive them of any form of agency. In order to achieve this condition, acts of normalizing trauma become important. This results in many silences in the text. If trauma is “normal”, it becomes impossible to convey individual emotions, fear, and desperation. Hence, on the one hand, the text shows how such a normalization is depicted by silences⁶ and voids in the text. What is not said? What cannot be expressed in such a social environment? Concerning trauma narratives in general, Ganteau and Onega (2014) state the following:

of course, trauma narratives, fictional or not, are often seen to be characterised by the inability to voice a trauma, and they tend to limit themselves to indirect evocation, beating about the hole that they must be content to circumscribe, short of describing it. More often than not, trauma narratives must renounce the possibility of describing the unassimilated traumatic memory and build their impossibility into the textual fabric, performing the void instead of anatomising it. (p. 10)

One instance of loud silence is the situation of the girls who are about to be married against their will. Society’s attempt to silence women becomes especially visible concerning the forced marriages of the girls selected to become Wives: “I’d overheard the Marthas saying that before

5 In the early stages of Aunt Lydia’s traumatization and violence-induced adjustment to the Gileadean regime she is described as if regressing into near-atavistic fears and instincts while assessing her fellow-victims during a meeting with Commander Judd: “I could smell her fear from across the table; I wondered if she could smell mine. It has an acid smell, fear. It’s corrosive” (Atwood, 2019, p. 174).

6 For a conception of trauma as unspeakable due to its inaccessibility for conscious understanding compare for example Caruth (1995, p. 10). This issue of unrepresentability has been widely discussed; compare for example Balaeu, 2014, or Leys, 2000, pp. 266–297.

some weddings tranquilizing drugs had been administered, with needles”. Drugging women into obedience constitutes a literal act of silencing them, and Agnes realises that she is given no choice, since she is deprived of her voice: “It was clear that I would be married to Commander Judd whether I liked it or not. Whether I hated it or not”. Although “She seems obedient” (Atwood, 2019, p. 224, 225, 227), Agnes likewise contemplates suicide but then devises a plan to become an Aunt instead of a Wife—her only way out which at the same time also becomes a way to express herself. Since only Aunts learn how to read and write (a right which is denied to the other women), she becomes one of the voices to produce a witness testimony and by that also to survive. This progression opens the gate for her to step into the complicated world of simultaneously being a victim and a perpetrator, as will be seen with the case of the most prominent voice of the novel, Aunt Lydia’s. Agnes’ testimony leaves many things unsaid thus emphasising on the one hand the impossibility of talking to someone about her emotions and on the other hand the process of normalization of constant trauma which becomes internalized; hence, as Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortin (2013) express it, “sometimes what is written is not the only means to access the meaning of trauma; the silences and gaps in the narration can provide readers with an insight into the traumatic experience” (p. 6)⁷. In other words, readers may end up being some type of participant, even if unwillingly so.

In the novel, the collective phobia of young girls is shockingly well founded, since many women are murdered by their husbands if they are no longer considered useful, as the fundamentalist state does not allow divorce. Thus, the other act of silencing women is murdering them. Commander Judd, one of the most evil and powerful characters in the novel, slowly kills his present wife, one of Agnes’ former school mates, with rat poison: “He’d already had several Wives—dead, unhappily—and had been assigned several Handmaids but had not yet been gifted with children”. His wives all die, since it becomes clear that “He had disposed

7 An interesting parallel exists in *The Handmaid’s Tale* when Offred reveals the survival mode of the women: “We lived in the gaps between the stories” (Atwood, 1996, p. 67).

of them all" (Atwood, 2019, 349, 222, 308). Here, the readers do not get detailed descriptions of emotions since the silence about the violent moments themselves point to the normalization of trauma and the emotional dissociation that the characters experience. In this instance, as in many others in the text, it becomes clear that often trauma cannot be described in detail by the characters, but literature can still account for it:

Trauma Studies has highlighted the fact that art in its different manifestations has frequently been used as a healing device by writers, minorities, and society in general, either because of the things that are explicitly *said* or because of the way in which it draws attention to what has been *silenced*. (Andermahr & Pellicer-Ortin, 2013, p. 2)

For the purpose of instilling obedience and normalization of trauma, the Gileadean regime relies on peculiar narratives and practices that aim to divest individuals of any agency, achieved by devious methods as depicted in the early days of the rule when Aunt Lydia and her colleagues were arrested. They were stripped of all humanity, offered only false demeaning, even fatal options, a foresight of the new selves they would become and indicative of the normalization of trauma:

They were reducing us to animals—to penned-up animals—to our animal nature. They were rubbing our noses in that nature. We were to consider ourselves subhuman. To the degree that when new prisoners were brought in, there was an absence of empathy. How tedious is a tyranny in the throes of enactment. It's always the same plot. (Atwood, 2019, p. 143)

Signs of the girls' trauma that renders them vulnerable and insignificant as individuals are connected with the total control of their bodies, designated to serve the Gileadean power structures. In her budding discomfort with her position, Agnes Jemima reflects:

The adult female body was one big booby trap as far as I could tell. If there was a hole, something was bound to be shoved into

it and something else was bound to come out, and that went for any kind of hole: a hole in a wall, a hole in a mountain, a hole in the ground. There were so many things that could be done to it or go wrong with it, this adult female body, that I was left feeling I would be better off without it. I considered shrinking myself by not eating.... (Atwood, 2019, p. 83)

3. “These Bloody Fingerprints”:

The Aunts as Traumatized Oppressors

Against all the obstacles to free expression in Gilead, *The Testaments*, as its title foreshadows, nevertheless manages to explore various possibilities to depict a multiplicity of women’s trauma as well as survival strategies. Thus, on the one hand, there are voids, silences enforced by society on women’s voices, but, on the other hand, the text explores some of the multivocality and multidimensionality of women’s experiences of suffering and witnessing. As Vickroy (2014) states about literature dealing with trauma, “Although silence may accompany descriptions of the survivor’s experience, fiction provides multiple perspectives that allows readers to meditate on the variety of human responses in shock” and continues that “Fiction that depicts trauma incorporates varied responses and survival behaviours within the characterization of survivors” (p. 130). In *The Testaments*, this is enacted by the juxtaposition of three narrative voices. Agnes Jemima narrates from within Gilead, while Nicole narrates from without and thus presents a completely different view once she enters Gilead.

The most ambivalent voice, however, is Aunt Lydia’s who at the same time presents the most intrusive voice, one that directly addresses a reader with her testimony as both victim and perpetrator, oppressed and oppressor, as both an agent who causes women’s trauma and who is a traumatized victim herself. As she greets the readers at the opening of the novel, writing secretly in the “private sanctum within the library of Ardua Hall—one of the few libraries remaining after the enthusiastic book-burnings that have been going on across our land” (Atwood, 2019,

p. 4), Aunt Lydia suggests both the repressive context and the doubt surrounding the very acts of remembrance, storytelling and witnessing:

The corrupt and blood-smeared fingerprints of the past must be wiped away to create a clean space for the morally pure generation that is surely about to arrive. Such is the theory.

But among these bloody fingerprints are those made by ourselves, and these can't be wiped away so easily. Over the years I've buried a lot of bones; now I'm inclined to dig them up again—if only for your edification, my unknown reader. If you are reading, this manuscript at least will have survived. Though perhaps I'm fantasizing; perhaps I will never have a reader. (Atwood, 2019, pp. 4–5)

Entangled in ambivalences caused by her position as both traumatized victim and traumatizing perpetrator, she reflects on remembering her violent experiences, on revealing her “bloody fingerprints” by writing down her actions, for which she might not find a reader in the future.

The Aunts embody the women who are complicit in women's oppression in this system, who, however, at the same time gain a certain power, not only by maintaining a women-only space in Ardua Hall: “No man is allowed inside without the permission of the Aunts. It's a law. You can rest here until I come back.' I might be safe from men, I thought, but what about women?”. By offering Agnes Jemima (and other girls) a way out of forced marriage, Aunt Lydia grants her the power to become a perpetrator, too, since in this society “They [the Aunts] get their hands dirty” (Atwood, 2019, p. 239, 238). At Ardua Hall, the Aunts inflict yet more trauma on the girls since, as Aunt Lydia reminds, “We are not forgiving towards one another's lapses, here at Ardua Hall”, so, they also administer “Corrections” after which one girl kills herself (Atwood, 2019, p. 34, 293). Aunt Vidala very explicitly highlights Aunt Lydia's acts of violence towards other women in stating “You didn't used [sic] to mind a little blood”. When Agnes becomes a Supplicant, she knows that the Aunts are in a position to move from oppressed to oppressor: “Was my mind being hardened? Was I being prepared for the tasks I would later be performing

as an Aunt?” (Atwood, 2019, p. 314, 309). She realises that her power will consist of knowing the secrets⁸ of all classes of people in the society of Gilead: “All of the secrets I had learned, and doubtless many more, would be mine, to use as I saw fit. All of this power. All of this potential to judge the wicked in silence, and to punish them in ways they would not be able to anticipate. All of this vengeance”. With the continuation of this circle of violence and vengeance, the Aunts are clearly both oppressor and oppressed. One of Aunt Lydia’s flashbacks shows her being a traumatized perpetrator: “I had a flashback, not for the first time. In my brown sack-cloth robe I raised the gun, aimed, shot. A bullet, or no bullet. A bullet” (Atwood, 2019, p. 309, 391).

The recollection of her role in the shooting of victims, recent fellow-prisoners at the stadium following the arrest, demonstrates the irrepressible trauma of first witnessing the executions of others by others, then having nightmares about it with her own self as the perpetrator, only to live up to that role in her new, bizarre reality:

I am standing in the stadium, wearing the brown dressing-gown-like garment Standing in a line with me are several other women in the same penitential garb, and several men in black uniforms. Each of us has a rifle. We know that some of these rifles contain blanks, some not; but we will all be killers nonetheless, because it’s the thought that counts. . . .

Those of us with rifles raise them. We fire. Something enters my lungs. I can’t breathe. I choke, I fall.

I wake up in a cold sweat, heart pounding. They say that a nightmare can frighten you to death, that your heart can literally stop. Will this bad dream kill me, one of these nights?” (Atwood, 2019, pp. 169–170)

Being forced to kill others, even the closest friends and acquaintances, in order to be able to survive at all, does not leave Lydia and other

8 This strategy is also elucidated in a later statement, resembling a resigned conclusion: “It was how the Aunts got their power: by finding things out” (Atwood, 2019, p. 286).

women any choices but instills unceasing trauma that regularly recurs in flashbacks, particularly in nightmares.

Since trauma is an acute, intrusive and extremely painful involvement, it sets off, beside psychological after-effects, emotional aftershocks of the traumatic experience that condition how the oppressed/trauma sufferers relate to their surroundings. A crucial characteristic of trauma is the uncontrollable recurrence of events that are too upsetting either to be fully experienced by the survivors at the time those events occur, or to be integrated into their memory of the past. For Cathy Caruth (1995), "the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (p. 4). The novel illustrates how traumatic experiences cause profound distress and injury to individuals. Simultaneously, with the dialogic nature of the storytelling, it intimates that an ambivalent vision of the traumatic narration may have the power to revise the past by imparting the trauma survivors with the potential to regain their agency and undertake a radical and possibly transformative mediation into the past. An example is Aunt Lydia who recognizes her ambivalent self:

I've become swollen with power, true, but also nebulous with it—formless, shape-shifting. I am everywhere and nowhere: even in the minds of the Commanders I cast an unsettling shadow. How can I regain myself? How to shrink back to my normal size, the size of an ordinary woman?" (Atwood, 2019, p. 32)

4. "It Was Gruesome; It Was Terrifying"—Nicole as the Traumatized Escapée and Mediator between the Worlds

The testimony of the character named Daisy/Jade who turns out to be Baby Nicole deals first with her life growing up in Canada under the jittery care of Neil and Melanie as her parents, but she feels otherized by their control, albeit well-intentioned: "They were too careful around me, as if I was breakable. It was like I was a prize cat they were cat-sitting" (Atwood, 2019, p. 47). Her traumatic experience starts on her sixteenth birthday when Neil

and Melanie are killed in a car bomb, executed by Gileadean agents, and she finds out her true background and identity that reduces her to a number of reactions revealing her powerlessness, sorrow, and grief:

Keeping up my anger was difficult, though, because by that time they were dead. You can be angry at dead people, but you can never have a conversation about what they did; or you can only have one side of it. And I felt guilty as well as angry, because they'd been murdered, and I believed then that their murder was my fault. (Atwood, 2019, p. 39)

The sudden and tragic events catch up on her and she feels emotionally and psychologically dislocated as her life is no longer hers, but part of the Gileadean horror record. Melanie's friend and underground operative Ada discloses that Nicole was rescued out of Gilead as a baby by her mother, a Handmaid, while Neil and Melanie were acting as her biological parents. Her response to the news demonstrates traumatic aftereffects:

I felt a little dizzy. I walked behind her over the uneven paving; it felt spongy, as if my foot could go through it at any moment. The world was no longer solid and dependable, it was porous and deceptive. Anything could disappear. (Atwood, 2019, p. 126)

The shocking event of the car bomb and new circumstances turn Nicole into an unwilling resistance agent, who is smuggled into Gilead to help the revolutionary movement aimed to bring an end to the regime. As an obvious outsider to Gilead, the character of Nicole serves to emphasise the multiple contrasts to the girls/Wives in Gilead, since Nicole was raised outside of Gilead, and is a (relative) innocent to the Gileadean indoctrination. However, ironically, she has to make her way into the patriarchal terror and assume the role of the victim/oppressed, a homeless, lost teenager, to be saved by Gilead and converted to faith. When she arrives in Gilead, she sees the strategies of oppression, since she has not been indoctrinated as the girls were: she holds up a mirror to Gilead (for the reader), exemplified with her words: "Gilead was slippery, like walking on ice: I felt off balance all the time. . . . It

was gruesome; it was terrifying" (Atwood, 2019, pp. 321–322). Her knowledge of both worlds serves an important role of witnessing and mediating for the readers and although she has lived outside of Gilead, her whole life is affected by the regime, and she is likewise traumatized, first by a life in hiding from the agents of Gilead searching for her and then the violent death of her parents which causes another flight, and second by her experiences once she enters Gilead. Here, she for instance presents the horrifying staged executions ("Participation") in direct detail, since she lacks the indoctrination and instead only perceives and narrates the cruel violence of the scene:

It was a double execution: two men literally torn apart by a mob of frenzied women. There was screaming, there was kicking, there was biting, there was blood everywhere, on the Handmaids especially: they were covered in it. Some of them held up parts—clumps of hair, what looked like a finger—and then the others yelled and cheered. (Atwood, 2019, p. 322)

In this scene, traumatized women become perpetrators in a staged game of power that is based on continuous violence and trauma.

5. Witness Testimonies: Trauma and Writing

There is a way out of this seemingly never-ending circle of violence towards women, however, and this is due to one of the advantages that the group of the Aunts has: they are able to read and write which is forbidden for all other women (Atwood, 2019, p. 290). Hence, only being an Aunt creates the opportunity to read: "Reading was not for girls: only men were strong enough to deal with the force of it; and the Aunts, of course, because they weren't like us". The ability to read leads to questions, critical thinking and even resistance to the doctrines⁹—"Once a story you've regarded as true has turned false, you begin suspecting all

9 Instances of these processes include Becka's questioning the male God as resistance starts by learning to read (Atwood, 2019, p. 295, 297). It further testifies to the importance of the written word as a powerful tool against oppression, revealing also meta-textual reinforcement of the power of the testimonies: "Up until that time I had not seriously doubted the rightness and especially the truthfulness of Gilead's theology" (Atwood, 2019, p. 303).

stories” (Atwood, 2019, p. 156, 307)—and get to know the hidden secrets necessary for resistance and eventually to bring about the downfall of the system. The manipulative tactics of the Gileadean society as a whole and of Aunt Lydia is built around knowledge, such as that contained in the blue folder (Atwood, 2019, p. 305) that narrates the story of Paula, Agnes’ stepmother, another example of how victims become perpetrators and how the truth is hard to find out. The vital role of different voices and testimonies (also chronicled and safeguarded in folders) is highlighted repeatedly in the novel: “They all held evidence of various crimes” (Atwood, 2019, p. 307). In the society of Gilead, which is divested even of calendars, to be able to write and leave a record of one’s own life and of the system and its workings is a powerful tool to gain voice and agency. Surviving for Aunt Lydia signifies a double bind of victim and perpetrator, of conforming and resisting. With this ambivalence and wavering between guilt and trauma she addresses the readers:

My bottle of blue drawing ink, my fountain pen, my notebook pages with their margins trimmed to fit within their hiding place: through these I entrust my message to you, my reader. But what sort of message is it? Some days I see myself as the Recording Angel, collecting together all the sins of Gilead, including mine; on other days I shrug off this high moral tone. Am I not, au fond, merely a dealer in sordid gossip? I’ll never know your verdict on that, I fear. My larger fear: that all my efforts will prove futile, and Gilead will last for a thousand years. (Atwood, 2019, p. 277)

Her whole narrative exhibits her guilt, her fear, as well as her attempt at resistance. She speculates about a reader who will find her testaments as witness to the establishment of the system of Gilead and the fall of it, both of which she has contributed to: “Perhaps you’ll be a student of history [. . .] I picture you as a young woman, bright, ambitious” (Atwood, 2019, p. 403).¹⁰ Furthermore, she attempts to anticipate and also influence

10 The emphasis on the specific profile of a projected reader evokes Aunt Lydia recalling her own girlhood in a poor, rural environment in a family of “trailer-park dwellers” and her fate as “a girl and, worse, a smarty-pants girl. Nothing for it but to wallop those

the readers' reactions by her reflections:

You'll labour over this manuscript of mine, reading and rereading, picking nits as you go, developing the fascinating but also bored hatred biographers so often come to feel for their subjects. How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? you will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself would never have had to. [. . .] But now I must end our conversation. Goodbye, my reader. Try not to think too badly of me, or no more badly than I think of myself. (Atwood, 2019, pp. 403–404)

Questions of guilt and empathy are linked in this address to a potential reader. Aunt Lydia's continuing engagement of the readers in the novel from the opening to the end at times seem to be intercessions for her actions deriving from the trauma and struggle to write, witness and survive, but, according to critical opinion, "Atwood . . . also asks us to consider to what degree the lurking fears that grip her victim characters prevent them from bearing responsibility for others or themselves or from treating others fairly and compassionately" (Vickroy 2013, p. 257).

Aunt Lydia's testimony, both a traumatic re-inscription and subversive act, gives her as a witness and writer as well as the (imagined and real) readers some sway over history. But, at the same time, the act makes them responsible for the traumatic inheritance that they can never fully escape. The female characters who experience or witness traumatic narratives feel the interpellation as either the victims or the perpetrators of oppression and abuse. By narrating the gendered violations of the characters, including the legacies they are forced to accept (as in the case of Aunt Lydia), readers are offered an understanding of their own act of witnessing, involving affect and even collusion.

pretensions out of me, with fists or boots or whatever else was to hand" (Atwood, 2019, p. 112). Clearly, her early life was nothing but struggle for a better existence, one that was based on hard work, merit and determination, through law school all the way to becoming a judge. Ironically, because of her professional profile, she was arrested by the new power structures of Gilead, tortured into accepting to turn fellow-mastermind of the coup and to mastermind the new separate spheres' organization.

Related to a traumatic experience Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortin (2013) argue that one of the key aims of its “writing through” is “to articulate an unbearable psychic wound that the subject or group is not able to communicate or exteriorise, that is to say, what cannot be spoken may be at least represented and mediated through cultural practices” (p. 3).¹¹ Aunt Lydia’s self-reflexive writing, however, represents more than a “writing through” or an act of abreaction as Ganteau and Onega (2014) describe it in the following way:

the goal of Freud’s and Breuer’s psychotherapy was to enable the ideas produced by the repressed affects to reach consciousness, so that the patient could give adequate expression to the shocking event, either in deeds or words, since, as they argued: ‘language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be ‘abreacted’ almost as effectively’ (8). (p. 2)

Survivors’ narrative and testimonials as dialogic genres are also attempts at creating a new ethic of reading. As Ganteau and Onega (2014) emphasize the dialogic nature of “the art of trauma [. . .] This dialogism of the art of trauma suggests an affinity not only with the analysand-analyst relationship required by Freud and Breuer’s talking cure, but also with the I-you relationship of narrator-narratee in autobiographical and testimonial writings” (p. 3). Autobiography as such “has always been an essentially dialogic genre, as the narrator/character invariably addresses his or her life story to an explicit or implicit reader/witness” (Ganteau & Onega, 2014, p. 6). Aunt Lydia’s witnessing makes the readers witnesses, too. In this way, suffering can lead to survival in the act of writing and being witnessed.

In the metatextual epilogue “The Thirteenth Symposium”, in which academics discuss the findings from Gilead and attempt to interpret them

11 Kai Erikson expands the concept of individual trauma to include its defining role on collective or communal trauma in terms of a community not just composed of individual trauma sufferers, but a community that suffers transformation of its very nature due to the traumatic event(s); see his “Notes on Trauma and Community,” 1995, pp. 183–99.

at a later time (like the epilogue in *The Handmaid's Tale*¹²), it becomes clear how especially Aunt Lydia's double position in Gileadean Society contributed to its establishment and to its downfall: "The 'Lydia' personage is referenced in several debriefings of deep-cover Mayday agents as both ruthless and cunning" (Atwood, 2019, p. 410). One of the academics in this epilogue underscores the value of such testimonies in a society which deprives women of all rights: "I was very excited by it [the text of the witness testimonies], since first-hand narratives from Gilead are vanishingly rare—especially concerning the lives of girls and women. It is hard for those deprived of literacy to leave such records" (Atwood, 2019, p. 412). The epilogue also reveals the effects of Lydia's refusal (and, indeed, that of the two other main female characters) to remain the silenced trauma victims.

6. Concluding Remarks

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Testaments* confirms her oeuvre's continuing central concern, that of gender and politics, and raises the question of the potential of storytelling to represent trauma in written form by the connection of three linked stories that testify to the multivocality and multidimensionality of women's experiences of suffering and witnessing. Hence, in this novel, the female characters, categorized as Marthas, Aunts, Wives, and Handmaids, are subjected to multiple types of traumatic suffering in the dystopian world of Gilead's totalitarian and patriarchal rule where women's fates are doomed by oppression and objectification.

Framed by theoretical and critical conceptualization of trauma, particularly Laura Vickroy's work about survivor narratives and effects of trauma in fiction, this paper analyzed the intersection of gender and class as key to how these women's experiences are communicated differently by the victims and survivors and showed how this literary trauma narrative manages to relate suppressed and muted voices in innovative narrative ways. In *The Testaments*, the three female protagonists are also

12 Compare Wallraven, 2014.

narrators whose destinies, identities, and survival strategies are shaped by their respective traumatic experiences, which leads to a reconsideration of the rigid categorizations of oppressors and oppressed. Their experiences are related but also conflicting and ambiguous, endowing the novel's structure – in sections named “The Ardua Hall Holograph”, “Transcript of Witness Testimony 369A”, and “Transcript of Witness Testimony 369B” – with a multifaceted and layered insight into women's suffering and witnessing by juxtaposing three narrative voices. Thus, with shifts of perspectives, the character/narrator Agnes Jemima testifies from within Gilead and that of Nicole narrates from without. For example, Agnes Jemima admits she is having nightmares, but does not disclose the complete horror of her continuing suffering, exemplifying both the difficulty of emotional testimony and of the internalization of traumatic experiences. Conversely, the character/narrator of Aunt Lydia represents a once traumatized survivor, now responsible for Agnes' and other girls' induction into the social system of forced marriages and rape, where female trauma is trivialized and ridiculed. However, Lydia rises to the power system's top echelon as an act of survival following her own traumatization by the Gileadean regime and reveals the ambiguity of her voice as well as that of witnessing, remembrance, and storytelling.

All three narrators and their stories of witnessing are connected, as well as their suffering and their (narrative and non-narrative) survival strategies. Vickroy (2014) justly states that “The mechanisms of trauma, how it is caused and perpetuated, and the possibilities of healing often depend upon social interconnections, through act of witnessing or sympathy” (p. 137). Witnessing and sympathy extend far beyond the text to us readers living in a world governed by inequality, gendered violence, and oppression—a world for which both Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* serve as dire warnings for the future.

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You Have (No) Right to Remain Silent:
(Un)Heard Voices in the Selected Novels
by Margaret Atwood

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Abstract

Although she has openly denied to be ‘a feminist advocate’ in her impressive collection of fiction, Margaret Atwood keeps her avid interest in issues concerning the position and the role women happen to play in the prevailing (if not still dominant) patriarchal culture and society. Most of all, she tries to give her female characters not only the possibility to deal with their innermost traumas and anxieties, but, also, to express themselves both through a number of narrative strategies and other literary means: either by sharing their (un)heard views among themselves, or by presenting their case openly to those who try to keep them silent. It is the aim of the paper to analyse how some of such women in the selected novels by Atwood (*The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*) defy their alleged passivity and exercise the right to testify about themselves even if such acts can incriminate them before men that want to hold them submissive and subjugated. The paper will also try to compare the impact of Atwood’s books and their visual representation as films or TV series on raising the public awareness about the need to counter the violence and repression against women, who seem to be equally under duress in both really democratic and utopian dictatorship environments.

Keywords: countering violence over women, patriarchal oppression, regaining voice for self-empowerment

1. Introduction

It might sound odd that some of the most prominent, or, at least, well-known female novelists writing in English all over the world refuse to be labelled as “feminist” authors, despite their rather active support for millions of women whose voices had been effectively suppressed for quite a long time in the conservative and patriarchal environment they have come from. It is the case with a number of Postcolonial writers, such as Arundhati Roy, Monica Ali, Jamaica Kinkaid, Zadie Smith or Buchi Emecheta, who had once stated that she was a “feminist” with small “f”, thus referring to her underprivileged position of an African spouse and mother while having depicted the unhappy lives of heroines in her book from a different perspective than her European or American counterparts. A similar position is also held by diverse critics of Postcolonialism, where the names of Leela Gandhi, or Gayatri Spivak first come to mind. Nevertheless, many recent male novelists have also chosen on purpose to create rather specific female rebels that happen to defy the traditional role of submissive, passive and silenced creatures unable to express themselves freely. One could only remember some fictional female characters, such as Amina from Hanif Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia*, or the Brass Monkey/Jamila the Singer, Parvati and Padma from *Midnight’s Children* by Salman Rushdie, who decided to reject imposed conventions and break out free from the suffocating norms that reduced them to passive, obedient wives, mothers or daughters. Their transformation into unusual and different “Oriental” women is impressive, since they have become self-confident, fulfilled and independent human beings within the context of circumstances that eventually made them respond to their subjugated position in the only way possible—through refusing to remain forever locked in their subservient destiny. They simply had no right to remain silent, which is the privilege granted in proceedings in Anglo-American legal system, nowadays also applicable in other democratic countries. Once arrested by law enforcement officers, persons suspected of having committed a crime are read aloud their rights. Without

a physical presence of a lawyer, they can opt not to utter anything that will incriminate them when properly charged and brought to trial in the court of law. In a similar sense, a defendant is given the choice not to testify against himself/herself under the protection of the famous Fifth Amendment in the USA Constitution. Finally, the presumption of innocence until proven guilty is duly maintained, although there have been a lot of cases when the accused were wrongly convicted for the crimes they had actually not committed. Nevertheless, women in general have been considered “guilty” in many different cultures and traditions simply because of their gender, or false charges in some religions that it was them who had been found responsible for many evils and tribulations the humankind experienced through history. One can just refer to the “original sin” or trials of alleged witches or stoning the adulterous wives without giving them a chance even to speak for themselves.

In a foreword written in 1979 for the Virago edition of *The Edible Woman*, Atwood described somewhat defensively the work as protofeminist rather than feminist:

The Edible Woman appeared finally in 1969, four years after it was written and just in time to coincide with the rise of feminism in North America. Some immediately assumed that it was a product of the movement. I myself see the book as protofeminist rather than feminist: there was no women’s movement in sight when I was composing the book in 1965, and I’m not gifted with clairvoyance, though like many at the time I’d read Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir behind locked doors. (Atwood, 1979, p. 2)

Rather than keeping both her readership and academic criticism, especially diverse proponents of feminist theories, Atwood situates the origin of her first book in the pre-theorised discourse, at least in regard to the rise of the second-wave feminist movement in the Western world. It did start to gain in prominence towards the end of Sixties, when *The Edible Woman* was first published, but its authoress had not been properly aware of her closer connection with such activism. It is true, she refers to

The Feminine Mystique by Friedan (1963) and *The Second Sex* by de Beauvoir (1949) as distant influences, but she refuses to be taken as an instigator of Western feminism, despite the fact that most critics found this book as a perfect example for illustration of their standpoints about the degraded position of middle-class white women in the context of Civil Rights movement and accelerated rise of consumer capitalism throughout 1960s. That is why, although some insightful feminist and ecofeminist theories can be quite helpful in understanding and interpreting her early fiction, the same can be said about none the less important critical views, such as narratology, psychoanalytical and gender criticism, Marxist-oriented or postcolonial studies, or the variety of most recent post-post-modernist literary theories.

2. Body within the Mind: *The Edible Woman*

Atwood's novels are in a constant dialogue with diverse attempts to position her female characters within diverse theoretical frameworks, such as feminism, narratology and psychoanalytic thinking, to mention just a few most productive ones, although there have been attempts to analyse her books in other critical theories as well. Her protagonists are often traumatised, they display a number of features that reveal their fragile and divided selves, and this traumatising is quite visible in the novels' narratives and the manner of narration. Protagonists frequently tell their stories in fragments, in seemingly disconnected bits and pieces, and in a disruptive style, which engages the reader. The lack of outward coherence makes them to appear as faulty and unreliable narrators, and they, as characters, seem to be fully aware of such a situation that make often ponder and apologise for it. They try to do it verbally, but even more so through different literary devices Atwood skilfully uses in order to present them from diverse angles. Some of these devices have been clearly applied from the outset of her literary career. One of the striking examples is her treatment of food.

The motif of food is almost always present in Atwood's books: many pages in her novels provide ample examples of food and its variations,

both in regard to different ingredients used for its preparation, cooking and the food they eat are often portrayed, sometimes in detail, or when describing specific social situations when the food has been served, such as tea making, picnic, or dinner. Since Western civilisation has placed more emphasis on the physical look in the decades following the end of World War II, but, at the same time, promoted a variety of food products that can be purchased and consumed without elaborate preparation; many of her female characters have found themselves in a limbo. On the one hand, urban, educated and cultured people need to keep the appearance of a healthy and good-looking person, and, on the other, they cannot refrain from eating large quantities of meals they feel entitled to. This trend has been further emphasised by the aggressive marketing campaigns that, since mid-1950s, had become the integral part of newly emerging habits. It is by no accident that in Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) the protagonist, 26-year-old Marian McAlpin, works as an analyst for a Toronto marketing firm. She has a somewhat vague job at Seymour Surveys, a market research company, in which she is supposed to revise questionnaires putting them into normal language. As the story opens up and further develops, she gets engaged with her boyfriend, a practicing lawyer Peter Wollander, suddenly stops eating, ends the engagement with her fiancée, and starts eating again. Kathryn VanSpanckeren sees the novel as "an inverted Cinderella story in which the poor working girl flees from the wealthy prince charming; or an inverted Sleeping Beauty, who wakes up when the prince is at safe distance." (VanSpanckeren, 1987, p. 4) In other novels by the same authoress, some of her characters suffer from a physical hunger or lack of it, their eating or non-eating leads to a symbolic hunger that is painfully present in the relationships between the characters and their vision of others. Emma Parker argues that in Atwood's novels "eating is employed as a metaphor for power and is used as [...] means of examining the relationship between women and men. The powerful are characterized by [...] eating [...] the powerless by [...] non-eating" (Parker, 1995, p. 349). However, some critics noticed that from one's early infancy on, eating is socially conditioned, or, even more

so, gendered. Susie Orbach explains that baby girls and girls are often given much less holding and feeding than baby boys (Orbach, 1986, p. 46). Traditional social norms imposed on girls and women demand them to control wisely their eating. They have also been educated to observe other people's eating, but, yet again, girls' appetite and eating manners have been harshly criticised and commented on in a very different way than that of the boys by adults. Such attitudes within the extended family/community or society at large see an important aspect of socialisation for girls is to, eventually, scrutinise carefully how to deal with interrelated aspects of food and eating. Once they reach early adolescence, when their sexuality and physical appearance are likely to become means of attraction for young boys, and, later on, to men in general, they are expected to pay a special attention to a weight watching and healthy eating. In turn, they need to exercise their roles as good dieters and expert in weight loss. Concurrently, they are constantly exposed to various cosmetics products that can help them to stay attractive and appealing until the moment they find a suitable heterosexual partner and marry him.

The focal theme that the novel *The Edible Woman* tries to explore in depth and vividly presents to its readers in a specific narrative manner, in fact, revolves around the possibilities that seem to have existed for ambitious and educated young women in the early 1960s Toronto in Canada. The initial question addresses a number of problems and restrictions that urban educated women faced in this period, and, in the course of the narrative, it gradually discloses given female roles and their complex identities. Nevertheless, it is no easy task for Atwood, since most, if not all, of her heroine's options remain quite limited, both at the beginning and at the end of the novel: "[A] career going nowhere [...] marriage as an exit from it" (Atwood, 1979, p. 2). The authoress is concerned with the dominant set of motifs that illustrate issues Canadian women have experienced at the time both on the metaphorical and concrete level, as they happen to be unfolded one after the other: awareness of one's own sexuality and prospects for finding the best match for a marriage, commitment to such a symbolic searching/hunting for future and its devastating influence on

women's identity, as well as motherhood and pregnancy, coupled with ever-present examples of blatant consumerism, best expressed in regard to food and the problems it causes.

The Edible Woman analyses the novel's portrayal of Marian's apparent problems with eating, but her condition is connected with her mental issues as well. The motif of food is introduced by her situation in life, for she is about to enter into the stage of marrying a man she believes to be in love with—Peter. Her engagement and the future changes in her life intimidate her so much that they cause traumatic symptoms that can be called, in medical terms, *anorexia nervosa*. Although her body responds with physical disgust of food, which emerges slowly yet persistently in the central part of the book, in terms of symbolic hunger, her vision of the world is divided into two opposite poles, where there are aggressive hunters and passive victims. Hunters are not necessarily only men—her female boss, Mrs. Bogue, is an epitome of domineering older matron who expects her lady employees to resign from work once they fulfil their primary goal and marry a man who will provide for them. This is a typical situation for most of Atwood's female protagonists. All of them are English-speaking white Canadians, middle-class and heterosexual, and in subordinate positions in the contemporary urban society in early 1960s. Capitalism and consumerism influence the life of her characters in negative ways, since, from the start, there are less choices and possibilities for women than for men. Women are also exposed to a number of threatening issues that range from a physical insecurity when entering into relationships with men, as well as psychological anxieties that prevent them to express themselves either verbally or non-verbally. These anxieties seem to intensify Marian's loss of identity and individuality. It has been visibly indicated by the silencing of her inner voice, because, instead of speaking by herself and for herself, she begins to quote Peter as a flawless authority to herself. She sees herself as a diminished object, as "small and oval, mirrored in his eyes" (Atwood, 1979, p. 83). It seems she accepts to be the mirror reflection of the ideal that Peter imagines her to be, thus giving up even the idea of being a person in her own right. Marian often

realizes that she is in habit of talking in a “soft flannelly” feminine voice that she can hardly recognize to be her own. When Peter exercises his control over her, she keeps her voice low, and thinks she’d better “watch how she spoke” to him (Atwood, 1979, p. 64). As Peter becomes more and more comfortable in his dominant role, she is more likely to accept socially acceptable feminine role of a passive sexual object. She even admits that “Life isn’t run by principles but by adjustments” (Atwood, 1979, p. 104) since she has already confided to her fiancé: “I’d rather leave the big decisions up to you” (Atwood, 1979, p. 92). As if she, like so many other women in similar situations, does not question her willingly assumed inferior status.

That is why such women revert to diverse strategies that should help them overcome the inability to speak in their own right and for themselves. In Marian’s case, she usually rushes away from social gatherings she has come to attend, and cannot explain afterwards why she reacted in such an unacceptable way to other persons and the occasion itself. When Peter arrives afterwards and angrily demands for an explanation for her sudden disappearance from his party, Marian surprises him with her behaviour. She is extremely polite, and seemingly self-asserting, confident in herself; but, despite trying to appear as involved and active, she is still distant and insecure. Somewhere deep in her mind, she also doubts her behaviour:

Marian had a swift vision of her own monumental silliness, of how infantile and undignified she would seem in the eyes of any rational observer. What kind of game did she think she was playing? But that wasn’t the point, she told herself nervously [...] Though if Peter found her silly she would believe it, she would accept his version of herself, he would laugh and they would sit down and have a quiet cup of tea. (Atwood, 1979, p. 270)

It might appear that the relationship has been restored to mutual satisfaction. Peter thinks his dominant male position as a fiancé is secured, which will be followed by usual preparations for marriage and “happy

ending”. However, Marian cannot make up her mind about marrying Peter, and enters into a rather strange love affair with Duncan. Duncan can be described as Peter’s opposite. The only common feature the two of them seem to share is their age—both are twenty-six. However, Duncan is still dependent, not only economically, since he is still a student, but also on other people, mainly on his two roommates. In contrast to Peter, Duncan’s lack of masculinity is stressed by his thin physique and emotional and intellectual immaturity. He leaves the impression of a great child and not of an adult, and, somehow, he enjoys the role. He is neither particularly attractive nor ambitious to pursue a permanent job, or career-oriented as Peter. One might even think that he has been presented on purpose as not only Peter’s antagonist, but also as the total contrast to an aspiring young professional. Duncan and Marian meet again while doing their washing at a laundromat facility, and she is both fascinated and somewhat afraid of his eccentric indulgence of fantasies and relaxed attitude to life. And yet, Marian feels somehow at ease in his company, despite his constant pushing her to “be real”. She has not, of course, forgotten that she had met him first earlier in the novel while doing the marketing survey about beer, when he presented himself as a rather unconventional person, blatantly lying to her and admitting immediately his dishonesty while providing answers to her questionnaire. It is, perhaps, because of his behaviour and attitude that Marian has no fears or reservations to speak with him about things she could never have dreamed of being so frank with Peter. Their second meeting ends, after a brief conversation, with a kiss, after which they stare at one another and leave. It is also an appropriate moment for Marian to reflect once more on her engagement to Peter and remembers her childhood dolls to which she used to leave food overnight, hoping it would be eaten the next morning.

This flood of memories with which the first part of the book appropriately ends has been characterised by the role of Marian as a retrospective narrator. She recalls the period of a few days, from Tuesday to Sunday, which is the Labour Day; that has served as both the introductory chapter in the book in terms of setting the scene, time and major and

minor characters, as well as a possible development and complication. Nevertheless, an important detail must be duly observed. Literally all the persons, events and memories have been filtered through Marian's own perspective and interpretation. The narrative framework becomes more relevant if one takes into account that *The Edible Woman* consists of three parts. In the first part, Marian gets engaged and tries to convince herself that it has been the right thing to do. In her role of the primary and not yet (un)reliable narrator, towards the end of the first part, she uses the present tense, but there is no return to the present tense after that. Although the second part tells of Marian's life as an engaged bride-to-be, whereas, in the third and shortest part, Marian becomes single again; it is difficult to assess if the parts two and three are just products of the narrator's imagination, confusion, unreliable memories or even nightmares. She tries desperately to bring together bits and pieces from her life and to organise them in a coherent "story", but it has become obvious that what she remembers is not identical to what, in fact, she had experienced. Her life has been coloured by a deep traumatic experience that tends to make her narration more complex as she wants to express it and share with whoever is ready to bear with her. She is constantly overwhelmed by panicky feelings and thoughts about marriage, pregnancy and children. At the same time, she is caught in between two persons she feels particularly close to. And these two female characters also epitomize two opposite sets of issues Marian is deeply concerned about. On the one hand, she can choose to, as her friend Clara does, accept the role of being just a traditional housewife, which Marian fears the most; but she is neither ready to become a single mother as her room-mate Ainsley Tewce decides to do by tricking Peter's friend Len into making her pregnant. Both options are repulsive to Marian, but it seems that becoming a rebel like Ainsley is unlikely the path she will take in the end. On both a concrete and symbolic level, she is in the centre of a square from where she desperately observes two interwoven sets of points: Peter vs. Duncan and Clara vs. Ainsley, but she is clearly unable to make up her mind and express herself openly to either one of them. That is why the first part of the book appears to be like

a physical cage or a mental prison from where there is no escape. This fact intensifies Marian's traumas that keep locked within her own fears and affects her role as the first-person narrator, but also as the main character not only in this section of the novel, but in the whole story—as a narrator and as a protagonist.

There is an obvious shift that occurs in the longest section of the novel, in the part two. It is narrated in third person. After the first part, in which, as the protagonist, she has been the active agent of narrating, Marian suddenly becomes “she”. She offers a kind of authorial comment on this change in the short third and last part of the book, which is only five pages long and much shorter than the other two parts: “Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than [Duncan's]” (Atwood, 1979, p. 278). Although she claims to have always been the narrator, it appears that, in the second part, during the engagement, she was unable to speak of herself in the first person. Since the engagement is definitely the main cause of her traumatic state, she must have felt as being somehow out of herself—being constantly observed as an object (the third person) rather than as subject (the first person). It is the change in narrative voice that Atwood has used in many of her novels, such as *Life Before Man* (1979) or *Bodily Harm* (1981). In *Life Before Man*, which retains the tripartite structure like *The Edible Woman*, all three of the novel's main characters Nate, Elizabeth and Lesje influence the narration, with each chapter presenting events from a particular character's perspective. In *Bodily Harm*, a Canadian ‘lifestyles’ journalist Rennie Wilford, after having had a breast cancer surgery, travels on a three-week journey to the fictional Caribbean Island to carry out research for an article, only to find herself amidst an ongoing revolution. Although she tries not to meddle into politics, Rennie is drawn into a romance with the American Paul, the mastermind of the uprising but also operating a drug-business, and the third of her previous negative relationships with Jake and Daniel, ends up in a survival struggle. The motif of entering into unhappy relationships of female protagonists with men requires a kind of “alternating narration”. It is used to describe the feel-

ing of divided self a woman has of herself as a subject and an object. In the theory of narratology, as Mieke Bal explains, alternation in narration can point to a “broken sense of self” (Bal, 1997, p. 83). The same critical approach sees Marian as the literary focalisor, or a person who presents a limited and its own, specific perspective of events, characters or the narrative thread, in general; and whose inner feelings and thoughts remain internal and presented in the third person, therefore, changing or altering the perspective through which the narration has been presented. It is considered to be a powerful tool in feminist attitudes towards the description of suppression of the heroine’s feelings and blocking her ability to speak up. It can definitely be seen in Marian’s decision to cancel the wedding, since the engagement has changed both the narration and perspective. Although her first-person narration is filled with irony, distancing and is, at times, humorous, intimate and confessional, it also raises the question of the narrator’s reliability. One cannot simply follow the piece of advice once expressed by D. H. Lawrence “never to trust the [teller but] the tale” (as cited in Ratcliffe, 2018) since the story is told from Marian’s recollections and self-assertion. Such characters in fiction can be easily caught ‘red-handed’, and Duncan’s confession that his story cannot be taken for granted should be extended to Marian as well. In *The Edible Woman*, it is Marian who notes that she has been narrating all the time, thus, her own credibility is ironically undermined, and she cannot be trusted even when she thinks she can find her voice.

However, the actual solution emerges when, in the course of the second chapter “Surfacing: Frozen Hunger,” she faces another major problem: preparing and eating food. The novel’s motif of food is connected with the issue of power, and, at first, she has no problems with food, since it appears to be the one area she is in control of. Apparently, she has become aware that she cannot influence a progress in her professional career, which seems impossible for a young woman of her time. The only way out of it is marriage, which means that she cannot work anymore, at least full time and seriously, but she cannot have both. Having felt trapped and, to a certain extent, hunted by the issues she cannot cope with, she experi-

ences yet another blow. Her feelings towards food begin with numbness, but gradually change, since her repressed memories start to surface and become more and more painful. Her body begins to act in the way similar to her mind. As she feels powerless to resolve mentally her inability to deal effectively with her career and love life, her non-eating disorder has become “a physical expression of her powerlessness and, at the same time, a protest against that powerlessness” (Parker, 1995, p. 350). It is not something she actually wants, but the body sends clear signals that can be taken as her own, highly subversive voice (Sceats, 2000, p. 95). It also reflects her reaction towards the Western culture, which insisted that the female thin body stands for purity, intelligence and self-control. Nevertheless, the feminists have equalised such an outdated male and patriarchal attitude with women’s subordinate position in society, their otherness, and a lack of power or control over their own bodies.

Since Marian has entered the world of masculine competition, she uses a food image to portray the company’s structure: “The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust and our department, they gooey layer in the middle” (Atwood, 1979, p. 19). The crusts are the men, executives and psychologists above, and below are the men with machines that handle the information. The image suggests that Marian’s relationship with food is time consuming and even obsessive: everything is seen through hunger and food. The chapter towards the end of the book discusses images of cake, and food remains as a set of intertwined symbols of deeper, even unconscious and threatening issues in Marian’s life. Yet again, Atwood creates a number of confusing opposites that aim to present the important motif of cake from different points of observation. In an extended sense, baking the cake refers to Marian as the future bride, since the apparent symbolism of the white colour and appropriate decorations is a reminder of her assumed virginity and the colour of her dress, traditionally associated with purity and chastity, as well a lack of experience and maturity. However, Marian’s cake seems to defy this conventional picture of a young bride. Its colour is pink, which must be connected to the image of Marian

the night before, since, at Peter's party, she chose to wear a red dress and elaborate hairdo. She has done it on purpose to defy the acceptable image of a pious and submissive woman. Her appearance is an act of rebellion, since it implies seduction and sin, a kind of *femme fatale* who is deliberately frivolous, as if to prove that she felt like "a callgirl" (Atwood, 1979, p. 210) and not like a virgin. By appearing to be overtly submissive and consumable/edible by males, Marian's cake seems to transcend the language she is unable to utter, since she does not want to do speaking herself, or to be lied to; but to present her 'voice' clearly different from expected rituals and associated symbolism. In this way, she can send the strong message to those who expect her to behave like a dutiful, sugary-like doll and not a real person, the woman whose destiny as a bride has been determined beforehand. She will, eventually, be consumed and eaten, thus, both literally and symbolically surrendering to her inevitable, "normal" future. It needs to be remembered that Marian has constantly questioned herself if she is normal or not. In her view, being "normal" is a precondition for a girl like herself in order to be married with Peter. When she tries to achieve this quality of being "normal", she cannot eat anymore, and attempts to restore her previous state by finding the pleasure in baking the cake for Peter. She offers it to him as a symbol of herself, but Peter is unable to consume the cake in the shape of woman. On the other hand, the novel ends with Duncan's hunger, eating, desire and speech.

Duncan sees no potential hidden meanings in Marian's feeding him. He neither hesitates to comment the shape of the cake nor to understand Marian's previous traumatic ordeal. He simply says: "It was delicious" (Atwood, 1979, p. 281), which happens to be the last words of the novel. Although it may suggest that Marian is, finally, able to display more dialogic behaviour and to have closer contacts with others again, since she cleans up her messy apartment, eats again and appears to be a normal, happy consumer she has appeared to be at the outset of the book; it is a different situation in the end because her words and convictions are undermined by masculine other, Duncan. When Duncan comes in, she has to interrupt cleaning—the refrigerator remains stubbornly frozen with

thick layers of ice—although she is positive of being able to see through the windows again. In her own words, ‘soot and rainstreaks’ she is unable to reach are blurring her vision, and her position in terms of expressing herself seems to be more stable. At the end of first part of the novel, being mainly a dialogue between Marian and Duncan, it is Marian who speaks to the reader and to herself, but not to others, whereas the last part of the book begins with her assertion: “So here I am.” Due to its shortness, and ambivalence, it suggests that Marian must reinvent herself to see the situation more clearly and to move on with her life. Atwood seems to imply that it is not enough, but prefers not to be conclusive and to leave open diverse options yet to be discovered.

3. Surfacing: “Why talk when you are a word”

These options have been further explored in Atwood’s second novel *Surfacing* (1972), in which a nameless protagonist returns to her small childhood home island in the Quebec bushes in Northern Canada because her father is reported missing. Again, the authoress presents a young urban woman in her mid-twenties, who works as an illustrator of children’s books. Although it may sound strange that the heroine’s name has been omitted on purpose, it is a reflection on her own background. In the small rural town she has come from, women have had no names—everyone is called “Madame”. Names for them seem not to be important at all because, as subservient individuals, they are not prominent enough even to be called by their first names. They simply do not matter, because they are taken to be only objects that belong to men in the male-dominated society. They exist primarily to satisfy the physical, domestic and sexual needs of their spouses or male companions, and they seem not to mind, or protest against these subordinated, imposed roles.

The female narrator travels to her familiar, native place with her new boyfriend Joe and a married couple, Anna and David, but unlike her, her companions are totally incompetent in these natural, if not even, wild surroundings. The decision to take her friends along with her is based on

a practical reason. Since there is no public transportation in the remote area, she depends upon David's car. At the same time, being with them also prevents her from thinking too much about her missing father and talking to her new friends is a useful distraction. On the other hand, there is an ongoing tension from the outset of their journey between male and female companions. The two men cannot admit their flaws, even when it is quite obvious, they do not know how to react under the circumstances in the strange, unfamiliar and non-urban surroundings. They both pretend that they can do everything right, although their skills and competences fail to resolve any practical test they have been exposed to. This creates an ongoing conflict between men and women, a kind of a power game of who is dominant and who is in a subservient role that forms an outline structure, or the external framework of the narrative. From time to time, it is being reiterated during the search for the missing father, but the protagonist often remains confused and numb, unable to voice her feelings to the others. She is clearly preoccupied with something more important. She speaks repeatedly of feelings of division and doubleness, which indicates her divided inner self. Many critics have thoroughly examined this division, and some of them noticed it as a trait that has not been limited only to the mind and body of the protagonist, but it can also be extended to the overall conditions in the country she lives in, Canada, and its compliant position to the mighty neighbour, United States. This parallel theme will be further explored during the first part of the book, when a number of poignant references to Americans and their alleged superiority to Canadians clearly situate the novel in the post 1960s period. In a way, the inability of the Canadians to express their views and feelings about their own inferior position to Americans in a clear and strong voice can be compared to the particular position of the narrator herself. In terms of postcolonial criticism, Canada, and especially its female citizens, has found itself at that time in the position of the Oriental "Other"—being perceived as marginal, irrational, passive, undisciplined, sensual, and without the ability to speak for itself—and, above all, as subaltern to the male, American, enlightened, rational, entrepreneurial, disciplined, su-

perior and eloquent people. Atwood carefully interweaves this political and geographical aspect of her narrative within the deeper psychological insights into the features of her female protagonist. She uses diverse storytelling methods to present a deeply perturbed young woman as the focus of her narrative, and pays a particular attention in what way the narrative unfolds, where the use of narratorial voice seems to be crucial.

Since the novel is written in first-person, it immediately opens up a series of particular interesting specifics and narrative limitations. One must assume, at least in the first part of the book, that the voice of this unnamed female narrator is reliable, when one takes into account her description of factual events (past and present), or the scenery of the island that unfolds with many small details necessary to create a verisimilitude of realistic landscape. There are at least two narratives presented concurrently in this novel. The first narrative is developed chronologically and revolves around the search for clues about the female nameless narrator's missing father and the subsequent details of her response to the search in progress. The second narrative, which focuses on the narrator's increasing intuition, where various ghosts from the past, including memories of an abortion, conversations with diverse persons and associative visions of her dead parents; serve as necessary immersion into her perplexed psyche, and it is, definitely, not developed chronologically. Rather, these diversions beneath her own surface seem to appear as having been triggered in flashbacks or recollections. That is why time, in the second narrative, imitates the natural cycles of day and night, or emerges as a reminder of her own bodily cycle. The appearance of the moon is both symbolic and concrete, since she realizes time is right for her to conceive a child. It brings back again the motif of aborted, dead foetus, the most painful memories she had tried to erase from her past: "I have to be more careful about my memories", she says, "I have to be sure they're my own. [...] I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi" (Atwood, 1972, p. 84).

"Her own version of life" indicates that she cannot be trusted as a narrator, which can be deduced from many little details that show she is a deeply troubled person who seems to have lost the touch with the reality of

life. It also explains somewhat why the first narration unfolds chronologically, whereas the second one happens to be loosely cyclical. It has also been clearly reflected in the language she uses in either part of the book. Whereas she tries very hard to keep a “normal” appearance to David, Anna and Joe in the first part, having followed her own childhood memories with a scientist father and caring housewife mother, when she was speaking English near a French-speaking village in Quebec; diverse opposite details gradually reveal that both she and her story cannot be taken at face value. Atwood carefully uses this initial situation to open up hidden layers of her narrator’s distressed mind. In addition to the aspect of time, Atwood introduces yet another equally important aspect of space—both the physical and mental territory the narrator passes through.

As the novel’s title implies, from the very beginning, the journey she undertakes should be examined from a number of intertwined perspectives. They primarily revolve around the metaphor of space, as well as the search for the missing parent within the outer space, but also the parallel search within her inner, troubled psyche. It is the split that occurs between her head and body—between the logical, objective point of view represented by the male principle (father), and feelings represented by the female principle (mother). In order to overcome this disintegration, and to regain her sanity and to become again the whole, completed self, she needs to achieve her inner balance. However, the process of healing involves, to some degree, destruction and her alienation from reality. Her thoughts and emotions vacillate between the logical, objective side represented by the nostalgic example of her father, although there are other more threatening examples of rational, scientific behaviour. She slowly realises that the rational language of her father’s life manual is ‘worthless knowledge’ and not the proper answer for her troubles. Instead, ‘the pulp magazines with their cautionary tales, maidens who give in and get punished’ would have been more suitable for her survival (Atwood, 1972, p. 33). These, at least, would have prepared her for the real nature of the struggle for dominance (Ewell, 1981, p. 195). They appear on several occasions in the form of intrusive Americans, who stand for a civilization

which is based on cold, hard logic of consumerist mechanical, artificial and patriarchal structures.

When the repeated efforts to find some evidence of her father's possible whereabouts fail, and the four of them are supposed to leave the island, she decides to stay and hides until the others leave. Once left alone, she wanders around the place in order to have contact with her dead parents, with herself, her memories and her surroundings. She feeds herself from what she finds in open nature, and what had been available as nourishment to our primordial human predecessors. Having abandoned processed food of the contemporary urban civilization, she appears to become more and more reminiscent of the character from Ted Hughes' poem "Woodwo", who constantly asks: "What am I? Who am I?" while being drawn to a pond with weeds, barks of woods and frogs. This creature is fascinated with roots and wants to achieve a sort of union with its owner/maker. The narrator in *Surfacing* is equally confused by so many things that she finds in Nature, wants to understand them and live by its rules. Unable to decipher this new, strange and frightening world around her, she, finally, performs a sort of shamanist ritual similar to the "Native American spirit quest" and encounters the spirits of her dead parents. The protagonist's parents are lost to her and she feels that she is lost from them. Her mother has died years ago and, during the final sections of the novel, the daughter finds out that also her father has died, too. The novel can be seen as her effort to reconnect with herself and her parents. During "the ritual", she manages to transcend her perception of and relationship with her parents. After the purification she has to obey certain rules: everything which can be associated with human civilization is forbidden and she tries to enter as much as possible into a kind of animal state, hoping to communicate as a pure natural creature with her dead parents. They do, in fact, appear to her—her mother feeding the birds, her father in the shape of a wolf-like creature, but they do not see the protagonist. The communication has been broken, for her deceased parents have now become part of nature. Accepting their definite loss means the final growing-up, and she

must seek exclusively for answers and wholeness in herself, and neither in the outside environment nor in other human beings.

Nevertheless, on the last page of the book, she thinks of going back to town and living with Joe and conceiving the child, but she does not act. Finally, coming out of her trance, facing her matted hair in the mirror, returning to so-called civilization, opening a can of beans to nourish her starved body, she decides to take her transformed self, and her new knowledge, back to the city. And she marks her new selfhood with a message that must remain the common denominator of all profoundly feminist works: “This above all, to refuse to be a victim [...] give up the belief that I am powerless” (Atwood, 1972, p. 140). As Patrick D. Murphy (1991) observes:

The transformation involves a clearly dialogical process in which the revelations that the woman initially has about the environmental destruction of her childhood Canadian locale and gradually translated into revelations about her oppression as a woman, and the intrinsic and indissoluble connections between these two unbalanced states of being. (p. 155)

Dale Bauer in her study of *Feminist Dialogics* (1988) astutely commented how the interaction of many voices forms the social community of the novel and how the functioning of these voices makes clear statements about the position and fate of women in these specific societies:

Because all language is “inherited” and because it is all socially and ideologically charged, the conflict of voices in a novel can reveal power structures and potential resistances to those structures. The dialogue begins when one speaker attempts to insert his or her utterance into a social situation; that is, inserts a voice, of whatever character, into the conversation that marks social relations. And, the listeners’ role is to respond with their own perspective on the world. (p. 6)

These views have been based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of heteroglossia, or multiple voices that reflect diverse dialogic situations in

which women often misinterpret and misunderstand their own ability to exercise social power over other persons. In her interesting study, Bauer herself had entered into polemics with other theorists such as Rene Girard, Wolfgang Iser, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, as well as with some other American feminists, having tried to argue that in social interactions each voice in the novel was a thematisation of an ideological perspective and, as such, competed for domination. The conspiracy of voices to exclude the female reflected the social reality as well, which had already been presented by Atwood in her diverse attempts to convey patriarchal and conservative messages of the mid-1960s Canadian culture in her first novel.

In many ways, this nameless protagonist from *Surfacing* can be compared to Marian in *The Edible Woman*. It is obvious that something terrible has happened to this woman, and this trauma threatens her sanity and safety. She finds other people menacing, and behaves sometimes recklessly, especially when she dives dangerously in the lake. On the other hand, she can be portrayed as a victim but also as a as a trickster, or “escape artist”, who weaves her stories that imprisoned her in the past she desperately wants to escape from. That is why she distorts or alters some important events from her life. In her narration, she claims that her brother has drowned, although it is not true. At first, she declared that he did drown, then that he almost drowned, and, finally, that this incident did not occur at all. She also asserts that she has been married and has had a child, but that she left the child in the care of her husband after their divorce. The actual truth is she has had an affair with a married man and had an abortion, in part pressured by her lover, who was her teacher.

The narration gradually reveals that the protagonist’s division is caused by conflicts in her adult life (and to a lesser extent, in her childhood) and especially by her abortion, which she sees as mainly involuntary. She has cut off her feelings concerning and during the abortion. This trauma has caused her to keep the secret deep in herself and, in turn, it prevents her from expressing herself verbally. Instead, her certain practical behaviour and the manic way of narrating and processing infor-

mation suggests anxiety, detachment and alienation in her character, which colours the quality of her stories. Neither she nor her stories can be trusted. The narrator's obvious unreliability adds to the distortion of her vision. She appears to be depressed, confused and in search for 'redemption' which always seems to be 'elsewhere' and not near or within her (Atwood, 1972, p. 126).

It is in this sense that, like other Atwood's novels, *Surfacing* also needs to be interpreted within the feminist tradition. It includes a female narrator, it deals with the motif of abortion, and presents the critique of heterosexual relationships, and it enters in discussions on issues such as makeup and the pill. Feminist criticism must also be credited for paying a proper attention to several creative women writers who had been interested in writing of women and madness. The book itself has often been referred to as one of the most important feminist novels of the 1970s. Within such a pretext, some critics argue that it should be interpreted as a rewriting and retelling of the 'madwoman in the attic' novel. The mad woman in the attic has been seen as a metaphor of the situation of women (writers) in patriarchy, and of the conflicts that women have with the image of the angel of the house and their will to express themselves and to live as they wish (Gilbert and Gubar 1984). Not only Gilbert and Gubar, but also Elaine Showalter's gynocritical perspective, and many other feminists and/or Marxist-oriented critics pointed out to the need to analyse in depth an 'incomprehensible' minor character Bertha Mason, the very 'madwoman in the attic' in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. It was Jean Rhys's sequel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) that had offered a radically different interpretation of Bertha Mason, having focused on her 'original' self in the character of Antoinette Cosway. However, unlike in *Jane Eyre*, 'madness' in *Surfacing* is closely connected to the protagonist, since she is not an outsider.

It is particularly visible in her conflicted language and its complex qualities characterised by its rigidity. Her communication is often problematic, and it is deeply rooted in patriarchal basis and occasional bouts of rage. To the nameless protagonist, the ordinary human communica-

tion—words, talking and writing—seem often frightening and dangerous and only make understanding between people more difficult or even impossible. That is why she decides to hide from her companions who are leaving the island. Unable to understand herself and share her feelings and thoughts with other people, she undertakes a dangerous dive in her mind, just as she has done while searching for her father in the deep waters of the lake. As her attempt to explore the depths of the lake provided no conclusive answers, so her trip to the underworld of her mind enters a rather slippery mental and verbal territory.

In order to (re)gain her sanity, Atwood's protagonist decides to abandon language, which seems to represent the trappings of civilization and to roam through the uncharted territories of her fragmented mind. The decision has been made after she discovers that her father left a map with mysterious drawings. The map seems to be better means to discover his potential whereabouts from traditional clues mainly asking for a logical and rational research. It opens up possibilities for the protagonist to retake her own mind by deciphering the signs and bring them together in an honest effort to come to understanding both of herself and her parents. However, there is a dilemma Atwood herself had had to solve: how to have her protagonist express herself in a credible and comprehensive manner when she speaks only from within her mind, but such incoherent thoughts ought to be transposed yet in a novel that is written in language. Instead of using standardised prose and punctuation, the novelist retreats into lines of poetry, and, afterwards, they go back to prose. It is particularly visible in chapter 25, just after the daughter has seen a vision of her father, when the novel's lines shorten and become end-stopped, like the ragged-right-edged lines of poetry, before returning to the long lines of prose. At the same time, this method imitates the feeling of alienation from other human beings and the deliberate lack of 'normal' communication. The complementary pictorial legacy of her mother can help her somewhat to find the meaningful solutions for her self-divisions. Nevertheless, some other artefacts of the protagonist's former civilized life—such as scrapbooks, albums, the photos, and, finally, her clothes—need to

be get rid of. She must immerse herself in ‘the other language’ that can effectively translate the message in the drawings. As an extension of visual perception, this new mode of inner expression is the language of ritual and gesture. She abandons more and more her previous linguistic modes. The syntax of her statement deteriorates. She gradually omits prepositions, then pronouns, nouns become verbs for a longer moment (Atwood, 1972, p. 133), and names fade as the narrator perceives shapes in terms of their forms and purposes. Periods or full stops, as the mark of finiteness and separation, must disappear. Instead of such punctuation signs, commas and spaces are used as a device by Atwood to establish contiguity of words and being. The language that has divided her troubled self is replaced with a silenced vision. It has been ultimately disturbed, even annihilated, and not the language but a pure perception enables her to see clearly. “The animals have no need for speech, why talk when you are a word” (Atwood, 1972, p. 133).

It seems to be end of a long process the narrator has gone through. She vividly remembers how she had to keep silent when she “discovered people could say words that would go in my ears meaning nothing” (Atwood, 1972, p. 14). Later on, she also learned that there can be sound without sense, and is confused to discover that “some words were dirty and the rest were clean” (Atwood, 1972, p. 52). It has isolated her more and more from her immediate surroundings, which illustrates well how Western, technologically-oriented society, dominated mostly by men, and in the case of *Surfacing*, by Americans as superior to local Canadians; cherishes rational, logical analysis as the ultimate standard of ‘truth.’ Instead, she needs to recall diverse fragments from her real life and to present them together as a substitute and altered “personal” history—“flattening it, scrapbook, collage, pasting over the wrong parts. A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; ... a paper house” (Atwood, 1972, p. 169). In fact, lies and distortions that the nameless narrator constantly applies when presenting her past to the others, reflect fragmented reality within whose self-imposed boundaries she manages to function. Atwood emphasises this reduction into orderly segments of reality through the character of David and the

film he wants to make during the journey. It is called *Random Samples*, where the basic elements of film—a series of frames that stand for “moving pictures”—represent not only the diminished and limited view of outer reality, but also reveal her fragmented self, or the otherness that is non self. As Barbara Ewell (1981) lucidly explains:

The invalidation of one’s experience by an inadequate language is intolerable like a vacuum that must be filled. Unable to fit the language to her experience, the narrator simply alters her experience to fit the language fit by her society. The very rift between sound and sense which she intuitively distrusted now comes to serve her: she can invent a new version of her experience, allowing the language to redefine her past since it won’t express it. (p. 190)

The new language is overtly pictorial and not verbal. Its visual elements happen to be simultaneous and contextual, whereas the linguistic representations based on logical conclusions are mostly serial, due to their intrinsic and independent significance. The narrator explains: “On a map or in an aerial photograph, the water pattern (of the lake) radiates like a spider, but in a boat you can see only a small part of it, the part you’re in” (Atwood, 1972, p. 36). The language of reason cannot describe fully, let alone explain, the complex relationships that make up the web of existence. Being an artist, the narrator feels more inclined to pictorial language and her natural inclination towards the integrity of visual understanding. It partly derives from her own profession as a book designer and it displays the growing influence of mass media in early 1970s. It is a small irony that her real antagonist, David, is a teacher of communication at a night school. He has done a variety of jobs before, including being a seminarian and a Bible salesman. When he gave up these professions, he turned to other secular modes of persuasion: politics, and, finally, teaching. However, he is a radio announcer, which often stands for indifferent and meaningless chatter. His incessant jokes are shallow; his remarks have often been borrowed from commercials, whereas his commentaries about politics have been made in the manner of cartoon characters. Da-

vid blatantly uses language as a means of manipulation and persuasion in order to achieve his sexual conquests. He often uses the ready-made cliché “it works”, which Anna accepts if somewhat reluctantly. David’s manifest disregard for his wife is continuous and displays fully his sexist ideology that is evident in his disrespectful commentaries, such as “ ‘It turns me on when she bends over,’ [...] ‘She’s got a neat ass. I’m really into the whole ass thing. Joe, don’t you think she’s got a neat ass?’ ” (Atwood, 1972, p. 114) This humiliating and denigrating behaviour is best illustrated in one of the most shocking passages of the entire novel, when David asks Anna to take off her clothes in order to record a video. Ashamed, she refuses to be seen, let alone recorded on video completely naked. However, she is captured nude on the sand while crying. It must be understood as the logical consequence of her lenient and submissive attitude towards David, or men in general, and their sexist and male-chauvinist mentality. The protagonist’s position in relation to Anna and David is that of a mere spectator, not interfering in their problems, for she herself is also helpless when confronted with male superiority. It has been mentioned on a number of occasions, when she remembers how she has been hurt by her ex-husband when she tried to become an artist: “For a while I was going to be a real artist; he thought that was cute but misguided, he said I should study something I’d be able to use because there have never been any important woman artists” (Atwood, 1972, p. 63).

The protagonist’s basic flaw is her inability to face her reality, coupled with passivity and a loss of feelings. The first step towards regaining her feelings and coping with the past is her decision to go back home, that is to say, to go back to her origins. And the lake which surrounds her home island plays an important role. A lake implies profundity, darkness, as well, as mysterious and hidden life. Her decision to immerse herself in it at the end of Part 1 can be taken as the willing choice to immerse herself into her personal past, her own psyche, in order to discover herself from anew. It is a paradoxical process—she goes under the water in order to come back to the surface, which is directly connected to the title of the book—*Surfacing*. It is not meaningless either: the unnamed protagonist, a

castaway in the sea of patriarchal society and in her own sea of fractured memories and experiences, goes through a process of self-discovery when investigating the disappearance of her father. This inner journey is metaphorically represented by the natural environment where most of the story takes place and, in particular, by water. On the other hand, it is deeply embedded in a very particular social context that has been in a dire need for major changes.

That is why the story could be interpreted as a message towards equality: women need men to fully ensure their survival as human species, but civilized society is too patriarchal a system for them to develop themselves in equal conditions as men. While most of the characters in the book are fit within archetypes—the dominant cynical male, the abused submissive woman, the ruthless American imperialist—to construct the fiction, it is no less true that it is precisely through those roles that Atwood's work becomes relevant from a (eco)feminist point of view. To this approach one must add a whole series of relevant features, such as the richness of the narrator's reflections on her own personal life, her presentation of her family relationships, the unreliable nature of her narration, her process of self-discovery, and her contribution to her own victimization or the symbolic language used. All these characteristics have turned Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* into a contemporary classic, in which feminism undoubtedly occupies a very significant position (Arrabal, 2019, p. 100). As Christine Gomez (1994) writes:

At the thematic level, Atwood's novels examine themes related to the politics of gender, such as enforced alienation of women under patriarchy, the delimiting definition of women as a function, the patriarchal attempt to annihilate the selfhood of women, the gradual carving out of female space by women through various strategies and women's quest for identity, self-definition and autonomy. Structurally, Atwood is an innovator who experiments with various narrative forms in her attempt to adequately express the feminist themes handled by her. Not only at the thematic and structural levels, but also in the organization of women characters, Atwood's novels are based on the politics of gender. (p. 74)

Two years after the publication of *Surfacing*, in 1981, Atwood wrote the screenplay for the film version, but, eventually, it was not used. Instead, an American writer Bernard Gordon, who had been blacklisted for decades due to his alleged leftist political sympathies, was hired by a Canadian producer and film director Beryl Fox to write the actual script. It should be noted that Atwood has written versions of screenplays of her other novels, too (e.g. *Lady Oracle*, *Cat's Eye*), but the projects have not been completed. Although the director Claude Jutra and the actors tried to retain the specific approach the authoress had applied in the novel, it proved to be “unfilmable”. It was a modest Canadian production and less known or available than the 1990 Hollywood version of *The Handmaid's Tale*, directed by the famous German filmmaker Volker Schlöndorff. The screenplay was written by Harold Pinter, who was eventually so exhausted from the strenuous work with the original director Carel Reisz, and clearly displeased with the final product. He even allowed Atwood and many others to make substantial changes in the script, as well in the final film version; but the novel gained the world fame with the 2017 TV series that ran four seasons. The film version is much less complex and comprehensive than the novel, since its radical and fierce feminist standpoints have been dissolved to the usual sugary coated and diluted Hollywood way in order to appeal to the popular taste. Several writers (see Willmott, 1995; Cooper, 1995; Kirtz, 1996; Stein, 1999) discussed and analysed the film and pointed out the obvious differences between the novel and film. In addition, Steven Gale (2003) presented the attitude of the original screenwriter Harold Pinter to the painful two and a half years long process of preparing the script that, in the end, became the ‘hotchpotch’ of so many different views he could no longer handle these divergences (pp. 217–221).

4. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985): A One-Woman Interior Monologue

According to Natasha Richardson, who played the lead role of Kate/Offred, alongside Faye Dunaway (who played Serena Joy), Robert Du-

vall (The Commander), Aidan Quinn (Nick), and Elizabeth McGovern (Moirra), Pinter changed his mind to use the technique of voice-over narration in order to convey the feelings and thoughts of a woman who needs to share them with the film audience, especially in her most intimate passages he is both unable and forbidden to express. Richardson played the roles in several films where this technique proved to be quite useful, and based his opinion (although expressed 19 years later after the production) on the simple fact: "After all, it's her story." However, Pinter used this device effectively in a number of his earlier screenplays (i.e. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, *The Remains of the Day*, *The Trial*, etc.), but was not fond to apply it in this film. However, he invented Kate's escape to Canada and the reappearance of the child and Nick, as well as, at the very end of the film version from 1990, with her soft voice-over passage explaining that she was safe with the rebels in the mountains and awaiting the birth of her baby. It was almost he provided a narrative framework for the sequel *The Testaments* that Atwood would publish in 2019, 34 years after its celebrated prequel.

However, the film that had been rejected by so many screenwriters, actors and actresses as well as Hollywood producers, since it was labelled as a "film for women and about women" and, therefore, not likely to score a commercial success; was not well received even by sympathetic critics, let alone the film viewers. Partly, it had to do with its grim dystopian overtones and undertones, but also because of numerous elements of misogyny and masochism that clearly tried to upset, if not even to deconstruct, comfortable, traditional-looking, museum-quality suburban universe of the USA towards the end of 20th century. On the other hand, it was rather difficult to transpose a one-woman interior monologue into an exciting and thrilling film, when, essentially, as the novel's title, states it is a "tale". Not a fairy tale for sure, but a dark and disturbing narrative about an alternative future that can be classified as dystopia, a negative utopia, or unsettling science fiction. The problem with the tale/story and its narrator is exactly the complex scope of reference, for she needs to provide a lot of information about a strictly religious society called Gilead, established after a revolution

in Maine, USA. As it has been so often referred to in the book, the birth rates have collapsed and fertile women are valuable for the sole purpose of providing future obedient and devoted members of the state, and its extreme patriarchal structures, rules and habits. However, there is an extreme and violent sexual difference, alongside with complicated power relationships between people in this totalitarian state, and, especially, in regard to numerous obstacles for a normal communication between its stratified members: Handmaids, Commanders, Commanders' Wives, Econowives, Marthas, and Guardians. Since the nameless thirty-three-year-old protagonist (again!), and also the female narrator, belongs to the lower ranks of handmaids, whose only purpose in such a society devoid of children is to play the role of a forced surrogate mother; once she becomes pregnant and gives birth, she will give the child to the married couple in whose home she abides and leave the place. Having proclaimed all second marriages and common law marriages illegal, the oppressive religious regime has a large number of women at its disposal to be used as handmaids. The novel starts when Offred (named after her owner, referred to as a Commander's given name Fred, therefore, literally "of Fred", or belonging to Fred)—a handmaid—has been five weeks in her third position, her third house. This house is her last possibility to succeed in her given duty and justification to live: getting pregnant by her Commander. Being concerned about her bitter predicament and well aware that she will be simply discarded and replaced by the new fertile woman, the narrator starts secretly to record her impressions about her downgraded position, while, at the same time, presenting the first-hand testimony about her daily activities and her memories from her past: her recollections of her mother, husband and daughter, whose fates are unknown to her. Before the religious revolution changed her life, she had lived with her husband Luke and their five-year-old daughter in Boston. Their attempt to escape to Canada has failed, and she implies that the daughter is given to some family with status in Gilead, and that her husband is probably dead. Torn between her longing for the family and the recollections she still has about her former life, she blends her past memories with the present events and situations.

Her biggest worry is how to survive regular ceremonial sex routine with her Commander, while his wife is present, since her future, despite its traumatic and unpleasurable experience, depends on it. On the other hand, she does not want to remain mute or silenced. There is a kind of stubborn desire in her to leave the trace of her existence through her detailed confessions on the audio-tapes, since she is not allowed either to read or write due to her status of handmaid. Offred mentions early on whilst describing the 'Faith' cushion: "I can spend minutes, tens of minutes, running my eyes over the print: FAITH. It's the only thing they've given me to read. If I were caught doing it, would it count?" (Atwood, 1985, p. 57) The picture signs above shops also help to create the impression that women are not allowed to be educated. The alleged simplicity they are expected to follow reveals their subordinate and subservient position. Nevertheless, Offred has not forgotten these basic skills, yet her recordings are quite particular. When analysing Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Lynne Pearce (1992) astutely observes that the narrator's way of address is "intimate" and "ambiguous", and that the narrator "tells her story to a nameless 'ally' who can be seen both as a fictional character in the text and also as the reader" (p. 186). This way of involving the reader as an ally or, even, accomplice, is present in Atwood's other works, mostly when the story is told by a first-person narrator (i.e., *The Blind Assassin*). This "you" Offred uses can refer to both an intratextual and extratextual reader, which will become obvious at the very end of the novel, where "Historical Notes" have been provided instead of an epilogue.

The novel has three main narrative lines: first, the present day in Gilead; second, Offred's past before the religious revolution; and third, the time after the revolution, when she is violently separated from her family and put into an education centre for women with fertile ovaries, or in The Rachel and Leah Centre, or the Red Centre, as the women themselves call the place because of its dominant colour. It is there that the ominous handmaid educator/controller Aunt Lydia tells the captured women that there is "freedom to and freedom from" (Atwood, 1985, p. 34), and in Gilead women have "freedom from" instead of the earlier "freedom

to”. It is the clear sign that they will be deprived of so many individual rights and liberties they have been accustomed to under the protection of the now defunct Constitution of the USA. They are denied the freedom of expression, both verbal and written, the freedom of movement and gathering, numerous bodily and mental activities, and, most importantly, the freedom of choice. It is the condition reminiscent of ancient slavery under the pretext of protection from bad habits or influences women in Gilead seem to be entitled to. Since she is made into “a worthy vessel” (Atwood, 1985, p. 75) for pregnancy, Offred is not allowed to cook herself. If she does not finish her portions of carefully selected diet, claimed to be nutritionally balanced and healthy despite its meagre quantity and quality; it will be reported to the superiors and she might be punished. Coffee, alcohol and cigarettes are forbidden for the handmaids because of their position as possible mothers. Offred yearns for cigarettes, which are a symbol of pleasure and desire. At the same time, the motif of food that has already been discussed in *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* is connected to her status. Offred is denied not only to prepare her food in the kitchen and to, eventually, meet other women in the household, but is made to eat alone in her room. Having been excluded from the immediate social contact, she yearns for talk and “gossip” (Atwood, 1985, p. 21), and, ultimately, for friendship and company. The only possibility to come as close as she could to it is during her daily walk to the store for the purpose of buying the daily ration of food for the household in a company of another handmaid. It is the perfect opportunity for Atwood to describe the daily routine of these wretched women, but, also, to supply additional pieces of information on the overall situation in Gilead by Ofglen with whom Offred exchanges in a rather low voice whatever news they could know and share. In addition, when speaking to other passers-by, they use ready-made language formulas that are both archaic and reminiscent of Biblical phrases, but also serve as the effective way to prevent them to enter into any meaningful communication with other people. Such a practice is deemed inappropriate and potentially dangerous. The rationale is found in Aunt Lydia’s explanation that in Gilead ‘righteous’ women are

“protected” from certain types of sexual harassment, such as the verbal or physical violence, or the influence of pornography. It is a very useful device that Atwood applies, since the further development in the novel will offer so many contrasting examples that the stark reality in Gilead is quite the contrary. That is why the narration is structured in an episodic manner, gradually revealing bits and pieces and deferring the complete information by the narrator, since she undergoes the process of learning herself what, in fact, is going on, and, consequently, recording it. In this way, her voice will be preserved and heard by those in the future interested to (re)construct the facts about this horrible dystopian project. It seems to be the main purpose of Offred’s testimony, however subjective and biased it might appear to professional academics two hundred years later. The nameless female protagonist or “Offred” literally “offered” her personal rendering of people, certain characters, places and events that form both the inner and outer frameworks of her narrative.

The Handmaid’s Tale consists of fifteen parts. Their names or titles are repetitive, prosaic and declaratory, such as “Night”, “Shopping”, and “Nap”. The narration is character-bound and the protagonist is a retrospective narrator. In terms of narratology, she is also in the role of the focalisor and the focalisation is internal. In the first chapter, the focalisor encompasses all the women in the women’s training centre, The Red Centre, and the pronoun used in narration is a collective “we.” After this the pronoun becomes singular, but the plural is used once in a while, showing the narrator’s alliance with the other handmaids. This “we” is indicative that the narrator is trying to capture a fate of a group of all subjected women, and not just herself. She is depicting a society and a large section or a distinct subordinate group within that same society. This “we” is a clever means to address the implied reader, too. It invites especially female readers to read the story, and suggests openly that the narrative is a depiction of what could happen to anybody who is ready to become involved in it. Offred’s personal traumatic and violent situation is visible in her narrative. The alternations in the narrative are quick as if to reflect her particular response to transcending multiple lines of time and concurrent narrative

layers. In one of her several addresses to her reader, Offred admits: “I’m sorry there is so much pain in this story. I’m sorry it’s in fragments, like a body caught in crossfire or pulled apart by force. But there is nothing I can do to change it” (Atwood, 1985, p. 279). Similar to the majority of all Atwood’s first-person narrators, Offred is well aware of her deficiencies as a teller of HER story. They arise from her lack of proper information, since she does not know what has happened to Luke or her daughter. In order to put her mind at ease, she can only imagine and invent their respective fates, hoping that her wishes for their well-being might turn out to be true. She has been tempted to alter the truth from time to time, for the truth, under such strenuous conditions, could be rather hurtful and painful. As much as she wishes to reach the happy ending of her “tale, she knows that she must correct certain passages that happen to be wrongly presented. That is why she keeps repeating: “This is a reconstruction.” (Atwood, 1985, p. 150), thus leaving the room for doubt about her own memory and the ability to include her falsely intoned wishful thinking instead of hard, objective facts.

I would like to believe this is a story I’m telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.

If it’s a story I’m telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off.

It isn’t a story I’m telling.

It’s also a story I’m telling, in my head, as I go along. [...] You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else. Even when there is no one.

A story is like a letter. Dear You, I’ll say. Just you, without a name. Attaching a name attaches you to the world of fact, which is riskier, more hazardous: who knows what the changes are out there, of survival, yours? (...) You can mean thousands.

I'm not in any immediate danger, I'll say to you.

I'll pretend you can hear me.

But it's no good, because I know you can't. (Atwood, 1985, pp. 46-47)

It is obvious that Offred's emotions are conflicting and problematic, since she knows quite well that what she has been doing is illegal and can result in a severe punishment. The overall situation colours additionally her narration, but even more so her relationship with five main female and three male characters. They include her own mother, two influential women in Gilead Aunt Lydia and the Commander's wife Serena Joy, as well as two handmaids Ofglen and Moira. However, Aunt Lydia and Ofglen must be considered as being of lesser importance in the larger context of Offred's wrestling with retelling both her past and present. Her mother was a radical feminist, who by choice became a single mother at the age of thirty-seven. All her life her mother promoted the values against traditional heterosexual lifestyle that her daughter eventually embraced; she fiercely fought against pornography and took part in public magazine burnings. She saw genders as polarised and at war, and insisted on separate women's culture, and was adamant that her feminist battles have not been properly appreciated by her daughter's generation, which simply discarded them as trivial and appropriated the benefits the earlier generation had fought for as granted. Having found herself in a kind of society her mother advocated, at least to some extent, Offred cannot resist but to quarrel in her mind with her mother: "You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant, but it exists" (Atwood, 1985, p. 137). The similar can be said about Serena Joy, who used to be an influential religious preacher and a hymn singer, who demanded publicly on a religious television channel that women should stay at home as obedient housewives. If, in the period before Gilead was established, Offred's mother promoted female separatism and public activism, Serena Joy opted for passivism and submission to domestic duties. Although she enjoys the enormous privileges and respect as the Commander's wife, since she has been a part of the religious uprising that created Gilead; once her loud

calls for change and secret political plans to overturn democratic order have become true, she speaks no more. In the traditional democracy she has been allowed to have a strong public voice and was not sanctioned when she wanted women to stay at home. However, when it, eventually, happened, it included her as well. She is confined to stay at home, which she does not like at all, and feels trapped:

She doesn't make any speeches any more. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (Atwood, 1985, p. 52)

The same applies for her newly acquired social status. When she met Offred for the first time, Serena Joy indignantly commented: "As for my husband [...] he's just that. My husband. [...] It's one of the things we fought for" (Atwood, 1985, p. 26). It seems that she is aware that without a baby a handmaid can provide for her she is also to be soon degraded from her current elevated status and join the long line of female victims in Gilead. Nevertheless, she is actively involved in the monstrous ritual, the Ceremony night, during which the Commander will have intercourse with their handmaid while his wife is present. It is duly preceded by a prayer which the entire household (the driver Nick and two Marthas) attends. Despite the obvious humiliation to her own sexuality, it seems that Serena Joy attends the ceremony with a kind of monstrous and sadistic pleasure. It is interesting to note that Offred is aware of Serena's superior role and thinks of herself as a mere object or artificial product in such a situation: "My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born" (Atwood, 1985, p. 76). It is a damning comment on the barren nature of Serena Joy and all the other respected female members of Gilead totalitarian hierarchy—their project will necessarily come to the bitter end, since it cannot ensure natural but violent and forced procreation.

On the opposite pole of this delicate social pendulum there is Offred's relationship with her friend Moira. Moira is strong, independent,

and lesbian, and the protagonist finds her behaviour and actions embodying resistance to the oppressive religious regime admirable, but Moira's rebellion is also frightening for Offred as the former compliant heterosexual married woman. Being lesbian clearly suggests that Moira rejects traditional male-female sexual interactions, the only kind that Gilead values and approves. She also stands as an alternative to the meek subservience and acceptance of one's fate that other females uneasily accept. Moira's radical ideas and opinions as a single feminist woman can be compared to those of the protagonist's mother. After all, she manages to escape from the confines of the Red Centre, and becomes a legend, a symbol for freedom, and hope for the degraded handmaids. It is indicative that her actual manner of escape included taking off her clothes and putting on the uniform of an Aunt, thus rejecting in the symbolic way the imposed identity in Gilead. Sadly, when Offred meets her former best friend from college days, Moira has been recaptured by the secret police, the Eyes, severely tortured, and is forced working as a prostitute at Jezebel's. Her liberal, independent and active feminist spirit has been finally crushed down by the totalitarian state and once rebellious and free-spirited Moira seems to become resigned to her inevitable downgraded fate. Moira's story serves as an appropriate connecting device for Offred's relationship with the Commander. She has learned that her tattoo in the ankle, her handmaid code, is "a Braille [the Commander] can read, a cattlebrand. It means ownership" (Atwood, 1985, p. 266).

The Commander is the one who has tattooed and marked her as his property. As her 'rightful' owner, he can do whatever he wants with her; nevertheless, he still needs to obey certain rules and follow unwritten customs of behaviour. Although his main function is to make her pregnant and, therefore, fulfil such a role, he enters into a dangerous romantic affair with Offred. He invites her to secret nightly meetings during which they talk and play Scrabble. Since handmaids are denied the pleasure of reading and exchanging words freely with the others, Offred gladly grabs the possibility to play with words in his room, which she finds "kinky in the extreme" (Atwood, 1985, p. 163). She compares it with the

real hunger for letters and writing, which suddenly opens up to her as a blessing. She even sees the Commander's right to read as a satisfaction of precious bodily functions. He has both the power and the wealth to eat a juicy steak "behind a restaurant window, not minding the eyes watching him from hungry darkness" (Atwood, 1985, p. 99). The metaphor of food not only as the basic subsistence need but also as a normal human pleasure is reinforced with the wordplay she had felt as her previous own self. She remembers some of the appealing words from those days: *café au lait*, *brioche*, *absinthe*, *shrimps* (Atwood, 1985, p. 164). When playing the *Scrabble*, Offred senses again the taste of liberty and the freedom of choice (Sceats 2000, pp. 112–113). To Offred, letters and words are delicious edibles, since the counters of the game are peppermint candies, and letter "c" tastes like lime. Having rediscovered such pleasures in herself, she begins to feel more powerful and want to know more about things again. The Commander graciously allows her to read the old glossy and pornographic magazines, which she interprets as the sheer signs of her newly acquired power over the letters, words and texts: "The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of words it contains. Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say (...) I envy the Commander his pen" (Atwood, 1985, p. 196). It is not just an obvious feminist allusion to Freudian concept of penis envy, since the pen means the phallic power over the others, but the individual lonely pleasure of writing as well (Bousson, 1993, p. 148). That is why she replaces the act of writing with the process of tape recording in the context of speaking again to her extratextual and intratextual readers. It brings her to the slippery territory of her love affair with Nick, the Commander's chauffeur, who provides the missing link to her missing husband Luke and their daughter. It seems that Offred begins to enjoy her sexual encounters with Nick, although she is not altogether certain if her sexual pleasures with him are genuine, since she has experienced feelings of both embarrassment and shame during her forced sexual intercourses with the Commander:

His mouth is on me, his hands, I can't wait and he's moving, already, love, it's been so long, I'm alive in my skin, again, arms

around him, falling and water softly everywhere, never-ending. (...) I made that up. It didn't happen that way. Here is what happened. (...) It didn't happen that way either. I'm not sure how it happened; not exactly. All I can hope for is a reconstruction: the way love feels is always only approximate. (...) I would like to be ignorant. Then I would not know how ignorant I was. (Atwood, 1985, pp. 274–275)

Since she keeps providing different versions to these memories, Offred's narrative often appear confused, troublesome and unlikely. Her eventual readers cannot always discern to whom she is addressing her story: is it to her daughter, or to her husband Luke, or to her friend Moira, or to the "we" in the first chapter, the handmaids. Her narration, despite its problematic and unreliable quality, establishes both herself and her addressee as allies in the process of regaining her true suppressed voice, identity and the possibility to lead her own life again: "I tell, therefore you are" (Atwood, 1985, p. 279). However, the climactic nature of her story is carefully interrupted and concealed in mysterious circumstances when the black van with two men (apparently from the secret police) came to take her away due to her "violations of state secrets." There is a hint from her lover Nick that, in fact, they would rescue her. Doubting if this is going to be her new beginning or the end, Offred admits she has no way of knowing for certain. She resigns herself to potentially similar fate as Moira's by uttering the final words: "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (Atwood, 1985, p. 284). Although it seems as an ominous prediction and her disappearance into oblivion, the last part of the book, eventually, transcends the darkness and shed more light on the overall story, but in a rather altered tone.

The Handmaid's Tale ends with an appendix or coda, in the form of an epilogue called "Historical Notes on The Handmaid's Tale," or a transcript of a University Conference, "the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies." It takes place 200 years later, at the International Historical Association Convention, organised by the University of Denay, Nunavit, on June

25, 2195. The very name of this invented academic institution, which implies a pun on “Deny none of it”, has been proposed on purpose. Nunavit, in turn, may also suggest Nunivak, a fogbound island off Alaska in the Bering Sea, but it can also stand for many other extratextual references, as if Atwood wanted to deconstruct thoroughly even the illusion of such a definitive explanation to her intentions. It is only obvious that this section is much lighter from the sinister atmosphere of the previous 46 chapters, and it can be understood as a comic relief, on one hand, but also as the postmodernist playing with issues of authenticity, political correctness, and diverse methods of finding and interpreting alleged historical and fictional data.

The main part of the epilogue consists of Professor James Darcy Pieixoto’s lecture “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*.” The lecture gives overall information of Gilead, and somewhat surprises the readers: the professor from Cambridge University, England, claims that instead of the novel presented as a fictional narrative, readers have been led to believe; it is, really, a reconstruction of thirty recorded cassette tapes of speech, having been found by accident, and subsequently edited and named by him and his colleague professor Wade. Therefore, it may be concluded that *The Handmaid’s Tale* can be seen as a novel of letters: not written letters, but spoken letters. The story of the actual recordings of tapes is from the late 1980s or the early 1990s, but it is treated as historical evidence from the past under the different circumstances from the imagined future. In the light of the epilogue itself, one can see that there is another external narrator, who has brought the handmaid’s narrative to the attention of the academic gathering in a distant future, and reveals himself at the end.

The novel’s ending somewhat changes the interpretation of the protagonist as the narrator in charge of her story. Although throughout the main body of the book the handmaid was the narrator of her own story, there is also another narrator who, in the epilogue, changes from the internal to the external narrator, and who has transposed her story into a scholarly, objective text. Since it has been duly included the epilogue, it

provides a balance to Offred's personal, subjective testimony and creates a narrative polyphony. On the other hand, it also succeeds to present previously neglected "low" genres of memoir and diary as legitimate literary works of oppressed women, but in an abrupt shift from sinister finale of Offred's destiny. It is a clear ironic twist and reversal of the readers' expectations. Instead of reaching some kind of conclusion to an intimate confessional autobiography, to which readers can identify with and connect with her as invited confidential listeners of her private thoughts, Atwood, in a rather postmodernist fashion, violates once more the protagonist of her book. It takes a man, again, this time in the person of Professor Pieixoto, who tells in a public, polemic, and argumentative academic manner that he and his colleague have arranged the narrative in the order they find logical, since there is no knowledge of the chronological sequence of the tapes. At first, such an attitude conforms to the framework of similar events (despite, again, the highly ironical dystopian whereabouts and the future timeframe), but the narrator, despite his witty and authoritative voice and manners, is obviously so masculine in his coldness, distance and irony. Being so sceptic and dismissive about his findings in terms of the handmaid as the narrator of her own story, to which he now superimposes HIS story, thus violating and negating HER story; one can only realize that, even after the demise of Gilead, the society remains equally misogynist. If it is not sympathetic to the sufferings of women in the past, why should one expect it to be any better in the futuristic present? It appears that the story moves from " 'herstory' to 'history' " (Howells, 1996, p. 146), since professor Pieixoto is not sensitive to or interested in feminist issues or women's rights, which are overtly present in Offred's (her)story (Cooke, 2004, p. 129). In a way, he silences again her testimony and makes it (un)heard or even mute, if considered from her own viewpoints. Nevertheless, even such a strongly gendered change to the end of the novel provides enough information about the early stage of Gilead, and positions it within a specific historical and social context. It also leaves the possibility that Offred, after all, did survive after she had taped her testimony, although Atwood, in the manner of her preferred open feminist

endings, invites her current and future readers to become active, implicated participants and ask themselves about the number of shocking issues her novel had raised. The epilogue and the whole book end with the words “Are there any questions?” (Atwood, 1985, p. 324) Although there is no evidence what the audience might have commented after the lecture, it was quite ironic. So many questions could be and should be posed, but there was no one to answer them. Instead, one could agree with Barbara Tolan (2007):

The Handmaid’s Tale emphasises the power of the story, which for Offred lies in its ability to posit a listener, “even when there is no one.” In its self-conscious examination of the function of narrative and the role of narrative in creating the historical record, Offred’s tale is a metafictional examination of metahistory, and the history in question is, to a significant extent, that of the feminist movement. (p. 144)

Nevertheless, in the manner of continuing fictional events that, in the meantime, have proved to be more real than reality itself, Atwood wrote the sequel, which was published in 2019 as *The Testaments*. It tried to offer some explanation that have been critically left unanswered to several generations of readers hungry to understand to the everlasting dilemma: “What happened next?”

5. *The Testaments*: “In my end is my beginning.”

The Testaments begins 15 years after the alleged end of the narrative of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in which the Handmaid Offred had escaped Gilead with her baby, Nicole. In comparison to the previous book, *The Testaments* is composed in 27 parts, further subdivided into 71 sections, but it consists of written not oral records, which have been found at “Passamaquoddy, formerly Bangor”, in north-eastern part of North America, or, more precise, in the region of Dawnland between the US state of Maine and the province of New Brunswick in Canada. The

place has not been chosen at random—besides the reference to a Native American/ First Nations people, whose rightful claim to the land has been duly acknowledged at the end of the novel in the name of the place; it had used to be the main hub of the Underground Railroad, which had seen a number of refugees fleeing from the horrific regime of Gilead. Since most of them were female, this secret network has been referred to in the novel as “Female Underground”, which indicates both the clandestine nature of this noble endeavour and the position of women under extreme duress. It can be interpreted as a variation of *Surfacing*, because the characters have had to go into hiding to save themselves from imminent persecution and torture. Naturally, they had to keep low profile and talk as little as possible, which excludes the possibility to create audio recordings. At the same time, it has been claimed that the original collection of tapes attributed to Offred and describing the events in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, have also been found there in a footlocker in house behind the false door. In terms of the historical research, it can be taken as the rich resource for further investigation in order to present the more comprehensive study about the period. Since the majority of such records had been destroyed on purpose in their digital form by the Gilead secret police, this finding can help illuminate certain issues with a desired level of accuracy and objectivity. However, the written documents uncovered there are quite particular. As a matter of fact, they are a combination of three different manuscripts the purpose of which is to present testimonies of active resistance to the oppressive regime of the Republic of Gilead. Eventually, the imminent fall of the authoritarian patriarchy complements the previous events, which have been so poignantly described by Offred on her salvaged tapes. The stories, or, originally, spoken accounts of two teenage half-sisters, Agnes and Daisy, have been presented in the form of two separate first-person written transcripts of witness testimonies.

The first testimony is a kind of memoir by the main enforcer of repressive rules in Gilead, the notorious Aunt Lydia, who gives her account in a manuscript known as “The Ardua Hall *Holograph*.” It was discovered inside

a nineteenth-century edition of Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (*A Defence of One's Own Life*, 1864), where this famous Roman Catholic convert explained his reasons for leaving the official Anglican Church as his response to attacks by his former denomination members. In respective sections of *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia's testimony is labelled as 'holograph' or handwritten document by its author(ess), manuscript or autograph. Ardua Hall is the epitome of control over the women in Gilead, the headquarters and living space of Aunts located on the former University Compound. It is one of the few remaining libraries in Gilead that have locked-up Bibles, a Forbidden World Literature section and, most importantly Bloodlines Genealogical Archives, where classified information about the true biological parents in Gilead are kept. Aunt Lydia keeps in there her own private collection of books, including *Jane Eyre*, *Anna Karenina*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Lives of Girls and Women*. Since it is illegal for women to know how to read and write, let alone to possess magazines or books, Aunt Lydia, despite her high position in Gilead structures, has broken the very laws and rules she has been entrusted to uphold by authorities. Being aware that her unlawful activities can be soon discovered, Aunt Lydia frantically fills the pages of her holograph as an act of self-empowerment. She emerges as a major opponent to the patriarchal regime, since her "testament" is literally a kind of last will. In it, she describes the way she had been forced to join the ranks of Aunts and to build her image over the years as the primary creator of their inverted feminist morality, and as a strict upholder of training of both new Aunts and the ranks of Handmaids, Marthas and Econowives. However, her written records, in the form of diary, where she constantly invokes an invisible future reader, reveals quite a different picture. All these years she was actively undermining and sabotaging the regime by preparing her personal revenge. Since Gilead desperately wants to bring baby Nicole from Canada, where her mother Offred had escaped to at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia seemingly supports and oversees the activities of Gilead agents (the Pearls) in Canada, whereas she establishes contacts with the Mayday resistance and devises a plan not only to save Nicole and her blood half-sister Agnes but to expose the devious ac-

tions of the Gilead regime to the world. She believes the best way to achieve it is to bring together Offred's daughter Agnes, now a teenage girl, from Canada and her second daughter Daisy, who was conceived in her relationship with Nick and left behind with the trusted Mayday adoptive family, Melanie and Neil, in Vermont/Gilead. Melanie and her husband raised the little girl as their own child while running a clothing store *The Clothes Hound* on Queen West in Toronto, Ontario. They kept the secret effectively from Daisy, who was considered "kidnapped" from her legal (although not biological in any sense) parents Commander Fred and Serena Joy. However, the Gilead agents killed Melanie and Neil by planting a bomb in their car on Daisy's sixteenth birthday. After having been saved by Mayday activists, she went into hiding under the assumed name Jade, and her real identity was disclosed to her in one of the safe houses. She agrees to go undercover with the two Pearl agents to Gilead, where she provides additional account of training of Aunts. It is Atwood's clever way to present the structure of Aunts from within, and also to connect with her half-sister, who had already been placed there by Aunt Lydia under the guise of Aunt Victoria. It is Aunt Lydia who implants a chip into Daisy's arm, which contains all kinds of information about the corruption in Gilead and further evidence about other evils in this totalitarian regime. In fact, Aunt Lydia wants to remake Gilead into the just country that would live according to its proclaimed principles that have been distorted or abandoned in the course of its existence. She plans to leak the evidence once Aunt Victoria and Daisy safely escape, and her writings reveal a whole range of inner dilemmas of her own role and character: "In my own present day I am a legend, alive but more than alive, dead but more than dead" (Atwood, 2019, p. 32). It is difficult to assess whether or not she is truthful to herself and her imaginary reader, but she soon admits her anxieties:

I've become swollen with power, true, but also nebulous with it – formless, shape-shifting. I am everywhere and nowhere: even in the minds of Commanders I cast an unsettling shadow. How can I regain myself? How to shrink back to my normal size, the size of an ordinary woman? (Atwood, 2019, p. 32)

Aunt Lydia realizes it is too late to attain her goals, but wants desperately her subdued, secret voice to be heard for the posterity. Nevertheless, it cannot be taken at face value, without reasonable doubts. She cannot be a single narrator, as Offred, but her story needs to be complemented by two separate ones, referred to as “Transcript of Witness Testimony 369A” and “Transcript of Witness Testimony 369B.” One should pay attention to obvious differences: Aunt Lydia’s account is a “holograph”, whereas the other two narratives are labelled as “transcripts” that can indicate either a police investigation records, or testimonies produced by two interrelated witnesses at the court of law. If these two testimonies have allegedly been given in the presence of other people (most likely Mayday operatives Ada and Elijah) and, perhaps, even partly recorded by them; Aunt Lydia’s writing is private and subjective and quite possibly coloured by her own interpretation. Having schemed and plotted against almost everybody in Gilead all the time with the sole goal to preserve her position and the life, her narrative can be seen as an attempt to redeem herself and justify her sinister activities. She openly admits that she lied, deceived, even caused murders, and therefore, could have easily omitted or even falsified some facts that could present her voice as unreliable. Although the tone of her diary is intimate and seemingly open and truthful, it must be taken with extreme caution.

Due to her intelligence, cunning and ruthlessness, the researchers from the Historical Society took into account many additional details that could prove her holograph had been a genuine one. The pair of other two documents by Agnes/Jemima and Daisy/Jade/Nicole have been deemed as “almost certainly authentic.” It is attributed to their relative inexperience and a lack of knowledge about many things that Aunt Lydia knows rather well. On the other hand, their stories have been presented in the manner of exciting adventures they participated in, and discovering along the way the missing pieces about their identity and background. The lack of information makes their accounts more believable, since they underwent a process of self-revelation while being constantly aware they need to discover more pieces to complete the puzzle. That is why their testimonies

alternate in the novel and provide the necessary progression of events that would eventually end after the perilous journey in a boat across the rough sea to the Coast of Fundy, successfully rowing their inflatable to the coast. They are finally united with their mother, which closes the subsection 70 of their ordeal, and finalises these series of events. It is a kind of happy ending most readers have expected anyway, which establish the two sisters as trustworthy narrators, despite all the things that had happened to them and their mother.

They have been additionally verified by tracing the bloodline relations of the two teenage girls, ascertaining their respective age, the circumstances of their exploits, and, in particular, the old-fashioned microdot embedded in a scarified tattoo. One needs to remember the tattoo on Offred's ankle as the sign of her submission to the Commander in *The Handmaid's Tale*, which, apparently, serves as direct connection between Offred and two girls. Their written records were located by chance in the library of the Innu University in Sheshatshiu, Labrador. They had been left unnoticed "because the file was not labelled clearly, being entitled "Annals of the Nellie J. Banks: Two Adventurers." It was, perhaps, misplaced there under such a label on purpose as if to point to an account of ancient liquor smuggling on a famous rum-running schooner, the *Nellie J. Banks*, in the early twentieth century. These pedantic details are, perhaps interesting or important to historians, even to historians of fiction, but they have been used mostly to create some kind of authenticity and to reinforce the events and characters in three intertwined narratives.

All three narrators give accounts of their lives in the past tense. Aunt Lydia, who writes her testimony, sometimes reflects in the present tense on the current conditions of her life. At times and places, the lives of these three narrators overlap, but the crucial pieces of information are left unexplained or postponed. It has to do with the narrative form Atwood has applied in the book. The novel's episodic structure resembles the form of TV series, where the influence of several seasons of *The Handmaid's Tale* by MGM and Hulu Production, having started in 2017, definitely influenced the mode of Atwood's writing. She even refers to it in the "Acknowledgement" section at the very back of the book. On the one hand, she admits:

The Testaments was written partly in the minds of the readers of its predecessor, *The Handmaid's Tale*, who kept asking what happened after the end of that novel. Thirty-five years is a long time to think about possible answers, and the answers have changed as society itself has changed, and as possibilities have become actualities. (Atwood, 2019, p. 417)

The permanent interest of her readers inspired Atwood to write the sequel that would have explained the demise of Gilead. She also praises the gripping, beautifully television series, which “has respected one of the axioms of the novel: no event is allowed into it that does not have a precedent in human history.” (Atwood, 2019, p. 418) In this case, the fictional precedent (or prequel) has become, in the meantime, stark reality with so many examples of totalitarian regimes and the violence against women. There are so many obvious literary similarities in the sequel with the prequel, as well as plenty of intertextual elements referred to in *The Testaments* which, intertwined carefully with the events allegedly taking place 15 years after Offred's disappearance from Gilead, create an exciting thriller-like narrative that can be easily transposed in yet another TV series.

However, *The Testaments* fill in many missing gaps left unexplained on purpose in *The Handmaid's Tale* and uncover the subversive plot by Aunt Lydia to undermine the oppressive theocratic regime from within. Atwood is careful not to reveal too much, but she builds the atmosphere through a meticulous interplay of her three narrators in order to provide a number of explanations along the way, as well as the final coda. The main events are additionally explained by the respective stories of three other women—Elizabeth, Helena and Vidala—who, with Lydia, had been the Founders of the Aunts. The novel's other two narratives feature Agnes/Jemima, who grew up in a privileged Gilead family, and the third narrator, Daisy, who was raised by adoptive parents Melanie and Neil, in Toronto, Canada. They are part of underground organisation that is committed to destroy Gilead. Other minor characters, such as Commanders

Kyle and Judd, the wives Tabitha and Paula, Handmaids, Marthas and Econowives, Pearl Girls, the girls from privileged families Shunammite and Becka, Dr. Grove, mysterious Ada and her resistance comrade Elijah and others from “Underground Femaleroad,” create the additional web of information that support the three main testimonies with the necessary pertinent details. They have all been carefully re-assessed, at the end of *The Testaments*, during the Thirteenth Symposium on Gileadean Studies in 2197, presented by Professors James Darcy Pieixoto and Crescent Moon. The same format of metafictional epilogue as in *The Handmaid’s Tale* somehow challenges, again, the examined written and spoken testimonies, thus asserting their fictional nature, but, also, pointing to the immediate turbulent historical context of Donald Trump’s presidency in USA (2016–2020).

The emphasis on the ability to read and write is interweaved with the importance of recording and disclosing vital pieces of information to the audience-at-large, thus creating the general revolt against the harsh treatment of women in Canada and elsewhere in the world, and leading to the inevitable end of Gilead. Although devious means to counter the intolerable situation women in Gilead had been exposed to for so long have been used in such efforts, they seem to be justified in the end, despite the tragic fate of some characters. This attitude has been often echoed in Aunt Lydia’s invocation of her potential future readers, whom she wants to involve in her cause and explain the reasons for her previous macabre activities. She concludes her account by echoing a quotation from Mary, Queen of Scots: “In my end is my beginning.” She imagines this motto embroidered on a wall hanging, thus also predicting her own imminent death. One can mostly repeat the similar explanations having already been given in the scholarly analysis of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. This time, however, Professor Pieixoto duly informs his academic colleagues on his continuous interest about Gilead: “My focus will be on the witness testimonies themselves, recorded and transcribed most likely for the use of the Mayday Resistance movement about the interwoven narratives” (Atwood, 2019, p. 412).

He does not question the authenticity of written accounts under observation, although he keeps warning that manuscripts can be deliberate forgeries, and insists on the application of diverse methods that can verify the findings with the extent of acceptable certainty. In the manner of such academic presentations, he keeps cracking jokes and puns, thus keeping the illusion of actual gathering alive. But one must always remember that it is also just another transcript (albeit a fictional one!) that is of similar nature as these witness testimonies it tries to make believable and reliable. Such an approach is, again, reminiscent of Russian babushka dolls, where there is a smaller one within the larger ones that keep opening up new possibilities for new secrets or stories. After all, at the outset of the Conference, the chairperson Crescent Moon gives credit to her esteemed male fellow-colleague and mentions both his previous written publications on the topic, and recent “television series, *Inside Gilead: Daily Life in a Puritan Theocracy*.” While welcoming her dry remarks, Professor Pieixoto cannot resist but to comment on her newly acquired position of the (Madame) President of the Historical Society, and offers his clearly male chauvinistic comment:

We all congratulate you on your promotion, a thing that would never have happened in Gilead. (Applause.) Now that women are usurping leadership positions to such a terrifying extent, I hope you will not be too severe on me. I did take to heart your comments about my little jokes at the Twelfth Symposium—I admit some of them were not in the best of taste—and I will attempt not to reoffend. (Modified applause.) (Atwood, 2019, p. 408)

One can hardly expect that Professor Pieixoto has drastically changed his negative attitude towards women in the two years period from the previous Symposium. He enjoys criticising his female colleagues, as well as women in general, under the guise of an offended and grudging scholar, but he continues to exercise his male supremacy over their abilities to attain the same results he boasts about. They can, at best, stumble across some interesting documents, as one of his graduate students Mia Smith

has done while searching for her thesis topic. Professor Pieixoto emphasises that “first-hand narratives from Gilead are vanishingly rare – especially any concerning the lives of girls and women. It is hard for those deprived of literacy to leave such records” (Atwood, 2019, p. 412). Nevertheless, he works exactly with such records, and hopes to decipher them, together with other available artefacts his students have collected during their visit to the main place, which was a crossing point between Gilead and Canada. With an arrogant stance about the field work his students have done for him, he shamelessly takes all the credit for himself and a fellow-colleague (although just in passing, clearly emphasising who is to be praised!), and concludes, in a haughty and superior manner, that the two of them have put all the material in the form that will make sense as a carefully edited reconstruction:

[my] colleague Professor Knotly Wade and I have prepared a facsimile edition of these three batches of materials, which we have interleaved in an order that made approximate narrative sense to us. You can take the historian out of the storyteller, but you can't take the storyteller out of the historian! (Laughter, applause.) (Atwood, 2019, p. 413)

His words imply that the male intervention into the three female texts have been highly necessary to produce a meaningful and understandable, because the accounts by women are, by default, emotional, subjective and prone to instil altered views that can make the historical interpretation less objective and unreliable. However, Professor Pieixoto's conclusion that HIS interpretation has been coloured by his ability as a storyteller signifies not only the Postmodernist attitude towards history and historiography as just another mode of narration (“storytelling”), but also reveals the current prevailing view on literature and its ongoing fascination with history. Under the pretext of post-postmodernist mindset, literature and history have been viewed as interdependent, overlapping and mutually beneficial when certain features or elements of narration, however improbable and untrustworthy, can be of use to a historian try-

ing to present events and persons from the past as relatively realistic and believable as literary characters and their exploits in a "user-friendly" manner. Historians nowadays cannot afford to refer just to major affairs, kings, generals or people of higher status in grand historical narratives, but they need to cover, even more so, the smaller and smallest ones if they can claim to be comprehensive and objective. This is, in a way, the overall predicament of the novelist's task, when (s)he attempts to combine fictional with historical documents with a rich imagination based on numerous examples from a distant or closer history. (S)he would do her task with the zeal and determination, as (s)he had done it so many times before. As if Atwood sends another message for the possible new book (or film, TV series, or some other suitable artistic form) in the years to come. And to present more (un)heard female voices to her readership. She seems to have no right not to write as long as her avid imagination (and health!) serves her well.

6. Conclusion

To find words for what we suffer, To enjoy what we must suffer –
Not to be dumb beasts. . . .

. . . .

. . . We shall survive And we shall walk
Somehow into summer. . . .

– D. G. Jones, "Beating the Bushes: Christmas 1963" (Atwood, 1972b, p. 56)

It has been argued in the paper that in the four selected novels (*The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*) Atwood wants to defy women's alleged passivity and exercise their right to testify about themselves, even if such acts can incriminate them before men that want to hold them submissive and subjugated. The transformation of female characters into changed and different women is impressive, since, in the process of gaining their voice(s), they have become self-confident,

fulfilled and independent human beings within the context of circumstances that eventually made them respond actively to their subjugated position in the only way possible—through refusing to remain forever locked in their subservient destiny and to speak up, or, eventually, write down their testimonies.

In Atwood's novels, one can distinguish the whole spectrum of female needs to express themselves from verbal overflow to aphasia (language disorder), from effusiveness to muteness, from excess, emphasis, verbiage and proliferation of words to the self-imposed state of silence, lack of proper words, ellipses, reluctance in narration and dialogue, but also typographical blanks that literally inscribe no words or other symbols on the page. In order to recreate her female protagonists in the full complexity, Atwood often applies different rhetorical devices. They range from hesitations, verbal unfilled spaces or *lacunae*, incomplete writings, fragmented stories, concision, postponement, displacement, rearrangement, avoidance strategies, delaying tactics and suddenly breaking off in speech (*aposiopesis*) marked by suspension points, blanks or dashes. These and many other omissions are all rhetorical ways of suggesting a reluctance to tell or to confess.

Atwood often portrays her heroines as unreliable, or, better still, the reluctant narrators, since her women have seen, experienced or caused something so traumatic that they seem not to have any other option but to re-tell their traumas through the lack of words, through indirections, masks and substitutions. Silence and speech have distinct and rather clear narrative implications for female characters in Atwood's novels. Dominant male authoritative voices in patriarchal societies, such as the one in Canada in her first two books, or in the imaginary Republic of Gilead of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, have been used to oppress and subjugate the female O/other, impose the official version and suppress the dissonant stories. As John McLeod (1985) sums it up, "the silence of the female as subaltern is the result of a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation" (p. 185).

Various strategies must be invented to propose an alternative option

and to fight against the hegemony of the supremacist male voice(s). In that case, silence, as a means of self-preservation and self-protection, is not necessarily synonymous with absence and submission, but can be a wilful way for the female victim, the colonised, the marginal, or subaltern to defy language's claims to power and resist participation in the discourses of patriarchy and domination. But, the mute Other also runs the risk of being spoken for by the loud majority, and thus silence can be an instrument of disempowerment and appropriation. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988): "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 287).

Spivak clearly states that the attempts at retrieving lost voices from historical sources—be it archives or fictional accounts from the past—and transposing them again either to history or literature do not bring subjugated women back to the surface. Even when their voices are somehow heard or given a possibility to speak for themselves and by themselves, their words are interpreted by male scholars (Professor Pieixoto!) who cannot refrain from a distinctly patriarchal and imperialist model of discourse. Nevertheless, in Atwood's novels, the submerged voices of women, which have been forgotten or deliberately silenced or muted throughout history, do come to the surface and propose alternative stories or counter-narratives. Although they may appear as ghostlike expressions, or disempowered, speechless and haunting voices, Atwood's heroines have found diverse ways, and with an admirable quality of eloquence, stamina and courage that have become their real trademark, numerous and diverse, quite appropriate words or texts that can describe vividly to their readers many persuasive stories about their existence and suffering. Together with their authoress, they continue to claim their right not to remain silent, but to speak, write, paint, compose or express themselves in any suitable manner that can alter the position of women today and create conditions for their safe and better future, when such accounts will remain warning testimonies about the sad and bad, but never forgotten times in history.

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