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GLOBAL—LOCAL—GLOCAL

CURRENTS

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Edited by

Joanna Antoniak, Edyta Lorek-Jezińska, Julia Siepak,
Nelly Strehlau & Katarzyna Więckowska

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***CURRENTS*. A Journal of Young English Philology Thought and Review**
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Editors-in-Chief: Edyta Lorek-Jezińska & Nelly Strehlau

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Editors-in-chief

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CURRENTS

The seventh & eighth issue editors

CURRENTS EDITORIAL
GLOBAL—LOCAL—GLOCAL: AN INTRODUCTION

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Nicolaus Copernicus University

GLOBAL—LOCAL—GLOCAL: AN INTRODUCTION

Keywords: globalisation, local cultures, glocal

It is our great pleasure to deliver the double issue of *CURRENTS. A Journal of Young English Philology Thought and Review* (issues no 7 and 8), edited by members of the Academic Association for Doctoral Studies of English at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. This year's issue gathers the articles largely inspired by the international conference organized by our Association in March 2021 and its major theme defined by the concepts of Global—Local—Glocal. The scholarly articles collected in this volume aim to tackle the questions of the global and the local, the ways these two categories intersect and engage in a meaningful exchange in the contemporary world, as well as the tensions that emerge at their crossroads.

In the Anglophone context, the process of colonization constitutes a point of departure to think about the world beyond the local. Both the processes of colonization and decolonization on local and global scale problematize the relationships between communities and cultures. In contemporary multicultural societies, these tensions are difficult to ignore as individuals are constantly confronted with the liminality of their identities: on the one hand being citizens of the globalized world, while on the other expressing desire to belong to their national and local communities. The recent rise of fundamentalisms and mass movements contesting them, such as Black Lives

Matter and Idle No More, demonstrate that these trends are still tangible and persistent in contemporary societies.

Postmodern and postcolonial theories provide conceptual frameworks to describe the contemporary human interstice between the local and the global. In the present world, time and space emerge as compressed. We live fast and enjoy the assets of the global village in our own houses through the connection to the internet and the media. The current COVID-19 pandemic further blurs the boundaries between the local and the global. Remote working, e-learning, as well as social and cultural activities being relegated online exacerbate people's alienation from their immediate communities in favor of virtual globalized realities. At the same time, the coronavirus crisis, quite to the contrary, evokes local responses and actions, providing a sense of community building and solidarity.

The articles published in this volume examine complex interactions and negotiations between the local and the global in three major areas: linguistics, literary and cultural studies.

Global—local—glocal in linguistics

The section devoted to the exploration of the local and the global in linguistics starts with an article written by **Lucia La Causa**. In *"Egyptian English" as an Emerging Glocal Language,* La Causa investigates a glocal variety of English which has developed as a result of linguistic and cultural cross-influences between English as a global language and Egyptian Arabic. The article argues that Egyptian English is an effect of the negotiation between two important tendencies and motivations: to be part of the globalized world and to preserve one's local identity. In her sociolinguistic analysis, La Causa examines a variety of language samples produced by young Egyptian users of English, such as message-texts, audio clips or YouTube videos, arriving at the conclusion that the EgyE variety has a potential to evolve into a new English variety in the future.

Miriam Kobierski's *The Reality of Living in a Pandemic World. Analyzing Reading Preferences and Language Usage* presents an early attempt at diagnosing some linguistic processes and changes in reading habits occuring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In her article, Kobierski presents existing literature on the subject, which concerns a clear distinction in new vocabulary used depending on people's attitudes to the virus and preventive measures. She also introduces her own survey, conducted on a small sample of respondents, that appears to uphold the theories concerning increased time spent reading, changes in selected genres of literature as well as use of new pandemic-related vocabulary.

Global—local—glocal in literary studies

The literary section of the seventh and eighth issue of *CURRENTS* opens with **Magdalena Dzierzyńska**'s article entitled *Queering History: Alternate Timelines and the Effects of Queer Divergence in Connie Wilkin's* Time Well Bent, exploring the volume in terms of its effort to queer the genre of alternate history. The article offers an analysis of two short stories from Wilkin's volume: Barry Lowe's "Sod'Em," which revises the Biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and "A Spear Against the Sky" by M. P. Ericson, which rewrites the history of Roman Britain. Dziurzyńska proposes the concept of *queer divergence*—a literary device that marks a deviation from the commonly accepted (hi)story and introduces queer elements into the narrative—to explore the means of queering the genre that traditionally overlooked non-heteronormativity. The author argues that by queering timelines, *Time Well Bent* not only reimagines the generic conventions of the speculative past but also reclaims the erased presence of queer individuals in the writing of history.

Karolina Kordala's reading of Neil Gaiman's *The American Gods* (2001) revises previous criticism on the novel by focusing on the figures of deities as represented in the narrative. Her article entitled *Corporeal Vessels: Gods as Personifications of American Anxieties in Neil Gaiman's* American Gods puts

forward the interpretation of Gaiman's characters that focuses on their construction as the personifications of contemporary American anxieties. Kordala argues that by juxtaposing the novels' old gods, who embody religious values brought from the Old World by settlers and immigrants, and the new gods, who epitomize the contemporary American ethics driven by capitalism and secularization, *The American Gods* questions the construction of American identity and its historical legacies rooted in colonialism.

In her article *Masculinities in Selected Stories by Raymond Carver*, **Agata Rupińska** analyzes different models of masculinity in short stories by Raymond Carver. By referring to theoretical writings of R. W. Connell, Rupińska distinguishes and compares two portrayals of masculinity present in the analyzed texts—a traditional model of masculinity and models which question this hegemonic understanding of masculinity. In addition, Rupińska notes that, despite being published in the 1970s and 1980s, Carver's stories address issues concerning masculinity that still resonate with the twenty-first century audiences.

In his article on *Dialectics of Utopia and Dystopia in* Never Let Me Go *by Kazuo Ishiguro*, **Paweł Oleksak** argues that utopian and dystopian aspects are so closely woven together in Ishiguro's novel that the ultimate interpretation of the text as either a utopia or a dystopia becomes impossible. Referring to the history and definitions of both genres, the author claims that the fundamental dilemma on which the readers' interpretation rests is the question about the human nature of clones. However, the openness of this interpretation is only illusory as a number of narrative strategies used by Ishiguro seem to direct the reader towards the dystopian reading.

Ambika Raja's article *Return to Homeland: Search for Identity through Ecological Memory in Romesh Gunesekera's* Heaven's Edge explores the depiction of ecological memory. Raja argues that in his novel Gunesekera, an award-winning Sri Lankan author, presents ecological memory as an essential element in the identity-formation process, the importance of which only grows

in the era of globalism. Furthermore, Raja also draws a connection between colonial and postcolonial experiences and ecological memory, highlighting that only through triggering emotional memories it is possible for the characters to reconnect with their lost homelands and gain a better understanding of their identities.

In her article *Engaging Story or Valuable Message? The Anthropocene in Anne Bishop's* Others *Book Series*, **Katarzyna Szyszka** sets out to examine Bishop's fantasy novels according to the concepts and premises of ecocriticism. In her analysis, the author tries to establish the extent to which the series seriously engages with the critical discussion on the Anthropocene and possible ways of solving the crisis and how this ecological commitment interacts with the need to meet the demand for an engaging story for the readers' enjoyment and immersion. Despite her critical assessment of the novel's realisation of ecocritical themes, the author arrives at the conclusion about the potential value of Bishop's presentation of the relation between humans and nature for raising ecological awareness.

Katarzyna Stępień's article entitled *"The future's (not) ours to see"—Visions of Forthcoming Humanity in Solarpunk* examines Solarpunk as a movement, presenting it as the descedant of Transcendentalism, strongly influenced by Murray Bookchin's social ecology. In her analysis of Solarpunk literature—represented by Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* and short stories by Daniel José Older, Jaymee Goh, T. X. Watson, Megan Reynolds, Lev Mirov and A. C. Wise—Stępień claims that Solarpunk presents a vision of a better future, one in which societies are characterised by equality and understanding. Focusing on the depictions of gender idenity in the aforementioned text, Stępień argues that such representations have a potential to challenge the already existing attitudes towards gender and, in consequence, become a catalyst for a change.

Global—local—glocal in cultural studies

The cultural studies section comprises four articles, of which the final two were inspired by the conference on dystopias, utopias and feminism "(Im)perfect omen in (im)perfect worlds" organized by Student Feminist Society in May 2021. The section opens with the article entitled *Ruins and Weeds: An Ecocritical View on Romain Veillon's* Green Urbex *Collection*, in which **Edgar James Ælred Jephcote** examines a series of the French photographer's urban exploration images published in the photobook *Green Urbex: Le Monde Sans Nous* (2021). The book presents photographs of dilapidated buildings at various stages of deterioration, in the process of being gradually reconquered by nature. The article comments on the complex relationship between human-made ruins and what comes to be called weeds within the anthropocentric cultural framework. Placed in the context of ecocritical theories, weeds and ruins, as the author argues, epitomize Donna Haraway's naturecultures, representing their processual and dynamic continuity and mutual transformation. Veillon's photographs also register the vibrancy of matter and its storytelling potential, which, according to the author's discussion of Iovino and Oppermann, can be seen as "sites of narrativity."

Agnieszka Staszak's article *"You can't let yourself be defined by the parts that are broken": Immersion, Traumatic Memory and the Representation of PTSD in* Tell Me Why analyzes the way in which this narrative game represents effects of trauma on a person's identity and memory. Staszak argues that the game is highly original not only in its subject matter, as one of the few game productions to prominently focus on a playable trans character, but also in its approach to using game mechanics to showcase the way in which trauma can affect memories, and its sophisticated narrative structure employing flashbacks, unreliable memories and unreconcilable points of view. In addition, Staszak discusses the potential reasons for playing games that feature trauma as their subject matter and their potential beneficial or negative effects on players.

In *The Evolving Female Narrative in Dystopian Video Games:* Bioshock Infinite, The Last of Us, *and* Horizon: Zero Dawn, **Dagmara Solska** examines the representation of female characters and their narrative agency in selected games against the background of the male-dominated discourse of the video game industry. Solska's analysis focuses on three female protagonists in dystopian narratives in order to trace the gradual subversion of gender-stereotyped narrative tropes and the growth of fully-realized independent female protagonists. Significantly, the article approaches video games as "texts which reflect and construct socio-cultural discourse" (Solska) thus highlighting the connections between the storyworld and the users' world and the transformation of gender patterns in both of them.

Paulina Szczepaniak's *"Instagram Face": Deconstructing the Seemingly Utopian and Idealized Image of Women Promoted by Social Media* examines the social and cultural effects of social media by focusing on Instagram's role in reinforcing prescriptive models of feminine beauty and identity. The article places the discussion of the image of women as perfect wives, ideal mothers and successful entrepreneurs in the context of consumerist capitalism, patriarchy and postfeminist media culture and links the cult of beauty with the growing number of teen plastic surgeries and increasing frequency of depressive episodes among girls. As Szczepaniak convincingly argues, the single type of face, behavior and identity promoted by social media not only deprives women of agency but also exploits them financially, thereby turning a utopian promise into a scenario of subjugation.

Book reviews

This year's issue of *CURRENTS* features **Kacper Marchlewski**'s review of *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* (2017), which constitutes an overview of a collection of essays edited by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons and Timotheus Vermeulen. The volume attempts to provide a framework through which to view culture in the twenty-first century,

drawing attention to significant ways in which contemporary texts depart from postmodernist aesthetics and conventions. As Marchlewski demonstrates, while the authors of the collection are united by their understanding of metamodernism as a "structure of feeling" best described through a comparison to a "pendulum that reaches both the postmodern and pre-postmodern, yet remains with neither" (Marchlewski), the essays themselves vary in theme, showcasing how metamodernism can be used to approach diverse types of media and genres of texts.

Conference reports

This section contains a report from the conference "Masculinity: Theories and Practices" organized by the Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University and the Institute for Prevention of Exclusions, which took place on the 26th and 27th May 2022 (online). Featuring lectures by four keynote speakers: Prof. Urszula Kluczyńska (Collegium Da Vinci, Poznań), Dr Michał P. Garapich (University of Roehampton, London), Piotr Maroń (University of New South Wales, Sydney) and Kamil Błoch (the Boys Performative Group) and many scholars from Poland and abroad, the conference explored "different aspects of male identity and discovering the alternatives to the standardized and hegemonic conceptions of masculinity" (Stepak).

GLOBAL—LOCAL—GLOCAL IN LINGUISTICS

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'EGYPTIAN ENGLISH' AS AN EMERGING GLOCAL LANGUAGE

Keywords: linguistic glocalisation, new variety, Egyptian English, language variations, code blending

Introduction

Since in the current 'global village' (Modiano) English is the international language with important roles across the world, geographical boundaries and cultural distances are becoming progressively indistinct and compressed (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Płudowski, & Tanno 12). This worldwide use of English allows it to enter in contact with different speech communities "drawing more and more countries into its net" (Khan 233). English penetrates not only those communities in which it has already acquired an official status, as in what Kachru names Outer Circle but also those in which it does not hold any official recognition being a simple foreign language, as in Kachru's Expanding Circle. This unprecedented global spread of English (Kachru xvii, 1; Seargeant 2012: 3; Buschfeld, Kautzsch, & Schneider 34) leads to the creation of new language-contact situations, a process which is facilitated by the global scientific, technological, economic, and cultural developments (Graddol 4) and the use of "media of communication which foster and accelerate it" (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, Płudowski, & Tanno 12), contributing to the creation of new linguistic exchanges of English with other different languages across the globe.

Inevitably, this global role of English has two related consequences: firstly, it leads to increasing bi-/multilingualism in contexts around the world in which

English is a foreign language (Warschauer, Said, & Zohry 31); secondly, it leads to a diversification of English (Deshors 7, among others) with the consequent emergence of new *local* varieties of English (Sharifian 2016: 2; Buschfeld, Kautzsch, & Schneider 16) in Expanding countries. Actually, it would be more correct to talk about 'glocal' varieties rather than 'local' varieties, since the emergence of these new linguistic forms is the result of the encounter between English as the '*Global* language' (Crystal; emphasis added) and the *local* language(s) spoken in the communities which English penetrates. On this account, the mixing between global and local linguistic elements gives birth to *glocal* (Okushima 2; Sharifian 2016: 1) or hybrid (Mesthrie & Bhatt 6; Schneider 2014: 9; Buschfeld 189) varieties.

A case in point would be Egypt, an Expanding country, which today is struggling with the concurrent use of English (Poese 5) as the 'Global language' (Crystal), and (Egyptian) Arabic as the local language. This article, which is part of a wider research project, aims at demonstrating that, because of the linguistic contact and the consequent linguistic tension, a code blending between English and (Egyptian) Arabic occurs, resulting in the development of a potential 'glocal' linguistic form in Egypt (Bruthiaux 165; Lewko iv-113, Al-Sayadi 3). It also tries to answer the question as to whether this new linguistic form can be considered a potential new variety of English, 'Egyptian English' to be included within the framework of World Englishes (henceforth WEs).

In order to reach these goals, a sociolinguistic and a linguistic contrastive analysis between a Standard model of English (henceforth StdE), in this case British English (henceforth BrE), and the potential 'Egyptian English' (henceforth EgyE) variety is carried out by means of the examination of written and oral language, namely message-texts, audio-clips, and videos by proficient young Egyptian users of English, retrieved from private chats, YouTube and Facebook pages. The corpus of EgyE is specifically collected and analysed for the purposes of this investigation.

Globalisation, Localisation and Glocalisation Tensions

Users of global English in the Expanding areas are in a constant tension between the desire of learning English to be citizens of the globalised world and the will of keeping their local language identity. Hence, if the use of a global standard language allows for "taking advantage of the globalized market" (Fojt 417) and feeling part of the globalised world, then, the use of "localized products will satisfy the expectations of people" (Fojt 417) of remaining "situated in their world through their bodily interactions, their cultural institutions, their linguistic traditions, and historical context" (Johnson, 102). The consequent result of these two apparently conflictual globalisation and localisation forces is a resolutive and inclusive "dual, parallel process" (Sharifian 2) which is termed 'glocalisation' (Sharifian 2010; Sharifian 2016: 1).

The term 'glocalisation', a blending between 'globalisation' and 'localisation', has been coined by Roland Robertson (1992; 1995) "to describe the way in which global pressures are made to conform to local conditions, and whereby the local culture does not act merely as a passive recipient, but absorbs and reprocesses global forces" (Seargeant 2009: 73). This concept perfectly describes what is occurring to English as the 'Global language' (Crystal). As Sharifian claims:

> In its journey across the globe, English has become increasingly localised by many communities of speakers around the world, adopting it to encode and express their cultural conceptualisations, a process which may be called glocalisation of the language. (2013: 1)

The glocalisation of English occurs because, in a linguistic contact situation, once English enters a country and "once entrenched, it does not remain foreign. Rather, it is territorialized so as to serve the purposes of local meaning-making and identity construction" (Edwards 182). In other words, once English spreads within a country, it does not remain a global product, but, at a certain point, in order to answer to the need of people to adapt it to the local purposes and identity, a 'localization tension' (Fojt 407) emerges, translated then into the practice of "making it [English as a global product] linguistically and culturally

appropriate to the target locale (country/region and language) where it will be used" (Esselink 3). Moreover, since in this process the local language "does not act merely as a passive recipient but absorbs and reprocesses global forces" (Seargeant 2009: 73) it would result in a *glocal* product, equally employed for both "global and local networks of use" (Onysko 191) and characterised by an international status and a local self-identity (Yano 124) at the same time.

The Case of English in Egypt

Today, Arab communities "have closed the gap between the Arab and Western worlds" (Abdoualzhraa, Ismail, & Yasin 395) and are opening up to the globe and the use of English as their *lingua franca*. This linguistic, social, and cultural openness has intensified communication between Arabs and English speakers with an unsurprising higher number of Arabs deciding to study English as a foreign language (395). In its turn, the intensification of English exposure through not only formal instruction but also other more spontaneous inputs, such as the ones offered by the globalised world (the Internet, the media, the social networks, and so on) is leading to a major linguistic contact between Arabic and English with the development of new potential 'glocalised' forms in Arabic-speaking countries.

A case in point is Egypt, which in the modern era "has undergone tremendous changes" mainly due to globalisation which has increased "the use of English by Egyptian citizens and institutions" (Schaub 226). In the last years, the role of English within the Egyptian boundaries has developed (and still is developing) visibly being no longer used for international purposes only but also for internal ones. In other words, it is used, for example, in local media, in local popular music, especially in rap (Bassiouney 107; La Causa forthcoming, among others), in advertising (Mohamed 162; Spierts 2, among others), signs and labels (Schaub 229), and even in spontaneous interactions on the social networks (La Causa forthcoming), and more generally in all internet productions. This spread in the use of English within Egyptian boundaries has

led to an increasing bi-/multilingualism in Egypt, "with both English (from 'above') and Egyptian Arabic (from 'below')" (Warschauer, Said, & Zohry 31). In such a variegated context, Egyptians consider English as the 'prestige language' (Labov; Aboelezz 256; Ibrahim; Yacoub 123; Mohamed 165) since it is the only linguistic tool that allows them to be linked with the Western economic prosperity (Stadlbauer 16), cultural wealth, technological advancement, and modernity which cannot be guaranteed by any of the Arabic varieties, not even by "the national language in Egypt, MSA, [Modern Standard Arabic, which] does not imply as much prosperity as English does" (Stadlbauer 16). Hence, "[k]nowledge of English is a valuable skill in Egyptian society today" (Reynolds 35) and for this reason more and more Egyptians are choosing to improve their linguistic skills. Consequently, almost all of them have "the ability to converse in English (in addition to their L1)" (Edwards 19), with different degrees of proficiency due to diastratic and diatopic variables.

In such a multilingual context in which there are different semiotic resources at speakers' disposal (Blommaert 193), Egyptians are required to continuously make linguistic choices struggling with the concurrent use of English (Poese 5) and the (Egyptian) Arabic variety, respectively representing the language of global identity and the language of local identity, feeling in a constant tension between the desire of learning English to be 'citizen of the globalised world' and the will of keeping and protecting their local language identity and the moral (and even religious) values it carries.

Egyptian English and Some of its Glocal Linguistic Variations

In Egypt, as in many other parts of the world, "English seems destined to be 'glocal'" (Yano 124). Indeed, a natural and uncontrolled strategy used by speakers for keeping global and local identity at the same time is the creation of a mixed linguistic form namely, a 'glocal variety.' In other words, when Egyptians use English, mainly due to their L1 interferences, they spontaneously produce linguistic interferences both in writing and in speaking, which, in turn,

can function as 'language builders' (Heine & Kuteva 35). This mixing practice implies that, at a certain point of the varietal development, linguistic interferences are no longer considered erroneous productions and deviations from the StdE varieties, but they can become proper linguistic variations typical of the specific variety of English, potentially involving the creation of something new (Schneider 2007: 45) in this case, of EgyE variety.

Egyptian users of English, as speakers in many other Expanding countries (Bruthiaux 160; Lewko 97, among others), strongly believe to be exonormatively oriented towards a global and standard use of English, mainly towards BrE and/or American English (AmE), to which they "striv[e] to approximate" (Schneider 2014: 28). However, while maintaining this conviction and trying to respect StdE norms, they actually make "the language their own" (Lewko 98), unconsciously introducing some elements of their mother tongue, which give a localised taste to their supposed global English production "com[ing] across as Egyptians in their speech" (Lewko 97) inevitably. The final linguistic result, indeed, is a variety constituted by elements of English and (Egyptian) Arabic which can be regarded as a glocal product (Okushima 2) and appears different and variated from the StdE forms in different facets of language affecting the orthographical, phonological, morpho-syntactical, and lexical aspects.

Below, a few examples of variations in form, sound, structure, and words retrieved through a comparative analysis between StdE and EgyE are reported. More specifically, for the purpose of this research a corpus of 300 message-texts and audio clips by proficient young Egyptian users of English was gathered and analysed, together with a sample of videos from YouTube and Facebook. For the section of the research presented in this paper, a case study on a single video taken from YouTube is referred to. As for the methodology, the corpus was analysed manually and following a contrastive approach with respect to the morphological, syntactical, and lexical levels. The focus was on retrieving instances of deviations/innovations from the standard norm. As for

the phonological level, this was investigated in the case study, for which a video was analysed contrastively with the standard norm with the aim of highlighting potential creative linguistic behaviours. Interestingly, by examining message-texts, audio clips, and videos from YouTube and Facebook pages it has been noticed that Egyptian users of English who participated in this study seem to produce nearly the same and repeated variations which would imply that linguistic interferences could not be simple erroneous formations, but rather some form of stabilised typical glocal features of the potential EgyE variety, becoming signs that English in Egypt is on the way to developing its endonormative form. However, since the sample size is too small, a proper comparison of the frequencies of standard and non-standard variations is not reported in this article, and data are discussed uniquely on the basis of their potentiality to become glocal features of the supposed new English variety in Egypt.

i. Variation in Form (Orthographical Variations)

Glocal EgyE orthographic features

- Different use of capital and small letters:

Variation in form involves, among other things, a different use of capital letters (Alenazi 122). In the Arabic language, capital letters do not exist and no distinction between upper- and lower-case letters is made. This would explain why capital letters are not always used in the instances of EgyE analysed in the study as required by StdE norms. Indeed, it is common to find a mixture of capital and small letters within a sentence (1) which acquire an improper function. Participants, for example, do not use upper-case letters for proper nouns (1) but they generally employ them with the aim of indicating yelling, excitement, emotions, or calls for special attention[1] (Yaghan 42) (2):

(1) I2: No **i**taly ....mean **c**esr..**c**aullisium ..**t**otti. Even **i** fascinated with **r**ome empire. Ceser... August...crazy **n**eron...etc. Roman empire the most effective civilization on mankind life

(2) I1: I was **A**fraid of them

- Different use of punctuation marks:

Punctuation is used differently as well. Although in Arabic punctuation has been recently introduced as part of the writing system, little attention is still given to it. Therefore, EgyE users of this study do not use full stops or commas and apply Arabic rules to English as it often occurs with the polysyndeton, with the reiteration of the conjunction *and* (translated from the Arabic و) replacing commas (3). Similarly, they do not always use question or exclamation marks and do not even use apostrophes where needed in StdE (4):

> (3) I3: I've seen your post about Egyptian language **and** English language and it's very important topic for me **and** I'm very curious about that **and** as Egyptian I would love to help with that **and** I think I've some informations about that topic mybe it'll help
> (4) I1: **dont** touch face. And before all if that **dont** panic

ii. Variation in Sound (Phonetic/Phonological Variations)

For the analysis of phonetical variations, a video from YouTube has been analysed. In this video clip the Egyptian actor Mena Massoud speaks in 'Egyptian English' as it is even specified in the video's caption *Mena Massoud Teach Fans How To Speak Egyptian English* (retrieved from YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ad3I_a2UtQ4) ironically emphasising the typical variations in sounds Egyptians produce while speaking English. Although it represents a constructed and not spontaneous communicative situation, this video is highly representative and helps to highlight many of the typical glocal phonetic features of the potential EgyE variety. Some of them are as follows:

Glocal EgyE phonetic features (consonant sounds)

- the substitution of the interdental, fricative, voiceless /θ/ sound to sibilants /s/ or /z/

> (4) /hɛ'lɒ 'ɛvrɪbɒdi, **z**ɪs ɪz 'brʌ**z**ər Xa:lid/
> StdE: /hɛ'ləʊ 'ɛvrɪbɒdi, **ð**ɪs ɪz 'brʌ**ð**ə Xalid/

- the production of the interdental, fricative, voiced /ð/ as alveolar, plosive /t/ and /d/ or as sibilant /z/

(5) /zɒ mɔːr ˈɛ**d**ɪk juː ɑːr ˈgɒɪŋg tuː hæv zɒ mɔːr strɛs **z**er ˈgɒɪŋg tuː bɪ/
StdE: /ðə mɔːr ˈɛ**θ**ɪk juː ɑː ˈgəʊɪŋ tuː hæv ðə mɔː strɛs **ð**eər ɪz ˈgəʊɪŋ tuː biː/

- the back-velar, nasal /ŋ/ sound is pronounced /ŋg/, sometimes devoiced /ŋk/

(6) /ˈbrɪŋɪŋ**g** juː tʊˈdeɪz ˈlisn wʌn wʌn/
StdE: /ˈbrɪŋɪ**ŋ** juː təˈdeɪz ˈlɛsn wʌn wʌn/
(7) /zer ɪz nɒ ˈɛnɪsɪ**ŋk** xɑlz/
StE: /ðeər ɪz nəʊ ˈɛnɪ**θ**ɪŋ ɛls/

- the swapping of /b/ and /p/

(8) /zɒ mɔːr ˈ**b**rɒblemz juː hæv zɒ mɔːr ˈɛdɪk juː hæv/
StdE: /ðə mɔː ˈ**p**rɒbləmz juː hæv ðə mɔːr ˈɛθɪk juː hæv/

- gemination

(9) /wiː hæv tuː ɪˈ**ll**ɪmɪneɪt za ˈmʌni. za lɛs ˈmʌni, za lɛs ˈbrɒblemz/
StdE: /wiː hæv tuː ɪˈlɪmɪneɪt ðə ˈmʌni. ðə lɛs ˈmʌni, ðə lɛs ˈprɒbləmz/

- the adding of an additional plosive sound between a word ending with plosive sound and a word beginning with vowel

(10) /ɪf juː drɒb**d**ɪt, der ɪz nɒ ˈmʌni, zer ɪz nɒ ˈɛnɪsɪŋk xɑlz/
StdE: /ɪf juː drɒ**p ɪ**t, ðeər ɪz nəʊ ˈmʌni, ðeər ɪz nəʊ ˈɛnɪθɪŋ ɛls/

Glocal EgyE phonetic features (vowel sounds)

- the use of the diphthong /ɒʊ/ instead of the diphthong /əʊ/

(11) /wiː n**ɒʊ** zæt zɒ mɔːr ˈbrɒblemz juː hæv zɒ mɔːr ˈɛdɪk juː hæv/
StdE: /wiː n**əʊ** ðæt ðə mɔː ˈprɒbləmz juː hæv ðə mɔːr ˈɛθɪk juː hæv/

- the use of the open back vowel /ɒ/ or of the low-mid back /ɔː/ replacing the diphthong /əʊ/

(12) /zɒ mɔːr ˈɛdɪk juː ɑːr ˈg**ɒ**ɪŋg tuː hæv zɒ mɔːr strɛs zer ˈgɒɪŋg tuː bɪ/
StdE: /ðə mɔːr ˈɛθɪk juː ɑː ˈg**əʊ**ɪŋ tuː hæv ðə mɔː strɛs ðeər ɪz ˈgəʊɪŋ tuː biː/

- the use of /ɪ/ sound instead of the close-mid front vowel /ɛ/

(13) /tʊˈdeɪz ˈl**ɪ**sn ɪz ɪnˈspaɪred baɪ ˈbrʌzər ˈbɪgɪst moːrst noːˈtɔːrɪoːs ?/
StdE: /təˈdeɪz ˈl**ɛ**sn ɪz ɪnˈspaɪəd baɪ ˈbrʌðə ˈbɪgɪst məʊst nəʊˈtɔːrɪəs ?/

All variations found in this video clip are mainly due to the different phonological repertoire of the two languages: English and Arabic languages

have certain sounds which do not exist in the other language (Schneider 2011: 20) and/or they may have fewer or more sounds (for example, in the Arabic alphabet there are extra sounds like the emphatic /ḍ/ (ض), /ṣ/ (ص), /ṭ/ (ط), /ẓ/ (ظ), /ḥ/ (ح), /ʾ/ (ء), which do not exist in English [Yacoub 122] and, similarly, in the English alphabet there are sounds such as /p/ and /v/ that do not exist in Arabic) which appear difficult to non-native English speakers. In fact, as Sabbah claims, when two languages are typologically different, such as English and Arabic, difficulties for speakers are very probable (271). These difficulties are mainly resolved by activating spontaneous phonetic approximation (Flege 119) or adaptation processes (Winford 119-121; Bolton 261) which guarantee close-to-English pronunciation with the replacement of a foreign sound speakers find difficult to produce with a similar but more familiar one taken from their L1, or with the modification of the pronunciation of a sound based on their mother tongue phonological rules (Corder 201; Flege 117).

iii. Variation in Structure (Morpho-Syntactical Variations)

Although structure is generally very difficult to be altered, Egyptians produce many variations at the grammatical level which depend on morpho-syntactical negative transfer from Arabic. In this section, a number of glocal variations in nouns and verbs typical of the potential EgyE variety detected in private message-texts are reported.

Glocal EgyE morpho-syntactic features (nouns)

In Arabic and English, plurality is manifested in a different fashion: while the plural system of English consists of two forms: regular plurals marked with the addition of the suffix *-s* (or *-es*) and irregular plurals which do not follow a regular pattern, the plural system in Arabic has three forms: regular masculine, regular feminine formed by the addition of specific morphemes, and broken irregular that does not follow any formation rule. Consequently, EgyE users of

this study apply the following glocal morpho-syntactic variations, among others:

- the default in number concordance (Al-Jarf 2000: 2)

(14) I1: This is my new kid**s** , waiting for born
(15) I1: Wht is ur new studi**es**

- the default in the use of irregular plural forms

(16) I1: Normally now between 4-5 **person**

In addition, although in both English and Arabic there exist collective and uncountable nouns which are not pluralised, countability and uncountability are not equally conceived in these languages so that some nouns, such as *information*, *money,* or *damage* are uncountable in English, but they are countable in Arabic (Sabbah 272). This leads EgyE participants to:

- the pluralisation of collective and uncountable nouns

(17) I2: Coronavirus not come from fish**es**😅
(18) I3: I think I've some information**s** about that topic

Arabic has no indefinite articles (Sabbah 273) which are replaced by diacritic symbols. This leads EgyE speakers to:

- the omission of the indefinite article where needed in StdE (Sabbah 273).

(19) I1: We have * month called Ramadan

- the use of the indefinite article where not needed in StdE

(20) I5: I don't have **a** problem [in a context in which StdE requires **any** instead]

- the use of *an* preceding consonants instead of the weak form *a*

(21) I1: It located in the suburbs of Cairo In **an** residential compound

Glocal EgyE morpho-syntactic features (verbs)

The (Egyptian) Arabic language verb system is different from that used in English (Alasmari, Watson, & Atwell 9) and while the English language has sixteen tense forms (Gadalla 51), the Arabic language only has three. For example, standard Arabic has only one tense, the imperfective, for both simple and progressive present actions (Muftah & Rafik-Gale 148) so that a sentence

like *I study* and *I am studying* are both translated أنا أدرس *ana adrusu* (literally 'I study'). This explains why participants, even the high-level competent ones, are not able to recognise the differences between these two English verb tenses. Some of the consequences are:

- the non-use of the progressive when required in StdE

(22) I1: He have a problem now. And ***[is]** tell**[ing]** me about it

- the use of progressive replacing Simple Present for habitual actions

(23) I1: Most of them wear**ing** Hejab (referring to a general habit of Arabic women)

Another glocal variation concerns the use of the verb *to be*. As Arabic is a zero copula language not considering the verb *to be* in the present tense, an EgyE performance is generally characterised by:

- the omission of the copula be in present tense (Ali 8; Sabbah 275)

(24) I1: It * blue 😂😝

- the non-use of to be as predicative verb in present tense

(25) I1: god * with u and bless u [which is also an example of an incorrect use of the subjunctive mood ("(May) god **be** with you")]

- the non-use of be as auxiliary verb in the progressive form

(26) I1: Hope you * doing well

English and Arabic languages are not characterised by the same process of agreement between verbs and subjects in gender, number, and person. As for gender, in Arabic, it is already manifested in pronouns and verbs, while in English the verb has always the same form for both feminine and masculine subjects. As for the grammatical number, in Arabic, verbs have two forms, singular and plural with the addition of a dual form. In English, instead, the number is unmarked. Moreover, while in Arabic the person can be clearly understood through the verb because a different conjugated form for each person exists, in English, with the exception of the third singular person in the Present Simple verb form that see the addition of the *-s* suffix, the verb itself

does not suggest the person morphologically. These differences in the two language verbal systems lead to the following glocal variations:

- the drop of -s endings in the 3rd singular person of the present tense of verbs (Muftah & Rafik-Galea 147; Sabbah 275 among others)

(27) I1: She work* in art therapy field

- subject-auxiliar non-concordance

(28) I1: **He** still **don't** reply on me

- the subject-verb non-agreement (Al-Jarf 2000: 2; Sabbah 278)

(29) I1: **We was** talking Coptic

iv. Variation in Words (Lexical Variations)

English influences the way Egyptians use their foreign language also at the lexical level, in both writing and speaking. In this article, only two of the many lexical features of EgyE met in private message-texts and in comments on Facebook are presented, respectively based on a different use of the derivational system in the two languages and on the practice of importing words from one language to the other creating a mixed code.

As far as the derivation process is concerned, both in English and (Egyptian) Arabic, different word classes are built by the addition of affixes (Al-Jarf 2015) which produce "a whole family of words that share a common meaning" (Ryan & Meara 533), as in the case of **كَتَب** (kataba) *he wrote*, **كَاتِب** (kātib) *writer*, **كِتَابَة** (kitāba) *writing*, and so on. However, despite similarities, the two systems differ in some respects. For example, the derivational word-formation process is less strong in English than in Arabic (Abdul-Halim, Shamsan, & Attayib 139). In English, indeed, semantically related words are not necessarily built on the same root as it occurs with the word pair *to eat* and *food* (30) which in Arabic, instead, share the same base, respectively يأكل (*to consume food*) and أكل (*food*), or a derived word may be replaced by a more complex expression as *to take a photo* (verb + noun) for *to photograph* which in Arabic would be more easily translated as **صور**, a root used for both noun and verb (31). As shown by the

instances of EgyE analysed in the study, these differences in the morphological systems of the two languages and the tendency to apply L1 morphological rules may lead Egyptians to make a wrong lexical choice or produce erroneous word classes with

- the creation of new instances of conversion (Al-Jarf 1994: 8)

(30) I1: Whom send u this delicious 😋 **eating**
(31) I2: **Photo** the beach 😍😍

As for the practice of mixing codes, which is the most common strategy used by Egyptian English speakers (Kniaź & Zawrotna 614), it could be observed through data collected, that Egyptians very often borrow words from English and insert them in their (Egyptian) Arabic performance (Mahmoud 40) (33) (34) or vice versa (32). This kind of language choice and the interchangeable use of elements from the two languages (Ibrahim) result in an

- (Egyptian) Arabic-English code-mixing/switching:

(32) I19: Our beautiful **tant bata** ♥♥♥♥♥♥
(33) I17: dah elli hy8yr el**mood** sa7
(34) I20: لا خالص انا المساج واللعب فالشعر
لا مؤاخذة بعني **meditation** باانسبالي احسن من اجدعها

Conclusion

The widespread use of English in Egypt is leading to an increasing (Egyptian) Arabic-English bi-/multilingualism among Egyptians who thus struggle between the desire of being skilled and proficient in English in order to be part of the globalised world and the wish to maintain their identity and cultural (Egyptian) Arabic roots.

In such a multilingual situation in which linguistic contacts are increasingly present, linguistic tensions towards globalisation or localisation of linguistic forms develop among Egyptians. The consequence is an uncontrolled and spontaneous code combination between English, the global language (Crystal), and (Egyptian) Arabic, the local language, which results in the emergence of a 'glocal' (Okushima 2) linguistic form, namely the EgyE variety, owning both an international and national character. In order to confirm this claim, a linguistic

contrastive analysis between standard BrE and the potential EgyE variety has been carried out by means of the examination of written and oral language produced by proficient young Egyptian users of English. It has been shown, indeed, by examining a few examples, that the linguistic variations developed at different levels of the language (orthographic, phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical), mainly due to negative transfers from (Egyptian) Arabic, definitely lead to an Egyptian-like way of using English to the point that it seems legitimate to hypothesize that English in Egypt is developing a certain endonormativity, becoming another case of new "emergent contexts" (Schneider 2014: 24) to be inserted within the World Englishes framework.

However, from a linguistic point of view, although not nativised, the EgyE variety seems to acquire all the appearance of a potential independent form; therefore, an analysis of other aspects and criteria, i.e., historical, ecological, social, cultural, cognitive, and political, is needed in order to understand whether it can be regarded as a proper new variety of English. For example, it would be important to analyse whether the speakers themselves recognise EgyE as "their own form of English" or whether they still regard it as deviant when compared with standard British English. Hence, as long as these other processes are not investigated, and only linguistic aspects are considered, it seems too risky to treat the EgyE variety as one of the Englishes. What is possible to claim more cautiously, instead, is that today EgyE has achieved a certain capability, at least from a linguistic point of view, for *potentially* becoming a new English variety in the future.

Endnotes

1. These claims are the results of the observations made in this specific comparative study and based on the absence of upper-and lower-case letters in Arabic. However, it is important to point out that, since data have been collected through computer mediated discourses, deviations from StdE are not necessarily due to linguistic differences between English and (Egyptian) Arabic, but they may be either editing mistakes not purposefully made by inattentively using a computer or mobile phone keyboards or due to phones' automatic functions (Turner, Katić, & Abrams 172), or even the result of the language norms teens usually use in digital spaces (Turner, Katić,

& Abrams 157). For example, a strong propensity toward lowercase in Instant Messaging (IM) (Tagliamonte & Denis 26; Turner, Katić, & Abrams 172) and a widespread use of a non-standard capitalisation (Turner, Katić, & Abrams 173) have been widely observed among these norms which would imply, if such, a mimicking of native English linguistic habits rather than a proper local variation.

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Abstract

In the context in which English functions as an international language and spatial and cultural distances are reduced due to the widespread use of the Internet and the media, the linguistic contacts among English and other languages are facilitated (Deshors 7, among others). The global diffusion of English leads to increasing multilingualism also in contexts in which it is a foreign language (Warschauer, Said, & Zohry 31) with speakers being in a constant tension between the desire of learning it to be citizens of the globalised world and the will of keeping their local language identity.

This study, which is part of a wider research project, will focus on the case study of Egypt struggling with the concurrent use of English (Poese 5) and the (Egyptian) Arabic variety. More specifically, the main aim is to demonstrate that, because of the linguistic contact and tension, a code blending between English as the 'Global language' (Crystal), and (Egyptian) Arabic as the local language occurs resulting in the development of an emerging 'glocal' linguistic form in Egypt (Bruthiaux 165; Lewko iv-113, Al-Sayadi 3) which could be labelled 'Egyptian English' (EgyE).

In order to reach this goal, a sociolinguistic analysis will be carried out by means of the examination of written and oral language, namely message-texts and audio clips by young Egyptian English users and videos from YouTube and Facebook pages. The corpus of Egyptian English will be specifically gathered and analysed for the purposes of the investigation.

Appendix

Private chat messages transcription*

I1 (engineer, Ph.D student and university teacher from Mynia)

Me: Ooh.. Do you ride horses?

I1: Yea I was playing horse riding

Me: I am afraid of horses, even if I really like them

I1: Me too 😂

Me: But you ride them.. How is it possible? 😅

I1: Yes I was Afraid of them until I have an accident while I was trying to ride one horse besides sea. Then I take decisions to learn riding horses. They told me you will never learn. After 8 months I was the team leader of my group of horse rider. I was afraid first, fail down more and more , then I did it.

Me: How is situation in Egypt with Covid?

I1: The number of deaths people around us still high Normally now between 4-5 person around me every week is dead

I1: Situation in Egypt not so bad in deaty rate...but we afraid from future. We have lock out...but i feel that virus every where. I hope...take care....20 sec hand cleaning...1

meter distance...dont touch face. And before all if that dont panic. World overcome many crises larger than this. I hope italy recovered i feel. I hope egypt also

I1: I was on site following my new villa design construction And I am back home right now Could you follow the project of my villa!? 😁 😂
This is my new kids , waiting for born 😂 [showing a picture of his project]

Me: You know? I passed my exam.. We are colleagues now.. 😆 😊
I1: ohhhh congratulation my dear i am happy for that Wht is ur new studies
Me: About Egyptian English
I1: 😁 Good you need to present it to me
ohhhh god with u and bless u

I1: We have month called Ramadan...which we dont eat or drink till sunset. To feel like poor people

I1: Hi is my friend. He do a phd with me He have a problem now. And tell me about it He love a girl And she is not And we discuss what he can do How can we make girl love man

I1: Arabic dress always full of details And wide And dress must be tall Closed Because of Muslim rules Most of them wearing Hejab

I1: It blue 😂 😝 R u kidding [referring to the colour of a dress]

Me: How are you?
I1: I am fine How r u dear Hope you doing well

I1: My sister will give the general Lecture of her phd thesis tomorrow The final one with jury
Me: Oooh.. Congratulations!
I1: She work in art therapy field

I1: No I buy new house for myself I prepare it this days An Apartment with 2 bedrooms
Me: That's good I hope you will have it soon 🙂
I1: 😁 I have it And I design its interior design And I construct it This days It located in the suburbs of Cairo In an residential compound

Me: any news from your friend?
I1: He still don't reply on me

I1: We [Egyptians] also was not talk Arabic language We was talking Coptic

I2 (engineer from Helwan)

I2: I thought u imagine us wear like ramses..on street 😂 When i went to finland last year...oneperson know i am egyptian He told me ...do u have a camal 😁

Me: Ahaha.. That is just a stereotype. It is the same with us, Sicilians.. People tell me "mafia" as soon I say that I am Sicilian

I2: No italy ....mean cesr..caullisium ..totti. Even i fascinated with rome empire. Ceser... August...crazy neron...etc. Roman empire the most effective civilization on mankind life

I2: They restrict sea and pools due to coronavirus 😢 I dont know why open sea

Me: Yes, I know.. That is a pity

I2: Coronavirus not come from fishes😅

Me: Yes.. 🤣 But it comes from people who go to the sea

Me: Do you recognise these sweets?

I1: Whom send u this delicious 😋 eating

Me: A friend of mine. She told me that these are typical biscuits Arabs eat after Ramadan

Me: I am fine.. I am at the beach relaxing. You?

I2: Oooh baby Take me with u I just back from work Photo the beach 😍😍

I3 (Costumer representative from Cairo)

I3: I've seen your post about Egyptian language and English language and it's very important topic for me and I'm very curious about that and as Egyptian I would love to help with that and I think I've some informations about that topic mybe it'll help

I5 (student from Sohag)

Me: I would like to improve my Arabic

I5: if you want from me to speak with you in Arabic . messenger call . voice call Arabic . I don't have a problem

Postings from Facebook transcriptions

1st post (commenting on a photo on a private Facebook page)

Comment 1: صباح الحير يا كتورة هنورة الد نيا كلها

Comment 2 (I19): Our beautiful tant bata ♥♥♥♥♥♥

Comment 3: Gamela 😍😍😍

2nd post (commenting on a photo on a private Facebook page)

Single comment (I17): dah elli hy8yr elmood sa7

3rd post (commenting on a photo on a private Facebook page)

Comment 1: 😂 ماذا تفعل؟ هل تمزق شعرك؟
Comment 2 (I20): لا خالص انا المساج واللعب فالشعر
لا مؤاخذة بعني meditation باانسبالي احسن من اجدعها

Video transcription

Hello everybody, this is Brother Khaled, bringing you todays lesson one one. Today's lesson is inspired by brother biggest most notorious ..?.. Ok. What does brother ..?.. is says to us. He says to us «the more money you have the more problems. And we know that the more problems you have the more ethic you have. And the more ethic you are going to have the more stress there is going to be, and the more stress there is going to be the more depression you are more likely to have, and the more depression you have the higher chance of suicide. The higher chance of suicide ..?.. More likely to drop it. And if you drop it, there is no money, there is no anything else. So, what do we have to do? We have to eliminate the money. The less money, the less problems.

UK pronunciation

/hɛ'ləʊ 'ɛvrɪbɒdi, ðɪs ɪz 'brʌðə Xa:lid, 'brɪŋɪŋ ju: tə'deɪz 'lɛsn wʌn wʌn.
tə'deɪz 'lɛsn ɪz ɪn'spaɪəd baɪ 'brʌðə 'bɪgɪst məʊst nəʊ'tɔ:rɪəs ..?..
'əʊ'keɪ wɒt dʌz 'brʌðə ..?.. ɪz sɛz tu: ʌs.
hi: sɛz tu: ʌs «ðə mɔ: 'mʌni ju: hæv ðə mɔ: 'prɒbləmz. ænd wi: nəʊ ðæt ðə mɔ: 'prɒbləmz ju: hæv ðə mɔ:r 'ɛθɪk ju: hæv.
ænd ðə mɔ:r 'ɛθɪk ju: ɑ: 'gəʊɪŋ tu: hæv ðə mɔ: strɛs ðeər ɪz 'gəʊɪŋ tu: bi:,
ænd ðə mɔ: strɛs ðeər ɪz 'gəʊɪŋ tu: bi: ðə mɔ: dɪ'prɛʃən ju: ɑ: mɔ: 'laɪkli tu: hæv,
ænd ðə mɔ: dɪ'prɛʃən ju: hæv ðə 'haɪə ʧɑ:ns ɒv 'sjʊɪsaɪd.
ðə 'haɪə ʧɑ:ns ɒv 'sjʊɪsaɪd ..?.. mɔ: 'laɪkli tu: drɒp ɪt.
ænd ɪf ju: drɒp ɪt, ðeər ɪz nəʊ 'mʌni, ðeər ɪz nəʊ 'ɛnɪθɪŋ ɛls.
səʊ, wɒt du: wi: hæv tu: du:? wi: hæv tu: ɪ'lɪmɪneɪt ðə 'mʌni. ðə lɛs 'mʌni, ðə lɛs 'prɒbləmz/

EgyE pronunciation

/hɛ'lɒ 'ɛvrɪbɒdi, zɪs ɪz 'brʌzər Xa:lid, 'brɪŋɪŋ ju: tʊ'deɪz 'lisn wʌn wʌn.
tʊ'deɪz 'lisn ɪz ɪn'spaɪred baɪ 'brʌzər 'bɪgɪst mo:rst no:'tɔ:rɪo:s ..?..
'o:'ke, wɒt dʌz 'brʌzər ..?.. ɪz zɛz tu: ʌs.
hi: zɛz tu: ʌs «zɒ mɔ:r 'mʌni ju: hæv zɒ mɔ:r 'brɒblemz. ænd wi: nɒʊ zæt zɒ mɔ:r 'brɒblemz ju: hæv zɒ mɔ:r 'ɛdɪk ju: hæv.
ænd zɒ mɔ:r 'ɛdɪk ju: ɑ:r 'gɒɪŋg tu: hæv zɒ mɔ:r strɛs zer 'gɒɪŋg tu: bɪ,
ænd de mɔr: strɛs zer 'gɒɪŋg tu: bɪ de mɔ:r de'prɛʃɒn ju: ɑ:r mɔ:r 'laɪkli tu: hæv,
ænd de mɔ:r de'prɛʃɒn ju: hæv za 'haɪr ʧɑ:nz ɒv 'sʊɪsaɪd.
za 'haɪr ʧɑ:ns ɒv 'sʊɪsaɪd ..?.. mɔ:r 'laɪkli tu: drɒbdɪt.

ænd ɪf ju: drɒbdɪt, der ɪz nɒ 'mʌni, zer ɪz nɒ 'ɛnɪsɪŋk xɑlz.
sɒ, wɒt du: wi: hæv tu: du:? wi: hæv tu: ɪ'llɪmɪneɪt za 'mʌni. za lɛs 'mʌni, za lɛs 'brɒblemz/

* Only some of the 300 messages analysed have been reported in this appendix.

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THE REALITY OF LIVING IN A PANDEMIC WORLD. ANALYZING READING PREFERENCES AND LANGUAGE USAGE

Keywords: pandemic, reading habits, language usage, COVID-19

Introduction

The global pandemic that began in 2019 has forced many people to introduce major changes into their lifestyles. As a society, we have had to learn how to cope with working, and essentially living from home, and with many restrictions being instigated in our everyday lives. The global outbreak has forced many into a new and unfamiliar territory, i.e., being forced to stay at home and limit real-life interactions to a minimum. But these were not the only things that have changed throughout this time. New trends can be also observed in reading habits and language usage.

With several lockdowns being enforced, people needed to come to terms with their perception of reality being shaken. This situation caused a deterioration of mental health for many. The results of a poll conducted in April 2020 by Angus Reid Institute showed that while 40% of Canadians reported that their mental health has worsened in general, another 10% reported that their mental health has worsened "a lot" (Angus Reid Institute 2020). Moreover, numerous studies have been conducted to determine the effects of quarantine; one research has shown that some of the negative consequences of quarantine include acute stress disorder, insomnia, exhaustion, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, poor concentration, and detachment from others (Brooks et al. 2020). In order to cope with these symptoms, online

support groups have been created to establish a sense of being connected to others. Furthermore, many people have turned to various forms of art, such as reading books — a survey conducted in 2020 found that 34.5% of children and young people were reading more during lockdown (Clark and Picton 2020). The pandemic has brought many changes, including how the number of readers has risen during lockdown, and the various types of books that were reached for the most often. But reading habits are not the only change necessitated by this new reality. Due to the dynamic nature of language, there has been a need to coin new terms, such as *COVID-19* or to establish terms like *lockdown* and *flatten the curve* as everyday phrases.

Changes in Reading Habits

The pandemic has brought about many different changes, one of them being the necessity of staying at home. Because of this, people had more free time and were able to discover new films, learn useful skills, and find new books to read. As stated by the U.K. Reading Agency, in 2020 "31% of Brits [we]re reading more since the COVID-19 lockdown began, including a 'particular spike' among readers aged 18 to 24" (Flood 2020). A similar survey was conducted in the same year in order to elicit information about the reading habits of its participants. The survey consisted of 105 participants: 86 students and 19 faculty members from law and computer science departments of Law and Technology College, respectively. The results have shown that before the lockdown, 21% of faculty members spent 3–5 hours a day reading books, whereas after quarantine the percentage has increased to 38%, so almost double the amount. When analyzing the responses from students, it can be seen that prior to lockdown about 8% of students were reading books for 3–5 hours, but after this period the number has increased to 15%. Another part of the survey has shown that 70% of students and 53% of faculty are reading more content during lockdown days (Parikh, Parikh & Vyas 2020). The content (apart from books) includes newspapers, magazines, and research papers. One of the

main categories for popular reads were critically acclaimed literary classics. Some of these titles include *The Great Gatsby* written by Francis Scott Fitzgerald and *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez ("Coronavirus: Book sales surge as readers seek escapism and education" 2020). Stephen King stated that he had been brushing up his knowledge on classical literary tales by "finally getting round to reading *Ulysses*" (King 2020). Coloring books and uplifting stories were the main choices for children. As far as adult readers are concerned, the main preferences were survival and medical history books (Pesce 2020). High on the list were also books about gardening and cooking. One explanation for this trend is that many people had more time to devote to their passions or to start a new hobby. In the report presented by The NPD BookScan, books are described as "an important resource" during times of crisis (Pesce 2020). The most prominent reason for this is that they offer information and entertainment without people having to spend countless hours gazing at a computer screen or any type of monitor. Furthermore, in the case of uplifting stories, the reader has a chance to escape to another world and try to forget about their troubles for at least a short period of time. This type of escape from reality can prove to be very beneficial for numerous reasons, the main one being that the reader can focus their attention on something else than the current events. Being constantly bombarded with statistics, upsetting news, general panic, and feelings of anxiety can lead to increased stress levels and feelings of distress (Lavanco, Smirni & Smirni 2020). By partaking in an activity that lets the reader engage their interest and thoughts, they can try to leave these negative feelings and relax. Another positive aspect is the educational value. During times of lockdown, many had the opportunity and the time to expand their knowledge and expertise in various fields of research or to study something entirely new. As mentioned earlier, books concerning the topic of medical history (including also information about the 1918 flu pandemic) were discovered to be one of the leading topics. Another popular choice were cooking and gardening books. Cooking books were a popular choice due to the

fact that many restaurants had to shut down because of declining sales and financial problems. Furthermore, citizens were encouraged to keep fit by going on daily walks in order to build up their immune systems. This also included introducing or maintaining a healthy and well-balanced diet. To achieve this, it is better to eat healthy produce and home-cooked meals rather than order take-out every evening. For example, researchers in France asked 2422 people to complete a questionnaire regarding their dietary changes. Many people spent more time cooking and over half of the focus group reported a positive change in their overall diet. The study also showed that 47.4% of the participants had started eating more fresh products, such as fruit and vegetables (Delamaire, Ducrot, Sarda, Serry 2022).

In this part I will discuss what type of books gained popularity during times of lockdown and trends in the literary world. As far as book sales are concerned, Amazon has revealed which books were the most frequently bought through their website in the United States of America (Sutton 2020) and the United Kingdom (Rainbow 2021). The data takes into consideration the period between the 23rd of March and the 11th of May 2020**,** when the lockdown was in full force. The top picks by American readers include the thriller genre, historical fiction, and drama. The book with the most sold copies is *Normal People* written by Sally Rooney. One of the reasons why this book was such a popular choice is the fact that it had been adapted into a BBC/RTÉ production released on April 26th 2020, and turned out to be a hit among viewers. The story follows two teenagers as they try to navigate their complicated relationship. Other positions on the list include the thriller *The Silent Patient* by Alex Michaelides, which tells the story of a woman named Alicia who has not uttered a single word ever since she shot her husband several years prior. Keeping in touch with the thriller genre being a prominent choice, *Blood Orange* written by Harriet Tyce tells the story of a lawyer named Alison who has been given a murder case to defend while discovering the truth behind her seemingly perfect life. The book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* by

Charlie Mackesy has taken the literary world by storm with its charming illustrations and inspiring words. To now compare these choices with the books that sold well on British Amazon (Rainbow 2021), the top ten bestselling books comprise titles such as *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman, which tells the story of four friends who solve cold murder cases. Similar to the previous list, the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* was also a frequently ordered position. Another popular choice was the book *The Midnight Library* written by Matt Haig, which discusses themes of philosophy, life and death, and the impact of the choices that one makes on their life and well-being. The two previous books both deal with the topic of mental health, which has been discussed more openly and can be found in various books that have been published before or during the time of lockdown. In the latter book, the main character must decide how she wants to continue to live out her life and how to overcome her past traumas. Other trends include discussing communal matters, such as social mobility and class. These themes are explored in the cases of Kiley Reid's debut novel *Such a Fun Age*, as well as the 2020 Booker Prize winner *Shuggie Bain* written by Douglas Stuart. Now looking at the same year but changing the location to Poland, as stated in the April report provided by Empik (Staszczyszyn 2020), one of the most prominent bookshops in Poland, criminal stories were the bestselling genre, with authors such as Remigiusz Mróz, Katarzyna Bonda, and Alex Michaelides having the largest number of copies sold. Another popular choice were fantasy books with Andrzej Sapkowski and his series of novels *The Witcher* taking the lead. But it seems that the pandemic itself has inspired readers to delve into the topic of viruses as Albert's Camus *The Plague* has experienced a 10 times higher number of copies bought online compared to the previous year. Following the trend, the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* by Gabriel García Márquez was a hit among Internet buyers. One might wonder whether the isolation of recent months has prompted authors to publish books on mental health, coping with difficult situations, and/or self-help books. This type of book is written to

inform the reader how to cope with or solve a given problem. It means that essentially, this text is meant to give instructions on what to do. According to recent data, the topic of self-improvement interested readers so much that in 2021, 30% more self-help books were sold compared to 2020 (Milliot 2021). But the current situation has not only revolutionized the topics of books being written and bought; the very form of reading has changed as well. Statistics have shown that sales of e-books have skyrocketed since the beginning of April. One of the reasons why people value the comfort of e-books is the "ability to deliver patron requests in a few minutes compared to days" (Neujahr 2011). Libraries have not been so popular in recent times. Some libraries were shut down or needed to introduce *book quarantine*, which means that after returning a text to the library, it had to be kept in a separate room for fourteen days before being placed on the shelf. This practice was meant to make sure that the books could be ventilated before being lent to the next reader. A study conducted by Ithaka S + R concerning academic libraries has shown that "most libraries have experienced budget cuts in the current academic year and there is great uncertainty about longer-term financial recovery" (Guren, McIlroy & Sieck 2020). This could mean that some libraries could be forced to rely heavily on e-books or not be able to afford to order new books. Another reason for the expansion of e-book sales is the lack of financial support and new stock in libraries. Seeing that physical bookstores were forced to close because of lockdown, the demand for online book shopping has quickly risen. Because of this, there is "an urgent need for publishers and booksellers to develop and reinforce their presence online" (Do et al. 2020).

Changes in the Language Usage

Language has also witnessed new changes since late 2019. The appearance of neologisms is an interesting matter to analyze "as it demonstrates the dynamism of language" (Akut 2020). New neologisms have been introduced and existing terms, such as *lockdown*, *pandemic,* and *quarantine* have become

more widely used in recent times. One of the most prominent examples is the name of the virus itself—SARS or COVID-19, derived from the very year the outbreak occurred. This means that the term is relatively new, having been popularized within a few weeks/months of its coining, and appears in many local and global news outlets. The term comes from coronavirus disease 2019 (Merriam-Webster 2020). What can also be observed is how the media have been using language to persuade the public into their desired way of thinking. If the viewer is bombarded with words such as *danger*, *lethal*, *dangerous*, or *hopeless*, they might begin to associate the outbreak with negative connotations. On the other hand, by using words such as *unity*, *overcoming difficulties*, and *hopeful*, the reader regains a sense of tranquility and, in some cases, might even begin to leave feelings of despair behind. These examples show how language is relevant to the world surrounding us and how quickly its users are able to adapt it to the existing circumstances. Since the term *COVID-19* was coined, it has become a permanent phrase in everyday conversations. Another example of a new term being coined is the lexical item *coronaświrus* invented by Polish speakers. The word *świrus* means headcase or nutjob, so the loose translation would be something along the lines of "a person going crazy because of corona/the pandemic." Another example of a neologism would be the term *corona babies*, children that were born during the time of the pandemic.

A study conducted in 2020 by Muhammad Asif, Anila Iram, Maria Nisar and Deng Zhiyong analyzed articles, books, social media platforms, different websites as well as the Oxford English Corpus. This study and others published in 2020 reveal that the majority of newly coined or invented terms are nouns. The expansion of language is not only prompted by creating new terms but repurposing existing lexical items as well. This can be seen in the case of the term *bubble*, which has gained a new meaning since the beginning of the ongoing medical situation. In her discussion, Nayantara Sheoran Appleton provides a definition of this word as a "space (home, dorm, shared flats, etc.) to

which its inhabitants were constrained. Additionally, those in your *bubble* were the only people you were allowed to have any physical contact with" (Appleton 2020). She then continues to describe the instances in which one could hear this term being used. These examples include hearing parents use the phrase *bubble formation* to ensure that the required two-meter distance was kept between other people and even led to people signing their emails with the expression "stay safe in your bubble."

The reasons for creating or blending new terms vary from technological advancements to the younger generation creating their own slang words. Another reason proposed by Veronika Katermina and Sophia Lipiridi is as follows: "trying to overcome the catastrophic consequences of the pandemic by categorizing them (new vocabulary), creating a system of colloquialisms and expressions that has a hierarchical structure" (Katermina & Lipiridi). Although quite a few new terms have been invented or coined, some words have simply become more popular in usage. This would be considered a different category, encompassing words or phrases that have already existed but have gained popularity in recent months. These examples include the term *lockdown*, which has experienced a boom in popularity since April. Other phrases include *social distancing* or *social distance*, which can be used as a noun or verb. The term itself means "a public health practice that aims to prevent sick people from coming in close contact with healthy people in order to reduce opportunities for disease transmission" (Pearce 2020). The methods include staying at home, limiting contact with other people, refraining from attending crowded places, keeping travel to a minimum as well as physically distancing oneself from others. On social media, some have been updating their profile pictures on Facebook with stickers "stay home." Signs such as "keep your distance" have been placed in many shops. Relating to the topic of new forms being created, abbreviations have been included in the list as well, with the abbreviation WFH, which stands for "work from home," making its way to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Another example would be the abbreviation BCAC, which stands for

"Before CoronaVirus and After CoronaVirus." BC would refer to the time period before the 31st of December 2019, when the first cases of the virus were recorded in Wuhan, China.

The creation of new lexical items does not only refer to the pandemic itself, but to various other topics as well. For example, the term *maskne* has been introduced to describe the skin condition caused by wearing a mask for extended periods of time. The term appeared after blending the words *mask* and *acne* together. This is an example of a portmanteau word, a word that is formed by combining or blending two lexical items in order to construct a new one. Another example would be the word *quarantini*, which is a blend of *quarantine* and *martini*. The lexical item refers to a drink prepared at home during lockdown. *The New York Post* was one of the first to use this term, with the article explaining what exactly the term means, as well as gave instructions on how to prepare one at home (Kussin 2020).

New terms have been introduced to the educational system as well. Schools were faced with the arduous task of managing lessons online. The phrase *zoom university* has been extremely popular and has become a fixed term in many students' personal vocabulary usage. Also connected with the platform Zoom used for hosting video conferences and classes is the term *zooming*, which refers to the activity of using the platform.

Although the examples previously mentioned mainly concern the English and Polish languages, examples of this trend can be found in other languages as well. Bryła and Bryła-Cruz (2021) examined new lexical items coined during the pandemic in English and Spanish. Furthermore, they analyzed the use of metaphor in discussing COVID-19 across a range of European languages, such as Norwegian. A model for the interrelation of emotion and time in the field of argumentation has been applied to a textual analysis of a COVID speech, which has been discussed by Prins Marcus Valiant Lantz (2021). This was used in order to show how argumentation affects action.

Questionnaire

For the purposes of comparative analysis I created my own questionnaire so as to elicit similar information and compare the responses with the previously mentioned studies. The overall number of participants in my study was 20. The survey was mainly addressed to university students, i.e. the age group was mostly from 19 to 26, similarly to the participants in the 2020 study conducted by Parikh, Parikh and Vyas. This age group made up 85% of the respondents. The questionnaire was composed of multiple choice, short and long open-ended questions. I designed the questions myself and asked the participants to describe their reading preferences, and the language usage caused by the 2019 pandemic.

The survey opened with questions related to reading preferences. I found that most people had either read more than ten books since the beginning of the pandemic or between five and ten. 20% of respondents stated that they had read fewer than five books during this time. The main reason for reading books was for pleasure as confirmed by 75% of participants. The second reason was for academic purposes. When it comes to reading frequency, three participants, i.e. 15%, answered that they spend between three and five hours per week on this activity. Thirteen out of twenty respondents stated that they spend less than three hours per week reading. The majority of the participants of this study said that they had read more books since the beginning of the pandemic. This conclusion is similar to the one drawn in the report published by the U.K. Reading Agency, stating that over 30% of Brits "are reading more since the COVID-19 lockdown began" (Flood 2020).

The most popular books read during times of lockdown include *The Great Gatsby* written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Normal People* by Sally Rooney, and *The Plague* by Albert Camus. In Poland, as stated in the April report provided by Empik (Staszczyszyn 2020), *The Witcher* series written by Andrzej Sapkowski was the most popular choice. Out of these options, *The Witcher* proved to be the book reached for most commonly, as seven respondents checked that they had

read this position, four had read *The Great Gatsby,* and one participant had read *Normal People*.

The most popular genre turned out to be literary classics. The titles included in this category are: *Animal Farm* and *1984* written by George Orwell, *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, *Tess of D'urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway, *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, and books by Jane Austen such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*. Another eagerly reached for genre were self-help books. The selected titles were: *Hardcore Anxiety* written by Reid Chancellor, *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, *Eat That Frog!: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time* by Brian Tracy, and Joyce Meyer's *Battlefield of the Mind*. The fantasy genre was mentioned several times with titles such as *The Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman, *Dune* by Frank Herbert, *Game of Thrones* by George R.R. Martin, and the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy by Leigh Bardugo taking the lead. Since one of the reasons for reading was to learn something new or gain a new skill, titles such as *Brief Answers to Big Questions* by Stephen Hawking, *How the Best Leaders Lead* by Brian Tracy, *100 Frequently Asked Questions about Jesus Christ* by C.Austin Tucker, *Economics* by Gregory Mankiw and Mark Taylor, *The Animator's Survival Guide* by Richard Williams, *George's Cosmic Treasure Hunt* by Lucy and Stephen Hawking, and *How to Eat: The Pleasures and Principles of Good Food* by Nigella Lawson were some of the examples provided by the respondents.

The majority of the participants, i.e. 65%, answered that they now used new words because of the pandemic. These words were mainly ones heard in the media or because other people started using them. Words or phrases such as *lockdown*, *social distancin*g, and *pandemic* have become an integral element in many people's everyday vocabulary. Overheard words in the media included *koronasceptyk*, i.e. somebody who is skeptical of the pandemic, who does not entirely believe in it; another older word to describe such a person is foliarz —

this term means a conspiracy theorist. Other examples of frequently heard terms include *coronaświrus,* and *pocovidowe,* which means any changes that have occurred because of the corona illness. In English examples included *maskne*, *zoomer*, and *plandemic,* which is a blend of the words *plan* and *pandemic* and it signifies a planned pandemic, a reference to a conspiracy theory.

The participants of the questionnaire were also asked whether they had created their own lexical items because of the pandemic. Two categories can be distinguished in this part. The first category relates to names created in order to give various names to people and the type of behaviour they showcase during the pandemic: *covidowiec*, *antyszczep*, and *antymaseczkowiec*. The last two terms refer to people who are against vaccination or wearing masks. The second category was connected with health, and included words such as *asymptomatic disease*.

The participants were also asked to discuss whether they had introduced any lifestyle changes since the beginning of the pandemic. The answers were mostly connected with health issues, such as washing their hands more frequently, wearing a mask in public spaces, working out more, but also starting new hobbies such as knitting or playing the guitar. However, not everybody responded so positively to the changes that the pandemic had brought about. Some respondents stated that their mental health deteriorated or that they could not attend classes on-site, which in return made their studying less effective.

Conclusions

As mentioned above, the events taking place since 2019 have had a significant impact on different aspects of everyday life. Starting with the introduction of new regulations, such as enforcing lockdowns and social distancing, new trends and tendencies in reading practices and language usage could be observed. Sales of e-books and self-help books have increased, as have the general

number of readers and the number of books read during the time of quarantine. As far as developments or changes in language are concerned, new terms have been invented and the usage of existing words, such as *quarantine*, *lockdown*, and *social distancing* has become more popular.

The results from the questionnaire that I conducted show that both reading preferences and the language usage has changed since the beginning of the pandemic. Although the sample group was quite small, it can be observed that people had read more books while staying at home and started to use new words. These findings are similar to the survey carried out by Kshama Parikh, Saurin Parikh, and Priyanki Vyas in 2020. It would be useful to gather a larger group of participants so as to conduct a more detailed analysis.

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Abstract

The global pandemic that began 2019 has influenced our daily lives in many different ways. Due to periods of lockdown, new trends in reading habits have appeared. In this article the reading preferences of both American and British readers will be analyzed, as well as a study which was conducted among university students and colleagues.

As far as language changes are concerned, new terms have been coined regarding the pandemic since 2019. These terms have either been entirely created specifically during this time period, such as *coronaświrus*, or blended with already existing words. Another change in language is the increase use of already known lexical items which have gained popularity during this time. The article will discuss these matters at greater length, as well as provide relevant examples.

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QUEERING HISTORY: ALTERNATE TIMELINES AND THE EFFECTS OF QUEER DIVERGENCE IN CONNIE WILKINS' *TIME WELL BENT*

Keywords: alternative history, queer, fiction, divergence, speculative past

Introduction

The focus of the paper is queerness in alternate history and speculative past. While queering the future in popular fiction has become more and more common in the last decades, queering the past remains rare. The genre of science fiction has proposed visions of the future portrayed from LGBTQ+ perspectives, including utopias or dystopias. Common representations include all-female lesbian worlds (Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*), all-male gay societies (Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos*), gender fluid or genderless worlds (Ursula Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness,* Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*), alternative dystopian future realities where homosexuality is the norm (Anthony Burgess's *The Wanting Seed*, Rafael Grugman's *Nontraditional Love*) or simply stories where a main character is not heteronormative, e.g. transgender, non-binary or bisexual. Due to the fact that speculative fiction provides authors and readers with flexibility to imagine societies that are different from the existing ones, such an opportunity is frequently used to examine gender, sexuality or sexual bias by challenging readers to reexamine their heteronormative cultural preconceptions. Therefore, speculative fiction gives both authors and readers the freedom to reflect on the past, present and on the possible future that can be improved for LGBTQ+ individuals. However, even though many authors

have attempted to conceive queer futures or alternate queer realities, LGBTQ+ communities have been excluded from those fictional representations which speculate about the past. Queerness has been overlooked in both recorded history and in contemporary speculative past fiction. In her anthology *Time Well Bent: Queer Alternative Histories* published in 2009, Connie Wilkins ventures to correct this omission by projecting queered alternate history.

Alternate History

Alternative histories present speculative past and, thus, they are often misclassified as science fiction. Both science fiction and alternate history are genres of change, possibilities and uncertainties; however, the relationship between fiction and history in speculative literature deserves deeper insight.

Nicholas David Gevers describes three modes by which science fiction appropriates the concept of history: historical extension (extrapolation), historical imitation, and historical modification (16). Historical extension is the most common within the genre of science fiction as it simply focuses on extrapolation and continuation of current reality or trends into the future. The aim is thus to present the future as the extension of the author's present times and recent history. There is also a strong reciprocal relationship between future and reality, as those images very often focus on precautionary or predictive visions in reference to the existing world. Historical imitation, on the other hand, provides direct appropriation of historical details or patterns and the modelling of futures on historical antecedents and past civilisations. Historical modification is in many ways similar to imitation as it is also based on the historical models. However, it entails both a sustained use of past paradigms and a deliberate departure from them (18). The most prominent application of this technique is the creation of *alternate histories*, in which some historical facts are counterfactually changed.

Any example of science fiction literature will be built using one or more of these three models of historical modification as the world depicted in science

fiction narratives must originate somewhere in the past even though certain precedents can be altered. These techniques of historical modification coexist at times, but they separate the general trends of science fiction's appropriation of history. Each mode accomplishes a unique sort of historical commentary, in which some events or elements of the story appear in the text unexpectedly. Therefore, the reader may be presented with elements of the future in the past or features of the past in the future. Such a combination of familiarity and dissonance is at the core of science fiction and, thus, history serves as an inevitable element in the genre.

An interesting point on the relationship between science fiction and history is also made by a historian, Edward James, who proposes four ways in which science fiction implements history in the text: the investigation of history (e.g., through travel in time), historical theory in practice (future as the extension of the past), historical theory as a theme, and alternate histories (10). A similar idea is also developed by Gevers, who identifies four varieties of history (Gevers 20). Those four modes of history are the items of different methodologies of verifiable allotment, which serves to divide the genre of science fiction. The first, *future histories*, is the broadest category of the science fiction genre as it includes texts set in a fictional future. *Future History* refers to any text that projects a future which is imagined on the basis of current reality and, therefore, it inevitably necessitates borrowings from history, whether through historical extension or historical imitation (Gevers 20). *Secret history,* which represents a rather small category within the genre, is a kind of narrative that presents a different explanation for previous or current history's documented facts without changing the history's recorded specifics. Therefore, it depends on historical modification and imitation (Gevers 21). The third category is *Renarrated History*, which is a type of historical imitation, as the text is situated in the past but the history remains unchanged. The past is directly recreated and retold, with all of the original features preserved (Gevers 20). The last category, which serves as the main focus of this paper, is *Alternate*

History. This particular mode is strongly influenced by some historical modification. It arises from historical events but imagines their different outcome. Therefore, it incorporates the element of counter-factuality, with its alternate world resembling ours, occupying an equivalent position in space and time, but varying from it due to some minor or major differences. In discovering and evoking places where history might have been modified, alternate history is implicitly based on historical imitation, but due to the disruption on the timeline the divergence occurs, and the historical modification governs the events from that point onwards (Gevers 20).

As pointed out by Karen Hellekson, alternate history dates back to 1836, when the first novel-length text of this particular genre was published by Louis-Napoléon Geoffroy Chateau (Hellekson 3). His *Napoléon apocryphe* (1836) provides an alternate history of Napoleon, in which he never fails but annihilates all opposition and becomes emperor of the known world (3). Since then, alternate histories have become increasingly popular, especially in the last decades.

By definition, alternate histories are based on historical modification. When history is altered to construct a counterfactual chronology, it creates a dissonance between imagined and real histories. As a result, the reader who is aware of historical facts notices anachronisms in the parallel reality. Therefore, in general terms, alternate histories are hypotheses based on historical facts that propose other scenarios regarding pivotal events in human history and depict results that differ significantly from the historical record (Hellekson 5). Such texts simply propose an alternative development of historical events which emerge due to some change in one exact point of time. As the known timeline is disrupted in such stories, the reader is presented with an outcome that differs from the one that they are familiar with. Alternative histories propose to investigate what the reality would look like if one thing happened differently or *if* history had taken a different course from one point onwards. Moreover, these scenarios also try to address the issue of how such alteration

can influence the present and the future. Authors can use distortions to speculate about history or actuality, and to reflect on reality as we know it. Furthermore, the paths that history did not follow contextualize the course that it did take. The reflection upon the possible consequences of historical modification is the core element of alternate histories, as acknowledged by one of today's most prominent authors of this genre, Harry Turtledove:

> Establishing the historical breakpoint is only half the game of writing alternate history. The other half, and to me the more interesting one, is imagining what would spring from the proposed change. It is in that second half of the game that science fiction and alternate history come together. Both seek to extrapolate logically a change in the world as we know it. Most forms of science fiction posit a change in the present or nearer future and imagine its effect on the more distant future. Alternate history, on the other hand, imagines a change in the more distant past and examines its consequences for the nearer past and the present. The technique is the same in both cases; the difference lies in where in time it is applied. (7)

Therefore, after all, it may be assumed that any kind of alternate history requires three conditions: a point of divergence from the historical timeline (however, it must be introduced before the time in which the author is writing), an alteration that would change the course of the known history, and, finally, an examination of the consequences of that alteration to history.

Andy Duncan in his article on alternate histories points out that the genre should not be classified as a history due to the fact that it is indeed a work of fiction in which the past that we are familiar with is defamiliarized, usually for dramatic or ironic effect (209). Therefore, as he claims, "[o]ften an alternate history dramatizes the moment of divergence from the historical record, as well as the consequences of that divergence" (209). Hence, at first sight, such a story or novel may appear to be a classic work of historical fiction depicting people or events that are known and familiar to the reader. However, the point of divergence, which appears on the timeline at the beginning of the text, introduces the alteration in the course of events. An example of such alternate history, provided by Duncan is *The Lucky Strike* (1984) by Kim Stanley Robinson, in which at first the reader is introduced to the real historical context

of the last month of the Second World War when US forces are ready to drop atom bombs on Japan, but as the story progresses we learn that the plane exploded and the bomb was never dropped on Hiroshima. This event is the story's point of divergence as from the moment the reader knows it is not a historical fiction but an alternate history.

The moment of divergence does not necessarily have to be dramatized. As Duncan continues:

> Often the story or novel begins many years after that moment has occurred. The reader is immediately in a different world, so that a pleasure of the reading becomes the discovery not only of what *will* happen but also of what *already* happened, to make this 'alternate world' the way it is." (210)

Such a technique is visible in the novel *The Signaller* (1966) by Keith Roberts. The story depicts life of Rafe Bigland and introduces us to a strange image of twentieth-century England in which radio is unknown, church and state are one and medieval trade guilds dominate the economy. Gradually the reader gets to know that the Spanish Armada conquered England and gave an end both to English Reformation and English Renaissance. Moreover, some alternate histories focus on the portrayal of the disturbances in history that were deadly and chaotic, like *Dispatches from the Revolution* (1991) by Pat Cadigan. The novel consists of fragmented documents from 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago during which, according to the story, President Lyndon Johnson and all the Democratic presidential candidates were killed. As a result the election never took place and thirty years later civil rights don't exist. On the other hand, some of them are more ironic and playful as the alteration seems quite mischievous. In Howard Waldrop's comic book *Ike at the Mike* (1986) the author portrays an alternate world in which Dwight Eisenhower is a famous jazz musician while Elvis Presley becomes a US senator. Notwithstanding some puckish cases of alternate histories, most such texts focus on dystopias and nightmarish worlds that might have existed. An interesting exemplar of such dystopian counterfactuals is *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick. The novel portrays the world fifteen years after

the Second World War, in which the Axis Powers actually won and Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany have become the superpowers.

Even though alternate histories may take variety of forms, the inevitable rule of the genre is that the reader must be able to distinguish between the fictitious and real-life histories. For that reason, many alternate histories clearly indicate the parallels between real and fictional timelines by bringing them together through science fiction devices, most commonly time travel (Duncan 212). Furthermore, it is presumed that parallel worlds with divergent timelines can coexist. Even if the author proposes only one timeline, the alteration in the course of history and the point of divergence must be obvious to the reader, so that they are able to understand not only the changes introduced but also the consequences of those historical modifications. The historical events or a particular period should be known to the reader as only then will it be possible to grasp the meaning of the alteration and its importance. As mentioned by Isaac Asimov, commenting on the process of creation of alternate histories: "You have to know the times, and not only be able to present them clearly and plausibly, but you must trace the consequences of some small change and make that clear and plausible, too" (7).

A concept which is very similar to alternate history, and sometimes even considered as a synonymous term, is *uchronia.* The word itself was coined as a neologism combining the word utopia (*u-topos* in Greek meaning "not-place") and *chronos* (time). Therefore, the term expresses the idea about a "not-place" in time; accordingly, it may be understood as a place not existing in time. *Uchronia* was first coined by French philosopher and writer Charles Renouvier in his novel *Uchronie (L'Utopie dans l'histoire*).[1] Even though the term *uchronia* is not explained by the author himself in the novel, the introduction provided by the editor elucidates the neologism which appears in the title:

> But this story, mingled with real facts and imaginary events, is in short pure fantasy, and the conclusion of this bizarre book is moving away from the sad truth. The writer composes an *uchronia,* utopia of times gone by. He writes history, not as it was, but as it might have been, as he

> believes, and he warns us neither of his willful mistakes, nor of his purpose."[2] (Renouvier 3)

Therefore, in contrast to entirely imaginary lands or universes, the term *uchronia* refers to a hypothetical or fictional time period derived from our reality. The concept is akin to alternate history, although uchronic times are not easily defined, and they are sometimes reminiscent of a constructed world. They are typically set in some remote or indeterminate moment before contemporary times. However, the term uchronia is used by some to refer to alternate histories.

Queering the History in *Time Well Bent*

Non-heteronormativity has been largely omitted in speculative past. Whereas numerous authors have attempted to imagine queered futures or alternative queered realities, few have tried to portray queerness in alternate histories. In 2009, Connie Wilkins, an American author of lesbian themed science fiction and fantasy, edited the collection of stories entitled *Time Well Bent: Queer Alternative Histories*, which strived to inscribe queerness into the genre. In the introduction to the book, she points to the fact that queerness has been left out not only in alternative histories but also in the actual historical records: "We have always been here, in every era and every area of society. So why have we been so nearly invisible in recorded history?" (11). This is why she decided to work on the volume. *Time Well Bent* features fourteen different short stories of alternative past, written by different authors, in which historical figures or events are queered. As the editor also explains in the introduction:

> In *Time Well Bent*, the perspectives are those of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender characters, some entirely fictional, many based on figures from history. Since these are short stories, not novels, the chief emphasis is on the differences, the points of divergence from "known" history, leaving the reader to ponder the long-term consequences. (12)

Thus, the stories present alternative visions of some factual historical events, in which the alteration is caused by queering historical figures. The introduction of a point of divergence to the timeline causes the process of changing the

history as we know it to the one that is *queered*. I call this particular change on the timeline that happens due to the introduction of a queer character or queered event and the consequent modification in historical record—the queer divergence. Alternative histories that implement queer divergence also leave the reader with reflection about the possible consequences of queer divergence. In general terms, these stories contemplate what our present reality would look like if some historical figures had been queer or some historical events queered.

Interestingly, alternative histories in Wilkins' anthology frequently break with traditional conventions of the genre. First of all, the chosen events are not the ones we could classify as the well-known parts of our history. Spanning from candid recorded history to more subtle mythological threads, the authors span centuries, cultures, countries, and continents. Most of the readers would be aware of some of the recounted historical events, for example the Second World War or the introduction of the American Bill of Rights. Nevertheless, the detailed history of Mayans, the work of E.M. Forster, the story of Roanoke colony or of the Hesperus ship may not be widely recognized in the common consciousness. Therefore, the reader is challenged to carry out research in order to understand the context of a given narrative. The stories are just excerpts from history that might not be easily identifiable for the reader. Consequently, the stories' divergence from historical events may be elusive. The reflection upon the possible ramifications and outcomes of the queer alterations in the narratives is ultimately up to the reader who interprets the effects of queer divergence. The subsequent analysis of two short stories from the anthology scrutinizes how alternative histories can be queered by employing queer divergence.

i. "Sod 'Em"

A simple but at the same time interesting example of queer alternative history is the story by Barry Lowe, author of numerous short stories and screenplays,

entitled "Sod 'Em." The tale is set in a monastery in a desolate region of Ireland around the ninth or tenth century. The main focus of the story is the relationship between two homosexual monks: Brother Francis and Brother Finan. The author proposes quite an accurate depiction of the life of a queer monk in the monastery. The relationship between Brother Francis and Brother Finan is constantly being referred to as "unhealthy" and "against nature" (72) by an abbot. The plot concentrates on Brother Francis' being entrusted with the task of copying old manuscripts of the Bible. He transcribes the text of the tale of Sodom and Gomorrah from the book of Genesis. In this biblical tale God reveals to Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah would be destroyed because of their inhabitants' sins and heinous deeds. Abraham, who wishes to save the righteous people of the cities, especially his nephew Lot, pleads God to spare the cities if ten righteous inhabitants could be found. Two angels, appearing as men, are sent to Sodom and stay with Lot but are met with a crowd of men who ask to meet the newcomers. Lot offers them his daughters instead, but this only causes further frustration in the gathered people. Realizing that only Lot and his family are righteous, the angels warn Lot to leave the city. While they are escaping Sodom and Gomorrah, God destroys it.

The biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah, as mentioned by Robert Gnuse, is "used by Christians to condemn homosexual behavior" (70). The same issue is acknowledged by Holly Joan Toensing who writes:

> Associating the biblical cities of Sodom and Gomorrah with homosexuality is common among the Christian Right. More specifically, many associate God's annihilation of these cities with the idea that the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were gay, engaging in sodomy. Verbal expression of this association is used against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals. (62)

Therefore, this tale has traditionally been used to condemn homosexual behavior of both men and women, homoerotic love being called the sin of Sodom. As Gnuse adds, this connotation comes from the fact that inhabitants of the cities did not want to meet the two visitors, but they demanded to have sexual intercourse with them (71). It is caused by the interpretation of the verb

know as *direct sexual activity*: "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them" (Genesis 19:5 in Gnuse 71).

In the alternate history, after finding this tale, Brother Francis reflects on its message: "Oh, how he wished God had not found it necessary to destroy Sodom. What had the men done, after all?" (Lowe 75). This is when the point of divergence emerges in the short story. Brother Francis decides to change the tale while rewriting the manuscript. The monk creates a vision in which Lot is visited by an angel—an exact reflection of his beloved Brother Finan. Brother Francis creates his own version of Sodom and Gomorrah, introducing the element of love between Angel and Lot:

> He invited the beautiful angel to his house and there prepared for him a great feast. They conversed as brothers and Lot vowed never to be parted from his angel friend. (…) The men and boys of Sodom, having heard of the beauty of the angel, came to Lot's door to see for themselves the perfection that God had wrought. (76)

Thus, in the version of the monk not only is Lot in love with the angel but also the inhabitants are amazed by his beauty and perfection. The love of Lot and Angel is so strong that the two cannot imagine parting:

> "I have come to love you as no other creature," Lot said. "I cannot bear to part with you. I will end my life and join you in heaven." The angel was saddened to hear this. "If you take your own life," he said, "then you are damned, and I will never see you hereafter." (…) And Lot wept. And the angel wept. And God saw that their love was good and he opened his heart. He allowed the angel to stay with Lot until it was time to take him to his reward in heaven. (77)

What Brother Francis creates is an emotional and sentimental tale of love, in which God, amazed by the strong feeling shared by Lot and Angel, decides to support their love appreciating the beauty of it. Therefore, in Lowe's story, God actually advocates for homosexual love, realizing how deep and indestructible the feeling and affection of the men are. At the point when the Monk is about to finish the manuscript, the monastery is attacked. Brother Francis decides to replace the original tale of Sodom and Gomorrah with his script and burn the remaining original copies.

This alternate history brings two main conclusions. First of all, it puts forward the idea that the Bible as we know is the result of centuries of translations, transcriptions, and interpretations and thus, may be seen as something dubious. Secondly, the reader is free to imagine what our reality would look like if the biblical story, instead of condemning homosexual relationships, praised and appreciated same-sex love. The queer divergence leads to the reflection on how a simple act of rewriting the story of Lot and Angel could change the history of Christianity or how our society would perceive queerness if *the sin of Sodom* never existed.

ii. "A Spear Against the Sky"

The second short story under analysis relies more on historical record, introducing only a minor divergence. "A Spear Against the Sky" by M. P. Ericson, who holds a Ph.D. degree in philosophy and the author of numerous short stories, is an interesting proposition of alternate history set in Roman Britain. The text focuses on the lives of two queens and warriors of Britannia: Boudicca and Cartimandua. Once again, before interpreting the short story and realizing its point of divergence, one needs to meticulously revisit historical record of that period.

Boudicca was a queen of the British Celtic Iceni tribe and is often called Britain's warrior queen, as she was the one who led an uprising against the invading forces of the Roman Empire in AD 60 or 61 (Collingridge 24). Importantly, Boudicca's husband Prasutagus, with whom she had two children, governed as a nominally independent ally of Rome. In his will, he wished to hand his kingdom jointly to his daughters and the Roman Emperor. When he died, however, his last wish was disregarded. The Romans annexed the kingdom and confiscated his property. Boudica was flogged and her two daughters raped. As a result, Boudica organized the uprising and led the Iceni and the other tribes of Britannia to revolt against the Romans. Even though the rebellion was not successful, according to historical records, Boudicca's rebels

caused the death of approximately seventy to eighty thousand Romans and pro-Roman Britons. After the rebels lost the final battle, the Roman Empire confirmed its control of the province, whereas Boudicca either took poison or died of illness (245). The other heroine, Cartimandua, was the queen of Brigante tribe from AD 43 to 69, and her rule depended mostly upon support from the Roman armies (256). She concluded a treaty with the emperor Claudius in the early period of his conquest of Britain, which began in AD 43. From that point onwards, the queen was considered pro-Roman and loyal to the Roman emperor. The two Celtic queens lived in exactly the same period, but their choices differed diametrically. There is also no historical record confirming that the two women ever met.

The story offered by M. P. Ericson is directly based on that historical moment. In "A Spear Against the Sky," the reader is introduced to the setting where Cartimandua is loyal to Rome and Boudica, disgraced by the conquerors, seeks revenge. Since the story offers an exact reiteration of historical events, Cartimandua is also portrayed as pro-Roman. However, the narrative introduces a modification—before she marries her husband, she has a secret romance with Boudica. Therefore, the alteration implemented involves homosexual relationship between the queens.

In the alternate history, Boudica pays a visit to Cartimandua after her daughters have been raped and asks the queen to join her in the rebellion against the Romans: "I have the Iceni, I have the Trinovantes, and I want the Brigantes as well. Together we will destroy the Romans and all who support them, and set this island free" (Ericson 65). However, Cartimandua does not support that decision, especially that the visit awakens the old emotions and memories of her past relationship with Boudica:

> They stared at each other, hot eyes meeting cold. In Cartimandua's chest an old rage sparked and burned. "You left me," Cartimandua said. "You made a choice. Now you are reaping the harvest, and it is not to your taste. So you want me to sweeten it for you with the blood of my sons." (66)

The reader learns from the conversation that the two were involved in an intense and romantic homosexual relationship and, moreover, that Boudica left Cartimandua not because she wished to but because she knew that it was inevitable: "It was necessary. You know that. We both had to marry, sooner or later, and Prasutagus was a good catch. Besides, I wanted children" (67). After all, Cartimandua rejects the proposition of Boudica but asks her to stay the night so that her daughters can rest peacefully. When the women lie down together, one close to another, it brings back the feelings and affection they used to have for each other: "The touch awoke memories of laughing together, holding hands in the sunshine, secret caresses in the night. It had been a glorious summer, full of promise and joy" (68). Finally, they let the emotions take over and spend a passionate night together: "Boudica kissed the skin at the nape of Cartimandua's neck (…) They made love quietly, breathlessly, while all around them the household slept" (69). After the alteration is introduced, divergence occurs: Cartimandua joins Boudica in her rebellion and consequently Britain's tribes crush Roman forces: "It was over. In far-off Rome such slaughter might now make the conquest of Britain seem more trouble than it could be worth, or it might not, but for now, they could claim victory" (70). Consequently, Rome does not conquer Britain in that particular moment of history. The alternate story proposes that the invasion of Romans in Britain never takes place, as they fail to stop the rebellion led by Boudica. Interestingly, such a potential course of history is mentioned by Vanessa Collingridge, the author of Boudica's biography, who claims that if Cartimandua had joined Boudica in the revolt, it would have stopped the Romans once and for all:

> Only the client kingdoms such as those of Cogidubnus and Cartimandua escaped the widespread retribution, for they had been amongst the few who had remained steadfast in their loyalty. Had they joined with Boudica, the potential for removing the Romans from Britain once and for all would have been almost boundless, for the rebels would then have had both the manpower and the money to keep the resistance fighting for years. (259-260)

In this alternative history, the course of events is changed by important historical figures being depicted as queer. It is the relationship between Boudica and Cartimandua that leads to the alteration and historical modification. Hence, the queer divergence produces the far-reaching effect of ending Roman occupation in Britain.

Conclusion

The two examples above serve as the illustration of what queer alternate histories may look like, what queer point of divergence is and how the process of queering the history emerges. The anthology may be seen not only as an example of queer alternative histories but also as a way to claim the place of LGBTQ+ individuals in general history. In the stories the authors use LGBTQ+ individuals as fantastic elements that leads to the creation of counterfactual timeline. However, many of those figures are historical ones, also placed in real historical context which emphasizes the assumption that queer individuals may have been erased from the recorded history. Therefore, such representation affirms the place and importance of LGBTQ+ individuals in the history, present and future. As the editor of the book points out:

> We have always been here. For as long as there has been such a thing as sex, even before we late-coming humans began etching a record of our existence into stone or clay. (11)

Hence, the process of queering the history does not only provide an opportunity to reflect upon the possible consequences of the divergence and upon the fragility of the course of history, but it also aims at making people realize that those who were invisible in the recorded history have in fact been there all along and could influence the present as we know it.

Endnotes

1. English: *Uchronia (Utopia in History), an Apocryphal Sketch of the Development of European Civilization Not as It Was but as It Might Have Been.*

2. Translated by the author. Original text: "Mais, cette histoire, mêlée de faits réels et d'évènements imaginaires, est en somme de pure fantaisie, et la conclusion de ce livre

singulier s'éloigne on ne peut plus de la triste vérité. L'écrivain compose une uchronie, utopie des temps passes. Il écrit l'histoire, non telle qu'elle fut, mais telle qu'elle aurait pu être, a ce qu'il croit, et il ne nous avertit ni de ses erreurs volontaires, ni de son but."

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Abstract

The article explores the genres of alternative history and speculative past from the perspective of queerness. The analysis focuses on the elements of queer divergence in *Time Well Bent* (2009), an anthology edited by Connie Wilkins. Short stories in the volume offer reflection on how the world might be different if some of the historical figures had been queer or some historical events queered. The fourteen contributors retell history from the point of view of gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered characters. The main emphasis is put on difference, divergence from known history,

and long-term global consequences of those alterations. The ideas of queering the history and of queer divergence are examined alongside the relationship between history and fiction.

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CORPOREAL VESSELS: GODS AS PERSONIFICATIONS OF AMERICAN ANXIETIES IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *AMERICAN GODS*

Keywords: American anxieties, prosopopoeia, Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

Introduction

Among Neil Gaiman's multitude of works, which cover a number of literary genres and media, *American Gods* (2001) is by far his least critically analyzed work. The novel has been nominated for numerous awards for best fantasy, horror, and science-fiction novel, but, characteristically for Gaiman, it eludes definite classifications. The novel follows the story of Shadow Moon, an ex-convict, who after losing his wife and best friend in a car accident, faces a new, solitary life. It is at this point that he meets Mr. Wednesday, a mysterious man who hires Shadow as a bodyguard and errand boy. Later in the novel, Mr. Wednesday and his associates emerge as American gods, i.e., Americanized versions of deities and mythical creatures that the immigrants brought to America together with their original beliefs and cultures. Mr. Wednesday's—Norse god Odin's—objective is to gather and unite 'old' American gods (such as himself) in order to fight the 'new gods' of technological advancement and globalization, who are on the rise in modern-day America, posing a serious threat to the old gods' existence. Throughout the novel, Shadow helps his employer convince different gods to join his side of the conflict, urging them to face the new gods in a battle that will determine America's spiritual future. In the end, however, Mr. Wednesday's plan turns out to be a hoax, set up in

collaboration with another god, Loki, in order to gain power from the strife. Even though the scheme is exposed, the conflict between the old and new gods remains unresolved—while both sides give up the fight, their mutual anxieties of surviving in modern America linger.

Despite the fact that Gaiman is a British writer, his depiction of America has been widely considered precise. According to Sara Kosiba, it is the author's status of an expat in North America, that allowed him to "view the region with fresh eyes and without the cultural associations and baggage that so many Americans would bring with them in perceiving a place" (108). Therefore, when analyzing existing scholarship on *American Gods*, one notices that the focus is most frequently placed on Gaiman's portrayal of American identity. It is considered by many critics to be a complex, diverse, and, most importantly, accurate representation (Kosiba 2010; Rata 2016). For example, in "Flyover Country," Kosiba provides a thorough description of Midwestern geography and culture present in *American Gods* and reads these tropes as exemplifying the construction of American identity through an emphasis on regionalism. Irina Rata's articles, on the other hand, address the problem of American identity in the context of the novel's intertextuality (2015) and its reliance on multicultural folklore (2016). Victoria Yee Wei Wen, in turn, argues that American identity presented in Gaiman's novel is also hybrid and diverse. She mentions its multicultural and heterogeneous character, as well as the fact that Gaiman's portrayal of American identity celebrates, at least to some extent, the country's cultural diversity resulting from its immigrant past (537-538). Although scholars focus in their analyses on the leading aspect of the novel, i.e., the representation of contemporary America, they simultaneously overlook the other, equally important element, namely, the gods. Even though the existing research acknowledges the gods' presence and reads them as symbols of America's conflict between its past and its present, few provide an in-depth analysis of the gods as personifications of the country's anxieties (Wheeler 2017; Yee Wei Wen 2019).

Because the gods' significance tends to be overlooked, the aim of this paper is to fill this particular gap in in the critical reading of Gaiman's novel. It is my objective to examine these characters as fundamental for the analysis of the American identity in the novel, especially in their representation of historical traumas. Below, I argue that both old and new gods in Gaiman's novel are personifications of America's unvoiced anxieties, originating in the country's problematic relationship with its past and present. The following analysis will be based on the literary device of prosopopoeia as defined by Eric Savoy. I will use this literary device to interpret the gods as corporeal vessels manifesting America's hidden fears, namely the lack of a coherent national identity and the nation's settler colonial history.

Prosopopoeia

Savoy defines prosopopoeia (i.e., personification) as a "verbal device […] by which abstract ideas (such as the burden of historical causes) are given a 'body' in the spectral figure of the ghost" (168). Characteristic of its Gothic tradition, Savoy argues, is a way of expressing America's true self through a corporeal manifestation of its repressed anxieties: "[t]hrough prosopopoeia – the figure of haunting through personification – the shadow begins to speak. And this shadow knows the underbelly of American history, the Real that has yet to be completely represented" (Savoy 175).

In American literature,-fantastical figures that convey a hidden meaning are a part of the literary tradition dating back to the country's Puritan past. Allegory is an example of this technique, which was ubiquitously employed in the colonial period. It was later transfigured towards symbolization and ambiguity during the American Renaissance, most prominently in Nathaniel Hawthorne's works. According to Savoy, Hawthorne's technique can be called "a symbolism of *implication*," where "Puritan-based allegory" is reconfigured so that it "implies indirectly rather than gesturing explicitly" (176-177). Therefore, through implied supernatural images (seemingly real but never confirmed as

true), Hawthorne's works allow the reader to uncover a *predetermined* meaning of the symbol, legible according to their own knowledge and experience.

Unlike Hawthorne's ambiguous texts that allude to supernatural presence, Gaiman's *American Gods* is rather specific. The presence of gods and other mythical creatures is never uncertain. Although their presence may be sometimes questioned by the main character, the gods in the novel are unmistakably real and alive. They are corporeal entities of spiritual and historical origins that haunt American landscape with their presence, having witnessed first-hand America's horrific past. This is why in the case of Gaiman's novel allegorical analysis seems futile: in a symbolic or allegorical reading of *American Gods*, the eponymous deities would function as ambiguous supernatural figures to deliver a symbolic message of the country's complicated past. In a prosopopoeic approach, however, the characters are treated as gateways to an explicit, culturally specific meaning, bringing the repressed national fears to light. In Gaiman's novel, therefore, the gods become personifications of America's dreadful past, allowing the atrocities of colonialism to resurface.

The New Gods and Critique of Consumerism

In Gaiman's novel, the new deities embody progress. They represent the cultural shift into the modern, turn-of-the-millennium America, marked by rapid technological advancement and globalization. As indicated by their names (Media, Technical Boy, Mr. World), they are "birthed from the ideas or consequences of a modernising society" and emerge as "wealthy, attractive […] and more tangible [than the old gods]" (Wheeler 124). The new gods are initially presented as an evil force that threatens the existence of the old ones, since they play into the stereotype of the new being intrinsically worse than the old. There are numerous occurrences in the novel where this conflict is visible and takes shape of a stereotypical generational gap. The new gods are described by the old gods as "foolish creatures" (Gaiman 151), whereas, in

return, the old gods are considered to be obsolete and unsuited for modern times by the new gods (Gaiman 476).

Since the new gods embody progress and modernization, they can be directly linked to the social reality of modern-day America. Their gradual rise to power, visible in the creation of globalized cities, fast food restaurants or roadside attractions, centers on providing cheap entertainment for the masses. The new gods, therefore, symbolize consumerism that threatens to eradicate the "traditional" ways of life represented by the old gods. The American lifestyle governed by consumerism is constantly referred to in Gaiman's novel, often with an emphasis on its senselessness and absurdity. Participating in consumerist routines also carries a specific spiritual meaning to American people:

> Roadside attractions: people feel themselves being pulled to places where, in other parts of the world, they would recognize that part of themselves that is truly transcendent, and buy a hot dog and walk around, feeling satisfied on a level they cannot truly describe, and profoundly dissatisfied on a level beneath that. (Gaiman 130)

Because roadside attractions are commercial endeavours that obscure the potency of an actual sacred place, the visitors are often stuck between the superficial pleasure of consumerist behaviors and their wish for actual spiritual fulfillment. When describing one of the tourist attractions in the novel, the dialogue clearly indicates such a connection:

> And then there was a carousel. […]
> 'What's it for?' asked Shadow. 'I mean, okay, world's biggest, hundreds of animals, thousands of lightbulbs, and it goes around all the time, and no one ever rides it.'
> 'It's not there to be ridden, not by people,' said Wednesday. 'It's there to be admired. It's there to be.'
> 'Like a prayer wheel goin' around and round,' said Mr. Nancy. 'Accumulating power.' (Gaiman 139)

In *American Gods*, the overall commentary on consumerism points to the fact that it is a structure which provides people with a false experience of spiritual fulfillment. Not only are such behaviors senseless but they are also excessive, often overstimulating people's minds. This is why the consumerist routines

exemplified in the novel are considered by some critics to be detrimental to American society. According to Irina Rata, changes resulting from globalization and consumerism nowadays pose a serious threat to what she sees (perhaps mistakenly) as the previous coherency of American identity; such phenomena dissolve it into "hundreds of disparate pieces connected together by the same territory and politics" (2015: 104). Yee Wei Wen argues similarly that the new gods are "representative of the desacralised and impersonal modern society, characterized by advances in technology, commercialisation and consumerism" (530).

Following Botting's argument (295) that overstimulation masks emptiness, I argue that consumerism represented in Gaiman's novel by the new gods actually conceals America's lack of identity. It is imperative to treat the excessive materialism described in the novel not as mere commentary on the problem America is currently facing, but as a façade behind which another, more profound issue is hidden. Therefore, in order to uncover the true nature of such problem one must access it by means of prosopopoeia.

Absent Identity

Since the new gods in Gaiman's novel are embodiments of the rapid progress of America at the turn of the century, one can claim that this is all that they represent. Nevertheless, as it was argued in the introduction, such conclusions would only be accurate in a symbolic reading. Through prosopopoeia, however, the new gods acquire a different meaning; rather than a mere commentary on America's current problems, they voice a deeper unspoken anxiety of a more universal nature. As I argue, the new gods in Gaiman's novel articulate America's fear of its actual lack of national identity.

As it was famously described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1991), national identity is a fictional concept, initially created by means of cultural texts (such as books or newspapers). In Gaiman's novel, American identity follows a similar logic. It is depicted as fictional; however,

some elements create a sense of coherence, such as the country's regionalism (Kosiba) and its lack of universally shared cultural or national values (Hume 300). Yet despite various explorations of the novel's representation of the American identity, few scholars have paid attention to the novel's commentary on its actual absence.

Carroll argues that "national identity [in *American Gods*] is a fictive construction" (307). She describes the extent to which American identity has been fabricated:

> The more Shadow sees of the United States, the less he feels that there is such a thing as a 'real America,' and the more he appreciates the national fiction that holds it together. (…) The problem may not be so much that America has no distinct identity, the novel suggests, as that coherent national and personal identity itself is an illusion. (320-321)

As Carroll notices, it is the national fiction that masks the lack of identity. As argued above, modern America's image is constructed by excessive consumerism and material wealth, and yet what created the country's current (placeholder for) national identity was a constant retelling of its history and lore.

Indeed, historically speaking, American identity has always been rooted in a fictive representation. Imagining itself as the New Jerusalem, founded on "the Anglo-Saxon values [considered to be] obviously superior to any of the traditions brought over, or maintained by, other immigrants" (Orosco 13), America gave birth to an entirely fictive identity. In *American Gods*, this construct is recognized and acknowledged as something entirely fictional and ultimately non-existent. As one of the gods describes it:

> The important thing to understand about American history, (…) is that it is fictional, a charcoal-sketched simplicity for the children, or the easily bored. For the most part it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself. (Gaiman 103)

It is important to notice that Gaiman does not attempt to re-imagine American identity, nor does he try to characterize its genuine self, as opposed to the current fiction. Following Savoy's Lacanian argument of the literature's impossibility of expressing the Real America (169), *American Gods* offers a

vision where behind the fictive image of American identity lies a void, giving rise to American anxiety of absent identity.

Since the artificial image of America created by consumerism is represented in the novel through the new gods, these characters become personifications of the American anxiety discussed above. As animated ideas of consumerism, globalization and progress, the gods become not only their symbolic representation, but also a mask behind which the underlying problem is hidden. Representing an illusion of identity, the new gods finally voice this usually repressed anxiety through their embodied existence in the story.

From the Old Gods to Progressing Secularization

In Gaiman's novel, the old gods play a pivotal role to the plot—they accompany Shadow from the very first pages of the novel (Low Key Lyesmith, i.e., Norse trickster god Loki) to the very last (the 'original' Odin in Iceland). As the novel describes them, in Mr. Wednesday's words: "[w]hen people came to America they brought us [the old gods] with them. (...) We rode here in their minds, and we took root. (...) Soon enough our people abandoned us, (...) and we were left, lost and scared (...). Old gods, here in this new land without gods" (Gaiman 150). As the passage suggests, the old gods started out as transplants to the American land, brought there by immigrants to the New World. When the people stopped believing in their original gods, the latter gradually lost their power. As Wheeler summarizes, the old gods were "transformed as a result of having been removed from their source culture and setting and [had to negotiate] between new terms of existence and relevance" (123). Thus, in Gaiman's novel the old gods represent beliefs, cultures and traditions imported by early American settlers and immigrants. As Rata states, "the old gods pertaining to different pantheons, with their idiosyncrasies, represent different ethnicities and cultures, as well as the Old World they come from" (2016: 37). Despite the fact that each god comes from a different cultural and historical

background, all of them face the same ordeal—that of struggling to survive in a rapidly secularizing American society.

According to Yee Wei Wen, American culture presented in Gaiman's novel is "a continuous process of struggling to find or create meaning in an increasingly desacralized world" (529), and since the old gods symbolize the country's traditional (spiritual) values, their existence seems to be threatened by the progressive secularization of American society. According to Baker, "[i]n recent years, (...) secularism in the U.S. has been making headlines and receiving more attention due to the rapid increase in the number *and* proportion of Americans who are secular" (1). Because of that it is frequently argued that *American Gods* shows how "modernisation has led to the diminishing belief in traditional mythic and religious narratives" (Yee Wei Wen 530).

Even though secularization is a result of global technological progress, what seems surprising is that many critics of the novel regard this shift away from traditional values as a fundamentally negative phenomenon. According to Wheeler, for instance, the gods in Gaiman's novel "uncover how the loss of tradition has a detrimental effect on concepts of personhood, native ecological perceptions and aspects of an individual's personal connection to the collective history of a cultural group" (125). Claiming that the values represented by the old gods (i.e., traditions and beliefs) are inherently better than those of the new gods (i.e., progress and globalization) is a common theme in the existing research on *American Gods*. Hume even goes so far as to claim that "[t]he old gods (...) embody emotions that are strong and human. The new gods are too shallow to exhibit any humanity" (299). These, I believe, are analytical inaccuracies resulting from the stereotypical conviction that the old values, whatever they may be, are superior to new ones, indicative of cultural change. It is important then, to recognize that the values represented by the old gods in Gaiman's novel are not only far from superior but also rooted in a colonial context. It has been repeatedly stated that the old gods symbolize America's historical and cultural traditions; it is, therefore, safe to assume that they are

also representative of the country's past. However, the past that the old gods embody is not only that of the fading cultural traditions, but one that has been successfully deformed in and repressed from American collective consciousness, i.e., colonialism.

Colonial Residue

Although the subject of colonialism appears in critical readings of *American Gods* (Wheeler 2017; Yee Wei Wen 2019), it is never addressed as the juxtaposition of the colonial and the Native perspective, which is actually at the core of Gaiman's novel. What the researchers often choose to overlook is that the old gods are not *really* America's old gods—they are immigrants on a foreign land, just like the people who brought them there.

Nevertheless, the old gods unapologetically claim to be superior beings in America. They believe that it is primarily them (and not Native American deities) that need protection from the changing times, despite their awareness of the country's actual history and colonial oppression. They consider themselves to be embodiments of America's true self, failing to notice their own immigrant status in America. It is especially visible in the way in which Mr. Wednesday describes the origins of the old gods in America:

> When people came to America they brought us [the old gods] with them. (...) We rode here in their minds, and we took root. (...) Soon enough our people abandoned us, (...) and we were left, lost and scared (...). Old gods, here in this new land without gods. (Gaiman 150)

Mr. Wednesday's speech seems to overlook the fact that in broader historical context the old gods were not the "original" deities in America. Following the colonial perspective, the old gods consider their arrival to be the starting point of not only of their lives but also of the country itself (described by them as a "new land"). Thus, they engage in mimicking a Eurocentric vision of America, where it is the colonizers' values and beliefs that are treated as representatives of America's real self.

The colonial past is a complicated and horrific aspect of American history, which has been continuously repressed and dismissed. However, as Savoy observes (following Freud's argument), the repressed always eventually returns: "[American] Gothic texts return obsessively to the personal, the familial, and the national pasts to complicate rather than to clarify them (...) Gothic literature is committed to representing that fearful 'uncanny' as it reappears in arresting figures (...)" (171). Thus, in Savoy's definition (175), the main function of prosopopoeia is to voice the ineffable nature of America's true self, namely, its dreadful past. In the case of *American Gods*, this resurfacing of anxiety over past atrocities is personified by the old gods. Indeed, the old gods' presence in the novel points to the problem of colonialism. They are the corporeal colonial residue that goes unnoticed and unrecognized because of America's long tradition of deforming and embellishing its past. Rather than defenders of long-lost values, the old gods stand as reanimators of the American anxiety of its own horrific past, reminiscent of specters that haunt the land.

Conclusion

Although often disregarded by the existing research on *American Gods*, the gods themselves can be read as a serious and accurate commentary on the American experience. As I have argued in this article, they are in fact personifications of repressed cultural anxieties of America's colonial past, resurfacing through the device of prosopopoeia.

The new gods, born from America's rapid modernization, symbolize the country's problem of globalization, technical progress and, consequently, increasing consumerism. However, just like the new gods' superficial characteristics, a façade of material wealth masks America's anxiety over the lack of coherent identity since that is shown to be non-existent. As animated ideas of consumerism, globalization and progress, the new gods become

personifications of America's unvoiced fear of the lack of coherent (and real) cultural identity.

The old gods, on the other hand, apart from signaling America's secularization, personify the country's horrific colonial past. The traditions that they represent are those of early settlers and colonizers, which, due to the United States' deformed history, have come to be considered traditionally American. However, through the figures of the old gods, the real, horrifying history comes into view, and the American anxiety over the colonial past resurfaces.

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the variety of anxieties represented by the eponymous characters in Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel *American Gods*. Through prosopopoeia, a device typical for American Gothic, corporeal gods become metaphors for American traumas and concerns, both hidden and silenced, such as the nation's colonial past as well as external ones, like globalization, consumerism and technical progress. Likewise, the characters constitute a basis for numerous questions about the true nature of the American experience, originating from the country's continual search for universal identity. Although the problems addressed in *American Gods* are rooted in the country's traumatic colonial past, Gaiman's personification of the foreign divine figures is also a way of offering a European perspective on America's current condition. In Gaiman's novel, personified gods—corporeal vessels for American anxieties—haunt the imaginary land, hinting at the complex terrors of America's past and present.

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MASCULINITIES IN SELECTED STORIES BY RAYMOND CARVER

Keywords: Raymond Carver, masculinity, gender roles, dirty realism, 1980s

Introduction

Today, many issues regarding manhood, such as navigating masculinity and its evolving nature in the modern world, as well as toxic masculinity and its impact on all genders, are often debated. Despite continuous increase in gender equality, men still struggle with many problems, frequently stemming from rigid masculine norms permeating different spheres of life. Literature can offer a window into how those norms are addressed by men in their everyday realities and how they negotiate their identities. One of the writers offering an interesting insight into masculine issues is Raymond Carver (1938–1988). Despite the passage of time, many depictions of masculinity in his works still seem relevant, making him an author worthy of continued attention. Carver's fiction feels rather timely, as the current situation in North America and other western countries in some aspects resembles that of his literary works. Similarly to the late 1970s and 1980s (Bimes 1), current western politics seem to be dominated by populism, which results in "[a] turn to conservatism" (Fan 111). An example of this phenomenon can be found in Donald Trump's presidency between 2017 and 2021. In the 2016 election, the politician attracted more male than female voters by a rather large, "12-point margin" (Tyson & Maniam 2016). This statistic might highlight the appeal of both Trump's conservative views and his masculine persona—which appears to be

compliant with hegemonic masculinity and often given as an example of 'toxic masculinity' (Ming Liu 2016)—to the dominant male group.

Both eras—the late 1970s and 1980s as well as the 2010s and early 2020s—seem to be defined by instability and uncertainty. The former was defined by the Cold War, the AIDS epidemic, and failures of Reaganomics that affected the disadvantaged portion of the population, such as the 1982 recession and 1987 stock market crash (history.com). Today some of the most important world-wide struggles are the Climate Crisis, refugee crises (unrefugees.org), increasing wealth divide (Horowitz et al. pewresearch.org), and numerous problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as loss of employment (bls.gov). Karwowski *et al.* argue that during the times of uncertainty, the population tends to skew towards more conservative politics (17-18). Anxiety caused by unpredictable circumstances "translates into a stronger personal need for closure" which then results into favoring of right-wing political candidates (Karwowski et al. 17-18). One may assume that this turn is towards the comfort of the known and predictable politics of the past, instead of novel solutions which could deepen the feelings of uncertainty.

Gender roles are social and cultural constructs and, accordingly, tend to reflect the general values of the era. Because of this relation, it is worthwhile to analyze literary works of the past which show similarity to the current attitudes towards ideals of masculinity. By doing so, it is possible to observe what challenges the norms of manhood may pose for men today. Therefore, my intention in this article is to examine selected stories by Carver—"They're Not Your Husband" (1976), "One More Thing" (1981), "Jerry and Molly and Sam" (1976), and "Cathedral" (1983)—from the perspective of masculinity studies.

Raymond Carver was born in 1938 in Clatskanie, Oregon. He came from a mostly working-class background (Hacht & Hayes 260-261). Carver attended Chico State College and a workshop at the University of Iowa. Over the course of his life, he had several blue-collar jobs, which most likely gave him an insight into the various aspects of working class lives he later wrote about in his fiction

(Hart 112). In his private life, Carver struggled with alcoholism and problems within his two marriages. He passed away in 1988, aged 50 (Hacht & Hayes 261).

Carver is generally referred to as a representative of dirty realism. The term, coined by Bill Buford in 1983, refers to an uniquely American phenomenon, distinct from writing from other parts of the world. Dirty realism usually portrays ordinary Americans, such as "waitresses [...], construction workers, secretaries and unemployed cowboys" (Buford granta.com). According to Buford, these characters are often depicted in the middle of their everyday activities. He also points out that dirty realists capture moments of characters "[being] in trouble" as scenes describing theft and other similar acts are not uncommon. Buford characterizes dirty realist writing as rather simple and "flat"; however, he also argues that, when compared to older realist novels, dirty realist works seem rather stylized. The critic highlights the importance of the minimalist style, which calls the reader's attention to what is not explicitly described in the story or uttered by its characters (Buford granta.com). The genre has been compared to the paintings of Edward Hopper (March-Russel 236). The similarities between them are remarkable, as the protagonists of both Hopper's paintings and dirty realists' writings seem to be lonely, isolated individuals living in the 20th century America.

Detailed studies of Carver's fiction by scholars such as Viola Kita (385–394) and Michael Hemmingson (2008) have primarily focused on the convention of dirty realism. Vanessa Hall (173–188) in turn approaches Carver's stories through the lens of masculinity studies and socioeconomic reality of the 1970s and 1980s. However, while her research is centered on Carver's constructions of what she refers to as "crisis in masculinity" (Hall 175), in this article I intend to focus on various types of masculinity presented in four stories by the American author through applying the theoretical framework of masculinity studies. In what follows, I attempt to define masculinity, relying, to a large degree, on Raewynn Connell's works. I attempt to demonstrate how Carver's

protagonists oscillate between complicit and marginalized masculinities in "They're Not Your Husband" and "One More Thing" while trying to remain faithful to its traditional models. By contrast, I approach the characters in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral" as undermining the patriarchal ideals of manhood and performing their masculinities in alternative ways.

Masculinity—Theoretical Considerations

The definitions of masculinity might differ, depending on the field in which the term is used. However, in this article, the focus shall be put on how it is understood through the lens of gender studies. In the *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*, Gabriele Griffin defines masculinity as "traits and qualities conventionally associated with boys and men" (2017) and points out that those can be exemplified by various physiological qualities. Masculinity tends to be seen mostly as a social construct and, as a result, it is regulated "by the norms applied to boys and men in a given culture" (Griffin, *A Dictionary*). Therefore, masculinity has a significant degree of artificiality. It is something that is "produced, and reproduced," not truly natural (Kimmel et al. 3).

As mentioned earlier, the traits associated with masculinity might differ depending on various factors, such as culture. However, for the purpose of this article, the emphasis will be put on how masculinity is understood in Western countries. The traits defined as masculine enumerated by various researchers quite often overlap. Jodi O'Brien claims in the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* that a considerable portion of literature defines masculine traits as those that "[reflect] agency or instrumentality" (33), for example "tak[ing] control and hav[ing] power" (34). O'Brien also points out other attributes frequently seen as masculine, such as "assertiveness and self-protection" (34). Another source of features traditionally seen as desirable in men is *Bem Sex Role Inventory* in which the author highlights such characteristics as aggressiveness, dominance, individualism, being at ease with making decisions, taking risks and taking a stand, as well as physical fitness (O'Brien 59; Bem

156). The image those features create seem to adhere to a rather monolithic standard.

In her ground-breaking work *Masculinities* (2005), originally published in 1995, Raewynn Connell divides masculinities into four groups: hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinity, complicit masculinity, and marginalized masculinity. The division of masculinities into categories arose initially from the necessity to recognize different types of manhood; however, it was only the first step. As Connell (76) writes, it is also crucial to "examine the relations between [masculinities]" in order to "keep the analysis dynamic," as well as prevents the masculinity groups from "collapsing into a character typology". Therefore, it is important to note that the models of masculinity are not fixed and invariable (76).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was inspired by Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the relations between social classes (77). The term 'hegemony' "refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (77). Therefore, this specific form of masculinity tends to dominate over other types. Hegemonic masculinity is defined "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the current accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). The men representing the hegemonic model of masculinity are usually those at the top of the hierarchy in branches such as the business world, the army, and government offices (77). Hegemonic masculinity is a fluid concept, prone to change over the years. Connell stresses that it "embodies a 'currently accepted' strategy" (77) of being a man. If the pillars of a certain hegemonic group crumble, a brand-new hegemonic group may emerge and take the place of the previous one (77). Raewynn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt elaborate on this concept in *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept* (2005). Their approach to this aspect of theory is optimistic, as, in their view, it opens the door for the possibility that one day hegemonic masculinity could

become "more humane [and] less oppressive" (Connell and Messerschmidt 833).

Subordinate masculinity is the second group of masculinities distinguished by Connell. This group operates within the social order in which the hegemonic group is the dominating one. As the scholar suggests, "there are specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (Connell 78). An example illustrating this point is the relation where heterosexual men dominate over homosexual men, a power dynamic which is characteristic of the societies of modern Europe and North America (78). According to the scholar, "gay men are subordinated to straight men by an array of quite material practices" (78) such as excluding the former from the spheres of politics and culture, putting in the position of economic disadvantage, and being targets of prejudice. As one might notice, "oppression positions homosexual masculinities at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men" (78). However, it is important to remember that the concept of gayness represents anything that is "symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity" (78), ranging from personal taste to sexual preferences. As a result, not only gay men but also "some heterosexual men and boys" who share these characteristics can be "expelled from the circle of legitimacy" (79).

The third model of masculinity discussed by Connell is complicit masculinity. As Connell contends, the group of men who actually meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity is, in fact, rather small. However, many men still profit from hegemony, i.e. they "benefit from the patriarchal dividend" (79) and women's subordinate position in society. The complicit group is rather large, as it refers to "men [who] have some connection with the hegemonic project but do not embody hegemonic masculinity". The recognition of "the relationship of complicity with the hegemonic project" is crucial. While complicit men gain from patriarchy, they are not its "frontline troops". The position of such men is not characterized by conflicts and uncertainties; on the

contrary, it is safe and comfortable. It can be noticed that the complicit group is rarely challenged, as opposed to the hegemonic group (79).

The mechanisms of complicit masculinity are quite intricate and complex. Many areas of "complicit" men's lives are not characterized by obvious and blatant patriarchal domination and unquestioned authoritative position (79). On the contrary, their everyday reality tends to "involve extensive compromises with women" (79). Men who benefit from patriarchy are often at the same time respectful towards the women they know intimately, such as their family members. According to Connell, complicit men also tend to do their part of housework duties and are providers of income for their households (79-80).

Marginalized masculinity is the fourth, and last, masculinity model introduced by Connell. It differs from hegemonic, subordinate, and complicit masculinities which "are relations internal to the gender order" (80), while marginalized masculinity is influenced by other factors, for example class and race. The term "'marginalization' is used here to refer to the relations between the masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes and ethnic groups" (80). In order to discuss marginalized masculinities, it is important to understand the concept of marginalization itself. As a general idea, marginalization may be used to refer to people or groups outside the "'mainstream society', [people] living at the margins of those living in the center of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare" (Sciffer & Schatz 6 in Haywood & Johansson 5). As Chris Haywood and Thomas Johansson suggest, the concept can also be understood by means of a simple scale showing whether a person or a group possesses power or not. One of the key criteria of marginalization is a lack of opportunities in various areas of life (Haywood & Johansson 5).

Traditional Masculinities in "They're Not Your Husband" and "One More Thing"

"They're Not Your Husband" is a story about a married couple, Earl and Doreen

Ober. Its beginning takes place in a café where Doreen works. While waiting for his order, Earl hears other men's negative comments about his wife's body. The next morning, Earl starts criticizing his wife's appearance and tells her to lose weight. Doreen obediently follows the instructions. As a result, she loses a considerable amount of weight, resulting in, paradoxically, more unhealthy appearance and lack of energy. Earl goes to the café again and asks another man about his opinion on Doreen. Much to Earl's disappointment, the stranger ignores him.

Three models of masculinity can be observed in "They're Not Your Husband": the hegemonic, the marginalized and the complicit ones. Hegemonic masculinity is represented by the two male patrons. They are wearing "business suits" (Carver 1985: 27), which suggests that they might hold important positions, for example in a corporation or a law firm. The men seem to be very confident as they sit comfortably with their elegant, but now nonchalantly disheveled clothing. They also make negative comments about Doreen's figure which, according to them, is too plump (27). These comments can be seen as evidence that these men assume a position of power, which allows them to make judgments about other people's, especially women's, appearance. These remarks also expose the characters' misogyny, as they suggest that the men only see women as physical objects to be looked at.

The character of Earl, on the other hand, seems to occupy a place in-between two types: marginalized and complicit. It can be rather safely assumed that the Ober family are members of the working class. Earl is described in the story as a temporarily unemployed "salesman" (27), therefore, he can be assigned to the marginalized group on the basis of his socio-economic stuatus. Earl's unemployment further highlights his unprivileged position. Another argument in favor of this classification is his attitude towards other men, especially those in higher social positions than his. The lack of reaction to other men's objectifying remarks made about Doreen is surprising. One would expect the husband to be deeply and, as a result, to stand up and start an argument, or

even a fight, in order to defend his wife. Earl, however, stays silent and walks away (28). It may be assumed that the main character is truly intimidated by the visitors. Earl most likely feels inferior to the men holding a higher social and financial status than him. Therefore, he refuses to confront them. The fact that he accepts the men's comments as true also highlights his insecurity. He sees their views as important and lets them change his opinion on his wife's appearance. As the character himself says, "[Doreen's weight] never felt [like] it was a problem before" (28). It is quite clear that the comments he heard about his wife made him reconsider his own previous opinion.

While, as it has been suggested, the main character can be seen as representing marginalized masculinity, this is not the only group he seems to belong to. Earl also displays some characteristics of complicit masculinity. In the story, he assumes a dominant position over his wife. Earl advises Doreen to lose weight, gives her instructions, and measures her on a scale (29). It is important to remember that his concerns with the woman's appearance do not prioritize her health. Earl seems to want Doreen to become thinner so he could appear better in the eyes of other men. It can be assumed that Earl would like Doreen to be a trophy wife, a woman of beautiful, youthful appearance often kept by her partner as a symbol of social status (Stevenson & Waite 1547). However, no matter the reason for Earl's behavior, he still exercises dominance, which seems to be one of the key components of mainstream masculinity. Therefore, he can be seen as partially belonging to the complicit group as well.

Men's authority over women and the objectification of female bodies seem to be the key themes of Carver's short story. The men at the bar make comments about Doreen, such as: "'Look at the ass on that. I don't believe it'" (27), which is the evidence of male characters' misogynistic attitude towards women. They look at Doreen as a sex object: they stare at her body and harshly judge her appearance. It can be assumed that Doreen is a middle-aged woman, based on the descriptions of visible, grey veins on her thighs. However, the men talk about her as if they wanted all women to stay young forever, just so they

could appeal to the 'male gaze' (Mulvey 19). The term describes, as explained by Laura Mulvey in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, how within patriarchal societies the act of "looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19). This power imbalance leads to objectification and sexualization of women for the sake of a male onlooker's pleasure (19). The men in the story, behave similarly and set unrealistic expectations which cannot be fulfilled. The sexist attitude displayed by the characters is also highlighted by the usage of offensive language. The men refer to Doreen as "quim" (Carver 1985: 27), a vulgar word used to describe a vagina; using a body part name when referring to the woman furthers her dehumanization, objectification, and oversexualization. Men's conduct can be examined through the lens of Timothy Beneke's theory of 'proving manhood,' which argues that sexist behavior allows men to prove their masculinity (41). Beneke states that another way of proving manhood is the use of vulgar or offensive language, as it tends to be thought of as masculine (42). Both elements are illustrated in Carver's story.

Earl's behavior also exemplifies a man's dominance over a woman. Here it is shown through his relationship with his wife, particularly in his encouragement of Doreen's weight loss. In the story, hearing other men's criticism about his wife prompts Earl to take action. The male protagonist tells Doreen: "I think you better give a diet some thought" (Carver 1985: 28) and then continues saying that she "could lose a few pounds" (28). The woman seems to be surprised by Earl's sudden change of attitude towards her appearance, but reluctantly agrees to follow his instructions. This first scene relating to Doreen's weight loss already shows that Earl dominates his wife. He appears to think that his opinion about the woman's looks is more important than her feelings. It is possible to infer that previously she did not think about her weight much and felt comfortable with her appearance. However, Earl's comments seem to spark a feeling of discomfort in Doreen. Earl places more importance on himself, his opinions and feelings, than on those of his wife. This

situation illustrates of the Bergerian notions of the male *surveyor* and the female *surveyed* (Berger 46–47), which refers to the act of a man looking critically at a woman. Quite similarly to Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, John Berger's idea points to the power imbalance between men and women regarding looking and being looked at. Berger explains that under patriarchy every aspect of a woman is scrutinized (46). As a result, the woman often internalizes the male gaze which leads her to become both, her own surveyor and surveyed (46). This process can be noticed later in Carver's story when the couple discuss various diets, none of which seems to be suitable for Doreen. Earl appears to be frustrated and tells the woman to "quit eating [...] for a few days" (Carver 1985: 29). The man's words seem to be an order and can be seen as yet another example of Earl assuming the position of authority. Given that radical fasting is known to pose significant health risks, Earl's stance reveals callous lack of concern for his wife.

Earl's insistence on measuring his wife's body further emphasizes her objectification and the man's need to control the female body. He buys a scale for measuring Doreen's weight, tells her to undress and looks at her body with disgust while weighing her (29). Afterwards, he writes down Doreen's weight. The whole process is humiliating for the woman. She is made vulnerable by Earl, as she stands before him undressed, subjected to his critical gaze. The husband increases her discomfort further, as he does not answer her questions and stays rather quiet. The scene exemplifies female objectification. As Ann. J. Cahil states in *Overcoming Objectification*, such practices deprive a woman of her humanity and "reduc[e] [her] to mere flesh" (84). When Earl finds Doreen eating breakfast, the man openly expresses his disgust and disappointment at the woman's behavior. He calls her a "slob" (Carver 1985: 30) and shames her for eating food. While scolding Doreen over fulfilling basic human needs, Earl exercises control over her body

Later in the story, Carver depicts how others see Doreen's weight loss. Doreen is described as losing a great amount of weight, resulting in the woman

becoming extremely thin, to the point where her clothing no longer fits (30). Doreen's co-workers seem to be worried about the changes in her appearance and behavior (30). Her husband, however, dismisses these concerns. He tells Doreen not to "pay any attention to [her colleagues]" (30), as he possibly does not want his authoritative position to be undermined. Earl says: "they're not your husband. You don't have to live with them" (30) once more asserting his dominance over his wife. He seems to try to establish his opinion as the only one that has any merit and importance.

The story shows that ultimately taking control over a female body does not provide a man with the desired feeling of self-confidence and pride. At the end, Earl once again visits Doreen's workplace and orders food where he ends up sitting next to a man. Earl observes the customer and notices him glancing at Doreen. Interested, he continues watching the other patron and "wait[s] for [him] to say something" (31). It is rather clear that Earl anticipates hearing a comment about his wife's appearance from the stranger. When the man remains quiet, Earl attempts to have a conversation with him about Doreen, similar to the one in the story's beginning. He asks the visitor about the woman in an objectifying and sexist manner: "Don't you think that's something special?" (32) and "Does it look good or not? Tell me" (32). Once again, in the story, the woman is degraded to the position of a sex object with the usage of pronouns such as "that" and "it," usually used for objects and animals. The stranger seems to be uninterested and perhaps even annoyed and uncomfortable. Even though the man appears to be indifferent, Earl goes on speaking in a similar misogynistic manner, as he comments: "look at that ass on her" (32). The comments' distastefulness is amplified by the fact that they are made by a husband about his wife. This type of behavior can be seen as a way for Earl to prove his manhood in front of other men – as Timothy Beneke explains, it is not infrequent for a man to use sexism in order to "prove [his] superiority" (47) and to mask insecurities and lack of assurance about his own masculinity (Beneke 43, 47).

Another example of traditional masculinity can be found in Carver's "One More Thing". It is a tale depicting a family fight between a male character, L.D. with his daughter, Rae. The fight is witnessed, and eventually interrupted, by the mother, Maxine. L.D. and Rae fight over the daughter's beliefs. The father is described as a drunkard, displaying aggressive behavior who, after Maxine's intervention, wants to leave the house—he packs his suitcase and announces his departure. Before stepping out, he seems to want to say his last words. However, he does not know what he should say and the story ends.

It is rather difficult to strictly categorize L.D., as he seems to have the characteristics of both marginalized and complicit masculinities. While not much information about him is given in the story, he most likely belongs to working class. The character is shown to abuse alcohol on regular basis, and the reader may infer that his addiction makes it unlikely for L.D. to have stable employment. Throughout the story it is suggested multiple times that the man is financially dependent on Maxine. The woman is employed (Carver 2009: 130) and pays the rent for the family's accommodation (132). These examples show L.D.'s underprivileged position and highlight his belonging to the marginalized manhood type.

However, L.D. also displays some features of complicit masculinity. The most noticeable one seems to be his desire to dominate the women in his family by such means as physical violence. L.D. partakes in aggressive behavior, such as throwing objects and breaking them, for instance: "he picked up the [pickle] jar and pitched it through the kitchen window" (131). L.D.'s behavior scares the women making them consider calling the authorities. L.D.'s desire for an authoritative position also seems to show through the way he talks to Rae and Maxine. In the story, the man calls his daughter names, degrades her, and refuses to stop his disrespectful behavior despite her request (131).

L.D.'s aggressive attitude towards his daughter and wife highlights his misogyny. The man appears to have a condescending attitude towards Rae's interests, such as astrology and the supernatural. The interest in zodiac signs is

quite often seen as "frivolous" (Kat 2017) and feminine (Waller 3), due to factors such as focus on introspection, media popularity of its female practitioners (Waller 3-4), as well as creating community open to women and, later, other marginalized groups (Beusman 2015), and, quite likely, its irrationality due to the lack of scientific proof. These associations are most likely the reason why L.D. criticizes Rae's hobby so ferociously. It seems that in his eyes, his daughter's interests discredit her as a worthy conversation partner: "I can't take anybody seriously who sits around all day reading astrology magazines" (Carver 2009: 130). Even though the topic of the conversation does not relate in any way to Rae's interests, her father still uses them to undermine her arguments and opinions and to emphasize the fact he supposedly values reason and logic as is expected of men. However, the father's behavior described in the story appears to be detached from these masculine ideals, and therefore, emphasize L.D.'s hypocrisy. The male character is shown using abusive expressions, such as threats and insults: "You're crazy, Rae," "This is a nuthouse", throwing objects, and reacting emotionally (131–132). His actions are often noticeably dramatic. For example, in the scene where L.D. announces he is going to leave the family, he keeps on repeating his statements, creating a dramatic effect. After packing his belongings, he repeats similar sentences again. L.D. seems to crave attention and wants to create an impressive exit. As these scenes show, his preference for logic appears to be only superficial.

An important feature of the male character in Carver's story is suggested by its title—"One More Thing." The expression comes from the last line of dialogue in the story (134), which is one of its key utterances, and calls attention to L.D.'s characteristics: wanting to be right and not being open to ideas that differ from his own. An example of such an attitude can be noticed right at the beginning of the story, when he refuses to listen to his daughter (130). The father dismisses the girl's opinions as he tells her: "keep your nose out of things you don't know anything about" (130). Here, the man seems to use silencing, which, according

to Judith V. Jordan, is a known practice under patriarchy (Jordan 148) that is used by men in order to keep their dominant position (Luke 211). Its usage also suggests L.D.'s unwillingness to have his opinions challenged by others as he wants to always have the last word in the conversation whether in literal speech or physical action. When Maxine informs L.D. that she does not want him to live in their house anymore (Carver 2009: 131), the man, instead of trying to discuss this matter with his partner, resorts to physical violence: he throws a jar through a window, breaking the glass. This situation shows that when L.D. does not have any worthy arguments, he uses physical force in an attempt to win the fight and assert dominance. Another example of such behavior can be found at the end of the story. When L.D. is technically ready to leave the house, he chooses to stand in front of the women in a way that seems potentially intimidating. He wants to say something before his final exit; however, it is soon revealed by the narrator of the story that L.D. does not know what to say (134). This moment shows that the man always wishes to have the last word. The contents of his speech seem not to matter to L.D as he is only interested in 'winning' an argument.

Another important aspect of L.D.'s character is his penchant for violence or violent and abusive behavior, which is pointed out numerous times in the story. The first aspect that is brought to the reader's attention is L.D.'s alcoholism, which is highlighted in the very first sentence of Carver's story: "Maxine [...] found L.D. drunk again" (130). The narrator describes in detail L.D.'s behaviour under the influence of alcohol: he starts verbal fights (131–132), uses abusive language (131–133), and calls his family members offensive names (131). The man does not control his anger when drunk, leading to violent actions such as throwing a glass jar (131). After witnessing it, Maxine tells Rae to leave the kitchen in case L.D. wants to hurt her. The situation suggests that the man either has physically hurt one of the women before or could potentially do so.

At the end of "One More Thing", L.D. once again behaves in a threatening manner towards the women as he suddenly moves closer to them. Although

Rae and Maxine both step away from the man, Maxine states that she is not scared of him. The man does not do anything more and tries only to say his last words. It is possible that Maxine's declaration both stopped him from continuing his violent actions and surprised him to the point where he does not know what to say and how to react. L.D.'s feeling of masculine entitlement as the head of the family is ultimately challenged by the female voice.

Questioning Masculinity in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral"

"Jerry and Molly and Sam" contains an example of masculine behavior differing from the social norm. The protagonist of the story is Al, a husband and a father. The man is driving around with the family's dog, Suzy, wondering whether to abandon the animal. Al is also thinking about his uncertain life situation, such as unclear job prospects and his love affair. After some time, Al finally lets the dog go. Upon returning home, he sees his family upset and decides to bring the dog back. The story ends ambiguously: Al finds the animal which then walks away from him. It is not clear whether he will come back with it or not.

The main character of "Jerry and Molly and Sam" can be seen as an example of marginalized masculinity. Based on the information Carver gives about Al, one can assume that he is a member of the working class. The company for which the man works is firing its employees, and therefore, his situation appears to be uncertain (Carver 1985: 115).The man seems worried about his financial situation, as his family has moved to a house with expensive rent (115).

The norms of masculinity, such as being assertive (O'Brien 34), decisive, and "willing to take risks" (59), are called into question in several ways in the story. It is important to analyze not only the character of Al and his reactions to certain events, but also the central conflict of the story which can be read metaphorically. On the surface, Carver's story is mainly about a man who wonders whether he should abandon his dog. However, on the metaphorical level, Al's doubts about letting the dog go can be seen as doubts about

abandoning his family. By means of this metaphor, the story explores themes of choosing between one's needs and desires and conforming to the expected social role. Being the head of a family is seen as a traditionally male position (Rosenthal & Marshall 183). Therefore, deciding whether to abandon such a duty can be a stressful process of questioning one's legitimacy as a man.

One of the masculine norms questioned in "Jerry and Molly and Sam" is the ability to make decisions without hesitation which is usually expected of men (O'Brien 59). The protagonist struggles with his decision regarding Suzy, the dog. At first, the man sees abandoning her as the "only [...] solution" (Carver 1985: 115). However, the man seems to start feeling unsure quite quickly, as right before heading out with the dog, he becomes easily irritable and feels the need to comfort himself by smoking cigarettes (118). When driving around, Al once again has doubts. This time he does not know where he should leave the dog and visits numerous places before making the final decision (118-119). After abandoning Suzy, Al is "jumpy and perspiring" (120) and it becomes clear that he doubts the rightness of his action. When Al comes back home, he sees his family members distressed, which causes even more doubt and regret. The character asks himself what he has done, and, while isolating himself in the bathroom, he realizes "how grave exactly was his mistake" (123).

Al is also not "willing to take risks" (O'Brien 59), which opposes the norm of traditionally masculine behavior. This theme is particularly noticeable regarding the relationship dynamics with his family and his lover, Jill. Throughout the story, it can be noticed that Al seems unhappy with his current life. Carver describes the character thinking about his secret relationship with Jill: "he did not want it to go on, and he did not want to break it off" (Carver 1985: 116). Here, once again, Al's problems with making decisions are highlighted. The next sentence—"you don't throw everything overboard in a storm" (116)—seems to point at the character's tendency to avoid difficult dilemmas and fear of taking risk.

Another non-traditional masculine quality which can be observed in the main character is his emotionality. As it was demonstrated earlier, the expression of emotions that could make a man appear weaker such as sadness, doubt, and regret, is generally seen as emasculating and, therefore, negative. The contempt for emotional expression, as well as other traits associated with femininity, usually stems from a mixture of misogyny and homophobia (Connell 2005: 78). Throughout the story, the character displays various emotions such as those mentioned above. Al seems to be starkly different from the masculine ideal as one of its key features is "successful endurance of distress" (Beneke 44). He easily gets angry because of the dog, which urinates inside of the family's house and destroys their possessions, such as underwear and wires (Carver 1985: 117). He seems to become nervous quickly and lets the dog become the source of his distress: "She's crazy [...] [a]nd she's driving me crazy" (117). Al also tends to have strong emotional reactions that follow his actions: for instance, after abandoning the dog, he starts sweating. The narrator of the story also mentions that the main character feels depressed to the point where others could notice it without trying: "it shows all over you, even in the way you light a cigarette" (120-121). Upon his return home and seeing the distress of his children caused by the dog going missing, which manifests in Al having a psychosomatic reaction. He experiences "a fluttery sensation in his stomach" (123), which most likely is nausea caused by a high level of stress that he is not able to control. Overall, the displays of emotions differentiate the protagonist of "Jerry and Molly and Sam" from the cold and distant idea of hegemonic masculinity.

In the Western society, marriage and children are often seen as highly important components of masculinity. Liberska *et al.* (223) highlight that popular in some cultures saying—"the true man should father a son, build a house and plant a tree"—implies the importance of family relationships and stability in the conception of manhood. This idea is also supported by the fact that in the majority of Western cultures men are expected to the family's main

providers (Kabeer 3) and protectors. This view is questioned by the main character of the story as he appears to be unhappy in his marriage and is accused by his wife of not loving their children. This reaction, while not uncommon among men, highlights the problems the protagonist has with his role as being a father. According to Adams and Coltrane (231), men often find it difficult to fit within a family due to emotional unavailability and difficulty with nurturing others, which are seen as important in families today. Those fathers' difficulties quite likely stem from following the rules of traditional fatherhood which is rooted in hegemonic masculinity. Katarzyna Suwada (40) highlights that such men "identify their main parental role as that of the economic provider" and do not actively participate in domestic life. As a result, emotional and physical closeness between fathers and their children tends to be very limited. Al's dilemma about abandoning the dog can be seen as a parallel of an inner conflict regarding his family. While it is never explicitly stated in the story, Al seems to be thinking about leaving his family, possibly in order to start a new life with his lover, Jill. However, despite these desires, there is also an aspiration to conform to the masculine ideal within Al. The character, while thinking about abandoning the dog, wonders about himself: "he felt he'd never get over it [...]. A man who would get rid of a little dog wasn't worth a damn. That kind of man would do anything, would stop at nothing" (Carver 1985: 124). In these lines, it is clear that Al builds a rather significant part of his self-worth on being a decent person, as the society wants him to be. However, he still questions the norms and his attempts to conform to them seem to make him unhappy.

The tensions between conforming to the rules of traditional manhood and challenging them is also present in "Cathedral". In this story, Carver uses first-person narration in order to show the events from the point of view of a husband. The protagonist recollects things his wife told him about her friend before his first visit to their home. The blind man, Robert, is the wife's former employer and the two have corresponded with each other using tapes. The wife

comes with Robert from the train station. The three have dinner and watch television together. Robert and the husband become more friendly with each other and watch a program about a cathedral. Robert suggests that he and the husband draw a cathedral together. While drawing the picture, the main character's hand is held by Robert.

It is difficult to categorize the main character and infer to which masculinity model he belongs. It is likely that, similarly to the majority of Carver's characters, he represents either the complicit or marginalized group. Nevertheless, the information given about the protagonist is not specific. He is said not to enjoy his work and being stuck in it, as apparently there is not much possibility to change it (Carver 1985: 440). The man seems rather distant and reserved. According to his wife, he does not have any friends (436). He does not seem interested in Robert's visit either and appears to feel rather uncomfortable when the blind man finally comes to his house (436–438). Throughout the story, the husband experiences a change within himself in regard to the guest.

Robert can be seen as an example of marginalized masculinity given his blindness (434). Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson (174) state that being a man and being disabled are often seen as "[being] in conflict with each other" This common perception comes from the view of disability as a source of dependency on others and the ensuing lack of power (174). As Robert is shown through the eyes of the main male character, to whom he is a stranger, few details are given about him beyond what the wife tells her husband (Carver 1985: 436–437). Overall, Robert seems more open and friendly than the main character.

In "Cathedral" the main character appears to experience a psychological transformation. What prompts the change in the man's attitude is Robert's visit. At first, the protagonist did not seem to be interested in the visit of his wife's friend and is uncomfortable with Robert's blindness, having never met a disabled person before (434). While pitying Robert due to his disability and his

status of a widower, the husband does not seem interested in his wife's stories about the man. Instead, the protagonist quickly gets lost in his thoughts about the strangeness of the situation (437).

The protagonist feels surprised that Robert does not meet his expectations of how a blind person should appear (437). During their first exchange he does not really know "what [...] to say" (438); he seems to feel awkward and is not sure on what topic he should start a conversation. He appears to fixate on the fact that this is his first encounter with a blind person. The husband carefully looks at Robert's appearance and the blind visitor's eyes in particular seem to capture his attention. The man finds them "creepy" (438) as they look and move in an unusual way. Having his expectations about other people's looks and behavior challenged seems to make the character uncomfortable and possibly even anxious. The husband tries to alleviate the tension by proposing alcoholic drinks (439).

The fragments of the story where the three have dinner and a conversation provide the foundation for the change that later occurs when the two men are left alone. When the husband, the wife, and Robert are together, the husband seems to be more of a passive observer rather than an engaged participant (440). He continues observing Robert and is repeatedly surprised by his character. Then, the three move to another room, where the wife and Robert lead the conversation. The husband seems slightly irritated that most of the attention is directed at Robert, and, in his mind, he sarcastically calls the disabled man "a regular blind jack-of-all-trades" (440). The husband seems either to be uninterested in the blind man's questions or not to know how to respond to them (440–441).

The atmosphere between the two men seems to change with the wife leaving the room for a while. Initially, the husband hopes that the woman will come back quickly. However, as she is gone for longer than expected, he suggests to Robert that they smoke cannabis together (441). This moment seems to mark the beginning of a noticeable change in the husband. The

character instructs Robert how to smoke marijuana (441-442). Smoking in general can be seen as an activity of male bonding and it appears to be the case in Carver's story as well. The two men seem to finally be able to relax, most likely both because of the bonding ritual and from the effects of cannabis (441–442).

The aforementioned act of smoking together makes it possible for the two to slowly become more comfortable with each other. The men watch the television and stay silent for some time. It is likely that even though they seem to have grown to be more friendly, they still do not know what they should talk about as they have just met for the first time (443). During a broadcast of a program about cathedrals, the main character asks Robert whether he knows what this type of building looks like. The blind man admits that while he has a basic idea of cathedrals, he is not sure how exactly they look like and asks the other man to describe them. The main character fails to deliver an evocative description. Robert assures him that he does not mind (444–445). Then, Robert proposes that he and the man draw a cathedral together. The scene of drawing the cathedral by the two male characters is a key moment in the story. The two men start drawing together and Robert "closes his hand over [the main character's] hand" (446). This scene can be seen as the protagonist's moment of finding a connection with another human being. Robert suggests the other man "never thought anything like this could happen" to him (446), as if alluding to the lack of connections in the main character's life. Robert proposed that they should add some people to the drawing, saying: "What's a cathedral without people?" (447). One can interpret this utterance as a metaphor; the cathedral appears to be the main character's existence. Robert might be showing him the absurdity of not letting people into his life using the comparison to an empty cathedral as well as an illustration of his own alienation due to the disability. The two keep drawing the cathedral, when the wife wakes up and is surprised at the sight she sees. It is possible that the woman is not used to seeing her husband bond with other people and, especially, touching them (447).

As the ending scenes of the story show, allowing quasi-intimacy between men can be a beginning of personal change. While drawing, Robert tells the main character to close his eyes and puts his hand over the protagonist's hand. The main character thinks to himself that "It was like nothing else in [his] life up to now" (447), suggesting that this is the first time that he has made a real connection with another man. Then Robert asks him to open his eyes and look at the drawing. However, the main character keeps his eyes closed and says: "It's really something" (447). He is most likely referring to the experience he has just had and the connection he made with another person. This theory is highly probable as male-male touch is often discouraged and treated as a taboo in Western societies. While bromance—usually described as male friendship characterized by close emotional and non-sexual intimacy—is often seen as positive, at the same time many displays on male closeness such as touching (Greene goodmenproject.com) or living together, are seen as inherently gay regardless of actual sexual orientation of the men involved (Solomon et al. 284). Moreover, bromances themselves are quite often interpreted as having sexual undertones, especially in fiction, with the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson in many iterations of the story being one of the most prominent examples (Caro Lancho 2013). As male closeness is often seen as a taboo, it is not surprising, that the experience of the main character in Carver's story is unfamiliar and, likely, unexpectedly pleasant. In addition, the fact that the action takes place in a safe, judgment-free environment of the protagonist's home, it makes it possible for him to authentically experience platonic intimacy without homophobic stereotyping. Josef Benson suggests that the fact that Robert is a blind man makes him appear non-threatening to the main character, and therefore, he "does not feel the need to prove his masculinity" anymore (90). This aspect emphasizes the possibility that the protagonist is in a safe place and can open himself up to male friendship. The scene however, can also be seen in a homoerotic context. Such reading of Cathedral has been discussed by Libe García Zarranz in her article "Passionate Fictions: Raymond Carver and

Feminist Theory". The author points to the existence of phallic objects, such as the pen and fingers, which can be used to "revea[l] a latent homoerotic desire between the two men" (28–29). García Zarranz also points to the sexually charged language used by Carver, such as: "his fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper" (Carver 447, García Zarranz 29). In conclusion, both interpretations of the scene can be seen as convincing.

Conclusion

Raymond Carver's stories, while written in the 1970s and 1980s, touch upon many problems still faced by men today. Despite the society's increasing tolerance towards different strategies of embodying manhood, such as legislative measure supporting non-heterosexual men and more diverse media representations of the male gender, many men especially those belonging to various economic, sexual, and racial unprivileged groups still struggle with the norms of traditional masculinity. Carver's fiction offers an insight into these universal dilemmas and highlights areas which need to be addressed in order for manhood to change.

The representations of masculinities in the short stories by Raymond Carver can be divided into two main groups: images of traditional masculinities and depictions which question the traditional norms. This grouping, however, is meant largely to address the main issues of the texts, as it can be noticed that the basic two types of representation often permeate each other. The stories that have been discussed, which represent the first group, are "They're Not Your Husband" and "One More Thing." In these two stories one can notice that the male figures display various characteristics and behavior associated with masculinity. "They're Not Your Husband" presents a husband who is controlling his wife, as he seems to be more interested in what other men think than in the woman's feelings. "One More Thing" depicts a situation which highlights L.D.'s misogyny and disdain for feminine interests, as well as his aggression. Some of the traditionally masculine qualities Carver highlights in these stories are

dominance over women and girls, emotional distance, and preference for logical and rational thinking. The two stories present the darker sides of traditional manhood and its effects on men and their relatives in a critical way. In his stories, as in other works of dirty realism, Carver uses very sparse descriptions, both of surroundings and, more importantly, of feelings. The author's restrained writing seems to correspond to the stereotypical, and therefore fitting social expectations, image of the male gender.

The stories that seem to question the Western norms of masculinity in more explicit ways are "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral." In the former, the main character is faced with a dilemma whether he should abandon his family and express emotions, which is traditionally seen as non-masculine. "Cathedral" depicts a character who undergoes a psychological transformation while learning to emotionally open up to others and allowing himself to be touched by another man. Carver seems to recognize the harmful aspects of traditional masculinity he presents in the stories. "Jerry and Molly and Sam" and "Cathedral" depict men who are more emotional, perhaps truer to themselves than to an unattainable masculine ideal. While Carver does not appear to suggest how exactly masculine norms should change, he seems to notice the importance of emotional expression and honesty to one's own feelings for men. The view of masculinity in "Cathedral" seems quite positive, as it emphasizes the possibility of a positive shift in a man's attitude. It offers a spark of hope and optimism in Carver's usually bleak literary output.

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the analysis of manhood in the stories by Raymond Carver. The first section introduces necessary theoretical background, namely R.W. Connell's theory of four masculinities. Whereas the second and third sections are dedicated to the analysis of Carver's selected fiction on the basis of R.W. Connell's theory. The analysis is split into two parts – the first concerns images of traditional masculinity, while the second presents stories in which the norms of manhood are questioned. The article shows that despite being written in the 1970s and 1980s, the depiction of men's problems remains relevant.

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DIALECTICS OF UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA IN *NEVER LET ME GO* BY KAZUO ISHIGURO

Keywords: Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, dystopia, utopia, dialectics

Introduction

This article examines the features of dystopian and utopian fiction in the novel *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro. Some literary scholars, for example, Ivan Stacy (225) and Kasturi Sinha Ray (284), tend to classify the novel as unmistakably dystopian. This analysis aims to underscore the dual character of *Never Let Me Go* and demonstrate how utopian and dystopian elements intertwine. First, the genesis and characteristics of utopian and dystopian fiction are discussed. These aspects are compared to a selection of early and relatively uncomplicated definitions of these genres, then their traces in Ishiguro's novel are identified. The findings imply that the conclusive evaluation of the novel's utopian or dystopian character is impossible and the final interpretation is based on interaction between the two. However, Ishiguro does not leave a reader without any hint, as he forms the narrative suggesting a dystopian reading by emphasizing omnipresent atrocity and oppression.

From Utopia to Dystopia: Literature Review and Context

The first piece of writing that started the genre known today as utopian fiction is Plato's *Republic* written around 380 BC (Gerhard 2-3). Since then, numerous definitions of that kind of fiction started to appear. The term utopia was first used by Thomas More in his novel *Utopia* from 1516 to name an island with a perfect sociopolitical system (Gerhard 4-5). According to Chad Walsh, these

early utopian worlds are based on the assumptions that human nature is inherently good and that there is no distinction between personal and communal fulfillment (71). Therefore, the happiness of an individual depends only on the efficiency of the social system since phenomena such as abuse of power, injustice, and corruption are unlikely to arise due to people's moral purity. Other critics over time form more detailed analyses of utopian fiction and focus on its different aspects. For example, Martin G. Plattel states that fiction about utopia usually searches for freedom and happiness (47), whereas Martin Parker emphasizes the role of the social structure (Parker 217). George Kateb, in turn, provides a definition with minuscule details (17). According to Kateb, such structure includes the resourcefulness of modern technology, lack of obstacles to a decent life, and any conflicts of interest (17). Nevertheless, all of them state that utopian fiction depicts "an ideal, imaginary society with a perfect socio-economic and political system superior to the present-day version of it where people live carefree, in abundance and happiness" (Gerhard 3).

However, the twentieth century brought about changes in the perception of human nature. The first set of reasons for these changes is associated with major historical events. As Patrick Reedy and Tom Moylan suggest, it was World Wars that laid the ground for utopian thinking (Reedy 175; Moylan xi). Also, the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union had an impact on the dystopian shift (Gerhard 7). The argument for this is that in utopian fiction, especially in early examples, society is "based on the idea of communism where everything is shared" (Walsh 40). Therefore, "the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union, once thought to be a model utopian experiment" (Ruppert 100) challenged optimistic assumptions regarding utopian societies. Another reason to doubt people's inherently good nature stemmed from the observation of progress in science. According to M. Keith Booker, many of the technological achievements suggested that "science in general goes against human nature and thus becomes a source of its suppression and control" (6).

Facts that also contributed to the emergence of dystopian thought are discoveries in psychology and philosophy (Gerhard 8). For example, the discoveries of Freud "proved that humans are not entirely rational beings: they have instincts and are driven by passions and desires" (Walsh 125). These discoveries about spontaneity and unpredictability of human nature stood in opposition to the basic utopian assumption. People could start being questioned scientifically so as to whether they can be trusted to "exercise justice and reason, when they govern the state and the general populace" (Gerhard 8). The utopian society needs a carefully planned system but now the human capacity to implement such a system is put into question (Walsh 55). As a result of this undermined utopian belief that human nature is perfect and morally good (Gerhard 8), the dystopian genre emerged. The genre reflects "the fear of what might happen to a utopia if the perfect 'planning' of the elements of that society goes awry and even turns against its people" (Gerhard 8). An early example of dystopian fiction, *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, from 1921, which "inspired most of the dystopias of the twentieth century" (Gerhard 9) directly fits this definition. *We* represents a society that is heavily regulated by the state. People are forbidden to manifest any form of individuality or creativity, turned into robots incapable of making their own decisions. They are "indoctrinated to embrace reason and logic, ignore their personal feelings and ambitions, and idolize the collective" (Gerhard 9). At this point, it becomes clear that dystopia is not anti-utopia in terms of being the opposite of the ideal place to live, but rather "shares a lot of characteristics with utopia" (Gerhard 1). What is different is the result of the functioning of such a system since dystopian fiction "portrays utopia gone awry" (Gerhard 1).

Never Let Me Go: Between Utopia and Dystopia

Bearing in mind the above, *Never Let Me Go*, to be read as either utopian or dystopian fiction, should depict a utopian society with a meticulously planned

system. Kazuo Ishiguro achieves that by speculating about the potential of medical technologies (Ishiguro 268) in an alternative version of late-twentieth-century England. At first glance, a reader may be deceived to think that the world of the novel mirrors reality, but as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the development of genetics is far superior to the contemporary world and that the novel's setting is fictitious. The main concept of the system designed in the novel revolves around the idea of prolonging lives through human cloning. The author created "a world that has come to regard cancer as curable" (Ishiguro 268). People are able to overcome terminal conditions by exchanging organs like spare parts. The process is crude, cruel, and of questionable ethics, because organs are cultured in the form of human clones. There is an intricate system developed to administer the process of upbringing to keep these cloned sets of organs in an immaculate condition. To achieve that, clones are reared as students in institutions away from the outside world. The students begin to donate their vital organs as young adults. As donors, due to becoming gradually crippled, they are nurtured by designated carers, i.e. clones that have yet to begin the donation program. Donors usually die after a third or fourth donation, and their death is called "completion" as a reference to the fulfillment of their designated role. The language of this system is purposefully softened by the author to contrast it with ethically doubtful and brutal actions. Clones are referred to, "in a chilling yet appallingly convincing-sounding euphemism," (Fisher 32) as "students" and they "complete" instead of dying. Such a choice of vocabulary resembles, for example, military jargon, in which soldiers communicate using collocations such as "eliminating targets," or "eliminating threats," to distance themselves from ethically dubious actions.

In this fictional world, clones are bred exclusively to provide vital organs for the general population, which poses the question of whether being a clone excludes being human. Answering this question seems necessary to decide if the vision presented by the author is dystopian or utopian. When a reader assumes that clones are not truly human, but merely artificial instruments

created to serve humanity, then there will be no major counter-argument to read the novel as utopian fiction. However, if a reader decides that clones are full-fledged people, then it will be a reading that recognizes clones as an oppressed class which is alienated and physically exploited by others to the point of being classified as victims of genocide. As a result, it seems that the author burdens the reader with the prioritization of ethical values before forming a final interpretation. Nonetheless, as suggested by Matti Hyvärinen, Ishiguro never introduces such issues neutrally (Hyvärinen 202). By the use of a first-person narrator, the author offers an emotional and intimate journey through the story, in close proximity to a group of clone-friends. He "seduces his readers into seeing the world from the perspective of clones" and as a result makes them "recognise the harsh, prejudicial and hypocritical human world, full of segregationist impulses" (Hyvärinen 220). The novel is "clearly a story about friendship and love" (Hyvärinen 206), which eventually ends abruptly because clones are prevented from "growing into humans" (Hyvärinen 216) in terms of starting mature life, as Hyvärinen suggests.

Moreover, clones are reared in humanitarian institutes treated as students, but regular people are still afraid of them (Hyvärinen 215) "[i]n the way people are afraid of spiders and things" (Ishiguro 263). To comfort themselves, citizens would rather not call them humans. Even supervisors at institutes such as Hailsham were only experimentally checking if clones "had souls at all" (Ishiguro 265) and it is "still not a notion universally held" (Ishiguro 265). When people were demonstrated that clones reared in the humane environment are "as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being" (Ishiguro 266) the novel only compares their qualities and cautiously never calls the clones humans. Nevertheless, the narrative clearly suggests that clones are a blessing for people, "[h]owever uncomfortable (...), their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease" (Ishiguro 268). At the same time, it suggests that the world with such a system will always

project a barrier against seeing donors as properly human (Ishiguro 268): they are treated impersonally, as people are afraid to confront their guilt. The novel eventually suggests that there is "no way to reverse the process" (Ishiguro 268) of clone donations as it has gone so far. Therefore, although the construction of the novel balances the question of clones' humanity, Ishiguro through the first-person narrative arouses the reader's sympathy towards these groups of friends. It is much later as the story unfolds when the fact that they are clones whose only goal is the inevitable participation in the donation program becomes revealed. Such a sequence develops sympathy for the characters since they appear as martyrs doomed to die for others.

Conclusions

Taking into consideration different definitions of utopia and dystopia as well as the effects of the point of view technique, one's conclusions regarding the dystopian or utopian character of *Never Let Me Go* are bound to remain ambiguous. In spite of the implied suggestions resulting from the construction of the narrative, interpreting the world in *Never Let Me Go* as a perfect place for its inhabitants remains debatable as long as clones are not unequivocally labeled as full-fledged members of society. Thus, in order to determine if the world is a utopia or not, it should be first established whether the clones are merely non-human tools used to alleviate suffering. When they are considered regular members of society, the practice of killing them so that others can live longer is mass murder. However, even the fact that human copies are being farmed for corporeal use is not a morally acceptable practice. It is impossible for such a place to be perfect, even if it provides longevity to its members. Relying on Julia Gerhard's statement that dystopia expresses what might happen to a utopia if it crumbles unexpectedly or even turns against its people (8), it can be safely asserted that *Never Let Me Go* provides few examples that apply to this definition. Unless clones are seen as humans, the system can go awry only in the case of developing eugenics experiments. However, the novel's

statement that clones have souls strongly implies that people and clones are equal not only on the corporeal but also on the spiritual level. According to Sharon Stevenson, the wrongness of dystopia may be based on a "belief system that annihilates or restricts some set of values the readers believe are indispensable to both their own and the characters' ability to function as fully dignified human beings" (131). Gerhard adds that the state "directly attack[s] dystopian citizens in both body and mind and turn[s] them into robots that are supposed to live and work for the state only" (15). Both statements in the context of clones having souls, and by extension being humans, confirm that *Never Let Me Go* depicts, after all, a dystopian society. Yet this mostly applies to a spiritual dimension. The clones outside institutes are stripped of their dignity, freedom and become a repressed, exploited group. Such a system collides with readers' belief in the importance of certain values, which contributes to the dystopian reading of the novel.

Although the novel refers to the times with no cure for many terminal diseases literally as "the dark days" (Ishiguro 268), the present is by no means presented in a positive light, but is soaked with omnipresent guilt for copying and farming clones instead. Even though people can prolong their lives significantly, they feel awkward and do "not want to think about (...) students, or about the conditions [they] were brought up in" (Ishiguro 270). This may be one of the more direct hints offered by the novel that the cost of this supposed-to-be utopian society is achieved at a great moral cost. The most significant flaw of the system, though, emerges out of fear. Regular people are afraid of the possibility that manufactured children "would take their place in society" (Ishiguro 269). The incident with a rogue scientist, who experimented with enhancing characteristics of the clones, "reminded them of a fear they'd always had" (Ishiguro 269). As a result, humanitarian facilities for clones lost funding and in consequence cease to exist.

Regardless of these conclusions, the novel asks what makes humans human, given the literary context in which clones play the key role. The answer for this

question lies beyond the scope of this article, but further considerations may be undertaken based on research such as Michael Tomasello's. He contends that thinkers have asked this question "[f]rom the beginning of the Western intellectual tradition" (Tomasello 297) and in terms of the real world, without any speculative elements, "[t]oday this puzzle is essentially solved" (Tomasello 4). His research may provoke people to ask and reflect on old questions in new, literary contexts, the way Kazuo Ishiguro does it in *Never Let Me Go*.

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Abstract
Based on the historical shift from utopian to dystopian fiction, the article argues that *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro does not invite a clear dystopian reading. The novel shows an innovative method of lengthening the human lifespan by implementing an ethically controversial system. Its analysis shows the dynamics between the communities and their positions in the world of the novel. Ishiguro constantly balances the elements of utopia and dystopia, but at the same time, the narrative provides a set of subtle suggestions which lead to highlighting the flaws of the system. As a result, assuming a certain set of values of most readers, the novel may be roughly qualified as dystopian fiction, but its boundaries between utopia are not clear-cut.

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RETURN TO HOMELAND: SEARCH FOR IDENTITY THROUGH ECOLOGICAL MEMORY IN ROMESH GUNESEKERA'S *HEAVEN'S EDGE*

Keywords: ecocriticism, memory, identity, Sri Lanka, glocal

Any discussion surrounding colonization and decolonization as well as global and local entanglements would be incomplete without referring to the theories of Edward Said. By suggesting that the notion of the Orient has been constructed by the West to justify colonization, Said has drawn attention to how geography and colonization are closely intertwined. Further, by pointing out that "these experiences [of colonization] enable complicated memories" (Said 181) for both the native inhabitants and the colonizers, Said has justified the "remarkable emergence" (182) of Anglophone writers who have attempted to retrace and re-excavate their past from a postcolonial point of view. A significant aspect of this recollection, exemplified by works of writers such as Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, and Shyam Selvadurai, involves remembering the environment of their native land and charting the transformation it underwent due to these global interventions. This also includes elucidating the tensions that have arisen following the application of global practices in local environments and the experience of the colonised nations' identity loss. In an attempt similar to that made by the writers mentioned hitherto, Sri Lankan author Romesh Gunesekera in his noted work *Heaven's Edge* reminisces about the ecology of a country that is at war with unnamed powerful forces and emphasizes what these memories mean to a glocal protagonist who is caught between two worlds. According to Said, the

presence "overlapping memories" (182) for both the colonized and colonizers is an inevitable part of the colonial experience and the "unending cultural struggle over territory" (182). *Heaven's Edge* highlights the multiple and confounding identities the characters have to navigate and how these memories, specifically the ecological memories, enable them to regain or preserve their identities.

Published in 2000 to initiate discussion on the sense of homelessness and exile that groups of indigenous people have felt due to colonialism and its aftermath the *Heaven's Edge* provides a significant groundwork for the understanding of the slowly emerging interdisciplinary field of ecological memory. Set at the intersection of ecocriticism and memory studies, research on environmental memory highlighted in *Heaven's Edge* is still in its early stage. Nevertheless, theorists have attempted to define and redefine the terms by building on the existing research in the fields of ecocriticism and memory studies. To begin with, memory is the "means by which we draw on our past experiences in order to use this information in the present" (Sternberg 258). Memories urge a person to recollect past events and experiences associated with a place, space, or people. As argued by Afzal "this process is an extension of understanding through rethinking or one might say reflecting upon the past to ameliorate the present. Memory encourages one to remember ancestors and their contribution in making one who s/he is" (86). Offering deep insights into collective, autobiographical, and historical memory, Maurice Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory* can be regarded as the seminal work that has laid the foundation for the study of memory. Building on Halbwachs' ideas of dreams, memory images, and localization of memory, subsequent practitioners have surpassed the limitations of the previous theories to include "transnational, transcultural, or global perspective" (Craps et al. 500) into the spectrum of memory studies. Pointing to the advent of a new phase in memory studies, wherein we have "start[ed]to think ecologically (rather than merely socially)" Craps emphasizes that the ideas have been "prompted by our growing

consciousness of the Anthropocene" (500). In other words, environmental memory urges one to assess and evaluate memories associated with nature, its beings, landform, and the ecosystem. It is the process of recollecting vital interactions between human beings and the physical environment.

The objective of this paper is to explore the memories of the environment of their homeland the characters in the novel have and how these ecological memories enable the glocal protagonist to find and accept his identity. In my attempt to understand the representation of ecological memory in *Heaven's Edge* and in tackling the question of the global and the local, I also approach the literary work from a postcolonial perspective, as the novel is essentially a postcolonial text that discusses the impact of colonization and decolonization in Sri Lanka. Additionally, the novel rigorously engages with identity crisis and the concept of belonging, which continue to be some of the essential elements of postcolonial literary works. While postcolonial studies and memory studies have several overlapping concerns, as Michael Rothberg points out, even the most influential monographs of postcolonial studies have "no mention of memory" (359). Likewise, both the founding texts and many more recent assessments of memory studies have also largely avoided the issues of colonialism and its legacies. My research paper is an attempt to fill this gap in research by studying and analyzing a South Asian literary work through the lenses of postcolonial studies and ecological memory. Through a close reading of the novel and application of key concepts and ideas related to postcolonial studies and ecological memory, I argue that for postcolonial subjects, ecological memories can serve as a pathway for finding their identities and gaining a sense of belonging.

In Romesh Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge* the central characters are rocked by the memories of the land and environment while struggling to keep alive the ecological aspirations of their ancestors. The characters here are subjects of both colonial and postcolonial experiences. Set in an unnamed island nation that has been ravaged by war with unnamed forces, analogous to the author's

homeland Sri Lanka, the novel can be viewed as a response to the Civil War that lasted for over two decades in Sri Lanka. Though the war erupted in the era following colonial rule, the roots of the Civil War can be traced back to the colonial period. Akash Kapur writes that "Sri Lanka was once the jewel of the subcontinent, a rich island with an educated and sophisticated population, a place where various ethnic groups coexisted harmoniously". However, during the colonial period, while the Sinhalese community of Sri Lanka distanced themselves from the British, the minority Tamil community grabbed numerous opportunities for economic advancements and availed themselves of colonial education (Ganguly 79). These differences, coupled with the postcolonial policies, led to a rift between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in the country which eventually resulted in the ethnic war. Akin to the writings of renowned authors such as Michael Ondaatje, Shyam Selvadurai and Nihal De Silva Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge* tries to explicate the struggle of the postcolonial, especially the struggle to understand one's identity, and break away from the subjugating dogmatic ideologies (Ramsamy 64). Unlike his earlier and most acclaimed work *Reef*, wherein the author presents the protagonist's flight from a spoiled paradise (Sri Lanka) to a secure and progressive nation – England (Ranasinha 30), thereby showcasing an "accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" (Said 6), *Heavens' Edge* displays the return of the protagonist, Marc, who is a diasporic subject, from London to his native land and his eventual acceptance of the island and its culture. The protagonist is essentially caught between the two experiences of growing up in an imperial nation and moving to a colonized country in search for his identity. This quest gets fulfilled through the ecological memories and environmental entanglements the protagonist has upon reaching his native land, which eventually helps him understand his identity.

Romesh Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge* has both the colonial period as well as the postcolonial war as its backdrop and traces the confused identities of three generations troubled by the outcomes of colonialism through the characters of

Eldon, Lee, and Marc. Eldon, the grandfather, leaves the island during his youth in the colonial period and settles in England, while Lee, his son, and Marc, his grandson and the protagonist of the story, grow up in England, and leave it in search of their identity for the island during the ethnic war period. Through these characters and through Uva, Marc's lover on the island, *Heaven's Edge* discusses the search for self-identity through the nuanced aspects of ecological memory in a postcolonial context. Even within these characters, the environmental memory adopts multiple shapes and forms, beginning with the narrative technique wherein the entire story is recounted from Marc's memory. By switching between the recollections of Marc's childhood and the memories of the war-torn nation, Gunesekera adds several layers to the ecological memories presented in the novel. Lawrence Buell, in his "Uses and Abuses of Environmental Memory," classifies environmental memory into four categories at which they operate: *biogeological memory*, which deals with human life and its evolutions since the beginning of time; *personal memory*, which focuses on an individual's relation with a place; *collective memory*, which theorizes memory at the level of a social group, and *national memory*, which examines the narratives of a nation (1). Going a step further, Rosanne Kennedy introduces the concept of "multidirectional eco memory, which link[s] human and nonhuman animals and their histories of harm, suffering, and vulnerability in an expanded multispecies frame of remembrance. It could facilitate new visions of justice that hold humans responsible and accountable for our actions towards nonhuman species" (268). The plea here is to not merely reminisce about the past associations with nature, but also to introspect and understand how these interactions affect the biotic and abiotic components of the environment. An analysis of any postcolonial literary text from the perspective of eco-memory would imply the espousal of such a multifaceted approach that necessitates an understanding of what these memories mean for nations that have been ravaged by imperialism.

In *Heaven's Edge*, the interplay of these personal, collective as well multidirectional eco-memories dominates the pages as the characters can be often found indulging in recollection of their own past experiences and exchanging tales of their community's associations with the physical environment. Here, for a character such as Marc, Lee, and Eldon, who are citizens of a globalized world rather than a local world, these personal and collective ecological memories serve as pathways for connecting with their traditions and thus regaining their identities.

After landing on the "pearl of an island" (Gunesekera 7), Marc, who is neither a tourist nor a native, but a man in search of his father and himself, realizes that the place is starkly different from the version he created in his mind while listening to the stories and memories of Eldon. Here, memory operates at two levels: Eldon's memory of his homeland and Marc's memory of his grandfather talking constantly about his native place. Halbwachs notes that elderly people have a tendency to repeatedly talk about the experiences and events of their past: "These men and women are tired of action and hence turn away from the present so that they are in a most favorable position to evoke events of the past as they really appeared" (47). The most crucial of Eldon's memories of the land is his trip from London to the island along with his family, during which they visit a range of ecologically rich areas, including the wildlife reserves, the cool tea-hills, and the coconut plantations, while searching for his ancestral home that had a "sand garden with lanterns and bougainvillea. Hundreds of butterflies. And a breadfruit tree" (Gunesekera 8). For Eldon, the journey is evidently one of his "fondest" (8) memories as he keeps narrating it to his grandson quite often. An inevitable element of postcolonial as well as memory studies is the presence of nostalgia in literary works that fall under these categories. Nostalgia has not just a continuing interest but a special resonance for those who are entangled by the long histories of colonialisation and decolonisation (Walder 12). Nostalgia in postcolonial writings often involves recollection of fond memories of a home or homeland and an

aspiration for restoration of the past, as exemplified through works including *Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958) by Laurens van der Post, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, or *Lose Your Mother* (2007) by Saidiya Hartman. Walder notes that while it is possible to recall and reflect upon the past as an individual or a group without being affected by nostalgia, it is often difficult to disentangle nostalgic feelings from the operations of memory (4). This can be observed in the case of Eldon, whose recollection of his days amidst the breath-taking environment of island nation is interspersed with the feeling of nostalgia which urges him to return to his homeland. Nonetheless, the disappearance of his ancestral home due to the war affects him to such an extent that he never returns to the island again, indicating how the destruction of a memorable environment from the past can rupture one's entire association with the place or land. Eldon, for whom his native land is a significant part of his identity, is thus forced to forgo his previous connections and return to his global landscape. The ecological interactions and memories associated with it make Eldon realize that he has to cut his ties with the island and embrace the new world he has pushed himself into.

Having grown up between fig trees and the congested spaces of London, Marc's visit to the island can be viewed as a voyage to find his own identity and his own roots through the ecological memories of his forefathers. These memories, rooted in the beauty of the island's environment, have created certain expectations for Marc. However, his attempts to recreate the images conjured by Eldon's tale prove futile as the land is not as vibrant and green as he had expected it to be (Gunesekera 9). Wondering at the drabness of the place, the pile of rubbles instead of any vegetation, and the lack of any sign of life, Marc doubts whether it is the "same island Eldon had talked about" (10). The realization that endless wars have wreaked havoc on the island occurs to him only after communicating with the natives, especially Uva (27). There are several instances in the novel wherein Marc, during his interactions with the physical environment of the island, gets emotionally transported to his younger

days. The memories of his days in London keep reverting to his mind every time he comes across a new place or an intriguing landscape. The blanched flowers soaking in the sun and thin leaves hanging from the trees that he comes across while exploring the region immediately remind Marc of the "ancient chronicles" (11) his grandfather used to interest him in when he was young. Furthermore, when he sees the emerald doves during his initial encounter with Uva, he right away recollects the name of the species as he had previously read about them in his "boyhood bird books" (13). For Marc, the birds that Uva keeps freeing into the wild are a reminder of the spring flowers and herons by the riverside that he had witnessed during his early youth. At this juncture, Marc is caught in a liminal space; he is unable to completely indulge in the ecological beauty of the new landscape as the environmental memories of his home in England force his mind to switch between the two places. Though he has come to the island in search of his identity, every local ecological aspect transports him back to the globalized world he is a part of. Identity, which is essentially an ambivalent and nuanced notion, is key for understanding personal experiences in a world of constant change. According to Stuart Hall, identity emerges as a kind of unsettled space or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses (Hall 10). In a postcolonial context, for diasporic subjects such as Marc, remembering not just his home but even the homeland has opened up the scope for multiple forms of identity within and beyond the nation-state (Walder 20). To elaborate, the colonized subject here dwells in a liminal space between his non-colonial identity in England and his newly found colonial identity which he realizes upon returning to his homeland. However, such identification is never simply a movement from one identity to another, it is a constant process of engagement, contestation and appropriation (Ashcroft et al 106), as exemplified through the case of Marc who is caught between his local and global experiences and thereby keeps shifting between his multiple identities.

It is worth noting that, for Marc, the memories associated with London and their environments are simultaneously connected to the life lessons Eldon had taught him during their expeditions in nature. While trying to adapt to his life as a newcomer on the remote island, Marc gets taken back to the examples from natural world Eldon had shown him to teach about dealing with life and its hurdles. Poking at the rich brown soil under the tall tropical trees in his Palm House, Eldon had demonstrated to Marc that one needed to grow and adapt to survive in the changing world (Gunesekera 204). Looking at his orange shoe-flower bush, Eldon had added that while many deemed hibiscus as a flower of idleness, he believed that "they prove you can change the world" (205). These words of wisdom taught through examples from nature prove to be highly beneficial for Marc who keeps harking back to them in times of crisis, which again indicates the liminal space he is caught in.

Though he spent very little time with his father and knew about him chiefly through Eldon's stories, it is hardly surprising that Marc spends a great number of hours pondering over the memories associated with Lee upon reaching the place of his death, the battle-scarred island. Predominant of these memories is the episode when the family learns that Lee passed away in a plane crash. While recollecting the order of events, Marc clearly remembers what the day looked like and how vibrant the garden along the Thames was, being a sharp antithesis to the incidents that were to follow:

> The sun was bright, but the sky hazy and the roar of jet planes coming in on to land seemed louder for their invisibility…Blackbirds were chi-chi-ing incessantly and the maroon roses on the straggly branches, too high up the neighbour's wall for my grandfather to reach, blossomed where the sun had warmed the buds into heavy blooms with ball grown pleats and voluminous petals… The garden was a riot of colour. (87)

Rather than remembering how he had felt when he learnt about his father's demise, Marc's memories of the day are strongly associated with the beautiful garden outside his London home and the heavy, sinking feeling within the house. The yellow Laburnum tree, the dandelion, the roses that he watered, the cabbage seedlings, and the ants in the garden are firmly imprinted in his mind

as opposed to the hazy images he has of his life after the death of his parents (90). The only other strong memory associated with his father that has been immortalized in Marc's mind is that of the video Lee had made while in the island country. The shots of the fresh yellow leaves and "birds trill[ing] between them in a pulsating tapestry of song" (151) as well as the wooden peacock chariot representing an amalgamation of history and mythology could be regarded as Marc's first insight into the culture and ecology of the landscape. In both instances, Marc's memory of Lee is strongly intertwined with the immediate physical environment surrounding him and his father. These instances suggest that for Marc, the local and global experiences are enmeshed in one another. He associates the memory of his father's death on the island with the flora and fauna he interacted with back at his home in England. He also connects the culture and ecology of the island with the memory of the untimely demise of his father. These interconnected eco-memories are precisely the catalysts for Marc's visit to the island in search of his identity.

In his discussions on the reconstruction of the past, Halbwachs juxtaposes the process of recollecting with the act of re-reading a book (46). Pointing out that while revisiting a book people try to remember how they had felt, the emotions they had undergone and their mental state when having read the book the first time, Halbwachs suggests that the present experience of reading the book would be vastly different from the former one. Each time a person re-reads a book, they feel as if they were going through an altered version of the work (46). Likewise, when Marc recollects the sequence of events that had occurred during Lee's death, though he has a clear memory of the situation and the setting, the sensations he undergoes are different from the ones he had felt earlier. The altered landscape, the unprecedented storm on the island, and the calm following it play a vital role in moulding Marc's current emotions. He now begins to imagine his father and grandfather standing against the same landscape, finally finding a place where they might all be "together again" (Gunesekera 90). The ecologically rich jungle surrounding him also reminds

him of illustrations he had seen in Eldon's boyhood book: images of sandpipers, green-shanks, golden-plovers, fish eagles, and brahminy kites (91). The images and the usage of the phrase *together again* are crucial as they suggest a sense of belonging Marc is beginning to feel on the island he has moved to. He can now envision living on the island and slowly embraces his identity as a native of the land. Several key postcolonial literary works (*The Mimic Man* by V S Naipaul, 1967; *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, 2000; *Hummingbird* by James George, 2003) have extensively dealt with the theme of belonging where the authors have shed light on the feeling of rootlessness postcolonial subjects have experienced immediately after gaining independence. The subjects as well as their descendants, who either continue to reside in the colonized nation or leave their homelands during the colonization process often grapple with the "phantom of colonization" (Chiriyankandath 36) that looms over the post-colonial globe, indicating that they are neither able to have a sense of belonging in their colonized nation nor find it in the countries they move to. In *Heaven's Edge*, Gunesekera highlights this struggle through Eldon, Lee and Marc. While Eldon completely ends his ties with his native land and slowly finds a feeling of belonging in a European world, Lee and Marc find it difficult to have a sense of belonging while residing in England. As Marc says: "Both my father and grandfather had been quick to escape their formative traps. Eldon by coming to England from this apparent pearl of an island, and Lee, fifty years later, leaving England, his birthplace" (Gunesekera 6). It is only after their return to their homeland that both Lee and Marc find their identity and rootedness in the island nation. This is made possible through the ecology of the native land and the memories that they lead to, as exemplified through the previous examples.

A significant aspect of memory studies is the understanding and exploration of the déjà vu phenomenon. In contrast to general memory responses, déjà vu can be defined as a "strong impression of familiarity in absence of explicit recollection" (Strongman 214), an experience Marc undergoes upon reaching the military retreat in Farindola. The images of the gently sloping lands, the

vale, the calm water, and the higher ground of hills covered in the jungle give him a sense of familiarity though he doubts if he has seen them before: "Somehow, the pastel colours of the grass, the reflective water, the balance of the sky, cloud and soft sweeping hillsides each in its own way seemed connected to a faint glimmer inside my head" (Gunesekera 130). Additionally, the colours, the shapes, the climate, and the temperature that greet him when he walks down the trail behind empty retreat give him a feeling that he has arrived in a place he has been before. In subtle ways, the déjà vu created by the view of the picturesque land in Farindola provides Marc with a sense of belonging, which eventually urges him to settle down in the country. From this juncture onward, Marc, who was earlier caught in the liminal space, slowly starts to understand that though he is a part of the globalized world, his identity is connected with this island.

As the narrative progresses, Marc's memories connected with the land and his ancestors get interspersed with the ecological memories associated with his partner Uva, who is a native inhabitant of the island. After her mysterious disappearance, Marc attempts to keep alive the memories related to her by frequenting a waterhole that reminds him of Uva's duckweed pond where he had first met her. By looking for ash doves and green imperial pigeons near the shrinking waterhole, Marc develops a sense of hope in him, a strong belief that he would soon reunite with his lover. "I wanted to believe they would reappear" (Gunesekera 50), he says, adding "re-adorned, singing for a greener world, as she must" (50). In an effort to pay tribute to her and create the ecologically rich *ashram* that Uva had worked towards, he frantically endeavours to modify the unoccupied house he inhabits into a microcosm of her ambitious ideas. The exercise serves the dual purpose of retaining Uva's memories through the creation of an environment she had longed for as well as signalling his presence if she visited the place at some point. Beginning with a birdhouse akin to the one his lover had maintained followed by a garden like

the one he had in his London home, Marc steadily progresses in his venture to turn the isolated land into a sanctuary of flora and fauna:

> I wanted space and order, light and colour. I wanted the place teeming with a hundred different types of birds, of bees, of squirrels. I wanted them all to come, drawn by a lodestone of passion and the heady, overpowering scent of a garden in the middle of a jungle; to bring Uva with them, and if she could not come here, I wanted the garden to become her. (193)

Being obsessed with planting, replanting, and transplanting, everyday Marc tries to add a new element to his budding haven, thus creating a dreamland Uva had envisioned. The place eventually becomes a memorial for his family and Uva alike. In the backdrop of the war on the island, the essential aspect of ecological memory is that it is not about creating a discourse on what one community does to the other, but rather about strengthening the societies to deal with similar battles in the future (Clark 697). Marc's effort to create a pristine garden in memory of Uva can thus also be regarded as a form of resilience to deal with the imminent attempts of the enemies to destroy the ecology of the land. Throughout these events, Marc tries to retain his newfound identity and fight against the higher and intrusive powers by creating the haven in memory of his lover.

It can be safely stated that Marc has drawn inspiration for the venture from Uva's own efforts to develop a similar "ashram" for birds (Gunesekera 21) in memory of her mother. While for Marc, the ecology of the landscape is linked to the memory of his father and grandfather, for Uva, it is a way of associating and re-connecting with her deceased parents. The absence of what environmental psychologist Peter Kahn, Jr. terms as *environmental generational amnesia* (Kahn 106-114) in Uva, is precisely what helps her to reconstruct the eco-rich habitat envisaged by her mother. Environmental generational amnesia occurs when each generation accepts the environment they are born into as the norm, despite its levels of pollution, toxicity, and contamination (106). Though born in a country shattered by war, Uva's experiences with nature have been moulded by her parents' relentless efforts to build an ever-growing sanctuary. Thus, for

her, a diverse and vibrant nature is the norm, instead of a war-torn environment. Uva is also a part of the globalized world; although she has lived on the island throughout her life, she has interacted and engaged with numerous people from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, to ensure that her identity remains intact and, to keep the memory and spirit of her parents alive and carry on their "vision in secret" (Gunesekera 36) Uva tries to construct a farm filled with "clumps of bamboo and banana, tall avocado trees, shrubs full of berries and lantana growing everywhere" (35), after their death. While her farm does get destroyed by the military, upon reuniting with Marc in his newly made retreat, Uva develops a sense of belonging, as if she were in her "mother's home again" (227). Though Marc's presence plays a huge role in putting Uva at ease, this warm and homely sensation has primarily been stirred by the presence of a bountiful garden and a dynamic jungle around her that revert her to the memories of her family. For both its inhabitants, the retreat develops a web of eco memories connected to one another and their ancestors. It offers a shelter in which they can sustain themselves like "scavengers" (227) and provides them with a sense of belonging that they had never experienced before.

In the seminal work *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature and the Environment*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley express the need to enhance ecocritical discourses through postcolonial literature and suggest that the literary works of the former colonies act as powerful tools in revaluing the role of humanities in addressing global environmental issues (9). As demonstrated throughout this paper, Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge* undoubtedly falls under this category of powerful fictions that are capable of generating newer narratives on identities and ecological memories. The characters of Marc, Lee, Eldo, and even Uva suggest that even though one might have multiple identities in a globalized world, it is possible to stay in touch with our roots through memories, and specifically ecological memories.

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Abstract

Situated at the confluence of ecocriticism and memory studies, the interdisciplinary field of environmental memory is slowly garnering attention, especially in researches pertaining to postcolonialism. While previous studies in environmental humanities focused primarily on the physical impacts of ecological transformation caused by global interventions on local communities, recent research sheds light on how these disasters shape the memories of individuals and groups with respect to their surrounding environments.

This research paper aims to explore eco memory as represented in the novel *Heaven's Edge* by award winning Sri Lankan author Romesh Gunesekera. Located in an unnamed island recalling Sri Lanka, ravaged by war due to certain unnamed forces, the novel highlights the ecological memories of a glocal protagonist who is in search for his identity. The paper attempts to understand how the novelist represents the nuances of ecological memory in his work and how this helps the characters in gaining or retaining their identities. By analyzing how the central characters navigate their memories and identities, the paper delineates the global and local interactions that pan out in the novel. Additionally, I argue that for those who have been displaced by colonial and postcolonial wars, ecological memories act as a pathway to reconnect with their homelands and thus regain or understand their identities.

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ENGAGING STORY OR VALUABLE MESSAGE? THE ANTHROPOCENE IN ANNE BISHOP'S *OTHERS* BOOK SERIES

Keywords: Anthropocene, ecocriticism, environmentalism, fantasy, literature

Ecocriticism is a very popular current in literary criticism nowadays. It brings together literature and environmental studies into one interdisciplinary area of inquiry, which usually focuses on how literary works portray nature, ecology, as well as environmental and climate issues. One of the events that highly impacted its analyses is the introduction of the term Anthropocene into the discourse of literary studies. The aim of this article is to discuss ideas related to the Anthropocene as shown in the fantasy book series *Others* by Anne Bishop. This article presents the goals and mission of ecocritical texts and sets out to situate Bishop's novels in their context.

As a geological concept, the Anthropocene emerged in the 1960s, indicating an epoch dating back to the first time humans began to exert a significant impact on the Earth's geology, ecosystems, and even climate ("Anthropocene," *Merriam-Webster*). However, it was widely popularized as recently as in the year 2000 by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer, who proposed using the term for the current geological epoch in order to emphasize the central role of mankind in the planet's geology and ecology (Rafferty). The concept quickly gained popularity in the ecological discourse, and with time, it also entered other areas of science, and eventually, the humanities. Due to these developments, different areas of human culture became objects of analyses using the lens of the Anthropocene and focusing on

the impact humans have on natural environments (Chua & Fair). One of such areas was literary narratives centred around or touching on the topic of nature in the world adapted to human needs.

As Hubert Zapf puts it, "literature and culture have always been responding to the state of crisis" (2). The Anthropocene discourse is indeed all about crisis, or rather many crises, of human perception and vision of the world. These cracks in our apprehension of reality may encompass phenomena such as the division between human culture and nature, the power relation between humans and other animate and inanimate elements of the world, the opposition between "us"—the humanity—and "it"—the natural world, and the role and mission of humankind. Despite the emphasis put on the intersection between the two worlds (human and natural), Gabriele Dürbeck points out that the role of the Anthropocene narratives is really to "question established human *self*-understandings," as it is the key to understanding our dynamics with the rest of the world (28). This shows how the relation between the humankind and nature is a very unbalanced one, and how the dialogue between the two is often seen as more of a monologue. The reason for this might be the prevalence of the conviction that, as humans, we are entitled to being in charge and deciding about the future. Such a sentiment is shared across many cultures and religions. Morten Tønnessen and Kristin Armstrong Oma write in their Introduction to *Thinking about Animals in the Age of the Anthropocene*: "Once upon a time, in the Anthropocene (…) we were human, we were powerful, and we were the talk of town amidst the chitter and chatter of the global animal community, from beast to bone" (vii). This position of power and authority visible in many narratives is the precise issue that the Anthropocene-led criticism scrutinizes and challenges.

However, it should be mentioned that different kinds of literary fiction depict the Anthropocene and deal with its premises in different ways. Some narratives merely point out the problem of human arrogance and lack of broader perspective onto the dynamics between mankind and nature; they

could be called diagnosis fiction. Other texts prophesy the disastrous consequences of human actions and portray those as the end of the world as we know it or human extinction; these have the characteristics of cautionary tales. Yet others give hope and propose solutions to the (im)balance of power that has existed for centuries; one might call them instructive or solution-seeking stories. Although most theoretical approaches advocate for a place for each of those versions, it might be disputable whether the Anthropocene literature should primarily represent any one of them.

Gabriele Dürbeck distinguishes five types of the Anthropocene-focused narratives: the disaster or apocalypse narrative (corresponding to the cautionary tale); the court narrative (similar to the first, but focused on the issue of blame, liability, and bringing the culprits to justice); the "great transformation" (in which the negative effects can still be reversed if swift action takes place); the (bio-)technological (a more radical version of the "great transformation", where large-scale interventions into the Earth systems are proposed); and the narrative of an interdependent nature-culture (which strives to rethink the notion of "mankind" from a posthumanist perspective, and challenges the philosophical dichotomy between humans and the environment, culture and nature) (28). These can be put onto more than one spectrum: the difference is not only in the content of the narrative, but also in the mission of its author, their tone, and the level of optimism in their aproach.

It is important to notice that most of the Anthropocene-focused narratives inherently seek to show the present human approach to the state of our planet in a negative light, as one that brings more damage to the natural environment than benefits to the humanity in the long perspective. Dürbeck herself says that the Anthropocene stories "share the idea of humankind as the villain but provide utterly different morals" (26). Ursula Heise sees them as a chance for rethinking the role of the mankind and the rest of the world (which might be seen as corresponding to Dürbeck's narrative of an interdependent nature-culture) (40). Donna Haraway states that "no species, not even our own

arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called Western modern scripts, acts alone" (159), and Tønnessen and Armstrong Oma define the next phase of history, dictated by the Anthropocene narratives, as one characterised by "vastly improved technology and environmental management, wise use of Earth's remaining resources, control of human and of domestic animal population, and overall careful treatment and restoration of the environment—in short, responsible stewardship of the Earth System" (xviii). This shows that although not all stories within this narrative framework propose the same courses of action and solutions, they all agree in their assessment of the situation, of its moral status, possible catastrophic consequences, and the need to resolve it before it is too late.[1]

The way that ecocriticism approaches different stories about nature and its role in the world influences the way those stories are later presented in the mainstream discourse. It also shapes the overall discussion about the climate change and other ecological crises that become more and more important nowadays. Furthermore, the very minute details of such stories influence, often on a subconscious level, our vision of the relation between humans and the environment, and which of its elements we accentuate or dismiss. That is why, in this article, I will try to prove that one of the ways of changing the ecological debate for the better is striving to rethink and retell the story of humans and their place in this world through literary fiction. To support this statement, I shall discuss a fantasy series that tackles the issues of the environment in a world very similar to the real one.[2]

Anne Bishop's book series *Others* tells the story of a small community set in the fictional world of Namid. The depicted world to a great extent resembles ours in terms of its geography and history, but one significant difference is that nature has its sentient representatives here. Those can take a variety of forms, from shape-changers to vampires and other kinds of monsters, all of whom are called "Others." They are described as very dangerous, mistrustful of humans and keeping to themselves. The coexistence of humans and Others is described

as fragile and easily thrown out of balance, and the Others (and, more generally, nature) are—in contrast to the real world—at an advantage due to their strength, efficiency and ruthlessness. The plot takes place on a continent resembling North America, and space is clearly divided between humans, who live in towns and cities, and Others, who inhabit the wilderness. Territories belonging to humans are supervised by representatives of Others, who set up small, enclosed settlements called "Courtyards" on the verges of towns, where they carefully observe their domain.

The action of Bishop's books takes place mainly in one such Courtyard, in the town of Lakeside, whose residents are one day visited by a young human woman, Meg. It soon turns out that she is on the run, having just escaped a closed facility for *cassandra sangue* (girls who can prophesy about the future after cutting their skin) where her abilities were abused and capitalised. Meg turns to Others for protection, applying for the post of a Human Liaison, a job that entails running the local delivery office, and settling in the Courtyard, where human laws and rules are not in force. The series pictures Meg and a handful of other human characters slowly gaining trust, and even friendship of the Others. Meanwhile, the antagonists, all human, try to harm the Lakeside community of the Others and the human protagonists associated with them, but time and time again they are outmanoeuvred, and often brutally neutralised. The majority of the human characters are depicted as middling and easily swayed towards discriminatory and hateful behaviours. The plot of the series includes the emergence of an anti-Others movement called "Humans First and Last," causing the scheming against the protagonists to become more coordinated and interlinked. The events in other parts of the world are mentioned sporadically, but at one point they become an important element, as the actions of humans in the equivalent of Europe eventually force nature and the extremely powerful Others called Elders (the elements or the ocean) to take action—they cause mass natural cataclysms, which wipe the majority of the human population off the face of Namid.

This series features many ecological and Anthropocene-related elements and themes. However, some of the ways in which they are realised might prove problematic in the context of today's Anthropocene discourse. The first problem is the manner in which nature is endowed with agency. Personification of nature is a common practice among authors of fantasy or science-fiction works that aspire to provide ecological commentary, and through that help the reader to identify with nature and advocate for its rights. A frequent way of achieving such personification is introducing supernatural creatures who are strongly connected to the natural environment. An example of this could be Charles de Lint's novel, *Widdershins* (2006), in which Native spirits and European fairies represent different ecosystems coming into contact with one another (Łaszkiewicz 161-162). However, as some scholars point out, personification is a tool that imposes a human system of reference onto the story, which can be limiting, as it does not allow for imagining alternative kinds of agency. This anthropocentric empowerment also tends to distribute the responsibility for the course of history more evenly, as the supernatural beings are treated as co-responsible for it. Such is the case in Bishop's *Others*, where, from the anthropocentric perspective, a part of the blame for the conflict between humans and nature falls onto the supernatural creatures, too. Since they are intelligent, and have behaved hostilely towards humans, seeing them as inferior, one cannot avoid the thought that maybe they could have done better as well. The difference between our world and the fictitious world of Namid is that the existence of Others and their actions and reactions to human activities make it easy for the series' antagonists to dissolve the responsibility for the developments and natural disasters that humans caused. In reality a similar process is visible in trying to dissolve responsibility for climate crisis, by attributing some of the changes to natural processes, such as volcanic activity. Such an approach clearly goes against the common feature of most Anthropocene narratives as outlined by Dürbeck, Heise and Haraway, that is the undeniable fault of humanity's arrogance and excessive power.

Bishop's books build strongly upon the division between different groups of characters. Among people, there are the good ones, who try to compromise and negotiate with the Others, and the bad ones, who do not understand the distribution of forces, and do everything in their power to antagonise the Others and the human citizens of Lakeside. Others, too, are divided into the ones who make the effort to communicate with their human associates, and those who advocate for displays of power and limiting the contact to the absolute minimum. And finally, even the positive human characters split into those who live *with* the Others, and those who live *next to* them. Those who are admitted into the inner circle of the Courtyard are almost exclusively people with supernatural abilities. Some of them are *cassandra sangue*, like Meg. Some, mentioned throughout the books, are Intuits—local communities of people endowed with exceptional intuition, who in their description resemble the Indigenous peoples of the Americas:

> Finally, Henry said, "There is no police force on Great Island. Not like there is in Lakeside. The Intuits who live in Ferryman's Landing aren't the same kind of humans as the Simple Life folk. Or you." (Bishop 102)
>
> The Intuits might be human, but their instincts were, in some ways, closer to those of the *terra indigene*. And their ability to sense things before something happened? How did that compare with Meg's ability to speak prophecy? (Bishop 106)

It is clear that the Intuits are considered different from "normal" humans and in some ways similar to the series' protagonist. It also seems that the only way to get truly accepted by the Others (here referred to as *terra indigene*) is to possess unique magical powers. It is not to say that the Others try to exploit these characters and their talents but rather, their strong bond with nature and natural forces is highlighted. However, it is worth pondering this situation in terms of fairness and agency. It is not enough to try your best, be friendly, polite, and fight against the discriminatory human adversaries—one needs to have a special trait, too, one that they have no power or choice over, to gain Others' protection and sympathy. Naturally, this problem constitutes an

extension of the one discussed before—giving nature anthropomorphic agency, and thus, liability—as it further dissolves the responsibility for natural history. Moreover, such deep emphasis on the role of divisions strongly contrasts with the idea in the Anthropocene discourse that humans and the natural environment belong together and that we should try to bridge the gulf torn between them by our actions and our narratives. Bishop's story does not inspire to renounce the traditional nature-humans division but rather seems to accentuate and create new partitions.

From the linguistic point of view, the very word "Others" is also loaded with meaning. The use of the word "other" in naming a major group of characters immediately evokes philosophical connotations. According to Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology, the notion of the "Other" is a conceptualisation of a being that is separate from the "Self," and is often ascribed negative characteristics and unwanted traits ("Edmund Husserl"). The perception and understanding of the Others in Bishop's novels have the same qualities. Humans feel that the supernatural dangerous creatures are different from themselves, so they name them "Others," which in turn makes them feel even more separate and dissimilar. In fact, both groups see each other as dangerous, unpredictable, savage, and cruel. The word "Others" has the power of fuelling the conflict between them. It also serves as an excellent excuse for caring only for one's own interests, self-idealisation and lack of self-insight, escalating fear, marginalisation, and violence towards the "common enemy."

The problematic issues of divisions governing the plotline of the series and of personification entail another one—that of the reader's identification with the characters. If most human characters behave in a discriminatory way, it is only natural that the readers do not want to see themselves as this majority. They identify with Meg, or other protagonists in this story, and want to believe that they would do the right thing if such a conflict with nature took place. After all, in the world of *Others*, people are shown as irrational, angry, greedy, hateful, and just evil, while also eventually playing the part of the victims of Elders'

well-deserved wrath and punishment. Instead of depicting nature as it exists in reality, and encouraging the reader to sympathise with it, Bishop writes the story from the anthropocentric perspective, at the same time personifying nature and vilifying humankind. Combined with the completely reversed balance of power between humans and nature in her series, it is very difficult to learn any lesson and change any course of action after reading the novels, because readers see themselves as someone on the nature's side, not as part of the "bad humans." The clash of humanity and nature is a completely different kind of conflict in those two worlds—fictional and real.

Within literature engaging with the Anthropocene a large trend devoted to the issues of colonialism and postcolonialism can be distinguished. It discusses the allocation of responsibility for the planet's current state among different ethnic and racial groups. According to Davis and Todd, in America, the mainstream discourse around the climate change and ecological crisis often overlooks how the deterioration of land, water and air was mainly the result of three big phenomena gaining momentum: colonialism, industrialism, and capitalism (771). All of those were brought to America by white people, but their consequences are suffered equally by all inhabitants, also those from Black and Native American communities.[3] The problem of Indigenous people's blame or lack of it in the course of destroying the natural environment is a widely discussed one. In *Others* the presence of the aforementioned Intuits in the narrative arc sheds light on this issue. Their role in contacts with Others is a positive one, but the problem of their supernatural powers arises once again. Their noble character, innocence, and candour seem to stem just as much from their magical connection to nature as from their conscious decisions and lifestyle choices. Their similarity to the real Indigenous peoples contributes also to the already widespread mythicisation of the latter in popular culture. The series depicts them as withdrawn from the rest of society and somewhat mysterious. It does not help in dismantling and disarming the colonial point of view, in which Native Americans were often portrayed as uncivilised and

savage, or later fiction's idealisation of them as highly ethical and moral peoples, and their culture as mystical and spiritualistic. The ability to rise above human cognition due to their belief system made it all too easy to admire them on a superficial level, while at the same time denying them human dignity and treating as second-class community. This characterisation appears already in the first conversation about the Intuits in the books:

> "They are the humans who have a sense of the world the rest of you lack, an ability to feel what is around them and recognize danger or opportunity before it is obvious. They were often killed because other humans believed such an ability must be evil. Even now, they keep to themselves and feel safer living in a human settlement controlled by the terra indigene than they do living in a city controlled by your kind." (Bishop 102)

The separateness of Intuits from the rest of humans is also explicitly articulated:

> Now he studied Henry. "Why did you tell the police about the Intuits? They hide among the *terra indigene* to escape from the humans who hate them."
>
> Henry nodded. "Long ago, they were hated for their abilities. It would be good to know if they still are." (Bishop 106)

Clearly, Intuits share a great amount of misunderstanding, exoticisation, rejection and trauma with the existing Indigenous peoples and minority groups. What highlights this presentation even more is the author's narrative choice to describe them through the words of the Lakeside Others. It provides an outside perspective on the motivations of the oppressors—one of non-human sentient beings. Thus, the issues of agency and identification resurface again —the prejudice against the Intuit community is shown as something irrational and typical of humans. Such an outlook strengthens the readers' identification with the non-human characters even more, which may divert their attention from the fact that, again, the readers are in reality more likely to make the same mistakes and be prone to the same fallacies as the antagonists of the series.

Taking into account all those problematic issues that the series presents, one cannot help but ask about the purpose of such approach and what it is that the author gains by sacrificing, misrepresenting and oversimplifying so many issues, and problematic ones at that. The answer seems to be: for the sake of the story. The primary purpose of Bishop's novels is to be interesting and for the plot to be immersive. This is much easier achieved by creating a story of scheming, of blame and punishment, and of villains being finally brought to justice, than by striving to redefine deeply rooted conceptual divisions and present a nuanced picture. As the very idea of a story is based on conflict in the Western culture, reading about it is much more entertaining and satisfying than an attempt at amending the wrongs and reconciling the conflicted parties. However, it is a concession that the author is making. And although the story is not harmful, and even points to ecological problems, its reading of the Anthropocene reveals a lot of problems in the presentation of the issues discussed here. Even though the personification of nature's agents and the coexistence of Others and humans could seemingly place the novels in Dürbeck's fifth category of stories (the narrative of an interdependent nature-culture), it is in fact an example of the apocalyptic narrative, where nature's agency and intelligence understood in anthropomorphic terms does not help in solving the conflict, but seems to exacerbate the problem even more, so that the plot line is exciting enough for the demanding reader.

To conclude, in her series *Others*, Anne Bishop creates a world whose problems are at the same time very similar and very far away from ours. Transferring the methods of solving those problems, and the attitude towards them, into our thinking about ecology can prove to be a misguided idea, as it provides more difficulties than solutions to the already existing problems. Despite my criticism of the books, Bishop's portrayal of ecological concerns, although not unproblematic, is still a valid effort to spotlight the role of nature and our environment in our lives and history. It also shows how the concept of

the Anthropocene can be employed to analyse the widest range of topics and narratives.

Endnotes

1. It should be noted that this perspective concerns chiefly the mainstream Western writing.
2. The reason I have chosen the fantasy genre is that because of its unrealistic convention, many problems connected with nature, and thus world-building, are exaggerated or more striking. This makes the readers pay closer attention to the ecological side of the story and facilitates a clear ecocritical argumentation line.
3. Frequently, to an even greater extent by the Indigenous groups.

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Abstract

Anne Bishop's *Others* is a fantasy book series following the peripeteias of a small American-like community. The series is set in a fictional world, whose biggest difference from ours could be defined as "nature being given fangs," as the non-human characters, i.e., the titular Others, protect their natural habitat against human influence and damage. They are supervised by ancient Elders and aided by human characters with supernatural abilities.

This article approaches the book series from the ecological perspective, trying to establish how its elements correspond with the premises of the Anthropocene. The main tenet of *Others*—the evened-out struggle between nature and (most of) humankind—may at first glance make it appear easily interpretable with regard to the Anthropocene concept. Yet, further exploration of particular themes and developments renders the series' central message more ambiguous in the light of the Anthropocene studies.

The article presents different types of narratives in terms of their interpretation of the Anthropocene, their common features, and the message they strive to deliver. Then, it examines the relation between the natural environment and humanity as proposed by Anne Bishop, including the inner divisions on both sides, the presence of Indigenous people's equivalent, and the introduction of the philosophical category of the Other in the characters' perception of one another. The end goal of this literary analysis is to juxtapose the story's immersion and its reader's satisfaction against the environmental values and lessons included in it.

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"THE FUTURE'S [NOT] OURS TO SEE"—VISIONS OF FORTHCOMING HUMANITY IN SOLARPUNK

Keywords: solarpunk, cyberpunk, future, ecocriticism, social ecology

Introduction

This article attempts to analyse the emergence of solarpunk and selected aspects of this literary genre including its progressive approach to gender, nature and social organisation. Referring to the genre's predecessors and Murray Bookchin's concept of social ecology as well as some ideas of transcendental writers, I examine several examples of solarpunk stories with a special emphasis on the representation of the anticipated version of social organisation. By commenting on its imaginary versions of social organisation and underlining the openness of gender identity, I assert that solarpunk can be approached as an important element of the science fiction literary scene and a forecast of a better tomorrow. As nowadays the future does not present itself in the brightest colours, one can argue that this positive vision presented by solarpunk is essential to balance out the adversely pessimistic present. The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, instability of the European Union, restrictions of reproductive rights in many countries around the world, ubiquitous threats to the independence of the judiciary systems, or, as listed by Rinkesh Kukreja from conserve-energy-future.com, exceptionally violent weather conditions, air pollution, soil degradation, global warming, overpopulation, natural resource depletion, waste disposal, deforestation, acid rain, and overfishing (Kukreja 1) are only some of the problems humanity is currently facing. Therefore, not

surprisingly, many people's thoughts have turned to narratives of the apocalypse rather than recovery and as "horror and tragedy are everywhere in our reality and mainstream media, they're often in our entertainment as well" (Sylver 1). Similarly, while humans destroy the planet, solarpunk's 'punk' predecessors, such as cyberpunk, steampunk, dieselpunk, decopunk, atompunk, and nanopunk, depict a hypothetical vision of the future that is characterized by pessimism.

Roots

In place of the pessimistic narrative solarpunk imagines "a solar system in which humanity has found a way to be responsible with its environment" (Dincher in Wagner and Wieland 8). It searches "for a more positive, sustainable, and realistic view of humanity's near-future" (Kobold 1), and emphasises "that humans can learn to live in harmony with the planet once again" (Valentine and Callebaut 1). Solarpunk focuses not only on being more eco-friendly but also on implementing the main principles of nature into reality. Drawing on discourses of gender and sexuality as well as race and colonialism it underscores the organisation of social life according to archaically established rules as outdated and insufficient.

Furthermore, solarpunk presents an unconventional approach to the literary form and creates a complex structure of shared imagination. Its peculiarity is related to the cultural space it occupies, as "much of solarpunk happens outside the published stories" on "numerous blog posts, Tumblr pages, and online discussion groups dedicated to the subgenre" (Williams 7). Therefore, it fits into the aesthetics formed by (and for) a generation for which the Internet and social media are part of everyday life. Moreover, due to the community-centred principles of the Internet, creativity of solarpunk has a collaborative structure that invites everyone to contribute and participate in the process of its development. Such a characteristic makes it more cooperative and encourages

a more diversified form of participation in shaping our attitudes to the natural environment.

Utopianism and New Forms of Social Organisation

Even though vision of equality depicted in solarpunk might seem somehow utopian, its utopianism is different from the sugarcoated version of it presented in other creative movements. It is not utopian in a negative sense, as it does not create a "perfect" place without considering present obstacles and social conditions that limit personal autonomy and sexual expression. It approaches the concept of utopia regarding it as a constant augmentation, which considers possible threats humanity might face in the future. Solarpunk describes a world where perpetual amendments should be implemented as often as possible because society is not unchangeable. This importance of progress is emphasised, for example, in Lev Mirov's "The Desert, Blooming" (2017) where "[t]he work is never finished…But at least it is begun" (Mirov 114) or in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Dispossessed*, where "[c]hange is freedom, change is life" (139). By focusing on change and relating it to ecology and the climate crisis, solarpunk accentuates the importance of action. Instead of portraying the sullen, hopeless version of the future, solarpunk authors search for newer possibilities of revolutionary methods of organising society and its relation to nature.

The interest of solarpunk in a new social order is inspired by Murray Bookchin's theory of social ecology which emphasises the necessity of replacing human tendencies to dominate over one another with a more progressive approach inspired by ecology, where variety and cooperation are prioritised. According to Bookchin, "to create a truly rational and ecological society, we must nourish the insights provided by reason to create a sense of a shared humanity that is bound neither by gendered outlooks nor by beliefs in deities," which he identifies as "merely anthropomorphic projections of our own beings and sensibilities" (101). This critique of anthropomorphism and equality

proposed by Bookchin seem to align with ideas presented by two transcendentalist writers—Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson—over a hundred years earlier. In his famous *Walden*, Thoreau points out the delight of an "equal simplicity, and (…) innocence, with Nature herself" (1892: 139) and "a strange liberty" one feels when "the whole body is one sense" in Nature (1892: 201). Moreover, in his journals, he rejects the idea that "the proper study of mankind is man," and indicates the necessity to "take wider views of the universe" (Thoreau 1962 [1852]: 369). For Emerson alike, nature is agentive, and it manifests in "the commodity" or "all those advantages which our senses owe to nature" (Emerson 128), that it makes "itself available or accessible to men" (Guthrie 73). He also draws a connection between spirituality, which we may understand as the inner self, and nature, claiming that "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture" (Emerson 134). Solarpunk, similarly to transcendentalists' writings from the nineteenth century and Bookchin's social ecology of the twentieth century, reaches beyond solipsistic aspirations and redefines the position of a human in relation to the rest of the ecosystem. Following Bookchin's proposed dialectic "to find the unifying threads that overcome the disjunctions between nonhuman and human nature" (1) and to define human's "place in nature" (141). Solarpunk focuses on a need to "redefine (…) the position of humans in our biosphere" (Meyers 188) and to go beyond the human-nonhuman distinction. In solarpunk literature, this surmounting over human/nonhuman distinction and the re-evaluation of humans' position in nature can be found in Camille Meyers's "Solar Child", where the necessity to "redefine (…) the position of humans in our biosphere" (Meyers 188) reaches "beyond coping with the current hot and toxic state of our planet" (Meyers 188) and a daily struggle to survive. Moreover, this somehow realistic clinging to hope for a better tomorrow, that characterises and distinguishes solarpunk among other

speculative movements, is present in *Dust* by Daniel José Older, where the narrator emphasises "there will be another [moment], better one in the not too distant future" (Older 70). Based on that hope, instead of serving the sullen, hopeless version of the future, it tries to reason and look for other possibilities for social and ecological organisation.

Ecological Revolution

In the preface to the first solarpunk anthology ever published, *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World* (2014), Sarena Ulibarri refers to a conversation she had with the editor of the book, Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro. Asked why he had chosen to work with solarpunk, he replied that "it was the right time to write stories in self-sustaining fictional civilisations" (Lodi-Ribeiro and Ulibarri 1) and that it does not matter where those worlds would be located as "greener and more inspiring futures or timelines not troubled by pollution, overpopulation, famine, mass extinctions and anthropogenic global warming" are needed everywhere (Lodi-Ribeiro and Ulibarri 1). Alongside describing a greener version of the future, solarpunk foregrounds the "ideals of community, care, and humility" (Williams 6), which "are prized above economic growth or competition" (Williams 6). With the emphasis on the benefit of a community over competition, the movement calls for the revolution in socio-political terms and focuses on egalitarian systems with tendencies towards social anarchism, where personal independence aligns with the benefits of society. Accordingly, an ideal civilisation in solarpunk would be "prior to the individual in the sense that each individual enters society in a condition of utmost dependence" (Baldelli 90). Acknowledging this relation between the society and the individual indicates that "actions of one person can be of great importance to society" (Stokka 4) and supports the participatory aspect of this subgenre. Moreover, it also reflects a society that grows on "a desire for a socially just and ecologically harmonious social organisation" (Williams 6). As the ecological aspect of peaceful social

arrangements is highlighted, solarpunk emphasises how the environment and ecology are essential for people. For example, in "Riot of the Wind and Sun" by Jennifer Lee Rossman, the narrator emphasises that nothing can survive without the sun as it "gave life to the Earth; [n]urtured her with light and warmth and made her vibrant and beautiful […] its light was transformed into energy that brought warmth and life to the most inhospitable caverns" (35). This relation to nature can be reflected in accentuation solarpunk put towards morality and conscious co-habitation of people and the planet. For instance, Camille Meyers's "Solar Child" concludes with a statement that "who we are does not come from what we are, but from what we do" (194) concerning the unexpected outcome of genetic manipulations conducted throughout the story.

Examples of Gender Equality from Solarpunk

Another revolutionary aspect of solarpunk is related to the concept of the human body and acceptance of diversity. Interestingly, its interest in gender equality might be an effect of promoting gender awareness today. Nowadays, an increasing number of people establish "nouns and pronouns to describe more genders" (Brauer 1) and provide "education about the differences between gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality, and asserting the rights of themselves and others to choose whether and how to align their self-identified gender and their gender expression" (Brauer 1). As solarpunk reaches into the future, its readers find a description of a different world, where society is already educated in terms of gender differences and follows egalitarian principles in adjusting their old methods of organisation. This interest in gender equality prevailed in solarpunk from the very beginning and partially derived from its predecessors' focus on this issue. Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), one of most notable ancestors of solarpunk, describes a planet called Anarres, where the concept of gender has already gone through this restructuring process and where sexuality or monogamy is no longer the main objective in organising a society. The protagonist, Shevek, at the

beginning of the novel travels to a neighbouring planet, Urras, where the most popular assumption is that "what women call thinking is done with the uterus!" (Le Guin 63). Such a way of organising a society does not align with what he believes in, which is reflected in his statement that gender seems "a very mechanical basis for the division of labour" (17), and people should be able to choose their "work according to interest, talent, strength" (17). He also asks his colleague, Kimoe, "what has the sex to do with that?" (17). Shevek's curiosity aligns with what solarpunk narratives are trying to achieve - by questioning the importance of sex in determining one's occupation or capacities towards certain activities, it ironizes an archaically established social construct of gender.

Nearly four decades after *The Dispossessed*, in "Dust" by Daniel José Older, the readers can find a representation of gender fluidity where the anatomy of the protagonist's (Jax) sexual organs changes regardless of his/her will. The story begins with Jax, who wakes up next to Arkex, his/her occasional lover, and realises that "[t]oday I'm a man too - very much so it turns out" (58). By using an element of unpredictability in this switch of genders, Older creates a complex character who does not fit "into the traditional stereotypes that SF generally squeezes non-binary people" (Stephens 1). Therefore, the story emphasises the uselessness of the archaically fixed binary norms, as they no longer play any particular role in a world where gender identity is unpredictable and creates a basis for a society that is more egalitarian than the current understanding of gender altogether.

In Jaymee Goh's "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine", most of the pronouns in the protagonist's language "were gender-neutral" (112), which also reflects how society was organised without a clear distinction of labour according to sex. Additionally, the story openly emphasises that the main character, Alina, is bisexual and fully accepted by her mother (113). As bisexuality "reveals sexuality to be a process of growth, transformation, and surprise, not a stable and knowable state of being" (Garber 66), Alina's sexual orientation serves as a

commentary on the very nature of sexuality. In this understanding, sexuality is fluid and does not have limitations within the hetero/homosexual scheme of relationships. This mention of Alina's bisexuality allows readers to interpret "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine" as a call for inclusivity and acceptance of sexualities from the outside of the "compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 150).

In the following example, "Petrichor" (2015) by Megan Reynolds, readers can find traces of liberation in terms of sex, relationships, and gendered norms of organising the society. The story describes a relationship between Elena and Anabel which slowly grows more and more intimate. Their encounters are described in a series of chronologically ordered short scenes, starting with a flirtation and moving towards an intimate and romantic bond. Reynolds not only implements lesbian love as a contradistinction to the aforementioned obligatory heterosexuality but also describes one of Elena's closest friends, Cal, with a gender-neutral pronoun 'ne'. Moreover, the usage of gender-neutral pronouns "dissolves gender expectations and includes all individuals no matter their gender identity" (Milles in Senden et. al 3). Therefore, Cal functions as a model character and signals different forms of freedom encoded in language and social organisation. Freed from the responsibility to perform (Butler 183) male or female gender attributes, Cal envisions one of the many possibilities for an anticipated human of the future.

Another story that touches upon the theme of gender-neutral pronouns is "The Boston Hearth Project" (2017) by T.X. Watson. It starts with a series of email correspondence exchanged between Andie and the non-governmental organisation X.S.U. which operates in the "digital activism and human rights" (14) sector. Andie wants to apply for a job there but is concerned about the confidentiality of the application process, which confirms Andie's/the character's high level of awareness concerning issues related to cyber-security described later in the story. Interestingly, Andy uses gender-neutral pronouns 'zie/zir' with which the emails were signed. Along with Andie's retrospective description of zir earlier life and how zie uses gender-neutral pronouns,

readers get to know zir as an outstanding member of society. Moreover, due to zir views about hacking as a method to help people, it has been described as a "modern robin-hood story" (Stokka 13). In this context, zie not only represents oppressed minorities but also functions as a kind of a mimetic character representing the actual responses of society to different scenarios.

The above examples lead to a conclusion that solarpunk calls for a more progressive and egalitarian social organisation, where neither gender identity, nor gender division of labour, nor "sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 186) would be a necessity. Based on the examples of gender-neutral pronouns found in "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine", "Petrichor", or "The Boston Hearth Project", non-heteronormative love from "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine" and "Petrichor", or a complete rejection of gender immutability and stability found in "Dust", it may be concluded that solarpunk accentuates that achieving equality and freedom would require a new way of organising societies.

Conclusion

Despite being a very young trend in the speculative genre, solarpunk may be already considered crucial for presenting images of a possible future version of humanity. It asks serious questions and wonders whether people can achieve sustainability, and, if so, how it would look and when it can be achieved. By portraying a general acceptance of all genders and relationships, solarpunk encourages the creation of an equal society. Moreover, it accentuates a belief in a future of humanity, hope for a better tomorrow, and a change, which we have to undergo as a society. It focuses on people and, as Adam Flynn has stated in his "Solarpunk: Notes toward a manifesto" (2014), presents a speculative version of "a future with a human face and dirt behind its ears" (1). Despite its utopianism, it has a chance to influence the anticipated image of the future, where gender equality would be possible. Examples from Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, Camille Meyers's "Solar Child", Daniel José Older's "Dust", Jaymee

Goh's "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine", T.X. Watson's "The Boston Hearth Project", and Megan Reynolds's "Petrichor" examined in this paper illustrate a variety of some possible futures of humanity as presented in solarpunk literature. Additionally, by referring to "The Desert, Blooming" by Lev Mirov I emphasised the positive aspect of solarpunk utopianism that depends on change and progress, instead of being a fictitious and laudable paradise. This particular characteristic of the movement is especially crucial in the context of the gloomy future of the planet mentioned in the introduction. It brings out hope and inspiration for applying more unbiased and impartial regulations toward a civilisation that creates a more sustainable, welcoming, and accepting world.

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Abstract

This article offers an analysis of solarpunk and selected aspects of this literary genre including its progressive approach to gender, nature and social organisation. Referring to the genre's predecessors and Murray Bookchin's concept of social ecology, I examine several examples of solarpunk stories with a special emphasis on the representation of the anticipated version of social organisation. By commenting on its imaginary versions of social organisation and underlining the openness of gender identity, I assert that solarpunk can be approached as an important element of the science fiction literary scene and a forecast of a better tomorrow.

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RUINS AND WEEDS: AN ECOCRITICAL VIEW ON ROMAIN VEILLON'S GREEN URBEX COLLECTION

Keywords: weeds, urbex, storied matter, New Materialism, ruin porn

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?
T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Introduction

In Romain Veillon's photobook *Green Urbex: Le Monde Sans Nous* (2021), an eerie, post-apocalyptic vision of Earth is presented, where the rough greenery of nature has, seemingly, reclaimed formerly-colonised hotspots of human culture, such as castles, theatres, places of religious worship, and even theme parks. In his online article, "What If We Disappeared," Veillon shares his apparent fascination with the themes of abandonment and what could be described as a cessation of human activity. The initial post-apocalyptic framing of his collection is, typically, anthropocentric, but gradually he shifts more towards the natural world and its recolonisation of the urban landscape. While the written passages in the book (printed in French) make the purpose of focusing on nature fairly explicit, it is possible to use Veillon's photographic text as a means for investigating, in an ecocritical fashion, the topic of nature's growth in urban spaces, placing particular interest on the result of the symbiosis of ruins and weeds.

'Green' Urbex and Ruin Porn

In the preface to *Green Urbex*, Sylvain Tesson explains how the arrangement of Veillon's collection methodically composes a chronology for the return of nature (5). The book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter shows the abandonment of beautiful buildings and interiors, the spaces of which are left either clean and empty or slightly dilapidated and derelict. These photographs are picturesque displays of human culture. Meanwhile, the natural world is only to be found in the form of artistic expressions, such as murals, ornate architectural flourishes, or various types of floral patterning. However, it seems that the culture that once populated these spaces is either dying or already dead. There is one photograph captured from inside the room of a French villa that evokes a scene from Ray Bradbury's 1953 dystopian novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, showing a floor completely covered in countless books, intermixed with other miscellaneous junk (Veillon 2021a: 35). The second chapter, titled "Le Pourrissement S'Installe" (the rot sets in), shows more of culture's gradual decline, with further dilapidation on show. The images are full of dust and rubble, peeling wallpaper, as well as collapsing roofs and floors.[1] One striking photograph from this chapter shows a soft chair precariously teetering on the edge of some missing section of floor and wall.[2] A broken chandelier lies beside the chair, while sundry books are scattered amongst its shattered remains. Also, on the right-hand side, the cracked wall that is allowing for a little daylight to seep through is reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." It is only in the book's final chapter where nature finally begins to take over, starting with the process of putrefaction. The two adjacent images that begin this final chapter indicate to the reader that nature is coming (Veillon 2021a: 164-65). They show two very similar-looking, spartan rooms, each with a welcoming aperture of sunlight. Even though the rooms remain reasonably untouched, the windows are full of creeping forms of shrubbery. As with the previously described image of the tilting chair, the creepers display movement as well as the passing of time.

The genre of art in Veillon's book currently trends online as either 'ruin porn,' or urbex (urban exploration). Siobahn Lyons opens her introduction to *Ruin Porn and the Obsession with Decay* by declaring ruin porn to be a new incarnation of the seventeenth century sublime (1). She also implies that the depiction of modern ruins is what defines this particular genre, explaining that the images of decay arouse "a fascination of our own death and a tangible image of the precise form it will take" (Lyons 1-2). Even when framed in the light of the climate change crisis and humanity's potential extinction (Lyons 3), the ruin porn genre, as introduced by Lyons, still remains deeply anthropocentric. However, Veillon's latest book diverges slightly from the works of other urbex photographers, such as Marchand Meffre's *The Ruins of Detroit* (2013) or Rebecca Bathory's *Orphans of Time* (2000) by his simple addition of the word 'green.' Veillon's gradual movement towards greener images in the book shows willingness to cross-fertilise the usually separate landscapes of the urban and the rural, thus gradually creating a more ecocritical text in the process, a definitive feature of which is simply not taking "the human cultural sphere as its sole point of reference and context" (Clark 6). Even though Veillon's book is persistently framed in perspective of the human cultural sphere, that sphere ceases to remain the 'sole point of reference' by the book's end.

Shifting Perspectives: Ruins and Weeds

Among the various forms of nature that appear in *Green Urbex*, weeds might provoke the most ambivalent emotional reactions. Culturally, especially in literature, they have long been synonymous with negative emotions surrounding decay and neglect, most memorably in Dickens' *Great Expectations* as well as *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and even to some degree in Hamlet's first soliloquy.[3] However, even Pip had cherished memories of the overgrowth of "tangled weeds" when circumambulating the gardens of Satis House in the esteemed company of Estella (Dickens 54). When viewing Veillon's third chapter, "La Nature Reprend Le Dessus" (nature takes over), the

ambivalence still remains, albeit in a different form. In this instance, the positive feelings one has for the weeds derive from the joy of seeing nature's resurgence and resilience; the weeds signal hope for the planet (even if not for humankind). Perhaps ambivalence about the ruins themselves may also be felt; we may wish to see some structures more 'ruined' than others. In his essay "Ruins and the Embrace of Nature," John Dwyer, on the topic of spontaneous plant growth upon human artefacts, states that what (for humans) is "deprecated from one point of view may be welcomed from another, and deep emotions may be involved either way" (14). In order to grow more appreciative of the weeds, it might be that one simply has to know them better. If the buildings in Veillon's work have been completely abandoned, as the book's sub-title 'the world without us' suggests, then there is no longer any reason for the sprawling plant-life to bear the stigma of an 'unwelcomed pest.' Therefore, a fresh opportunity arises to view these abandoned structures from the weeds' perspective; for example, how they might be useful to the growth of weeds and future successions of plant-life.

In fact, such ruined structures as these often help to give rise to a proliferation of different plant species. Dwyer's essay reveals how the old ruins of the Colosseum in Rome had once been known for its great abundance of weeds (10).[4] The British charity English Heritage, which chooses to present its ruins as gardens (Dwyer 12), has also noted the significance of this form of plant growth. For example, in the "Landscape Advice Note: Vegetation on Walls," the distinct value of vertical walls (as opposed to leaning ones) is clearly noted, explaining that they create more demanding conditions for plant growth, thus resulting in the appearance of more uncommon, specialised species (Cathersides and Parker 2). Of course, in Veillon's work, there is no evidence of such rare and attractive forms of undergrowth (at least, not yet). However, even the more common species of weed will eventually lead to later successions of more colourful vegetation, which, in turn, results in a more welcoming environment for birds, insects, or molluscs.[5]

The very topic of the resilience of weeds growing in urban spaces and their ability to create a haven for other flora and fauna has recently been shown in spectacular fashion in a new BBC documentary series, *The Green Planet*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough. In the final episode of the series "Human Worlds," Attenborough explains that the urban path he is standing on – without human intervention – could be completely overrun with pioneer species of plant within the space of just ten years: "the pioneers giving way to shrubs, and the shrubs, in due course, to trees" (00:00:35 – 00:00:51).[6] Utilising an innovative robotic timelapse camera, aptly named the Triffid,[7] the BBC series is able to show us the slow growth and regrowth of plants, such as the pioneers in urban areas, all in a matter of seconds. Despite being a very different medium to the *Green Urbex* photobook, the acquired effect of the BBC series is similar to that of *Green Urbex* in that they both remind us how the world of plant-life operates on a time-scale completely different from that of the human world. Part of the challenge of thinking more deeply about non-human life is the difficulty in contemplating the fact that "everything has its own time, its own temporality" (Morton 64). Despite reminding the viewer of these stark differences in time and temporality, the BBC series still presents a "measurement of time" that is "convenient for humans" to consume mentally (Morton 64). While *Green Urbex* maintains its picturesque framing on the abandoned or ruined structures (in contrast to the close-up framing of the plants in the BBC television series), the aspect of time seems to be left more to the reader's imagination.

Storied Matter

The close focus on this complex ecology based on the slowly increasing symbiosis of weeds and ruins can be enlightening, allowing us to see multiple forms of natural life actively interconnecting and coevolving with the human world. Such a focus seems to be embodied in the new materialist concept of "storied matter," reframing nature, especially, in its relationship with human

culture, as an agentic and expressive force; as Serpil Oppermann claims, this concept "compels us to think beyond anthropocentricity and about our coexistence and coevolution in the story of the earth itself" (2018b: 412). Going beyond the limits of this photographic text, an alternative yet similar example of storied matter can be found in the work being done to restore the ecosystem of reefs. Between 2007 and 2010, hundreds of old subway carriage chassis were purposefully dumped into the Atlantic Ocean in order to create an artificial coral reef; the process of which, over time, was captured in photographs by Stephen Mallon, whose work was later exhibited at New York University's Kimmel Galleries (Parke). In this instance, an interesting comparison can be made with Veillon's overground ruins because both types of ecological environment can emerge and thrive with the help of human-made structures.[8] Furthermore, both Veillon's and Mallon's work can help us to think positively and constructively about the problems of man-made pollution and climate change. According to Oppermann, matter's expressive capability to bear "material stories about ecological crises interlaced with socio-political struggles and geophysical forces" is part of the key to the concept of matter having a storied dimension (2018a: 10). Both photographic texts show examples of storied matter in that they help us "better understand our fragile ecosystems" and compel us to imagine stories for a better future (Oppermann 2018b: 413). Such examples of 'ecological crises' can be found in coral reef degradation as well as the Chernobyl disaster of 1986. Alongside his photograph of the Ferris wheel at the Pripyat amusement park in Chernobyl, Veillon mentions the fact that researchers have noticed the vegetation adapting to the abnormal levels of radioactivity (Veillon 2021a: 208-09). In this third and final chapter, Veillon not only depicts the rise of plant-life but also shows the waste and ruins of a more recent past, such as tanks, buses, gas masks, railway lines or bridges, and even a water park. This slowly decaying waste could also be taken as an example of what Jane Bennett refers to as "vibrant matter": non-organic forms of life that may help us to draw attention "to an interstitial field of non-personal, ahuman

forces, flows, tendencies, and trajectories" (2010: 61). These "actants" of non-human materiality can be "bona fide participants" in any given narrative (Bennett 2010: 62). The concept of vibrant matter highlights the active agency of the raw waste left behind by humans, which then through its symbiosis with spontaneous vegetation becomes further storied. Matter itself is 'storied' by embodying a signifying power.

Viewing Veillon's collection through the lens of storied matter can help to "think beyond anthropocentricity and about our coexistence and coevolution in the story of the earth itself" (Oppermann 2018b: 412). The images toward the end of the book appear more haunting than those of the eighteenth century interiors at the book's start because they are a reminder of the brevity of our own modern culture, thus further reinforcing the author's post-apocalyptic theme. We are also invited to ponder what newer life-forms could emerge from such a landscape. If matter "becomes a *site of narrativity*, a storied matter, embodying its own narratives in the minds of human agents and in the very structure of its own self-constructive forces" (Iovino and Oppermann 2012: 83), then it seems that Veillon's 'site of narrativity' is human artefacts (urbex) plus vegetation (green). The very combination of these two elements, could be the "ongoing configurations of signs and meanings that we interpret as stories" (Oppermann 2018b: 412). In *The Green Planet*, while exploring a long-abandoned ironworks, Attenborough states that "the ability of plants to reclaim the most unlikely sites is truly extraordinary: given time they will attract animals, rebuild complex communities, and even reclaim bricks and mortar for the natural world" (00:01:18 – 00:01:37). The documentary's onscreen captions also say how the ironworks structure has created a haven for natural life "protected by a fortress of our own making" (00:02:10 – 00:02:17). Not knowing what unique natural structures will develop, it seems that different sites with different materials will create different configurations and stories. The book's post-apocalyptic setting, serving as a reminder of the brevity of human existence, helps present a speculative narrative on what stories our

modern ruins will leave behind. Using examples such as fossils, volcanoes and tree rings, Oppermann explains that storied matter "represents a new ecology of understanding the ultimate ontology of a meaningfully articulate planet" (2018b: 413). An example from *Green Urbex* could be an abandoned coal mine, which is likely to represent a relatively brief period of industrialised society (Veillon 2021a: 201).

Disenchantment

The collection as a whole can be seen as a true to life representation of a very real, very present, and disenchanted world. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, Jane Bennett speaks of "the disenchantment of modernity," describing the "depiction of nature and culture as orders no longer capable of inspiring deep attachment" (2001: 4). Bennett's surface description of the common mood toward modernity is also present in Veillon's text. For example, the apparent neglect of churches and chapels could be metaphors for the breakdown of hierarchical structures in society. In addition, certain modern artefacts depicted in the book, such as a passenger plane or a rollercoaster ride,[9] could be said to be objects of lost enchantment in the twenty-first century. For example, air travel has become a symbol of mass pollution while theme parks may signify capitalist elements of the American Dream. On the topic of disenchantment and human practices, Oppermann writes:

> Thinking about storied matter in a disenchanted world means thinking seriously about how our invasive economic practices produce planetary cycles of pollution, how our political decisions and cultural meanings are enmeshed in their production, and how they all enfold into one indissoluble process. (2018b: 413)

In contrast, a more enchanted outlook could be perceived through an ecocritical reading of Veillon's book. Bennett refers to a "Deleuzean kind of enchantment, where wonders persist in a rhizomatic world without intrinsic purpose or divinity" (2001: 34).[10] She says that for Deleuze, "enchantment resides in the spaces where nature and culture overlap: where becomings happen among humans, animals, and machines" (Bennet 2001: 34). Perhaps for

Bennett, the prospect of symbiosis present in Veillon's images would provoke this sense of enchantment. Veillon's images may not always be pleasing to the eye, but Bennett claims that "[t]o be enchanted is to be both charmed and disturbed: charmed by a fascinating repetition of sounds or images, disturbed to find that, although your sense-perception has become intensified, your background sense of order has flown out the door" (2001: 34). This sense of disturbance is strongly evoked throughout *Green Urbex*.

Natureculture

Ruins themselves are not essentially 'human'; nevertheless, they are human-made. Their apparent fusion with the weeds is also embodied in Donna Haraway's term "natureculture" (Malone & Ovenden 1), the intention of which is to show humans' impact on the natural world as well as to break down the traditional 'man vs nature' dualisms. By focusing on the weedy, less attractive forms of vegetation in these photographs, an imaginative, ecocritical viewer can begin to engage with the "expressive dynamics of nature's constituents," as proposed by the study of 'Material ecocriticism' (Oppermann 2013: 57). As with trees and coral, weeds, particularly in regard to their ontology with the ruins, possess natural-cultural storytelling qualities, which may help "breach the categorical schism between nature and culture" (Oppermann 2013: 60). Thus, John Dwyer's comment that "contemplation of ruins reminds us that weeds have their place in the realm of nature" seems highly relevant to this ecocritical presentation of Veillon's work (14).

Conclusion

Veillon's pictures may not have been framed chiefly in the interest of displaying the basest forms of plant matter;[11] however, by looking at the images where weeds and ruins become deeply entangled, the viewer may develop a keener awareness of the weeds' performative powers and presence. The careful arrangement of his photographs shows his ability to tell a story without any

human involvement, and while lacking some of the enchantment of *The Secret Garden* and the sentimentalism of *Great Expectations*, Veillon's photographic text can become part of a newer form of materialist story-telling. An ecocritical and materialist reading of *Green Urbex*, particularly in the light of the concept of storied matter, helps us to go beyond the mere aesthetic buzz of ruin porn and to look at pollution and other ecological crises in a more constructive manner. Displaying an abundance of weeds and mostly unattractive ruins toward the book's end, Veillon presents an honest depiction of the world with a disenchanting and ominous sense of the post-apocalypse, which altogether establishes a suitable framework for this new form of storytelling culture.

Endnotes

1. Walking around structurally compromised buildings is a dangerous aspect of Urbexing as a hobby.
2. This image is listed as photograph "#30" on Veillon's online picture blog ("What If").
3. Hamlet refers to the world as "an unweeded garden" (Ham. 1.2.134–136).
4. Dwyer refers to both Dickens' account in 1846 as well as the botanical study of Richard Deakins, who in 1855, "catalogued and illustrated 420 different species of plants growing spontaneously in the Colosseum" (10).
5. The English Heritage document also mentions specific types of fauna which are likely to appear as a direct result of wall vegetation such as ivy (4).
6. The timestamp refers to a short section of the episode that can be watched via a clip from the BBC Earth YouTube channel.
7. The Triffid timelapse camera has, no doubt, been named after the 1951 post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids*, written by British sci-fi novelist John Wyndham. The novel presents a fictional species of plant that attacks and kills people.
8. On January 20th 2022, the Guardian newspaper reported that a huge coral reef had just been discovered in the Pacific Ocean, which was a rare find because of its depth, meaning that it lacks the sunlight upon which the coral depends (Greenfield 2022).
9. The rollercoaster from the abandoned Nara Dreamland theme park in Japan is listed as photograph "#5" from Veillon's picture blog ("What If").
10. Rhizome is a botanical term for creeping rootstalks. Deleuze adapted the concept to be used as a philosophical term to describe theories that are heterogeneous, multiplicitous, non-dualist, and non-hierarchical in their assemblage.
11. The photos are clearly framed in accordance with the shape of the buildings, rooms and other human structures.

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Abstract

Urban exploration (urbex for short) has become a popular activity for adventurous photographers, particularly for those looking toward non-human subjects for ways to express their art. Romain Veillon's latest publication of photographs – *Green Urbex* – invites us to imagine a world without humans, where abandonment leads to the inevitable rot and decay of their artificial structures, eventually giving way to various successions of plant-life. In addition to composing a review of Veillon's book, the main focus of this paper is essentially to approach the greener aspects of Veillon's urbex collection from an ecocritical point of view. The photobook slowly shifts our perspective away from mostly picturesque and anthropocentrically framed images of grand interiors to more modern-style conceptions of the post-apocalypse, simultaneously depicting nature's recolonisation of these seemingly forgotten areas of human culture. In similar fashion, the paper starts with an appreciation of the weeds and ruins phenomenon in aesthetic terms, progressing towards more contemporary theories and reflections of ecocriticism, with particular interest placed on concepts surrounding the interdisciplinary approaches of new materialism, such as "storied matter" and "natureculture." By using ecocritical thinking to move beyond the scope of Veillon's text, we can see whether it is possible for weeds and ruins to tell their own story of this human-nature relationship. Also, with Veillon making little attempt to beautify his subject, can the topic of weeds and ruins become more enchanting when viewed from this ecocritical perspective? The very fact that weeds are culturally considered 'unwanted,' or are traditionally associated, in metaphor, with themes of decay and neglect, makes them an interesting topic for discussion because they present an opportunity to contemplate life from a distinctly non-typical, unfashionable, and even somewhat alien perspective. These general themes of forgotten worlds and undesirability should make suitable topics for ecocritical discussion, especially considering the attempts by Veillon to facilitate meditations on realistic post-apocalyptic scenarios such as human displacement or ecological crises.

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"YOU CAN'T LET YOURSELF BE DEFINED BY THE PARTS THAT ARE BROKEN": IMMERSION, TRAUMATIC MEMORY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF PTSD IN *TELL ME WHY*

Keywords: trauma, *Tell Me Why*, immersion, traumatic memory, video games

Introduction

Thanks to recent technological developments (such as high-resolution graphics or VR equipment), video games have become more realistic, and as a result, they possess new qualities that facilitate the process of engaging in the fictional worlds more deeply and thoroughly. Scholars who specialise in game studies often opt for the term 'immersion' to describe "video games' ability to absorb the player and continually keep her under its grasp" (Nae 11). Immersion can (but does not have to) be enhanced by the player's active role, specifically when they are the ones in charge of choosing particular pieces of dialogue and moving the gameplay forward. Such could be the case for the DONTNOD Entertainment game entitled *Tell Me Why*, which was released in three chapters in 2020.

Tell Me Why focuses on the emotional journey of revisiting traumatic experiences which occurred in the childhood of identical twins, Alyson and Tyler Ronan. After nearly ten years apart, the twins reunite to sell their childhood house. However, upon entering the bedroom of their late mother, they realise that the past might have been different than they initially remembered. The twins decide to learn the truth about their trauma and childhood. Owing to the game mechanics, the gameplay becomes individualised

and the consequences of actions taken by the player during the three chapters unravel at the end of the game. Importantly, the player initially remains unaware of whether their choice of dialogue might possess any meaning for the progression of the game and/or for the maintenance of relationships with non-playable characters. The information that a recently made choice bears significance is given only after making the decision, and it is signalled by a specific sound and icon. Moreover, the simplicity of the game mechanics, consisting in moving, examining objects and, most importantly, engaging in conversations, might lead to the impression that the gameplay experience is tedious or unappealing. It does, nonetheless, attract those who engage in games for the sake of the narrative, and not necessarily the play. Importantly, as argued by Alexander Galloway: "video games are not just images or stories or play or games, but *action*" (in Kapell 3). Thus, special emphasis should be put on the role of the player in the gaming experience, and in the case of the game in question, the player's actions dictate the unfolding of the events and eventually the conclusion of the game.

The key factor of the plot is the distinction between the known and the unknown, as the protagonists go on a journey through their psychological trauma. For the purpose of this study, I define trauma after Cathy Caruth as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" (1996: 57). Deprived of the ability to control their own memories, the traumatised person is unwillingly brought back to the events which caused emotional distress and threat. Thus, a traumatised person remains "possessed by an image or event" (Caruth 1995: 4-5). The emotional and physical response occurring after the traumatic events reveals itself in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The symptoms of PTSD essentially derive "from the three symptom clusters: re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal" (Golier et al. 226).

Traumatic memories might differ from "regular" memories, as the situation of danger or threat oftentimes leads to dissociation, which is

> an experience in which a person feels cognitively and emotionally removed from the current environment (...) [It] is an automatic response

> to overwhelming emotions. It is a protective response in which the individual "escapes" from the pain or intensity of an unbearable emotion. (...) It is a reaction that is fairly unique to specific types of traumatic situations—ones that are so uncontrollable, unavoidable, and threatening that physical escape is impossible. (Cloitre et al. 157)

Dissociation may further cause so-called dissociative amnesia, which prevents the traumatised person from retrieving the factual events at their will (Bremner 2013: 166). Instead, they are as if doomed to store the fragmented and incomplete memories (Golier et al. 226).

The aim of this article is to explore the devices employed in order to (re)present trauma in the narrative adventure game entitled *Tell Me Why*. In addition, the article investigates the role of the player in the gameplay experience, as the decisions they make have an impact on the relationship between the twins and the ending of the game.

Traumatic Memories Reflected in the Game Mechanics

When the player is first introduced to the game, the storyline seems to be rather simple, as it focuses on the protagonists' reunion after having been separated for ten years. The main characters, Alyson and Tyler, meet for the first time since the tragic death of their mother (Mary-Ann). What ought to be mentioned, however, are the circumstances in which Mary-Ann died. The initial recollection of the memories from the twins' childhood provided in the game offers a version in which Mary-Ann, angered by Tyler's transness, and provoked in particular by him cutting his hair short, tries to kill him with a gun. Upon hearing Tyler scream for help, Alyson runs to stop Mary-Ann and in defence of her brother she stabs her mother with a pair of scissors. Tyler successfully persuades Alyson to lie and tell the police that it was him who killed their mother. Eventually, Tyler is sent to a juvenile detention centre, and Alyson stays in town with her new legal guardian (a police officer, Eddy). This particular version of events is disputed once the twins discover a guidebook for parents of transgender children among their mother's possessions. The discovery, although potentially insignificant, changes the protagonists'

approach towards their traumatic past, as it contradicts their explanation concerning Mary-Ann's aggressive behaviour. The book leads to Tyler questioning the past the twins remembered and/or believed in: "She can't do this to me. Not now… When I've… finally made sense of a few things" (*Tell Me Why*, chapter 1). From this moment on, the game engages the player in the process of reconstructing the past, as the protagonists interview the residents of the town who were close to Mary-Ann and who might have known about her problems before the tragic events.

The exploration of the past is facilitated by the inclusion of supernatural elements, such as *the bond*—an ability to mentally share thoughts, feelings and memories between the twins. Moreover, Alyson and Tyler are capable of recalling their memories in the form of physical, and often quite detailed visions. These mechanisms, or powers, provide an opportunity for a player to (re)discover the past of the protagonists in a rather unusual, yet engaging form. They additionally seem to correspond to the ideas found in magical realism, which

> combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them (...) [it] radically modifies and replenishes the dominant mode of realism in the West, challenging its basis of representation from within. (Faris 1)

The twins possess and use a supernatural power which simply exists in their reality, yet it is noticeable only to them.

Throughout the game the possibility of interacting with an upcoming memory is signalled by a specific sound. Additionally, the area in which the recollected event happened starts to glow. The player cannot dismiss these memories, as they are necessary to understand the story and to progress within it. On the one hand, memories appear haphazardly and force the protagonist (and the player) to acknowledge them; on the other hand, though, the player needs to activate, or, as it is named in the game, *remember* them by holding the mouse button. The simultaneous intrusiveness of memories and the effort put

into activating them seem to represent the complex nature of the psychological process of retrieving memories.

The visions which occur in the game could be classified on the basis of their (in)direct connection to the traumatic memories associated with the death of Mary-Ann. The memories which hold no direct connection to the twins' trauma are remembered easily and rather quickly, as the player needs to hold the mouse button for approximately a second. In the case of the traumatic memories, particularly the ones preceding the death of Mary-Ann and/or happening in the same spot (the dock), the twins have trouble remembering them, which is also reflected in the player's experience, as in order to activate the vision, the mouse button needs to be held for much longer. What might be considered a rather insignificant element of the mechanics of the game, in fact, seems to correspond to the distinction made in trauma theory between regular and traumatic memories: "[h]ealthy (...) [m]emory formation involves encoding, storage (or consolidation), and retrieval" (Bremner et al. 2002: 379). In comparison,

> dissociative states at the time of psychological trauma may represent a marker of pathological processes affecting brain structures involved in memory, such as the hippocampus (...) Considering the role that the hippocampus plays in memory, dysfunction of the hippocampus may result in a breakdown of healthy integration of memory and consciousness. This breakdown may entail abnormalities of memory encoding, consolidation, or storage or some combination of the three. (Bremner et al. 2002: 390)

The mechanics of the game are constructed in a manner which seems to represent the difficulty of retrieving traumatic memories in real life.

The ability to re-imagine, or retrieve the traumatic memories through the aforementioned visions is eventually used to arrive at a conclusion as to what actually happened on the day Mary-Ann died. Each of the twins, after interviewing people around them and gaining new knowledge concerning the time before the event, remembers the event differently. The possibility of the twins experiencing dissociation due to experiencing extreme emotions suggests that this is what might have led them to remember the details of the event

differently. As argued in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*,

> [d]issociative states may also result in the encoding of bizarre or distorted traumatic memories that reflect altered perceptual states occurring at the time that traumatic memories were formed (...). Beyond the selectivity of the information that is encoded at the time of the trauma, repetitive rehearsal of traumatic memories can alter the meaning (...). The focus on central details at the expense of contextual information present in the initial encoding process becomes even more pronounced in rehearsal of traumatic memories. (Krystal et al. 158)

The twins remember the general event similarly. The one element that they cannot decide on, however, is the intention of Mary-Ann, and whether she genuinely intended to hurt Tyler, or whether he happened to surprise her the moment before a suicide attempt. The final decision, and the twins' different versions of the events, reflect the complexity of recapturing one's traumatic past. The core reason as to why Mary-Ann was pointing a gun at Tyler remains unknowable to both the protagonists and the players. However, the player is the one in control, as they can decide which version to assume to be true. Importantly, either choice, combined with other decisions taken by the player in the whole game, results in a different ending, partially pointing to another aspect of the traumatic memory—the difficulty to accept new elements of trauma, not considered previously:

> [i]n contrast to "ordinary" memories (both good and bad), which are mutable and dynamically changing over time, traumatic memories are fixed and static. They are imprints (engrams) from past overwhelming experiences, deep impressions carved into the sufferer's brain, body and psyche. These harsh and frozen imprints do not yield to change, nor do they readily update with current information. The 'fixity' of imprints prevents [one] from forming new strategies and extracting new meanings. (Levine 24–25)

Depending on the decisions made throughout the game, the epilogue shows either of the twins. If Tyler is seen in the epilogue, it confirms that "the twins will follow through on their plans to sell the house. Otherwise, Alyson will stay at 12 Cannery Road to process and heal from her grief in the place she knows

best" (https://www.tellmewhygame.com/endings-explained). Importantly, as it is noticed by the lead narrative designer Elise Galmard, the epilogue which includes Alyson staying in the house,

> is very much the Alyson way of healing and trying to make sense of it all: by channeling all of that energy into creation and art. Life is not over, and it is most definitely not put on hold for Alyson. She is simply going through a period (...) where she needs to look within for a little longer before emerging on the other side. And that is okay. (https://www.tellmewhygame.com/endings-explained)

Contrary to Alyson's appearance, Tyler appearing in the epilogue is never an implication of him trying to process trauma. As Galmard explains, "Tyler 'did the work' already when he was in Fireweed by going through therapy and dealing with what had happened. Going back to Delos was just a way to seal this chapter of his life shut" (www.tellmewhygame.com/endings-explained). Although the explanation provided by the creator does not necessarily signal the only line of interpretation, it comments on a significant aspect of the experience of trauma.

Representation of Trauma and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Part of the gameplay experience in *Tell Me Why* represents the process of coming to terms with the difficulties of the past. As established before, the identification of PTSD depends on the recognition of symptoms from at least one of the three clusters, "re-experiencing, avoidance, and arousal" (Golier et al. 226). In *Tell Me Why*, Alyson is the only character exhibiting symptoms of PTSD.

The re-examination of the past leads to Alyson displaying symptoms of trauma in the form of nightmares. Uncertain whether her killing Mary-Ann was justified and unable to access her traumatic memory in full detail, Alyson questions her own actions from the past. Most vividly, Alyson's trauma is represented in the last episode of the game, which opens with a scene in which she is having a nightmare about being stranded in the ice near the dock—the place where Mary-Ann died. In the nightmare scene, Alyson is woken up by a hooded character (resembling herself) who throws flyers onto the ice. The flyer

she picks up reads "you killed me." The flyers that can be noticed on the ground include the following captions: "you killed your mother" and "you will end up like me." When the ice breaks, Alyson falls on the floor of her childhood home. She is led by the hooded figure towards the door of their childhood bedroom. Upon entering, she yet again finds herself in the place where her mother died. The scenery is painted in darker colours, intensifying the eeriness of the nightmare. The hooded figure standing on the dock resembles Mary-Ann at the moment of pointing a gun at Tyler. When Alyson touches the character, she suddenly becomes the hooded figure herself and drops a pair of scissors. Eventually, she sees her mother on the dock saying "you killed me." When she turns around she is met by Tyler repeating "you killed me." The scene is disrupted by the title screen. This sequence shows that Alyson is haunted by intrusive nightmares which directly stem from her trauma. Moreover, the nightmare points to the mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar, which leads to the situation in which "the form the memory takes may make it seem strange or foreign. This is particularly likely if the memory occurs as an illusion or a fragmented image" (Golier et al. 226). In addition, as argued in *Treating Post-Trauma Nightmares: A Cognitive Behavioral Approach*,

> although post-trauma nightmares may be described as replicative, there is usually some variation of content from the actual event. The variation may be related to stuck points or hot spots—aspects of the trauma that are difficult for the individual to process. In addition to replicative nightmares, trauma-exposed individuals may also report trauma-similar nightmares (i.e., nightmares that have some components similar to their traumatic event, but such significant features as place, time, and people involved are different) or trauma-dissimilar nightmares (i.e., nightmares with no distinguishable relationship to the trauma). Even those nightmares that appear to have little to do with the traumatic event may still be associated with it. (Davis 42–43)

The contents of the nightmares included in *Tell Me Why* correspond to Davis's description of post-trauma nightmares. The elements of the traumatic event (the setting, the characters and the act of killing Mary-Ann) which appear in the nightmare become distorted by the intrusive thoughts troubling the protagonist. After questioning the rightfulness of the action she had taken,

Alyson's traumatic memory changes to such an extent that she becomes haunted more by her inability to justify her own actions rather than the traumatic memory itself. The fact that Alyson eventually becomes the mysterious hooded figure (who haunts her at first) could be interpreted in multiple ways; however, one of possible readings is to interpret the figure as a metaphorical representation of the condition of being trapped in one's own mind experienced by a traumatised person.

Another aspect of traumatisation included in the game also points to Alyson's struggle with intrusive thoughts and distorted versions of the memory visions discussed in the previous section. The gameplay presents traumatic memories as particularly difficult to access, as the typical manner of activating the memory visions is impossible, despite there being signs of upcoming ones. The player, thus, is capable of vicariously experiencing the difficulty of recalling the traumatic event at one's will and the intrusive nature such memories can possess. The memory visions, previously activated by the player, in the last episode, specifically in the section which focuses solely on Alyson, are activated automatically. They are the visual representation of the protagonist's intrusive thoughts, which find confirmation when Alyson herself decides to talk about them:

> ALYSON: My anxiety's through the roof. I can't eat anything without getting sick… And I've been seeing things… Memories. Of Mary-Ann, and me and Tyler when we were kids, and Eddy, and… It used to be just stuff I'm pretty sure really happened, but now I see them everywhere, shouting every shitty thought I've ever had about myself. I don't know how much more of it I can take. (*Tell Me Why*, chapter 3)

A further exploration of the intrusive nature of trauma is presented in the breakout room of the local police station. The intensification of Alyson's traumatic responses after discovering new aspects of the past, along with the setting directly connected to her trauma, causes her mental distress. Unable to rationalise her intrusive thoughts, Alyson suffers a severe panic attack. The player is in control of calming the protagonist down, as the gameplay requires them to play a mini-game in the form of an anxiety-relieving application. The

mini-game's point is to steady the protagonist's breathing. The memory vision appearing after handling the panic attack points to the fact that the consuming aspect of Alyson's trauma could be attributed to her allowing Tyler to take the blame for her action (i.e. the act of killing Mary-Ann). Once she reveals the truth, her PTSD symptoms seem to subside.

Final Remarks

Throughout the gameplay of *Tell Me Why*, the player, and the protagonists, have the opportunity to discover new aspects of the past, focusing especially on its traumatic elements. Although trauma is a subject that is considered unsettling and oftentimes unspeakable, its representation can be found in various types of media. The inclusion of traumatic themes in video games no longer appears shocking or surprising. As noticed in "Playing with Trauma: Interreactivity, Empathy, and Complicity in *The Walking Dead* Video Game,"

> the last few years have seen the release of big-budget video games that acknowledge trauma by using it as a trope or characterization method (*Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, 2011, for instance), allow the player to step into the shoes of a traumatized character (*Trauma*, 2011 and *Max Payne*, 2001), incorporate the structure and aesthetics of trauma into the mechanics of play (*Limbo*, 2011 and *Braid*, 2009), or put the player in traumatizing situations and require them to make near-impossible choices (*Spec Ops: The Line*, 2012 and *Lone Survivor*, 2012). (Smethurst & Craps 270)

Thus, it can be concluded that trauma has become a subject that is employed in various manners and that can be found in numerous game titles. It might, however, be interesting to consider the reasons why players would willingly choose such games. The appeal of the gameplay experience of *Tell Me Why* might stem from the so-called "positive discomfort [which] is connected to game content that provokes reflection in the player, provides new insight, has a purpose in the narrative, or makes the player curious about the story and makes her want to continue playing" (Jørgensen 160). What could have additionally contributed to the popularity and the critical acclaim of this game

is the fact that "*Tell Me Why* [was] the first major studio game to feature a playable transgender lead character" (Durkee).[1]

Furthermore, *Tell Me Why* discusses the problematic aspect of seeking help after being exposed to a traumatic experience. The possibility of not being able to receive proper treatment is presented in the game in a rather realistic manner. Importantly, as described in the previous section, only Alyson exhibits symptoms of PTSD, which might pose a question concerning her reasons as to why she had never gotten the help she needed and whether she was eventually capable of going to therapy. The answer to the former concern can be found in the explanation the character provides: "I've looked into therapists a few times, but they're all so far away, and so expensive" (*Tell Me Why*, chapter 3). Although this remark is not particularly highlighted, this piece of dialogue comments on the issue of inaccessibility of psychiatric treatment. As concluded in a recent study, "[t]he most prevalent barriers to healthcare access link to issues with affordability, (...) as many Americans lack the physical or financial resources to receive the healthcare services they need" (Coombs et al.). Noticeably, however, every ending alludes to the fact that Alyson eventually receives the needed help.

The gameplay experience of *Tell Me Why* allows the player to visualise and understand the difficulties of dealing with psychological trauma. As a central part of the narrative, it is represented in a multilayered form, thus, providing a realistic experience, despite its inherent fictionality. The usage of the game mechanics, and most importantly, the possibility of re-examining the past in a rather effortless manner, enables the player to fully submerge in the story and, perhaps, even find solace in the characters' experiences. Supposedly, the representation of trauma in the form of a video game, and the employment of audio-visual elements proves beneficial, as the traumatic memory "is (...) not subject to the usual narrative or verbal mechanisms of recall, but is instead organized as bodily sensations, behavioural reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks" (Whitehead 115). The form of the video game, thus, assists the

player in a comprehensive journey through the psychological trauma, which might contribute to better understanding of the subject, but it potentially also could lead to the vicarious traumatisation of the player. Vicarious trauma, although briefly characterised as "the traumatization of the ones who listen" (Caruth 1995: 10) can also be experienced by readers, spectators and players. However, it is worth mentioning that

> [i]n a certain sense all media response should be seen as at most vicarious trauma, not as experiencing trauma itself[, as] (...) spectators do not feel the protagonist's trauma. They feel the pain evoked by empathy—arousing mechanisms interacting with their own traumatic experiences. Such mechanisms are especially powerful when a viewer has had firsthand traumas that are similar to those being portrayed. (Kaplan 90)

Kaplan here touches upon another important element of vicarious trauma—the therapeutic aspect of the experience. Potentially, in terms of the discussed game, a player with similar experiences could see themselves and their struggles represented, which could result in making their own experience feel less alienating.

Endnotes

1. The protagonist's trauma does not stem from his being transgender or the process of transitioning. In order to avoid stereotyping of a transgender character and to ensure the authenticity of trans experience, the game developers sought "guidance from LGBTQ, cultural and mental health advocates" (https://www.tellmewhygame.com/resources). Despite the fact that the game heavily relies on the events from the past (before Tyler's transition), his storyline is written in a manner aiming to be sensitive to transgender, or gender non-conforming players (e.g. the game never reveals the deadname of the character).

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to conduct an analysis of traumatic memories and the role of the player in the gameplay of the narrative game *Tell Me Why*. Drawing upon the theory of trauma and memory as well as game studies, the article provides an interpretation of the narrative and the mechanics developed in the game. As the game primarily focuses on the aspect of processing the trauma and dealing with (un)wanted memories, the article discusses the possible impact on the player, considering mostly the issue of decision-making, and the outcomes resulting from it. Additionally, the article addresses the question concerning the popularity of the game.

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THE EVOLVING FEMALE NARRATIVE IN DYSTOPIAN VIDEO GAMES: THE CASE OF *BIOSHOCK INFINITE*, *THE LAST OF US*, AND *HORIZON: ZERO DAWN*

Keywords: video game, game studies, representation, gender roles, dystopia

Introduction

The following study examines the portrayal of three female characters in dystopian games. While Elizabeth from *BioShock Infinite* and Ellie from *The Last of Us* are perceived as characters that mark the 2013 transition in representing women in video games, Aloy from *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (2017) is seen as a representative of a complex narrative design of a lead female protagonist put in a primary role within the game world. The three triple-A video games were chosen due to their focus on the narrative component. Digital dystopias constructed in each of the chosen video games are seen as hostile environments in which it is necessary for female characters to (re)define themselves in terms of narrative agency in order to traverse the oppressive spaces. Within the scope of this article, video games from 2013 onwards are seen as particularly relevant to the examination of the gradual shift in terms of the representation of women in gaming—from a partial subversion of tropes previously established by game discourse to a game narrative representing a fully-realized sole female protagonist.

The gaming community has long been considered a male-dominated and male-oriented environment (Harvey and Fisher 2015). Nowadays, the popularity of the stereotypical image of a gamer constructed as male is increasingly deteriorating. The recent report generated by the Polish Gamers

Observatory (*The Gender of Polish Gamers* 2020*)* indicates a more equal distribution across gender with women constituting forty-nine percent of gamers in Poland. Despite the fact that gamer demographics are constantly shifting with regard to the involvement of female players, video games have traditionally been "perceived to belong in the male domain, and female players and male players alike experience greater social acceptance by staying within sex-role expectation" (Lucas and Sherry 517). Nevertheless, Linda Kaye, Charlotte Pennington, and Joseph McCann (2018) argue that gaming is largely considered by both men and women as a "masculine pursuit" (2). In fact, female gamers state that they experience marginalization within gaming communities and commonly present themselves as men in "an attempt to dispel gender-related gaming stereotypes" (3). As maintained by Linda Kaye, Charlotte Pennington, and Joseph McCann (2018), empirical research tends to emphasize the negative experiences that female gamers encounter once they engage with "hardcore" forms of gaming including "online multi-player games and competitive and violent videogames" (3). Kaye, Pennington, and McCann (2018) claim that the aforementioned factors have led to the unequal distribution of female gamers in large forms of gaming and the "#GamerGate" conflict, an online harassment campaign aimed at women in gaming which serves as an example of "how social media operate as vectors for public discourses about gender, sexual identity, and equality, as well as safe spaces for aggressive and violent misogyny" (Braithwaite 2016).

In 2016, merely 3 per cent of video games published included female protagonists. As of 2020, the figure rose to 18 per cent (Sarkeesian 2020). Nevertheless, the report states that "the percentage of games shown at E3 that focus on women has hovered around the 7-9% range for the past few years" (*Feminist Frequency* 2018). Because of the observable discrepancy in the number of female and male lead characters, the representation of female protagonists with an actual narrative agency can be seen as underwhelming. In a study analysing in-game content spanning 31 years, Teresa Lynch, Jessica

Tompkins, Irene Van Driel, and Niki Fritz (2016) concluded that even though the overt sexualization of playable female characters has declined since the 1990s, modern-day game narratives may perpetuate the gender-stereotyped female tropes with female characters represented as those of secondary role in story development and game design. As stated by Mildred Perreault, Gregory Pearson Perreault, Joy Jenkins, and Ariel Morrison (2016), the year 2013 marked the narrative transition in the number of female characters in larger (triple-A) video game titles. A growing number of women featured in leading roles: Elizabeth in *Bioshock Infinite*, Ellie in *The Last of Us*, Jodie in *Beyond: Two Souls*, and Lara Croft in the reboot of *Tomb Raider*. Mildred Perreault, Gregory Pearson Perreault, Joy Jenkins, and Ariel Morrison emphasize the way in which the game narratives of 2013 are fundamentally rooted in "previously established character tropes" (2). At the same time, the authors argue that gender stereotypes were to a certain degree subverted by "diversifying the traditional roles of women" (2) in the aforementioned games and the narratives which they constructed. As was previously mentioned, during the 2016 E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo), a staggering lack of female lead characters was observed. The only triple-A video game with a female protagonist showcased in 2016 was *Horizon: Zero Dawn*. Despite the long-held view that players prefer to play as male lead characters (Burgess and Jones 10), the majority of players (73.3 % of gamers identified as male) perceive Aloy, the female protagonist of *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, "as a distinct identity and persona that [they] controlled during gameplay" (16) as well as a "compelling character" (15) with whom they can relate with regard to her narrative experiences. In this article, the year 2013 is seen as the turning point with respect to representing women within larger (triple-A) video games.

The Construction of Game Narratives

Whilst the debate between game mechanics-focused ludologists and storytelling-oriented narratologists subsided within the field of game studies,

the study of the narrativity of video games can be seen as inherently related to the interrelation between both the ludic and the narrative elements through which a video game is produced. The consensus proposed by Ryan (2006) is that "some games have a narrative design and others do not" (192). In terms of analysing video game narrative representation, narrative design is understood as "story experience" (Jenkins 6) established by sculpting game spaces, primary and secondary characters, and character-driven story arcs. In *Game Design as Narrative Architecture*, Jenkins (2002) claims that game designers "don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces" (4). From this standpoint, the virtual environment of a video game is perceived in terms of environmental, "spatial" storytelling. According to Jenkins, storytelling enacted through the virtual environment of a game-world allows for an immersive narrative owing to the following preconditions: spatial stories induced by narrative associations; spaces set up the "staging ground" (6) where the story (narrative) is established; the game environment can "embed narrative information within their mise-en-scène" (6); and spaces enable narratives through the employment of game objects.

In his research on utopian and dystopian spaces in video games, Farca (2018) outlines the perspectives through which the implied player interacts with the elements which construct a gamescape: sensorial perspective, world perspective, plot perspective, and system perspective (6). The concept of the implied player refers to "the empirical player's participation on all levels of involvement (offering her various roles to perform)" (164). While the sensorial perspective can be associated with the visual filter through which the player "is granted access to gameworld" (26), the world perspective entails the gameworld with "its settings, objects, and topological/labyrinthic structures; the sounds and music of this world; and characters who inhabit it" (26). On the other hand, the plot perspective ("storyworld") comprises the plot framework with the "official narrative" and "counter-narrative" (resistance to the gameworld). The system perspective is the "ludic" perspective: it is related to

rules of the game, player actions, and playing styles. Particularly relevant in the following case studies is the world perspective due to the fact that it encompasses the gameworld and characters inhabiting its violent and oppressive spaces.

The character is thus embedded in the narrative structure which is oftentimes bound by genre conventions. The idea of a game genre adds another layer to the textual analysis of a given game in terms of gender representation. Whereas role-playing games allow for choosing whether the "avatar" (in-game protagonist) is typified as female or male, other game genres such as action and first-person shooters tend to narrate the story from the point of view of predefined, "default" characters. Even so, video game developers are increasingly tackling multiple genres and thus a substantial number of video games can be classified in terms of a variety of subgenres. Within the space of video games, characters function as both visual and narrative entities. Video game characters can be categorized according to their role within the gameworld and the extent of their interaction with the player (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 211). Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Jonas Smith, and Susana Tosca propose a typology of video game characters inhabiting the gameworld: stage characters, functional characters, cast characters, and the player character (212). Whilst stage characters can be referred to as non-playable characters, functional characters are seen to serve a general in-game function such as attacking the player. Cast characters function in the storyworld as "companion" characters with unique personalities and underlying motives. The player character, on the other hand, can be perceived as the "avatar" controlled by the player; in fact, the player "can usually control [their] actions but [the player's] motivations and missions are decided by the story" (179). Moreover, the narrative role of in-game characters can be further classified as "primary" (player character, in some cases "companions") and "secondary" including stage, functional, and cast characters (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2016).

As far as the story (narrative) design is concerned, the games discussed in this article can be classified as belonging to the category of character-oriented and story-driven video games. In this study, story-driven games are understood as video games that incorporate the narrative into the "video game paradigm" by treating narrative as the "central mode of engagement" (Cameron 35). Character-oriented video games imply a strong emphasis on relationships between characters (playable and non-playable) inhabiting the gameworld and "game mechanics changing in parallel with character development" (Vang 2018).

The environment of a video game visually informs the world represented by characters and the narrative dimension. Particularly relevant in considering the issue of representation in video games is their interactive, player-focused component. Bodi and Thon (2021) underline that the notion of "narrative agency" or "agency" has been conceptualized within the field of game studies in terms of the "the possibility space for 'meaningful' choice expressed via player action that translates into avatar action, afforded and constrained by a videogame's design" (159). It is argued that interactive narrative games activate narration in such a way that the player agent traverses the spatiotemporal construct of a gameworld so that they can "be in the story as the character agent and also outside the story interpreting and analysing it as a narrator agent" (Joyce 59). Rather than passively observe the events unfolding within a given narrative, video game players assume an active role and experience the storytelling from a point of view of the primary character while interacting with the represented world. The term "agency" can be understood both in terms of the end-user (player) interacting with the storyworld as the playable character and "the perception that characters within a text have the ability to influence their own story and potentially the greater narrative arc" (Cole 2018). As stated by Cole, although the characters are recognized to follow a narrative trajectory pre-defined within game design, the player attributes intentions as well as motivations to given characters (14). In this paper, the

term "narrative agency" is employed in order to refer to the recognized ability of a character to influence the storyworld. Importantly, Farca emphasizes the fact that "playing dystopia" (27) inherently compromises the narrative agency experienced through "play" and embedded within the plot framework due to the disrupted nature of the gameworld and the "imminent cataclysm" (51) underlying the narrative. The narrative focus of dystopian games lies, therefore, to a certain degree in regaining agency.

As stated by James Paul Gee (2015,) discourse is "becoming increasingly 'multi-modal', concerned primarily with the interplay of language, image, and sound" (2). In the context of video games, the term discourse can be defined as "ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (Gee 29). From this perspective, a "game's universe of discourse" (45) is viewed as an interaction between different symbols ("modes") bridging the gap between the narrative and ludic, gameplay-specific aspects of game text. The textual analysis applied to video games "does not involve seeing a game as an isolated, static object. It looks to the game-as-played, to games in culture, and to culture in games" (Carr 2007). Therefore, video games as cultural artifacts are to be considered as texts which reflect and construct socio-cultural discourse.

The Representation of Female Characters in Gaming

A substantial number of academic research has recognized stereotypical patterning of female characters in video game narratives (Dietz 1998; Ivory 2006; Jansz and Martis 2007; Lynch, Tompkins, van Driel, & Fritz 2016). In the analysis of gender portrayals in modern game narratives, Jared Friedberg (2015) observes that female characters "fundamentally fulfil different roles than men" (34). Women tend to be presented as the driving force in the gameworld "not by the actions they take, but through the violence or harm done to them or the unconditional support that they offer the protagonist" (34).

From this perspective, female characters can be seen as "secondary" to the protagonist.

Women are included in the storyworld as plot devices, which "limits their agency and identity" (34). Basing upon the assumption that video games can be analysed as comprising ludic (gameplay), narrative (story), and visual elements (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Smith & Tosca 2016), the representation of female and male characters can be divided into physical (visuals of the gameworld), gameplay (game mechanics), and narrative representation. As was previously mentioned, female characters tend to be marginalized or hypersexualized within game narratives.

In addressing the problem of systematic hypersexualization of female characters, Teresa Lynch, Jessica Tompkins, Irene Van Driel, and Niki Fritz (2016) point to how the gaming industry "is realizing it is marginalizing half its audience [by] making women characters pander to the male gaze" (5). In terms of the visual representation of the female body, Lynch, Tompkins, Van Driel, and Fritz (2016) observe the trend towards depicting women with disproportionate body models, particularly focused on enlarged breasts, unrealistically slim waist, and emphasizing the bottom part of the body (7). In third-person perspective games, camera angles are employed to show the full-view of the female body centred around the over-accentuated aspects of female physique, the most notable example seen in the *Tomb Raider* franchise before the reboot in 2013. This type of visual over-sexualized imagery in video games can be viewed as corresponding to the phenomenon described as "sexualization of culture" ("pornification") which denotes the saturation of mass media with sexualized themes and imagery (Atwood 2006; Gill 2012). When compared to male characters, women are seen to typically wear revealing body armour unsuitable for the actions constructed within the narrative and intended by game mechanics. On the level of visual representation, women tend to be shown as sex objects (Dietz 429) conforming to realistically unattainable ideals and thus further perpetuating the representation of female characters as

having little to no narrative agency but rather included to cater to desires of the adolescent audience.

On the level of game narrative, female characters have been frequently depicted as characters supporting the male protagonist (*The Legend of Zelda*; *Resident Evil* 1998; *Assassin's Creed: Origins* 2017). As stated by Friedberg (2015), women assume the role of "field support" to the male player character; that is to say, female characters "provide them with advice, heal them when they are injured, point them in the right direction, or provide them with the tools (mainly weapons) that they need to overcome narrative obstacles" (34). Women in video games can be presented as secondary characters assuming passive narrative positions rather than active narrative positions of dominant masculine heroes. Female protagonists have been portrayed in gender-stereotyped roles varying from damsels in distress (the narrative of victimhood) to the so-called evil seductresses (Dietz 435).

In her YouTube series *Tropes vs. Women in Games* (2013), Sarkeesian investigates feminine identities constructed and performed within the game narratives. In order to classify tropes present in the representation of female characters, Sarkeesian (2013) categorizes female characters according to their narrative roles as follows: damsel in distress, "Ms. Male Character," women as background decoration, women as reward, sinister seductresses, and the lady sidekick. Within the role of a damsel in distress, the narrative agency of a woman is fringed upon by the "hero" character; a woman is ultimately disempowered and "reduced to a state of helplessness, from which she requires rescuing by a typically male hero for the benefit of his story arc" (*The Damsel in Distress* 2013). While "Ms. Male Character" exists solely as the "female version" of a male counterpart, the role of a lady sidekick perpetuates the notion of women perceived as objects to be protected and men "as the ones in control, who take action and do the protecting" (*The Lady Sidekick* 2013). "Lady sidekicks" function in the gameworld as "glorified gatekeepers, helpless burdens, and ego boosters" (*The Lady Sidekick* 2013). The motif of a sinister

seductress communicates "a false notion of female sexuality rooted in ancient misogynistic ideas of women as deceptive and evil" (*The Sinister Seductress* 2013). Thus, female sexuality and sexual agency are perceived as inherently threatening to the male characters inhabiting the gameworld. The "woman as reward" trope, on the other hand, codifies "female bodies as collectible, as tractable or as consumable, and positions women as status symbols" (*Women as Reward* 2013) to be rewarded for player actions. "Women as decoration" exist in the gameworld "as environmental texture while titillating presumed straight male players" (*Women as Decoration* 2013) and occupying the role of "the perpetual victims of male violence" without any narrative agency.

Although such narrative tendencies have been prevalent in the video game industry, it is crucial to underline that more recent AAA games abandon the narrative of secondary female characters and instead subvert gender stereotyping in narrative design. Citing the pattern of change in the sexualization of women observed by Lynch, Tompkins, Van Driel, and Fritz, Lucas (2019) maintains that recent video games such as *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* (2017) have made an active attempt to give voice to the previously marginalized female protagonists, "increasingly 'threatening' the male space games inhabit" (18). As video games are becoming more and more culturally relevant, as a form of media they ought to be examined on the basis of "the ways [in which they] reflect, reinforce, question, or subvert cultural ideas about the categories of masculine and feminine, male and female, transgender and other concepts related to gendered identity" (Salen and Zimmerman 522). Lucas (2019) points to the fact that video games represent by "creating depictions of characters, stories, settings, ideas, and behaviors" (28). In the analysis of the evolving narrative representation of women in games, Lucas argues that video games can have the ability to "converse with and subvert the problematic ideologies of the cultures they exist in" (117). In this sense, games are perceived as "transformative" with the potential of rejecting "heteronormative and masculine power fantasy" (113) by

giving prominence to "what makes the character an agent in their narrative" (115) regardless of their assumed gender. In this paper, the gamescape of video games is understood as the interweaving of the visual, gameplay, and narrative aspects to create meaning.

BioShock Infinite: "The Lamb" and the Narrative (Re)establishment

BioShock Infinite (Irrational Games 2013) is a first-person shooter video game released as the third instalment in the *BioShock* series. The game presents a dystopian narrative set in the airborne city-state of Columbia in 1912. The seemingly utopian gamescape of *BioShock Infinite* is constructed through a distinct blend of religious zealotry and American exceptionalism. The floating cityscape, initially presented as the ultimate expression of Americanism, evolves into a theocratic state overseen by a self-proclaimed prophet, Zachary Hale Comstock. Within the game narrative, Columbia is depicted as a highly nationalistic society run by the Founders, a white supremacist faction whose name further points to the narrative relying heavily on the idea of alternative US history. Throughout the primary narrative, players follow the story's protagonist, Booker DeWitt. The cityscape of a seeming utopia is explored from Booker's point of view. Booker, a private investigator, sets on a mission to find a woman named Elizabeth. His main objective within the story is to rescue Elizabeth who is confined in a tower by the Prophet, Elizabeth's father and "jailer." Elizabeth is established as one of the primary characters within the narrative alongside Booker and Comstock.

Elizabeth's narrative role within *BioShock Infinite* advances considerably as the story progresses. At the beginning of the narrative, Elizabeth assumes a passive role fitting into the female video game trope of a "damsel in distress" (Sarkeesian 2013). She is stripped of narrative agency, locked away in a tower by a dominant authority figure embodied by the Prophet. The main objective within the story: "Find the Girl," further exemplifies the gender-stereotyped trope of having to be rescued by a male character for the purpose of

progressing the story arc. At first, Elizabeth is not even referred to by her name but merely as "the girl," "miracle child" or "the lamb," which reduces her narrative position to an object to be "retrieved" by Booker. Due to her inexperience largely caused by captivity, Elizabeth is at first portrayed as a naïve, innocent, almost child-like female character. On the level of game narrative, her role is dependent and established in terms of other characters' interests. In the space of Columbia, she is seen as a vital element of the Prophet's ideology by being construed as a future "saviour," a messiah figure whose main purpose is to cleanse the corrupt world "below."

In terms of game mechanics, Elizabeth is seen to assume the role of field support to Booker within the combat scenarios. Thus, in terms of mechanics employed by the game Elizabeth's character is established as that of a companion, a role commonly performed by female game characters. While taking advantage of her powers to manipulate other dimensions, Elizabeth without fail throws supplies such as first aid kits or ammunition that are at the given moment needed by Booker. However, in the later parts of the game, players observe a narrative change in Elizabeth's character. Upon killing Daisy Fitzroy, the leader of the Vox Populi revolutionary group, Elizabeth takes her narrative agency back. After the initial post-killing shock, she is re-established on the visual level of the in-game representation. As she cuts her hair short and changes the bloodied dress for a corseted attire once worn by her deceased mother, she emerges with a new determination to destroy the Prophet. The change in Elizabeth's appearance signifies the key stage in her character progression as she fully embraces her identity and recognizes the need to escape the suffocating space of Columbia, putting an end to Comstock's warped idea of a theocratic society. Despite the fact that the initial segments of the game narrative establish Elizabeth as an archetypal "damsel in distress," she is ultimately repositioned in the narrative as a character wielding substantial power within the gamescape since she possesses the ability to open Tears that exist in the fabric of spacetime. Manipulating Tears as part of the ludic,

gameplay-specific mechanic, allows Elizabeth to become an active character with the narrative advantage of being able to perceive possible scenarios in the spacetime fabric. Unlike the majority of supporting female characters in first-person shooters, Elizabeth can thus be seen as a formidable character in control of the gamescape in which the narrative takes place.

The Last of Us: Ludonarrative Reinforcement and the Removal of Agency

The Last of Us (Naughty Dog 2013) is an action-adventure survival horror game published by Sony Computer Entertainment as a console-exclusive video game. The storyworld of *The Last of Us* (TLOU) is set in the year 2033 in the post-apocalyptic landscape of the United States of America, a country depicted as a pandemic-ravaged police state placed under martial law. The game narrative takes place twenty years after the outbreak of a highly virulent, fungal-based virus (Cordyceps fungus). The mind-altering and aggression-inducing virus has infected approximately 60 per cent of the world's population and transformed the gamescape through which the player traverses into a hostile environment overrun by "hosts" whose brains have been damaged by the Cordyceps Brain Infection (CBI). The linear narrative of the game is divided into four seasonal arcs ("Summer," "Fall," "Winter," "Spring"). The game follows the story of Joel, a survivor of the Outbreak Day and a smuggler, and Ellie, a fourteen-year-old girl from the Boston Quarantine Zone, whom Joel is to escort. The player observes the developing father-daughter relationship between the two characters as they journey across the country to search for a possible cure for CBI. For the substantial part of the game narrative, the player controls Joel as the primary character. In the "Winter" act of the story, the player assumes control of Ellie established as the character second in importance to Joel, who is the primary player character.

Upon its release in 2013, *The Last of Us* was widely acclaimed for its "revolutionary treatment of women imagery within the game" (Atrio 2018). The bond between Joel and Ellie, with each informing the character

development of the other, places Ellie as a female character vital to the main narrative and not a mere extension of the player character. Within the gamescape, due to her apparent immunity to the virus, Ellie as the sole character holds the cure to the infection which decimated the human population. While the ability gives narrative power to her character, the immunity she possesses in the pandemic-ravaged spaces puts her in a position of an "asset" to be obtained.

Ellie functions within the storyworld as the second most important character accompanying Joel. Naughty Dog's Dyckoff points to how the gameplay design of Ellie establishes her as an active companion, not a burden to the player in combat scenarios: "If she's just staying close to you [player character], she's just going to be an escort quest" (Farokhmanesh 2014). In the initial part of the game, in terms of game mechanics, Ellie's survival and combat skills are largely limited due to her inexperience and age. Her inability to swim proves to be a ludic obstacle in game locations with bodies of water as players have to find a way to get through the water. Since Joel does not readily entrust her with a weapon, she is forced to rely on a switchblade, and Joel's survival skills are presented as superior in nature. Rather than engage proactively in a fight, she alerts the player character about the nearby enemies and stays in cover.

In this sense, her role gameplay-wise can be perceived as that of a "lady sidekick" and to a certain degree a "damsel in distress" (Sarkeesian 2013). This analysis of Ellie's character in terms of game narrative and gameplay is, however, not an exhaustive one and does not take into consideration the autonomy Ellie gains throughout the progression of the story. As the story develops, Ellie is seen to take on more survivor qualities. Even though male characters may have an upper hand in terms of brute strength and hand-to-hand combat, Ellie adapts to the environment by stunning her opponents with objects and knifing them with a switchblade. As she is recognized to be able to hold her own, she is handed a gun by Joel after saving him from a hunter.

Although Joel can be seen as the "protector," a paternal figure to Ellie portrayed as the one to be defended, the roles are later reversed within the narrative. In the third story act called "Winter," Ellie provides for Joel after he is injured and virtually immobilized. Sporting a bow, she hunts for food and sets out to find medicine for him. In "Winter," the player assumes control of Ellie as an evolved character. Despite the fact that Ellie is captured by David and his group of cannibalistic survivors, the narrative gender-stereotyped expectations are subverted with Ellie escaping from her captor and implied almost-assaulter without Joel's direct intervention. Although the player switches between Joel's and Ellie's perspectives in-game, it is Ellie who rescues herself and kills the antagonistic man. The game narrative and gameplay mechanics help to portray both protagonists as equal partners with their own advantages.

Nonetheless, the ending to the game can be seen as reinforcing the idea of taking away female narrative agency. In deciding to kidnap Ellie from the hospital in which she was to have a surgery to find a cure for the fungal-based virus, Joel "takes the ultimate choice away from Ellie—the choice to live or die" (Benkert 50). In the end, Joel in a self-serving act does not let Ellie decide about her own fate. When Ellie asks about what had transpired, Joel lies to her while coming to the realization that Ellie might have wanted to sacrifice herself for the cause. The ending to the game, however, is not intended to be readily identified as an act of heroism undertaken by Joel as the ultimate "protector," but it is left ambiguous and open to a discussion on gender norms within the game narrative.

Horizon: Zero Dawn: **Landmark for Female Protagonist Design**

Horizon: Zero Dawn (Guerrilla Games 2017) is an open-world action role-playing game published by Sony Interactive Entertainment as a console-exclusive title. The game narrative is set in the 31st century in a post-apocalyptic world in which humanity has reverted to its tribal state. Four tribes are of interest to the development of the game narrative: the Nora (a

matriarchal, hunter-gatherer tribe), the Carja (an economy-oriented, monarchical tribe), the Oseram (a metalwork-oriented, mechanism-revering tribe), and the Banuk (a nomadic, mountain-based tribe). The gamescape of *Horizon: Zero Dawn* is dominated by "machines," robotic creatures which become increasingly more hostile towards the tribal-organised human population due to a phenomenon known as the "Derangement" corrupting the creatures. The narrative world of the game emerges as the result of the actions of "Old Ones," technologically superior predecessors of the humans of the 31st century, whose advanced military-automated Faro robots, due to a "glitch," became independent entities and were able to consume the biosphere in 15 months. Within the game narrative, the player assumes control of Aloy as the sole playable character, at first known in the gamescape as a "motherless outcast" from the Nora tribe. The story revolves around Aloy's character arc and her development from an outcast to the anointed "Seeker" who embarks on a quest to discover the truth about her origins and the cause of the machine-corrupting phenomenon. Shuhei Yoshida, the President of Sony Interactive Entertainment at the time when *Horizon: Zero Dawn* was released, pointed to the larger issue of having a female protagonist as a monetary risk in the gaming industry: "She's a female lead character," he said. "That has always been the vision by the team, but we had a discussion. Is it risky to do a female character?" (Crecente 2015). Therefore, the creation of Aloy as the default protagonist in itself contends the market practices observable within the industry.

As a video game character, Aloy is to be recognized as "an unequivocal landmark of gender equality in AAAs" (Williams 2020). Hulst, the managing director at Guerrilla Games, underlines how the developers, above all else, wanted to design a fully fleshed-out, complex character: "It's really important that we didn't look for a woman and that turned out to be Aloy. We had Aloy and one of her very many attributes is that she is a woman" (Loveridge 2017). Thus, Aloy is not established as a "Ms. Male Character," a "female version" of a

male hero, but rather she is narratively designed as a complex character going beyond the rigid categories of gender as perceived by the video game industry. Within the game narrative, gender-stereotyped tropes are subverted from the very beginning of the game. Guerrilla Games wanted to design a non-sexualized female character, a trend discernible within more recent video games (Lynch, Tompkins, Van Driel & Fritz 2016). In the first place, Aloy's hunting outfits are practical and not unnecessarily revealing in terms of game mechanics in order to cater to the player's gaze. While the previously discussed characters of Elizabeth and Ellie were seen as companions to the male protagonist, Aloy is the sole protagonist in the storyworld of the game and her character can be seen as the focal point of the storyline. Aloy does not serve as a "tool" used to further the primary protagonist's story arc, but it is her who is supported by a male character, Rost, at the beginning of the game. Male-stereotyping is deconstructed by the character of Rost, Aloy's "adopted" father and guardian. Whilst male characters tend to be associated with virility and violence in gaming, Rost is established as caring, understanding, and supportive of Aloy's decisions.

Rost goes against the domineering and overbearing male stereotypes in gaming and does not take away Aloy's narrative agency. In fact, he encourages her not to feel obliged to him and join the Nora tribe. The father-daughter relationship between Rost and Aloy is depicted in a way that the paternal figure's masculinity does not limit Aloy's agency. Within the game narrative, Aloy is established as a self-reliant character who actively engages with the gamescape. When as a child she falls down into the ruins of the "Old Ones," a space forbidden to the Nora tribe, she explores the underground complex and claims a Focus device, an augmented reality device from the dreaded "Old Ones" as her own. In no way does Aloy adhere to the trope of a passive female character. Indeed, such character-building narrative sections emphasize her proactive, curious, and brave nature. McCaw, narrative designer for *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, indicates the significance of the representation of femininity as

"womanhood and motherhood are woven into the story at every level" (Sarkar 2020). Aloy's quest to find her origins, her mother, is at the forefront of the game narrative. With the story progression, it becomes apparent to the player that Aloy was created by a scientist, Elisabeth Sobeck, and the AI named GAIA after the Greek personification of Earth, two female entities who exemplify "life positive" technologies. Playing as Aloy, the player, in turn, brings to fruition Elisabeth Sobeck's wish to save life on Earth by destroying the antagonistic HADES and its corrupting virus, an AI seen as the opposite of GAIA designed to preserve life after the Faro Plague.

As far as the ludic aspect of the game is concerned, Aloy is shown as a capable fighter who uses the environment and technology of the "Old Ones" to gain the upper-hand in combat scenarios. Unlike a considerable number of female video game characters, Aloy's fighting and survival skills established by the employed game mechanics are comprehensive in nature. As the sole playable character, Aloy does not require assistance from a companion character to traverse the landscapes. She is able to gather necessary resources, craft ammunition as well as hunt down and tame the hostile robotic creatures in the wilderness of the post-apocalyptic landscape. Within both the game narrative and game mechanic, Aloy can be seen as a fully realized female character—exemplifying complex narrative game design rather than following narratively confining stereotyped female tropes.

Conclusion

This paper sought to analyse the ways in which stereotyped female tropes are perpetuated within game narratives by examining narrative game techniques and taking into consideration the ludic, gameplay-specific aspect of video games. In this paper, video games were described with regard to the interplay between narrative, visual, and ludic game elements contributing to the creation of a given video game discourse. Although the gaming industry is largely perceived through its male-oriented market, the approach towards the

representation of women characters can be seen as evolving, gradually shifting away from the tropes of over-sexualization, subjugation, and marginalization. The games investigated in terms of gender-stereotyped tropes may indicate the emergence of positive trends in female character design.

While video games are widely recognized as tending to establish female characters as narratively subjugated which is exemplified by the tropes of a "damsel in distress," a "lady sidekick," or a "woman as background decoration," the female characters from the three video games can be perceived as narratively evolving and to a varying degree subverting gender expectations for female characters in gaming. Elizabeth (*BioShock Infinite* 2013) at the beginning of her journey can be categorized as an archetypal "damsel in distress" with no narrative agency and established as secondary field support rather than a fully-fledged character. Nonetheless, traversing the storyscape, Elizabeth re-establishes herself as a narratively competent character next to Booker. In *The Last of Us* (2013), Ellie is coded in the game narrative as second in importance to the overarching story, with Joel established as her "protector" and a parental figure. In this sense, Elizabeth and Ellie share similarities on the level of game narrative design which places them both as companions to the male character. Despite the ambiguous nature of the ending, Ellie's character throughout the narrative does not feel like an extension to the player character or "an escort mission," but rather as a complex character who evolves with regard to narrative agency by learning how to operate in the post-apocalyptic environment on her own.

As the sole playable character of *Horizon: Zero Dawn*, Aloy can be seen as a protagonist least informed by traditional female narrative tropes. Unlike Elizabeth and Ellie, she does not share the space of the storyworld with a hyper-masculine character. On the contrary, she is placed as the primary narrative agent who uses the game environment to her advantage. Within the storyline, the issues of womanhood and motherhood are entrenched into the gamescape, further subverting gender norms observable in video game

narrative design. In this sense, *Horizon: Zero Dawn* can be perceived as a breakthrough in terms of female character design and storytelling from the point of view of the game industry practices.

While the primary focus of this study was to examine the representation of women, other representation and diversity concerns should not be disregarded within Game Studies. Male characters as narrative agents tend to be coded into the gameplay and narrative through hyper-masculine gender norms infringing upon female agency. In discussing the detrimental portrayals of gender-stereotyped characters, female and male characters alike should be given attention in order to achieve a more comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural discourse constructed in gaming. Further investigations into video game representation can examine in more depth the treatment of other groups silenced by the game discourse, particularly LGBTQ+ and racial communities.

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Ludography

Bioshock Infinite. 2013. 2K Games.
Horizon: Zero Dawn. 2017. Guerrilla Games.
The Last of Us. 2013. Naughty Dog.

Abstract

This article aims to explore the representation of three female characters in triple-A dystopian video games and the way in which female protagonists are constructed by the video game discourse and situated within the game world environment. Video games are cultural artifacts described in terms of the interplay between narrative, visual, and ludic game elements that contribute to the creation of video game text and its discourse. The following study attempts to investigate female narrative tropes perpetuated within the game text dimension and video game industry as such. *BioShock Infinite*, *The Last of Us*, and *Horizon: Zero Dawn* are analysed both on the basis of the game narrative and employed gameplay design. One of the main objectives of the study is to examine whether gender stereotypes are subverted in the chosen video games or whether the female protagonists are codified as confined, subordinate, and marginalized characters informed by gender-stereotyped narrative tropes varying from the damsel in distress to the secondary field support to male protagonists.

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"INSTAGRAM FACE": DECONSTRUCTING THE SEEMINGLY UTOPIAN AND IDEALIZED IMAGE OF WOMEN PROMOTED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Keywords: feminism, social media, beauty standards, utopia

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant changes in society's daily functioning, transforming the way we work, study and participate in social events. Amongst its many consequences and repercussions, there is one that is seemingly harmless and described as a mere distraction—our constantly growing use of smartphones and social media. According to an article in *The New York Times*, Facebook saw a nearly 30% increase in daily use time amidst the pandemic, while for Instagram the figure has grown by 14% (Koeze and Popper). This means that, on average, users of these apps spend about 30 more minutes a day browsing social media. During these difficult times, social media have proven to be both a tool for social interaction and building a community in times of crisis, as well as, according to the latest research data, a useful source of healthcare information, providing a space for medical experts to upload publications on the virus and create guidelines. It has also given healthcare professionals an opportunity to practice crowdsource peer reviews of the latest discoveries about the virus (Wong et al.). However, these events have brought to the general public's attention not only the advantages, but also disadvantages of long hours spent on social networking sites. In this paper, I focus on the problems arising from prolonged use of social media, specifically on how exposure to various content affects the daily lives and behaviors of its users. Furthermore, I analyze social media's influence on women and, using the example of the Instagram app, demonstrate that it not only negatively

influences women's perception of themselves, but also creates the norm of femininity, outlining what is accepted and admired within a society and what is rejected, thrown outside the frames of normativity. This article sets out to deconstruct the model of perfect womanhood proposed by social media and analyze the effects of the popularity of this utopian image.

Commodification and Consumer Culture in Social Media

Before proceeding to the analysis of social media's ideal model of womanhood, it is necessary to first propose a theoretical framework that would let one describe the mechanisms behind social media's immense role in creating the existing norms. For the sake of this paper, it should be clearly stated that social media relies on encouraging the public to participate in the reproduction of consumer culture and underlines the role of the beauty cult in contemporary culture.

Social media plays a significant role in creating desire, thereby making its users particularly susceptible to struggling for a unified, specific appearance that rejects any differences and does not leave any space for diversity. Mike Featherstone describes the creation of desire as one of the most important aspects of consumer culture in his "The body in consumer culture" (1991). Featherstone presents obsession with beauty, youth and bodily preservation as one of the key features of capitalist society. The scholar distinguishes between the outer and inner body and argues that "the outer body refers to appearance as well as the movement and control of the body within social space" (171). In the case of feminist studies, it is a statement that is strongly linked to the issue of women's public appearance—its constant judgment and comparison against the existing set of norms.

Following that trope, the body in late capitalist society is treated as a commodity and becomes a product itself. Featherstone mentions the exchange-value of a body: the closer it is to the ideal—the younger, healthier and more conventionally beautiful it is—the higher its value on the market as it is more

desirable and more suitable to be an object to be consumed by the voyeur (177). Accordingly, people in late capitalist society either contribute or wish to contribute to the duplication of a certain image—a body that does not age, does not show any signs of tiredness and is always ready and eager to be an object of desire.

Social media is closely linked with consumerist culture. In *Consuming Life* (2007), Zygmunt Bauman states that "in a society of consumers, [...] human bonds tend to lead through and be mediated by the markets for consumer goods" (82). This is clearly visible in the relationship between social media users and creators of its content. Users form a specific type of bond with creators, treating them as leaders who can show them the most important and interesting "trends," following which allows them to be seen as up to date. The creators, therefore, can use this specific bond in order to promote products, increasing their sales. The choice of these products is often dictated by personal interests, such as creator's "market bond" with a company or their relationship with its owners. Bauman also describes a *consumerist syndrome* which consists in valuing novelty over longevity—this aspect is visible on many social media profiles as every day customers are encouraged to make new purchases (86). Clothes, home goods and electronic devices are not supposed to last long; rather, they are supposed to be quickly disposed of and exchanged for a new product, propelling the capitalist market for which the number of produced goods and the profit from selling them is more significant than their quality and usefulness.

In addition to creating a demand for goods and inciting its users to spend more money through establishing a bond between them and content creators, social media uses one more significant tool, enabling its normative and controlling function in society: the beauty cult. In the introduction to *Consuming Life*, Bauman describes the process through which consumers start to become similar to products themselves, trying to be as attractive to others as possible; accordingly, capitalism not only teaches consumers that they need to buy

certain products in order to be placed within certain social norms, but it also turns the consumers themselves into a product—one that ought to be attractive to their relatives, employers and, finally, to other members of the society (12). Social media's objective is to promote a vision of an individual who does not age and who is flawless and always ready to consume in order to become an improved, better version of themselves. Instagram is one of the apps that put perfect appearance in the centre of users' attention and present a huge amount of content focused on women's bodies and the ways of perfecting them in order to fit into the Western canon of beauty.

The Definition of Instagram Face

"Instagram face" is a phrase coined by Jia Tolentino in "The Age of Instagram Face," published in *The New Yorker* on December 12, 2019. The author describes the "cyborgian face" with high cheekbones, flawless skin and catlike eyes as a phenomenon that is spread across the Instagram app and that is supposed to present the image of a perfect woman promoted by social media. She mentions that the human face has become an object of constant improvements and corrections and is being continuously manipulated by the use of, for example, social media filters. Tolentino pays attention to how social media and reality TV have created endless possibilities to "regard one's personal identity as a potential source of profit" and highlights how this mode of thinking is being applied especially to women as they are encouraged to treat their bodies in a similar manner.

The phrase coined by the author can be used to discuss a wider phenomenon visible on social media: circulation of a single type of face, behaviour and identity that is regarded as acceptable and desirable. However, it is necessary to mention that the desire to possess an "Instagram face" comes to life through the app continuously presenting particular images to its users, manipulating them with numbers of likes and views. In order to better

understand this process, it is crucial to introduce the most important principles according to which Instagram chooses its content for users.

The first principle is user's interests: depending on the content that is searched for by the user, Instagram will suggest more similar accounts. The next one is recency: the app's goal is to make the user check Instagram as often as possible: if a user does not pay sufficient attention to the app, it will send them notifications and reminders about new posts from the people they follow. Then, Instagram remembers the user's interactions with other accounts and on the basis of their activity, it constantly suggests new people to follow, trying to fit into the user's interests. The app's algorithm always tries to make the user stay on it longer; therefore, it keeps constantly moderating its content (DiMico).

All these factors have to be kept in mind when discussing the fact that content is not only adjusted to users' interests, but also their age, gender and personal relationships. Thus, an average woman in her 20s will have a different Instagram feed than a man her age, the content being adjusted on the basis of what her friends and relatives may be viewing. The more often a specific kind of content appears on the app, the more frequently it will appear on an individual's feed simply because of the many links between accounts and the content that is shared on them. This, therefore, explains why the phenomenon of "Instagram face" received so much attention and spread unbearably fast—first promoted by accounts with millions of followers, it was then picked up by thousands of other users. Step by step, this led to the emergence of a particular, seemingly utopian image of womanhood promoted by the app whose description will be the focus of the next section.

Deconstructing the Ideal—How Does Social Media Impact Reality?

The perfect woman of Instagram is one that is able to remain perfect, regardless of the situation that she finds herself in. Every posted image is supposed to capture their effortless, yet perfectly exercised attractiveness and, most importantly, happiness. The woman is often accompanied by a man, in

order to underline her ability to not only reach personal success, but also find the perfect partner, proving that she is widely appreciated and her womanhood is conventionally accepted. Examples of celebrities promoting this specific kind of image of a successful woman accompanied by "her man" are the American singer and songwriter Beyoncé, frequently posting pictures of herself and her husband in expensive clothes and exclusive interiors, or the British fashion designer and singer Victoria Beckham.

What is important is that the perfect woman of Instagram is obviously a heterosexual one: her value and desirability are shown through her attractiveness for men as well as through functioning in roles traditionally assigned to women in society—the role of the mother and wife. The perfect mother on Instagram is pictured during various activities connected to daily life, be it a walk with their children or feeding or preparing children's birthday parties, but the most significant requirements are always the same: to look attractive and happy. The previously mentioned Victoria Beckham is known for posting pictures of her whole family together on various occasions—Christmas, birthdays, family reunions. In each of the photos, all members of the family must be smiling, dressed elegantly and in a state of seemingly complete happiness.

Figure 1. A post from @beyonce on Instagram

Another example of a "celebrity mum," presenting the picture of a "perfect life" on Instagram, is an Italian blogger Chiara Ferragni who, with almost 26 million followers on Instagram, describes herself as "Leo and Vitto's mama and digital entrepreneur Boss baby." Ferragni posts pictures from almost every event, from family trips to intimate moments spent at home with her husband and children. Motherhood and marriage are frequently on display on Instagram, meant to present a neoliberal, postfeminist fantasy of a woman who is able to be not only a perfect wife and mother—she is also able to make money on it, be it from her own fashion brand or from makeup products. The perfect mothers of Instagram propel the beauty business by advertising certain items, giving the users an image of perfection that is supposedly within their reach thanks to the use of special products.

Figure 2. A post from @chiaraferragni on Instagram

Another aspect of the "ideal" Instagram woman that should be mentioned and that is strongly visible across the platform is the question of body fitness and its accordance with the current canon promoted by the app's most followed users such as Kim Kardashian (276 million followers) or Kylie Jenner (292 million followers). The famous body image promoted by both of them, characterized by a small waist and disproportionately wide hips, has led to the emergence of a

new standard, that contrasts with the previous "skinny" ideal. Both sisters are known for their pictures in tight costumes to emphasize the shape of their bodies.

Instagram's "perfect body type" is actually more than one. Apart from the Kardashian-Jenner family, there is an endless amount of "fitness influencers" who convince their followers that all one has to do to have a conventionally attractive body is to follow a certain fitness regime and buy products promoted on their accounts. An example would be Pamela Reif, a German fitness trainer, who puts her videos on YouTube for free. On her account, there are series of images presenting the perfectly exercised body in different clothes and situations; whether in a famous world tourist destination or at home, near her Christmas tree, the influencer presents her followers with a body shape that is perfect according to the Western canon, achieved through posing in a certain way or wearing special clothes meant to highlight and moderate the body shape.

The aspects of perfect womanhood promoted on Instagram all fall under the category of the perfect woman as created by the patriarchal society—one whose biggest interest and obligation is to be desired and accepted, fully immersed in the role of a wife and mother, but simultaneously successful, making a lot of money (one of the most important goals of late capitalist society that supposedly makes one a worthy, fulfilled person) and keeping her body and appearance in a flawless, non-aging condition. However, most importantly, the woman of Instagram must present an image of being unbelievably happy, living in a state of "utopian motherhood" where she does not become tired and is always ready to be looked at and judged, whether it is at work or in her private life.

The perfect image of womanhood promoted by apps such as Instagram has, in fact, worrisome consequences in reality. According to a study published by *The Guardian* in 2019, there is a strong link between girls' use of social media and the frequency of depressive episodes. In addition, more than 60% of girls

with depression are unhappy with their appearance, compared to more than 20% of boys the same age (Campbell). In 2018, the same newspaper published an article titled "Girls and social media: 'You are expected to live up to an impossible standard'" in which they cited opinions from girls aged 15 to 22 on how social media affects their mental health. Amongst them could be found expressions such as "There is always an unspoken feeling that you need to be better than other people and that creates a negative environment" or "It feels like you're sold a life and are expected to live up to a standard that is impossible to achieve." One can also find a mention of parents' lack of knowledge about what is actually going on in their children's lives and what kind of content they are browsing through (Marsh).

In addition to the polls and opinions, there is also a growing amount of data concerning teen's access to plastic surgery. According to data presented by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, between the years 2000 and 2006, there was a 48% rise in the number of plastic surgeries performed in the United States, while between the years 2005 and 2018, there was a sharp increase of about 7.5 million of such procedures (American Society of Plastic Surgeons). What is more, women perform 92% of all cosmetic procedures, while women aged 40-54 undergo 49% of all procedures. What is disturbing is the number of plastic surgeries carried out on people aged 13-19. In 2018, the total number of such procedures in the United States amounted to 64.994 and almost half of them were connected to nose reshaping (rhinoplasty). Another most frequently carried out surgery was breast augmentation, amounting to almost 9,000 procedures (American Society of Plastic Surgeons).

It might be crucial to understand the postfeminist[1] dimension of apps such as Instagram in order to understand how social media use women's insecurities to sell products and advertise them as "necessary" for being a desirable woman. Women's bodies are one of the main foci of new media which put them under strict control and allow their constant judgment by society (Gill 149). Postfeminist media culture led to the change of representation from women as

silent, sexualized objects to women who are actively seeking to seem sexualized on their own accord (Goldman 1992 in Gill 151). Instagram is the perfect place for self-promotion and profiting from being desired; however, all this is concealed under the commonly used notions of "pleasing oneself" or "becoming the best version of oneself." Fashion and fitness bloggers as well as celebrity mums commonly use phrases such as "self-branding" and "creative autonomy." Both notions have been widely used in spreading "gendered social media production" that is aimed at women and promoted as a way of self-liberation (Duffy and Hund 3). Widespread new media have an impact on women's self-perception and are used to constantly persuade them to buy new products, engage in fitness routines and perfectly fulfill the roles of wives, mothers and entrepreneurs, all that while staying effortlessly young and attractive.

As Gill explains in her article "Postfeminist media culture," "The notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to postfeminist discourses, which present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances whatsoever" (153). The steady rise in the number of plastic surgeries across years might be one of the indications that the discourse on "free will and choice to change oneself" has reached a vast number of women. Never before has there been a faster and more available way to change one's features. Instagram and other forms of postfeminist media show women the ways in which they are expected to look, while cosmetic brands, beauty salons and clinics take this opportunity to make more money.

Another phenomenon that is connected to the use of social networking sites and exposure to numerous advertising campaigns is the continuously expanding market of beauty products—for example, the estimated sales of L'Oreal, the most profitable beauty brand, amounted to 19.5 billion euros in 2010 while in 2019 they reached as much as 29.87 billion euros (L'Oréal Annual Report). The needs of consumers are growing alongside the costs of advertising campaigns aimed at ramping up the sales records. According to the study by Ann Marie Britton on "The Beauty Industry's Influence on Women in

Society," 54.3% of women reported that their choice of beauty brands depends on their loyalty towards it, proving how crucial advertising campaigns are to a brand's success (15). What is more, according to the study, 97.8% of responding women reported checking social media daily, while a significant amount of them confirmed obtaining their information about makeup and beauty products from social media apps, such as Pinterest, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (Britton 20).

The link between social media and women's self-perception is undeniable—constant supervision and self-examination proves to be one of the root causes of a growing amount of mental health problems amongst women of all ages, significantly impacting even the youngest ones. What is more, women are spending more financial resources on beauty brands each year, contributing to the already monstrous profits of the biggest corporations around the world as social media influences women's consumer choices. Through creating a vision of a utopian possibility that is within the reach of everyone following the latest trends, it not only imposes unrealistic standards on women, but also lowers the quality of their lives to a significant degree.

Conclusion

The rise of social media is linked to the emergence of an idealized, dehumanized image of women. Apps such as Instagram use data profiling in order to gain new users and promote content that gives the greatest financial gain. It seems that there is a growing need to emphasize the exploitative side of social media that is deeply rooted in consumer culture of late capitalist society as well as the beauty and youth cult that is perpetuated by endless ways for self-improvement. For today's feminist movements, it is crucial to study the impact of social media on how women perceive themselves and how they interact with their environment when it promotes a single, strict normative look that is enhanced by tools such as face filters and plastic surgeries. What is being sold as a utopia can, in fact, be described as a tool for the subjugation of

women, taking control of not only their self-perception, but also the way in which they spend their financial resources. In addition to having a negative effect on one's private life, social media also plays a huge role in expanding the late capitalist market of beauty brands, contributing to ageism, exclusion and discrimination of those women who fail to fit into the perfect image of flawless, endlessly polished Instagram pictures.

Endnotes

1. In her work *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* Susan Faludi describes postfeminism as an "antifeminist backlash" that arose in the 1990s in reaction to women's progress. It can be characterized by dividing women into, for example, single and married, middle- versus working-class. As Faludi writes, postfeminism "manipulates a system of rewards and punishments, elevating women who follow its rules, isolating those who don't" (11–14).

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Abstract

The article examines how social media changed our perception of beauty and how the socio-cultural phenomenon of "Instagram face" led to the creation of a new idealized image of women. It focuses on the description of mechanisms that play an important role in creating standards for app's users and attempts to describe the relationship between subjugation of women's bodies through manipulation techniques used by social media and the drastic rise in the popularity of plastic surgery and cosmetic brands' income in recent years. The author aims to show how the seemingly utopian image of perfectly happy women presented on Instagram is a tool for control and how this phenomenon affects women in contemporary times.

BOOK REVIEWS

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CONCEPTUALIZING THE POST-POSTMODERN WORLD: A REVIEW OF *METAMODERNISM: HISTORICITY, AFFECT AND DEPTH AFTER POSTMODERNISM* BY ROBIN VAN DEN AKKER, ALISON GIBBONS AND TIMOTHEUS VERMEULEN (EDS.)

Editors: Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen
Title: *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*
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Keywords: post-postmodernism, metamodernism, cultural logic, structure of feeling, cultural periodization

In 2010, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker entered the academic debate regarding the question of what replaced postmodernism in the contemporary world by publishing the essay "Notes on Metamodernism." Therein, they proposed their own label for what is broadly referred to as post-postmodernism. The authors argued that metamodernism, described as an emerging structure of feeling (a term borrowed from Raymond Williams's 1954 *Preface to Film*), is "situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, italics original).

Published seven years later, the 2017 *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism*, edited by Robin van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, and Timotheus Vermeulen marks a more developed attempt to construct "a language, or at least a series of linked dialects, to come to an understanding of

our current historical moment" (van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017: 3). The text comprises three main sections: historicity, affect, and depth—each corresponding to a defining area of difference between metamodernism and its predecessor, as well as mirroring Fredric Jameson's discussion of postmodernism in his seminal essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984). The area of interest tackled by the particular chapters contributed by different authors varies from film criticism and literature to politics, crafts, or photography. Their common point is the recognition of the constitutive paradigm of metamodernism: the movement of oscillation between "post-modern and pre-postmodern (and often modern) predilections: between irony and enthusiasm, between sarcasm and sincerity, between eclecticism and purity, between deconstruction and construction" (van den Akker and Vermeulen 2017: 11). This description serves as a point of departure for descriptive studies included in the volume.

In "Periodising the 2000s, or, the Emergence of Metamodernism" van den Akker and Vermeulen build on the ideas introduced in their 2010 essay. Crucially, they elaborate on the full implications of the employment of the prefix *meta* in their proposed heuristic label, which, taken from Greek, means *with*, *between*, and *after* (2017: 8). They argue that metamodernism is thus characterized by the upcycling of past culture, in which intertextuality becomes capable of "adding value" through "mov[ing] beyond the worn-out sensibilities" it quotes (2017: 10). Moreover, they establish that the dialectical oscillation of the new structure of feeling functions in a "both-neither dynamic": it should be thought of as a pendulum that reaches both the postmodern and pre-postmodern, yet remains with neither (2017: 10–11). The authors then provide a periodization hypothesis for metamodernism, locating its development in the 2000s and mentioning events such as the Iraq War, the fourth technological "quantum leap" which made personal computers widely accessible, and the financial crisis of 2007–2008 (2017: 12–17). The chapter concisely lays the theoretical ground for the more detailed analyses that follow.

In the introduction to the first section of the book, van den Akker declares that metamodernism brings a renewed "regime of historicity," notably absent during postmodernism (2017: 21). He finds its symptoms in "a contemporary culture that harks back to its past futures to make the present into the future's past" (2017: 23). Such a regime is "multi-tensed": it reconciles "past possibilities and possible futures" (2017: 22). James MacDowell, in the first chapter of the section, "The Metamodern, the Quirky and Film Criticism," outlines three metamodern aesthetic sensibilities: the quirky, "a tone that balances ironic detachment from, and sincere engagement with, films' fictional worlds and their characters"; (29) neo-romanticism, the reemployment of "Romantic impossibility" and grandeur (37); and queer utopianism, an affirmation of queer society's "transcendental" power to achieve social unity (38–39). He discusses them with reference to three films, *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (2009), *Glory at Sea* (2009), and *Shortbus* (2006), thus reaffirming the relevance of his theoretical categories for contemporary cinema.

The reemergence of historicity is more directly tackled by Josh Toth in "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the Rise of Historioplastic Metafiction," where he traces the shift to the view of history as potentially plastic. Morrison's novel is taken as an example of the metamodern readjustment from historiographic metafiction, which "emphasizes the inescapability of the graphic construct," to historioplastic metafiction, which "shifts our attention to the infinite yet bound pliability of the past" (43). At the center of this new genre stands the paradox between the recognition of history as unsteady and the simultaneous rejection of the resulting relativism (53).

Jörg Heiser's "Super-Hybridity: Non-Simultaneity, Myth-Making and Multipolar Conflict" explores the impact of technologically accelerated intertextuality on culture. The notion of super-hybridity refers to "a method of responding, or exploiting" these rapidly "converging sources and influences" (67). Heiser manages to find its examples in a variety of contemporary phenomena, for instance, in the Islamic State's inclination towards the use of

technology, which results in an intersection of the modern globalized world with the violently orthodox world of the organization. The author concludes that this case also illustrates the widespread non-simultaneity through the interaction of two historically distant sentiments—"myth-making" based on tradition and participation in the technologically literate culture (61–62).

In the final chapter of the section, "The Cosmic Artisan: Mannerist Virtuosity and Contemporary Crafts," Sjoerd van Tuinen discusses what he calls the "artisanal turn," denoting a renewed interest in handicraft. He describes the metamodern "'a-synchronous' present," where coexists a "heterogeneity of (material, technical, social, political, digital, etc.) practices which, in their hybrid togetherness, express and construct the contemporary" (69). The author then points out that art, craft, and design are now reunited through "resingularization," which replaced standardization as technological advancements remodeled the relationship between the processes of creation and production (82).

Alison Gibbons introduces the second section of the volume with the assertion that the metamodern structure of feeling witnesses the return of affect, and phenomenological hermeneutics resurface as accessible (86). In "Four Faces of Postirony" Lee Konstantinou endeavors to set forth the main artistic modes that emerged out of the move past the postmodern irony: "motivated postmodernism, credulous metafiction, the postironic Bildungsroman and relational art" (89). Interestingly, he explicitly rejects the association of postirony with New Sincerity: the latter assumes that it is authenticity that remains after the waning of irony as its Manichean opposite, whereas the former seeks to avoid the irony's eroding power but still carry its critical capability (88–89).

"Radical Defenselessness: A New Sense of Self in the Work of David Foster Wallace" by Nicholine Timmer convincingly situates Wallace's fiction within the cultural logic of metamodernism. In her analysis, she uncovers the oscillation between "psychologistic" and "poststructural" registers in the work of the

author (115). Timmer draws from Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion of ethical experiences—namely, those ones which cannot be accurately expressed through language—to find the glimpses of affective sensibility of "radical defencelessness," or "the radical exposure to the other" in the texts (113).

In "Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect" Alison Gibbons deconstructs the prevailing view of autofiction as a typically postmodern genre by establishing affect present therein as "situational" rather than fragmented: present insofar as the subject is located in reference to the surrounding world and people (120). The last contribution to the section concerns a phenomenon that is, arguably, one of the most tangibly present in the metamodern structure of feeling. "The Joke That Wasn't Funny Anymore: Reflections on the Metamodern Sitcom," by Gry C. Rustad and Kai Hanno Schwind is a comprehensive exploration of the tonal shift in the humor of sitcoms from the postmodern "laughing at" the subject, fueled by irony and detachment, to the perceptively warmer dynamic of "laughing with" (132). The discussed change may perhaps be expanded to a broader change invited by the affective turn—the global change of the relation between the reader and the characters in the text to a personal engagement experienced *with* them, hinted earlier by Gibbons (130).

The final section of the book is devoted to the metamodern depth model. Consistently with the methodology employed by van den Akker and Gibbons in their introductions to the previous parts of the volume, Vermeulen establishes the notion of "depthiness" by way of contrast with Jameson's postmodern counterpart—depthlessness. Vermeulen argues that nowadays "artists, activists and writers feel that appearances may well inspire sensations of an outside, of an elsewhere—even if the existence of that elsewhere is by no means certain, or often even unlikely or impossible" (2017: 149). Accordingly, Irmtraud Huber and Wolfgang Funk provide a polemic with post-structural thought in their chapter "Reconstructing Depth: Authentic Fiction and Responsibility." The authors develop the method of reconstruction (in

conscious opposition to Derridean deconstruction) as both internally present in a text and available as a way of reading it that moves past the artistic surface (153). Curiously, they contend that the reconstructive search for "authentic depth" is not merely encouraged but stands as the reader's responsibility (156). This chapter seems to be particularly important for establishing the methodology of uncovering metamodern sensibility in cultural products.

The contribution by Sam Browse, "Between Truth, Sincerity and Satire: Post-Truth Politics and the Rhetoric of Authenticity," analyzes the influence of metamodern depthiness on politics. He focuses on the contrast between Tony Blair's "mimetic authenticity" and Jeremy Corbyn's "curated authenticity" (178). As he argues, the former politician markedly tried to appeal to metamodern sensitivity by explicitly showing the space of backstage politics as normal and common, whereas the latter marginalized his private life and focused on public issues, thus making "a tacit claim to [his] authenticity" (181). Blair and Corbyn, therefore, are said to exemplify the contrast between depthless surface and appeal to depth, respectively. However, the author's implication that a mere shift of focus in public appearances can exemplify the metamodern depth is itself not unproblematic because it appears to take for granted that the latter politician's reference to collective problems is essentially sincere.

"Notes on Performatist Photography: Experiencing Beauty and Transcendence after Postmodernism" by Raoul Eshelman is the last chapter of the section. Notably, in 2008 Eshelman published a work titled *Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism*, which takes on the very same task of conceptualizing post-postmodernism as the presently discussed volume. Nevertheless, the two approaches are reconcilable, as the ultimate goal of performatist theory is to describe modern cultural texts "in terms of specific techniques and the implicit norms regulating their usage," thus remaining smaller in scope than metamodernism (199). Accordingly, Eshelman discusses the crucial method used in contemporary photography—double framing, whereby common items

or settings are given depth through the recognition of "some higher form of order" present within them (185). The author notices that this purposeful act of seeking unity is directly subversive in relation to the postmodern focus on disorder. He considers the fact that irony becomes "tiring" as an aesthetic sensibility to be the root cause of the emergence of this new perceptual mode (198).

Finally, in the epilogue entitled "Thoughts on Writing about Art after Postmodernism," James Elkins observes the paradox inherent in academic texts tackling cultural production. He points out that such writing continues to employ a post-structuralist approach to deconstruct the scientific discipline it concerns but, simultaneously, remains complacent about the rigorous "formal boundaries" imposed by the academy on the critique itself. Ultimately, Elkins encourages scholars to face the consequences of the fact that it is "impossible to continue to write nonfiction" and to turn from creating purely theoretical texts in favor of experimental forms (206, 210).

On the whole, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth After Postmodernism* stands as a comprehensive investigation of the contemporary structure of feeling. Without a doubt, it is an important work for anyone seeking the answer to the question of what comes after postmodernism. The clear division into sections analogous to Jameson's effort to describe the cultural logic of late capitalism makes the book not only easier to grasp but also more useful as an analytical tool. While not all chapters seem to be fully focusing on the topic suggested by their placement in a particular part of the book, the editors themselves acknowledge that some contributions have relevance for more than one metamodern paradigm (van den Akker & Vermeulen 2017: 18). Moreover, the fact that the volume enters into an open dialogue with other attempts to label post-postmodernism also makes it a valuable contribution to the academic debate on that topic. Van den Akker, Gibbons, and Vermeulen extensively try to avoid the unproductive, albeit tempting act of rigid classification of the present cultural condition holistically

under one hermetic term. The conceptualization of metamodernism as a structure of feeling is inclusive enough to allow the contributors to find diverse yet cohesive meanings instead of searching for a dogmatic set of features of the contemporary culture.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

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MASCULINITY: THEORIES AND PRACTICES
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE

Organized by: Faculty of Humanities at Nicolaus Copernicus University and the Institute for Prevention of Exclusions
Conducted in: Polish and English
Took place on: 26-27 May 2022
Took place in: Toruń (online)
Report by: Katarzyna Stepak

The conference "Masculinity: Theories and Practices" took place on the 26th and 27th May 2022. It was conducted online, which enabled the participation of many scholars from different parts of Poland and abroad. The main themes of the conference included exploring different aspects of male identity and discovering the alternatives to the standardised and hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Participants reflected on how masculinity is presented in different cultural practices and discourses. Both days of the event opened and closed with inspiring lectures elaborating on the topic. All sixteen presentations were divided into five panels, each of which was followed by a discussion.

The conference began with a lecture by Prof. Urszula Kluczyńska (Collegium Da Vinci, Poznań) – a sociologist and pedagogist specializing in critical studies on masculinities and men with a focus on social contexts of men's health, ageing, sport, the medicalisation of masculinity and male sexuality, and masculinity and care. She devoted her lecture to the notion of caring and hybrid masculinities, referring to the research conducted among male nurses. The first session of the conference was devoted to exploring the concept of "real men" as shaped by culture and media. The papers explored how the selected discourses

restrict performances of masculine identity and how men can escape the bonds of these limitations (Sylwia Wajs, a graduate of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw) and how media portray masculinity, traditionally associated with militarism, nationalism and patriotism, in the context of the war in Ukraine (Tomasz Tomasik, Słupsk). During the second session, the first two speakers analysed the portrayal of men in video games: the vision of tender and empathetic masculinity in *Life is Strange 2* (Grzegorz Zyzik, University of Opole) and the potential of computer games for the construction of positive masculinities (Sylwester Matkowski, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The third speaker focused on the place of men in society, family, and politics in Croatian medieval city-state (Martyna Bąk-Ziółkowska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The third session was conducted entirely in English. It comprised papers that examined masculinity in selected cultural texts: the portrayal of immigrant fatherhood in Kerri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*, Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café* and M. G. Vassanji's *No New Land* (Joanna Antoniak, Nicolaus Copernicus University), the spatial realms of masculine identity in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (Edgar James Ælred Jephcote, Nicolaus Copernicus University) and a portrait of a caring man in *Scenes from a Marriage* (2021) as a departure from the patriarchal male archetype (Natalia Jaworańska, Nicolaus Copernicus University). Lastly, the participants had the opportunity to listen to Piotr Maroń's lecture on how male bodies are presented in the discourse on eating disorders. Maroń, a PhD student at the Centre for Social Health Research (University of New South Wales, Sydney), presented the results of his studies on male eating disorders performed in clinical practices.

The second day of the conference opened with a lecture by Dr Michał P. Garapich (University of Roehampton, London)—a social anthropologist specializing, among others, in the issues of migration, ethnicity, nationalism, and multiculturalism. He focused on the nationalism of the Polish diaspora in England understood as a symbolic reconstruction. The first paper of the

morning session was dedicated to the Polish manosphere (Bogna Kociołowicz-Wiśniewska, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań). The speaker provided some crucial characteristics and described the political dimension of men's online spaces. The session continued with a detailed analysis of the representation of homosociality in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (Bartłomiej Brzozowski, Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The two last presentations explored the masculinization of sports: the manifestation of masculinity and reflection on the new roles of men in sport on the basis of research in a Warsaw-based Brazilian jiu-jitsu club (Karol Górski, University of Warsaw) and the analysis of Polish TV sports news as biased towards men's sports at the expense of women's sports (Sylwia Ryszawy, University of Silesia in Katowice). The last panel of the conference focused on masculinity as constructed in cultural and media discourses. The first presentation explored the rhetoric of the crisis of masculinity in *Pan* magazine (1987-1993) as a starting point for reflecting on the impact of the political transformation on domestic models of masculinity (Ludmiła Janion, University of Warsaw). The second speaker (Dominik Puchała, University of Warsaw) addressed male privilege and sense of entitlement in the context of the #MeToo movement and the socio-political situation of women in Poland. The session continued with a presentation on how the traditional images of masculinity have changed in various cultural practices, including film, computer games, advertising and theatre (Nina Putyńska, a graduate of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw). Finally, Joan Copjec's theory on male identity was presented on the basis of her essay "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason" (Łukasz Silski, Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The conference ended with a lecture on the "Practices of tender masculinity" given by Kamil Błoch from Grupa Performatywna Chłopaki (the Boys Performative Group)—a collective of men exploring the idea of tender masculinity beyond socio-cultural roles and stereotypes controlling men.

The conference on the theories and practices of masculinity proved to be a successful event. It initiated many engaging discussions and inspired the exchange of ideas among its participants.[1]

Endnotes

1. All details concerning the event can be found at https://www.fundacjaipw.org/en/meskosc.

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ABSTRAKTY

Magdalena Dziurzyńska

Queering History: Alternate Timelines and the Effects of Queer Divergence in Connie Wilkin's *Time Well Bent*

Artykuł ma na celu zgłębienie koncepcji alternatywnych historii i spekulatywnej przeszłości z perspektywy Queer studies. Analiza skupia się na tym, jak inny mógłby być obecny świat, gdyby niektóre postacie historyczne lub wydarzenia z nimi związane miały charakter queerowy. Do analizy wykorzystany został zbiór opowiadań *Time Well Bent* (2009) pod redakcją Connie Wilkins, w skład którego wchodzi czternaście opowiadań, w których historia jest opowiedziana z punktu widzenia gejów, lesbijek, osób biseksualnych lub transpłciowych. W artykule nacisk położony jest na rozbieżności pomiędzy dominującą a queerową wersją historii oraz długoterminowe, globalne konsekwencje tych zmian. Rozważana jest idea queerowania historii i queerowego odejścia od tradycyjnej linii czasu, a także relacje między historią a fikcją.

Edgar James Ælred Jephcote

Ruins and Weeds: An Ecocritical View on Romain Veillon's *Green Urbex* Collection

Eksploracja miejska (krótko: urbex) staje się popularnym zajęciem wśród lubiących przygody fotografów, zwłaszcza tych, którzy upatrują w pozbawionych człowieczeństwa obiektach sposobu na wyrażenie własnej sztuki. Najnowsza publikacja fotografii Romaina Veillona Green Urbex zaprasza nas do wyobrażenia sobie świata bez ludzi, w którym opuszczenie prowadzi do nieuchronnego murszenia i rozkładu sztucznych struktur, ustępujących w ostatecznym rozrachunku miejsca różnorodnej sukcesji życia roślinnego. Oprócz dokonania przeglądu książki Veillona, głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest przyjrzenie się temu bardziej zielonemu aspektowi zbioru Urbex Veillona z ekokrytycznego punktu widzenia. Zbiór fotografii powoli przesuwa naszą perspektywę od najbardziej malowniczo i antropocentrycznie wykadrowanych obrazów wielkich wnętrz w stronę bardziej modernistycznych koncepcji post-apokaliptycznych. Jednocześnie Veillon obrazuje rekolonizację, jaka

dokonuje się za sprawą natury na tych pozornie zapomnianych obszarach kultury ludzkiej. Podobnie sam artykuł wychodzi od ujęcia zjawiska chwastów i ruin w kategoriach estetycznych, aby następnie przejść ku teoriom bardziej współczesnym, zwracając szczególną uwagę na koncepcje wywodzące się z interdyscyplinarnych podejść ekokrytycznych, takie jak „materia opowiedziana" i „natura-kultura." Wykorzystując ekokrytyczny sposób myślenia do wyjścia poza zakres tekstu Veillona, można rozważyć, czy to możliwe, by chwasty i ruiny opowiadały swoją własną historię o relacji człowieka z przyrodą. Ponadto, chociaż Veillon nie stara się zbytnio upiększać fotografowanego obiektu, przy analizie serii fotografii nasuwa się pytanie, czy spojrzenie na temat chwastów i ruin z ekokrytycznej perspektywy może uczynić ten temat bardziej czarującym. Sam fakt, że chwasty w kulturze postrzegane są jako coś niechcianego lub tradycyjnie w ujęciu metaforycznym kojarzone bywają z motywami rozkładu i zaniedbania, czyni z nich interesujący temat do dyskusji, ponieważ stają się one okazją do zastanowienia się nad życiem z wyraźnie nietypowej, niemodnej, a nawet nieco obcej perspektywy. Te ogólne motywy zapomnianych światów i bycia niepożądanym mają szansę przerodzić się we właściwe tematy dyskusji ekokrytycznej, szczególnie, jeśli wziąć pod uwagę podejmowane przez Veillona próby zachęcenia do rozważań na temat scenariuszy realistycznych i postapokaliptycznych, takich jak wysiedlenia ludności czy kryzysy ekologiczne.

Miriam Kobierski

The reality of living in a pandemic world. Analyzing reading preferences and language usage

Globalna pandemia, która rozpoczęła się w 2019 roku, miała znaczny wpływ na codzienne życie. Ze względu na zakazy wyjścia z domu, pojawiły się miedzy innymi nowe trendy czytelnicze. W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowane zostaną preferencje czytelnicze czytelników zarówno amerykańskich, jak i brytyjskich, a także analiza badania przeprowadzonego wśród studentów i współpracowników autora.

Jeśli chodzi o zmiany językowe, to od 2019 roku ukuto nowe terminy dotyczące pandemii. Terminy te albo zostały w całości stworzone specjalnie w tym okresie, np. *koronaświrus*, albo zmieszane z już istniejącymi słowami. Kolejną zmianą językową jest zwiększenie wykorzystania znanych już elementów leksykalnych, które w tym czasie

zyskały popularność. W artykule te kwestie zostaną szerzej omówione, a także podparte odpowiednimi przykładami.

Karolina Kordala

Corporeal Vessels: Gods as Personifications of American Anxieties in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

Celem artykułu jest analiza amerykańskich lęków, uosabianych przez tytułowe postacie w powieści Neila Gaimana pt. *Amerykańscy bogowie* (2001). Przez pryzmat prozopopei, środka charakterystycznego dla tradycji amerykańskiego gotyku, Gaimanowskich bogów czytać można jako ucieleśnienie amerykańskich traum - zarówno tych wynikających z problematycznej przeszłości USA (np. kolonializmu), jak i dotyczących obecnych problemów, takich jak globalizacja, gwałtowny rozwój technologiczny czy konsumpcjonizm. Co więcej, w *Amerykańskich bogach* autor proponuje także europejskie spojrzenie na „prawdziwą" naturę Ameryki. Niczym zjawy, bogowie w powieści Gaimana nawiedzają amerykański krajobraz, przypominając o jego przeszłych i obecnych traumach.

Lucia La Causa

"Egyptian English" as an Emerging Glocal Language

W dzisiejszym świecie, w którym język angielski jest językiem międzynarodowym, a dystans przestrzenny i kulturowy zmniejsza się z powodu powszechnego korzystania z Internetu i mediów, kontakt języka angielskiego z innymi językami jest ułatwiony (m.in. Deshors 7). Prowadzi to do wzrostu poziomu wielojęzyczności w kontekstach, w których angielski jest językiem obcym (Warschauer, Said, & Zohry 31), a jego użytkownicy trwają w ciągłym napięciu—z jednej strony pragnąc opanować go w celu stania się „obywatelem zglobalizowanego świata," z drugiej—chcąc zachować własną, lokalną tożsamość językową.

Niniejsze badanie, będące częścią szerszego projektu badawczego, skupia się na studium przypadku, jakim jest Egipt zmagający się z jednoczesnym użytkowaniem języka angielskiego (Poese 5) i (egipską) odmianą języka arabskiego. Głównym celem artykułu jest wykazanie, iż ze względu na ciągły kontakt wspomnianych języków, a także występujące pomiędzy nimi napięcie, kod językowy będący mieszaniną języka angielskiego jako „języka globalnego" (Crystal) i (egipskiego) arabskiego jako języka

lokalnego, prztczynia się do wyłonienia się i rozwoju „glokalnej" formy językowej w Egipcie (Bruthiaux 165; Lewko iv-113; Al-Sayadi 3), którą można by nazwać „egipskim angielskim."

Aby osiągnąć ten cel, zostanie przeprowadzona analiza socjolingwistyczna poprzez badanie języka pisanego i mówionego, a mianowicie tekstów wiadomości i klipów audio młodych egipskich anglojęzycznych użytkowników i użytkowniczek oraz filmów wideo pochodzących ze stron YouTube oraz Facebooka. Na potrzeby naszego badania zostanie zebrany i przeanalizowany korpus egipskiego angielskiego.

Paweł Oleksak

Dialectics of Utopia and Dystopia in *Never Let Me Go* by Kazuo Ishiguro

Opierając się na historycznym przejściu od fikcji utopijnej do dystopijnej, artykuł argumentuje, że *Never Let Me Go* autorstwa Kazuo Ishiguro nie poddaje się wyraźnej dystopijnej interpretacji. Powieść ta przedstawia innowacyjną metodę wydłużania życia ludzkiego poprzez wdrożenie etycznie kontrowersyjnego systemu. Jego analiza ukazuje dynamikę między społecznościami i ich pozycje w świecie powieści. Ishiguro nieustannie balansuje między elementami utopii i dystopii, lecz jednocześnie jego narracja dostarcza zestawu subtelnych sugestii, które prowadzą do uwypuklenia wad systemu. W rezultacie, zakładając pewien zestaw wartości jakie posiada większość czytelników, powieść można pobieżnie zakwalifikować jako fikcję dystopijną, jednak granice oddzielające ją od utopii pozostają rozmyte.

Ambika Raja

Return to Homeland: Search for Identity through Ecological Memory in Romesh Gunesekera's *Heaven's Edge*

Celem tego artykułu jest analiza przedstawienia pamięci ekologicznej w powieści *Heaven's Edge* Romesha Gunesekera. Osadzona na nienazwanej wyspie targanej wojną powieść podkreśla znaczenie pamięci ekologicznej w poszukiwaniu tożsamości przez glokalnego protagonistę. Autorka artykułu podejmuje próbę zbadania sposobu w jaki Gunesekera oddaje niuanse pamięci ekologicznej oraz wpływu tegoż rodzaju pamięci na kształtowanie się tożsamości bohaterów. Poprzez analizę sposobów w jaki bohaterowie nawigują swoje wspomnienia i tożsamości podkreślone zostaje zarówno ich globalny jak i lokalny wymiar. Poprzez odwołanie się do teorii postkolonialnych,

Autorka również udowadnia, że pamięć ekologiczna pozwala na odbudowanie więzi z utraconą ojczyzną—a co za tym idzie, na lepsze zrozumienie własnej tożsamości—tym bohaterom, którzy zmuszeni byli do jej opuszczenia na skutek kolonialnych i postkolonialnych konfliktów.

Agata Rupińska

Masculinities in Selected Stories by Raymond Carver

Celem artykułu jest analiza motywów męskości w opowiadaniach Raymonda Carvera. W pierwszej części tekstu zostaje wprowadzone tło teoretyczne w postaci teorii czterech rodzajów męskości autorstwa R.W. Connell. Części druga i trzecia poświęcone są natomiast analizie wybranych opowiadań przez pryzmat teorii. Warstwa analityczna została podzielona na dwie części— pierwsza zajmuje się przedstawieniami tradycyjnej męskości, natomiast w druga dotyczy tekstów, w których normatywna męskość jest kwestionowana. Artykuł pozwala zauważyć, że mimo, że opowiadania Carvera powstały w latach 70. i 80. XX wieku, to przedstawione w nich problemy dotykające mężczyzn nie straciły na aktualności.

Dagmara Solska

The Evolving Female Narrative in Dystopian Video Games: *Bioshock Infinite*, *The Last of Us*, and *Horizon: Zero Dawn*

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu przyjrzenie się reprezentacji trzech postaci kobiecych w dystopijnych grach AAA oraz sposobu, w jaki protagonistki są konstruowane poprzez dyskurs gier wideo, jak i usytuowane względem środowiska gry. Gry wideo postrzega się jako artefakty kulturowe, które powstają w wyniku wzajemnego oddziaływania narracyjnych, wizualnych i ludycznych elementów gry. Autorka podejmuje próbę zgłębienia wzorców narracyjnych utrwalonych poprzez świat gry oraz samą branżę gier wideo w kreacji postaci kobiecych. „BioShock Infinite," „The Last of Us" oraz „Horizon: Zero Dawn" analizowane są zarówno pod kątem narracji w grze, jak i zastosowanej konstrukcji rozgrywki. Na przykładzie wybranych gier sprawdza się, czy stereotypy dotyczące płci są podważane w świecie przedstawionym, czy też bohaterki są przedstawiane jako narracyjnie ograniczone, podporządkowane i zmarginalizowane postacie oparte na archetypach kobiecych, począwszy od motywu „damy w opałach," a skończywszy na drugorzędnej roli wsparcia dla męskich protagonistów.

Agnieszka Staszak

"You can't let yourself be defined by the parts that are broken": Immersion, Traumatic Memory and the Representation of PTSD in *Tell Me Why*

Celem tego artykułu jest przeprowadzenie analizy wspomnień traumatycznych oraz roli gracza w grze przygodowej *Tell Me Why*. Odwołując się do teorii z dziedziny groznawstwa (ludologii) oraz tej dotyczącej traumy i pamięci, artykuł podejmuje interpretację narracji i mechaniki zawartej w grze. Ze względu na to, że gra skupia się głównie na aspekcie przepracowywania traumy i radzenia sobie z (nie)chcianymi wspomnieniami, w artykule omówiony zostaje prawdopodobny wpływ gry na gracza, w szczególności skupiając się na podejmowanych przez niego decyzjach, a także wynikających z nich skutkach. Dodatkowo, artykuł porusza kwestię popularności gry.

Katarzyna Stępień

"The future's (not) ours to see"—Visions of Forthcoming Humanity in Solarpunk

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia analizę wybranych aspektów gatunku literackiego określanego mianem solarpunk, w tym jego progresywnego podejścia do tożsamości płciowej, natury i organizacji społecznej. W nawiązaniu do poprzedników gatunku i idei ekologii społecznej Murraya Bookchina, przyjrzę się kilku przykładom solarpunkowych opowieści ze szczególnym naciskiem położonym na reprezentację antycypowanej wersji organizacji społecznej. Omawiając wyimaginowane wersje organizacji społecznej i podkreślając otwartość tożsamości płciowej, twierdzę, że solarpunk można traktować jako ważny element sceny literackiej science fiction i zapowiedź lepszej przyszłości.

Paulina Szczepaniak

"Instagram face": Deconstructing the Seemingly Utopian and Idealized Image of Women Promoted by Social Media

Artykuł podejmuje temat wpływu mediów społecznościowych na nasze postrzeganie piękna oraz opisuje zjawisko tzw. „Instagram face," które doprowadziło do powstania nowego wyidealizowanego obrazu kobiety. Autorka skupia się na opisie mechanizmów odgrywających rolę w kreowaniu standardów wśród użytkowników aplikacji, a także podejmuje próbę zaprezentowania związku między podporządkowaniem kobiecego ciała poprzez techniki manipulacyjne wykorzystywane przez media społecznościowe a

gwałtownym wzrostem liczby wykonywanych operacji plastycznych oraz przychodów firm kosmetycznych na przestrzeni ostatnich lat. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, w jaki sposób utopijny obraz kobiecości prezentowany na Instagramie jest narzędziem kontroli, a także jaki ma obecnie wpływ.

Katarzyna Szyszka

Engaging Story or Valuable Message? The Anthropocene in Anne Bishop's *Others* Book Series

"Inni" autorstwa Anne Bishop to seria książek fantasy, która przedstawia perypetie niewielkiej amerykańskiej społeczności. Akcja sagi osadzona jest w fikcyjnym świecie, który różni się od naszego obdarzeniem natury swego rodzaju mechanizmem obronnym, gdyż bohaterowie nieludzcy—tytułowi Inni—ochraniają swoje naturalne środowisko przed działaniem człowieka. Inni mają nad sobą starożytnych Starszych, a pomagają im ludzie o nadprzyrodzonych zdolnościach.

Niniejszy artykuł przygląda się serii z perspektywy ekologicznej, próbując ustalić, jak jej elementy korespondują z założeniami koncepcji Antropocenu. Na pierwszy rzut oka główny zamysł sagi—wyrównana walka między naturą a ludzkością—może sprawiać, że zdaje się ona być historią łatwą do zinterpretowania w odniesieniu do idei Antropocenu. Jednak głębsza analiza poszczególnych wątków i ich rozwinięć sprawia, że kluczowe przesłanie serii staje się bardziej niejednoznaczne w świetle studiów nad Antropocenem.

Artykuł prezentuje różne rodzaje narracji i ich stosunek do koncepcji Antropocenu, ich wspólne cechy oraz przesłanie, które starają się przekazać. Następnie przygląda się relacji między środowiskiem naturalnym a ludzkością według wizji Anne Bishop, w tym wewnętrznym podziałom po obu stronach, obecności ekwiwalentu ludności rdzennej oraz wprowadzeniu filozoficznej kategorii Innego w postrzeganie siebie nawzajem przez bohaterów. Ostatecznym celem tej analizy literackiej jest zestawienie zdolności opowieści do absorbowania i zadowalania czytelnika z przesłaniem i wartościami ekologicznymi w niej zawartymi.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Magdalena Dziurzyńska is a PhD candidate at the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wrocław, Poland. She holds a double major in English and French Studies. Her research revolves around the representations of gender, sexuality and queerness in science fiction, as well as utopian and dystopian literature.

Edgar James *Æ*lred Jephcote is currently pursuing a Master's degree in English Studies at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. His BA was in English Philology at the University of Wrocław, where his thesis titled "T. S. Eliot's Use of the Chorus: *The Rock* and *Murder in the Cathedral*" was awarded the Distinguished Bachelor Thesis Award by the University's Institute of English Studies in 2021. For his current thesis he is researching the modern cultural aesthetic of cottagecore and its relationship to Victorian fiction.

Miriam Kobierski holds a Masters degree in English philology from the University of Łódź. Her main area of research is linguistics, specifically linguistics connetected with the field of Artificial Intelligence. Her interests revolve around cinema and writing, as well as researching the topic of Artificial Intelligence. Since the beginning of her academic career at university, Miriam Kobierski has attended many conferences both as a listener and speaker. She has also been on the planning committee of two of them—the most recent one being PhiLang 2021. Additionally, she is actively engaged in various students' societies.

Karolina Kordala is an MA student at the University of Łódź. Her current area of research centers on both British and American Gothic, especially in the works of Neil Gaiman. In 2019 she graduated with a BA in British literature. In her BA thesis, she analyzed Gothic elements in Gaiman's children's novel *Coraline* and how their variety influenced the dualistic perception of the novel. She participated in the sessions of the United Students' Society at the University of Łódź, which included hosting an event dedicated to parodic treatment of Gothic tropes in Gaiman's short stories.

Lucia La Causa holds an MA in Languages and Comparative Literatures (2018). She is now a third-year PhD student in 'Sciences of Interpretation' at the University of Catania, Italy, DISUM, Department of Humanities. Her doctoral research investigates the variety of English spoken in Egypt, a supposed new emerging variety of English, which is analysed through the use of a new theoretical model she proposes for the study of world Englishes development.

During the second year of her PhD, she has spent a three-month research period in Regensburg (Germany) supervised by Professor Dr. Edgard W. Schneider, and she is the member of AIA (Associazione Italiana di Anglistica). As a speaker, she has participated in several national and international conferences, and she has written the article "(Egyptian) Arabic and English swinging between heart and mind: code-switching in Egyptian rap music and social networks" (forthcoming).

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Ambika Raja is a former journalist from India who has recently completed a Master's in English Literature at the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad. She pursued her undergraduate studies in English Language and Literature at the Madras Christian College, Tamil Nadu and subsequently worked as an education reporter with two national dailies in India. Her areas of research interest include ecocriticism, South Asian literature and popular culture.

Agata Rupińska is a PhD student in literature studies at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Her main academic interests include gender studies, American literature, popular culture and aesthetics.

Dagmara Solska is a member of Games Research Association of Poland. She graduated with a Bachelor's in translation studies at the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Gdańsk and received her Master's degree in natural language processing at the Department of Glottodydactics and Natural Language Processing at the University of Gdańsk. In her research, she primarily deals with ludology, narrative aspects of video game analysis, classification of text types in a multilevel ludonarrative model, localization of large-scope role-playing games, text and discourse analysis in the context of new media, cyberspace, cyberdiscourses as well as issues related to computer mediated communication (CMC).

Agnieszka Staszak graduated with a master's degree from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In her MA thesis she examined selected aspects of trauma in the Netflix series *BoJack Horseman*. She is primarily interested in the theory of trauma and its representation in popular culture and the representation of LGBTQ+ community in literature and culture.

Katarzyna Stepak obtained her BA degree in the field of literary studies at the Department of English, Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She continues her education at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and is currently working on her MA thesis about racism in beauty standards analysed through the lens of Toni Morrison's fiction. She is interested in feminism, gender studies, ecology and cinematography.

Katarzyna Stępień is a graduate student at University College London (UCL), where she pursues her diploma in Comparative Literature. During her studies at Nicolaus Copernicus University, she established the Students' Feminist Society, published a number of articles about feminism, Anthropocene, Ecofeminism, and Ecocriticism, and co-organised two academic conferences. She finished her studies at the University of Wolverhampton. Recently, she presented the results of her research during conferences organised by George Washington English Graduate Student Association (GW EGSA), American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS), the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES), and Centre for Knowledge, Ideas and Development Studies (KNIDS). Currently, she works as a deputy editor at Res Publica Politics and is actively involved in several academic projects. In her free time, she translates Anne Waldman's poetry into Polish.

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