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MODERNISM RE-VISITED

Editors
Urszula Gołębiowska and Mirosława Kubasiewicz

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this volume, *Modernism Re-visited*, suggests yet another re-engagement with early twentieth-century literature in search of new insights and interpretations. However, the act of revisiting also creates an occasion to reconsider those concerns and values of the movement which could inform reflection on our own moment and its literature. In fact, the current revival of interest in modernism demonstrates its continuity and relevance for our times against the dismissal of the period in the latter half of the twentieth century. Attacked by both the realists of the 1950s and 1960s and later by postmodernists for being elitist, formalist, hostile to popular culture and conservative, modernism has emerged in the last two decades as not, in its entirety, indifferent to pressing social, political, and ethical problems. Certainly, not all modernists shared progressive political views and commitments, the attitudes of some are in fact considered downright reactionary (for instance, those of T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound).[1] Still, even when it was acknowledged that modernism did oppose the current reality, "pitting its innovative art against a reified bourgeois life-world," the fact that those oppositional or critical ambitions were not fully realized has been held against the movement and seen as confirming its irrelevance.[2]

Among other factors, it is this transformative aspiration that informs modernism's lasting impact: J.-F. Lyotard suggests that what is present in modernism, but disappears in postmodernism, is "'the close bond' between aesthetic endeavors and 'an idea of the progressive realization of social and individual emancipation encompassing all humanity.'"[3] For Fredric Jameson, the essential difference between the two eras is that modernism "still retains a sense of something outside capitalism" – the belief in the power of culture to transform nature, which becomes lost during the postmodern period.[4] The resurgent appeal of modernism in today's globalized, capitalist reality suggests that this utopian, idealist, emancipatory aspiration (and potential) of art resonates with contemporary artists' desire to perform vital functions while resisting

1 Andrzej Gąsiorek, *A History of Modernist Literature* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 560.

2 *Ibidem*, 555. Gąsiorek observes that modernists aimed at preserving "the independent power of creative intelligence" capable of fostering an individual rather than a total social transformation, about which they were skeptical (560).

3 Ryan Trimm, "Contemporary Fiction and Modernism," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. http://oxfordre.com/literature/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.001.0001/acrefore-9780190201098-e-186?rskey=L1AOim&result=1.

4 *Ibidem*, 8.

the pressures of the market. Borrowing Marjorie Perloff's words, it can be said that modernism "remains, at the beginning of our own century, incomplete and *open* to the future: *modernism*, it is now widely understood, is not yet finished, its momentum having been deferred by two world wars and the Cold War so that many of its principles are only now being brought to fruition."[5]

Recent developments in the field of modernist studies provide a timely context for a re-visiting and re-interpretation of the literature of the period. New methodologies and approaches (transnational, gender, race, environmental and other theories and methodologies) have allowed critics to reframe their perspectives on this cultural and literary period and phenomenon, which has led to a questioning of the conventional "mythology" of high modernism. While the essential features of this mythologized, traditionally conceived, modernism still resonate today, the dominant tropes of elitism and autonomy of modernist art, its detachment from social and historical realities, are being reconsidered in current research. Recent studies foreground previously unrecognized aspects and motifs, allowing us to revisit works which have been perceived in a limited manner and made to fit predetermined critical agendas. Apart from offering fresh perspectives on the canonical literature of the period, current revisions are also conducive to re-interpreting and re-assessing works which temporally belong to the period but, as they fail to conform to narrow conceptions of modernism, have been relegated to the periphery or excluded from the canon. At the same time, the very temporal and spatial coordinates of modernism are being reconstituted, extending the field of study temporally, beyond the boundaries of traditional periodizations of the movement, and spatially, beyond the American and European metropolitan centers.[6] These extensions have had the effect of broadening the scope of studies and incorporating works produced before and after the core period of 1890 to 1945 and on the peripheries of the early twentieth-century culture.

Alongside the re-interpretations of the literature of the (expanded) period, the other impulse of the new studies of modernism is the examination of contemporary literary production which exhibits the continuity of modernist concerns and artistic techniques. The aptly titled 2016 volume *The Contemporaneity of Modernism* traces the re-emergence in contemporary literature and culture of key preoccupations of modernism such as the critical function of art and its autonomy from the domination of the market as well as the current renewal of interest in the issues of time and temporality.[7]

5 Marjorie Perloff, "Epilogue: Modernism Now," in *A Companion to Modernist Literature and Culture*, ed. David Bradshaw and Kevin J.H. Dettmar (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 571.

6 Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 737-748, 738.

7 Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges, "Introduction," *The Contemporaneity of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 1.

Contemporary novelists such as J.M. Coetzee, Kazuo Ishiguro, Colm Tóibín, and Zadie Smith acknowledge their fascination and affinities with modernism, apparent in their interest in modernist writers as well as in their explorations of characters' interiority and the themes of alienation and search for meaning in today's globalized world. Likewise, the continuity of modernist aesthetics in the post-war literature and its contemporary afterlives signal the persistence of the movement. Although the contemporary redeployments of modernist techniques have been frequently considered the result of merely drawing on an inherited formal tradition, the editors of *The Contemporaneity of Modernism*, Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges, adopt a different approach. Against the widespread tendency of the new modernist studies towards downplaying the aesthetic aspects of modernism and focusing on its critical engagement in socio-political or ethical issues[8] (and their contemporary relevance), they suggest regarding the return to the modernist aesthetics as not a sign of a purely formalist preoccupation. D'Arcy and Nilges draw on the views of Theodor Adorno, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Rancière, and T.J. Clark, for whom the modernist concept of aesthetic autonomy does not necessarily imply a separation from the social world, "the claim to aesthetic autonomy and reflection on aesthetic medium" being not opposed to the socio-historical context, but "dialectically involved in it."[9] For one, aesthetic experiments, by creating uniqueness and difficulty, enact resistance to the expectations of easily consumable artistic "goods" for the contemporary cultural mass market.

New readings of both the established modernist writers and those who are frequently omitted from accounts and anthologies of modernism comprise the first section of this volume – the essays in this part are devoted to explorations of the works of Katherine Mansfield, Charles Williams, Henry James, and Vita Sackville-West. Jacek Gutorow looks at Henry James's late writings through the lens of Theodor W. Adorno's conception of *Spätstil* (late style), identified by the philosopher in Beethoven's last disharmonious, unsettling compositions. Likewise, James's late idiom, most visible in his works composed after 1900, is marked by a tendency towards complication. An accumulation of epithets, a complex sentence structure with multiple parallel clauses,

8 The element of opposition and subversion in modernist literature is particularly emphasized in new modernist studies. By contrast, Charles Altieri argues that for modernist writers "subversion and critique were very rarely ends in themselves but functioned as […] the ground for positive visions" (765). Altieri's rejection of the "idealization of subversion" which he identifies in the current discourse on modernism seems to offer a particularly refreshing perspective on modernist and contemporary production. Modernist works are committed not just to criticism but to defining a positive impact of literature – how it might "get individuals to change aspects of their ways of paying attention and orienting their affective lives, in the hope that rebuilding individuals' senses of the good is required to produce durable social change." Rather than being purely negative – oppositional and critical – art may, in a subtle way, promote positive goals such as individual emancipation (765, 767).

9 *Ibidem*, 5.

frequent hesitations and parenthetical restatements result in an increased ambiguity of the writer's late prose. Gutorow argues that this elaborate late style, far from being a mere rhetorical or linguistic phenomenon, manifests the writer's growing sense of his work's "existential insufficiency and irrelevance, [...] of the inadequacy of the medium and [...] of art as necessarily anti-mimetic and anti-realistic." In an essay on another canonical author, Katherine Mansfield, Richard Cappuccio examines the role of prayer in her stories "Prelude," "At the Bay," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Taking the Veil," as well as in some of her unpublished sketches, relating Mansfield's use of prayer as both a subject and form in her stories, journals, and poetry to T.S. Eliot's treatment of prayer in his work. Mansfield's story "Prelude" returns in the essay by Cristina Dodson-Castillón, who examines the theme of madness in the story from the perspective of feminist literary criticism, which views some forms of mental illness in female characters as a consequence of oppression experienced in patriarchal society. Additionally, Dodson-Castillón indicates the modernist aspect of madness as a symbol of rebellion. Anna Kwiatkowska explores the presence of *hypotyposis* in Katherine Mansfield's stories, interpreting compositions of flowers, fruit, musical instruments, and kitchen utensils described in narratives as reminiscent of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century still lifes by Jean Chardin, Johannes Vermeer or Francisco Zurbaran. The article establishes analogies between Old Masters' compositions (with the focus on still life, *vanitas* and genre painting) and Mansfield's narrative structures.

Unlike Katherine Mansfield, who has enjoyed the status of a legitimate modernist for some time now, Vita Sackville-West has been frequently omitted from the canon. Ann Marshall reclaims the writer and famous gardener as a modernist. Until recently written off as a marginal writer, Sackville-West emerges in Marshall's essay as a "green modernist," whose unsentimental garden writing "anticipates today's environmentalists." In her prose she not only challenges pastoral ideals but also questions Victorian perceptions of the harmonious relationship women were expected to have with the natural world. Marshall's reading of Vita's garden writing and of her novel *All Passion Spent*, reveals a writer responding to the challenges of her natural environment, a conscious modernist and a feminist author. In the only essay in this volume devoted to modernist criticism, Rowland Cotterill reconsiders Charles Williams's critical writings as a contribution to the modernist discussion of Shakespeare's work. Cotterill demonstrates that Williams's arguments, though largely omitted from accounts of English inter-war critical work which constituted the "modernist Shakespeare," resonate with both the Empsonian conception of 'ambiguity' and the modernist emphasis on poetic coherence.

The essays in the second section of the volume trace the presence of modernist inspirations, both formal and thematic, in recent fiction. The deployment of modernist modes and techniques – non-linearity, interiority, chronological play – has

been labelled, by David James and Urmila Seshagiri, "metamodernism," a movement regarding "modernism as an era, an aesthetic, and an archive."[10] Contemporary fictions, however, do not only re-appropriate modernist techniques but also address modernism's "sociopolitical, historical, and philosophical contexts."[11] The lasting influence of the modernist aesthetic on more contemporary writers can be seen in Marek Pawlicki's essay, which juxtaposes Nadine Gordimer's short story "A Company of Laughing Faces" with Katherine Mansfield's "The Garden Party." Pawlicki underlines "thematic and structural similarities" between both stories, paying special attention to their use of epiphany – an inconclusive spiritual experience, which Dominic Head calls "equivocal epiphany" as opposed to a complete illumination. Rather than with modernist techniques, Olga Glebova's essay is concerned with philosophical contexts of modernism in J.M. Coetzee's novel *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013). Glebova proposes to read the novel as an "existential fable enacting the fundamental sense of disorientation and bewilderment" reminiscent of Lukács's conception of "transcendental homelessness." Coetzee's displaced characters in settings resembling Kafkaesque and Beckettian locations indicate a continuation of modernist impulses to draw on existentialist thought in an attempt to grasp the human condition in specific historical circumstances. Barbara Poważa-Kurko's essay analyses the topos of paralysis in *Dubliners 100* (2014), a collection of 'cover versions' of James Joyce's stories. Written by different authors to commemorate the centenary of the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*, the contemporary versions share with one another and with their prototypes the theme of paralysis experienced in the contemporary world in the form of personal rigidity, Internet addiction, and isolation. Finally, in our essay we demonstrate that the treatment of memory, history, and myth in Kazuo Ishiguro's most recent novel, *The Buried Giant* (2015), shows affinities with modernism. Modernist conceptualizations of memory – Maurice Halbwachs's ideas on collective memory, Sigmund Freud's theories concerning individual memory, and Marcel Proust's notion of involuntary memory – are reflected in Ishiguro's novel. Likewise, in its vision of a cyclical character of human history, the novel embraces a mythical perspective on time, rather than the spatialized, scientific time of historiography, which constitutes yet another link with modernism.

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10 David James and Urmila Seshagiri, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution," *PMLA* 129.1 (2014), 88-89.

11 *Ibidem*, 93.

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PART ONE:
NEW READINGS

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A SENSE OF ENDING. HENRY JAMES AND ADORNO'S *SPÄTSTIL*

Abstract: While we are perfectly justified in acknowledging the emergence of a new idiom in Henry James's works after 1900 (the date is necessarily tentative), we should see in his so-called late style not only a mere rhetorical or linguistic phenomenon but a result of existential processes transcending questions of style, language and novelistic technique. The main proposition set forth in the article is that it might prove interesting and critically illuminating to situate James's late texts in the context of Theodor W. Adorno's notion of *Spätstil* (late style) as developed by the German philosopher in his essays on Beethoven's last compositions. James's urge to complicate and indeed question his own work, to forward and assist its own exhaustion and dissolution, to point to its existential insufficiency and irrelevance, is a critical impulse conspicuously compatible with the Adornian concept. The ends of such a critique is a heightened awareness of the inadequacy of the medium and an assumption of art as necessarily anti-mimetic and anti-realistic. As is well known, this tendency informed James's last writings, and it gave them a distinct, unmistakable flavor.

Key words: modernism, aesthetics, late style, organicism, revision

After 1900 Henry James puzzled most of his readers with a trilogy of long and terrifyingly complex books: *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Reactions to the new novels were in the main visceral. In a few letters sent in the first decade of the XX century, the novelist's brother William expressed serious reservations about what he called Henry's "third manner." He voiced his conviction that in these novels the author's intentions were muddled by unnecessarily distorted syntax and superfluous rhetorical effects, and that the latter invalidated the realistic substance of his prose: "for gleams and innuendos and felicitous verbal insinuations you are unapproachable […] the effect of solidity you reach is but perfume and simulacrum."[1] William objected to his brother's ornamental language as well as his evasions and avoidances which resulted in the dispersion and dissolution of the meaning of many sentences. Consequently, William added, the reader was left with the "illusion of a solid object, made […] wholly out of impalpable materials, air and the prismatic interferences of light, ingeniously focused by mirrors upon empty space."[2]

1 William's remarks as quoted by Leon Edel in his *The Master: 1901-1916* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), 301.

2 *Ibidem*.

A few decades later F. O. Matthiessen came up with a full critical recognition of the quality and scope of James's post-1900 style. He proposed to refer to the last years of James's life as the "major phase": "I realized […] that though James' later evolution had involved the loss of an engaging lightness, he knew what he was about, and that if we want to find the figure in his carpet, we must search for it primarily in the intricate and fascinating designs of his final and major phase."[3] What Matthiessen stressed was not only the exceptional superiority of James's last three novels but the fact that they constituted the culmination of the novelist's artistic and intellectual development, and thus made for the distinct (final) period in the novelist's *oeuvre*. In this deliberate reversal of William James's pejorative account of his brother's "third manner," the critic made it clear that we should see the three novels as possessing a "greater depth and richness" than the works published before 1900.[4] This view was welcomed and has since been generally accepted.

What are the formal coordinates of the Jamesian "third manner"? The customary specification of his late idiom involves such features as linguistic/rhetorical mannerisms, ambiguous meanings informed by repetitions and elongated clauses, the use of the shifting viewpoint technique and interior monologue or the constant utilization of organic metaphors and metonymies. The net effect achieved by means of such devices has often been described as both mesmerizing and dumbfounding, fascinating yet at the same time off-putting. What Edith Wharton wrote in her literary autobiography *A Backward Glance* about James's famous (or notorious) monologues, conveyed during innumerable social feats, might be easily addressed to the stylistic qualities of his last novels and short stories:

> he began, forgetting us, forgetting the place, forgetting everything but the vision of his lost youth […] the long train of ghosts flung with his enchanter's wand across the wide stage of the summer night […] wavering and indistinct, they glimmered at us through a series of disconnected ejaculations, epithets, allusions, parenthetical rectifications and restatements, till not only our brains but the clear night itself seemed filled with a palpable fog: and then, suddenly, by some miracle of shifted lights and accumulated strokes, there they stood before us as they lived, drawn with a million filament-like lines.[5]

Sheldon M. Novick, who recalls these words in his excellent biography of the American novelist, helpfully comments on what he terms the "increasing complexity" of James's style: "[James] had trained himself to analyze his own memories into their original, constituent units, breaking down his own remembered perceptions into abstract elements, very much as a painter abstracts from his model a line drawing and

3 F. O. Matthiessen, *Henry James: The Major Phase* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), xv.

4 *Ibidem*, xiii.

5 As quoted by Sheldon M. Novick in his *Henry James: The Mature Master* (New York: Random House, 2007), 271-272.

a selection of pigments, which he then assembles artfully in a manner that will create the illusion of reality."[6] The biographer makes us aware of the linguistic and rhetorical features of the novelist's language: "ordinary nouns and verbs would slowly drop from his writing. He preferred proper nouns […] and concrete images, each of which would quickly give way to a pronoun. A cloud of descriptive nouns, adverbs, and adjectives would surround the pronoun like a skein of metaphors – coalescing in the reader's eye."[7] And then: "the elements of his description fuse in the reader's imagination, as an Impressionist's brushstrokes fuse in the retina of an observer, with the force of an immediate impression."[8]

Accordingly, the phrase "James's late style" has come to signify the excessive sophistication of the novelist's means of expression and articulation, his stubborn determination to extend and prolong minutiae, nuances and subtleties of his stories and to do so almost unendingly, as if he wanted to provide all perspectives at once and at the same time exhaust his narratives, leaving to his readers a (somewhat uneasy) sense of bare life and its never-ending processes. It might be said, incidentally, that despite appearances this obscure and indeed cryptic manner does not leave much room for the reader. To be sure, James's extended sentences and long-drawn-out clauses are invitingly open-ended and inconclusive. However, the sheer accumulation of all kinds of expressions, tropes and linguistic features makes it almost impossible for the reader to decide on the novelist's possible intentions or attempt to resolve his narratives. More often than not, the reader stands in genuine awe of their complexities and seems hypnotized by the uninterrupted flow of more and more words and images.

One problem with the standard accounts of James's late style is that they seem not to give adequate justice to the continuity of his work and writing. There is no doubt that such novels as *The Ambassadors* present us with serious interpretative challenges that are quite new and require a new kind of approach, if not a new kind of sensibility. There is also a blatant sense that if James's earlier narratives are more or less typical specimens of late Victorian fiction, his post-1900 works transcend the bounds of Victorian idiom and imagination. We have to be careful, though, with describing the development of James's novelistic technique in terms of strict oppositions between the early, middle and late phases of his career. Presenting the characteristic features of his late manner along rhetorical, linguistic or grammatical lines is an understandable but somewhat delimiting critical gesture. After all, James had resorted to sophisticated, demanding prose idiom before 1900, and we can see in his *oeuvre* an uninterrupted process of refining linguistic means of expression. If his last novels are more syntac-

6 *Ibidem*, 270-271.
7 *Ibidem*, 271.
8 *Ibidem*.

tically and lexically complicated than the earlier ones, the difference is quantitative rather than qualitative. That is, it has to do with the elaboration of literary and formal devices which had already been present in James. One can only agree with the editors of the 2012 *A Historical Guide to Henry James* when they claim that "stylistic difficulties are not just reserved for the novels of [James's] major phase; even his earliest writings require careful attention to rhetorical subtlety, multiple meanings, and the discursive twists and turns that reflect aptly the high society whose members enjoy the leisure to entertain subtle interpersonal relations and problems."[9]

My contention is that while we are perfectly justified in acknowledging the emergence of a new idiom in James's works after, say, 1900 (the date is necessarily tentative and could be moved backward or forward a bit), we should see in his late style not a mere rhetorical or linguistic phenomenon but a result of existential processes transcending questions of style, language and novelistic technique. It is tempting to identify the existential questions with autobiographical concerns. But in James, and this refers to his late writings as well, biographical matters seem secondary and ultimately subjected to his artistic vision. Even when he touched upon the subject of death, which is after all the conclusive biographical datum, the American writer did so in terms of the artist's accumulating consciousness which seemingly transcends questions of life and death (this kind of argument informs one of his most astonishing essays entitled "Is There Life After Death?").[10] James's awareness of old age in general, and his own old age in particular, is not to be easily dismissed in any discussions of his last writings, but it is by no means a constitutive element of his late style. It is possible that the latter should be located somewhere between life and work, external circumstances and internal necessities, autobiographical pressures and artistic challenges. Reality of one's life, yes – but only when and as sanctioned by art.

It would be interesting to discuss James's late style in the context of some ideas proposed by Adorno in his famous essays on Beethoven's final compositions. To my knowledge, the Adornian context has not been seriously explored in the interpretations of James's late work. It should be remembered that Adorno's fragments on Beethoven and the concept of *Spätstil* were published in German in 1993 and only translated into English five years later. Since then, there have been some attempts to apply Adorno's theoretical concepts to James's texts. An interesting example is a reading developed by Philip Tsang in a 2014 issue of *The Henry James Review*. While recognizing that "what

9 John Carlos Rowe and Eric Haralson (editors), "Introduction," in: *A Historical Guide to Henry James* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

10 Henry James, "Is There a Life After Death?," in *Autobiographies: A Small Boy and Others, Notes of a Son and Brother, The Middle Years, Other Writings*, ed. Philip Horne (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 716-717.

we identify as James's late style seldom crosses paths with late style as a theoretical concept," the critic offers an interpretation of *The American Scene* as a text which, Adorno-wise, undermines the centrality of authorial consciousness. Thus, what we find in the James of *The American Scene* is an indirect movement towards erasure, avoidance and self-effacement.[11] Another critic (Daniel Moore) suggests that what one can see in James's post-1900 writings is primarily a disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, and stresses the anti-mimetic quality of the novelist's late works. One of Moore's conclusions is that James's "lateness" (an "atomized concept") looks forward to Adorno and Fredric Jameson.[12] Importantly, however, both scholars view the Adornian context as highly problematic and unwieldy.

Such reluctance to put the American novelist into a narrow theoretical framework is understandable. As one of the critics puts it: "James's late personal writings develop a subtler and less antagonistic sense […] of the relations between art and the real."[13] It is not difficult to imagine James rejecting Adorno's persuasive arguments to the effect that the great artist has to defy his time and transcend his social environment, genuine art being "esthetically fully autonomous" and radically opposed to the "social tutelage" of the bourgeoisie.[14] The novelist was of course perfectly aware of the grim realities of the culture industry and the book market in the Anglo-American world at the beginning of the XX century (as Michael Anesko has splendidly demonstrated in his important study[15]) yet he never saw himself as seriously subverting the social system he lived in. Similarly, he would never endorse Said's otherwise persuasive idea of the anti-dynastic intellectual who breaks with tradition and rejects received notions in the name of critical independence and integrity.[16]

In general, one might say that as for the writer's conscious motives and articulate intentions, James's novelistic credo did not leave room for any kind of negativity, a central trait of the Adornian *Spätstil*. This can be evidently seen in the prefaces to The

11 Philip Tsang, "A Transcription of Impressions: *The American Scene* and the Jamesian Aesthetics of Lateness," *The Henry James Review* 35.3 (2014): 295-296.

12 Daniel Moore, "Lateness in James and Jameson," *The Henry James Review* 36.3 (2015): 290-292.

13 Oliver Herford, *Henry James's Style of Retrospect: Late Personal Writings, 1890-1915* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

14 Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven. The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, UK, and Malden, USA: Polity Press, 1998), 43.

15 Michael Anesko, *"Friction with the Market." Henry James and the Profession of Authorship* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

16 Introduced in a 1993 conversation with Joseph A. Buttigieg and Paul A. Bové (*Power, Politics and Culture. Interviews with Edward W. Said*, ed. Gauri Viswanathan, London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2004, 186), the concept anticipated Said's influential book *On Late Style. Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London-Oxford-New York-New Delhi-Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2006). See also Said's review "Untimely Meditations. Maynard Solomon's *Late Beethoven*," in *Music at the Limits. Three Decades of Essays and Articles on Music* (London: Bloomsbury Publications, 2008), *passim*.

New York Edition, an impressive declaration of artistic freedom and self-rule. What is stressed in them is the integral character of the work as well as its indebtedness to and interconnectedness with the past. In addition to the figures and concepts connected with the organic concept of the work of art, there are metaphors evoking a sense of fullness, completeness and profusion. In his nuanced comments to the process of composing *Portrait of a Lady*, the novelist refers to architectural notions, with the celebrated image of the "house of fiction" serving as one of the basic figures of his writing. In the same essay, he describes *The Ambassadors* as his best novel, putting emphasis on its "superior roundness."[17] James's idea of the modern novel was thus mostly positivist. As a matter of fact, it embraced all the essential features of XIX century positivism: its rationalism, its rooting in natural phenomena, its empiricism and its endorsement of the *a posteriori* knowledge. It would not be a great exaggeration to refer to the American novelist as a follower of the Enlightenment tradition, and this fact puts him poles apart from Adorno's aesthetic assumptions and preoccupations as expressed in, say, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or *Negative Dialectics*.

But even if the coupling of Adorno's and James's views on the aesthetics of the modern literary work is neither obvious nor straightforward, some puzzling parallels between the Adornian examination of Beethoven's late style and the novelist's many self-referential comments are noticeable. For one thing, it is worth remembering that for the German philosopher one of the most essential features of late style is the constant clash of biography and work. It might be said that Adorno's idea of late style arises out of a sense of the irrelevance of the subjective moment in the artistic and creative process, or rather out of the artist's realization that in order to express himself or herself, s/he needs to go beyond the constraints of the personal point of view as mentioned earlier. It is definitely something that characterizes James's last writings, too. Secondly, Adorno approaches the idea of negative dialectics (arguably an ironic and deconstructive reversal of the Hegelian dialectics of the Spirit) as a means of artistic expression. Thus, Beethoven's aesthetic originality and artistic rebelliousness, manifest in his last string quartets and piano sonatas, resulted not only from the composer's defiance of traditional conventions but also from his fascination with received artistic stereotypes and clichés. Adorno accentuated this double bind, and resolutely turned his discourse on negativity into a defense of the sublime art which abandons the protocols of beauty and celebrates moments of dissociation and disintegration. The critic formulated it in a succinct formula: "In Beethoven's late style there is altogether something like a tendency towards dissociation, decay, dissolution, but not in the sense of a process of

17 Henry James, *French Writers, Other European Writers, The Prefaces to the New York Edition*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: The Library of America, 1984), 1075 (the "house of fiction" metaphor) and 1080 (*The Ambassadors* as a novel possessing a "superior roundness").

composition which no longer holds things together: the dissociation and disintegration become artistic means."[18] Such an imperative can be no doubt felt in James's last novels, and that is why it is perfectly justifiable to address them in the light of the Adornian characterization of *Spätstil*.

Let us highlight a few critical hypotheses set forth by Adorno in the Beethoven essays. The critic begins by developing a radical critique of the aesthetics and philosophy of art based on the idea of the continuity and homogeneity of the work, and concludes by identifying discontinuity as a feature of the modern work of art (modernity being equivalent to lateness). Here is a characteristic metaphor with which he opens his discussion of *Spätstil*: "The maturity of the late works of important artists is not like the ripeness of fruit. As a rule, these works are not well rounded, but wrinkled, even fissured […] They lack all the harmony which the classicist aesthetic is accustomed to demand from the work of art."[19] This line of argument leads to an important thesis that late style finds its full expression in moments of compression and exhaustion.[20] Next, we can find in Adorno the vital idea of the quasi-sublime subjectivity that exceeds and thus negates itself. As the philosopher puts it, late works "are products of a subjectivity […] ruthlessly proclaiming itself, which breaks through the roundedness of form for the sake of expression, exchanging harmony for the dissonance of its sorrow."[21] And in a similar fashion: "The force of subjectivity in late works is the irascible gesture with which it leaves them. It bursts them asunder, not in order to express itself but, expressionlessly, to cast off the illusion of art".[22] Finally, and for many readers this could be a somewhat surprising twist of argumentation, the German philosopher puts stress on the seminal role of artistic conventions which are viewed by him as constitutive in the never-ending process of dismantling received ideas and traditions. One of his significant tenets is that "conventions [are] no longer imbued and mastered by subjectivity, but [are] left standing […] they finally themselves become expression; expression no longer of the isolated ego but of the mythical nature of the creature and its fall."[23]

The hypothesis of discontinuity may seem contrary to James's assumptions concerning the "art of fiction." As pointed out, most of the images and metaphors by means of which he depicted the construction of the novel had almost always to do with the organicist concept of the work of art. Assuming there is anything like the Jamesian aesthetic of the literary work, one should perhaps define it as based on such notions as the superiority of the inaugural idea of the story (frequently described by the novelist

18 Adorno, *Beethoven*, 189.
19 *Ibidem*, 123.
20 *Ibidem*, 159.
21 *Ibidem*, 123.
22 *Ibidem*, 125.
23 *Ibidem*.

as germ or seed), the controlled and balanced development (growth) of the narrative as well as the sense of the tale being rounded off and completed. In the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady* James recalled the origin of the plot of the novel, using his preferred type of organic imagery:

> These are the fascinations of the fabulist's art, these lurking forces of expansion, these necessities of upspringing in the seed, these beautiful determinations, on the part of the idea entertained, to grow as tall as possible, to push into the light and the air and thickly flower there; and, quite as much, these fine possibilities of recovering, from some good stand-point on the ground gained, the intimate history of the business – of retracing and reconstructing its steps and stages.[24]

However, when we read the prefaces with an eye to details, we will discover that the novelist's organicist rhetoric is subjected to quite unexpected transformations that seem to break it. Already in the note preceding *The Portrait* James remarks on the "high price of the novel as a literary form" and notices that it "tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould."[25] This is in fact one of the first impressions that we have upon reading his late novels – we feel as if they burst at the seams and disintegrate under the burden of the novelistic convention. A memorable trope of the decomposing form is to found in the preface to *The Spoils of Poynton,* where the standard metaphor of the germ of the story gives way to the metaphor of the virus of language (uncannily anticipating William Burroughs's well-known dictum). After pointing to a casual remark overheard during a party, a "minute and wind-blown seed" of the narrative, and after describing it in terms of its fineness, accuracy and fruitfulness, James suddenly turns to the virus metaphor and further elaborates it into the image of life's "splendid waste."[26] The suggestion of the disordered and uncontrolled form is powerfully developed in the preface to *The Golden Bowl* where the American writer discusses the artist's right to ceaselessly revise his or her works. Although he tries to stick to the organic imagery, suffusing the newly-discovered rhetoric of revision with the metaphors of flowering and blooming, James concludes his text with the following, almost Nietzschean coda: "We are condemned […] whether we will or no, to abandon and outlive, to forget and disown and hand over to desolation, many vital or social performances – if only because the traces, records, connexions, the very memorials we would fain preserve, are practically impossible to rescue for that purpose from the general mixture."[27]

Importantly, the late James is a self-styled revisionist who perceives art as a "*living* affair"[28] not in the sense of its aspiring to the full, mature and complete form, but in

24 James, *French Writers*, 1072.
25 *Ibidem*, 1074-1075.
26 *Ibidem*, 1138-1139.
27 *Ibidem*, 1340.
28 *Ibidem*, 1335 (emphasis in the original).

the sense of its inexhaustibility, its boundlessness, its proneness to organic deviations, mutations and variations. In the remarks closing the preface to *The Golden Bowl* James refers to an "incalculable art" involved in the writing of literary texts.[29] This highly charged phrase, which stands in apparent contradiction to the writer's organic (or is it simply realistic?) ideals of the unified, harmonious and integral work of fiction, is richly resonant and finds its parallels in James's writerly practice, in particular in the last works which anticipated the modernist ideal of the literary text as processual, multivocal and consciously self-deconstructive. James's vision of the novel's limitless and inestimable potential may be situated in the context of the Adornian stress on the discontinuous form as the main characteristic of the late work of art. Being incalculable, the novel lends itself to moments of self-contradiction and self-negation. It also does away with the utopia of the organic form by letting itself be shattered from within (let us note in passing that in James's last finished novel the bursting of the form is presented symbolically as the cracking of the golden bowl).

This leads us to Adorno's contention that one of the characteristics of the late works is that they display the author's inclination towards compressing and exhausting the inherited artistic conventions. This is yet another issue seemingly contrary to James's critical assumptions and literary practice (one thinks here not only about his novels and short stories but also about his critical essays). As just pointed out, James's nuanced prose is ostensibly inexhaustible in generating long and apparently endless clauses; already in the first paragraph of the first preface (to the *Roderick Hudson* volume) he makes us aware of his "tendency to multiply" and to write by "unfolding" and ceaselessly developing his themes.[30] Having attested to the formal and linguistic expansiveness of such novels as *The Ambassadors* or *The Wings of the Dove*, one could consider it problematic, indeed absurd, to discuss James's novelistic idiom, early or late, in the context of the minimalist aesthetics of the Adornian *Spätstil*. To the contrary, one feels that the categories used to describe the rhetoric of James's last novels ought to emphasize the ideas of its opulence and profusion, not the ones that would reveal the work's delimiting features and imperatives.

While not contesting the latter point, we should definitely point out the paradoxical nature of what might be called James's linguistic and rhetorical exuberance, or even extravagance. One of the most conspicuous features of the novelist's late style is the serious impairment of its mimetic function, all the more surprising as James aimed at the realistic presentation of his characters' motives, aspirations and actions. In his penetrating analysis of *The Wings of the Dove*, J. Hillis Miller notices that the ostensibly

29 *Ibidem*, 1339. For a further discussion, see Jacek Gutorow, "Toward the Incalculable: A Note on Henry James and Organic Form," *The Henry James Review*, 35. 3 (2014): 285-294.

30 James, *French Writers*, 1040.

realistic abundance of details leaves the reader with the impression of the unreality of the presented world. While referring to Roland Barthes's concept of *l'effet du réel*, the critic argues that James's last novels are not so much realistic as they are "realistic" (in quotation marks), subverting their own convention and in a way parodying their own mimetic purposes.[31] Their language is so studied and laborious, so rich and lush in details, that in the end it loses its representational character and becomes its own subject: "each apparently 'realistic' or mimetically represented element stands for something else that is named only indirectly, can be named only indirectly, in catachresis."[32] The resulting dispersion of meanings gives the reader a strong sense of the exhaustion of the narrative which at times seems tautological: it speaks about its own impossibility as it piles up more and more parallel clauses, sentences and paragraphs. James tries to compress the reality into language yet what he achieves is its linguistic and highly rhetorical simulation, spectral and make-believe.

Interestingly, Hillis Miller reminds us that James did not finish the two novels that might have been supposed to crown his novelistic output: *The Ivory Tower* and *The Sense of the Past*. The American writer felt it impossible to go on narrating stories and simply gave up writing; it is by the way important to note that it was his own resolution (and not death) which was the main cause of the discontinuance. The sheer inability to continue and cohere fragments into an organic whole is obviously the kind of effect analyzed by Adorno in his essays on late style. In his own way, Miller interprets James's reluctance to finish his tales in the context of the deconstructive dictum of the spectrality and self-referentiality of all writing, the aporia (or, as Miller calls it, the "quasi-Turn-of-Screw effect"[33]) realized by the novelist in his last years. To this suggestive reading one could add James's own explanations included in his "Working Notes for *The Ivory Tower*," in themselves a dense synopsis of what was to be written and a roundabout confession of artistic impotence of the kind found later in, say, Eliot or Beckett. At one moment the novelist remarks on the impossibility of writing the next sections of his novel: "I seem to see already how my action, however tightly packed down, will strain my ten Books, most blessedly, to cracking. That is exactly what I want, the tight packing *and* the beautifully audible cracking."[34] This is manifestly not the James of "The Art of Fiction." What we hear in the two sentences is a sense of abrupt ending, coming without climax or conclusion, taking the writer by surprise at the sudden exhaustion of both the narrative and (probably) the will to narrate.

31 J. Hillis Miller, *Literature as Conduct. Speech Acts in Henry James* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 154.

32 *Ibidem*, 318.

33 *Ibidem*, 326.

34 Henry James, "Working Notes for *The Ivory Tower*," in *The Ivory Tower. An Uncompleted Novel* (Milton Keynes: Aegypan Press, reprint of the 1914 edition), 152 (emphasis in the original).

In the already quoted preface to *The Golden Bowl* James sets forth the hypothesis of the transcendental self which is capable of surpassing its own limits and conventions. The novelist's radical and transgressive propositions make one think not only of Adorno, but also of poststructuralist and deconstructive projects. With James, the problem of subjectivity seems to have arisen out of his preoccupations with the idea of revision, in itself one of the central notions lying behind the concept of the edition. It is essential to remember that for the American writer the process of textual revision and narrative reinterpretation was not just a technical or rhetorical issue. Significantly, it is described as both an existential ordeal and a mode of perception: "the deviations and differences […] became, as I say, my very terms of cognition."[35] James's careful revisions of his old novels and short stories were treated by him as "new readings" and "new conductors of sense," and they were supposed by him to provide the "very record and mirror of the general adventure of one's intelligence."[36] At one moment, the novelist sees himself as following in the old footsteps left in snow. The passage deserves to be quoted in full:

> It was, all sensibly, as if the clear matter being still there, even as a shining expanse of snow spread over a plain, my exploring tread, for application to it, had quite unlearned the old pace and found itself naturally falling into another, which might sometimes indeed more or less agree with the original tracks, but might most often, or very nearly, break the surface in other places. What was thus predominantly interesting to note, at all events, was the high spontaneity of these deviations and differences, which became thus things not of choice, but of immediate and perfect necessity: necessity to the end of dealing with the quantities in question at all.[37]

Towards the end of the text, James makes a distinction between the non-revisionists (who are "numerous," "protected" and "undisturbed") and the revisionists (who "sound […] more abysmal waters").[38] It should be noted that the language used in the New York Edition's final preface is highly significant and self-evident. Thus, the effort of textual reexamination and rewriting implies a new way of seeing and is in fact an existential venture; to correct what one wrote is to challenge one's old self and, on a more general level, to question the stability and legitimacy of the self as a source of meanings. James's intentions are flatly encapsulated in passages like this one: "we are condemned […] to abandon and outlive, to forget and disown and hand over to desolation, many vital or social performances – if only because the traces, records, connections, the very memorials we would fain preserve, are practically impossible to rescue for that purpose from the general mixture."[39] What the American novelist postulates is clearly the dissolution

35 James, *French Writers*, 1330.
36 *Ibidem*, 1335.
37 *Ibidem*, 1330.
38 *Ibidem*, 1336.
39 *Ibidem*, 1340.

of the self and the near-annihilation of subjectivity in the name of the "general mixture." As we know, such was also the intention of his last novels, those strange literary enterprises in which the realistic convention with its postulates of stable meanings and narrative voice/s exceeds and exhausts itself in the seemingly never-ending series of syntactical and semantic shifts and switches.

Situating James's late writings in the context of Adorno's dialectical concept of *Spätstil* is by no means an obvious gesture. As can be seen, however, there exist certain analogies which make it possible to speak of James's late style not as just a culmination of his *oeuvre* but rather an effect of the strong imperative to rewrite, revise and refashion one's past works – the critical moments considered by Adorno as constitutive of the rhetoric of lateness. The effort of reconstruction is undoubtedly there. Not that the novelist was or wanted to be a radical. After all James, unlike Beethoven, did not seek to proclaim himself in opposition to the social environment or artistic conventions. Nor did he want to negate art in the name of absolute expression. Yet the urge to complicate and indeed question his own work, to forward and assist its own exhaustion and dissolution, to point to its existential insufficiency and irrelevance, is a critical impulse conspicuously compatible with the Adornian description of late style. In this view, the latter is approached not only as an elaboration of the literary idiom but also as a questioning and critique of language and artistic form (convention) in their capability to reflect on the world and one's self. The ends of such a critique is a heightened awareness of the inadequacy of the medium and an assumption of art as necessarily anti-mimetic and anti-realistic. As is well known, this tendency informed James's last writings, and it gave them a distinct, unmistakable flavor.

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Modernism Re-visited

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"I TRY TO PRAY AND I THINK OF SOMETHING CLEVER": KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND MODERNIST PRAYER

Abstract: Katherine Mansfield was raised in a culture that instilled prayer as central to daily life. She recorded her first extant diary entry in her *Book of Common Prayer;* those penciled notes started a lifelong dialogue with religion. However, Mansfield's emphasis on individuality and art over tradition resulted in her ambivalence towards religion; she was critical of a piety learned by rote and of a dogma to which one blindly adhered. This paper contends, however, that she exploited the complexity of prayer in her private and published work. Forging her writing style, Mansfield consistently used prayer as both a subject and form in her stories, journals, and poetry. In her fiction, she records an extended narrative of the conflicted petitioner. Most importantly, she used prayer to examine the spiritual nature of the writer. Mansfield's religious sensibility, both reactive and participatory, was part of her search for the miraculous. While T.S. Eliot in his praise of the "Light Invisible" eventually reclaimed prayer for modernism, Mansfield focused, instead, on an individual's struggle in using prayer. In assessing Mansfield in relation to Eliot, this paper examines "Prelude," "At the Bay," "Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Taking the Veil," as well as some of her unpublished sketches. In addition, there is particular emphasis on her poems that take the form of prayer. While Mansfield's fictional characters expect an immediate response to prayer, privately Mansfield recognized her ongoing effort required for meaningful meditation.

Key words: prayer, modernism, the penitent in literature, modernist reactions to religion, Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot

Katherine Mansfield's parents fostered her early relationship with prayer: they gave her *The Book of Common Prayer* which would have encouraged recitations of the collects in the Anglican service. Her copy also documents her writing life: it contains her penciled notes, part of her first known diary entry, "I am going to be a Mauri [sic] missionary."[1] Mansfield's notes indicate that this was not a book simply to be used during services; instead, it was a book with which she felt an intimacy and freedom by inserting her thoughts and experience. That act appears to contradict Antony Alpers' impressions that overshadow Mansfield's complicated relationship with orthodoxy: in his biography, he stated that "the Church of England played scarcely more part in [...Mansfield's] life than it had in her father's."[2] Recently Redmer Yska points with greater clarity to the Beauchamps' religious foundations when he writes, "religion […] shaped the family's

1 Gerri Kimber, *Katherine Mansfield: The Early Years* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 90.

2 Antony Alpers, *Life of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Viking, 1980), 19.

life in Karori."[3] Ken Arvidson accurately assesses the influence of these early experiences on Mansfield: "It was habitual for her to think religiously."[4] This essay looks at that relationship of religious practice to the self in some of Mansfield's characters, analyzes her use of prayer in her poetry, and advances a reading of her modernist approach to prayer as a path to be a better writer.

Just as T.S. Eliot would later reject his Unitarian upbringing, Mansfield would reject Anglican orthodoxy, a reaction that resulted from familiarity with the tradition: Sir Harold Beauchamp was on the vestry at St. Mary's; the maid Rose Ridler "taught Sunday school at the Karori Parochial Hall which the Beauchamp girls attended [...] accompanied by their grandmother."[5] Both in Karori and later in Wellington, there were "regulation church attendances on Sundays" with the children present at both morning Sunday school and evening services.[6] Her uncle Valentine Waters was the choirmaster. The Beauchamp family's religious involvement is clearly illustrated with her brother Leslie's Christening at St. Mary's Church in Karori.[7] At the same ceremony, Annie Beauchamp and her sister, Belle, were also baptized.[8] This information forces a reevaluation of claims that "Mansfield had no such [religious] conditioning in her early years. She appears remarkably free and untormented."[9] Mansfield freed herself from the organized church, but she was knowledgeable of Anglican traditions; she inserts reactions to religious conditioning, just as she annotated her prayer book, throughout her stories, journals, and poetry. As readily as Eliot would include allusions to Dante, Mansfield made effective use of religious texts: when assessing herself as a writer, she references the *King James Bible* with lines that would have come from her deep memory: "Why do ye tarry . . .! Ah, why indeed?"[10]

Mansfield's Running Commentary on Prayer

If Mansfield's early years in Wellington included a life that nurtured participation in the Anglican community, she continued to be exposed to and reacted against those

3 Redmer Yska, *A Strange Beautiful Excitement: Katherine Mansfield's Wellington 1888—1903* (Dunedin, New Zealand: Otago University Press, 2017), 111.

4 Ken Arvidson, "Dancing on the Hand of God: Katherine Mansfield's Religious Sensibility," in *The Critical Response to Katherine Mansfield,* ed. Jan Pilditch. 211-218 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), 212.

5 Kimber, *Early Years,* 53.

6 Yska, *Strange Beautiful Excitement*, 176.

7 Kimber, *Early Years,* 44.

8 Yska, *Strange Beautiful Excitement*, 111.

9 C. K. Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot," in *Answering to the Language*, 149-161, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), 151.

10 Barbara Lounsberry, *Virginia Woolf's Modernist Path* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), 200. The quotation is from the KJB, Acts 22:16.

traditions when she was studying in London. At Queens College, Walter Rippmann, her influential teacher, shared a two-page quotation by Samuel Augustus Tipple in Mansfield's autograph book. Tipple was "a favourite of Ruskin," and his ideas could only have fed the youthful Mansfield's reimagining of spirituality with her growing interest in aestheticism.[11] That quotation emphasizes personal experience over dogma: "Has not God drawn nearer to us [...] at times and spoken with us more intimately or healingly in a wonderful sunset than in any words of the preacher?"[12] One of Mansfield's diary entries from that period records the New Year's Eve church service that ushered in 1904. She was staying with her uncle Henry Herron Beauchamp:[13]

> I have just returned from a Midnight Service. It was very very beautiful & solemn. The air outside was cold and bracing and the Night was a beautiful thing. Over all the woods & the meadows Nature had tenderly flung a veil to protect from the frost, but the trees stood out, dark and beautiful, against the clear starry sky. The church looked truly very fit to be God's House, tonight. It looked so strong, so invincible, so hospitable.
>
> It was only during the Silent Prayer that I made up my mind to write this. I mean this year to try and be a different person, and I want, at the end of this year, to see how I have kept all the vows that I have made tonight.
>
> So much happens in a year. One may mean so much good and do so little.
>
> I am writing this by the light of a wee peep of gas, and I have only got on a dressing gown -- so *decollete* [sic]. I am so tired, I think I must go to bed. Tomorrow will be the 1st of January. What a wonderful and what a lovely world this is. I thank God tonight that I am.[14]

Mansfield balances her youthful optimism with the sobering thought that one can expect to "do so little." The entry explores an unusually mature reflection: Mansfield connects the silence of prayer and writing. Not only does Mansfield sense a serenity through prayer, she observes that those impressions give the writer the groundwork for assessing herself, to "try and be a different person."

Furthermore, the thoughtful earnestness of Mansfield's observation along with the image of "Nature" supplying its "cold and bracing" control over the Night approaches a poetic moment. Her diction and intentional use of the upper case carry the same impact of her later style. Mansfield embraces a revelation of the self through nature, and while the romantic ideal is not new, one aspect of her writing predicts her modernistic style: the revelation is hinged to the inclusion of a single word, "tonight." Her meditation is not an endorsement that at a future time the church would impress her as open and strong. In the privacy of her room, with a gas light that flickers in imitation

11 Kimber, *KM Early Years*, 114.

12 *Ibidem*.

13 Henry Beauchamp was the father of Mary who authored *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898).

14 *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: Vol 4 – The Diaries,* eds. Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 13-14.

of the night sky, she offers her most transcendent observation, “I thank God tonight that I am.” The statement has an understated simplicity: Mansfield writes on the verge of sleep while she assesses her sincerity. Readers here are invited into an intimate, prayerful reflection rather than an authoritative doctrine that she knew and would have heard in church that night.

Mansfield’s commentary on spiritual uncertainty is a distinctive contribution to modernism. Unlike Eliot, Mansfield does not position prayer in the foreground. Instead, she integrates it for the reader to assess a character’s earnestness. In “Prelude” (1918), for example, Mansfield returns to the image of the nighttime landscape. When Kezia, like Mansfield the young diarist, is on the eve of change, she looks to the heavens: “Everything looked different—the [...] gardens far bigger and wilder. Bright stars speckled the sky and the moon hung over the harbour dabbling the waves with gold.”[15] Kezia is filled with wonder: she “could not open her eyes wide enough. ‘Do stars ever blow about?’”[16] Her awe is coupled with exhaustion: despite the fact that she asserts, “‘I’m not an atom bit sleepy,’” she adds, “‘But my eyes keep curling up in such a funny sort of way.’ She gave a long sigh, and to stop her eyes from curling she shut them...”[17] Here is a crafted Mansfieldian passage that illustrates her earlier prayerful observation that nature elicits a sense of being: “tonight [. . .] I am.” Upon arriving at the new home, unlike Lottie who sleepily asks where they are, Kezia exclaims with pure emotion, “‘Ooh!’”[18] Mansfield contrasts the experience of the two sisters: compared with the younger Lottie’s sleepy disorientation, Kezia’s awareness is influenced by a Wordsworthian spot of time; however, Mansfield used romantic ideas similarly to the influence of such ideas on Virginia Woolf; in a letter to Lytton Strachey she explained, “romanticism. How do I catch it? [. . .] I think, [it] comes from the effort of breaking with complete representation. One flies into the air.”[19]

One such flight takes place later in the story; Mansfield humorously accentuates Lottie’s naïve demonstration of rote religious practice:

> Gentle Jesus meek anmile,
> Look pon a little child.
> Pity me, simple Lizzie
> Suffer me to come to thee.[20]

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15 *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: Vol 2,* eds. Gerri Kimber and Vincent O’Sullivan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 60.

16 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 61.

17 *Ibidem*.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: Vol. II,* eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, eds. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 568-9.

20 Lottie misspeaks the second half of the first, and the second and third lines of Wesley’s hymn: “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,/Look upon a little child;/Pity my simplicity,/Suffer me to come to Thee.”

Lottie's recitation lacks a clear understanding of Charles Wesley's words, but the humor of her childish parroting is directly linked to the words that she has learned correctly: "Gentle Jesus [...] suffer me to come to thee." The lesson is mixed with confusion. Mansfield had previously considered this hymn in an early, unpublished poem, "The Last Thing" (1907):

> You, all ready for your bed,
> First kneel down by Mummy's chair
> Fold your hands upon her lap
> Learn to say a little prayer.
>
> First, just 'thank you, God' -- and then
> 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild'
> Last 'I lay me down to sleep
> Make me please a better child.'[21]

The last stanza exposes the child's real motivation:

> Very solemn, very grave.
> Then you get up from your knees
> And you rush to Daddy kins
> 'Now the Barley-sugar -- please.'[22]

The speaker addresses the younger self who expected immediate reward. The child seeks something tangible; prayer is memorized, less motivated by Godliness than by sweets. Mansfield wrote the poem in a period of teenage disaffection. At the time she identified more with the wit of Oscar Wilde than the devotion of a spiritual seeker; she might have, like St. Oscar, believed in his proclamation that "When the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers."[23]

When Mansfield integrates her commentaries about prayer into her episodic stories, she adds a modernist perspective and style, alluding to prayer with a simple reference or the rhythm in her language. In "At the Bay" (1921), for example, when Kezia asks about Uncle William, whose death occurs before the story takes place, her grandmother, Mrs. Fairfield, states events with the cadence of the Nicene Creed: "'He went to the mines, and he got sunstroke there and died.'"[24] There is, however, no soothing platitude or promise of heavenly afterlife in the face of Kezia's childishly stubborn demand for reassurance that death will never affect her. Even though Mrs. Fairfield speaks with

21 *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Works of Katherine Mansfield: Vol 3 – The Poetry and Critical Writings,* eds. Gerri Kimber and Angela Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 53.

22 *Ibidem*.

23 Oscar Wilde, "An Ideal Husband," *The Complete Works*, vol. 8, (New York: Doubleday, 1923), 260.

24 *KM Edinburgh Edition,* vol. 2, 357

the rhythm of prayer, her words depict a scarred landscape with a "little man fallen over like a tin soldier by the side of a big black hole."[25] This explanation is as much about the dead of the Great War, a topic that haunted Mansfield and was fresh in the minds of her readers when the story was written; for them there was no rite of burial nor real consolation.

Mansfield was staring at her own mortality when writing "At the Bay," and Kezia's questions about the certainty of death anticipate the photo of Mrs. Stubbs' dead husband in the following section. Mansfield juxtaposes Mrs. Fairfield, who does not offer consolation with platitude, with Mrs. Stubbs. On an oversized photo of her deceased husband, there is a biblical quotation: "Be not afraid, it is I."[26] The garish silver lettering on the red cardboard ground conveys a conviction of eternal life: she speaks of her husband's death as an event of divine decree, "a judgment."[27] Along with these hints at Mrs. Stubbs' comfort in Christian teaching, she also corrects her visitor. Alice comments about the dropsy that caused Mr. Stubbs' death: "I suppose it was water."[28] Mrs. Stubbs is a stickler for language: that word, so often in biblical verse refers to the waters of salvation, and she corrects Alice. Afterwards, Alice's reaction is skillfully ambiguous, but her desire to return home is rooted in the comfort of the physical world. She finds freedom in the present.

The character in "At the Bay" who comes closest to being moved to prayer is the reflective Jonathan Trout. He spends his Sundays "in church—he was the leader of the choir—with such fearful dramatic intensity that the meanest hymn put on an unholy splendor."[29] Trout is someone who fills common prayer with such intensity that others are left both shaken and awed. In that regard, the portrait of Trout is also Mansfield's portrait of the modernist writer who embraces simultaneously transcendent splendor and earthly terror. Mansfield shares a similar sentiment about her own creative process in a letter to Dorothy Brett. After completing *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (1921), she writes, I "Laid down the pen after writing 'Thanks be to God'. I wish there was a god, I am longing to (1) praise him (2) thank him."[30] Mansfield connects the grandeur of creativity with being moved to prayer while simultaneously dismissing belief in a divinity.

25 *Ibidem*.

26 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 361. In quoting from the King James Bible, Matt. 14:27, Mansfield changes the word order: "It is I; be not afraid."

27 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 360.

28 See, for example, KJB, John 7:38.

29 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, vol. 2, 365.

30 *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield,* 5 Vols. eds. Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984-2008), vol. 4, 278.

Elizabeth Bowen best expresses Mansfield's understanding of the modernist's rejection of orthodoxy and an unexamined dependence on prayer: "There are no signs that she was casting about to find a formula: a formula would, in fact, have been what she fled from."[31] It wasn't just with Mrs. Stubbs that Mansfield examined a blind faith. The unpublished sketch "R's first husband was a pawnbroker" (1919) has a fairy tale quality: a woman's life is shaken by death, impoverishment, and abuse. It remained a sketch, but there are qualities to the story that indicate Mansfield's careful artistry. The first husband profits from the misfortune of his clients. This causes no discomfort, but he finds out that he has been cheated: this "preyed on her husband's mind, went on preying."[32] While the pawnbroker worries, the wife prays, a practice that infuriates her second husband and aggravates her situation. When her second husband abuses her, she relates,

> Well I went to see a clergyman and told him everything and he said, 'My child [...] I am very sorry for you, but with God's help [...] it's your duty to make him a better man. You say your first husband was so good. Well, perhaps God has kept this trial for you until now.[33]

Prayer, however, offers her no safety:

> I went home—and that very night he tore my crucifix off and hit me on the head when I knelt down. He said he wouldn't have me say my prayers; it made him wild. I had a little dog at the time I was very fond of, and he used to pick it up and shout 'I'll teach it to say its prayers,' and beat it before my eyes—until—well, such was the man he was.[34]

It is impossible to predict how Mansfield would have refined the sketch; however, it has all the necessary elements of one of her crafted stories, both thematically and structurally. Once again Mansfield questions reliance on prescribed prayer in the face of terror.

Mansfield raised the same question in one of her most important stories, "The Daughters of the Late Colonel" (1920). When "Mr Farolles of St John's" pays a call on the sisters Josephine and Constantia, they are sitting in their drawing-room, kept dark like a side chapel.[35] The sisters react to his presence with the posture of prayer: "They both hung their heads."[36] Mr. Farolles, however, leaves the sisters disquieted rather than comforted with his offer to console them. The patriarchal church, after all, is not as powerful as their deceased father:

> 'If either of you would like a little Communion, either or both of you, here *and* now, you have only to tell me. A little Communion is often very help—a great comfort,' he added tenderly. But the idea of a little Communion terrified them.[37]

31 Elizabeth Bowen, "Introduction," to *Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Vintage, 1956), ix.
32 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, vol. 2, 185.
33 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 187.
34 *Ibidem*.
35 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 269.
36 *Ibidem*.
37 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 270.

The sisters' reaction reveals the formality of their upbringing in the Church.[38] Their internalized objections to the inappropriateness of the offer of the "little communion" take the form of litany:

> What! In their drawing-room by themselves—with no—no altar or anything! The piano would be much too high, thought Constantia, and Mr Farolles could not possibly lean over it with the chalice. And Katie would be sure to come bursting in and interrupt them, thought Josephine. And supposing the bell rang in the middle? It might be somebody important—about their mourning. Would they get up reverently and go out, or would they have to wait … in torture?[39]

Sensing their hesitancy, Mr. Farolles offers to accommodate them at a later time, and Josephine and Constantia maintain another aspect of Church ritual; they respond in unison as a congregation would: "'Oh yes, thank you very much!' they both said."[40]

Unlike the staid sisters who are indoctrinated in church ritual, Edna in "Taking the Veil" romanticizes prayer and believes it leads to her conversion following her infatuation with a stage actor. She describes a scene that is, for her, divine, lit in the style of a baroque painting with the actor under "one beam of light, just one beam, [… shining] full on his raised sightless face."[41] Edna retreats to the "gardens of the Convent of the Sacred Heart," a tranquil setting with the voices of the devout in the background obediently repeating the instruction of Sister Agnes.[42] There, Edna "bowed her head [and ... at] that moment the future was revealed"; Edna wants to enter a convent—not "this convent" right in front of her but, instead, a sentimentalized daydream of one.[43] It is a fantasy, similar to Mansfield's own of becoming a missionary.

Mansfield again invokes the mannerism of prayer having Edna in a sacred place and bowing her head. Instead of a spiritual meditation, Edna envisions a melodrama: like a saint she imagines giving away her jewelry while clasping a "black [library] book . . . as though it were her missal."[44] She even writes her own hagiography: she is Sister Angela, a saint whose gentle smile attracts "the little children who run to her"; her ecstasy, when the "big bee [...] crept into a freezia, and the delicate flower leaned over, swung, [and] shook," recalls the sexualized image of Bernini's St. Theresa.[45] Mansfield exposes a moment that is not transcendent but, rather, a fantasy: "now at last for the first time in her life—she had never imagined any feeling like it before—she knew

38 Scripture would allow Mr. Farolles' offer: see KJB, Matt 18: 20.
39 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 270.
40 *Ibidem*.
41 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 468.
42 *Ibidem*.
43 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 470.
44 *Ibidem*.
45 *Ibidem*.

what it was to be in love, but—in—love!"[46] The outward mechanics of prayer do not guarantee spiritual awareness. Most importantly, if Edna is unaware of her foolishness, the reader is not.

Mansfield's Prayer Poems

Readers might think with such a critical view of prayer that Mansfield might have avoided writing in the form. She was, however, familiar with the rhetoric of devotion and made effective use of it in a number of her poems. Her first major poem, "To Stanislaw Wyspianski" (1909), most often categorized simply as elegy, is organized as a public prayer. Although it was not published in English during her lifetime, Florian Sobieniowski translated it into Polish for publication.[47] Kathleen Jones and others correctly note that the poem uses "a form borrowed from Walt Whitman."[48] In 1907, when Mansfield returned to Wellington, she read the American poet and embraced a "Whitman phase."[49] The fact that Oscar Wilde had visited Whitman at his home in New Jersey could only have intensified her interest in his work. Two years later, she and Sobieniowski still discussed Whitman's poetry.[50] Mansfield would have noticed Whitman's free verse and use of litany that exploit the rhetoric from the Psalms to celebrate the individual spirit and "to erect a new faith, a post-Christian paganism worthy of the age."[51]

Mansfield's use of parallelism echoes liturgical litany and acknowledges the influence of both Whitman and the Psalms. In Mansfield's poem the humbled petitioner speaks in the voice of the outsider:

> From the other side of the world,
> From a little island cradled in the giant sea bosom,
> From a little land with no history.[52]

Mansfield shifts her parallelism in the second incantatory sequence: she uses an internal repetition reflecting an internal voice. The speaker ponders about "Piecing together, this and that, finding the pattern, solving the problem."[53] The sophisticated parallelism, alliteration, and assonance contrasts with a child's simple diction, "this and that."

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46 *Ibidem*, vol. 2, 471.

47 *Poems of Katherine Mansfield,* ed Vincent O'Sullivan (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988), 87. Sobieniowski, with whom she was romantically linked, published the translation in 1910.

48 Kathleen Jones, *Katherine Mansfield: The Story-Teller* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 118

49 Alpers, *Life of Katherine Mansfield,* 76.

50 Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 74.

51 Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski, *Prayer, A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 282.

52 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, vol. 3, 74.

53 *Ibidem*.

The speaker, however, in her litany recognizes the strength of the adult: "Oh Master, we belong to you there; / Oh Master, there we are children and awed by the strength of a giant."[54] Mansfield's apostrophe to the warrior-hero echoes military metaphors in both the bible and hymns: "I sing your praises, magnificent warrior: / I proclaim your triumphant battle."[55] Mansfield addresses Wyspianski whose godlike strength outperforms Christ's gentleness: "Yours a more personal labour than the Nazarene's miracles, / Yours a more forceful encounter than the Nazarene's gentle commands."[56] Unlike Christ who died, was buried, and returned to the living, Wyspianski "is lying there, wakeful; / The blood in his giant heart pulls red through his veins."[57] It is difficult to dismiss this work, as one critic has, as an "idealistic but rather poor poem."[58] Mansfield commands not just the conventions of prayer—the initial gesture of humility, the direct address to the powerful, and the litany of worship—but she uses them to subvert the form in applying a religious rhetoric to praise an earthly hero.

Most of Mansfield's poetry is part of the large body of private writing, unpublished during her lifetime. One such example is "Verses writ in a Foreign Bed" (1918) in which she writes of her illness with the conventions of prayer and also illustrates her ironic wit. While the poem may not demonstrate a modernist poetic, she writes of a lingering disquietude that readers find in the modernist text.

> Almighty Father of all and Most Celestial Giver
> Who hast granted to us thy children a Heart and Lungs and Liver;
> If upon me should descend thy beautiful gift of tongues
> Incline not thine Omnipotent ear to my remarks on Lungs.[59]

At first the poem appears as two playful couplets with satiric rhymes; however, in the context of Mansfield's other uses of prayer, it offers readers time to consider a calculated ambiguity. Gerri Kimber discusses the difficulty the work presents to a translator: "the French version omits the humorous tone [...] by turning Mansfield's rhyme into prayer-like prose."[60] She continues, "the French version appears much more serious and even religious in tone."[61] Kimber and Claire Davison agree that the lines are "full of pathos," and it is likely that the translator might have had to settle on a single interpretation of the poem.[62] The fact is that the short poem offers both reverence and wit. The quatrain's

54 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 75.
55 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 74.
56 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 75.
57 *Ibidem*.
58 Jeffrey Meyers, *Katherine Mansfield* (New York: New Directions, 1978), 269.
59 *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks, Vols, 1 and 2,* ed. Margaret Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 2: 144.
60 Gerri Kimber, *Katherine Mansfield: The View from France* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008), 143.
61 *Ibidem*.
62 *The Collected Poems of Katherine Mansfield,* eds. Gerri Kimber and Claire Davison (Dunedin:

unholy aspect, what Kimber calls its "perceived 'blasphemous' content," works equally with its sincerity.[63] The opening line suggests a penitent addressing God with traditional respect: "Father [...] and Celestial Giver." However, the tone turns satirical about her reason for writing, her tubercular lungs. She lists her failing lungs with her healthier heart and liver and qualifies her request: *if* you are powerful, *then* respectfully note that I have overstated the condition of my lungs. In four lines, Mansfield captures both her reliance on prayer while subverting it with a dark humor.

Mansfield continued to use prayer in poems that remained unpublished in her lifetime. The strength of these works is their private nature, just as the strength of her journals and letters is in their private nature. In *Poems* (1923), John Middleton Murry published two prayers that further suggest the confluence of her private thoughts with her early religious background. Murry supplied one with the secular title "Stars."[64] Recently restored as "Most merciful God" (1915), it is, after all, not about stars; it is a meditation that leads to a revelation that truth exists not in a single answer but, rather, in the questions that arise from praying. It starts with the respectful direct address of the collects:

> Most merciful God
> Look kindly upon
> An impudent child
> Who wants sitting on.[65]

The speaker leaves the safety of her house and garden to ponder the enormity of the night in the hope for change and correction. Looking into the heavens the speaker, with the alliterative "amazed, Almighty, August," sounds the sensation of awe.[66] The opening lines unite sound and vision: the reader hears the consonance in God and child but sees the presence of the letter "o" that connect six of the first twelve words. However, Mansfield's use of alternating end rhymes suggests that God is still distant. After the revelation of the vision, Mansfield tightens the order, switching to rhyming couplets that suggest a change to a closer relationship of her thoughts within the prayer. The penitent may be humbled, but she does not experience the immediate reward of an answer. Like much of her fiction and modernist works that aim at an open-endedness, this vision ends in ambiguity: "Was it spite [...] Was it duty..?"[67] The prayer leads to questions that linger into the night.

Otago University Press, 2016), 227.

63 Kimber, *France*, 142.

64 O'Sullivan retains Murry's title; Scott places it in the context of Mansfield's notebooks; Kimber and Smith refer to the poem by its first line.

65 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, vol. 3, 93.

66 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 93-4.

67 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 94.

Murry also published “A Little Girl’s Prayer” (1919), a meditation on stillness. The anterior action is implied: the speaker had paused to look at a single bud. The petition becomes expansive: she asks to see “The other buds, the other blooms, / The other leaves” before a substantial request for tranquility: “take into my bosom/ The breeze that is his brother/ But stiller . . .”[68] Her final request is for sharpened senses, to “hear the small birds singing/ The song that the silence knows,” before an interruption and the final parenthetical moment:

> (The Light and the Shadow whisper together,
> The lovely moment grows,
>
> Ripples into the air like water
> Away and away without sound,
> And the little girl gets up from her praying
> On the cold ground.)[69]

Mansfield cannot end the poem while still in prayer; that might imply a belief in a response. Instead, she shifts to the third person, contextualizing the meditation as part of a narrative. The “little girl” may be humbled, but she is not a child; children, in a Blakean vision, exist as clouds in the sky. Mansfield’s image of the cold ground echoes the finality of rippling shadows, a detached awareness of mortality.

Mansfield’s Modernist Statement About Prayer

T.S. Eliot’s resumption of a dialogue between the writer and Christian devotion is the standard paradigm for the modernist’s approach to religion. Mansfield contributes a different position: she embraces a dual impulse, retaining a place for prayer while dismissing orthodoxy. The approach to the spiritual, for both Mansfield and Eliot, necessitated turning away from the religion of their youth: Mansfield rejected her family’s tradition of religion and her early naïve impulse towards the evangelical; Eliot cast off his family’s liberal Unitarian faith. Their position as foreigners, Janet Wilson explains, instilled in both “a capacity for self-invention.”[70] The outsider status of Eliot and Mansfield might have bolstered their identity as artists, but their upbringing defined their need for a spiritual philosophy. Mansfield would have agreed with Eliot when he wrote that the writer must devote himself to a “total harvest of thinking, feeling, living and observing human beings.”[71]

68 *Ibidem*, vol. 3, 128.
69 *Ibidem*.
70 Janet Wilson, “ ‘Feuille d’Album’: Katherine Mansfield’s Prufrockian Encounter with T.S. Eliot,” in *Katherine Mansfield and the Bloomsbury Group,* ed. Todd Martin, 73-89 (Bloomsbury, 2017), 73.
71 T.S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 8.

Mansfield recognized Eliot's artistry. She famously read "Prufrock" aloud at one of Ottoline Morrell's literary salons at Garsington and admired the poem because, as she wrote to Virginia Woolf, it is "after all a short story."[72] Mansfield's acknowledgment of Eliot's craftsmanship is again evident when the two left a London dinner party together; she recalls the event in cadences that sound like his: they walked "past rows of little ugly houses hiding behind bitter-smelling privet hedges, [and] a great number of amorous black cats loped across the road and high up in the sky there was a battered old moon."[73] To Mansfield, Eliot's ability to combine poetry and the short story spoke to her own desire, after her brother Leslie's death, to write poetry, or at the very least "a kind of special prose."[74] In her last mention of Eliot, in a letter to Violet Schiff, Mansfield maintains that despite speaking "so grudgingly of Elliot [sic ...] I think Prufrock by far and away the most interesting and the best modern poem. It stays in one's memory."[75] His influence is most evidenced in the rhythms in her fiction; she writes about choosing "not only the length [… but also] the sound of every sentence […] After [… writing] I read it aloud – numbers of times – just as one would *play over* a musical composition."[76]

Mansfield, however, had other equally strong opinions about Eliot: aside from "Prufrock," Mansfield thought Eliot's poems "unspeakably dreary" and "without emotion."[77] In a letter to Dorothy Brett, Mansfield describes Eliot as "pathetic [… and suffering] from his feelings of powerlessness […. He] is too serious about himself, even a little bit absurd. […] He wants kindly laughing at and setting free."[78] That last observation sounds not only like a description of Prufrock but also like a description of the daughters of the late colonel, who accepted indoctrination rather than rely on their own experience. Many readers would agree with C. K. Stead about the two writers, that by 1923 "one was dead; but […] the other – as *writer* – was dying."[79]

One way to evaluate Mansfield's importance alongside Eliot is through Langdon Hammer's question about modernism: "Is […] 'modern-ness' an index of the way it extends the past, or is it rather 'modern' because it breaks with the past? Does 'modern' mean some kind of renewal and continuity, or does it mean rupture?"[80] Eliot's

72 *KM Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 318.
73 *KM Collected Letters,* vol. 1, 312.
74 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, vol. 4, 192.
75 *KM Collected Letters,* vol. 5, 256.
76 *KM Collected Letters,* vol. 4, 165.
77 *KM Collected Letters*, vol. 2, 318.
78 *KM Collected Letters,* vol. 5, 75.
79 C. K. Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot," in *Answering to Language,* 149-161 (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989), 160.
80 Langdon Hammer, "The Use of Quotation in Poetry," *Modern Poetry*: *Lecture 10,* (New Haven: Yale University Open Lecture Series, 2007), accessed 16 September 2017, http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/514/engl-310

attraction to religious convention harks back to an ancestral identity, and "academics have tended to treat everything he published as of more or less equal interest" even though there was a "dramatic falling away" in his work over time.[81] On the other hand, Mansfield in her short lifetime subscribed to the "Modernist agenda" of the literary magazine *Rhythm* (1911-13), which she edited along with Murry: "its declared intent [was] that art, to be modern, must first learn to be brutal."[82] That brutality is embedded not only in her observations about prayer but in the harsh turns in her prayer poems, works that appear conventional but whose themes contain a disquieting, modernist ambiguity. Eliot's canonical status should not obscure Mansfield's approach any more than one would now accept Eliot's assessment of Mansfield. He believed Mansfield "to be a dangerous WOMAN."[83] In a lecture at the University of Virginia, Eliot dismissed Mansfield's story "Bliss" as "slight" but conceded the skill with which she "handled perfectly the *minimum* material – it is what […] would be called feminine."[84] That lecture, known for Eliot's anti-Semitism, also exposes a dismissive misogyny that conflicts with Eliot's spiritual equipoise, "the still point of the turning world."[85]

In contrast, Mansfield's pilgrim is always on an uphill journey, attempting to steady herself on unstable ground. Her commentary on or reflection about her own spiritual state often goes beyond that of the "high-spirited pagan for whom the notion of art had replaced traditional religion as the source and receptacle of the highest truths and the finest achievements of humankind."[86] She was upset with herself for not seriously reading the bible while at Queens College; her description of her headmaster, however, demonstrates that her attention had been on her craft; she describes him while delivering his lessons: "I have been very interested in the Bible. I have read the Bible for hours on end [.... Why] didn't I listen to the old Principal who lectured on Bible History twice a week instead of staring at his face that was very round, a dark red colour with a kind of bloom on it & covered all over with little red veins with endless tiny tributaries that ran even into his forehead & were lost in his bushy white hair."[87] Mansfield's prayer poems express acceptance of the same conflict between spiritual interest and her fascination with the quotidian. Finally, her modernism equates the growth of the penitent to her growth as a writer. In her notebook from October 1921, she confesses her struggle for attentiveness and the difficulty of summoning that through prayer:

81 Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot," 160.
82 *KM Edinburgh Edition*, "Introduction," v. 1, xxi.
83 *The Letters of T.S. Eliot,* v. 1, ed. Valerie Eliot (New York: Harcourt, 1988), 389.
84 T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), 35-6.
85 T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1941), 11.
86 Stead, "Katherine Mansfield and T.S. Eliot," 151.
87 *KM Collected Letters*, vol. 4, 189.

> I wonder why it should be so difficult to be humble. I do not think I am a good writer; I realise my faults better than anyone else could realise them. I know exactly where I fail. And yet, when I have finished a story & before I have begun another I catch myself *preening* my feathers. It is disheartening. There seems to be some bad old pride in my heart: a root of it that puts out a thick shoot on the slightest provocation ... This interferes very much with work. One can't be calm, clear, good as one must be while it goes on. I look at the mountains, I try to pray, & I think of something *clever.* It's a kind of excitement within one which shouldn't be there. Calm yourself. Clear yourself.[88]

She does not write, "I must be calm and clear"; instead, she addresses not just herself, but the imperative also directs others to try the same practice. Later in the same entry she proposes a qualified answer: "Perhaps poetry will help." Mansfield is both struggling penitent and modernist writer: the struggle for self-knowledge comes from quiet, but there is no "Light Invisible."[89] Ultimately for Mansfield the sacred act is experiencing the present, knowing there is the possibility of finding truth in the ongoing act of writing.

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88 Kimber, *KM Edinburgh Edition*, v. 4, 389-90.

89 T.S. Eliot, "Choruses from 'The Rock,'" *Collected Poems: 1909-1935*, (New York: Harcourt, 1936), 209.

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THE FEMININE CONDITION: WOMEN AND MADNESS IN KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S "PRELUDE"

Abstract: This article discusses the representation of women and mental illness in Katherine Mansfield's short story, "Prelude." The theme of madness and psychology in feminist literary criticism has been an active field of contemporary research. Critics such as Phyllis Chesler, Elaine Showalter, and Jane Ussher view some forms of madness as traditionally gendered, feminine conditions in which women become mad due to their oppressive realities. Additionally, Louis Arnorsson Sass links madness to Modernism by examining its adoption as a symbol of rebellion. Although a recent volume of the Katherine Mansfield Studies Series, *Katherine Mansfield and Psychology*, paid special attention to the influence of mental illness in Mansfield's *oeuvre*, there is still much to be studied. Thus, this paper analyzes the ways in which Mansfield, as a Modernist writer, incorporates the themes of women's madness and rebellion in "Prelude." To do so, this work focuses on the figures of Linda and Kezia Burnell. Although the diagnosis of fictional figures is untenable, indications of psychological suffering in the context of the Burnell women's social and historical environment are undeniable. The narrative techniques Mansfield employs in describing their mental states serve to highlight implications of madness and the reasons behind their mental instability: their oppressed status and cross-generational desire for freedom. The examination of instances of hallucination, animization, apophany, symbology and other symptoms leads to the conclusion that for Linda and Kezia Burnell the only means of escape or rebellion is through madness.

Key words: women and madness, gender studies, modernism, Katherine Mansfield studies, madness as rebellion

Madness, one of the most enigmatic concepts of Western culture in recent and ancient history, has often been considered a feminine condition. In order to fully understand madness, it is important to view it not as an ontological given, but as a notion whose meaning is culturally ascribed. In other words, although it may have its origins in medicine and biology, the definition of madness depends on social ideology. Many scholars have previously encountered a pattern in the diagnosis and description of mental disorders: women, in their association with patriarchal systems of oppression, have often been situated within the parameters of psychological instability. Moreover, as Jane Ussher states, "the symptoms of the various syndromes are often indistinguishable" and current medical terminology often accommodates and fuses with previous disorders and symptoms.[1] This being said, the reality and distress of mental illnesses

1 Jane M. Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 103.

cannot be discarded because "the despair, the anxiety, the desperate misery is far more than a label, more than a construction without a firm basis in reality."[2] Thus, madness works within an often obscure paradigm; for it is a product of the interaction between culture and biology.

This article seeks to examine the ways in which Katherine Mansfield's short story "Prelude" discusses the female characters' thwarted desire for social liberation, resulting in madness. This will be done by highlighting and analyzing certain indicators of mental instability and oppression encountered in Mansfield's protagonists, Linda and Kezia Burnell. By examining the behavior and depiction of the characters in "Prelude" with regard to mental disorders, one can gain insight into the social causes and implications of their madness.

Women and Madness

According to feminist criticism, women's madness serves two interrelated functions: as a patriarchal label to oppress women and as women's only method of escape from their assigned gender roles.[3] Concerning the latter, Ussher states that this misogynistic social context acts as an instigator of mental illness by creating "a culture of incarceration and oppression within which madness is the inevitable outcome for women."[4] Elaine Showalter adds that "women's high rate of mental disorder is a product of their social situation" of cultural subjugation.[5] In line with this argument, the analysis of "Prelude" suggests that, Mansfield depicts how Kezia and Linda Burnell fall or escape into madness as a result of misogynistic oppression and their desire to break free from their gender roles. And so, one must consider the complex relation between women, society, and madness within a specific historical context. The terminology of the field

2 *Ibidem*, 7.

3 For more on the theories concerning women and madness, see also: Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000; Busfield, Joan. *Men, Women and Madness: Understanding Gender and Mental Disorder*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996; Busfield, Joan. "Mental Illness as social product or social construct: a contradiction in feminists' arguments?" *Sociology of Health and Illness* 10.4 (1988): 521-542; Howell, Elizabeth. "The Influence of Gender on Diagnosis and Psychopathology." In *Women and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes, 153-159. New York: Basic Books, 1981; Lerner, Harriet E. "The Hysterical Personality: 'A Woman's Disease.'" In *Women and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes, 196-206. New York: Basic Books, 1981; Miller, Jean B. and Ira Mothner. "Psychological Consequences of Sexual Inequality." In *Women and Mental Health*, edited by Elizabeth Howell and Marjorie Bayes, 41-50. New York: Basic Books, 1981; Mitchell, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975; and Russell, Denise. *Women, Madness and Medicine*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

4 Ussher, *Women's Madness*, 7.

5 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987), 3.

of psychology has changed over time, yet different syndromes and symptoms of madness seem to overlap and become easily interchangeable.

The gradual and significant increase in female psychiatric patients from the Victorian period onwards, along with mainstream propaganda about the Victorian madwoman, led to a correlation between women and insanity and connotations of some forms of madness as inherently feminine conditions. And as with all binary constructions, women's madness served as a counterpart to male rationality. In the Victorian era, the reason for the predominance of female patients was believed to be "that women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control."[6] This establishment of women's insanity as solely within the female sexual or biological terrain led to the creation, or discovery, of specifically feminine mental illnesses. Some of the most recognized female mental disorders—puerperal insanity, hysteria, neurasthenia, and schizophrenia—are all analogous. As these forms of madness can be considered a result of oppression and the only method available to escape, many symptoms—such as dissociation from society (including from husbands and children), laughing, temporary paralysis, headaches, depression, and isolation, among others—correlate with women's defiance of their assigned gender role within society.[7] According to contemporary medical textbooks, this could lead to behaviors that were closely associated to depressive and self-destructive dispositions with "'a total negligence of, and often very strong aversion to, her child and husband […] explosions of anger occur, with vociferations and violent gesticulations […] [and] most awful oaths and imprecations.'"[8]

Although symptoms and conditions were the same, the terminology of female madness slowly evolved from Victorian hysteria to modern schizophrenia. In contrast to the hysterical madwoman, the schizophrenic was constructed and adopted as a Modernist symbol of rebellion.[9] This connection between schizophrenia and Modernism is subtly implied within "Prelude," in which Mansfield imbues her characters with a need for independence that subsequently triggers their descent into madness. The term schizophrenia, according to Louis Sass, was recognized as a schism or split "in two main ways: in the relationship to external reality and in the relationship to the self" whereby the

6 *Ibidem*, 55.

7 For more on the symptoms of female madness, see: Showalter, Elaine. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago, 1987; Ussher, Jane M. *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?* New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991; and Appignanesi, Lisa. *Mad, Bad, and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*. London: Virago, 2008.

8 Quoted in Showalter, *Female Malady*, 57-58.

9 For a more in-depth study of schizophrenia and Modernism, see Sass, Louis Arnorsson. *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

schizophrenic feels completely isolated from the world and fragmented into multiple selves.[10] In relation to this division between the personal and the public, schizophrenic symptoms included "lack of affect, disturbed associations, autism, and ambivalence."[11] This isolation and apathy has clear origins in hysteria, a condition that was frequently the psychological result of a woman's rejection of her social role. Further symptoms are defined as "delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech (frequent derailment or incoherence), grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and[…]'affective flattening,'"[12] thus, an evidently feminist reading can be derived from the analysis of mental maladies and their symptoms.

As previously stated, madness can often be considered the result of misogynistic oppression, and its symptoms reflect unhappiness and desires for liberation on a subconscious plane. Mad women would escape into a psychological irrational realm as a means of freedom, and the clues for such a retreat would lie in their symptoms: hallucinations allowed them to create a different reality; dissociative behavior alienated them from actuality; and apathy or affective flattening would aid in such dissociation and further isolate women from society by severing emotional ties. These symptoms highlight a schism between women and reality and women and themselves in which their oppression and gender roles did not allow them to create stable, healthy relationships. Although this is not a novel theory of women and madness, delineating these maladies and symptoms and their causes and effects serves to provide a more in-depth basis for a fresh analysis of "Prelude."

Katherine Mansfield's "Prelude"

The connection between women and madness and Mansfield's work is a topic still left relatively unexplored. Although feminist literary theory has often been employed to analyze her oeuvre—scholars have interpreted Mansfield's short stories as subversive of the misogynistic society of her times— literary analyses have only recently included psychological readings.[13] In fact, the *Katherine Mansfield Studies* volume on, *Katherine Mansfield and Psychology,* edited by Clare Hanson, Gerri Kimber and Todd Martin

10 Louis Arnorsson Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 76.

11 Showalter, *Female Malady*, 203-204.

12 Appiganesi, Lisa, *Mad, Bad, and Sad* (London: Virago, 2008), 202.

13 For more information on psychology and madness within Katherine Mansfield's oeuvre, see Burgan, Mary. "Childbirth Trauma in Katherine Mansfield's Early Stories." *Modern Fiction Studies* 24.3 (1978): 395-412; Francis, Joan Rita. *The Chaos Within: Repressed Desires and the Divided Self in Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*. Dissertation. California State University Dominguez Hills, 2007. UMI 1449130, 2008; and Wilson, Janet. "'Where is Katherine?': Longing and (Un)belonging in the Works of Katherine Mansfield." In *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, edited by Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson, 175-188. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

in 2016, is one of the first critical works to highlight psychology and the rejection of Western patriarchal roles within a wide array of Mansfield's works.[14] According to Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, "as the prevailing symptomatic constellation in Mansfield's stories, it is of course hysteria which brings forth the question of 'woman' as not being duped by the scenarios explaining gender division" and her struggle with such oppression.[15] To contextualize Mansfield's production, works such as "Bliss," "Psychology," "The Daughters of the Late Colonel," "Frau Brechenmacher," "At Lehmann's," and those belonging to the Burnell series "At the Bay," and "The Doll's House" all signal similar perspectives in Mansfield's subtextual or, in fact, evident preoccupation with mental illness and the influence of psychology in her larger oeuvre.[16] Functioning within this thematic paradigm, "Prelude" also contributes to the interpretation of madness as a reaction to misogynistic oppression and gender roles in Mansfield's female characters. As previously stated, female mental illnesses have flexible definitions and tend to encompass each other throughout history. Thus, the examination of madness in "Prelude" falls within the parameters of schizophrenia, yet connotations of other syndromes, such as hysteria, can be detected.

"Prelude" (1918) portrays the New Zealander Burnell family, chronicling their move to a new house in the countryside. Mansfield contrasts this framework of an ordinary familial transition with her characters' tumultuous mental dispositions, focusing especially on Linda and Kezia. As Meghan Hammond states "all [Mansfield's characters] appear before the reader in states of psychological isolation"[17] even though they are constantly in contact and surrounded by others and framed by social expectations. The author depicts Linda and Kezia with particular distinction in their relation to patriarchal impositions and the effects of such oppression on their mental states. According to Kate Fullbrook, "their struggles to find their identities, the masks they wear and the ways they perceive the world" are central to "Prelude."[18] The omniscient narrator

14 Some articles of note in *Katherine Mansfield and Psychology*, ed. Clare Hanson, Gerri Kimber and Todd Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016) are: Hammond, Meghan Marie. "Mansfield's Psychology of the Emotions", 56-67; Hanson, Clare. "Katherine Mansfield and Vitalist Psychology", 23-37; Thorndike-Breeze, Rebecca. "Feeling 'Like a Work-girl': Class, Intimacy and Alienation in 'The Garden Party'", 68-81; and Dickson, Polly. "Interior Matters: Secrecy and Hunger in Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss'", 11-22.

15 Josiane Paccaud-Huguet, "A Trickle of Voice: Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Moment of Being", in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 133.

16 All these can be found in the anthology: Mansfield, Katherine. *Katherine Mansfield's Selected Stories*. Edited by Vincent O'Sullivan. New York; London: Norton, 2006.

17 Meghan Marie Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014), 107.

18 Kate Fullbrook, *Katherine Mansfield* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), 67.

conveys the inner workings of their minds and allows the reader glimpses into the way they perceive the world.

Of this mother-daughter duo, Linda exhibits the most advanced symptoms of schizophrenia. Characterized as the typical domestic figure or "Angel in the House," Mansfield portrays Linda as trapped in her role as an upper-class lady wishing to escape from the duties of continuous reproduction, child-rearing, and the maintenance of her household. "Linda is woman-as-wife, the woman of childbearing age, lost in a nightmare of fertility, the passionately desired prey of her robustly animal husband."[19] Her desire to reject this oppressive gender role results in schizophrenic symptoms and gradual insanity. As a younger counterpart to her mother, Kezia is "the girl-child who is in the process of being deformed into one of the wounded and wounding adults who populate the fiction."[20] Mansfield establishes parallelisms between mother and daughter throughout the story, which strengthen the analysis of their mental illnesses, and provides a frame of reference for the development of madness from childhood into adulthood. The descriptions of both characters indicate forms of psychological disorders, which seem to be proportional to their age and their experiences in a misogynistic society: whereas Kezia's symptoms are brief instances and sometimes difficult to recognize as such, their amplification in Linda draws direct correlations between the two.

In the opening scene of "Prelude," Mansfield highlights Linda's mental and emotional distance and rejection of her children with the depiction of her departure from the old house. When deciding whether to take her youngest daughters, Lottie and Kezia, along in the buggy, Linda contemplates abandoning them as there is no space, and she does not want to carry them. "'We shall simply have to leave them. That is all. We shall simply have to cast them off,' said Linda Burnell. A strange little laugh flew from her lips; she leaned back against the buttoned leather cushions and shut her eyes, her lips trembling with laughter."[21] In this short scene, Linda's distaste towards her children is palpable; she wants to be free, and they tie her down. This desire to leave the girls behind, consequently rejecting her role as mother and wife, and her joy at such a thought serves to isolate Linda from her family and her surroundings—another symptom of schizophrenia—as she closes her eyes and retreats into her humorous notions of abandonment.

The "strange little laugh" directly correlates to Linda's desire to repudiate her maternal role and reflects another symptom of schizophrenia characterized by "a frequent, causeless, sudden outburst of laughter."[22] With this short passage, Mansfield also

19 *Ibidem*, 68.

20 *Ibidem*, 76.

21 Katherine Mansfield, "Prelude", in *Katherine Mansfield's Selected Stories*, ed. Vincent O'Sullivan (New York; London: Norton, 2006), 79.

22 Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad, and Sad*, 204.

implies Linda's lack of control over said laughter and her body: it "flew from her lips" as if with an agency of its own. This mad mirth has physical repercussions and makes her body "tremble" with the effort of containing it, thus emphasizing Linda's lack of authority and control over her body and social situation. Shortly after, Linda creates an even larger dissociative distance between herself and her daughters by dehumanizing them and making them analogous to furniture: "How absurd they look! Either they ought to be the other way up, or Lottie and Kezia ought to stand on their heads, too. And she longed to say: 'Stand on your heads children, and wait for the storeman.' It seemed to her that would be so exquisitely funny that she could not attend to Mrs Samuel Josephs."[23] Linda's disconcerting amusement at wanting the children to stand on their heads indicates a queer, irrational humor, which denotes schizophrenic irony or "a bizarre form of satisfaction" which will "further alienate the patient from the possibility of satisfying intimacy with others."[24] Instead of empathizing with her children who are being left behind for want of space, Linda finds irrational, incomprehensible humor and pleasure in isolating herself, further signaling schizophrenic detachment. This reverie distances her and hinders communication not only with her children but with Mrs. Samuel Josephs, a neighbor who, in this case, acts as an extension of society.

This odd temperament includes a lack of empathy and "affective flattening" so that Linda feels no real affection towards her progeny; both symptoms and causes for the schizophrenic's isolation. Because of this alienation from society—her family and her neighbors—the schizophrenic retreats into her private sphere and devaluates her public self. She does this by "[abdicating] the public self entirely—either by hermitlike isolation or through refusal to interact in a more than perfunctory way—and this is accompanied by a tendency to locate the source of being in the tremors and yearnings of the inner life."[25] Mansfield depicts Linda's interactions with others as stunted and awkward, emphasizing, instead, her private self and the inner workings of her mind.

Both Linda and Kezia also seem to suffer from hallucinations—another typical schizophrenic trait. When walking through her old, empty house, Kezia has a vision of "IT" following her: "IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back door."[26] Although critics have interpreted this scene as part of a child's vivid imagination,[27]

23 Mansfield, "Prelude", 80.

24 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 114.

25 *Ibidem*, 100.

26 Mansfield, "Prelude", 82.

27 See Hammond, Meghan Marie. "Communities of Feeling in Katherine Mansfield's Fiction." In *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, by Meghan Marie Hammond, 56-67. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2014; and Miao, Tracy. "Children as Artists: Katherine Mansfield's 'Innocent Eye.'" *Journal of New Zealand Literature* 32.2 (2014): 143-166.

the parallelism between this hallucination and Linda's "THEY"—analyzed below—indicates a manifest association with mental illness. In a moment of solitude and grief regarding the departure from her home, which marks a stage in her own psychological development and maturity, Kezia experiences a haunting hallucination. Mansfield's capitalization of the pronoun imbues this figure with more textual significance, while Kezia's recognition and fear of "IT" indicate sinister psychological undertones, not mere childish fancy. Encountering "IT" within this abandoned household symbolizes Kezia's notions on domesticity and female gender roles that trigger an atmosphere of foreboding and fear of such domestic oppression. By denying her the ability to see "IT," Mansfield also withholds from the reader a full narration and representation, which further contributes to the scene's menacing and illusory significance. As Kezia is still young and her future status in society uncertain, "IT" merely haunts and frightens her; a spectral looming which may later consume her as an adult.

Linda's delusion is more detailed and vivid, signaling her increased immersion in madness and her status as an adult. Possibly alluding to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, this hallucination occurs while Linda is observing her own bedroom wallpaper. [28]

> Sometimes […] she woke and could not lift a finger, could not even turn her eyes to left or right because THEY were there […] THEY knew how frightened she was; THEY saw how she turned her heart away as she passed the mirror. What Linda always felt was that THEY wanted something of her, and she knew that if she gave herself up and was quiet, more than quiet, silent, motionless, something would really happen.[29]

Linda's more ominous "THEY" is strikingly similar to Kezia's "IT." During this episode, Linda seems to suffer from various schizophrenic symptoms: she is unable to move, which indicates some form of temporal paralysis; she imagines beings or voices that seem to request something from her; and she is silent and passive in her fear. Linda's terror parallels Kezia's: it is encountered in the private, domestic sphere and can be associated to her fear of "giving herself up" to her gendered duties as a mother and wife. Thus, the hallucinatory affinity of "IT" and "THEY" emphasizes "their roles as females who are likely to undergo the trauma of sex and pregnancy and birth" as well as other oppressive obligations that are required of upper-middle class women in the

28 It is also noteworthy that this scene may allude to, or at least is reminiscent of, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), a short story in which the protagonist, trapped in a room with yellow wallpaper, suffers from madness and hallucinations. Although there is much that can be said as to the similarities between both works—probably an entire article in itself—the scope of this study does not allow for a more in-depth analysis.

29 Mansfield, "Prelude", 91-92.

late nineteenth century.[30] The multiplication of Kezia's singular "IT" into Linda's plural "THEY" suggests that Kezia's youthful worries are less threatening; her obligations and oppressions lie in her possible future while Linda's "THEY" signal her current, numerous, and inescapable encumbrances—her progeny, her husband, the stress of maintaining her status in society, etc. As Kezia is still a child, Mansfield subtly insinuates mental illness; Linda, however, is fully immersed in Western patriarchal society causing amplified and strengthened madness.

Especially revelatory is Mansfield's suggestion that Linda is familiar with "THEY;" she has encountered them on other occasions, and they comprehend her and her fear. Mansfield states that Linda "turns her heart away as she passes the mirror." This allusion to the mirror, a significant symbol in literature, highlights its psychological typology: for when we look at our reflection, "we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul."[31] Linda, therefore, avoids the confrontation with the confrontation with her true self because she fears facing the desire to be free of the social and cultural confines of her gender role and the ensuing internal conflicts this would cause. Hence, she "turns her heart away" from any revelations these reflections may cause, choosing dissociation and apathy—symptoms of schizophrenia—as coping mechanisms. If "THEY" embody the haunting specters of Linda's obligations and duties, in submitting to what "THEY" want, she will truly lose herself. By using the term "give herself up," Mansfield subtly implies that this would result in Linda's death—"something would truly happen"—as she would become "more than quiet, silent" and completely "motionless."[32] Thus, Linda walks the line of madness: a no-man's-land between complete submission to the heteronormative social order and suicide.

Similar to schizophrenics, Linda and Kezia (mentally) animate objects. As stated by Sass, schizophrenics "may sometimes experience the world in an animized fashion (as if even the walls were listening and the clocks staring)."[33] When Kezia arrives at the new house, upon viewing the "hundreds of parrots" in the hallway, she attempts to remind herself that they are painted on the wall.[34] However, they "persisted in flying past Kezia with her lamp."[35] This animation of the wallpaper parrots is also ambiguous, for it could be due to Kezia's lively imagination; still their persistence in becoming alive

30 Marvin Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1971), 33.

31 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 309.

32 Mansfield, "Prelude", 92.

33 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 25.

34 Mansfield, "Prelude", 85.

35 *Ibidem*.

affords these painted animals their own will and reality out of her control. As with the hallucinations of "IT," Kezia's animization is triggered by her fear and doubts about this transitional period and her new environment. While the parrots are free and "fly past her," she remains trapped within her new, more socially-elevated household and the private, domestic domain.

The fact that both characters' animization occurs on wallpaper—another allusion to Perkins Gilman's story—symbolizes the superficial nature of their situation and provides connotations of entrapment: wallpaper presents a pleasing façade to the viewer, but what lies underneath is unknown, hidden, confined. Likewise, both women present an appealing and complacent exterior, yet by depicting their psychological dispositions, Mansfield demonstrates that they are oppressed and suffering.[36] The uncanny parallelism between Linda's and Kezia's animation of objects strengthens the notion that Kezia's hallucination could be due to her own incipient madness. While Linda observes her bedroom wallpaper, more images seem to come alive. She begins to animate a flower and moves on to other objects in her bedroom: "Things had a habit of coming alive like that. Not only large substantial things like furniture but curtains and patterns of stuffs and the fringes of quilts and cushions."[37] Linda's quilt tassels become a "funny procession of dancers," and the medicine bottles turn into "a row of little men with brown top-hats on."[38] These objects that Linda personifies also express a lack of control. The tassels are like puppets in a procession in which they dance without being able to escape. The medicine bottles, which beggar the question why Linda has so many, connote illness and resemble doctors. Whereas Kezia's parrots only flew away, Linda's animated objects share "their sly secret smiles" seemingly acknowledging her struggles and taunting her inner desires.[39]

On the first night in their new home, Mansfield portrays an intimate scene between Linda and her husband, Stanley. When Linda attempts to fall asleep, dismissing his sexual desires with a quick kiss, Stanley demands intimacy by "[drawing] her to him" and she responds, "'Yes, clasp me,' said the faint voice from the deep well."[40] In utilizing the forceful, active verb "draw" Mansfield indicates the ways in which Stanley exerts physical control over Linda in order to satisfy his need for sexual intercourse and his all-consuming desire for a male child; in fact, she resembles a puppet such as the tassels

36 Mansfield provides many scenes in which both characters seem to wear a mask or façade. One of particular note is Linda's reaction to Stanley's sexual advances in which she dissociates. After said encounter, she dreams of birds flying free and escaping, which all seem to trigger, upon waking, what can be considered a great hallucinatory episode.

37 Mansfield, "Prelude", 91.

38 *Ibidem*.

39 *Ibidem*.

40 *Ibidem*, 88.

in her hallucination. Linda's only means of resistance and attempt to escape from her duties is through dissociation by utilizing a remote, disaffected voice coming from her deep, private, isolated well. This voice can be considered

> the involuntary reaction of a woman living in terror of her body and its astounding, unwilled capacity to generate life. [...] Her body is her enemy, collaborating with and subjected to the men, who, in her imagination as in her life, trigger its involuntary response. Linda is alienated, exposed, threatened, and she cannot see beyond the threat to any positive action.[41]

The only possible means of relief is through the dissociation provided by an escape into madness, the only realm free of males that has been allotted to women.

This constant oppression due to men's desires is signaled in both Linda's and Kezia's dreams where they are apprehended by rushing animals who are constantly seeking to subjugate and impose upon them. When travelling to her new house, Kezia states how she loathes them: "I hate rushing animals like dogs and parrots. I often dream that the animals rush at me."[42] Linda also equates Stanley to a Newfoundland dog and thinks

> If only he wouldn't jump at her so, and bark so loudly, and watch her with such eager, loving eyes. He was too strong for her; she had always hated things that rush at her, from a child. There were times when he was frightening—really frightening. When she just had not screamed at the top of her voice: "You are killing me." [...] "I have had three great lumps of children already"[43]

This image of rushing animals serves to link both Linda and Kezia in their fear of, and resistance to men and procreative, among other, duties. Mansfield equates patriarchal men to dogs who are seemingly loyal and submissive, yet parasitic and violent. Linda's passage is especially poignant and more detailed in her detachment and love/fear of Stanley. His physical strength and social domination overpower Linda, and she wishes to tell him that maintaining her image and continuing to have children is physically and mentally killing her. In his desire for a male heir, he is putting her life at risk, yet Linda is frightened and feels powerless to stop him. In accordance with the Victorian notion of madness, Mansfield seems to suggest that Linda's psychological frailty is rooted in her physical and biological weakness, yet, directly correlates Linda's rejection of her reproductive role with her mental instability.

One of the most important and loaded symbols in "Prelude" is the aloe plant.[44] This natural element serves to link Kezia and Linda once again by captivating their attention and providing the only moment of meaningful conversation and connection between mother and daughter. Throughout the short story, the aloe holds symbolic precedence;

41 Fullbrook, *Katherine Mansfield*, 78.

42 Mansfield, "Prelude", 84.

43 *Ibidem*, 111.

44 In fact, the first working title and original, longer draft was titled "The Aloe," published posthumously in 1930.

as a representation of both characters' desires for freedom, it triggers symptoms of madness. In their long periods of profound contemplation of the plant, Linda and Kezia appear as schizophrenics who "often take pleasure in this prolonged concentration on objects."[45] Mansfield returns to the plant on various occasions to depict the ways in which the women interact with it and with each other. Kezia enquires as to the aloe's nature. "'Does it ever have any flowers?' 'Yes, Kezia,' and Linda smiled down at her, and half shut her eyes. 'Once every hundred years.'"[46] In this brief interaction, both women bond over the pleasure in their enthrallment with the plant. Linda's smile and queer humor is perceived once again, resembling the schizophrenic's "famous empty smile" which "expresses a certain irony and shyness stemming from preoccupations with a private inner world."[47] Linda is amused by the irony of the aloe's less persistent obligation to reproduce; as it only yields flowers "once every hundred years," while her inner world is preoccupied with her frequent, damaging reproduction.

Linda revisits the aloe with her mother, Mrs. Fairfield, in the evening. Her second encounter and interaction with her own mother trigger an *apophany*, a trance-like experience in which "every detail and event takes on an excruciating distinctness, specialness, and peculiarity—some definite meaning that always lies just out of reach, however, where it eludes all attempts to grasp or specify it. The reality of everything the patient notices can seem heightened."[48] Mansfield highlights Linda's apophanic experience and significance of the aloe by transforming it into a ship; its vitality surpassing and dulling the rest of Linda's surroundings.

> the high grassy bank on which the aloe rested rose up like a wave and the aloe seemed to ride upon it like a ship with the oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung upon the lifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew. "Do you feel it, too," said Linda, and she spoke to her mother with the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave—"Don't you feel that it is coming towards us?"[49]

In this excerpt, Mansfield repeatedly uses similes to compare the aloe to a large ship travelling on the sea, using alliterative phrases focusing on /s/ /g/ and /w/ sounds with simple, natural vocabulary to evoke the sound of waves and air. The author's style here highlights the significance of (Mother) Nature by creating an atmosphere of magical luminescence with hanging "bright moonlight" and "glittering dew" that resemble the reflections of mirrors. As opposed to the mirrors in her house, which are placed in the oppressive, domestic sphere, Linda's connection and apophanic experience with the aloe, as a symbol of her private desires, creates a liberated, feminine environment

45 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 72.
46 Mansfield, "Prelude", 97.
47 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 112.
48 Sass, *Madness and Modernism*, 52.
49 Mansfield, "Prelude", 110.

in nature which allows her to glimpse the inner turmoils that she previously tried to avoid. When she utilizes her "special voice" that seems to come from deep within her, it parallels the one she employed when being intimate with Stanley, yet in this case, it corresponds to the spaces exempt of men.[50] Mansfield highlights that this voice resembles sleep-talk or hollow caves, both isolated places where women can truly be themselves and reflect on their desires. Her apophany with the aloe allows Linda to retreat into madness and imagine a comfortable, unimpeded space in which she can escape such obligations and recognize her yearnings.

The aloe advances towards Linda like a ship in an attempt to rescue her from social oppression. Looking upon it in a schizophrenic apophanic state triggers a symbolic vision in which the main element is Linda's desire to escape from the domestic role imposed upon her by a misogynistic society. She

> was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden tree, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: "Faster! Faster!" to those who were rowing. How much more real this dream was.[51]

In this dream vision, Linda still lacks the authority to free herself. She is "caught up," in other words, she is not the agent of the action. Her only command is to plead with the unknown rowers to go "Faster," yet even then she "hears herself" as if she was still dissociated. The repetition of "quickly" and "Faster!" signals her immediate need for escape, while she remains inactive. Although she is in a ship, she seems to be flying in the air, echoing Kezia's visions of flying parrots. As in a true apophany, this madness-induced hallucination is fantastic and irrational, yet it seems "more real" and more tempting to Linda than her domestic reality. With this, Mansfield indicates that the only instances in which Linda has any semblance of freedom from her oppression are in her mad dreams or fantasies.

Conclusion

This analysis of Linda and Kezia's experiences serves to exemplify Mansfield's use of mental illness within "Prelude," connecting this short story with her larger oeuvre. In basing this examination on traditional, established definitions of the "female maladies" triggered by social oppression, this work correlates descriptions in "Prelude" with (women's) madness. Although some instances could be interpreted as childish imagi-

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50 This seems to anticipate the notion of "*parler femme*" or womanspeak coined by Luce Irigaray which describes a particular maternal, feminine language utilized specifically by women. See Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.

51 Mansfield, "Prelude", 110-111.

nation or simple daydreams, the direct connections between both characters and the symptoms they exhibit demand a more profound reading of their psychological states. Linda struggles with her role as a mother and wife, likewise, Kezia displays discomfort towards the domestic sphere, and Mansfield's portrayal of these internal conflicts, corresponding with episodes of unnatural laughter, hallucinations, animation of objects, and apophanic experiences, insinuates some form of insanity.

Linda's rejection of her social position, which leads to madness and its consequent related symptoms, seems to serve as a barrier against intrusive patriarchal oppression, yet is futile, for Linda is trapped within these social confines and continues to fulfill, albeit unwillingly, her gender role. As opposed to this bleak depiction of Linda's entrapment, one should note that Mansfield provides some hope. Linda's internal conflict is reflected within Kezia in the regeneration of the desire for female emancipation. However, Kezia's madness is not completely developed. In fact, the ambiguous nature of her experiences reinforces an optimistic narrative. As her future oppression is not predetermined, her feminine condition could change, and she could achieve the freedom her mother craves. With prospective liberation and escape from patriarchal confines, her onset of schizophrenia could just as well dissipate, and Kezia could break the cycle of women and madness.

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MODERN MANSFIELD AND OLD MASTERS. HYPOTYPOSIS IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES BY KATHERINE MANSFIELD

> Individuality in the work of art is the creation of reality by freedom. […] Art is individual; […] It is the splendid adventure, the eternal quest for rhythm.[1]

Abstract: The stories of Mansfield show a strong affinity with seventeenth and eighteenth-century paintings. It is interesting to observe how Mansfield's Modernist narratives activate in the reader's mind the pictures and genres typical of past artistic epochs. Her stories abound in all types of references to Old Masters' paintings – one can find verbal representations of flowers and/or fruit compositions, arrangements with musical instruments or with food and/or kitchen utensils. Many of these pictorial descriptions can be viewed as instantiations of *hypotyposis*, a concept that is broad enough to allow for various associations: while some readers will point to those elements of the description which hint at the influences of Paul Cezanne, others will indicate features that bring to mind Claude Monet or Mary Cassat, whereas still others will identify the subtle charm of Jean Chardin, the ambience of Johannes Vermeer's interiors, or meticulous food arrangements by Francisco Zurbaran. The article seeks to establish analogies between Old Masters' compositions, (with the focus on still life, *vanitas* and genre painting) and Mansfield's narrative structures.

Key words: Katherine Mansfield, still life, vanitas, genre painting, narration

Reading Katherine Mansfield's (1888–1923) short stories, the reader may notice that their focus is predominantly on the everyday and the mundane, which was very much in vein with the Modernist love of the ordinary. This particular aspect of Modernist reality, i.e. the common and the everyday, has recently once more attracted the attention of the researchers, including scholars of literary studies. As Rod Rosenquist observes, their publications examine "how the ordinary, seemingly insignificant things grow in significance when brought into direct observation or treated with innovative forms of representation."[2] Further, Rosenquist remarks that Modernist readers are "ready to accept that the ordinary or everyday becomes an event through the aesthetic media-

1 Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry, "The Meaning of Rhythm," *Rhythm* 2, no 5, (June 1912): 20, accessed January 10, 2018, https://library.brown.edu/cds/repository2/repoman.php?verb=render&id=1159894950942254&view=pageturner&pageno=1

2 Rod Rosenquist, "The Ordinary Celebrity and the Celebrated Ordinary in 1930s Modernist Memoirs," *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture* 49.3, (2015): 369.

tion of the object."[3] This indicates a connection with art, especially as he had previously addressed a "focus on the common, the ordinary or everyday" which points to "generic, as in genre painting."[4] Such a statement leads us to seventeenth and eighteenth-century European schools of painting[5] and to the topic of this article. The purpose of the present study is to show how the artistic traditions of Old Masters manifest themselves in the narratives of Katherine Mansfield or, in other words, how the Modernist writer made literary use of them. Whether viewed from a historical perspective or studied with the tools of structuralism, the stories of Mansfield show a strong affinity with seventeenth and eighteenth-century paintings. The correlation between the verbal images encountered in Mansfield's short stories and the Old Masters' paintings will be demonstrated within the framework of *hypotyposis*. It is interesting to observe how Mansfield's Modernist narratives activate in the reader's mind pictures and genres typical of past artistic epochs. More precisely, the discussion will center around the characteristic features of still lifes, *vanitas* and genre painting detected in Mansfield's narrative structures.

Before proceeding to the exemplification of Mansfield's literary love affair with Old Masters, let us first briefly see how *hypotyposis* is defined. In literature and literary studies, *hypotyposis* is referred to as a rhetorical figure which is employed in the construction of particularly compelling, ekphrastic descriptions. Such verbal portrayals address our sense of sight and appeal to our visual predilections, and they result in a picturesque, highly illustrative reconstruction of the theme. The term comes from the Greek word *hypotypóein* meaning to sketch.[6] Pierre Fontanier defines *hypotyposis* as a literary tool which "paints things in such a lively and forcible way that it stages them under one's eyes, so to speak, and turns narrative or description into an image, a picture or even a real scene taken from life."[7] In the same vein, Richard A. Lanham compares

3 *Ibidem*.

4 *Ibidem*.

5 This is because the term genre painting is generally applied to the 17th century Dutch masters like Jan Steen, Peter de Hooch or Johannes Vermeer, and the French 18th century artists who would specialize in one type of painting dealing with nature or middle-class life (e.g. Jean Chardin). Moreover, the connection is further justified by the fact that many of the leading artists at the turn of the century were inspired / openly drew from such Old Masters as Chardin (Eduard Manet, Paul Cézanne), Rembrandt (Chaim Soutine), Corot and Chardin (Giorgio Morandi), to name but a few. Additionally, the traditional Old Master's theme of *vanitas* (represented by typical motifs like skulls, candles, dried flowers, etc.) also re-appears in the works of Pablo Picasso or Max Beckmann, and the predilection for intellectual arrangements of objects and food stuff in the still lifes by Willem Heda shall be witnessed once more in the still life compositions of Cubists.

6 Mirosław Jarosz, Maciej Adamski and Irena Kamińska-Szmaj (eds.), *Słwonik wyrazów obcych* (Wrocław: Europa, 2001), hypotypoza [entry]. Michał Głowiński (ed.), *Słownik terminów literackich* (Wrocław: Open Wydawnictwo Naukowe i Literackie, 1998), hypotypoza [entry].

7 "[Hypotypose] peint les choses d'une manière si vive et si énergique, qu'elle les met en scène quelque sorte sous les yeux, et fait d'un récit ou d'une description, une image, un tableau, ou même une scène vivante." Pierre Fontanier, *Les Figures du discours*, in Fabienne Gaspari, "Painting and

hypotyposis to "sketch, outline, pattern" and presents it as synonymous with *enargia*, "[a] generic term for visually powerful, vivid description which recreates something or someone, as several theorists say, 'before your very eyes.'"[8] Similarly, Krieger classifies *hypotyposis* as one of the forms of *enargeia*[9] and Sandra Logan calls it "a poetic means stimulating the experience of seeing."[10] Certainly, this type of connection between the text, the image and the reader is based on subjective choice and personal associations, but so were Mansfield's artistic choices.

In studies on Mansfield and her art, critics and researchers supply numerous examples of the writer's broad artistic inclinations. Not surprisingly, references to visual arts loom large in her fiction, from the overt ones (for example the use of colours, the employment of the figures of painters, art discussed by protagonists), to less obvious instances (the application of techniques used by painters in the construction of Mansfield's complex, narrative structures). Certainly, it was her private artistic tastes that were largely responsible for the thick artistic layers and textures of her short stories. Her art-related passions were not, however, limited to the artistic trends permeating Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.[11] To Mansfield, art as such was of importance, regardless of the epoch in which it was created. Moreover, she claimed that a piece of art was true and worthwhile only when it entered into a dialogue with your emotions. In a letter to her friend, Dorothy Brett, a painter, she explains it quite bluntly: "Hang it all, Brett—a picture must have *charm*—or why look at it? It's the quality I call *tenderness* in writing, it's the tone one gets in a really first-chop musician. Without it you can be as solid as a bull and I don't see what's the good."[12]

For that reason, despite the alluring array of artistic schools and tendencies in which Modernism was shrouded, Mansfield also found many fascinating artistic works in the previous ages. In her *Journal* as well as in her letters, there are references, discussions and polemics referring not only to contemporary artistic celebrities but also to the Old

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Writing in Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man*, *Lewis Seymour and Some Women*, and *A Drama in Muslin*", in *George Moore: Across Borders*, eds. Christine Huguet and Fabienne Dabrigeon-Garcier (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2013), 51, n. 20.

8 Richard A. Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (London: University of California Press, 1990), 64.

9 Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 78.

10 Sandra Logan, *Text/Events in Early Modern England. Poetics of History* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 4.

11 To read about Katherine Mansfield's artistic fascinations see, among others, Rebecca Bowler, "'The beauty of your line – the life behind it.' Katherine Mansfield and the Double Impression," *Katherine Mansfield Studies* 3 (2011): 81–94; Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990).

12 *Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. John Middleton Murry (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 2: 447, accessed December 10, 2017, https://archive.org/details/lettersofkatheri031425mbp.

Masters. For example, in one of her letters to her husband's brother, Richard Murry, she writes about Rubens:

> About Rubens. I never can forget his paintings in Antwerp. They seemed to me far more brilliant than the London ones—I mean impressive. He must have enjoyed himself no end a doing of them. But I confess I like his small paintings best. One gets really too much for one's money in the big ones—There's rather a fat woman wading in a stream in the National Gallery—Quite a small one. It's very good—isn't it?[13]

And in yet another letter to him, she expresses her opinion about Old Masters as such (artists and writers together):

> About the old masters. What I feel about them (all of them—writers too, of course) is the more one *lives* with them the better it is for one's work. It's almost a case of living *into* one's ideal world—the world that one desires to express. Do you know what I mean? For this reason I find that if I stick to men like Chaucer and Shakespeare and Marlowe and even Tolstoi I keep much nearer what I want to do than if I confuse things with reading a lot of lesser men. I'd like to make the old masters my *daily* bread—in the sense in which it's used in the Lord's Prayer, really—to make them a kind of essential nourishment. All the rest is—well—it *comes after.*[14]

As if against Mansfield's apparent demonstration of love towards Old Masters, many scholars have tried to classify the artistic influences visible in the writer's literary output within one of the turn of the century schools of artistic thought. But it seems unfair to try to fit her only within Modernist artistic frames. As Liliane Louvel rightly points out, we should refrain from trying to look for analogies with a single or dominant school of visual representation in Mansfield's works.[15] Rather, we should ask about the extent to which her texts are dominated by the visual. Louvel suggests a "typology of the pictorial" in regard of literary texts, which could be quite useful in the analysis of visuality in Mansfield's oeuvre.[16] Such a perspective agrees remarkably well with Mansfield's eclectic artistic tastes. Also, thanks to such an approach, Mansfield can escape the merciless classification (of her work). Instead of giving her the label of "Impressionist" or "Expressionist," one should rather consider talking about her as a pictorial writer, or, to use the words of Louvel, a writer whose works are characterized by a high "pictorial saturation."[17] Looking at Mansfield's texts in such a way makes room for discussion of her artistic fascinations translated into the verbal patterns of her stories in reference to different genres and epochs. What is more, the genre which seems to have been among the most favoured by Mansfield, i.e. the still life, creates a bridge between the

13 *Ibidem*, 467.
14 *Ibidem*, 387.
15 Liliane Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext,* trans. Laurence Petit (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2011), 85.
16 *Ibidem*.
17 *Ibidem*, 89.

modern and the old. The writer often defined the interiors of the places she was in as still lifes. Similarly to the Old Masters, she also loved to look closely at small, seemingly unimportant, common objects and admire details, thus displaying an approach which characterizes a still life painter. In one of her letters to Brett, she remarks:

> It seems to me so extraordinarily right that you should be painting Still Lives just now. What can one do, faced with the wonderful tumble of round bright fruits, but gather them and play with them–and become them, as it were. When I pass the apple stalls I cannot help stopping and staring until I feel that I, myself, am changing into an apple.[18]

Furthermore, Mansfield was living in Europe at the time when still life was undergoing a true revival. Although the drawings of inanimate objects can be traced back to antiquity, still life as a genre was recognized quite late. The first modern paintings of this kind (i.e. separate, framed images of fruit baskets, bowls or goblets) appeared as late as the seventeenth century and it was not until the eighteenth century that a theory on still life, alongside other genres like portraiture or landscape, was proposed by Reynolds.[19] The true recognition of the still life comes then in the twentieth century.[20] To a large extent, this is because its nature corresponds with a new perception of reality by Modernist artists, who are now interested, as was already observed, in the ordinary, the common and the everyday. As Norman Bryson underlines, "[s]till life takes on the exploration of what 'importance' tramples underfoot. It attends to the world ignored by the human impulse to create greatness. Its assault on the prestige of the human subject is therefore conducted at a very deep level. […] Narrative – the drama of greatness – is banished."[21] Besides, still life is a very wide, almost "all-inclusive" notion. As Rosemary Lloyd points out, "[s]till life, in all its manifestations, has demonstrated that it is a remarkably flexible device for exploring not just the domestic areas of human experience but also much broader areas of experience."[22]

As for Mansfield's short stories, they display numerous instances of descriptions which, either directly (as a part of a plot) or indirectly (as a part of space), can be linked to still life compositions. Rishona Zimring, in "Mansfield's Charm: The Enchantment of Domestic 'Bliss'", discusses still lifes encountered in "Feuille d'Album" and "Bliss".

18 *Ibidem*, 42.

19 Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 7.

20 Stefano Zuffi, Matilde Battistini and Lucia Impelluso, *Martwa natura, arcydzieła, interpretacje*, trans. Katarzyna Wango (Warszawa: Arkady, 2000), 121, 146, and Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked,* 8.

21 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 61. NB. this statement could serve as a general comment to Mansfield's fiction.

22 Rosmary Lloyd, *Shimmering in a Transformed Light: Writing the Still Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), in Elizabeth Hicks, *The Still Life in the Fiction of A.A. Byatt*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 157-58, e-Book Academic Collection.

However, her focus is on the objects that are used for the compositions and on their "magical" power of transformation. Still life arrangements in the two stories are presented as a means of linking the fantastic and the real; thanks to the artistic compositions, everyday mundane spaces are transformed into the extraordinary.[23] Yet, the very same still lifes are additionally capable of connecting the old with the new. Consequently, many of these pictorial descriptions can be viewed as instantiations of *hypotyposis*, a concept that is broad enough to allow for various parallels with a variety of art works: while some readers will point to these elements of the description which suggest the influence of Paul Cezanne, others will indicate features that bring to mind Claude Monet or Mary Cassat, whereas still others will identify the subtle charm of Jean Chardin or orderly spaces of Johannes Vermeer.

Let us now turn to the first passage from Mansfield's texts. It comes from the short story entitled "Bliss":

> There were tangerines and apples stained with strawberry pink. Some yellow pears, smooth as silk, some white grapes covered with a silver bloom and a big cluster of purple ones. These last she had bought to tone in with the new dining-room carpet. Yes, that did sound rather far-fetched and absurd, but it was really why she had bought them. She had thought in the shop: "I must have some purple ones to bring the carpet up to the table." […] When she had finished with them and had made two pyramids of these bright round shapes, she stood away from the table to get the effect – and it really was most curious. For the dark table seemed to melt into the dusky light and the glass dish and the blue bowl to float in the air.[24]

The acclaimed scene with Bertha Young arranging the fruit, and thus composing a still life, is a perfect illustration of the timeless aspect of Mansfield's vivid narrative style. Admittedly, on the basis of formal analogies with certain modern styles or schools of painting, the scene might evoke in the reader an Impressionist or post-Impressionist image. The similarities include the technique of juxtaposition (for instance, when it comes to the shapes and colours of fruit), the usage of light effect (the change of perception due to the change of light), focus on the sensation and the impression ("the effect […] was most curious"). One might further argue, if only by referring to the information from the earlier part of this article, that it is in Modernism that still life genre, after being treated as a form of "lower" art[25] for centuries, comes to the fore. Artists, beginning with Cezanne[26], started to manifest their deep interest in the struc-

23 Rishona Zimring, "Mansfield's Charm: The Enchantment of Domestic 'Bliss,'" *Katherine Mansfield Studies* 4 (2012): 33-50.

24 Katherine Mansfield, "Bliss", in Bliss and Other Stories (Ware, England: Wordsworth Classics, 1998), 68.

25 Margit Rowell, *Objects of Desire. The Modern Still Life* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1997), 13.

26 It is important to note that Cezanne's still lifes show clear links with the Dutch seventeenth-century paintings and invoke the eighteenth-century compositions of French painter Jean-Siméon

ture of artistic space as well as in the object located in this space.[27] To me, however, this seemingly modern description displays quite striking affinities with the seventeenth and eighteen century art. On inspecting the scene more closely, there emerge certain elements which suggest the Old Masters' approach to still life. Let us consider such issues as the objects and material used, the structure of the composition, and finally the specific code of representation – factors that were at the highest focus among the painters of still lifes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Just as in Old Masters' paintings, the verbal still life in "Bliss" is composed of lavishly diversified fruit and materials. For her composition, Bertha uses exotic tangerines, delicate apples and perfect pears as well as juicy grapes. She also includes the new carpet, a glass dish and a blue bowl. All these items are signs of luxury and prosperity and thus correspond to Dutch still life representations. As we can read in Paul Zumthor's *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, the "desire to acquire objects determined largely the character and development of the nation's cultural existence during the seventeenth century" and "the structure and morality of Dutch society limited the choice of these principally to things which could add to the comfort of the house or enhance its appearance."[28] Similarly, Bryson, in his interesting book on still life, states that "Dutch still life painting is a dialogue between the newly affluent society and its material possessions."[29] And this is exactly the case in "Bliss." These are the reasons for Bertha's decision to buy the grapes; she does not need them, she does not crave their taste, she purchases them merely for decorative and compositional purposes. Obviously, this also provides evidence of her high social standing and wealth. Affluence is additionally prompted by the comparison ("smooth as silk"), which simultaneously implies pears of the best quality (with thin, intact, delicate skin), and, by referring to the sense of touch, evokes associations with expensive, delicate fabric.

As for the structure of the composition, in this case there are also some well-defined textual markers which substantiate the thesis of a close-knit relation between Mansfield and Old Masters. The image created by Bertha follows the ideas of the old school. First and foremost, it is characterised, to a large extent, by the realistic and the theatrical. The food items presented cease to be lifeless images the moment the reader learns how they were obtained – they were simply bought in a shop. This reference to the "outside-the-image" reality, to the real life of Bertha Young, supplies the fruit with a realistic tinge. Additionally, the already mentioned reference to the sense of touch (the fabric

Chardin, in Carol Armstrong, *Cezanne in the Studio. Still Life in Watercolors*, (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 53-55.

27 Zuffi et al., *Martwa natura*, 151.

28 Paul Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 194.

29 Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 104.

impression, the fact that Bertha touches the fruit – "she had finished with them," "made two pyramids") completes the realistic, pictorial description of the objects. As for the theatricality of the scene, an important aspect of the Old Masters' artistic idea of still life painting, it is suggested by the orderly, geometrical figures of two pyramids. The round shapes were rigorously framed in two pointed edifices. Such an arrangement results in artificiality. Nothing is left to chance. The viewer admires the perfectly arranged food items, as if forgetting that their primary function is related to eating. The fruits do not show any signs of their role as items for consumption[30] and the fact that they might be, after all, consumed in the future, is not hinted at in any way. Likewise, the reader does not think about the fruit in terms of food but in terms of an aesthetic value. The arrangement created by Bertha is distant, real and unreal at the same time, "most curious" indeed.

Despite the variety of textual clues (mentioned above), in keeping with the idea of *hypotyposis*, each reader must make his/her own associations with a particular painting. For me, the ambience, the stillness, the artificial, but mathematically perfect, aesthetic arrangement on a dark table, with the background disappearing into "the dusk" as well as the focus (close-up on the arranged items) – all these may bring to mind the paintings by Spanish artist Francisco Zurbaran (e.g. "Still-Life with Plate of Apples and Orange Blossom", ca. 1640) or, the elaborate pyramidal structures by French painter Jean Chardin (e.g. "The Buffet", 1728).

Finally, let us focus on the veiled meanings. Unlike the early twentieth century still lifes, in which form and/or colour visibly dominate the symbolic content, the Old Masters' works were highly symbolic and could be "read." Likewise, the still life constructed by Bertha is a vividly presented message. It is only from the perspective of the protagonist that the fruit and dish arrangement serves a mere aesthetic and decorative function. The reader, however, like the seventeenth and eighteenth-century viewer, can decipher the coded messages. And the symbolism of the pictorial scene is twofold. It foreshadows the events of the story and thus is complementary to the plot, and, as in the Old Masters' paintings, it describes the condition of human life itself. And so the exotic tangerines stand for wealth and economic success[31]; the apples allude to original sin, the temptation, the unknown, as well as to life on Earth, power and domination[32];

30 An interesting discussion on food which is barely eaten by the characters in Mansfield's stories can be found in Mary Burgan, *Illness, Gender and Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield*", chapter 2, "'They discuss only the food': Body Images" (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 21-39.

31 Vivian Thomas and Nicki Faircloth, *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens. A Dictionary* (London–New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 249.

32 Beata Purc-Stępniak, *Kula jako symbol vanitas. Z kręgu badań nad malarstwem XVII wieku* (Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz/Terytoria, 2004), 57-58; Zuffi et al., *Martwa natura*, 213.

as for the pears, they are linked with passion and sensuality[33]; and grapes imply an unequivocal link with Bacchus, meaning wine and debauchery, but also hospitability and entertainment. All these symbolic associations can be found later on in the short story. In other words, the verbal picture becomes a comment on the emotions and life status of the characters. The still life composed by Bertha on the one hand illustrates her seemingly happy life (expressed by the artificial perfection of her composition which is devoid of spontaneity but proclaims luxury) and her emotional distress (the variety of fruit and shapes superficially belonging together in terms of colour only)[34]. By analogy, Bertha's still life-like fruit decoration serves also as a general, social comment. It points to the position of upper middle class women, their role as wives, their emotional perturbances. It trumpets naivety and hypocrisy, artificial bliss and concealed unhappiness.

Another example of the influence of the Old Masters on the pictorial descriptions in Mansfield's narratives comes from the short story "Sun and Moon". Let us look at the description of the table after the party:

> And so they went back to the beautiful dining-room. But – oh! oh! what had happened. The ribbons and the roses were all pulled untied. The little red table napkins lay on the floor, all the shining plates were dirty and all the winking glasses. The lovely food that the man had trimmed was all thrown about, and there were bones and bits and fruit peels and shells everywhere. There was even a bottle lying down with stuff coming out of it on to the cloth and nobody stood it up again.[35]

There are a number of elements embedded in the above passage which bridge the gap between the world of modern Mansfield and the realm of the Old Masters. Of particular importance is the motif of a banquet table, as well as the objects used for the composition and their arrangement.

Tables with food half-consumed and overturned vessels, bits of fruit or nutshells were a recurring motif of *vanitas*, paintings denoting "emptiness, or the transient nature of earthly possessions."[36] The fragment under discussion is a verbal representation of *vanitas*. The state of the dining room after the banquet is vividly suggested to the reader via enumeration rather than long descriptive sentences. Mansfield, once again, makes use of her favourite tool, i.e. contrast. The narrator goes from one element to another, listing the items and noting their states – collating those after and before the party:

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33 Thomas and Faircloth, *Shakespeare's Plants*, 259.

34 For a more detailed discussion about this particular scene in the context of still life as well as about the role of still life compositions in Katherine Mansfield's short stories, see: Anna Kwiatkowska, "Martwa natura w opowiadanich Katherine Mansfield," in *Literatura a malarstwo*, ed. Joanna Godlewicz-Adamiec, Piotr Kociumbas and Tomasz Szybisty (Warszawa-Kraków: iMAGO, 2017), 205-218.

35 Mansfield, "Sun and Moon," in *Bliss*, 121.

36 James Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art* (Boilder, Collorado: IconEditions, 1995), 210.

"beautiful dining room" versus "ribbons and roses pulled untied", "shining plates" and "winking glasses" versus "dirty" dishes, "lovely food" versus food "thrown about". As for the objects used in the composition, as in the passage previously analysed, they are charged with certain symbolic meaning. As in *vanitas*, the dirty dishes, the unappetising leftovers, "bones and bits and fruit peels and shells" stand for emptiness, hollowness, decay and passing, the indispensable elements of earthly existence. Quite paradoxically, the dead stillness of the scene divulges the movement that was once there. The sudden, unexpected (for the children in the story) disappearance of both beauty and life underlines the idea of passing more strongly. The narrator, employing the childish, limited and therefore naïve perspective of a little boy, presents the passing of time straightforwardly and bluntly – the little boy and his younger sister come back to the previously beautiful room and cannot believe their eyes: within a few hours all beauty has been ruined. Symbolically speaking, the boy's utter disgust and horrification at seeing the spectacle (expressed at the end of the story in the style of Conrad's Kurtz with the words of "Horrid! Horrid! Horrid!") corresponds to the idea of the shortness of life or a certain stage of it (childhood) and the inevitability of change (entering another stage of life, losing illusions). All in all, once elaborate and now ruined dishes, empty plates and undone ribbons – all of these signify on the one hand opulence and pleasure, but on the other, the temporality and fragility of such a state. By extension, we can also draw conclusions about the participants of the party. The mess they have left behind and the unconsumed food (too much prepared for too few) point to their love of pleasure and their wealth, but even more to their gluttony, vanity and lack of measure.

The arrangement of the objects of this verbally depicted *vanitas* also enhances the atmosphere of disorder and sadness characteristic of the works of Old Masters. Again, the composition is based on opposition and contrast – the napkins are on the floor and not on the table, the food is all over the table instead of being nicely arranged on plates or dishes, unsightly remains of food are everywhere instead of being put out of sight, and a bottle is 'lying down' instead of standing. The scene from "Sun and Moon" might bring to mind banquet paintings by Old Masters, for example those by Abraham van Beyeren in whose works on the one hand "the rich and sumptuous arrangement was meant (…) to engage and delight the patron" (*e.g.* "Still Life with Lobster", ca. 1653-55) but on the other it was "to remind him of the transience of human life and the vanity of worldly possessions and pleasures"[37] (*e.g.* "Banquet Still Life", ca. 1653-55). Similarly, in Mansfield's short story, the verbal banquet still life is to remind the reader of the shortness and fallibility of both material things and human life. This conclusion seems to be especially compelling bearing in mind Mansfield's acute awareness of the transience

37 Scott A. Sullivan, "A banquet-piece with vanitas implications," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art,* 61.8 (1974), *280.*

of time. This notion of passing related to the seventeenth-century Dutch painting and its connection with Mansfield has also been noted, for instance, by Melissa C. Reimer. In her "Katherine Mansfield: A Colonial Impressionist", she writes that "[e]ssentially, their [the Impressionists'] canvases are modern representations of an age-old concept – the transience of life, previously epitomised in Seventeenth-century Dutch still lifes, or *Vanitas*. Mansfield was demonstrably alert to these ideas and it is one of the most distinctive features of her writing."[38]

These theme-based connotations are additionally reinforced by the ones stemming from the ambience and structure of the presented scenes. The above mentioned works of van Beyeren are characterized by sharp focus, silence and limited perspective (closeness of the foreground). Moreover, the red dominant as well as the signs of wealth (type of food, material of dishes and vessels) and signs of human activity (like half-peeled and half-eaten fruit, the crumpled table cloth) serve as connecting points, too. Both Mansfield and Old Masters play with perspective in a similar way; they bring the reader / viewer, respectively, closer to the scene, riveting therefore his/her attention to a certain fragment of depicted (fictional) reality. As a result, the background as if dissolves into insignificance; indications of size or furniture, if any, are lost in the impenetrable background or located outside the frame, and thus in the space that cannot be accessed by the viewer.

The last passage to be discussed here comes from "Prelude."

> In the dining-room, by the flicker of a wood fire, Beryl sat on a hassock playing the guitar. She had bathed and changed all her clothes. Now she wore a white muslin dress with black spots on it and in her hair she had pinned a black silk rose.
> Nature has gone to her rest, love,
> See, we are alone.
> Give me your hand to press, love,
> Lightly within my own
> She played and sang half to herself, for she was watching herself playing and singing. The firelight gleamed on her shoes, on the ruddy belly of the guitar, on her white fingers . . . .
> 'If I were outside the window and looked in and saw myself I really would be rather struck,' thought she. Still more softly she played the accompaniment-not singing now but listening. . . . . 'The first time that I ever saw you, little girl-oh, you had no idea that you were not alone–you were sitting with your little feet upon a hassock, playing the guitar. God, I can never forget. . . . ' Beryl flung up her head and began to sing again: […].[39]

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38 Melissa C. Reimer, "Katherine Mansfield: A Colonial Impressionist" (PhD diss., University of Canterbury, 2010), 258. Note: in the quoted source there is a footnote mark after the word "*Vanitas*". It refers the reader to page 280 of the article by Emilie Sitzia "'A Toutes Les Heures, Par Tous Les Temps': Impressionist Landscapes and Capturing Time", *Art & Time*, eds. Jan Lloyd Jones, Paul Campbell and Peter Wylie (Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 2007), 273-84.

39 Mansfield, "Prelude", in *Bliss*," 25.

The above quotation is yet another instantiation of the presence of Old Masters in Mansfield's short stories. It recalls genre painting which centred on the domestic. Firstly, the depicted scene is composed of elements typical of an interior scene: a fireplace suggested by the burning wood, the guitar, a figure of a young girl in her evening dress. The space is made cosy and safe thanks to the flickering fire, a reference to quiet music (the guitar, the singing of the girl), fabrics reflecting light (muslin dress, silk rose, the smooth surface of the shoes). A sense of seclusion is likewise conveyed by the soft, gleaming light. The ambience corresponds with that observed in paintings of seventeenth and eighteenth-century artists. In addition, the composition of Mansfield's short story also brings to mind the arrangements encountered in the old paintings – a young woman in the midst of her daily chores or during her pastime activities – playing a guitar, singing, reading a letter. Frequently, the painters would offer the viewer a glimpse of a private life, seen as if by accident from outside the window or through a half open door. This is precisely the situation in the passage quoted above. The impression of an Old Master-like image is particularly reinforced by the reference to a window – a common element of the seventeenth-century painting serving as a source of light in the picture. At the same time, the window in the quotation functions as a frame since, as Beryl suggests she should be looked at from that direction – outside looking in. Apart from the arrangement, the mood of Old Masters' paintings is also evoked by the focus on light effects ("flicker of wood fire", "the firelight" gleaming on Beryl's shoes, fingers, the guitar), the limited range of colours, the delicate contrasts, as well as the allusion to the senses of touch and hearing so frequently addressed in the canvases by Old Masters, too.

The scene may bring to mind Jan Vermeer's, "The Guitar Player", ca. 1672. The girl playing the guitar in that piece is aware of someone looking at her, she is apparently gazing in the direction of some invisible (for the viewer) onlooker, or perhaps only towards an imaginary figure (like Beryl). The landscape painting on the wall behind the girl is also of interest – a piece of nature in the room. As some art critics suggest, this was to manifest the idea that a beautiful girl was like nature or a part of nature, she was an image to be extolled. According to Elise Goodman, who comments on that particular painting by Vermeer in her "The Landscape on the Wall of Vermeer", "the ubiquitous idea that the lady was the 'masterpiece of nature,' to be admired, possessed, and displayed, appeared in countless poems, songs, and tracts on beautiful women in the seventeenth century."[40] This makes the relation between the painting and the scene from Mansfield's "Prelude" even closer, for in the passage there are references to nature as well. The most vivid one is the reference to nature from the stanza of the love song Beryl is singing. What is more, the lines of the song are reminiscent of the

40 Elise Goodman, "The Landscape on the Wall of Vermeer", in *The Cambridge Companion to Vermeer*, *ed. Wayne* E. Franits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 82.

landscape piece from the painting since they are clearly separated from the text of the narrative.[41]. Moreover, the scene from the short story is limited as far as action and decoration are concerned. Nothing really happens; at some point Beryl even stops singing, she is merely playing and listening. She is accompanying her thoughts rather than her song, thus participating in the imaginary and not the real. Vermeer's genre pieces were created on the same grounds. The artist would use "elements drawn from an underlying reality, [building] genre pictures in which the story telling was reduced to a minimum of hints."[42] On top of that, Beryl is wearing a dress "with black spots", the pattern so characteristic of the dresses of Vermeer's girls.

* * *

The impact of art on the works of Katherine Mansfield, both in terms of motifs and narrative construction is undeniable. Her highly pictorial descriptions offer, among other possibilities, an interesting insight into the realm of the Old Masters. It seems that still life, *vanitas* and genre painting, in particular, combine the Modern with the Old. They link the past with the present, the real with the unreal. Moreover, features of the traditional artistic genres to be traced in Mansfield short stories are responsible for the ambience of many of her narratives; they complement the plot and illustrate the emotional states of her protagonists. The above discussion is an attempt to read Mansfield a-new, to look at her modernity from the perspective of Old Masters. The aim was to show the timeless aspect of her writing expressed with the ekphrastic allusions to the old, but equally timeless, seventeenth and eighteenth-century visual representations of the world. Summing-up, although the spirit of the past ages in Mansfield's short stories has been noted by scholars, especially in reference to Shakespeare, her affinity and literary transposition of the paintings of Old Masters has been neglected.

The representations of Old Masters paintings are so adroitly ingrained in the narrative structures of Mansfield's stories that it is easy to overlook them. As the writer has been predominantly discussed in connection with Modernism, the compositions spotted in her works were chiefly classified as manifestations of artistic trends and influences of the early twentieth century. Like the works of Impressionists, Post-Impressionists or Fauvists, especially their still lifes, Mansfield's verbal paintings at first glance seem to be void of a story; they could easily exist for themselves – the descriptions of little pieces which we can easily imagine to be framed and hung on a wall, just for decoration.

41 Additionally, to me, both a wood fire and a silk rose, may further enter into the dialogue with the sound hole cover for the guitar of Vermeer's girl, since it is made of wood and resembles the flower Beryl has in her hair.

42 John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 197.

However, though Modernist in form these "pictorially saturated" fragments evoke the works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Old Masters. Just like these canvases, Mansfield's narratives are charged with meaning, and in the context of a particular story, they are evaluative and serve as both artistic and social commentaries. Thus, Mansfield's immensely visual modern narratives enter into a dialogue with the past. She borrows freely from Old Masters to her own ends. The writer uses them as a certain tool to ridicule and deride the vices and/or weaknesses of her characters and of her contemporaries. Additionally, the ambience and narrative construction of Mansfield's visual passages correspond with the atmosphere and structuring of Old Master canvases. Mansfield's verbally depicted scenes and the Old Masters visual arrangements on their canvases simultaneously radiate with the known (the ordinary and domestic) and the unknown (the secretive and obscure). They render stilled moments[43], slices of life, via close-ups and the microscopic focus. Both Mansfield and the Old Masters urge the reader/viewer to take notice of details, to ponder the spectacle described. Subsequently, the receiver becomes as if suspended in time, forced to contemplate the life of the protagonists / the figures in the painting / those absent in the scene as well as his/her own.

The above conclusions can be supported with other references to Old Masters which are scattered across the stories. They come in a variety of forms – sometimes they are quite straightforward, while at other times they are less prominent and veiled and thus easily overlooked. For instance, William Hogarth's "Marriage à la Mode" immediately comes to mind when reading Mansfield's story with the very same title, which deals with a fashionable approach to marriage. Indeed, it is not only the title of the short story that brings Hogarth to mind but also the fact that the name of the main character, the old-fashioned, traditionally-minded husband, is William[44]. Later on, the plot evolving around William's modern, "new", seemingly happy and easy-going young wife, Isabelle, provides yet another quite ostentatious link with the Old Masters. At some point in the story, one of Isabella's trendy friends tellingly calls the scene in which Isabella is reading a love letter from her husband 'A Lady reading a Letter', thus making quite a conspicuous nod towards Vermeer's "Woman in Blue Reading a Letter" (ca. 1663–64) or "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" (1657-59). Some other painterly implications are less straightforward, but still to be found if only we look

43 Such stilled moments which include human figures may also bring to mind tableaux vivants, a fashionable form of entertainment in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

44 Apparently, this example is at the same time a splendid illustration of the complexity of Mansfield's cross time references. "Marriage à la Mode" is simultaneously a tribute to another Old Master, namely William Shakespeare. Hence, the figure of William from the short story in question, while viewed in relation to the theatrical behaviour of the characters, the costumes and masks they eagerly put on, the language employed by them and the space of the garden, makes the reader think of the Renaissance playwright.

closely enough. For that matter, the pages of Mansfield's short stories are filled with little objects so characteristic of Old Masters' paintings, i.e. like pearls, shells, little flower arrangements, musical instruments. And above all, Mansfield's sharp focus on tiny detail, her individual, almost motherly, approach to every, even the smallest, object or its part, her interest in domestic, frequently feminine interiors and the effect of light in dark spaces, makes her inexorably a part of the Old Masters' tradition, which she addresses with a modern wink.

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Modernism Re-visited

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VITA'S MODERNISM: THE GREEN SACKVILLE-WEST

Abstract: The reservations of Virginia Woolf about Vita Sackville-West's fiction have long dominated her legacy. What Marina McKay calls the "decisive historicist turn in modernist studies" continues to exclude Vita because she is written off as a reactionary, yet her garden writing challenges pastoral ideals. As a garden writer, she undermines beliefs about women and the natural world. Vita was a green modernist, keen to revise the Victorian image of women and flowers in safe intimacy; "Come into the garden, Maud" gives way to new dignifying of the garden's resistance. She advocated "violence" in her writing while de-mystifying traditional gardening language. At the same time, she elevates the quasi-mystical nature writing of D. H. Lawrence and his challenge to man's domination of nature. Vita's Sissinghurst, long assumed to be an aspect of her conservative, aristocratic character, reveals on closer examination the trouble with privilege. Study of her garden writing also leads to a fresh reading of her novel *All Passion Spent* where she challenges human claims to mastery over the vital experience of the natural world.

Key words: anthropocentrism or homocentrism, ecocriticism, feminism and gardening, garden writing, modernism, pastoral

Vita Sackville-West is remembered as gardener, popular novelist, and aristocratic poet of *The Land* (1926), her long Georgic that celebrates the agricultural year in Kent: "Classic monotony, that modes and wars / Leave undisturbed, unbettered."[1] Her link to pastoral has led critics to overlook her modernism. What Marina McKay calls the "decisive historicist turn in modernist studies"[2] has not helped her reputation because she is written off as a member of a dilettante, landholding class, out of touch with the concerns of urban modernists.[3] Her most recent biographer restricts Vita's modernism to the novella *Seducers in Ecuador* (1925): "Vita's [subsequent] books [….] confirmed Vita's aesthetic credentials as those of a traditionalist and a conservative."[4] Although eco-critic Greg Garrard has reevaluated pastoral as "infinitely malleable for differing

1 Vita Sackville-West, *The Land* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, reprint 1939), 1.

2 Marina McKay, *Modernism, War, and Violence* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11.

3 Susan Bazargan argues "the 'naturalness' of rural poverty and destitution goes unexamined" in *The Land*. See "The Uses of the Land: Vita Sackville West's Pastoral Writings and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*," *Woolf Studies Annual* 5 (1999), 33.

4 Matthew Dennison, *Behind the Mask: The Life of Vita Sackville-West* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 2014, 171.

political ends,"[5] the innovative aspects of Vita's writing still seem to be overshadowed by assumptions about her patrician view.

Vita's admirer Geoffrey Scott is less often quoted than Virginia Woolf on Vita, but his astute comments reveal her modernism to be more than a single experiment. Annoyed by Bloomsbury's dominance and fearful that Vita would be over-schooled by Woolf, he urged her to consider her strength in opposition to Woolf's style: "Virginia forged her method for her own very personal perception of phenomena. Your intimate instinctive apprehension is I think at the opposite pole to hers [...] and is I should say *au fond* nearer to Lawrence's."[6] Scott may have been the first to identify Vita's link to D. H. Lawrence, an affinity she later claims in her garden writing as a shared preference for violence in writing. Scott claims for her "more lasting-power than the cleverness of Bloomsbury," recognizing "an unwieldy *something* in almost all your books which has more reality in it than any amount of modish psychology and modish technique."[7] Victoria Glendenning believes "Vita agreed with this really. The 'unwieldy something' that she felt sometimes as her strength and sometimes as her failing was going into *The Land*."[8] This "unwieldy something" and fondness for violence in writing appears in her informal garden writing of columns in *The Observer,* reprinted in six separate volumes. In those essays, she reveals resistance to garden experts while advocating a deep respect for plants. Her novel *All Passion Spent* (1929) features a heroine approaching death, who honors the kinship of human and non-human nature. In that novel, as in her garden writing, Vita strives to unsettle her audience by debunking traditional tropes and redefining pastoral values for a skeptical age. In opposition to notions of gardens as dignified, didactic spaces for female accomplishment, she respects the garden's resistance to control as an opportunity for meaningful submission to the natural world.

I. The Myth of Mastery

> The behavior of plants is indeed inexplicable. It breaks all of the rules;
> and that is what makes gardening so endlessly various and interesting.[9]

There is the echo of Antigone's link to chthonic forces in the many green modernists who observe the earth as an ally against the brutal rule of a warring patriarchy. Katherine Mansfield poignantly memorializes her brother "blown to bits" in Belgium

5 Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 33.

6 Letter of 1924 as quoted by Victoria Glendenning, *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville*-West (New York: Knopf, 1983), 142.

7 *Ibidem*.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 Vita Sackville-West, *In Your Garden Again* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1953; Oxford: Isis 2001), 67.

with her New Zealand stories.[10] Mansfield's aloe blooming only once every hundred years allows Linda Burnell, a character based on her mother, to imagine a serene female flourishing, detached from the demand for yet another child, a male heir, whose future, in fact, though not in the story, brings the terrible sacrifice of the unburied soldier.[11] The language of Vita's garden writing also reflects "the undeluded, disenchanted and knowing modern attitudes to war."[12] Vita did not escape the harrowing effect of the two wars, the later enlisting both her sons. Her growing retreat into her garden, described in Nicolson's and Raven's recent books on Sissinghurst, makes her striving after a modern language to elevate flowers both salutary and moving.[13]

Vita had a habit of keeping a bloom on her desk so that she might examine it intently, an intimacy divorced from the instrumentalism of a traditional garden project: "My flowers are mostly (not all) intimate flowers, which gain from being intimately observed; and this can only be done when one can pick up the pot or vase off a table, and stare in odd moments when one has nothing else to do."[14] By briskly confining this practice to "odd moments," she avoids the image of sentimental flower arranging. Vita advocates "recklessness" in gardening and "violence" in garden writing.[15] Her unwillingness to observe the usual feminine decorum attracted readers to her weekly columns and charmed listeners on BBC radio.[16] Her advice on gardening often includes stubborn argumentation against male authorities, a trait shared with her biographies of women. In *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea,* she takes pride in that tendency: "I have gone to some length into the destructive arguments advanced by Dr. Bernbaum."[17] Even when she offers specific approaches, she seldom utters absolutes; her contentious caution indirectly sharpens her authority. Challenging accepted accounts of plants, she conveys a skeptical spirit to match her unregulated pleasure in the garden.

10 Anthony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Viking, 1980), 183.

11 Katherine Mansfield, "Prelude," in *The Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield,* vol. 2, eds. Gerri Kimber & Vincent O'Sullivan (Edinburgh: University Press, 2012), 73. On the anachronistic presence of the war in Mansfield's childhood story "Prelude," there are two essays in *Katherine Mansfield and World War One*, eds. Gerri Kimber et al (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014): Alex Moffett's "Katherine Mansfield's Home Front," 69-83, and Richard Cappuccio's "War Thoughts and Home," 84-97.

12 MacKay, *Modernism, War, and Violence,* 24.

13 Vita Sackville-West & Sarah Raven, *Sissinghurst: V.S.-W. and the Creation of a Garden* (New York: St. Martin's, 2014); Nicolson, Adam, *Sissinghurst: An Unfinished History* (New York: Viking, 2008).

14 Vita Sackville-West, *Some Flowers* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1937; New York: Abrams, 1993), 1.

15 See "Outside the Garden Gate" in Judith Page and Elise L. Smith, *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780*-1870 (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 38-49.

16 The *Observer* columns ran 1946 to 1961. See Glendenning on Vita's radio work, 208. See also Dennison, 190-96.

17 Vita Sackville-West, *Aphra Behn: The Incomparable Astrea* (London: Gerald Howe, 1927). See Foreword, i. In that biography she devotes 17 of 78 pages to refutation.

Her style imitates the unpredictability she attributes to Lawrence Johnston's garden at Hidcote Manor.[18] Rather than trace a visitor's orderly progress through the garden rooms, her unruly account turns back on itself: "Nor must I forget the quincunx of pleached hornbeam, set behind the two small garden-houses. It may not be an exact quincunx in the geometrical sense, but the word will serve."[19] The hornbeams at Hidcote do not form an exact *quincunx*, the pattern of five pips on dice, but the Latin word adds a labial workout and spondaic cadence to dramatize astonishment: the **quin cunx** of **pleached horn** beam. Her account is just one of many challenges to older garden geometry; Hidcote delighted her because it broke with both Victorian and wild-garden traditions, incorporating formality along with the esthetic she and Johnston inherited from the Irish advocate of wild gardens, William Robinson.[20] By the time Vita is writing, Robinson and influential English garden designer Gertrude Jekyll have reviled Victorian carpet bedding with plants-as-soldiers standing in orderly rows, and Vita acknowledges: "What gardener can afford to garden on the grand scale nowadays?"[21]

Instead of relying on grand formal schemes, gardeners can stretch the imagination with provocative plants, giving visitors a share in the excitement of plant-hunting:[22]

> I had planned my Verbascum Brusa [sic] against the dark background of the yew hedge. [….] For my own part I had compared them to giant Roman candles, fireworks, tethered to the ground, but somebody came along and said they were like some strange sub-marine growth, waving about; and somebody else said they ought to be growing in a primeval landscape with a pterodactyl browsing amongst them. [23]

18 Jenny Uglow calls the American-born Johnston's Oxfordshire garden one of the "most original gardens of the first half of the twentieth century." After Cambridge and service in the second Boer War, Major Johnston began his garden in 1907 on "windswept fields" and developed "compartments flowing downhill […] offering alluring glimpses, or surprises, or sudden distant views." See *A Little History of British Gardening,* (London: Pimlico, 2005), 251.

19 *In Your Garden,* 227.

20 It is hard to exaggerate the impact on 20th century gardens of Robinson's *The Wild Garden* (1870) and *The English Flower Garden* (1883). He began as gardener's boy in County Wicklow, left Ireland, and found work at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kensington. Charles Darwin was his sponsor at the Linnean Society. He spread his extensive knowledge of plants and ideas about naturalistic planting, using hardy perennials, in his magazine, *Gardening Illustrated.* See Uglow, *A Little History,* 224-25; 228.

21 *A Joy of Gardening* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), 101.

22 Vita is "in search of rare and interesting plants," *In Your Garden*, 222. Vita was certainly aware of Gertrude Jekyll's influential garden layouts, her "mixed borders and striking single-color schemes." See Sarah Rutherford, *The Arts and Crafts Garden* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2013), 58. Jekyll, from a wealthy family and formally trained as an artist, collaborated often with renowned architect Sir Edwin Lutyens. She was the talented workhorse of the arts and crafts garden movement, but Vita seems more strongly affected by the figure of Reginald Farrer whose hunting of Alpine plants and flamboyant writing appealed to her venturesome spirit. Farrar died in 1920 on one of his trips to seek plants in China. He came from Clapham, North Yorkshire, where he returned to develop his Alpine garden in a quarry on family property. See this essay's third part and Nicola Shulman's *A Rage for Rock Gardening* (London: Short Books, 2002), esp. 51-2.

23 *In Your Garden*, 95-96.

Vita relished responses to her provocative plants. She shared with her 18th century predecessors a manipulative bent, the creation of a garden that stages the uncanny. She writes repeatedly of her "taste for greenish flowers."[24] Of course, the wild garden esthetic had elevated subtle variations in green, but there is nothing subtle about some of her favorites, such as the anemic *Molucella laevis,* Bells of Ireland.[25] The butterfly rose *Mutabilis* "is likely to please anybody with a freakish taste."[26]

Unlike the traditional authorities, Vita downplays her expertise; she elevates a neighbor's greenhouse and quarter-acre garden. The neighbor is a wise crone in her "seventh decade," vastly superior to the so-called experts. The wise gardener may be the friend and neighbor Katherine Drummond, to whom Vita dedicated her poem, *The Garden* (1946).[27] Vita carried the discussion of a gifted neighbor over several years in her garden column touting her practice in contrast to her favorite targets, the nurserymen: "A cottage friend of mine who grows some superb cyclamen on her kitchen windowsill tells me that her grandmother advised her to water them with weak tea. This may sound like an old wife's tale, but the tales of some old wives sometimes turn out to be right."[28] Three years later, she returns to the gifted neighbor as a model of success: "Successful gardening is not necessarily a question of wealth. It is a question of love, taste, and knowledge. The neighbor about whom I was writing […] possesses all these virtues, added to fingers so green that the water must surely turn emerald in the basin every time she washes her hands."[29] Vita lovingly describes her neighbor's greenhouse:

> It would make any professional laugh, and would send him away scratching his head with a lot to think over. She does the oddest things. She digs up clumps of violets […] and as she takes the trouble to whitewash her pots, instead of leaving them their normal hideous terra-cotta colour, you may imagine how the flowers gain in beauty [….] There are cardboard dress-boxes tied round with string to prevent them from disintegrating, and old Golden Syrup tins, and even some of those tall tins that once contained Slug-death.[30]

Vita never places herself in a league with this frugal neighbor whose higher esthetic leads her to transform "hideous" terracotta and cultivate violets in winter.

In her *Some Flowers* (1937), awe at cottagers appears first in the chapter "*Lilium Auratum*," in which she digresses on the unmanageable Madonna lily just to show how contradictory authorities can be:

24 *Ibidem,* 41.

25 Vita Sackville-West, *Even More for Your Garden* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1958, Francis Lincoln, 2004), 31.

26 *V. Sackville West's Garden Book.* Ed. Philippa Nicolson (Slough, Berkshire: Hollen Street Press Ltd, 1968; New York: Atheneum Press, 1979), 127.

27 Vita Sackville-West, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Gardens* (London: Penguin, 1951), 14-15.

28 *In Your Garden, 42.*

29 *Ibidem*, 44.

30 *Ibidem*, 44-5.

> On the divergent side we are told (a) that the Madonna lily revels in a heavy mulch of manure, and (b) that manure is the one thing she cannot abide. We are told a) to plant her among other growing things, that her roots may be shaded; b) to plant her where the hot sun will ripen her bulbs […] (c) to lift her every two to three years (d) never at our peril to move the bulbs at all.[31]

She lampoons the experts who exaggerate the prospects of this hapless lily: "On the unanimous side we are told that the Madonna lily is the easiest of all lilies to grow with complete success, and that, as every gardener who has not the luck to be a cottager knows, is totally and miserably untrue."[32]As in her biographies of saints, Vita takes grim pleasure in enumerating misguided efforts by authorities. The extended description of the violated body of the Madonna lily anticipates a fiasco recounted in gruesome detail in *The Eagle and the Dove* (1943). There it is the body of Teresa of Avila, repeatedly exhumed and finally mutilated by her own Abbot in desperate pursuit of a sacred relic. To borrow a phrase from that narrative, "the imagination shudders at its contemplation."[33] In her garden writing, Vita recounts the efforts of occupants of great houses like herself who try to emulate cottagers with offerings of "purifying grit," "soap-suds," and even car exhaust: "I would, in short, do anything to please them, but all my efforts have led me to the sad conclusion that the Madonna lily, like the wind, bloweth where it listeth."[34] The myth of mastery cannot be sustained.

Vita urges readers to follow Robinson's caveat, "The sacrifice of flower gardens to plants that perish every year has often left them poor of all the nobler plants."[35] She also echoes the dismissive tone of Reginald Farrer, the English plant hunter who introduced naturalistic rock gardens, when she disdains predictable groupings: "I do not myself, very much like the association of lilies with shrubs. It always looks to me too much like the-thing-one-has-been-told-is-the-right-thing-to-do. It savours too much of the detestable shrubbery border effect."[36] In *Some Flowers,* Vita's choice of interesting plants "that should be painted" may strike us as heterodox, but like Robinson and Farrer before her, she sees no contradiction in including the non-native species among her nobler plants. More surprising and democratic is her inclusion of humble zinnias in her pantheon. She excludes many of the simple beauties in favor of rugged naturalized specimens, ranging from the evanescent Algerian Iris to the vivid and aggressive Chinese Witch Hazel with its "spider-like" flowers.

31 *Some Flowers,* 107.

32 *Ibidem.*

33 Vita Sackville-West, *The Eagle and the Dove: A Study in Contrasts, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Thérèse of Lisieux* (London: Purnell & Sons, reprinted 1953), 100.

34 *Some Flowers*, 108.

35 William Robinson, *The English Flower Garden* (London: J. Murry, 15th ed., 1933; New York: The Amaryllis Press), 1989, 41.

36 *Some Flowers,* 108-9.

Supporting Vita's preference for striking perennials over uniform shrubs is her association of shrubs with the Edwardian gardens at Knole. Cutting roses from those shrubs was as close as her mother ever came to gardening in a setting maintained by her staff. In *Pepita,* Vita depicts the pathos of an aging Lady Sackville handicapped by ignorance in the garden. She would waylay a passing plant seller outside her city home and descend to the garden in her nightgown, covered with a cloak of Venetian velvet, to direct her own gardener in "the planting of plants as never plants were intended to grow [...] she could sink them into the ground and pretend they had grown there [....] Perhaps of all the odd corners of her garden the one she liked best a sort of rockery entirely planted with flowers made of china."[37] In other words, Lady Sackville was the anti-type of the wise cottager. Vita's disapproval recalls the admonition of the painter G. D. Leslie: "It seems as hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of garden as into that of heaven. The thing is worked for him by hirelings, whose own the flowers are not."[38] Vita recognizes the trouble with privilege in its most extreme form, an absurd disconnection from the material earth.

II. "A light and volatile existence" in *All Passion Spent*

"Every true artist is the salvation of every other."[39]
"So all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tieresias."[40]

Widowed at 88, Deborah Holland in *All Passion Spent* is another antitype of Lady Sackville. Deborah is an *artiste manquée*, unimpressed by society and signally responsive to the natural environment. Freed from the ambition of her powerful husband Henry, erstwhile Viceroy to India and Prime Minister of England, she moves to a modest house in Hampstead Heath, much to the astonishment of her conventional children. She had spotted the house and garden years before and had found it suggestive of an artist's life.

The narrative of the widow's escape makes use of modernist juxtaposition. Each stop on the underground punctuates Deborah's recollections. Her thoughts are untethered from her surroundings until the train pulls into the station. One stop interrupts memories of her husband deluding "legions of people into believing that they had really secured his interest. (Tottenham Court Road.)"[41] At the empty house, Deborah

37 Vita Sackville-West, *Pepita* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1937), 286-287.

38 Francis Jekyll, *Gertrude Jekyll: A Memoir* (London: Bookshop Roundtable, 1934), 131.

39 D. H. Lawrence's Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1922), Ch. 16, 236.

40 T.S. Elliot's "Notes" to "The Waste Land", in *Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962), 52.

41 Vita Sackville-West, *All Passion Spent* (London: Hogarth, 1931), 82.

embraces kinship with spiders, "impudent inhabitants blowing, waving, running, as they listed," and contemplates companionship with natural things:

> These things – the straw, the ivy frond [threading through the window], the spider, – had had the house all to themselves for many days. They had paid no rent, yet they had made free with the floor, the window, and the walls, during a light and volatile existence. That was the kind of companionship that Lady Slane wanted; she had had enough of bustle, and of competition, and of one set of ambitions writhing to circumvent another.[42]

In her meditation on straw, ivy, and spiders, she observes their material otherness, limiting her use of Ruskin's pathetic fallacy, that "curious web of hesitating sentiment";[43] instead, she embodies what Lawrence Buell calls the environmental imagination, "human selves as unstable constellations of matter occupying one among innumerable riches in an interactive biota":[44] Buell surveys nature writers who strive toward "relinquishment of homocentrism."[45] For almost a lifetime, Deborah has forgone weaving webs: "She wanted to merge with the things that drifted into an empty house, though unlike the spider she would weave no webs. She would be content to stir with the breeze and grow green in the light of the sun, and to drift down the passage of years, until death pushed her gently out and shut the door behind her."[46] She has left behind her part as the dutiful wife to Lord Slane in India and in London.

At his death, her children are stunned by her "emancipation."[47] She does not resent her reduced income because she is not acquisitive. Her eldest daughter watches "in silent rage" as she hands her jewelry over to Herbert "the heir": her daughter thinks "Such simplicity amounted to imbecility."[48] Yet such detachment allows Deborah to dispassionately review her life and her unfulfilled wish to be a painter. Reminiscence of Henry's interference in her plans dominates the novel's second part, climaxing in a flashback to the 17-year-old Deborah's fantasy of boyishness:

> For the thoughts which ran behind this delicate and maidenly exterior were of an extravagance to do credit to a young man. They were thoughts of nothing less than escape and disguise; a changed name, a travestied sex, and freedom in some foreign city [....] that fichu would be replaced by a shirt—and here the fingers felt for the knot of a tie; those skirts

42 *Ibidem,* 91-2.

43 Ruskin contrasts the Greeks, who believed God was in nature, with later writers whose practice of "giving sympathy to nature" becomes, for Ruskin, contrived and untruthful. *Works of John Ruskin, Modern Painters,* "Of Classical Landscape," Part 4, Ch 13, 177, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/38923/38923-h/38923-h.htm#CHAPTER_XIII.

44 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard, 1995), 167.

45 *Ibidem.*

46 *All Passion Spent,* 92.

47 *Ibidem*, 83.

48 *Ibidem*, 76-77.

> would be kicked for ever aside—and here very shyly this time, the hand dropped towards the opening of a trouser pocket.[49]

She admires her prior yearning for the "travestied" masculine self: "*Then*, she had been face to face with life, and that had seemed a reason for a necessity for the clearest thinking; *now,* she was face to face with death, and that again seemed a reason for the truest possible estimate of values, without evasion. The middle period alone had been confused."[50] The novel's challenge to a unified biography and a sequential development of character borrows from the modernist approach to new biography more daringly presented in *Orlando*.[51] While Suzanne Raitt credits Woolf's daring, it is equally important to acknowledge Vita's success in incorporating a view of the de-centered self within an orthodox character and recognizable novelistic structure, a modernist novel for general readers.[52] By placing unconventional recognitions in a conventional, attractive woman late in life, she is normalizing what others regard as eccentric. The reader never shares the children's disapproval of their mother.

Seeing Deborah's "middle period" as a prolonged travesty reinforces her questioning of the unitary self and its inevitable tie to the physical body. While recalling her love for her husband, she ponders the unstable self: "Who was the she the 'I' that had loved? And Henry, who and what was he?" She decides the sense of self is a product of routine, and love a matter of the situation: "It was all words now, without reality. The only things which touched reality were the routine of her life with Genoux," her devoted lady's maid, "the only person who knew exactly what she meant by a sudden exclamation as she fell back into her chair, the bond between herself and Genoux thereby strengthening to the pitch of the bond between lovers, of an exclusive physical intimacy."[53] Frail but stimulated by her new life, she looks forward to weekly visits from her landlord Mr. Bucktrout, who, despite his surprising apocalyptic beliefs, hires a contractor to remedy the "Falling, falling" condition of the old house. Deborah views her own death with less anxiety because the kindly Bucktrout avoids euphemisms in discussing her limited occupancy. The tyranny of the body in old age interests her: "her body had, in fact, become her companion, a constant resource"; in her indomitable artistic spirit she is able to find her bodily preoccupation "rather than otherwise, an agreeable and interesting tyranny."[54]

49 *Ibidem*, 148-149.

50 *Ibidem*, 166-167.

51 Suzanne Raitt, *Vita & Virginia: The Work and Friendship of V. Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 107-116.

52 *Ibidem.*

53 *All Passion Spent*, 194-195.

54 *Ibidem*, 194.

In the novel's third part, Deborah achieves that lightness denied her in society: "once more the reed wavering in the river, the skiff reaching out towards the sea."[55] When her forgotten admirer from India days, Mr. FitzGeorge, reattaches himself and leaves her a fortune and his art collection, she resists the worldliness of her stodgy, grasping children and leaves the art to the V & A, the fortune to the poor of the nation.[56] FitzGeorge is reminiscent of art collector Sir John Murray Scott and his legacy to Vita's mother. Lady Sackville sold his art and antiques after she prevailed over Scott's siblings in 1913. This was her second court appearance over a legacy, the first in 1910 when she testified to her illegitimacy in order to protect the inheritance of her husband (and first cousin) from her own siblings. The parallels to *All Passion Spent* lie in the frustration of grasping relatives.

One of Deborah's relatives applauds her decision, her musician great-granddaughter who, by the loss of the legacy, is freed from an unwanted engagement: "This child, this Deborah, this self, this other self, this projection of herself was firm and certain. [Young Deborah's] engagement, she said, was a mistake; she had drifted into it to please her grandfather."[57] In the presence of her young namesake, Deborah further relinquishes her identity: "This unexpected confusion of her own life with that of her granddaughter" is "as strange and as lovely" as her reunion with FitzGeorge.[58] Free indirect discourse supports this loosening of strict individual subjectivity. Deborah sees the individual much as Lawrence does, "no more than an accidental cohesion in the flux of time."[59] In his troublesome will, FitzGeorge has offered her a second chance to resist the worldly pressure that once undid her aspiration. Young Deborah is articulate about such choices, as though she had incorporated her great-grandmother's experience, dramatizing a unity across persons: "among the people I like, I find something hard and concentrated in the middle of them, harsh, almost cruel. A sort of stone of honesty."[60] That stone of honesty recalls the "unwieldy something" that Geoffrey Scott asserted in 1924 as a trait of Vita's artistry, and Vita in 1931 regards it as an essential value. FitzGeorge adds another startling trait to the Sackville-West poetics when he comes to Lady Slane's Hampton house and discovers, "Thank goodness, […] she has no taste […] There was no relation between […] 'decoration' and real beauty."[61]

55 *Ibidem*, 283.
56 Glendenning, 35; 57-58.
57 *Ibidem*, 283.
58 *Ibidem*, 282.
59 D.H. Lawrence, "The Crown," in: *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), 272.
60 *All Passion Spent*, 286-287.
61 *Ibidem*, 208.

III. Violent Writing, Sacred Earth, and Unseen Worlds

"Nature has ideas of her own, which put ours to shame." [62]

"The stone of honesty," a "harsh, almost cruel" feature of Vita's writing that overrides taste, links *All Passion Spent* to her advocacy of "violent writing" in *Some Flowers*. Her understated title announces its modernity.[63] It is not *The Flower Garden,* but an eccentric gathering, each bloom "a painter's flower" with "a quality of its own" inspiring close examination.[64] The flowers embody a beauty that defies sentimental Victorian taste. Her terms also echo the modernist connection of terror to beauty. Violence is crucial to the apocalyptic modernism of writers like Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, proponents of Vorticism, who wrote of a culture war "to be fought for the sake of its violence."[65]

W. B. Yeats famously associated violence with the beauty of Irish Republican martyrdom in "Easter, 1916," "A terrible beauty is born." Vita mentions Yeats in her journal of 1924: "February 3. 34 Hill St. A real spring day at the cottages; we sat on the step in the sun, read Yeats, and were quite warm, surrounded by Canute, Wolf, Swend, & Enid [her dogs]".[66] Vita added a Yeatsian flourish to Rilke's lines in the Duino Elegies: "For beauty's nothing but the birth of terror, / Which we endure but barely, and, enduring, / Must wonder at it [...]" "Birth" does not appear in the original, "*das schöne ist nichts / Als des schrecklichen angang*" or, literally, "The beautiful is nothing but the beginning of the terrible."[67] Vita may not have fully shared Yeats's or Lewis's faith in the cleansing power of violence. However, she did adopt the rhetoric of violence as she sets out to claim allegiance with innovative garden writers of her day. Her most admired garden writers were two irascible men, Reginald Farrer, the renowned plant-hunter, and D.H. Lawrence, green modernist. Del Ivan Janic describes Lawrence as standing "at the beginning of the modern posthumanist tradition and of the literature of environmental consciousness."[68]

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62 Vita Sackville-West, "Surprises," *Country Notes in Wartime* (London: Hogarth, 1940), 53-6, 54.

63 Harold Nicolson called his biographical sketches in a new style *Some People* (1927); Vita's title may be a play on his title suggesting personhood for flowers.

64 *Some Flowers*, 11.

65 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Bodley Head, 1990), 9.

66 *Vita Sackville-West: Selected Writings,* ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 44.

67 *Duineser Elegien/Elegies from the Castle of Duino*, translated from the German of Rainer Maria Rilke by V. Sackville-West and Edward Sackville-West, "First Elegy," trans. V S-W (London: Hogarth, 1931), 4-5.

68 Del Ivan Janic, "Environmental consciousness in modern literature: four representative examples," ed. G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (London: Shambhala, 1995), 107.

In *Some Flowers,* Vita considers first Farrer for his "extravagance and *bravura.*"[69] She acknowledges his style does not appeal to all: "He has been accused of being too poetical and rhetorical. He was admittedly a conscious stylist."[70] Farrer was also extreme in his willingness to risk his life in pursuit of unknown plants. Vita admired his ability to balance "lyrical prose and botanical precision":

> Take for example, his account of the first time he ever beheld the gentian which bears his name – "[….] the mouth and the wide gold flanges are of so luminous and intense a light azure that one blossom of it will blaze out at you among the grass on the other side of the valley [….] It is like a clear sky soon after sunrise, shrill and translucent, as if it had a light inside. It literally burns in the alpine turf like an electric jewel, an incandescent turquoise."[71]

In Farrer's violent prose, "'a fresh crashing explosion of colour in the fold of the lawns,'" she found language which conveys "something of the excitement and enthusiasm which fired the author"; she adds, "in spite of the excitement he never loses sight of his standards of comparison," and concludes, "He can be accurate as well as extravagant."[72]

Her other writing model was Lawrence, a herald of modern environmentalism as seen in "Flowery Tuscany" where he writes, "Man *can* live on the earth and by the earth without disfiguring the earth." [73] From that essay, Vita quotes Lawrence on the radiance of flowers:

> "How a colour manages to be perfectly strong and impervious, yet of a purity that suggests condensed light, yet not luminous, at least not transparent, is a problem. The poppy in her radiance is translucent, and the tulip in her utter redness has a touch of opaque earth. But the Adonis-blood anemone is neither translucent nor opaque. It is just pure condensed red, of a velvetiness without velvet, and a scarlet without glow".[74]

Vita admired Lawrence as well as Farrer for recognizing the inchoate world underlying nature, the ability to "approach the flower as though it were a mystical thing, reflecting on each some strange beauty which is to be found in perfection only in another, unknown world."[75] Her sample passage from "Flowery Tuscany" makes rhetorical use of negation, a precedent she follows in her own descriptions. Lawrence's characterization of the anemone's shade as a "problem" prepares the reader for the struggle to find adequate language for an ineffable thing. Vita calls "Farrer half poet, half botanist; Lawrence, wholly poet"; she adds, "There is one thing, however, which both Farrer

69 *Some Flowers,* 14.

70 *Ibidem*, 13.

71 *Some Flowers,* 13-14.

72 *Ibidem.*

73 D.H. Lawrence, "Flowery Tuscany," *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays* (London: Penguin, 1999), 225-243, 226.

74 *Some Flowers,*15.

75 *Ibidem.*

and Lawrence have in spite of their differences. They both write with violence and not with sentimentality."[76]

Vita's admiration of writing with violence and without sentimentality helps to explain peculiar, almost cruel passages in her work, as when she peremptorily ends her praise of fuchsia with a violent gesture: "I like the ecclesiastical effect of their red and purple among the dark green of their foliage; and, of course, when you have nothing else to do you can go round popping the buds."[77] Popping fuchsia was a way of queering the lady garden writer and undermining the expectations of modesty. Vita's impudence with the Incense plant, *Humea elegans*, might also be included under the rubric of violent and unsentimental writing. While she hurried the fuchsia to maturity, she cannot wait for the Incense plant to die: "I kept some sprays of it in a vase for so long that I began to loathe the sight of the thing; it turned dusty long before it started to fade and die; it reminded me of those Everlasting Flowers, the *Helichysams,* which are only too everlasting indeed."[78]

Some plants like "those Everlasting Flowers" are well-named, but Vita takes exception to the sentimental gendering of others. The so-called "Lady Tulip" strikes her as especially misrepresented:

> She [...] actually reminds one most of a regiment of little red and white soldiers. Seen growing wild on Mediterranean or Italian slopes, you can imagine a Liliputian army deployed at its spring manoeuvres. I suppose her alleged femineity is due to her elegance and neatness, with her little white shirt so simply tucked inside her striped jacket, but she is really more like a slender boy, a slim little officer dressed in a parti-coloured uniform of the Renaissance.[79]

This re-gendering of "elegance and neatness" follows on her objection to feminizing clichés in *Some Flowers*. Her audience was familiar with the trope of women as flowers in poems like Tennyson's "Come into the Garden, Maud," which inspired photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron. Garden historians may trace this trope back to Rousseau or even as far back as the *Song of Solomon* and *Romance of the Rose*. Vita self-consciously breaks with this feminine floral tradition.

Given the long history of floral women, Vita had to concentrate on un-gendering her own garden writing. She awards "dishonourable rank" to the overused genteel adjectives, "quaint," "dainty," and "winsome."[80] The issue of "smell" arises as garden writers supply "genteel substitutions": "'Smells good' is an honest phrase at least, and neither 'scent' nor 'perfume' nor 'odour' or 'fragrance" can take its place."[81] She is similarly frank about the

76 *Ibidem*.
77 *In Your Garden,* 82.
78 *Ibidem*, 91.
79 *Some Flowers*, 37.
80 *Ibidem*, 13.
81 *Ibidem.*

smell of her beloved Knole, "a mixture of woodwork, pot-pourri, leather, tapestry, and the little camphor bags that keep away the moth."[82] In describing her desired visceral responses, Vita uses throughout her garden writing the verbs "startle," "surprise," and "shudder" as well as their participle forms. Her use of "shudder" recalls both Yeats's and T.S. Eliot's work. Frank Kermode calls Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" the "great modern shudder poem."[83] Evaluating Tennyson with a modernist's eye, Eliot observes that *In Memoriam* gives him "'the shudder that I fail to get from anything in 'Maud.'"[84] According to Kermode, since Yeats, the shudder "has acquired a strong sexual sense [….] orgasm accompanied by cosmic destruction."[85] Vita appropriated this modernist use of the word shudder; its sexual suggestiveness empowering a full-bodied, intimate appreciation of her garden.

IV. Conclusion

There is a commonplace that Vita Sackville-West was a romantic in the garden, but this classification does not suffice. Vita's anti-sentimental thrust links her to modernism, feminism, and environmentalism. She derided feminizing commonplaces about flowers as she celebrated material practices by wise, un-squeamish women. For Vita, gardens are not sentimental places; she declares war on tidy narratives of human mastery. In choosing her precedents, she explicitly ties her garden writing to Farrer's and Lawrence's styles. There is also the influence of the new biography running through Vita's writing from her saints' lives to her botanical portraits. Much of her garden writing is as exciting as she wished it, energized by intimate observation and impudent admissions calculated to unsettle her readers.

Along with Lawrence, Vita anticipated the thought of recent environmentalists: it is easy to imagine her delighting in Australian ecologist Val Plumwood's rumination on her near-death by crocodile.[86] Both women celebrate epiphanies that challenge human exceptionalism. Vita's determination to overthrow the myth of mastery coexisted with a wish for glimpses of an unseen higher beauty. She was keen on the element of surprise that teaches us to "approach the flower as though it were a mystical thing, reflecting on

82 Vita Sackville-West, *Knole and the Sackvilles* (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1949), 12.

83 Frank Kermode, "Eliot and the Shudder," *London Review of Books,* v. 32, no. 9, 13 May 2010, 13-16, 14.

84 *Ibidem*, 13. (Eliot as quoted by Kermode.)

85 *Ibidem.*

86 Val Plumwood, "Tasteless: Towards a Food-based Approach to Death." *Environmental Values* 17, no. 3 (2008): 323–30, http://www.environmentandsociety.org/mml/plumwood-val-tasteless-towards-food-based-approach-death, accessed July 30, 2018. Plumwood asserts the need to restore wonder while not being side-tracked by rationalist dismissal of anthropomorphism. See her "Journey to the Heart of Stone," in *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmental Criticism,* eds. Fiona Becket and Terry Gifford (Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi, 2007), 17-36.

each some strange beauty which is to be found in perfection only in another, unknown world."[87] As it does for the artist protagonist in *All Passion Spent,* Vita's connection to non-human nature makes death surprisingly approachable and conventional good taste irrelevant. I began by connecting Vita's rebellious spirit to Antigone as well as to her modernist contemporaries. In the era of world wars, when so many despaired of any order, Vita championed a sustaining connection to the earth, undermining claims of human triumph over it.

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87 *Some Flowers,* 15.

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Modernism Re-visited

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CHARLES WILLIAMS AS A SHAKESPEAREAN CRITIC IN THE AGE OF MODERNISM

Abstract: Charles Williams, known as novelist, poet, and member of the inter-war 'Inklings' circle of writers, also contributed to Modernist critical debate, particularly in his writings on Shakespeare. He responded distinctively to contemporary critical emphases on 'Elizabethan theatrical convention' and aesthetic and poetic autonomy. He re-asserted, against contemporary tendencies, the salience in Shakespearean drama of individual choice and sequential action. Stressing the power of Shakespearean poetry to register ambiguity and to embody divided consciousness, like William Empson, he also sought to balance claims about 'character' with an emphasis on the poetic modes and energies whereby character and self-division come into existence. Williams found in Shakespeare's oeuvre a development towards a sense, first fully present in *Troilus and Cressida*, of 'division in the nature of things'. Such division, debated but philosophically unresolved in several plays, is expressed with unique force in tragic poetry which embodies the complex co-presence of disorientation, solitude, and a will to remedial but destructive action. Williams's discussions here powerfully rework Aristotelean stipulations about the nature of tragedy in general. He saw a Shakespearean resolution of, or escape from, tragedy in the late Romances, and in the prelude to them, *Antony and Cleopatra*, where 'division' was reworked in terms of a poetic acceptance and enjoyment of the simultaneous multiplicity, and the possibilities for forgiveness, within human relationships.

Key words: poetry, division, change, solitude, action

This paper offers a short introduction to the Shakespearean criticism of an English writer, Charles Williams, whose life and work coincided with the canonic period of Modernism. Williams is now best known for his involvement with the self-styled 'Inklings' authors, who regularly adopted stances opposed to both Modernism and social and technological modernity; from these associations his reputation may have lost more, in relation to the full range of his achievement, than it has gained, and some emphasis on one aspect of that range seems appropriate and overdue. After an initial presentation of Williams's oeuvre, I shall survey two accounts, by Hugh Grady and Gary Taylor, of 'Modernist' criticism of Shakespeare. These accounts, entirely ignoring Williams, nonetheless situate his work helpfully in its temporal and conceptual settings. The rest of this paper shall be devoted to an introductory consideration of Williams's own Shakespearean texts.

Charles Williams lived, in or near London, from 1886 to 1945.[1] His chief professional employment was with Oxford University Press. He never took a university degree. Alongside a substantial body of non-fiction, he wrote seven novels, eighteen plays (most of them in verse) and several books of poetry; the novels have always found devoted fans, while the dramas invite and sustain comparison with those of T.S. Eliot. Williams himself saw the poetry as his central achievement. This is the profile, clearly, of a Grub Street man. Married with one son, Williams was never comfortably off and, infectiously enthusiastic for the world of books, attempted many subjects in diverse genres. Like G.K. Chesterton, whose career in an earlier generation is comparable, Williams wrote popular biographies, some of figures from the 'Elizabethan age'. He wrote on literary topics, introducing poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins, writings by Søren Kierkegaard and an anthology of Victorian narrative poetry. One extended critical work, *Poetry at Present*, covering eighteen English poets between 1880 and 1930, written as a companion to OUP anthologies of what was at the time perceived as "modern verse", includes perceptive treatments of Hardy, Housman and Kipling, and a nicely, perhaps disingenuously, baffled but admiring treatment of T.S. Eliot's work up to *The Waste Land*; to each critical essay Williams appends a poem of his own.[2] Throughout his work poetry and criticism are seen as contiguous in their demands upon verbal precision, rhythmic language and semantic energy. In his last years, those of the Second World War, Williams worked mainly in Oxford (the OUP moved its premises there at this time), developing relationships there with some of the Inklings writers. C.S. Lewis in particular developed towards Williams in person his existing admiration for him as a writer, while T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, among more major writers, also came to feel in Williams a personal vibrancy, perhaps a sanctity, unique amongst their acquaintance. In this period Williams emerged as a writer of Christian theology; three significant short books, *The Descent of the Dove, He came down from Heaven,* and *The Forgiveness of Sins* appeared between 1938 and 1942.[3]

His Shakespearean work took several forms. In 1933 he published *A Short Life of Shakespeare*, abbreviating Chambers's two-volume Life.[4] *A Myth of Shakespeare* is a substantial verse drama recounting the dramatist's life, in scenes between 'Shakespeare' and his contemporaries – 'Marlowe', 'Raleigh', 'Jonson', 'Queen Elizabeth' and others – and through extended extracts from plays; Williams's own writing, in dramatic blank

1 Grevel Lindop, *Charles Williams: the third Inkling* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015).

2 Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930).

3 Charles Williams, *He came down from Heaven* and *The Forgiveness of Sins* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940); *The Descent of the Dove* (London: Longmans, Green, 1939).

4 Charles Williams (ed), *A short life of Shakespeare, with the sources* (London: Clarendon Press, 1933).

verse, is less obscure than his later poetry, and the work might repay theatrical revival.[5] Anne Ridler's collection of Williams's writings, *The Image of the City and other essays*, includes brief reviews of Shakespearean books by S.L. Bethell and J. Dover Wilson.[6] Two novels, *Shadows of Ecstasy* and *Descent into Hell*, contain passages significant for Williams's sense of Shakespeare's late plays; his last theological work, *The Forgiveness of Sins*, contains a Shakespearean chapter.[7] All these are parenthetical treatments compared with the essay in Williams's critical study *The English Poetic Mind*,[8] whose arguments are extended and partly modified in *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*.[9] Uniquely in its period, the chapter in *The English Poetic Mind* attempts a connected and cumulatively argued treatment, within eighty pages, of Shakespeare's whole dramatic oeuvre in its most important aspects – its dramatic action, character, thought, poetic form, above all its compelling psychological salience and (one could reasonably say) spiritual importance.

Before turning to these, it will be useful to consider two presentations, by Hugh Grady and Gary Taylor, of the "modernist Shakespeare" which they take English inter-war critical work on the plays to have constructed. Grady's account premises a "rise of professionalism" in the field of Shakespeare studies, following a largely non-academic 19th-century discourse, from Coleridge through Hazlitt and Swinburne to A.C. Bradley, which had focussed upon the characters of the plays and the moral commitments of individual dramas and on the oeuvre as a whole in its relationship to the elusive life of its author.[10] This new modern professionalism emphasised the study of linguistic, textual, and political disciplines salient for both Shakespeare and his dramatic contemporaries, whose output could provide a crucial contrast and control for a proper sense of what, in Shakespeare, might be truly distinctive. It became customary to believe that some plays traditionally ascribed to Shakespeare might more properly be attributed to these contemporaries – the "disintegrationist" approach; while supposed Shakespearean singularity was to be supplemented by awareness of general dramatic conventions distinguishing all Elizabethan and Jacobean plays from the dramaturgy current in the period of 'modernity' itself, of Ibsen, Shaw, Chekhov and 'theatrical realism'. This line of thought, in effect, combined 'professionalism' with a newly astringent attitude to Shakespeare's supposed pre-eminence as author and playwright, and a general neglect

5 Williams, *Poetry at Present*.

6 Charles Williams, *Selected writings*, chosen by Anne Ridler (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).

7 Charles Williams, *Shadows of ecstasy* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1933); C Williams, *Descent into hell* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1937).

8 Charles Williams, *The English Poetic Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932).

9 Charles Williams, Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).

10 Hugh Grady, *The Modernist Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

of the Victorian focus on Shakespearean characterisation by which that pre-eminence had been upheld and defined.

Grady considers in some detail the early Shakespearean work of a major 20th-century critic, G. Wilson Knight. He sees him as exemplary for the period in applying to Shakespearean plays the interpretative modes of literary modernism, valorising artistic autonomy, and developing spatial, rather than temporal, modes of critical reading and textual constitution: "..spatial...is a category Knight constitutes by searching for intelligible patterns formed by those aspects of the play not connected with time-flow, plot, or its associated cause-and-effect structure".[11] Rather than actions, Wilson Knight, in Shakespearean plays, sought and found 'themes'. Or, rather, this is Grady's own 'theme'; a passage from Wilson Knight, by contrast, makes a related but different point:

> Now since in Shakespeare there is this close fusion of the temporal, that is, the plot-chain of event following event, with the spatial, the omnipresent and mysterious reality brooding motionless over and within the play's movement, it is evident that the two principles thus firmly divided in analysis are no more than provisional abstractions from the poetic unity.[12]

Given this important stipulation, Knight's Shakespeare is not, in fact, 'spatialized' at the expense of 'temporal' plot and action; it would be better to see Knight's Shakespeare as dominated not by 'theme' but by 'counterpoint', between themes and the ongoing dramatic actions. And issues of dramatic action remained important for other critics, older contemporaries of Wilson Knight, on whose work Taylor's presentation lays significant emphasis.

Taylor's picture of interwar criticism encourages a view of critics, not so much (as with Grady) collectively constituting an artistically autonomous and coherent body of authorship, but rather, each in turn, combating and correcting exaggerated claims of precursors and contemporaries - thus testifying to multiple and intertwined potentialities, in Shakespearean texts, which they sought, through aggressively 'professional' techniques but without complete success, to standardise and separate out from each other.[13] His chapter coincides with one of Grady's emphases in starting with two critics, Levin Schücking and E.E. Stoll, who 'both insist upon interpreting Shakespeare's characters in terms of the theatrical conventions of his own time' – following in this some leading authors of the period, including Shaw, who had been prepared to see their own 'Ibsenist' drama as "a big blessed advance over the primitive conventions of the Elizabethans".[14] Such iconoclasm is a world away from Wilson Knight. Yet at this point Taylor, to incorporate Wilson Knight and others, sets up, from some texts by

11 *Ibidem*, 94.
12 George Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), 5.
13 Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1989).
14 *Ibidem*, 234, 235.

Shaw, a dichotomy - which becomes in turn a bridge – "between the opposing worlds of Ibsen and Wagner, between argumentative prose realism and musical myth"; what Shaw thus separated, T.S. Eliot willed into new union – "a fusion of musicality and myth held together by wholly artificial theatrical conventions".[15]

The argument is tenuous – what has become of Ibsenian prose realism? – yet Taylor's problems here indicate the genuine diversity of inter-war Shakespearean critical practice. He passes on to the newly 'professionalised' approaches of biographers, such as Chambers, and of textual scholars – to which he might have added (a strange omission) the historical readings by E.M.W. Tillyard of Shakespeare's English Histories as vehicles for Tudor political ideology. All these disciplines – biography, textual study, and historiography – contended with basic matters of authorship and chronology; thus 'By redefining Shakespeare as a complex of problems, critics and scholars redefined themselves as problem solvers. And so goodbye to all those amateur enthusiasts...' – especially in the areas, previously so prominent, of moralising and character profiles.[16] Here – a crucial event – the emergence of the 'New Criticism' deployed terminology giving supreme value to ambiguity and irony – a further professional advance for the academic study of English. By 1939, in effect, Shakespeare had recovered from his downgrading by Ibsenists, to become – here Taylor's account again joins Grady's – a prize exhibit in the field of complex textual meaning. Thus the alleged features of Elizabethan dramaturgy prominent in Shakespearean criticism up to about 1930 – exciting but illogical action, flat and/or inconsistent characters, and an absence of constructive moral thought – were, without explicit counter-argument, subordinated to the values set upon 'themes', 'image-clusters' and an inconclusive or ironic 'play of ideas'. It was in fact here, in the New Critical approach to Shakespeare, rather than in the work of Wilson Knight, that 'spatiality' came to dominate over considerations relating to what I would want to call 'character(s) in action'.

As I have said, Grady's and Taylor's narrative analyses coincide in their omission of Charles Williams. They also fail to do justice to the overall treatment of Shakespearean writing in the oeuvre of T.S. Eliot, splendidly illuminated in Anne Stillman's recent chapter – especially with regard to Eliot's poetic allusions and echoes of the dramatic texts, throughout his work, and to his 'impersonations' in such poems as 'Coriolan' and 'Marina'.[17] Such achievements are indeed scarcely predictable from the rather patronising tone of Eliot's earlier Shakespearean essays, particularly his notoriously negative *obiter dicta* at the expense of Hamlet and *Hamlet*. Yet the most indefensible

15 *Ibidem*, 238.

16 *Ibidem*, 245.

17 Anne Stillman, "T.S. Eliot" in A Poole (ed.), *Joyce, T.S.Eliot, Auden, Beckett. Great Shakespeareans*, Volume XII (London and New York: Continuum, 2012), 57-104.

gap left by Grady and Taylor is their failure to represent the supreme achievement, in discussion and interpretation of Shakespearean plays and texts, of William Empson in his two inter-war masterpieces *Seven Types of Ambiguity* and *Some Versions of Pastoral*.[18] There is no space for any general consideration of what was, and remains, at stake here – Michael Wood's recent book is splendidly responsive to the greatness of 'Empson's Shakespeare'.[19] But two abiding principles of Empson's work are relevant for a presentation of his lesser contemporary Charles Williams.

Firstly, Empson never abandoned the idea that a certain 'type of ambiguity' (for him, 'the seventh') in a text embodied a situation where "the two meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind".[20] He remarks further that "the simplest way for the two opposites defined by the context to be suggested to the reader is by some disorder in the action of the negative..." – a thought amply developed in Williams's insistence on 'the negative' in the context of a well-known line of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida,* "This she? No, this is Diomed's Cressida" (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.2.137).[21] Moreover, in practice Empson's development of his own maxim, in its applications to Shakespearean and other dramatic texts, readily and plausibly attributes "fundamental division" to the mind not so much of Shakespeare as of the fictive stage speaker of a text; this crucial point entails, for Empson, an intense focus upon the situations, in the social and interpersonal setting and the sequential narrative process of a drama, within which the ambiguous and revelatory utterances of a character are to be rendered more or less intelligible.

The second Empsonian principle can thus be encapsulated in the maxim "Read for the plot"; yet this might wrongly impute to him the 'Aristotelean' priority, 'action' above 'character'.[22] Rather he is concerned with the responsibility of the reader to attend at once to 'character', the kind of person a character is, and to 'action', what a character does. In his great *King Lear* essay he writes of "...the Victorian assumption that the characters ought to be followed...".[23] Despite the apparent scare-adjective, this is indeed what he does; he considers Lear and others in terms of how their positive actions, and their responses to the others' actions, are related to their thoughts as these are expressed in their utterances. He treats, then, Shakespearean dramatic language

18 William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto and Windus Ltd, 1930); W. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935).

19 Michael Wood, *On Empson* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017).

20 Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 192.

21 *Ibidem*, 205.

22 Samuel Henry Butcher, *Aristotle's theory of poetry and fine art*. (London: Dover Publications, Inc, 1951), 25-29.

23 William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1951), 155-56.

as spoken in definable and usually complex interpersonal situations, upon which the speaking 'characters' bring to bear both feeling and thought. The best single expression of this is found early on in his oeuvre:

> ...the process of understanding one's friends must always be riddled with such indecisions... People, often, cannot have done both of two things, but they must have been in some way prepared to have done either; whichever they did, they will still have lingering in their minds the way they would have preserved their self-respect if they had acted differently; they are only to be understood by bearing both possibilities in mind.[24]

What people do and what they understand; how, amidst immense pressures making for fundamental change, they preserve, or fail or refuse to preserve, their distinctive identity and self-respect; how they choose to act and how their actions may be understood – these central concerns are found, also, in the Shakespearean writings of Charles Williams. Showing some general awareness of 'modernist' trends, Williams rarely responds to them directly, accepting at most some sense of limitation (but, also, consequent positive qualities) in the earlier plays. Overall, he is unusual in his responsiveness to a range of topics – of action, thought, poetic language, psychology, and what one might simply call human truth – rarely drawn together, except by Empson, in contemporary criticism.

I shall focus, in what follows, on *The English Poetic Mind.* Before this more detailed consideration, Williams's other Shakespearean texts deserve brief mention. His response to the possible trajectory of Shakespeare's life and work is best seen in *A Myth of Shakespeare.* Here Williams accepts familiar milestones – departure from Stratford in search of fame and fortune, encounters with fellow-playwrights and poets and with the court of Queen Elizabeth, peace at the last – while laying structural emphasis, within his own drama, upon a mid-career crisis at once of life and of thought, voiced by 'Shakespeare' thus –

> For I too can be spleenful, out of heart
> With this absurdity which is the world.
>
> – and again –
>
> O now forget
> To know thyself, my Reason, and be dark
> And quite immured![25]

The terms of 'Shakespeare' 's rhetorical self-awareness here are taken up in Williams's later critical treatment, in *The English Poetic Mind,* of *Troilus and Cressida,* as a play

24 Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 44.
25 Charles Williams, *A Myth of Shakespeare* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 83, 85.

centred upon an experience of reason in crisis which cannot, by the techniques of reason, be dispelled or resolved. The essay's two climaxes, its treatments of *Antony and Cleopatra* and of the last plays, are also paralleled by passages in Williams's novels. The protagonist of *Shadows of Ecstasy,* Nigel Considine, remarks – with reference, overtly, to Roman history, but clearly also to Shakespeare's play – that "[Antony] could have destroyed Octavian and he and the Queen of Egypt in their love could have presented the capacities of love to a high stage before the nations. But they wasted themselves and each other on the lesser delights."[26]

In *Descent into Hell* the narrator claims, of a play written by the fictive poet Peter Stanhope, that "...like the Dirge in *Cymbeline* or the songs of Ariel in *The Tempest* it possessed only the pure perfection of fact, rising in rhythms of sound that seemed inhuman because they were free from desire or fear or distress."[27]

A later passage of narrative comment, again addressed to Stanhope's evidently 'Shakespearean' play in its eventual staging, marks Williams's closest approach to the 'modernist' criticism of Wilson Knight:

> Now the process of the theatre was wholly reversed, for stillness cast up the verse and the verse flung out the actors...It was not sequence that mattered, more than as a definition of the edge of the circle, and that relation which was the exhibition of the eternal. Relation in the story, in the plot, was only an accident of need.[28]

As will be shown, Williams's essay claims, by comparison, a greater weight than this for the concept, and the presentation by Shakespeare's plays, of dramatic sequential action – albeit in relation to the tragedies rather than, as by implication in the novel, the late dramas.

On these Romances the *Forgiveness* essay also dwells, without neglecting earlier work. Thus, Williams writes, in earlier comedies "there is always a reach-me-down forgiveness at hand. Shakespeare was not yet interested in what happens when men [sic] forgive"; and "In the tragedies the question of forgiveness does not arise. It may be said that this is one reason why they are tragedies".[29] Here, in apparently neglecting the great encounter of Lear and Cordelia late in *King Lear,* Williams interestingly anticipates a remark in Empson's later essay – "One cannot speak of trust, because if she has poison for him Lear will drink it; there is no need for trust".[30] But in the last plays Williams finds, alongside some "pardons...of a more distant kind and... more formally expressed", a will to forgiveness that "is so swift that it seems almost to create the

26 Williams, *Shadows of ecstasy*, 92
27 Williams, *Descent into hell*, 66.
28 *Ibidem*, 185.
29 Williams, *He came down*, 111, 113.
30 Empson, *Structure of complex words*, 146.

love to which it responds".[31] His emphasis here - he is considering, above all, Innogen in relation to Posthumus in *Cymbeline* – is on the properties, as much dramaturgic and poetic as psychological, of 'realism' and 'speed'. It is worth adding, in the light of Williams's 'Inklings' connections, that he goes out of his way to argue that Shakespeare gave this power of instant unargued forgiveness "to personages in whom he implied no touch of what the theologians call grace".[32]

Turning now to the extended Shakespearean chapter in the *English Poetic Mind* (the book also considers Milton and Wordsworth in detail), one is struck, given its relative brevity, by the scale of its ambition; it touches upon almost every drama of the First Folio – exceptions are *1* and *2 Henry VI,* which he perhaps followed many contemporaries in supposing largely non-Shakespearean.[33] Williams makes no use of the *Sonnets,* which offer ample material for his central theme of "contradictory experience"; he may have felt some reasonable uncertainty about their dating and sequence. His account, in fact, rests much on sequentiality; its purpose, simply expressed, is "... to consider the changes in Shakespeare's way of dealing with things in his poetry".[34] Considerable substance is added, to this foregrounded notion of 'poetry', as the essay proceeds; but the next paragraph opens up another major topic.

> Every poet, like every man, sets out to enjoy himself...Of this early delight Shakespeare had his full share. The diction of the plays is part of it....[35]

There follows a reference to "the dance of words, the puns and the rhymes, for instance in the antiphon between Luciana and Antipholus in the *Comedy of Errors*".

> And even more than in the diction this enjoyment is felt in the manner of emotional apprehension. The bodies in *Titus Andronicus*, the proclaimed villainy of Richard III, the reckless and unconvincing pardon of Proteus in *Two Gentlemen*, are all examples of Shakespeare "having a good time"...There is no malice and no injustice, except by chance. Quarrels do break out; letters do go wrong; appointments are missed; and death happens. What can one do about it? Nothing but enjoy.[36]

The last three or four sentences here refer to *Romeo and Juliet*; but their implications should also cover the "proclaimed villainy" of Richard of Gloucester, such evident cases of 'malice' as Don John in *Much Ado*, and the injustices and 'quarrels' of civil war (as in both sequences of English Histories). This seems problematic, even bizarre, and Williams's case is not helped by his total omission of Shylock from the treatment of *The Merchant of Venice.* What can be said for it? Three things, perhaps.

31 Williams, *He came down*, 115, 114.
32 *Ibidem*, 117.
33 Williams, *The English poetic mind*, 29-109.
34 *Ibidem*, 29.
35 *Ibidem*, 30.
36 *Ibidem*, 30-31.

First, Williams's seemingly amoral and 'delighting' Shakespeare is at once 'man' and poet – and it seems to be the poet's delight here that determines anything that can be said of the 'man'. One thinks of Yeats's resounding contemporary formulation in *Lapis Lazuli* – 'Hamlet and Lear are gay'. Closer at hand in Williams's work is a speech addressed to 'Shakespeare' by 'Marlowe' in *A Myth of Shakespeare*:

> You are fortunate
> Above most men in this - never to know
> An ill so heavy or a chance so wry
> You cannot bring it still to blessedness
> By breathing it in music.[37]

Secondly and connected, Williams's highest terms of praise for the Shakespeare of the late plays involve the claim that "[t]he preconceived ideas of the characters had vanished; and therefore the preconceived methods of approach. Things are but themselves; his genius found that nothing brought him all things".[38] Though the point is never made explicit, the essay's overall trajectory can be defined by the idea of an adequacy, between words, worlds and emotional thought, initially unproblematic, then thrown into crisis, only to be subsequently and far more powerfully restored and reasserted. Thus, thirdly, within this grand narrative, the "early Shakespeare" is found to be in keeping, to a large extent, with the "conventional Elizabethan dramatist" of contemporary modernist criticism, unworried by issues of morality or psychological introspection.

Be this as it may, for the early work Williams also introduces distinctions. On the one hand these separate from one another, within any individual play, genres and modes – "the poetic part and the comic part".[39] On another hand, beyond what one might thus see as "group action" and "impersonal poetic beauty" ("dance-music") – a separation recalling that of "prose realism" from "musical myth" promulgated by Taylor –

> there appears 'the hero'; for example, Richard III and Petruchio. Action, tyrannical action (if we may abolish morality for a moment), broad tyrannical action, is their occupation and characteristic: from this seed the discoveries of Shakespeare sprang.[40]

The central weight carried by 'action' in Williams's account sets it apart from 'spatialized' criticism, and this emphasis re-emerges, after subtly positive and congenial accounts of the Bastard (in *King John*) and Falstaff, in reference to *Henry V*, where

37 Williams, *A myth of Shakespeare* 39-40.
38 Williams, *The English poetic mind*, 103.
39 *Ibidem*, 31.
40 *Ibidem*, 32.

> The speech of Henry's before Agincourt, and indeed his whole behaviour...has the final unity of the active life...All the subtlety of the outer world is in it...The ardent purpose of communal life in a world of activity and danger overrides the prospect of death.[41]

Again, no concern with the justice of Henry V's cause against France; more positively one notes the highly Empsonian notion of "the subtlety of the outer world". But here, for Williams, comes the central turn in Shakespeare, "...that swift, lucid, effective verse stayed, and changed".[42] From now on, in the essay, 'the poetic part' and 'the hero', fusing with each other, assume centre stage, absorbing that concern for 'action' previously assigned to 'the comic part'; while matters of 'sorrow', of 'injustice', and of non-patriotic history emerge from the 'enjoyment' which had involved their earlier suppression. 'Enjoyment' (this is the implication of Williams's detailed treatment of *Twelfth Night*) is retrospectively to be perceived as shadowed - as a matter of multiple and complex, albeit not necessarily 'unjust', deception; the play, especially its concluding song, is "the turning-point from the light to darkness, and itself – could one bear it – a comment at once on joy and grief. It is neither comic nor tragic nor ironic, but rather poetry's own comment on all that had hitherto been done".[43]

In Williams' next paragraph the central axis and distinction of his essay is opened out:

> In *Henry V* Shakespeare had avoided opposition and contradiction by killing Falstaff. In *Twelfth Night* he brought opposition in and reconciled it by invoking a delicate and joyous deception or self-deception everywhere. In *Julius Caesar* for the first time he allows the opposition which is in the nature of things to run its course...[44]

'Unknown powers' appear, from here on in; moreover "the verse of the play is continually apprehensive" and "[t]he failure of Brutus's reason is half the play... until he throws it over altogether, abandons his philosophy, and accepts the thing which is beyond philosophy"[45]

'Philosophy' is an issue for Williams's Shakespeare. Here lies one emphasis of his treatment (outstanding in its time and even now) of *Troilus and Cressida*; '"there are here two full-dress debates that are not paralleled elsewhere" – debates which, as he shows especially in relation to Hector's advocacy, in the "Trojan debate", of reason, are brought to a point and then abandoned.[46] Equally Williams stresses what he sees (in a way very perceptive for its time but, perhaps, not conclusive in the light of the play's

41 *Ibidem*, 44.
42 *Ibidem*, 42.
43 *Ibidem*, 47.
44 *Ibidem*.
45 *Ibidem*, 48, 49, 50.
46 *Ibidem*, 54.

largely subsequent performance history) as an "abandonment on the side of action" also.[47] But the defining weight of his treatment of the play, and a core idea of his whole essay, is found in his presentation of Troilus's speech focussing on the line "This she? no, this is Diomed's Cressida."

> The crisis which Troilus endured ...is in a sense the only interior crisis worth talking about. It is that in which every nerve of the body, every consciousness of the mind, shrieks that something cannot be. Only it is....The whole being of the victim denies the fact; the fact outrages his whole being. This is indeed change, and it was this change with which Shakespeare's genius was concerned.[48]

This, for Williams, is "the opposition which is in the nature of things", and it is, within his presentation of Shakespeare, as ineluctable and irreducible as any or all Empsonian ambiguities. Moreover – for alongside 'change' and 'crisis' there subsists, in Williams's discourse, a pre-eminence, as conceptual protagonist, for something else – poetry, or more precisely a 'single line' or phrase, in and of poetry, matures into a new achievement; writing of Troilus's line about the 'changed' Cressida, "Nothing at all, unless that this were she", he claims that

> It might be too much to say that the line is the first place in which that special kind of greatness occurs in Shakespeare...but it is, I think, true to say that never before in his work had such complexity of experience been fashioned into such a full and final line. It is his power entering into a new freedom.[49]

The threads of Williams's account of this play, and much that follows, are now drawn together; for him, initial attempts "to press deeper and deeper into the complexities of experience" "by a philosophical vocabulary" yield to, or are upstaged by, "lines so profound and intense that they cannot be analysed".[50] Poetry, confronting situations where necessary debate does not issue in consequential action, and where action is confounded by situations so painful or unthinkable as to defy representation, can, in and as itself, at this newly Shakespearean level of 'power' (a word central, as may by now be evident, to all Williams's work and thought), operate in three conjoined ways; as a register of 'change', as a definition and a resource of (heroic) 'solitude' – these two features being, as far as they go, compatible with a 'spatial' approach to an 'autonomous' text – and (Williams's decisive extra emphasis) as a vehicle and mode of 'action'.

These three terms, or 'things' – change, solitude and action, which 'are the concern of Shakespeare's style from *Othello* through *Lear* to *Macbeth*' – amount, in effect, to Williams's definition of tragedy.[51] He draws no connections between these terms and

47 *Ibidem*.
48 *Ibidem*, 59.
49 *Ibidem*, 61.
50 *Ibidem*, 62.
51 *Ibidem*, 76.

those of Aristotle's *Poetics.* Yet 'solitude', incumbent on a protagonist as the one by whom 'change' is experienced and confronted, arguably relates to Aristotle's conception of tragic 'character'; while 'change' and 'action' taken together not only amount to Aristotle's 'plot' but encompass the larger Aristotelean tragic teleology of 'reversal and recognition'.[52] In a crucial and remarkable passage, Williams spells out his full conception:

> It would almost be possible to imagine Shakespeare's genius proceeding by questions - not that it is likely to have done so but as a way of making its progress clear. (1) When does man act? (2) At his deepest crisis: what is that crisis? (3) This 'thing inseparate' dividing wider than the sky and earth [the reference is to *Troilus and Cressida* 5.2.148-49]: how does he receive it? (4) He madly avenges himself on the thing which typifies that division; but if he cannot? (5) He will break under it.[53]

The strong emphasis in all this on 'action' develops, in Williams's presentation, partly from *Hamlet,* where the essay shows its contemporary critical context most clearly in its concern to establish the fact and the explanations of the protagonist's 'delay'. But the argument relates also to *Othello*:

> [Othello] has lived in one world, and now he begins to live in another; this is change...In the last scene the natural egotism of Othello has achieved in this new world the balance it thought it had achieved in the old...*What* is the cause? ...of what? [The reference is to *Othello* 5.2.1] Of the action that is immediately to ensue...The lines are spoken in a play and they are the play. They mean, they are, the discovery and the expression – the poetry – of action itself. They are action speaking of itself. They are poetry gathering up into itself all the preceding poetry...Only in the superficial movements of life is action divided from its cause; in the profounder the cause is in the action, until the action has concluded or has become habitual or has been reversed...Shakespeare is not talking metaphysics; he is talking Othello. It is not abstract cause and abstract action; it is *this* cause and *this* action...the line shuts up Othello still more dreadfully in his own solitude.[54]

In abbreviating Williams's discussion here I have, I think, neither clarified nor muddied the waters of his thought; he enjoys rhetoric, he has an individual conception of verbal and syntactic rhythm, and he is dealing with formidable complexities of tragic scale and local semantic interpretation. The line opening Othello's great soliloquy, at once verbally simple and deeply obscure in reference, had already drawn from Empson the remark that "There is no primary meaning for lack of information...we are listening to a mind withdrawn upon itself, and baffled by its own agonies".[55] Where Williams's impressive general analysis of Shakespearean tragedy distinguishes 'crisis', 'avenging', and 'breaking', his treatment of *Othello* develops, from such distinction, a sense of tragedy

52 Butcher, *Aristotle's theory of poetry*, 27, 39-43.
53 Williams, *The English poetic mind*, 83-84.
54 *Ibidem*, 78-81.
55 Empson, *Seven types*, 185.

involving at once formal convergence and human painful inextricability. Moreover, where Williams attributes, to the subject of this crisis, 'solitude', one might see, not so much a protagonist's isolation from other characters, but rather a willed fusion with all that bears, in the society of the play's tragic world, the weight and strain of such contradictory crisis – a crisis at once representable in terms of spatialised stasis and intelligible only in terms of antecedent and prospective temporal action.

Within Williams's essay such a contention finds its home in his treatment of *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

> *Othello* had shown solitude and action arising out of change. But in *Macbeth* the three are one; this is the inner unity of the play... if we regard Macbeth from one point of view we are compelled to see the others at the same time. He is changing throughout; and each change develops its action; and each action its deeper solitude...There is another cause that sets this play with *Antony...Macbeth* has a double centre; *Antony* a triple. Shakespeare's genius imagined a more complex origin for them, it imagined a relationship of individuals rather than an individual in relationships. The relationship in *Macbeth* is dissolved, in *Antony* it becomes more intense; this is the progression of the poetic mind discovering fresh powers of knowledge in itself, comprehending more of 'the wondrous architecture of the world'.[56]

In Williams's reading of *Antony and Cleopatra,* multiplicity, rather than solitude, is central.

> In the other plays we had seen everybody's point of view, but here we see the whole play from everybody's point of view...All these persons are not merely persons, they are poetic powers. They project their own potentialities upon the main theme and it is this which helps to make the complexity of the play...[Shakespeare] does here for the theme of the one play what he did throughout the plays for life itself; utters every kind of poetry about it and then carries it into a last state of simple being.[57]

To put this another way, in terms Williams uses elsewhere: *Antony and Cleopatra* does not much deal in solitudes; rather it fuses multiplicities into sets of reversible relationships, regenerating political and personal clashes and antagonisms in the form of complex richness of language and perception. Where there was contradiction, there has become, now, once again, 'poetic play'. But Williams's view entails more than this. He dwells on the interpersonal relations and actions of the play's last four scenes, including as they do Antony's remarkable forgiveness of Cleopatra (who has precipitated if not caused his suicide) and, above all, what he calls 'an even further exploration', after that death, by Cleopatra:

> When [Antony] is dead... [t]here is no sense of any kind of value left at all; therefore no significance. The awareness of Macbeth and of Cleopatra for a single second are in touch. But there had been a difference; Macbeth had been full of an intense vision of himself,

56 Williams, *The English poetic mind*, 89.
57 Williams, *Reason and beauty*, 159.

> Cleopatra – more than she knew - of an intense vision of Antony. Macbeth's vitality recedes, but Cleopatra's enters a new state of being...Irony disappears - almost entirely - from this and all future plays...Cleopatra awakes to the elemental facts of her being... her perception... becomes the play - the clouding of it, and the clearing of it... She sees what she is and what others are...[58]

Or, to recall the *Forgiveness* essay, "…the realistic style reflects a realism: this is what the loveliest pardon is – it is love renewing itself in a mutual and exchanged knowledge".[59] For Williams, in *Antony and Cleopatra* and in the Romances which follow it,

> the crisis of *Troilus and Cressida* is wholly reversed and resolved. The domination of that thing inseparate [the reference is to the 'division' perceived by Williams as central to Troilus's consciousness] is turned back and is dominated by the mind of man, and poetry which explores the mind of man. The world which cannot be and which is is here united with the world which is and which cannot be...Cleopatra's poetry is a thing which reconciles and unites them.[60]

Williams's account of Shakespeare thus at its climax situates the central emphases, both of what is conventionally seen as 'modernist' Shakespeare (poetic coherence) and of Empsonian 'ambiguity', within a persuasive and inspiriting narrative account which offers, in effect, to reconcile and accommodate the work of any or all of his contemporaries. It would be good for Shakespearean studies if his essay were better known.

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58 *Ibidem*, 164-166.
59 Williams, *He came down*, 116.
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PART TWO: MODERNISM TODAY

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"AT THE BRINK OF A VISION": EPIPHANY IN THE SHORT STORIES OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND NADINE GORDIMER

Abstract: The main aim of the article is to discuss the influence of Katherine Mansfield's prose on the short stories of Nadine Gordimer. The article starts with an overview of short story criticism, concentrating on the theories of the modernist short story by Clare Hanson and Dominic Head. It is argued that the distinctive features of the modernist short story are its deemphasizing of plot, the preoccupation with the protagonist's thoughts and emotions, its use of epiphany, as well as its distinctive vision of man's identity. The first part of the article also provides a more detailed insight into the notion of epiphany. It is shown that the modernist short story often problematizes the notion of epiphany as a moment of spiritual illumination. The notion of "equivocal epiphany," introduced by Dominic Head in his analysis of Mansfield's "The Garden Party," is later applied in a close reading of Nadine Gordimer's story "A Company of Laughing Faces," included in her sixth volume of short stories, *Not for Publication* (1965). The juxtaposition of Mansfield's and Gordimer's stories shows a number of thematic and structural similarities which testify to the enduring influence of Mansfield's writing, as well as the strong hold of the modernist aesthetic over more contemporary writers.

Key words: the modernist short story, Nadine Gordimer, Katherine Mansfield

Introduction

In an interview she gave in 1963, the South African author Nadine Gordimer remarked that she was a "natural writer,"[1] by which she meant that it was not the circumstances of her life that led her to become an author, but that she did so because of a natural inclination to write. Gordimer started writing at the age of nine and continued until her death in 2014, eighty-two years later. What she called "my first story about adults"[2] was published in 1939, when she was only sixteen. There is no doubt that if Gordimer had devoted herself to writing short stories, she would have become famous as a short story writer, like Katherine Mansfield, Katherine Anne Porter or Eudora Welty – three writers she greatly admired. Throughout her life, Gordimer, however, was prolific in two genres, publishing fifteen novels and eighteen collections of short stories (including six volumes of collected stories). Her novels have always been favoured over her

1 John Barkham, "Author: Nadine Gordimer," in *Conversation with Nadine Gordimer*, ed. Nancy Topping Bazin and Marilyn Dallman Seymour (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 9-11.

2 Nadine Gordimer, "A Bolter and the Invincible Summer," in *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places*, ed. Stephen Clingman (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 19-30.

short stories – and this tendency can be seen in the verdict of the Swedish Academy. Having awarded Gordimer the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991, the Academy in their press release discussed her major novels, devoting only the last paragraph to her short stories. As the Academy observes, "the powerful novels should not make us forget the shorter works. Compact and dense, they are extremely telling and show Gordimer at the height of her creative powers."[3]

The main aim of this article is to discuss the influence of literary modernism on Gordimer's short stories. It will be argued that in her writing career, she was inspired by one modernist short story writer in particular: Katherine Mansfield. Gordimer's early stories show striking resemblances to Mansfield's work both in their choice of topics – many of them trace the evolution of a young woman's consciousness – as well as their technique, such as their masterly use of free indirect discourse and their use of epiphany. Before analysing Mansfield's and Gordimer's short stories, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the characteristics of the modernist short story. The theoretical insights into the modernist short story will then be considered in the context of Gordimer's understanding of this genre, as described in her literary essays.

Critical perspectives on the modernist short story

In the introduction to her study of the short story from 1880 to 1980, Clare Hanson draws a distinction between two kinds of short stories. The first kind is based on the tradition of the oral tale, and dates back to the works of Boccaccio and Chaucer. The distinctive feature of this kind of writing is its emphasis on plot. As Hanson observes, "In the tale, significance tends to inhere more in a particular configuration of events than in an individual human nature or response."[4] In the other tradition of short story writing, the primary focus is not on action, but rather on the thoughts and motivations of the characters; in such works, "plot is subordinate to psychology and mood."[5] This latter kind of writing, which Hanson calls short *prose*[6] (to distinguish it from the former kind, which she refers to as short *stories*) was developed by such modernist writers as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield. Rather than focusing on action, the modernist short story is characterized by its interest in what Hanson

3 "The Nobel Prize in Literature 1991: Press Release," The Nobel Foundation, accessed December 6, 2017, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1991/press.html.

4 Clare Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fiction, 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 6.

5 Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fiction*, 5.

6 Since Hanson's term *short prose* has not been widely adopted by short story critics, it will not be used in this article. The expression *modernist short story*, as used by Dominic Head in his acclaimed study, is preferable in the context of this discussion.

calls "the realm of human probabilities."[7] Since it rarely includes surprising plot twists, Hanson calls the modernist short story "plotless fiction."[8]

A further feature of the modernist short story is that it deals not with the fantastic or the improbable, but with the quotidian, seeking "that quality of the marvellous which is hidden within the mundane."[9] The marvellous lies within the individual consciousness and is revealed in a moment of epiphany. As defined by Joyce in his autobiographical novel *Stephen Hero*, epiphany is "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself."[10] Morris Beja in his important study of this notion comments that the popularity of epiphany among modernist writers stems from the discovery that "character can often be more profoundly and powerfully revealed by our mental reactions to so-called trivia than by our external reactions to demonstrably important events."[11] As defined by Beja, epiphany is characterized by two criteria: the Criterion of Incongruity – the fact that epiphany is thematically unrelated to the event that triggers it – and the Criterion of Insignificance – that although epiphany offers a profound insight into one's existence, it is often brought about by an unremarkable incident. Robert Langbaum adds four more criteria for epiphany: the Criterion of Psychological Association, which stipulates that the epiphany is not the result of divine intervention, but arises from "a real sensuous experience"; the Criterion of Momentousness – the fact that "the epiphany lasts only a moment"; the Criterion of Suddenness – the fact that epiphany catches the character unawares; and finally, the Criterion of Fragmentation – as Langbaum writes, "the text never quite equals the epiphany";[12] in other words, epiphany always transcends the character's fragmentary and imperfect understanding. It follows that the significance of a given epiphany is created by the reader and the interpretation of this event depends on their sensitivity, as well as their reading experience.

It should be noted that the overview of the modernist short story discussed above constitutes only a very general outline of this special kind of prose narrative. Among the other features of the modernist short story we also find its self-reflexivity – in other words, its tendency to foreground its style and technique – as well as its distinctive understanding of human personality, based on what Dominic Head describes as "a consideration of the fragmented, dehumanized self."[13] This latter notion is by now

7 Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fiction,* 6.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 *Ibidem*, 6-7.

10 Quoted in Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), 14.

11 Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel,* 21.

12 Robert Langbaum, "The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature," in *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, ed. Wim Tigges (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 44.

13 Dominic Head, *The Modernist Short Story: A Study in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7-8.

an unorthodox one; indeed, most philosophers and critics agree that modernist literature (not only the short story, but also the novel and poetry) was often critical of the notion of a unitary self. Charles Taylor in his important philosophical study *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* argued that modernism, like romanticism, was a reaction against a mechanistic and utilitarian image of man, as created by the European Enlightenment. Unlike romanticism, however, modernism did not put faith in nature and man's creative powers as stable sources of self. On the contrary, the inward turn of the modernists led to what Taylor calls "a fragmentation of experience which calls our ordinary notions of identity into question."[14] Taylor's argument will be taken up in the conclusion of this article.

The four features of the modernist short story mentioned above – its deemphasizing of plot, the preoccupation with the protagonist's thoughts and emotions, its use of epiphany, as well as its distinctive vision of man – can all be found in the short stories of Katherine Mansfield and Nadine Gordimer. Indeed, the extent to which Gordimer shared the modernist outlook on man and literature – at least at the beginning of her career – may seem surprising when we consider the fact that her first collection of short stories was published only after the Second World War, in 1949. Yet it is interesting that Clare Hanson in her aforementioned study discusses Gordimer's philosophy of composition as an example of a modernist approach to literature.[15] What, then, is Gordimer's conception of the short story and to what extent was it influenced by the great modernists?

Throughout her writing career, Gordimer commented on her novels and short stories, evolving what may be called a philosophy of composition. In the case of the short stories, one of the most important texts is an essay titled "The Short Story in South Africa" (1968). In this essay Gordimer juxtaposes the short story with the novel, pointing to one important difference between the two genres. As she writes, the tasks of the novelist and the short story writer are completely dissimilar in that the former has less freedom than the latter. The novelist creates characters whose thoughts and behaviour are by definition consistent over time. This is, in Gordimer's understanding, a limitation because this "consistency of experience (…) does not convey the quality of human life, where contact is more like the flash of the fireflies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness. Short-story writers," she adds, "see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of – the present moment."[16] The short story is, as Gordimer writes, ideally suited to writing about modern man: "The short

14 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 462.

15 Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fiction,* 57.

16 Nadine Gordimer, *Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1954-2008* (New York: Norton, 2010), 170.

story is a fragmented and restless form, a matter of hit or miss, and it is perhaps for this reason that it suits modern consciousness – which seems best expressed as flashes of fearful insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference."[17]

Gordimer's essay is impressionistic in its use of imagery – one is reminded of Virginia Woolf's "Modern Fiction" – but at the same time precise in identifying the central issue, namely the short story's concentration on the present moment. To Gordimer, our understanding of the surrounding world and of the bonds we create with other people is both dynamic and intermittent; dynamic because it evolves over time, intermittent because we do not at every point of our life fully realize the nature of our relationships with people and our place in society. This realization comes to us only during a brief moment of insight, which Gordimer calls "a discrete moment of truth"[18] and "flashes of fearful insight,"[19] both of which are clear references to epiphany. Modern consciousness, Gordimer suggests, understands the world in the mode of epiphany.

While the notion of epiphany is crucial to an understanding of Mansfield's and Gordimer's prose, readers should be wary of depending excessively on it. First of all, it should be noted that not all of Gordimer's stories make use of epiphany. Indeed, one may even contest the general statement offered by Thomas M. Leitch, who argued that "all short stories, we might say, proceed to a revelation that establishes a teleology, a retrospective sense of design, informing the whole story."[20] The comment is true, no doubt, but not in the case of all short stories, and not even all those that concentrate on the workings of the human mind; after all, not every psychological portrait of a character has to proceed to a moment of revelation, understood as a suddenly-acquired self-understanding. Analysing Gordimer's oeuvre, it becomes clear that even her early short stories (in such short story collections as *Face to Face* (1949), *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952) and *Six Feet of the Country* (1956)), which were the most heavily influenced by modernism, were not all concerned with analysing the characters' interiority. From the beginning of her career, Gordimer was not only a prolific, but also a diverse short story writer: her stories do not only follow the modernist mode of writing, but are also inspired by the tradition of the classical short story (in the tradition of Boccaccio and Maupassant), with its close dependence on plot and narrative resolution. Nevertheless, as Robert F. Haugh rightly points out, Gordimer's "best mode is the lyric and vividly impressionistic";[21] it seems that her stories are at their most impressive when she writes

17 *Ibidem*, 170-171.

18 *Ibidem*, 170.

19 *Ibidem*, 171.

20 Thomas M. Leitch, "The Debunking Rhythm of the American Short Story," in *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*, ed. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 131.

21 Robert F. Haugh, *Nadine Gordimer* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 80.

in the tradition of Chekhov and the great modernists that followed him. The influence of the proto-modernist and the modernist short story is clearly visible in Gordimer's early short stories, many of which concentrate on the epiphanies experienced by its characters.[22] This is also the case in "A Company of Laughing Faces": Gordimer's short story, which will be analyzed later in this article.

Equivocal epiphany in Mansfield's "The Garden Party" and Gordimer's "A Company of Laughing Faces"

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, an important thematic similarity between Mansfield's and Gordimer's short stories is that many of them describe the development of a young woman's consciousness. This is also true in the case of the two stories which have been chosen for this discussion: Mansfield's "The Garden Party," published in her third collection of short stories, *The Garden Party and Other Stories* (London, 1922), and Gordimer's "A Company of Laughing Faces" from her sixth volume of short stories, *Not for Publication* (London, 1965). There are striking resemblances between the two works. First of all, Mansfield's and Gordimer's stories concentrate on young women (Laura Sheridan and Kathy Hack, respectively) on the brink of adulthood, who experience a crisis, leading to a moment of intense awareness, which can be described in terms of an epiphany. What is more, in the case of both stories, the crisis, as well as the resulting epiphany, is brought about by their encounter with the unknown, as they are confronted with the death of other characters.

In Mansfield's story, the death of the Sheridans' working class neighbour constitutes a great shock to Laura, who initially argues that it is indecent for them to have a garden party in such grave circumstances, but who is then won over to her mother's point of view that their working class neighbours do not expect any sympathy from them. After the party successfully draws to a close, Laura collects the leftover food and, with a basket in her hand, visits the house of the grieving family, where she is invited to look at the deceased man. It is at this point that she experiences her epiphany. Looking at the dead man, she imagines him to be "fast asleep" and is moved by the image of peacefulness: "He was given up to his dream. What did garden-parties and baskets and lace frocks matter to him? He was far from all those things. He was wonderful, beautiful."[23] Having experienced this moment of epiphany, Laura finds herself confused and overcome by emotion: she comes back home crying, and, when asked about her

22 Robert F. Haugh analyses several Gordimer short stories which are modernist in their use of epiphany: "A Bit of Young Life, "Check Yes or No," "The Gentle Art," "Charmed Lives" etc.

23 Katherine Mansfield, "The Garden Party," in *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2006), 209.

visit, gives a short and vague answer: "It was simply marvellous."[24] It seems that she is unable to verbalize her thoughts.

No doubt, one of the most interesting and insightful analyses of Mansfield's story is that offered by Dominic Head. His argument is that the epiphany experienced by Laura involves a keen, if momentary awareness of the complexity and the disparity of life,[25] but that this epiphany is "compromised"[26] in that its insight is transformed into a superficial aesthetic impulse (Laura's appreciation of the calm indifference which she reads in the face of the deceased man). Head's interpretation concentrates on the workings of ideology and its impact on Mansfield's protagonist. Laura is seen as both heavily influenced by her mother's materialistic and superficial philosophy of life, which is informed by the desire to compartmentalize, i.e. to impose order on diverse and disparate events. The impulse towards "social conditioning,"[27] as Head calls it, is powerfully conveyed in the way that Mansfield uses space in her story. The garden is an enclave of the wealthy Sheridan family, separated from the poor working-class neighbourhood. The news of the tragic death of one of the workers is considered by the Sheridans – with the notable exception of the main protagonist – as a threat to the peacefulness of the house. This short fragment from a conversation between Laura and her mother is significant:

> 'Mother, a man's been killed,' began Laura.
> 'Not in the garden?' interrupted her mother.
> 'No, no!'[28]

Behind Mrs. Sheridan's spontaneous response is the conviction that since the tragic death did not happen in the garden, then it need not concern them. Laura too is shocked at the prospect of a tragedy within the peaceful and secure realm of the family garden.

Head analyses Laura's behaviour – her initial doubts about the garden party, as well as the decision to visit the home of the grieving family – as an attempt to transcend her mother's superficial and egoistic ethics, and offer genuine sympathy uninformed by social distinctions. Her impulse towards the aestheticization of death is seen as a recourse to the philosophy of compartmentalization, and thus her failure to embrace the disparity of life. As Head writes, "Laura has arrived at the brink of a vision, but her

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24 *Ibidem*, 210.

25 Head argues that this awareness is precisely what Mansfield wanted to express in her story. He quotes Mansfield's commentary on the story, in which she stated that the main aim of "The Garden Party" was to convey "the diversity of life and how we try to fit in everything, Death included. That is bewildering for a person of Laura's age. She feels things ought to happen differently. First one thing and then another. But life isn't like that. We haven't the ordering of it" (Quoted in Head 132).

26 Head, *Modernist Short Story*, 136.

27 *Ibidem*, 133.

28 Mansfield, "The Garden Party," 205.

Sheridanese is inadequate for rendering the experience."[29] While Laura is no doubt endowed with a more sensitive and emphatic predisposition than her mother, her way of thinking and communicating ("her Sheridanese"), as revealed in the free indirect discourse of the narrative, does not seem to offer any vocabulary for thinking about the suffering and misery of others. It is as if her sensitivity and empathy have been channelled into a self-gratifying aesthetic appreciation of the world.

It should be noted that Head's analysis of the equivocal epiphany in "The Garden Party" is part of a more general case he makes for the modernist short story. The critic challenges the notion of epiphany as a spiritual revelation, arguing that "if one agrees that a 'worthwhile' story involves some kind of 'moral or ethical' challenge, one might also argue that the significant moment in modernist fiction can, with worthy intent, challenge the concept of momentary understanding itself."[30] Head convincingly shows that characters in the short stories of Joyce, Woolf, and Mansfield often fail to grasp the significance of the epiphanies that they experience. Whether or not this insight can also be applied to Gordimer's "A Company of Laughing Faces" will be discussed below.

As mentioned, there are several similarities between Mansfield's and Gordimer's stories, the most important of which is that they both concentrate on the psychological development of young women who are unexpectedly confronted with sudden and tragic deaths. As is the case in "The Garden Party," death in Gordimer's story disrupts a peaceful and leisurely atmosphere – this time, not of a garden party, but of a holiday on the South African coast, where Kathy Hack – the main protagonist – and her mother are spending their Christmas vacations. During their two-week stay at a resort on Ingaza Beach, the seventeen-year-old Kathy meets her peers, starts a clandestine romantic relationship with a boy (the romance ends abruptly as the boy scares her away by his aggressive sexual advances), and, most importantly, befriends a nine-year-old boy, who, towards the end of the story, dies in an accident, as he falls off a cliff and strikes his head on a rock. Kathy is the first person to discover the dead boy, at the sight of whom she experiences a moment of insight, not unlike that described in Mansfield's story.

"A Company of Laughing Faces," like "The Garden Party," concerns a close mother-daughter relationship, but, unlike in Mansfield's story, this relationship is at the core of Gordimer's story. There is no doubt that the seventeen-year-old Kathy Hack is under the absolute influence of her mother: as we learn from the first paragraph of the story, Kathy is a cherished only child, who "had led her mother's life"[31] in that she followed her to various parties of the privileged white middle classes in South Africa. Since Kathy

29 Head, *Modernist Short Story*, 136.

30 *Ibidem*, 21.

31 Nadine Gordimer, "A Company of Laughing Faces," in *Not for Publication* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), 31.

leads a life of isolation, as she is separated from her peers by her overprotective mother, she constructs an idealised image of the life which awaits her once her mother allows her to live among her peers. Awaiting their arrival at the seaside resort where she and her mother are to spend their holidays, Kathy eagerly anticipates the moment when she will join the other teenagers and discover for herself the joys of leading an adult and independent life: "the idea was lit up inside the girl like a room made ready, with everything pulled straight and waiting . . . Soon – very soon now, when they got there, when it all began to happen – life would set up in the room. She would know she was young."[32] The picture of the room conveys Kathy's unrealistic hope that on entering her adulthood she will find her life as ordered and transparent as it was during her childhood. As with Mansfield's story, there is the underlying expectation that life will follow a set plan, taking the young woman through such socially accepted stages of adulthood as courtship, marriage, and children. When Kathy finally meets a boy, their casual friendship gives rise to some vague preconceptions concerning the male-female relationship, as well as the nature of physical love: "She and her mother were great readers of novels and she knew, of course, that there were a large number of caresses – hair, and eyes and arms and even breasts – and an immense variety of feelings that would be attached to them."[33] It is surprising to her that the boy's caresses are at first casual, non-committal, and devoid of any deeper significance. When she is invited by him for a romantic tryst – the implications of which she does not anticipate – she is surprised that the "bare little room,"[34] "dim and forgotten,"[35] with the "male smell of dead cigarette ends and ironed shirts,"[36] has any place in the comfortable, seaside hotel. The room, so unlike that inhabited by Kathy and her mother, is the place where she is confronted with the aggressive sexual advances of the boy (unlike the tender and meaningful caresses she read about in romantic novels) and where she discovers – and is scared by – her own passion. That mutual passion can take the form of an egoistic impulse, leading to aggression, is an insight that Kathy is not ready to confront, as her understanding of physical love is informed by the concepts of reciprocity and meaningfulness.

It is against the background of her painful experience that the subsequent events of the story should be viewed. After she escapes from the unsuccessful rendezvous with the boy, she runs to the beach of her holiday resort, where, for the first time during her stay, she looks out into the sea: "The glare from the sea hit her, left and right, on both sides of her face: her face that felt battered out of shape by the experience of her own passion. She could not go back to her room because of her mother; the idea

32 Gordimer, "A Company of Laughing Faces," 32.
33 *Ibidem*, 39-40.
34 *Ibidem*, 40.
35 *Ibidem*, 41.
36 *Ibidem*.

of her mother made her furious."[37] The fragment describes a brief moment of insight experienced by Gordimer's protagonist. Not unlike the brief and imperfect moments of self-understanding described in modernist short stories, Kathy's insight into her thoughts and emotions is based on a realization that she is not ready to accept; in fact, her growing awareness of sexual desire is described as if it was an attack on herself: we learn about "the glare from the sea" which "hit her."[38] The word "glare" is especially important insofar as it acquires a symbolic significance in this passage. It seems that Gordimer is playing here with the idea of illumination, understood as a moment which enables one to understand obscure (and in this sense 'dark') thoughts and motivations. The moment of illumination experienced by Kathy, compared to the glare of the afternoon sun, is so overwhelming that she is not ready to accept it; this sudden realization of her sexuality is described as if it was an assault on her identity. Viewed from a psychological perspective, the reason why Kathy is not ready to reflect upon her newly-realized impulses is that she experiences acute embarrassment on making this discovery. It seems that this keen feeling of embarrassment stems from the unrealized awareness that her sexuality, which she has now recognised as a powerful driving force of her emotions, is a transgression of the widely-accepted moral standards represented by her mother. In other words, what Kathy finds deeply unsettling is not only that she was attacked by the boy, but also that she became aroused by his sexual advances. The sense that her passion has lingered in her body despite her disgust and outrage at the boy's actions is a discovery she is unable to accept.

In its first moments, Kathy's flight from her newly-acquired self-knowledge takes the form of an imaginary return to her childhood, as she joins a nine-year-old boy – the one who dies in a tragic accident at the end of the story – at his childish and innocent games on the beach. After this meeting, she rejoins the company of her peers; this time without the sense of alienation that she experienced before:

> Certainly Kathy was no longer waiting for a sign; she had discovered that this was what it was to be young, of course, just exactly this life in the crowd that she had been living all along, silly little ass that she was, without knowing it. There it was. And once you'd got into it, well, you just went on.[39]

Kathy's decision to join in the carefree holiday life of her peers is connected with her discovery that it is possible – indeed, necessary – to embrace the superficial existence favoured by her peers. The immediate reward of this life is the reassuring sense of being part of the crowd, not only in the immediate, physical sense, but also in the sense of uncritically accepting the norms and attitudes of others. What Kathy does not

37 *Ibidem*, 42.
38 *Ibidem*.
39 *Ibidem*, 43.

realize at this point is that this kind of behaviour is not only characteristic of youth, but is also part of adult life; indeed, the kind of superficiality and social conformity that she learns during her holidays have been mastered to perfection by her mother.

If Gordimer's story ended at this point – leaving Kathy testing her newly acquired social skills in the "company of laughing faces" – it would be an elegantly-written and ironic commentary on the kind of superficiality and social conformity that a young girl has to acquire in order to find her place in society. The story, however, does not end at this point; like many stories that focus on the protagonist's interiority it proceeds to an inner revelation, which can be discussed in terms of an epiphany. Kathy experiences this unexpected moment of insight when she is confronted with the body of the nine-year-old boy. She is the first of the search party to find who finds the dead child. The moment of coming across the body, submerged in a small pond underneath a waterfall, is described as a private or even intimate encounter between the two:

> What she felt was not shock, but recognition. It was as if he had had a finger to his lips, holding the two of them there, so that she might not give him away. The water moved but did not move him; only his little bit of short hair was faintly obedient, leaning the way of the current, as the green beard of the rock did. He was as absorbed as he must have been in whatever it was he was doing when he fell.[40]

What is reminiscent here of Mansfield's story is that death is described as a state of peacefulness; the calm and focused face of the child seems to bear no trace of his violent death. The almost perfect immobility of the child's body, which Gordimer conveys masterfully by referring in detail to the moving strand of his hair, likens him to an artifice; he has become a work of art which fills Kathy with wonder, rather than dread. This interpretation is borne out by the last sentence of the story, in which we learn about Kathy's emotional reaction to the macabre discovery in the lagoon: "the sight, there, was the one real happening of the holiday, the one truth and the one beauty."[41]

A close reading of Mansfield's and Gordimer's stories shows striking parallels between "The Garden Party" and "A Company of Laughing Faces." First of all, the epiphanies experienced by Laura and Kathy are informed by a strong aesthetic impulse, which, in both cases, can be analyzed as a subconscious attempt to channel negative feelings of dread and apprehension into a romanticised reaction based on awe and aesthetic appreciation. There is a sense that the young women are unable to confront the death of others, as well as the sadness and mourning that surrounds its finality. This is even more pronounced in the case of Kathy: as we learn, after discovering the dead boy, she "looked at him, for a minute, and then she clambered back to the shore

40 *Ibidem*, 46.
41 *Ibidem*, 47.

and went on with the search."[42] Kathy's failure to inform the others about her discovery can be seen as a reluctance to break the terrible news to the boy's family, but also as an extreme (and successful) attempt to ward off the awareness of death. It is as if she decided to enter into the conspiracy of silence offered by the boy: as we learn from the fragment quoted, she imagines the boy holding a finger to his lips, as if he was asking her to keep his death a secret. Like Laura, Kathy is either reluctant or unable to talk about her discovery; the only reference to the tragic incident that she conveys is the childlike comment addressed to her mother: "I don't like this place,"[43] which terminates their holidays.

Viewing Kathy's response to the drama of death as an example of an "ambivalent epiphany" leads to a new, more nuanced interpretation of Gordimer's story. As mentioned, the notion of "ambivalent" or "equivocal epiphany" is discussed by Dominic Head in his study of the modernist short story. Analysing Mansfield's "Miss Brill," Head notes that in the short story, "a revelation of self-awareness has been offered,"[44] but that this newly acquired self-awareness is instantly effaced by the main protagonist, leading to an "ambivalent 'epiphany,'"[45] which highlights "the character's own internal conflict between awareness and delusion."[46] It can be argued, using another phrase of Head's, that both Mansfield's and Gordimer's protagonists find themselves "at the brink of a vision,"[47] whose insight they are either reluctant or not ready to fully confront.

Conclusion: the complexity of life and the fragmentation of the self

Juxtaposing "The Garden Party" and "A Company of Laughing Faces," it can be argued that they share a distinctly modernist way of viewing the notion of identity. In this context it is worth coming back to Charles Taylor's important comment on the modernist aesthetics of fragmentation. Taylor claims that what underlies the literary works of the modernists is the contention that "an escape from the traditional unitary self was a condition of a true retrieval of lived experience."[48] The notions of a unitary self, favoured both by writers of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, distort the complexity of life, which simply cannot be conveyed in a work narrated or focalized by a rational and unitary consciousness. It is perhaps due to this belief that many modernist short stories, as well as those which have been influenced by modernism, concentrate on

42 *Ibidem*, 46.
43 *Ibidem*.
44 Head, *Modernist Short Story*, 111.
45 *Ibidem*.
46 *Ibidem*.
47 *Ibidem*, 136.
48 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 462.

moments when the characters' consciousness, confronted with the complexity and indeterminacy of the surrounding world, is splintered into dynamic, and at times, contradictory impressions. In other words, it can be argued that both Mansfield and Gordimer focus on individual consciousness at the very moment when its seeming unity is being undone in the act of perceiving the multifarious reality of life. In both stories the truth is that which cannot be contained and thus escapes all attempts at being verbalized. The fact that Gordimer used the modernist aesthetic to describe what she called "modern consciousness,"[49] and did so both in her early and later stories, shows that the modernist outlook on human identity continues to be important for more contemporary writers.

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49 Gordimer, *Telling Times*, 170-171.

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MODERNIST AESTHETICS AND EXISTENTIALIST THOUGHT IN J.M. COETZEE'S *THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS*

Abstract: J.M. Coetzee's art is deeply rooted in European literary tradition and reflects the complicated relationships between two twentieth-century European avant-garde movements – modernism and postmodernism. This chapter aims to explore Coetzee's involvement with modernism in his novel *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), an elusive allegorical narrative, peopled by displaced characters and set in an indeterminate location, strongly evocative of disconcerting Kafkaesque and Beckettian spaces. In this novel, Coetzee employs a distinctly modernist aesthetics of minimalism to deal with such themes as dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom and commitment. Moreover, Coetzee's novel represents a continuation of modernist impulses to draw on existentialist thought in an attempt to grasp the human condition in specific historical circumstances. It is proposed in this chapter to read Coetzee's novel as an existential fable enacting the fundamental sense of disorientation and bewilderment that is associated with the postmodern condition and that is akin to the pervasive feeling of anxiety defined by Heidegger's term of *Geworfenheit* and expressed in Lukács's conception of "transcendental homelessness".

Key words: J.M. Coetzee, modernism, existentialism, philosophical novel, allegory

1. Introduction

The first decade of the twenty-first century was marked by the movement away from postmodernism as a dominant literary and aesthetic mode. In their overview of the literary scene in the 2000s, Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson point out that as postmodern experiments in fiction lost their novelty and postmodernism became embedded in mainstream culture, novelists and cultural critics started to examine "the end, or indeed, ends of postmodernism."[1] According to Bentley, Hubble and Wilson, one of the most important factors that stimulated the desire to move beyond postmodernism, while recognizing its continuing importance, was the growing awareness of limits to postmodernism in a philosophical sense. As is well known, postmodernism is characterized by a radical skepticism towards all systems that claim totalizing narratives; however, many writers in the 2000s began to think beyond that limit. Some critics

1 Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson, "Introduction: Fiction of the 2000s: Political Contexts, Seeing the Contemporary, and the End(s) of Postmodernism," in *The 2000s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 14.

of postmodernism such as Fredric Jameson or bell hooks, see postmodernism not as a radical disruption of totalizing narratives but the aesthetic practice that is complicit with late capitalism and neo-imperialistic practices as pursued by Western nations. Consequently, the embracing of postmodernism in the academies and in popular culture can be regarded as "a component of cultural imperialism that exports ethical relativism to marginalized groups, making it difficult to ground an oppositional politics in any set of agreed ideologies such as class struggle, feminism or postcolonialism."[2]

The wish to interrogate the legacies of postmodernism has intensified the theoretical debate concerning the relation between postmodernism and modernism. Thus, Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges reject the traditional dichotomy of postmodernism versus modernism because, in their opinion, it constricts a historical development to the choice between two linear, chronological positions. Instead of confining modernism to a specific historical or geographic location, they emphasize the pervasiveness and contemporaneity of modernism, which came to signify a twentieth-century tradition of artistic seriousness and value:

> […] contemporary culture is returning to modernism – not only to celebrate it as a canon of aesthetic value or an exemplary tradition of innovation […], but to consider the contemporary status of problems that have been seen as constitutive of modernism: art's movement to self-referentiality and critical engagement, and the material conditions of this movement; the role of the aesthetic in preserving the thought of an interval of difference from the colonization of culture by the universality of the market; modernism's challenge to historicism and inherited models of temporal development.[3]

The changing attitudes to postmodernist cultural practices are also manifest in the work of contemporary novelists. In the aftermath of postmodernism, there are writers who have turned to modernist or realist techniques as a way of returning to a pre-postmodernist aesthetics.[4] There are also contemporary writers who demonstrate the complicated relationships between modernism and postmodernism in all of their oeuvre. One of such writers is J.M. Coetzee, whose ambivalent position in relation to these two movements has resulted in literary critics variously describing him as "a self-conscious postmodernist,"[5] "a late modernist" or "a neo-modernist,"[6] and as a writer whose works both extend and challenge modernism.[7]

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2 *Ibidem*.

3 Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges, "Introduction: The Contemporaneity of Modernism," in *The Contemporaneity of Modernism: Literature, Media, Culture*, ed. Michael D'Arcy and Mathias Nilges (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 2.

4 Bentley, Hubble and Wilson, "Introduction," 17.

5 Elizabeth Lowry, "Like a Dog," review of *Disgrace*, by J.M. Coetzee, *London Review Bookshop*, October 14, 1999, www.lrb.co.uk/v21/n20/lowr01_.html

6 Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2-6.

7 Dominic Head, *The Cambridge Introduction to J.M. Coetzee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34.

J.M. Coetzee's art is deeply rooted in European modernist tradition: Beckett and Kafka are two of his major influences. As a literary scholar, Coetzee explored their style of writing in a number of critical works; moreover, his doctoral dissertation was devoted to the style of Samuel Beckett's English fiction. Coetzee himself commented on Beckett's impact on his writing style:

> He is a clear influence on my prose. Most writers absorb influence through their skin. With me there has also been a more conscious process of absorption. Or shall I say, my linguistic training enabled me to see the effects I was undergoing with a degree of consciousness. The essays I wrote on Beckett's style aren't only academic exercises, in the colloquial sense of that word. They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own. And discard, eventually, as it is with influences.[8]

He praises Beckett as "a master of restraint"[9] and admires his minimalistic, "spare" prose, which serves as a model for his own technique: "I do believe in spareness […]. Spare prose and a spare, thrifty world […]."[10] Coetzee's description of "the late-Beckettian world" in which characters are "condemned to a purgatorial treadmill on which they rehearse again and again the great themes of Western philosophy"[11] can be applied to his own novels as well. Significantly, Joseph Brodsky was quoted as saying that Coetzee was "the only one who had the right to write prose in English after Beckett."[12] As to Kafka's influence, it is, as Dominic Head observes, "the combined sense of nightmare and inscrutable authority […] that Coetzee appropriates, and which resonates powerfully in his treatments of oppression and marginalization."[13] Obviously, the modernist writers' association with existentialism has found its reflection in Coetzee's work too.

Coetzee's minimalist, self-reflective prose, especially his post-millennial novels, has mounted "the discreet revolution" in fiction[14] by radically re-defining and re-thinking the form of the novel. This chapter focuses on *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013), whose elusive content has received controversial responses both from critics and readers. Some of the reviewers described the book as "obscure"[15] and "bloodless,"[16] while oth-

8 J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 25.

9 J.M. Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett, the Short Fiction," in *Inner Workings: Essays 2000 – 2005* (London: Harvill Secker, 2007), 169.

10 Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, 20.

11 Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett," 169.

12 Lev Loseff, *Joseph Brodsky: A Literary Life*, trans. Jane Ann Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

13 Head, *Cambridge Introduction*, 33.

14 Neel Mukherjee, Review of *Slow Man*, by J.M. Coetzee, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/fiction/article2361536.ece

15 Hedley Twidle, Review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee, *The Financial Times*, March 8, 2013, https://www.ft.com/content/151395ea-84e4-11e2-891d-00144feabdc0.

16 Theo Tait, Review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee, *The Guardian*, February 27, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/27/childhood-of-jesus-jm-coetzee-review.

ers, on the contrary, hailed it as sophisticated and "thought-provoking."[17] Indeed, the multilayered and protean allegory of the novel opens up possibilities for different interpretations. For example, the book has been read as a Buddhist utopia representing the Buddhist-style afterlife as Buddhist ideals of non-attachment and serene imperturbability are frequently invoked. Consequently, one of the main themes of the novel has been identified as that of spiritual discipline: self-denial versus sensualism, which has long been present in Coetzee's writing.[18] On the other hand, the contributors to the collection of essays entitled *J.M. Coetzee's* The Childhood of Jesus*: The Ethics of Ideas and Things* variously approach the novel as a parable of the migrant and refugee experience and the assimilating drive of modern nation states; as the Cartesian fantasy of creating artificial human life; or as a narrative that explores the production of meaning in literature and in mathematical and theological representations. Besides, some authors in the collection focus on the theme of familial bonds and education as well as on the examination of the novel's rich intertextuality (references to Cervantes, Borges, Plato, Bergson).[19] In particular, Robert B. Pippin explores the novel's dialogue with apocryphal infancy gospels excluded from the New Testament canon of the Bible, that record the strange nature of Jesus as a child.[20]

This chapter aims to discuss Coetzee's novel from the perspective of its involvement with modernism and existentialism. *The Childhood of Jesus*, an ambiguous narrative peopled by displaced characters and set in an unspecified location, is strongly evocative of disconcerting Kafkaesque and Beckettian spaces. In his novel, Coetzee employs a distinctly modernist aesthetics of minimalism to deal with such themes as dread, boredom, alienation, freedom and commitment. Moreover, Coetzee's novel represents a continuation of modernist impulses to draw on existentialist thought in an attempt to grasp the human condition in specific historical circumstances. It is proposed in this chapter to read Coetzee's novel as an existential fable enacting the fundamental sense of disorientation and bewilderment that is associated with the postmodern condition and that is akin to the pervasive feeling of anxiety analysed by such existentialist philosophers as Heidegger, Sartre and Lukács.

17 John Harding, Review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee, *Daily Mail Online*, February 28, 2013, www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-2285956/J-M-Coetzee-THE-CHILDHOOD-OF-JESUS.html.

18 Tait, Review.

19 Anthony Uhlmann and Jennifer Rutherford, ed., *J.M. Coetzee's* The Childhood of Jesus*: The Ethics of Ideas and Things* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

20 Robert B. Pippin, "What Does J.M. Coetzee's Novel, *The Childhood of Jesus*, Have To Do With The Childhood Of Jesus?", in *J.M. Coetzee's* The Childhood of Jesus*: The Ethics of Ideas and Things*, ed. Anthony Uhlmann and Jennifer Rutherford (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 9-32.

2. Modernist poetics and existential allegory in *The Childhood of Jesus*

For his novel Coetzee creates a peculiar, indeterminate setting: it is an unnamed country, presumably somewhere in Latin America, with its own customs and laws. In this country, everyone is migrant from somewhere, a refugee from a past life. They have all come to this place "for the sake of a new life, a new beginning."[21] As one of the inhabitants, Elena, explains to the newcomer Simón: "You arrived in this country naked, with nothing to offer but the labour of your hands. You could have been turned away, but you were not: you were made welcome. You could have been abandoned under the stars, but you were not: you were given a roof over your head. You have a great deal to be thankful for."[22] The main action of the novel takes place in Novilla, a port city where refugees arrive to start a new life. Before being allowed into Novilla, however, they have to stay at a camp in the desert called Belstar[23] where the newcomers are made to discard all traces of their former lives so that they arrive in their new country "washed clean of the past."[24] They are taught Spanish (the universal language of communication in the country) and their new Hispanic names are issued to them by the authorities. In Novilla, they are provided with modest sustenance and accommodation in uniform housing blocks. Coetzee's austere modernist aesthetics is especially effective in creating the atmosphere of a drab and vague place:

> Some weeks after they first presented themselves at the Centre, a letter arrives from the office of the Ministerio de Reubicación in Novilla informing him that he and his family have been allocated an apartment in the East Village, occupation to be effected no later than noon on the coming Monday.
> East Village, familiarly known as the East Blocks, is an estate to the east of the parklands, a cluster of apartment blocks separated by expanses of lawn. […] The blocks making up the village are of identical pattern, four floors high. On each floor six apartments face upon a square that holds such communal amenities as a children's playground, a paddle pool, a bicycle rack, and washing lines. East Village is generally held to be more desirable than West Village; they can count themselves lucky to be sent there.[25]

Although the migrants are treated decently and their basic needs are satisfied, the sense of calm, furthered by Coetzee's stark prose, is very disturbing; there is a growing

21 J.M. Coetzee, *The Childhood of Jesus* (London: Harvill Secker, 2013), 79.

22 *Ibidem*, 107.

23 Belstar brings to mind the Australian immigration detention centres and internment camps (such as Baxter Detention Centre or Belsen), mentioned by Coetzee in *Diary of a Bad Year*. Essay 22 of the novel, "On Asylum in Australia," contains a sharp critique of the immigration policy pursued by John Howard's Liberal-National Coalition Government of incarcerating unwelcome refugees or asylum seekers in detention centres (where the conditions are, as Coetzee puts it, no better than in Guantanamo Bay) while their applications for legal entry are being processed for long periods. See: J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (London: Vintage Books, 2008/first published 2007), 111-113.

24 Coetzee, *Childhood*, 80.

25 *Ibidem*, 51.

atmosphere of dread. As Simón and his protégé, the boy David, are trying to settle in Novilla, they discover a lot of incompetent bureaucracy while the city itself has certain "labyrinthine or Kafkaesque qualities":[26]

> Partly because he is tired and disoriented, partly because the map the girl has sketched for him is not clear, partly because there are no signposts, it takes him a long time to find Building C and the office of señora Weiss. The door is closed. He knocks. There is no reply. […] They make their way back to the Centro de Reubicación. The door is locked. He raps on the glass. There is no sign of life inside. He raps again.[27]

Like Kafka, Coetzee shows his characters as being caught up in situations and systems that are well beyond their understanding and control. Simón experiences a sense of disorientation and anxiety in the new social and spatial milieu in which he finds himself – the strange society from which he feels alienated, the confusing urban space of Novilla, and the unknown territory of the hinterland, which though "lush and fertile," has almost no human habitation and whose "emptiness strikes him as desolate rather than peaceful."[28] His efforts to locate his position within this complex new milieu, to gain a concrete sense of place turn out to be futile. The protagonist's sense of disorientation is highlighted by his unsuccessful attempts to use maps to find his bearings in the new country: maps are either misread or misrepresent space since what is shown in the map does not match what the protagonist sees ("either he has misread the map or the map itself is at fault"[29]), or the maps are not available at all when most needed (as during the protagonists' escape from Novilla: "He has no map. He has no idea what lies ahead on the road"[30]). The characters are stranded in this strange country and they do not know where they are or what their purpose is, or their purpose lacks discernable meaning.

Coetzee's novel seems to be a fictional embodiment of a situation denoted by Heidegger's term *Geworfenheit,* which Coetzee himself has used to describe the atmosphere of Beckett's novels: "being thrown without explanation into an existence governed by obscure rules."[31] This idea is also illustrated by a dialogue between David and Simón:

> "[…] what are we here for?"
> "I don't know what to say. We are here for the same reason everyone else is. We have been given a chance to live and we have accepted that chance. It is a great thing, to live. It is the greatest thing of all."[32]

26 Keith Miller, "The Saviour Abroad," review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee, *Literary Review*, March 2013, https://literaryreview.co.uk/the-saviour-abroad.
27 Coetzee, *Childhood*, 4.
28 *Ibidem*, 67.
29 *Ibidem*, 68.
30 *Ibidem*, 262.
31 Coetzee, "Samuel Beckett," 171.
32 Coetzee, *Childhood*, 17.

Coetzee's abstract, elusive narrative can be read as a postcolonial fable, a contemporary allegory dramatizing the process of uprooting and relocation in the present world with its increasing mobility and immigration. On the other hand, the novel can be interpreted in a broader sense, as an existential parable enacting our experience of being-in-the-world which frequently resembles the experience of being lost. This feeling of disorientation is akin to the pervasive feeling of anxiety expressed in Lukács's conception of "transcendental homelessness" or in Heidegger's *das Nicht-zuhausesein* ("not-being-at-home").[33] In Heidegger's view, the experience of being in the world is occasioned by an intense anxiety (*angst*) and a sense of the uncanny, which is fundamentally a sense of not being "at home" in the world.

3. Simón as an existential individual and a modernist hero

Although the protagonist, Simón, tries to adjust himself to the strange society of Novilla, he feels alienated from its atmosphere. Novilla is a society based on logic, rationality and impersonality while passion, imagination and individuality are suppressed. All is generic and universal in this society, which Joyce Carol Oates describes as a "quasi-socialist state in which conformity, mediocrity and anonymity are both the norm and the highest values."[34] Novilla seems to be run along utopian lines. As Hedley Twidle notes, the name Novilla captures the mixture of newness and nowhere that resides in literary utopias from Thomas More onwards. And as in More's commonwealth, we are left uncertain about whether this is a brave new world or else a worryingly centralized and even sinister dictatorship of the people.[35]

In existentialist terms, Novilla can be described as a society in which "there is no place for the past as repentance or the future as obligation, defining features of the ethical sphere."[36] Repentance, obligation and commitment come into play as a result of an exercise of free choice and thus an individuating choice. Novilla's society illustrates the underlying theme of existentialists that "the pull in modern society is away from individualism and toward conformity."[37] The inhabitants of Novilla live inauthentic lives; they do not see "any doubleness in the world, any difference between the way things

33 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row,1962), 233.

34 Joyce Carol Oates, "Saving Grace," review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee, *New York Times*, August 29, 2013, Sunday Book Review, www.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/books/review/j-m-coetzees-childhood-of-jesus.html.

35 Twidle, Review.

36 Thomas R. Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31.

37 Flynn, *Existentialism*, 24.

seem and the way things are";[38] they do not understand irony and "they have no secret yearnings […], no hankerings after another kind of life."[39] It seems that only Simón is "the exception, the dissatisfied one, the misfit."[40] Simón considers the nameless land "too placid for his taste, too lacking in ups and downs, in drama and tension."[41] As he confesses to his fellow worker Eugenio:

> "Something is missing, Eugenio. I know it should not be so, but it is. The life I have is not enough for me. I wish someone, some saviour, would descend from the skies and wave a magic wand and say, *Behold, read this book and all your questions will be answered*. Or, *Behold, here is an entirely new life for you*."[42]

In a series of Platonic dialogues he conducts with various characters (Elena, Alvaro, Eugenio and other stevedores) he poses fundamental existential questions about the nature of humanity and the meaning of life. Thus, he addresses the problem of asceticism versus passion and ultimately what it means to be human: to desire "storms of passion"[43] or refusing desires: "If we had no appetites, no desires, how would we live?"[44] Questions concerning the meaning of life are central to Simón's musings: "what are we here for?", "what is it all for, in the end?", Is there "a larger picture," "a loftier design"? In other words, he wonders if there are external, transcendent, or eternal grounds for justifying one's own existence or for finding some essence or meaning apart from the world (for example, God):

> "Still, what is it all for, in the end? The ships bring the grain from across the seas and we haul it off the ships and someone else mills it and bakes it, and eventually it gets eaten and turned into – what shall I call it? – waste, and the waste flows back into the sea. […] How does it fit into a larger picture? I don't see any larger picture, any loftier design. It's just consumption."[45]

According to existentialist thought, in the anxiety that causes one to feel disoriented or lost, one must have the freedom to create one's own meaningful existence. Sartre, while acknowledging the real anguish that accompanies a person's sense of being lost, demands that individuals develop projects by which to give our lives meaning, or to re-establish our sense of place and purpose in the world. Likewise, Kierkegaard in his *Journals,* mused: "the thing is to find a truth which is true *for me,* to find the idea for which I can live and die," that is, a personal conviction for which one is willing to risk one's life.[46]

38 Coetzee, *Childhood*, 64.
39 *Ibidem*.
40 *Ibidem*.
41 *Ibidem*.
42 *Ibidem*, 239. Original emphasis.
43 *Ibidem*, 32.
44 *Ibidem*, 29.
45 *Ibidem*, 108.
46 Quoted in Flynn, *Existentialism*, 3. Original emphasis.

According to Flynn, for existentialists, truth is not an "objectively" correct path to choose. Existential truth is more a matter of decision than discovery. The decisive move is not purely intellectual but a matter of will and feeling (it leads to fundamental turnings in a person's life).[47] Sartre calls it initial or "fundamental Choice" that gives unity and direction to a person's life. As Sartre famously stated, "man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."[48]

Simón, very much in the existentialist vein, examines the freedom and authenticity of his personal life and the life of the society in which he has found himself. He realizes that life does not follow a continuous flow of logical argument and that one often has to risk moving beyond the limits of the rational in order to live life to the fullest. He is searching for "a truth to die for," establishing a sense of place and purpose in the world via a project through which it is possible to overcome "transcendental homelessness" or "not-at-home-ness," by making sense of the world.

The response of Coetzee's protagonist to the defamiliarized and uncanny space in which he lives is to set himself the task of helping David, the lonely boy he meets on the way to Novilla, through his project of searching for David's mother. Simón believes that David "is no ordinary boy."[49] The boy is upsetting the social order, allowing a space for fantasy, refusing to conform. After reading *Don Quixote*, the boy announces that he is going to be "a lifesaver."[50] Asked by his teacher, senior León, to show that he can write, David writes, "I am the truth."[51] In his project, Simón establishes the boy as a kind of El Niño, the Child Christ: "And what if we, who so confidently take the step, are in fact falling through space, only we don't know it because we insist on keeping our blindfold on? What if this boy is the only one among us with eyes to see?"[52] Simón can be compared to Joseph whereas Inés is the counterpart of the Virgin Mary. When Simón sees Inés for the first time, "it had burst on him like a star"[53] that the woman is the boy's mother: "She has the boy. He came to her as a gift, out of the blue, a gift pure and simple. A gift like that ought to be enough for any woman."[54] The three of them enact the holy family, forming a small pool of familial warmth and safety in an indifferent world. Towards the end of the book, David, Simón and Inés flee the authorities to save David, in an evocation of the Flight into Egypt. They pick up a hitchhiker who

47 Flynn, *Existentialism*, 11.

48 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 29.

49 Coetzee, *Childhood*, 124.

50 *Ibidem*, 172.

51 *Ibidem*, 225.

52 *Ibidem*, 250.

53 *Ibidem*, 77.

54 *Ibidem*, 189.

becomes the first disciple, and there is a sense that disciples are being gathered, and that the protagonists' existential journey is beginning.

Coetzee's novel can be seen as part of the rich literary tradition of Christ-related stories.[55] The diversity of responses to the figure of Jesus led Theodore Ziolkowski to define Christ-related narratives as a stand-alone genre.[56] Coetzee's twenty-first-century transformation of the biblical narrative is the author's response to the changing ideological and spiritual consciousness of his time. The protagonist of the novel, Simón, traumatized by displacement and the immigration experience, embodies an individual human's pursuit of meaning in a postcolonial and postindustrial age amidst the social and economic pressures for superficiality and conformism. Re-inventing the Nativity story and producing his own secular version of the tradition of venerating the Child Jesus, Coetzee's protagonist becomes an existential hero who is able to overcome the state of "transcendental homelessness" and create meaning in a world abandoned by God. As Joyce Carol Oates comments,

> […] it seemed likely that *The Childhood of Jesus* is a Kafka-inspired parable of the quest for meaning itself: for reasons to endure when (secular) life lacks passion and purpose. Only an arbitrary mission - searching for the mother of an orphaned child, believing in a savior who descends from the sky - can give focus to a life otherwise undefined and random.[57]

From the literary perspective, Simón is a modernist hero, since modernist sensibility requires meaning and wholeness in contrast to postmodernism, which accepts fragmentation.[58] Like Vladimir and Estragon, Simón hankers for some deeper or "transcendent" reality. However, unlike Beckett's characters, who are waiting for some external force – Godot - to enter their life and transform it,[59] Coetzee's protagonist creates his own personal "metanarrative." Therefore, Simón represents a modernist attitude to the openness and uncertainty of the postmodern condition since he longs for a return to the lost fullness of purpose of the past.

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55 Some of twentieth-century rewritings of the New Testament include George Moore's *The Brook Kerith* (1916), Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1928-1940, not published until 1966-7), Sholem Asch's *The Nazarene* (1939), Robert Graves's *King Jesus* (1946), Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1960), Anthony Burgess's *Man of Nazareth* (1979), José Saramago's *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), Gore Vidal's *Live from Golgotha* (1992), Norman Mailer's *The Gospel According to the Son* (1997), Jim Crace's *Quarantine* (1997), to mention only a few best-known names.

56 Theodore Ziolkowski, *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

57 Oates, "Saving Grace."

58 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995), 83-84.

59 Barry, *Beginning Theory*, 92.

4. Imaginative literature as a response to "transcendental homelessness"

A considerable part of the novel is devoted to Simón and David's reading and discussion of the story of Don Quixote, which becomes an important subtext of Coetzee's narrative. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* occupies a special place in the history of European literature. Georg Lukács saw the book as a turning point in the movement from the age of the epic to the age of the novel. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács argues that the modern world, in which the novel is the representative literary form, is typified by fragmentation and open-endedness. Lukács described the novel as "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God."[60] In Lukács's view the novel is a response to a condition of "transcendental homelessness,"[61] in which the individual or collective subject must now create a cosmos in order to make his own existence intelligible and meaningful. Thus, a fictional story is a writer's existential project, a way of giving form to the world. Literature and imagination can help us preserve our humanity and individuality, against commercialism and conformism.

According to Leo Robson, because Coetzee's book focuses on Cervantes's novel, it is tempting to see Novilla not as a reconfigured version of the industrial or postindustrial city but as an outpost of the republic of letters with its own customs, laws and logic – Novel-land.[62] Therefore, the self-referential aspect of the novel serves to express Coetzee's concern about the role of imaginative literature in contemporary society. Earlier, Sartre developed the concept of "committed literature," with its basic premise that writing is a form of action for which responsibility must be taken, but that responsibility carries over into the content and not just the form of what is communicated.[63] In a similar vein, pondering on the role of fantasy and imagination, Coetzee emphasizes the necessity for the author to take an ethical responsibility for his work – this idea runs through many of his novels. As Dominic Head puts it, "Coetzee expresses something about the limits of fiction and of the writer's authority, and yet also demonstrates the enduring power or value of fiction."[64]

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60 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971/first published 1920), 88.

61 *Ibidem*, 121.

62 Leo Robson, "Across the Boundary," review of *The Childhood of Jesus*, by J.M. Coetzee and *Harvest*, by Jim Crace, *New Statesman*, March 7, 2013, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/03/reviewed-childhood-jesus-j-m-coetzee-and-harvest-jim-crace.

63 Flynn, *Existentialism*, 12-13.

64 Head, *Cambridge Introduction*, 85.

5. Conclusion

Coetzee's novel *The Childhood of Jesus* demonstrates the persistence of modernism in contemporary literary discourse and the effectiveness of the austere modernist aesthetics as a means to represent the individual's search for meaning in a globalized and standardized world. As a philosophical allegory *The Childhood of Jesus* confirms the continued relevance of existential philosophy today, emphasizing the idea that the world in which we are situated is not of our own making, but our very existence requires us to shape this world. Coetzee's protagonist, Simón, emerges as an existential individuality, who accepts responsibility for his actions and makes a choice which involves risk, commitment and individuation. Moreover, imaginative literature is seen as a way of overcoming existential *angst* and making sense of the world.

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Modernism Re-visited

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THE THEME OF PARALYSIS IN *DUBLINERS 100*

Abstract: The paper analyses the sources of paralysis in *Dubliners 100*, which is a collection of 'cover versions,' as its editor, Thomas Morris, called them, of James Joyce's collection. They were written by different authors and published in 2014 to commemorate the centenary of the publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*. The only common denominator they share with one another and their great predecessors is the theme of paralysis. Whereas in Joyce's *Dubliners* religious motifs are ubiquitous, they are almost absent from *Dubliners 100.* The question is asked what supplanted religion and the theme of religious guidance and oppression. Subsequently politics is analysed with special emphasis on the sense of disappointment and totally new problems it entails. Personal rigidness is discussed as the main theme of several stories, as well as the constricting impact of Internet addiction. Homoerotic unrequited love and the isolation of an overweight, unattractive hero are poignant reminders of the solitude which one faces in society. The theme of transgression as limiting one's sense of security is raised in three stories of the collection in the form of sexual perversion, business machinations, excessive drinking and plagiarism. The ultimate form of the paralysis gripping the protagonists of Joyce's *Dubliners* results from a sense of the imminence of death. In the new collection the theme is present, but it is conspicuously avoided in the only short story whose title suggests it should be the main theme.

Key words: *Dubliners, Dubliners 100,* Joyce, paralysis, modernism

Writing about *Ulysses,* Eliot states that James Joyce "is pursuing ... [what] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[1] This could equally be applied to his collection of stories *Dubliners.* The sense of crisis, so crucial for modernists, prompted Richard Sheppard to propose that all forms of modernist thought and art can be seen as one of seven responses to crisis.[2] Interestingly, in *Dubliners* James Joyce cannot be said to have consistently taken one of the approaches Sheppard mentions, possibly due to the fact that he describes the crisis in the individual lives of his protagonists without resorting to very radical modernist means of expression. This is what Peter Childs, drawing on David Lodge and Roman Jakobson, had in mind when he stated that *Dubliners*, with the exception of "The Dead," have been written in the

1 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "*Ulysses,* Order, and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T.S.* Eliot, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 177-178.

2 Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism" in *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory,* ed. Steve Giles, (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 33- 39. The responses are the following: nihilism, ecstasy, mysticism, aestheticism, a decision to turn one's back on modernity, primitivism and modernolatry.

metonymic rather that the metaphoric mode, which suggests the author's adherence to realism.[3] Nevertheless, it has left an important mark on literature written in English after modernism. Not only literary critics but also writers have drawn on this famous literary collection. In 2006 a collection, *New Dubliners,* edited by Oona Fawny, was published, and in 2014 two other collections refer directly to Joyce's work: Daniel Zuchowski's *The New Dubliners 2014* and *Dubliners 100*.

The present paper is an endeavour to analyse *Dubliners 100,* published in 2014, with reference to Joyce's collection of short stories published in 1914. The first difficulty such an analysis poses lies in the establishment of the criteria for comparison. Unlike the other collections, which draw loosely on the original, *Dubliners 100* is a well-thought out project whose aim is to write a "cover version", as its editor, Thomas Morris put it, of each story from Joyce's *Dubliners.*[4] On the one hand, it is meant to be a tribute to Joyce to commemorate the centenary of the first publication of Joyce's *Dubliners*; on the other hand, the writers commissioned with the task were given exceptional freedom to approach the story in whatever way they liked. Still, one cannot discuss their output in terms of post-modern text fluidity, as all the authors were well aware that they were vying with a writer in whose shadow they have to live. And yet some took exceptional liberty with the original, the result unrecognizable but for its title.

The specific unity of Joyce's cycle cannot be replicated in the new collection for a number of reasons. The first one is very obvious and yet of particular consequence: the unity of authorship has been lost. Instead we have a variety of styles, literary interests and attitudes in comparison with the work of their predecessor. Moreover, Joyce's stories, as the title itself suggests, are set in the Irish capital, whereas "Counterparts" and "After the Race" in *Dubliners 100* are set in the USA, and the action of "The Dead" takes place in some apocalyptic future in a place called Hyberny. Even though all the stories from *Dubliners* employ free indirect speech and make the protagonist the focal point through whose eyes the reader experiences Dublin life in its multifarious forms, the stories concerning childhood additionally employ a first person narrator, making them even more emotionally charged, whereas the remaining stories are told by third person narrators, which certainly creates some distance for the reader to feel, but also to assess and consider. The new collection, on the whole, adheres to the original narrative patterns, but departs from them markedly in three cases. "An Encounter" features a very rare type of second-person narration, while "Eveline" and "The Dead", unlike their Joycean counterparts, are written in the first person. Another difference is that the protagonist's gender has been switched in some stories.

3 Peter Childs, *Modernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 188.

4 Thomas Morris, "Far Away and Very Close: Dubliners at 100", *Wales Arts Review,* 19.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.walesartsreview.org/far-away-and-very-close-dubliners-at-100/.

Having enumerated the most prominent similarities and differences, I realize that this is insufficient to provide a viable framework for a good analysis. The fifteen new stories, even if meant to honour the great Dubliner, were also written as independent literary works. Instead of speculating on their inherent value as such, I propose to compare the two collections not in terms of merit or faithfulness, but in terms of the theme which Joyce himself considered to be the crucial unifying element in his work, that is, the concept of paralysis, which appears in his frequently- cited explanation: "My intention was to write a chapter in the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis."[5] If this concept was central for Joyce himself, it is reasonable to expect that his followers would at least take it into consideration. The question arises: What then are the sources of paralysis in contemporary Dublin as compared to Dublin of a century before? Even though Joyce was well aware that he may have been unjust concentrating only on the peculiar type of stagnation in which his characters found themselves entrapped in Dublin, he still thought it worthwhile "to give the two or three unfortunate wretches who may eventually read me" his own idea of "the significance of trivial things."[6] Do the sequels share Joyce's passion for representing fear, failure and inaction? Rather than follow the thematic division of *Dubliners* into stories dealing with childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and public life, this paper focuses on the major factors that circumscribed the outlook on life of Joyce's characters and endeavours to pinpoint the constraints *Dubliners 100* are encumbered with. The factors which are crucial for the shaping of the confined lives of Joyce's heroes and heroines include religion, politics, personal rigidness, transgression, and death.

Religion permeates the lives of Joyce's characters to a great extent. It is the unquestioned authority for children as well as adults. Pictures of priests hang on the walls; their lives, deaths and political involvement are of the utmost significance; a retreat is chosen as the cure for an alcoholic; religious imagery pervades the language of a first love. The Dubliners live in the shadow of the towering presence of the Roman Catholic Church, but Protestantism has also left its mark on the lives of some. They may be sceptical, they may not be very devout Christians, yet religion is the very air they breathe. Thus its constricting influence accounts in many cases for the lack of will to pursue a dream, to enact a plan to change one's life. In *Dubliners 100* religion is conspicuously absent, even from the stories "The Sisters" and "Grace," where, in the original collection, it played a major role. In the "cover" version of the former the only vestigial ele-

5 Letter to Grant Richards, 5 May, 1906 in *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 83.

6 Quoted from Stanislaus Joyce's *Dublin Diary* in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 169.

ment of religion is the setting: the story takes place at Christmas time, which makes the fire in the building that the main character watches with his friend and a group of adults an even more poignant experience. Both boys are confronted with something which is powerful and which shakes their sense of security. In both stories there is the threatening presence of a paralysed person, but Patrick McCabe has replaced Father Flynn with Nurse Connolly, who is not the focal point of the drama. The fact that she is immobilized in her flat adds a sense of terror to the fire, which is the main threat to the lives of the occupants of terraced houses. There is no mystery or superstitious fear about the blaze for, after all, the fire brigade arrives in time to quench the fire.

In Joyce's story the adults talk over the head of the boy, employing cryptic language he is never fully able to make sense of; however, in the new version they try to interact with the boy, to reassure him and reinforce his shaken self-confidence. It is no accident that the boy in Joyce's story is nameless, but is addressed as Desmond in McCabe's version. Talking about Father Flynn, gathered around his deathbed, the adults do not even try to explain anything to the child. Thus the sense of religious awe is maintained: even if the boy realizes that there is more to the authority figure than meets his eye, it remains an unsolvable puzzle for him. This might influence the rest of his life, whereas little Desmond will simply grow out of the game "International Rescue" and his childish worldview. Instead of the "International Rescue" team, a regular fire brigade comes just in time for the inhabitants to go back to their cosy flats to celebrate Christmas, which is "that time of year when everyone prefers to forget all their troubles."[7] The greatest difference between the world presented by Joyce and that presented by Patrick McCabe is the foreboding presence of authority in the former and its absence from the latter. Efficient public services remove the danger and allow the people to enjoy Christmas – a holiday that has lost its religious significance. They might learn to take more precautions in the future, but no residual metaphysical awe is going to trouble their lives. No looming authority figure, even if a flawed or even a fallen one like Father Flynn, will hover over the protagonists' lives in the future.

The absence of religion is even more conspicuous in Sam Coll's version of "Grace." Alcoholism seems to be a perennial problem and the downfall it leads to is presented as being as abhorrent in the early 21st century as it was at the turn of the 20th. The protagonist, whose name has become Vernon Crumb, has an updated profile: he is a "ligger," someone who gate-crashes conference get-togethers and takes advantage of the buffets on offer at cultural events in Dublin. But the grim reality of his addiction when he finally collapses in "the building's bowels,"[8] where the toilet is located,

7 Patrick McCabe, "The Sisters," in *Dubliners 100*, ed. Thomas Morris (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014), 9.

8 Sam Coll, "Grace," in *Dubliners 100,* 190.

is not alleviated by the culture which accompanied his drinking. Yet the solution that his concerned friends offer is devoid of any religious content. They want to help him recover by arranging a stay in "a woodland retreat, to live like a hermit and get back in touch with nature. To wake up to the sound of birdsong and not the fecking traffic."[9] The mention of "hermit" is religious in tone, but the whole concept of moral recovery through the beneficial influence of nature is rather flimsy. It smacks of insubstantial spirituality, resembling a holiday more than a retreat. Not surprisingly, Mr Crumb assents to the proposal and lets his friend drive him to a cottage owned by a cousin, where he will be able to rest and recover. Paradoxically, having so much leisure could have proved conducive to relapse, but his well-meaning friends do not seem to have considered such a possibility. Nor, in fact, is this the case. The story ends abruptly and without giving the reader any sense of a proper denouement. To give the writer his due, the ending is certainly one element of Joyce's story the writer might have wanted to emulate, yet the outcome is totally different. In Joyce's "Grace" the importance and influence of Catholicism has been reinforced, even though the people remain unchanged. In Coll's "ecological" version nature reasserts its power, but not in the way Crumb's friends would have wished: death is presented as part of nature, as inexorable as all its laws. The ending, one must admit, is effective precisely because it is so baffling. It puzzles as much as death itself. It cannot be explained by the protagonist's own actions. It just happens as a kind of *non sequitur* amidst a pastoral landscape. In the short story by Joyce, even if religion is unable to provide solutions, one is still able to accommodate it in one's sinful life and thus find respite and consolation. Here, instead of God the "spiritual accountant,"[10] the reader encounters Death the absolute tyrant. The absence of religion, or rather, as he calls it, "shying away" from the theme is what Adam Duke perceives as a serious flaw in the story, pointing out that religion is "still very relevant to Irish life."[11] The above-quoted review recommends caution when treating the aspects of paralysis described in *Dubliners 100* as a credible diagnosis of the reality of Dublin. Still, it is interesting that an "ecological" retreat should replace a traditional Catholic one in this particular short story written by a contemporary Irish writer.

To redress the balance between traditional spirituality and secularity in contemporary Dublin it seems appropriate to discuss Paul Murray's rendition of "A Painful Case," which is the only one to consider the metaphysical yearnings of modern man. It is certainly unjust to call it "a mere rewrite" of the original, as Adam Duke does.[12] On the contrary, it seems to depart from the original in many important respects even if

9 *Ibidem*, 200.

10 James Joyce, "Grace," in *Dubliners,* (London: Penguin, 1926), 198.

11 Adam Duke, "Review: Dubliners 100", *College Tribune*, 1.2 (2015), accessed August 20, 2017, http://collegetribune.ie/review-dubliners-100/.

12 *Ibidem*.

there are obvious similarities as well. As with Joyce's prototype, Mr Duffy lives "at a little distance from his body."[13] In the original story he is a cashier, but the quasi-monastic quality of his rigidness has been noted by critics, most clearly by Suzette A. Henke. Murray focuses on this particular quality and elaborates on it. This approach enables him to develop the story of an unreligious, embittered and spiteful restaurant critic, who, against his better judgment, develops a fascination with monastic life. If Mrs Sinico serves as a "Lacanian mirror – an echo, a *heimlich* womb of mental warmth whose hothouse heart encourages Duffy's shrivelled soul to sprout tendrils and gradually blossom,"[14] then Bill, the mysterious monk from Murray's version, has a similar influence on the protagonist, who "had never spoken like this to anyone; listening to himself, James wondered if it was the wine making him emotional."[15] It turns out that there is a conflict of expectations between the two partners. Bill, who sought in the monastery a refuge from his family and probably also from the truth about his sexual orientation, encourages Duffy's interest and hopes for a fulfilling relationship. Duffy, on the other hand, relishes the simplicity of the monastic cuisine and the pervading silence, unaware of the fact that he is killing it with his own constant babble. Involved in the process of his frustration and disappointment and absorbed in his spiritual disquisitions, he invents his own version of Bill, whom he treats instrumentally, completely ignoring him as a human being. His quest for spirituality stems from a mixture of egoism and honesty. He interprets the meetings with the silent monk as "some kind of epic pilgrimage," "some great slab of a door swinging open"[16] within him on exposure to the silent holiness of the monk. The language which Murray uses to describe the protagonist's experience has deeply religious or even mystical overtones, yet his brutal rejection of Bill as a person testifies to his extreme egotism. The one-sided silence provides a space which allows the two men to create false images of each other. But the original spiritual craving which motivated Duffy to return to the restaurant in the monastery and keep in touch with Bill cannot be questioned. It would be difficult to ascertain whether it is the lure of traditional religion or simply the presence of a non-threatening, silent human being that this withdrawn restaurant critic finds so enticing. What constrains him most is his personal rigidness, a theme which this story shares with some others from the collection: "The Boarding House," "A Little Cloud," "A Mother," and "Counterparts." What is more, the first three share the theme of marriage in crisis, which stems from the protagonists' lack of ease and obduracy.

13 Suzette A. Henke, *James Joyce and the Politics of Desire* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 36.

14 *Ibidem*.

15 Paul Murray, "A Painful Case" in *Dubliners 100,* 146.e

16 *Ibidem*, 147 and 145.

Elske Rahill presents the young Kathleen from Joyce's short story "A Mother" at a later stage in her life. Influenced by her mother, she is in the habit of doing things "right."[17] She has acquiesced to marrying the unromantic but upright Graham, who would provide for the family and safeguard stability and civility in their relationship. Having given priority to prudence, she has sacrificed her Romantic dreams and settled for their substitutes: romances on DVD's watched with a box of Turkish delight to sweeten her mundane life even more. She supresses the feeling that there is something missing in her life by cultivating a sense of her own superiority, which, in turn, makes her censorious about other people, especially single parents at her children's school. She finds the "brazenness" of one mother especially annoying: "The way she kissed her child [...], and tousled his hair, all sweetness and joy – you'd swear she was the world's best mum."[18] The author's use of free indirect speech here is especially effective as it emphasizes the protagonist's bitterness, which derives, partly at least, from jealousy. She is intransigent in her rigidness though, and she even persuades her daughter not to invite the single mother's son to her birthday party. She is so preoccupied with morality that she equates the little boy with moral permissiveness, which is at odds with the school ethos and thus must be eradicated. She does not see the human being behind this ethos, completely indifferent to the fact that he is, after all, no more than a small boy. Apart from the cherished sense of moral superiority and her secret viewings of romances, she finds one more source of solace: she organizes a "Brides Again Party". This is a pathetic attempt at Romanticism, but executed in her "right" way. All the details are seen to, and the whole event is organized with due pomp and ceremony. She becomes so excited about this surrogate romance that she does not listen to her friends' objections that the limousines are too expensive, which leads to bickering about money. Sadness and disappointment permeate the party, for the women seem to be happier talking about their husbands and re-enacting their weddings without the actual husbands being present. This rift between the wives and their husbands is clearly seen when Graham returns from his business trip earlier than planned, making his wife feel awkward. He does not fit into this play, so he leaves the stage quickly, settling the payment for the taxis first, ironically emphasizing his role as Kathleen's bread-winner. Interestingly, his wife seems aware that in her husband's life there has been another woman whom he still loves, but she chooses to ignore this knowledge as it might jeopardize the stability of her marriage. Her marriage, after all, is one based not on love or passion, but on propriety.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne is rather critical of Rahill's rendering of "A Mother", which allegedly shares the flaw found in Oona Frawley's version of "The Boarding House".

17 Elske Rahill, "A Mother," in *Dubliners 100*, 167.
18 *Ibidem*, 172.

According to the critic, in both stories James Joyce "lampoons a middle aged, managerial type of woman – the only kind of woman for whom he has little sympathy," and the cover versions, even though well-written and entertaining as such, do not attempt to "reassess the gender politics of the master."[19] All four heroines of the original short stories and their cover versions are control freaks, but Mrs Kearney from "A Mother" acquires an even more conservative character in Rahill's version and develops from "a pushy mother who wants her daughter's performance fees to be paid" into "a crazy upholder of traditional family values."[20] Conservative family values are thus emphasized in *Dubliners 100* even to a greater degree than in the Joycean originals.

The moralistic conservatism of Marie Mooney is rendered even more stringent as she does not simply arrange the marriage of her daughter to avoid scandal, as her counterpart did, but interferes directly in the life of her married daughter and her son-in-law, whom she has caught visiting porn websites. Ger and Therese's marriage may not be unhappy, but their bankruptcy and the need to live once more with the wife's mother place a lot of strain on their relationship. Ger compares it to living in a boarding house, which is a reference to the original story, but also an apt diagnosis of their condition, which is further complicated by the fact that they have a little child and Therese is expecting another. Therese herself is angry with her husband's secretive use of online porn sites, yet it seems that the fact her mother knows about it makes it even harder for her to bear. On the other hand, the mother-in-law's cross-examination makes Ger question his own normality. It seems unjust to blame the matriarch for the crisis in this marriage, yet her vigilance and dominance do not help to solve the couple's problems. The ending is ambiguous: Therese going into labour may signal a new beginning or a new limitation. When Therese is "calling for him, the waters everywhere"[21] it may mean that she trusts him after all, or it may emphasize her helplessness. Family life, it seems, is just as limited by external circumstances as it was 100 years ago.

The sense of failure in the context of a loveless marriage is one of the main themes of "A Little Cloud" by John Kelly, a story which remains very close to the original. For this very reason Adam Duke perceives it as a "mere rewrite" and thus "redundant."[22] Yet the author introduces some changes to make the conversation between a successful writer who comes to visit his homeland and his friend, a poet manqué, more contemporary. Moreover, Chandler has a teenage daughter rather than a baby son, which emphasizes the struggle in his marriage as the two women unite against the only man, whom they

19 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, "*Dubliners 100*. 15 New Stories Inspired by the Original Dubliners," *Estudios Irlandeses,* accessed August 20, 2017, https://doi.org/10.24162/EI.

20 *Ibidem*.

21 Oona Frawley, "The Boarding House," *Dubliners 100,* 82.

22 Duke, "Review: Dubliners 100."

consider "a loser."[23] Both Chandlers would like to blame their wives and family lives for their lack of success, yet the modern version seems to go further in questioning this claim. Inky Chandler is presented as an extremely egocentric man, too busy with inventing metaphors for describing a homeless woman to be at all sensitive to her plight. On the other hand, the hysterical, aggressive behaviour of his daughter may make the reader sympathize with the protagonist to a greater extent than the hopeless crying of the small child in Joyce's story. Nonetheless, the tears the protagonist sheds in both versions are ambiguous: they might be tears of shame and remorse, but also of self-pity. Nevertheless, it seems that both characters will go on living their limited lives, aggravated by the illusion that the family is to blame for their artistic failure.

Two stories in *Dubliners 100* mention a new source of paralysis, namely addiction to the Internet. In both "Counterparts" and "Clay" it seems to derive from a deeper psychological disorder. The former is one of the few stories set outside Dublin. The author, Belinda McKeon, admits she was unsure of that decision, but it is certainly a choice she can defend. Elizabeth, the heroine, although physically in New York, "is living in a sort of Dublin of the mind."[24] Her homesickness, ennui, unwillingness to complete her article on *Re:Joyce* – "a collaboration between the New York Fiction House and the Irish Department of Culture"[25] – and her reluctance to be an intern now that she "knew the dance"[26] all push her deeper into addiction. Instead of writing, she watches Dubliners chat on Facebook and Twitter. On the one hand, the story presents a longing for the real life experience of Dublin and Dubliners instead of any artfully mediated one; on the other hand, Elizabeth seems to be killing time and escaping from work. She peeps into the lives of the people she follows instead of aiming at any real interaction or participation in their lives. This Internet addiction twists and perverts her intentions. Following the story of an abducted girl, Elizabeth is more concerned with the fact that a person she dislikes, Richie Mulligan, has more followers than she does than with the missing girl. On the other hand, the Internet and mass media expose their users to so much misery that it evokes rather a sense of helplessness than any incitement to action. Elizabeth is so overwhelmed by the multifarious exploits of these Dubliners that she herself is indeed paralysed. The idea of counterparts, very clear in Joyce's story, is not so evident in this tale. Elizabeth's aggression towards Richie Mulligan may be paralleled with her boss's anger which leads to her eventual dismissal. It is worth mentioning that Sullivan's anger is partly justified, as Elizabeth has not completed her article, but at the same time it is in some sense absurd. Obsessed with political correctness, Sullivan

23 John Kelly, "A Little Cloud," in *Dubliners 100*, 99.

24 Belinda McKeon, in Cahir O'Doherty, "Portrait of the Irish: Belinda McKeon on *Dubliners 100*", *Irish Central*, 14,6 (2014). Accessed August 20, 2017, https://www.irishcentral.com/.

25 Belinda McKeon, "Counterparts," in *Dubliners 100*, 107.

26 *Ibidem*, 108.

fears that Elizabeth's wish to be Hasidic and thus enjoy her Sabbath may be read as an anti-Semitic jibe. The atmosphere pervading this short story is that of stagnation, and, as Éilís Ní Dhuibhne notes, the story "lacks the raw horror of the scene in Farrington's cold and dark kitchen."[27]

Another story from *Dubliners 100* which deals with computer addiction is Michèle Forbes's version of "Clay," which Valerie O'Riordan calls "a knockout piece," a story which is "perfect in its narrowness: in a single journey, we get the entirety of a sad life so succinctly that we reckon Aristotle himself would be pleased."[28] Furthermore, just as Joyce, Forbes writes from the perspective of his protagonist throughout.[29] Conor, an overweight young man who, like little Maria, is quite satisfied with his life, is, just like her, dragged out to perform in front of others only to be ridiculed. But before that happens, he looks forward to spending Halloween alone at home, now that his mother has gone out, in front of his computer, well-equipped with sugary drinks and snacks. In this respect he seems different from Maria, who is paying a visit to relatives, but, in fact, both characters are equally isolated from a society which finds them both unattractive and ridiculous. Conor's computer addiction is only a symptom of his loneliness, something that he does not want to face and change. His singing a song about a strong macho man makes him ridiculous in the eyes of the girls listening, just like Maria's romantic song makes her an even more pathetic figure in the eyes of her family. Whereas in "Counterparts" the computer, which should be the protagonist's work tool, becomes a means of escape, in "Clay" what seems to be a solitary addiction contains some elements of creativity. Conor is unwilling to work, and accepts his training as an administrative assistant in Mr Wyrzykowki's office only to remain eligible for unemployment benefit. What he really wants to do is to make movies, which he does for his own pleasure. Even if computer addiction is a modern phenomenon, it is easy to imagine Elizabeth addicted to alcohol, for the nature of addiction has not changed.

Another source of social alienation in *Dubliners 100* is homosexuality. If the young narrator of Joyce's "Araby" imagines his love as "a chalice" which he carries "safely through a throng of foes,"[30] the narrator of John Boyne's story is totally confused by his feelings. This is emphasized by the name used to refer to the object of his love: "the brother of the Mangan girl."[31] He is well aware that it is she who should be the focus of his attention, not her brother: "Were boys not supposed to think of girls, had I not read

27 Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, "Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories..."

28 Valerie O"Riordan, "An Interesting and Attention-Grabbing Volume – *Dubliners 100*, ed. Tomas Morris," *Bookmunch,* 24.7 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, https://bookmunch.wordpress.com/author/bookmunch/.

29 Ní Dhuibhne, "Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories..."

30 James Joyce, "Araby", in *Dubliners* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 31.

31 John Boyne, "Araby", in *Dubliners 100,* 35.

that somewhere?"[32] The confusion the boy experiences is exacerbated by his parents' absence; they have left for Canada with the vague promise that they will send for him later. His aunt spends her time in front of the television; his uncle is either at work or in a pub. Left to his own devices, he longs for a father figure. The sight of the older boy's strength and masculinity makes him "hope for a protector."[33] It is only at the end of the story, when his presence at the match, even if acknowledged, does not evoke the same degree of elation, and his gift is ignored altogether, that he realizes that he has reached "a place" that would take him "years to understand and negotiate."[34]

If, as Suzette Henke points out, in Joyce's *Dubliners* "Women and children have been relegated to the margins of discourse in a culture that is male-centered and woman-avoidant,"[35] they do not seem to be similarly unrepresented in *Dubliners* 100. Several stories have a heroine instead of a hero, and the substitution of a male protagonist by a female seems especially important in two short stories from that collection, namely "An Encounter" and "Two Gallants." Both deal with the particular sort of oppression that women still suffer in society, and yet both avoid simple feminist propaganda or sentimentality. Both consider the theme of transgression. In "An Encounter" the central theme is the sexual threats two girls face when they enter a forbidden city zone. The sexual transgression of meeting a man the protagonists take for a flasher does not exhaust the exploration of the theme. There are at least two more forms of transgression. The very fact that they ride on bikes down the same slope where a friend lost control of her bike and was killed turns their escapade into a dangerous game with death. Moreover, when a suspicious man approaches them and strikes up a conversation, one of the girls, Jo, leaves, apparently to find help, but for her friend this is an act of treachery. The encounter with the stranger, although nothing really happens, puts such a strain on their relationship that later she realizes it was not the flasher but Jo she is afraid to meet.[36] The story is the only one to employ the second person narration, as if the older self of the protagonist were discussing the past events and their significance with the younger self. It seems at the end that the man they met as young girls and who was responsible for their estrangement might not have been such a monster. After all, Ely's Arch, the construction he might have invented in order to, as it seemed then, lure them into some forbidden sexual act, is really there to see. So the man's invitation might possibly have been innocent. There is a sense of loss which pervades the ending: the loss of innocence, friendship and childhood. The encounter has affected their lives forever.

32 *Ibidem*, 33.
33 *Ibidem*, 32.
34 *Ibidem*, 37.
35 Henke, *James Joyce*..., 12.
36 Mary Morrisy, "An Encounter," in *Dubliners 100*, 27.

“Two Gallants” raises the topic of plagiarism in the context of female exploitation, and is very much in the vein of Joyce’s original. The protagonist, Ruth, participates in a conference on Joyce for which she has prepared a paper on “Two Gallants.” However, she is not preoccupied with any new interpretation of the story, but rather with its historical setting, claiming that she is a descendant of the skivvy cheated by Corley, one of the gallants. Roz Lewis notes that the theme itself is a theft not only from Joyce, but also from Trevor Williams’s story “Two More Gallants,” in which a student dupes a hated professor into believing the story of an old lady he bribes to say she was the skivvy from Joyce’s story.[37] Even if the reader cannot be certain that the letter allegedly written by Ruth’s ancestor is a mere hoax, there is a strong suggestion that originality in literary criticism is tainted with plagiarism. It thrives on stealing from the authors it interprets. Keith Hopper points at the layers of plagiarism in the story, in which “the usual conference shenanigans are intercut with italicized parodies of the original characters, Lenehan and Corley. Joyce’s mean-spirited protagonists are comically counterpointed by two boorish plagiarists who are eventually unmasked (plagiarism is wryly figured here as an unacknowledged form of adaptation).”[38] It is no coincidence though that the only official, criminal act of plagiarism that is committed is intended to victimize a woman. All the dealings are submerged in a sexist mentality which treats women academics in a disparaging way. TD, the villain of the story, instructs his accomplice, Lachey: “If you’re worried about being found out, remember that if you stole from a man chances are someone might have heard it before, but a girl, it’s unlikely. You’ll never be caught.”[39] So when he is caught out at the end while reading Ruth’s paper that Lachey stole for him, apart from it being a deliciously ironic reversal, the ending also proves that, after all, times have changed.[40]

Women may have more power in contemporary Dublin, but the paralysis experienced by a young man in his dependence on a rich father has not changed much. “After the Race” from *Dubliners 100* does not alter the storyline or depart from the original in any dramatic way. The only marked departure of Andrew Fox’s version from the original is that the setting has moved to New York, where the creators of the Celtic Tiger’s greatness gather at a charity run. Participation in such events has been recommended by media strategists to “rebuild what they called the firm’s *reputational equity.*”[41] The account of the dealings of the Irish businessmen is reminiscent of a media report

37 Roz Lewis, “Two Gallants by Evelyn Conlon – a short story from *Dubliners 100*” http://www.rozz.ie/?p=1723, accessed August 20, 2017.

38 Keith Hopper, “New Dubliners”, in *Times Literary Supplement,* 4.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/new-dubliners/.

39 Evelyn Conlon, “Two Gallants,” in *Dubliners 100*, 66.

40 Ní Dhuibhne, “Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories...”

41 Andrew Fox, “After the Race”, in *Dubliners 100,* 50.

with all its references to business terms and control institutions and the complexity of accusation and evidence, but the reader is certain to grasp one important point: the need to "humanize"[42] the businessmen is urgent. James, the protagonist, is trapped in his life. His education has been paid for by his father from an income whose source is questionable. He is part of fashionable society, trying desperately to keep pace with the other wealthy youths. He is trapped in the luxurious life he has become accustomed to. However, he struggles with the sense of dependence on his father, who resorts to "bullying tactics"[43] both in his professional and private life. James tries desperately to convince himself that he owes everything he has achieved to his own hard work, and that his father only "paid the bills."[44] At the end of the story James has to pay one bill himself; he pays with a hangover and an empty wallet after a night's carefree carousing. Daybreak is equally painful in Joyce's and Fox's stories.

The oppressiveness of politics is the main topic of "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," and it remains so in Eimear McBride's cover version, in which she, as she claims herself, "was trying to capture or show something of the multi-layered disappointment of the nation."[45] This particular story has invited the most diverse responses. Some critics accuse the author of inadequately confronting the theme of politics,[46] while others praise the story for the fact that "the satirical savagery of the older story is replicated with integrity in the new version, so that it both speaks back to the past and makes its own distinct statement about present-day corruption and cowardice."[47] The same critic notes furthermore that the story will be difficult to understand for readers who do not know much about Irish political life, just as Joyce's story, too, was difficult. Even if McBride's version seems to refer to a particular event – the fall of Bertie Ahern – Éilís Ní Dhuibhne points to the perennial nature of politics, which the episode emphasizes. McBride, the critic suggests, ignores the modern technology used by politicians, thus drawing the readers' attention to the fact that "Politics is all talk."[48]

"Eveline" addresses another problem connected with politics, namely immigration; this is the reverse of Joyce's exploration of emigration. If, for Eveline, the thought of changing her life by accepting Frank's proposal to go with him to Buenos Aires proves paralysing, the situation for the illegal immigrant in Donald Ryan's cover is even more constricting. Joyce's Eveline cannot overcome her sense of duty and fear of the unknown.

42 *Ibidem*.
43 *Ibidem*, 51.
44 *Ibidem*, 53.
45 In an interview with Gill Moore, "The Joy of Joyce: *Dubliners 100* Preview," *Totally Dublin*, 5.6 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, http://www.totallydublin.ie/arts-culture/joy-joyce-dubliners-100-preview/.
46 Duke, "Review: Dubliners 100."
47 Valerie O'Riordan, "An Interesting and Attention-Grabbing Volume..."
48 Ní Dhuibhne, "Dubliners 100. 15 New Stories..."

Hope has the law of the country against her. She depends on the nigh-eponymous Evelyn to a much greater extent than Joyce's Eveline did on Frank. The theme of the parents' suffocating emotional influence on the grown-up child is present here as well, additionally aggravated by religious differences. The first person narration, presenting the point of view of the Irish citizen, the one who has a right to live where he does and may deny this right to others, marginalizes Hope even further and exposes the ironic overtones of her name. The name of the other protagonist is no less ironic. He claims to have been named after Evelyn Waugh, a Catholic writer preoccupied with the theme of divine grace operating in the world. It is Evelyn who abandons Hope, not wishing to antagonize his own Christian mother – or simply out of cowardice. Ryan highlights the sad fact that love in the contemporary world may face social and political restrictions we have long thought of as belonging to past epochs. It is still easier to cling to one's culture-bound certainties, it would appear.

"Death is one of the few things that happen in *Dubliners*."[49] In *Dubliners 100* even death is mentioned rarely. Death is even absent from the last story, despite its title. Instead of the many themes dealt with by Joyce, we have a very simplified story which focuses on the precariousness of culture. A great masterpiece can burn well in a world which does not recognize conventions that we readily accept, yet some of the survivors of this post-apocalyptic world are deeply moved by the story of Gabriel. So, paradoxically, masterpieces prove eternal. Literature unites people and teaches tolerance: the protagonist is chased away from the pub and from a religious meeting by a priest, but is accepted by those who appreciate Joyce's masterpiece. The library is the centre of the insurgency the regime fears and endeavours to crush. On the other hand, Crazy Mary burns Joyce's masterpiece, calling it "men's palaver,"[50] which offers a feminist critique of the original version of "The Dead". The perspective has changed. The only dead person here is Joyce himself; his literary works are left at the mercy of the people who have come after him. They are also seen and described by the narrator as ghosts; this may be a comment on the vanity of all literary criticism.

As such a pessimistic vision of literary criticism does not seem a fit conclusion for a literary essay, I would like to draw on Adam Duke's review; although he does not come across as being particularly pleased with the whole collection, he gives it its due, claiming that "given Joyce's reputation as the most experimental author to use the English language, it's hard to think of a more fitting tribute"[51] than *Dubliners 100.* Dublin may have changed, but the new stories "resonate,"[52] as Chu He puts it, with Joyce's writing

49 Henry Levin, *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), 32.

50 Peter Murhpy, "The Dead", *Dubliners 100*, 214. The word "palaver" is the exact word Lily uses talking to Gabriel about men in Joyce's "The Dead."

51 Duke, "Review: Dubliners 100."

52 Chu He, "New Dubliners and Joyce," *Breac, A Digital Journal of Irish Studies,* 15.4 (2014), accessed August 20, 2017, https://breac.nd.edu/articles/new-dubliners-and-joyce/.

style, thus providing the readers of this collection with a rich intertextual experience. All the stories from *Dubliners 100* show a world in crisis, which the protagonists find difficult to overcome. Even though the difficulties they face may have different causes than the obstacles Joyce's characters found insurmountable, yet the pervading sense of constriction, closeness and a lack of perspectives has remained very similar. It would be risky to draw conclusions concerning real Dubliners from literary fiction, yet it seems justified to assume the Irish writers had something to say about life in Dublin at the beginning of the 21st century. As evidence one may quote the unqualified "yes," which was Eimear McBride's answer to the question asked in a Bookclub discussion whether young writers, like herself, write about some "collective Irish unconscious" by describing it in their novels as a "scenario of hopelessness without apparent access to redemption."[53] From *Dubliners,* through all the responses to Joyce's collection, the theme of paralysis, a will frozen by crisis, seems to have remained a perennial Irish theme.

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53 *Bookclub*. "Eimear McBride – *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing,* BBC. Radio 4 podcast, 8.2 (2018).

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Modernism Re-visited

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MEMORY, MYTH, AND MODERNISM IN KAZUO ISHIGURO'S *THE BURIED GIANT*

Abstract: Kazuo Ishiguro's affinities with modernism have been the subject of critical studies of his earlier works, which have been found to display such modernist features as the preoccupation with psychological and moral depth and the exploration of the inner life. Correspondences with modernism are also detectable in his most recent novel, *The Buried Giant* (2015). While the concern with feeling and consciousness is evident in this novel, in the following essay we argue that what inscribes *The Buried Giant* even more clearly within a new, reconfigured modernism is Ishiguro's treatment of memory, history, and myth. The conception of memory that emerges in the novel shows the imprint of modernist inspirations: memory as a construction involving forgetting and repression is reminiscent of both Maurice Halbwachs's ideas on collective memory and Sigmund Freud's theories concerning individual memory. Likewise, the inevitable and unwilled return of the lost past, featured in *The Buried Giant*, although not identical with Marcel Proust's conception of involuntary memory, shows affinities with his idea. The fact that this mode of memory is firmly anchored in the body additionally highlights the modernist-like valorization of the corporeal and the intuitive over the intellectual. Finally, in its vision of the cyclical character of human history, the novel embraces a mythical perspective on time, rather than the spatialized, scientific time of historiography, which constitutes yet another link with modernism, the "underlying metaphysic" of which is myth.

Key words: Kazuo Ishiguro, modernism, collective and individual memory, forgetting, involuntary memory, myth

Since our aim in this article is to discuss Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015) as a novel with strong affinities with modernism, we shall first consider the ways in which his earlier work has been classified. Neither of the labels often attached to Ishiguro – post-colonial or postmodernist – seems adequate as, in our view, his novels can be more fruitfully aligned with modernism. The category of a post-colonial novelist was applied to Ishiguro in the 1980s, when he published his first two novels, both set in Japan. This coincided with the appearance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, which received a Booker Prize in 1981 and effected a significant change in the cultural awareness of the English literary world by exploring Indian post-colonial experience. *Midnight's Children* successfully exploited "postmodern tropes of migrancy, nomadism and hybridity: the migrant and the nomad no longer tied to any one national tradition but rejoicing in the fluid, the disseminated and the rootless."[1] However, the Japanese

1 Patricia Waugh, "Kazuo Ishiguro's not-too-late modernism," in *Kazuo Ishiguro. New Critical Visions of the Novel*, ed. Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (Palgrave Macmillan: Houndsmill, 2011), 14.

content of Ishiguro's *A Pale View of Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986) was dictated by an entirely different purpose. If Rushdie's novel was a display of a revisionist "triumphant, post-imperial spirit,"[2] for Ishiguro, as the novelist himself explains, writing his two 'Japanese' novels, was "an act of preserving things that would have otherwise faded in [his] memory,"[3] an attempt to reconstruct a place to which he "in some way belonged, and from which [he] drew a certain sense of […] identity and […] confidence."[4] Ishiguro's classification as a post-colonial novelist was, then, a matter of his origin rather than his writing. As it soon became apparent, Japan was not to be his main theme – in 1989 he published *The Remains of the Day*, which, like his subsequent novels, was set in Europe. If it is not possible to pigeonhole Ishiguro as a post-colonial writer, it is not easy to classify him as a truly postmodernist author, either; even when, as Patricia Waugh observes, "iconic images from popular culture" appear in his work, it is not to create the effect of postmodern play, but to serve as "shortcuts, opening spaces for affective exploration."[5] Neither does Ishiguro subscribe to relativity and pessimism – his novels constitute rather an attempt to offer meaning and consolation. Moreover, although Malcolm Bradbury calls Ishiguro 'an artist of the floating world', the name refers less to the fluidity of postmodernism than to his impressionistic, indirect narrative method which never reveals the plot fully.[6]

Ishiguro's literary inspirations and models as well as the critical evaluations of his work rather point to the writer's kinship with modernism. The novelist himself admits to the influence of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* on his writing method and style – Proust gave him freedom of composition, of handling time and space, which he likens to that of an abstract painter who can "place shapes and colours around canvas."[7] One cannot avoid the association with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* here – her handling of time, plot and memories, and Lily Briscoe's abstract painting. Ishiguro also expresses his admiration for Anton Chekhov and his "spare and precise, controlled tone,"[8] and complex emotions hidden under apparently inconspicuous gestures and words. Unsurprisingly, literary critics have not failed to notice modernist traits in

2 Sebastian Groes, Barry Lewis, "Introduction: 'it's good manners, really' – Kazuo Ishiguro and the ethics of empathy," in *Kazuo Ishiguro. New Critical Visions of the Novel*, ed. Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (Palgrave Macmillan: Houndsmill, 2011), 6.

3 Kazuo Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro on song lyrics, scones, and the life he could have had," interview by John Freeman, *LitHub*, October 5, 2017, https://lithub.com/kazuo-ishiguro-on-song-lyrics-scones-and-the-life-he-could-have-had/.

4 Kazuo Ishiguro, "Nobel Lecture," *Facts. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Media AB*, 2018. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2017/ishiguro/facts/

5 Waugh, Kazuo Ishiguro's, 16-17.

6 Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (Penguin Books: London, 1994), 424.

7 Ishigure, "Nobel lecture."

8 Kazuo Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro by Graham Swift," interview by Graham Swift, *BOMB* 29 Fall 1989, Oct.1, 1989, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/kazuo-ishiguro.

Ishiguro's work. Bradbury places Ishiguro among those authors who managed to marry successfully "British with other forms of fiction to create an international, late-modern fictional voice that is, like Henry James', larger than any individual culture."[9] Bradbury's association of Ishiguro with one of the first "international" writers is confirmed by Patricia Waugh, who links the writer with the first wave of the internationalization of the novel, rather than the second one, initiated by Rushdie.[10] Additionally, Waugh underlines the presence of 'depth' in Ishiguro's work, which she understands as an exploration of "what it is to be human as well as what it is to be British, or Japanese or American": this "constant preoccupation with 'depth'" puts him "closer to modernism than postmodernism, a *late* international modernism."[11] Thus, Ishiguro's novels address the same question which modernists asked before – of whether the novel "can still provide a moral and political 'sentimental education.'"[12] Ishiguro's fiction, which explores the themes of identity and otherness, the characters' interactions with the world, human relationships and feelings, brings to mind Henry James's psychological analysis of his characters and his interest in otherness, Woolf's focus on "the dark places of psychology," Conrad's "preoccupation with the 'secret sharer', the hidden double or secret agent," and Forster's "concern with the undeveloped heart."[13]

Likewise, the theme of memory that weaves through Ishiguro's work from his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), to his latest, *The Buried Giant* (2015), is strongly present in the literature of High Modernism – in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, or James Joyce's *Ulysses*. In his first two novels, the writer's aim was to preserve Japan as he remembered it and to explore the questions of how people remember, whether their memories are clear or "blurred at the edges," and what role memory plays in "constructing a sense of oneself."[14] While his latest novel also explores the issues of personal memory and identity, collective past and memory play an increased role. The mythic setting of the novel emphasizes the universal and recurrent character of the questions Ishiguro poses in *The Buried Giant*, in that the dilemma whether to erase collective, traumatic memories or to confront them remains relevant in the aftermath of all wars and acts of genocide. In the remainder of this essay, we will demonstrate that Ishiguro's way of engaging with the issues of memory, collective and individual, in *The Buried Giant* makes apparent the continuity between current conceptions of memory and

9 Bradbury, *Modern British Novel*, 425.
10 Waugh, "Ishiguro's not-too-late-modernism," 15.
11 *Ibidem*, 20.
12 *Ibidem*.
13 *Ibidem*, 15-16.
14 Kazuo Ishiguro, "Kazuo Ishiguro Interview on *Charlie Rose*," YouTube, 24:52. February 21, 2017. Accessed 08.09.2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RohhPLfXWfE.

the ideas that arose at the beginning of the twentieth century: memory as a construction involving forgetting and repression brings to mind Maurice Halbwachs's ideas on collective memory and Sigmund Freud's theories concerning individual memory. The unwilled return of the lost past, featured in *The Buried Giant*, also shows affinities with Proust's conception of involuntary memory. We will argue as well that Ishiguro's foregrounding of the cyclical nature of human history further links the novel with mythopoeia which is "the underlying metaphysic of much modernist literature."[15]

It is particularly *The Buried Giant*'s concern with the dynamics of remembering and forgetting that establishes a link between the novel and the conceptualizations of memory in modernism. Although modernism is commonly associated with a radical break with the past and a distrust of conventional historiography, its explorations of history and memory, both literary and theoretical, offer a sustained reflection on the role of memory in individual and collective life; the philosophical discourses of Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud, Benjamin, and Halbswachs precede, run parallel to, and inform the works of modernist novelists and poets. As early as at the end of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche had elevated oblivion to a positive faculty on the grounds that it provides a remedy for the burden of excessive history and memory. Opposing the classical philosophical tradition and its valuation of memory, Nietzsche, in the second of his *Untimely Meditations*, claims that for individuals and nations alike, forgetting is essential to happiness and to action; its value lies in the erasure of the overwhelming past in order to escape its determinism and to reimagine a different future. Since "the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture," it is vital to be "as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time."[16] The question of whether forgetting, or rather totally erasing a traumatic past, is indeed beneficial for individuals and communities runs through *The Buried Giant*. The novel is set in post-Roman Britain, a land enveloped in an oblivion-inducing mist. The erasure of people's memories makes possible peaceful coexistence of Britons and Saxons, who only a generation before were locked in a violent conflict. As it transpires, the mist – the effect of Merlin's magic – was a measure adopted by the victorious King Arthur to prevent future bloodshed. In this landscape, an elderly Briton couple, Axl and Beatrice, embark on a journey to reunite with their long-lost son and to restore the memories of their life together, which have been wiped out by the mist.

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15 Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997), 2.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874), *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 62-3.

Ishiguro's novel does not endorse historical amnesia: presented as a temporary measure, it deprives each tribe of its collective memory, which is necessary for maintaining a sense of community. Since collective identities are founded on rehearsed memories, neither Britons nor Saxons know who they are. Not being anchored by a shared past and identity, they feel insecure, fearful and suspicious of all otherness. The inhabitants of the Saxon village that Beatrice and Axl visit are prone to violence towards strangers, while the members of the Briton settlement where the couple lived before their journey treat both people from the outside and each other with hostility. Shared memories emerge as vital for the creation of a community, as suggested by the first theorizations of collective memory at the beginning of the twentieth century. The concept was defined by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 as comprising a "body of shared concerns and ideas" of a particular group of society, "which its members have *constructed* over long periods of time" (emphasis added).[17] For Halbwachs, collective memory does not resurrect the past, but reconstructs it, adjusting past events to the demands of the changing present. Each generation creates memories which, in turn, participate in the construction of a group identity. Further elaborated by Jan and Aleida Assman, Paul Connerton and Pierre Nora, collective memory thus emerges as a construct, not necessarily fully conscious and deliberate,[18] aimed at meeting present needs, such as the development of a sense of identity and social cohesion, rather than at preserving the past. While shared memories are indispensable for the creation of a community committed to long-term continuity, it is also vital to forget those truths that do not promote the communal feeling.

Contemporary theories confirm that such selective forgetting is an inevitable component of all forms of memory, but analogous insights were already expressed in the first half of the twentieth century. Walter Benjamin's idea of remembering as a way of forgetting implies that by remembering the past in a certain way, we simultaneously forget that it could be remembered otherwise. According to Benjamin, the societal production of meaning involves this kind of forgetting, which is apparent in the widespread politicization of memory. It is therefore necessary to "brush history against the

17 Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (Routledge, 2009), 128-29.

18 Jeffrey K. Olick, drawing on the work of, among others, Jan Assman, theorizes an 'unconscious' "dimension of memory at the level that supersedes that of the individual." Inspired by Freud's work, Assman sought to show that there were unconscious elements not only in individual but also in collective memory. Those unconscious aspects, as Olick writes, "shape horizons of understanding whereby speakers might deploy the same tropes in defense not only of their solitary egos, but of cultural identities more generally […] Cultural memory is born of collective identity, constitutes it in time, and in turn serves it, though usually not in straightforwardly instrumentalist ways" (4-5). See: "The Ciphered Transits of Collective Memory: Neo-Freudian Impressions," *Social Research* 75.1. *Collective Memory and Collective Identity* (Spring 2008): 1-22.

grain."[19] By referring to memory as a construction, John Frow's recent narrative model provides a link between memory and forgetting, indicating a continuity of modernist insights: "rather than being a repetition of the physical traces of the past, [memory] is a construction of it under conditions and constraints determined by the present," and, therefore, subject to distortion and selective forgetting.[20] If the past is open-ended, submitted to ongoing revision, "rather than having a meaning and a truth determined once and for all by its status as event, its meaning and its truth are constituted retroactively and repeatedly."[21] Aleida Assmann expresses a similar view, observing that all types of remembering involve various forms of inclusion, overlooking, ignoring – "those gaps created by forgetting form an integral part of remembering, enabling its focus and providing contours."[22] In collective life, the gaps are not accidental – the selection criteria of the economy of remembering are imposed on individuals by the groups to which they belong. Certain memories are excluded because they are considered irrelevant or unacceptable from the point of view of the group.[23] As a result, representations of collective memory vary not only historically, as each generation revises and rewrites the past. Even within the same generation, competing versions of the same events are created by different social groups with their particular agendas.

In *The Buried Giant*, in spite of the mist, diverse instances of collective memory are in evidence since people are not affected by oblivion in the same way. While the mist has effectively erased the memories of common, unreflective folk, Gawain and Wistan have evaded the impact of the fog as they have preserved the memory of their people, the Britons and the Saxons respectively. Consistent with Halbwachs's ideas, each of them remembers only those facts and events which conform with their people's collective memory, which has survived among those who are strongly motivated to remember – the monks who side with Gawain and the Saxon king who has entrusted Wistan with the mission to kill Querig. Sir Gawain only appears to be an errant knight; in fact, together with the monks he protects the collective memory of the Britons and their king. He remembers his sovereign as "a great king, like God himself, [who] must perform deeds mortals flinch from" (BG 314) and justifies Arthur's decision to break the peace treaty between the two tribes in order to wage the final battle. By contrast, for Axl, Gawain's contemporary and the knight who engineered the peace treaty, the

19 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt, (Schocken Books, 2007), 257.

20 Quoted in Julie Hansen, "Theories of Memory and the Imaginative Force of Fiction," In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies*, ed. Shiobhan Kattago (Routledge 2016), 203. In Frow's conceptions of memory there is memory as archive and memory as construction.

21 *Ibidem*, 205.

22 Aleida Assmann, "Forms of Forgetting," Frankfurt Humanities Research Centre, 29 April, 2015.

23 *Ibidem*.

memory of King Arthur is a painful memory as he was the man who broke the treaty, which was "an unholy thing" to do (BG 313). Sir Gawain's vision of the past is also contrasted with that of Wistan, a young Saxon warrior that Axl and Beatrice meet during their quest. While Gawain's story is told from the perspective of the victorious Britons, Wistan represents the Saxons, who were conquered and nearly wiped out, and therefore his memory emphasizes violence, trauma and the desire to settle old scores. However, what motivates the warrior is not just his personal memory of the Britons and the lost battle, but primarily a collective narrative of victimization, which has proved to be stronger than the mist. This narrative has obviously been sustained at the court of the Saxon king, who has sent him on a "mission to slay the dragon Querig" (BG 136). The elimination of the dragon and the death of Gawain in a duel allow Wistan to predict a new order in which the Saxon version of memory will prevail and all traces of the Britons will be eradicated: "And country by country, this will become a new land, a Saxon land, with no more trace of your people's time here than a flock or two of sheep wandering the hills untended" (BG 340). In *The Buried Giant*, memory is thus a construction that depends on generation, ethnic group or individual attitude.

Regardless of the version of the past to which Ishiguro's characters subscribe, their individual recollections, which appear spontaneously, often clash with the accepted vision of the past. The fact that the characters' memories reappear unbidden makes it possible to regard the mist as a figure for the working of human memory – how it selectively forgets, repressing unwanted truths, events and experiences. Thus, the return of the suppressed memories in the novel is consistent with Freud's conception of memory, according to which the burden of the past cannot be removed for it is permanently lodged in the unconscious. On this view, neither Nietzsche's willed forgetting nor externally imposed amnesia can erase the past irrevocably. Disappointed in his king, Axl has relegated to his unconsciousness his life as Arthur's knight while Gawain retains and cherishes that very life, for it is the foundation of his identity. What Gawain represses, however, is the final battle and the atrocities he committed. Wistan, on the other hand, despite the fog, consciously reconstructs a narrative of bloodshed, carnage, and injustice, which offers a sense of identity and gives purpose to his life; however, he has repressed the kindness of Britons he experienced in his childhood. Unexpectedly, involuntary recollections begin to subvert the official version of Saxon memory and the hatred of Britons he has embraced so far. On seeing Axl for the first time, though he cannot remember the man, Wistan's "heart leapt for joy" as the old Briton's features seem pleasantly familiar (BG 124). Later, when his memories slowly return, the warrior realizes that the very first encounter with Axl took place in the Saxon village in which Wistan was raised. The Briton knight used to visit the village as King Arthur's emissary of peace. This recognition, although emotionally disturbing

to the warrior, does not change his attitude. Wistan ignores the voice of his suppressed memory and chooses to hate all Britons, compelling his young companion, Edwin, to do the same (BG 276-77). Similarly, the memories of the last battle that unexpectedly invade Gawain's consciousness reveal the burden of repressed guilt, which makes him refer to himself as a "slaughterer of babes" – this does not, however, alter Gawain's perception of himself or his late sovereign (BG 244).

Even if the sudden sensation Wistan feels at the sight of Axl's face does not fully conform with Proust's understanding of involuntary memory, the warrior's reaction shares a number of important features with the moments of remembrance in Proust's novel: both are non-intellectual, arise suddenly and by chance, and revive a memory image that is accompanied by sensations and emotions.[24] Moreover, in both cases, it takes a considerable effort to grasp the original event or experience – it is only after some time that Wistan can understand why Axl's face has evoked such a strong and pleasant emotion. The fact that the memory that is restored in Wistan's consciousness undermines the version of the Saxon past held by his king is in line with Proust's conception of involuntary memory. When he sees Axl, Wistan relives the feelings he experienced as a child, and the joyful character of the sensations associated with the elderly knight disrupts his consciously constructed narrative of the hateful Britons. This derives from the fact that involuntary memory is non-narrative, grounded in the body and the emotions. According to Proust's distinction between voluntary memory and its involuntary counterpart, arriving at true memories is not possible through a willed, intentional contemplation: "And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect."[25] Since voluntary memory remains at the service of the intellect, it retains no trace of the past. As Walter Benjamin observes in his 1939 essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Proust's distinction between voluntary and involuntary recollection was later confirmed by Theodor Reik, an Austrian psychoanalyst, whose conceptions of remembrance and memory

24 Although it is Marcel Proust who is usually associated with the concept of involuntary memory, it had been mentioned by Aristotle, Voltaire, Diderot and analysed in great detail for the first time by Paul Sollier, a doctor who treated Proust in 1905 for "neurasthenia." Sollier linked involuntary memory with affective factors – a violent emotion felt, for instance, during an accident which a person has witnessed, may trigger the revival of memories which are not related to the actual accident, but have evoked a similar emotion. Sollier claimed that the voluntary retrieval of life events is not efficient, and our will plays a trivial role in the evocation of memories. Proust elaborated on Sollier's ideas: he emphasized the "shock" caused by the surge of a previously forgotten memory, which may lead to an intense feeling of happiness due to the affective overlap between the past and the present. See: J. Bogousslavsky and O.Walusinski, "Marcel Proust and Paul Sollier: the involuntary memory connection," *Schweizer Archiv fur Neurologie und Psychiatrie* (4/2009): 130-6.

25 Marcel Proust, *Swan's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1956), 61.

correspond to Proust's voluntary and involuntary modes of memory: the function of intentional, intellectual remembrance [Gedächtnis] is the "protection of impressions; memory [Erinnerung] aims at their disintegration. Remembrance is essentially conservative, memory is destructive."[26] In *The Buried Giant*, Wistan's and Gawain's involuntary memory offers a corrective to the voluntary mode, its intuitive truth opposes the inevitably constructed character of voluntary memory. This destructive and subversive nature of involuntary memory is consistent with the modernist deemphasizing of the conscious and the intellectual and the valorization of the unconscious and the corporeal.

In the case of Axl, whose memory has repressed his military past, involuntary recollections bring back the very experience from which he detached himself by leaving King Arthur. Axl registers a sudden sensation when he witnesses Wistan's movements as the warrior prepares to confront Lord Brennus's soldier. To his own surprise, the elderly Briton recognizes and correctly interprets both warriors' gestures and strategies as if they were part of his own intimate experience. As it later turns out, before the fog descended, Axl was a warrior himself, which explains his ability to evaluate the skills of Wistan and his opponent. Axl's vague and involuntary sensation is thus anchored in his Briton past, which resonates with Halbwachs's theorization of the link between individual and collective memory: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories."[27] In his early work *Social Frameworks of Memory* (1925) and in his later studies, such as *The Collective Memory* (1940), Halbwachs argues that while the collective memory "endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember."[28] The collective and the individual intersect in the sense that collective memory constitutes a 'framework' into which individual remembrances are incorporated.[29] Ishiguro shows how individual memory hinges on collective memory – it is a fusion of Proust's and Halbwachs's ideas that illuminate Axl's, Wistan's and Gawain's crucial acts of remembrance. An important aspect of this fusion is the bodily character of Proust's involuntary memory, which revives a certain image of individual past together with related sensations and emotions; throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, a physical sensation "acts as a catalyst for involuntary memory," demonstrating that the "richest route into recollection is through body memory."[30]

Ishiguro's treatment of history as cyclical constitutes another link between his novel and modernist myth-inspired conceptions of temporality present, among others, in

26 Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, 160.

27 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter, intro. Mary Douglas (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 38.

28 *Ibidem*, 48.

29 Whitehead, *Memory*, 126.

30 *Ibidem*, 104-105.

the work of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot or W.B. Yeats. The novel continues the legacy of the mythopoeic strand in British modernist literature, which employed myth to find "a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[31] In his essay "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," T.S. Eliot identifies this method in the novel of James Joyce and the work of W.B. Yeats. Eliot resorts to myth himself in *The Waste Land* in order to overcome the fragmentation and chaos of the modern world. Ishiguro's employment of elements of myth serves the double purpose of structuring his novel and giving meaning to the world it presents. The quest-like journey of the main characters, the recurring Charon-like figure of the ferryman, the upward movement towards light/knowledge provide structure, but the fact that knowledge is at all achievable suggests that Ishiguro's is a (quasi-modernist) novel of epistemological questions and not a postmodernist text of ontological doubt. Ishiguro's focus on myth as generating meaning becomes inscribed in the recent "engagement with history and a revival of mythic meaning-making that the arch-postmodernists would have abhorred."[32]

The perception of history as cyclical requires the adoption of a dispassionate, detached vantage point, which is advocated by Nietzsche. Through the character of Axl, Ishiguro alludes to Nietzsche's "superhistorical spirit," which arises when "a great range of historical knowledge spanning different cultures and times has been assimilated," revealing "the partiality and limitation of all those issues which seem supremely important to one's contemporaries. The superhistorical spirit transcends historical time."[33] This transcendence, as Bell argues, is not necessarily a negative "withdrawal into some realm of the timeless," but may be "a condition of properly living within history."[34] Such 'living within history' involves a perception of history not as a chain of events arranged chronologically in time, but as cyclical and "understood under the sign of myth."[35] Such a recognition of the repetitive nature of violence informs Axl's final reflections on the Briton and Saxon future. After Wistan's slaying of the she-dragon, Axl realizes that the cycle of violence, stopped for a short time by the mist, will be unleashed again, inscribed in a never-ending pattern of vengeance: "Who knows what will come when quick-tongued men make ancient grievances rhyme with fresh desire for land and conquest?" (BG 340). This is immediately confirmed by Wistan's predic-

31 T.S. Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth," *The Dial*, Nov. 1923, 483. https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/review-of-ulysses-by-t-s-eliot-from-the-dial.

32 Alison Gibbons, "Postmodernism is dead. What comes next?", *Times Literary Supplement*, June 12, 2017. https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/postmodernism-dead-comes-next/

33 Michael Bell, "The metaphysics of Modernism." *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

34 *Ibidem*.

35 *Ibidem*, 14.

tion that Britons will soon become erased from both the land and memory. Ishiguro's recognition of the cyclical nature of human history resonates with similar insights of modernist writers: Yeats's conception of its spiral character, expressed for instance in "The Second Coming," or in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, where the idea of cyclical return resembles a vicious circle.

The myth-like structures underlying history do not apply just to collective life, but also to individual existence. Axl and Beatrice's journey to reunite with their son turns out to be a quest for memories which, as they hope, will strengthen their love and allow them to travel to the otherworld together. In the course of the journey they move upwards, first to reach the monastery, where they gain insight into the nature of the mist, and then up the cairn, towards the she-dragon's lair, where they confront dark aspects of their common past. Both the significance of the motif of ascent to a higher vantage point, which functions as the figure for gaining higher understanding, and the presence of the motif of quest in *The Buried Giant* point to its affinity with the modernist myth-inspired novel with its development of spatialized rather than chronological structures. The fact that the novel represents both historical and legendary past deemphasizes the role of time and chronology and underlines the mythic and universal aspects of human experience. This universality marks both collective and individual experience: the repetitive pattern of violence illustrated by the unresolved conflict between the Saxons and the Britons and human life as a journey towards death, enacted by Axl and Beatrice's quest that culminates in the final meeting with the ferryman. The ferryman, who takes people to the mythic island *qua* otherworld, is a recurrent figure in the novel, a constant reminder of death as the ultimate horizon of human life. While the repeated encounters with the ferryman prompt a reconciliation between Axl and Beatrice, his presence in the novel does not perform the same function at the collective level – the longer lifespan of nations makes them less receptive to the recognition of finality and the need to end the cycle of violence.

The vision of human history in *The Buried Giant* as cyclical and myth-like reflects the modernist tendency towards detecting meaningful patterns as opposed to the post-modern break with the idea of deeper significance underlying history. When Ishiguro draws on myth, then, it is not only to add to his mixture of various genres in the novel: fairy tale, medieval romance, fantasy, contemporary adventure story. While this playful measure situates the novel formally within the postmodern convention, the deployment of myth adds depth and universality to his work, which is in fact consistent with Ishiguro's intentions. In an interview he explains the rationale behind the novel: "I wanted to write a universal novel about memory and forgetting, and the function of these two antagonistic forces in the life of a nation and in a relationship, regardless

of whether it is a relation between husband and wife or between friends."[36] This very intention to find universal meanings and patterns in the existence of individuals and of communities together with the manner in which Ishiguro shows memory – as both voluntary and involuntary, as shaped by the conscious and unconscious processes of forgetting – suggest the continuation of a modernist literary legacy, which is resurfacing nowadays in the new literature that breaks away from postmodernist "playfulness and affectation."[37]

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