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Contents

Rethinking the biographical canon: Silences and gaps in Colm Tóibín's *The Master*

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Abstract

Over the last number of decades, the biographical canon has become the focus of scholarly attention for several reasons: revision of the essential concepts of (self)-identity, keen interest in liminal literary forms, searches for new forms of assessment of the artist's creative output and new interpretive methodologies. Biofiction as a genre encompassing both documentary and fictional elements represents not only the biographical subject proper but also the author's subjective orientation. The case study of a recent biofiction about Henry James (*The Master* by the Irish gay writer Colm Tóibín) suggests that silence as a semiotic practice and cognitive failure plays an important role in this particular example of the numerous biographies of James and functions not to uncover the sites of suppression of a presumably gay protagonist but acquires a universal, ontological meaning, signifying the fatal solitude of the artist, which is very close to the main credo of James' own writing.

Kanon biograficzny na nowo:
przemilczenia i luki w *Mistrzu* Colma Toibina

Abstrakt

W ciągu ostatnich kilka dekad kanon biograficzny zyskał na znaczeniu z kilku powodów: nastąpiła rewizja podstawowych konceptów (auto) tożsamości, pojawił się wzrost zainteresowania granicznymi formami literackimi, zaczęto poszukiwania nowych sposobów oceniania twórczości artysty oraz nowych metodologii. Biofikcja, która jako gatunek obejmuje elementy zarówno dokumentalne jak i fikcyjne, ukazuje nie tylko sam przedmiot biografii lecz również subiektywne nastawienie autora. *Mistrz* Colma Toibina, której tematem jest życie Henry'ego Jamesa sugeruje, iż przemilczenie jako praktyka semiotyczna i porażka poznawcza odgrywa w niej istotną rolę, funkcjonując nie aby zdemaskować miejsca, w których domniemany homoseksualizm bohatera został stłumiony, lecz zyskuje uniwersalne znaczenie ontologiczne, znacząc fatalną samotność artysty, tak bliskie credo pisarstwa samego Jamesa.

Słowa kluczowe

cisza, biofikcja, Henry James, Colm Toibin, literatura gejowska

1. Introduction

Over the last few decades the biographical canon (both in the epistemological and generic meanings of the concept) has been at the center of interest of the academe and public at large; it has also been essentially revised for several reasons. The tremendous popularity of biofictions at the beginning of the new millennium has maintained its momentum up to the present time. In a very broad sense, the boom of memoirs and biographical literature is connected with the sociocultural situation of postmodernism and the cultural period that is replacing it, which might be called *post-postmodernism*. If a couple of decades ago the proliferation of memoirs and biography fiction

obviously relied upon the postmodern revision of the essential-
ist concept of (self)-identity and poststructural interest in limi-
nal or hybrid literary forms (fiction/non-fiction, among others),
after the postmodern tenets started to lose their influence, bio-
graphical writing, displaying various degrees of fictionalization,
still retains its enormous popularity. Probably because of its
very close relation with "real-life stories", the biographical gen-
re has relatively easily acquired new rules and conditions im-
posed by the new sociocultural situation of post-post-
modernism. It seems evident that biographical narratives
again seem to be part and parcel of the new cultural logic
which, according to Alison Gibbons, brings such transfor-
mations as "a rehabilitated ethical consciousness", "popularity
of historical fiction" and " revival of realism", which means that
"when real elements appear in fiction now", it is to "signal real-
ism, rather than to foreground the artifice of the text" (Gibbons
2017), breaking with endless language games, moral relativity
and all-embracing irony.

There is another reason for the blossoming of biofictions
which is embedded in the present situation in Literary Studies
as an academic discipline. In this respect, it seems only natu-
ral that a number of authors of biofictions are professional
literary scholars (David Lodge, to give the most telling exam-
ple). My assumption is that after the dominance of "New Criti-
cism" which excluded the author's biography from the realm of
Literary Studies as an unnecessary, if not harmful context;
after structuralism which declared "the death of the author";
after post-structuralism which claimed the author to be just
a space for intertextual games – after all these academic oscil-
lations, nullifying the real author, the reaction was inevitable,
and it took the form of the biofiction boom.

Biofiction is a specific mode of biographical writing where
fictional elements co-exist on presumably equal terms with
non-fictional, biographical ones. As Michael Lackey aptly puts
it, "biofiction 'is' literature that names its protagonist after an
actual biographical figure" (2016: 3). In his survey of criticism
about biofiction, the American professor refers to the 1991 ar-

gument of the French writer and literary scholar Alain Buisine, which, in my opinion, appears to be extremely useful for an understanding of the postmodern preponderance of the bio-fiction genre (living well into post-postmodern times):

> Postmodernism underscores the degree to which fiction necessari-ly plays a role in the construction of a biographical subject and why, therefore, an accurate representation of the biographical subject is ultimately impossible. For Buisine, these intellectual developments led to the rise of biofiction, which is a postmodern form of biography that implicitly concedes through its dramatiza-tion that it cannot accurately signify or represent the biographical subject because *the author's subjective orientation will always in-flect the representation*". (summarized in Lackey 2016: 5; italics mine – O.A.)

M. Lackey seems to support this stance in a post which reads:

> Biographical novelists are different from biographers, because they are more committed to the sacred art of imaginative creation than biographical representation. Thus, they take unapologetic liberties with the life of their subject in order to communicate their own vision of life. (Lackey 2016a)

What is important for the case under study is that in bio-fictions the artistic message is conditioned not only by the pro-tagonist's life, but also by the personality of the biographer. As will be further demonstrated, this thesis gives a rationale for my choosing the concept of *silence* as the cornerstone of inter-pretation.

Although Henry James' life was mostly uneventful, paradox-ically, the American writer has been a favourite with biog-raphers. Quite a number of academic biographies (F. O. Matt-hiessen, L. Edel, F. Kaplan, L. Gordon, Sh. Novik etc.) have been published, and this can hardly be surprising. However, the proliferation of *biofictions* focusing on Henry James may seem embarrassing. Suffice it to say, the article on Henry James in *Wikipedia* contains a special rubric "Portrayals in

fiction" where the "incomplete" list of literary texts comes to sixteen.

I have already had an opportunity to analyze the existing canon of Henry James biographies, both in its documentary and fictional modes (Antsyferova 2017). In a recent publication I have also elaborated on this curious phenomenon and put forward the assumption that the biographers of the new millennium turning to Henry James's life might be attracted and challenged by the following: "(1) James's personal aversion towards invasions of his privacy and his firm belief that the essence of the art should be sought not in an artist's life, but in his work; (2) the paradoxical combination of James's extreme privacy with his huge correspondence and dramatic tensions around his archives, worthy of *The Aspern Papers*; (3) James's propensity for self-fictionalizing and self-mythologizing; (4) fictionalizing as an intrinsic feature of all preceding writing about James, both fictional and non-fictional" (Antsyferova 2017: 119). Here I would like to focus on the case of Colm Tóibín's novel *The Master* (2004) and to demonstrate that to estimate its place among other James' biographies and to critically assess the book along with its reception, it is equally important to consider both the personality of the protagonist and the personality of the biographer and his aesthetic and ideological credo.

Upon reading the novel, without knowing that John Updike had entitled his review of Tóibín's book "Silent master. Henry James becomes the hero of a historical novel" (Updike 2004), I perceived *silence* both as the main structural and narrative strategy, as well as a significant ideological stance of Tóibín. Ironically, another review, published in *The Guardian*, was entitled "In his master's voice" (Mars-Jones 2004), which only speaks for the controversial nature of silence of Henry James as a biographical subject.

However, before analyzing Tóibín's biofiction, it seems necessary to provide an insight into the theoretical issue of silence.

2. Silence in literature and culture
   as a theoretical problem

The special significance of silence as a semiotic practice results from certain topical issues of today's cultural situation. A British academician who studied the preoccupation with silence in English-language literature before 1950s, puts it in the following way: "The prevalence of a fictional and theoretical recourse to silence in the twentieth century is […] concomitant with the period's cultural and philosophical investment in language" (Dauncey 2003: 1-2).

The first scholars to explicitly involve themselves in the study of silence as an aesthetic phenomenon in the 1960s were George Steiner (Steiner 1967), Susan Sontag (Sontag 1966) and lhab Hassan (Hassan 1967). In particular, Ihab Hassan writes that "McLuhan heralds the end of print; the Gutenberg galaxy burns itself out. Electric technology can dispense with words, and language can be 'shunted' on the way to universal consciousness […] At a certain limit of contemporary vision, language moves towards silence (Hassan 1974: 36). Simultaneously, Susan Sontag remarked: "Silence can […] be a physical/spiritual state, an aesthetic, and a cultural device" (Sontag 1967: 10).

Since then an obvious tendency can be traced which allows silence to be viewed more broadly — and to focus on the uses of silence within fictions where it is not always an explicit narrative or thematic concern. Nowadays, it would be more correct to speak not just about the *aesthetics of silence*, as Sontag did, but about the *culture of silence*. Thus, today silence can be studied not only as "a 'conscious' narrative device, with manifold expressive possibilities" (Dauncey 2003: 6); just as well, silence may be viewed as a manifestation of the text's ideological agenda. "Silence can be charged with socio-political significance, by reason of its ability to denote or uncover sites of oppression, at the same time as it can be invested with the capacity to subvert habitual modes of communication" (Dauncey 2003: 7). As Cheryl Glenn points out, the "rhetoric of silence"

has always relied upon notions of power, authorship, and agency (Glenn 2004: 26), while both Cheryl Glenn and Susan Sontag speak of silence as potential resistance against misrepresentation and imposition. In this way, silence frees the artist from "servile bondage to the world" (Sontag 1982: 190).

While theorizing about the difference between a biographer and a novelist (*aka* an author of biofictions), the most distinguished of Jamesian biographers Leon Edel claims that the difference "resides in the biographer's having to master a narrative of inquiry. Biography has to explain and examine the evidence. The story is told brushstroke by brushstroke like a painter, and the biographer often has to say he simply doesn't know – he cannot fill in the gaps" (Leon Edel 1985).

This, by contrast, is exactly what the author of a biofiction is free to do – to fill in the gaps. While doing so, the novelist (the author of biofiction) also has to solve another crucial problem – the problem of choice, which presupposes foregrounding some biographical facts and turning a blind eye to others appearing less necessary or contravening the ideology of the life-narrative. It is here that the cultural work of silence in the form of bypassing, suppression, and eliding starts.

3.   *The Master* by Colm Tóibín

Silence as a semiotic practice in *The Master* is mobilized by virtue of both ideological and aesthetical premises.

3.1. Ideological premises of silence in *The Master*

In the wake of poststructuralism and deconstructivism, silence is viewed as having clear-cut sociological and ideological dimensions, which often relate to problems with self-identity (whether social or gender). To a certain extent, the national identity of the biographer is likely to be commended for his predilection for silence, especially in the light of some recent Irish studies. The argument of Irish literary scholars is noteworthy: "Silence continues to prove a forbearing presence in

literary, historical, cultural and political discourse in Ireland, North and South" (Beville, Dybris 2012: 1). However, Jamesian biography gives very little opportunity to touch upon the Irish issue, so it would be reasonable not to focus upon it, agreeing, nonetheless, that Tóibín's book can be found to be in full accordance with the statement that "silence in Irish literature becomes less the thing that one is unable to speak of, and more the thing that one decides not to say. In dealing with such literature we are presented not with the limitations of silence and language but instead, the power of silence and language" (Belville, Dybris 2012: 4).

In the case of Colm Tóibín (and, presumably, Henry James), the overt predilection for silence as a thematic concept and ideological agenda might be primarily connected with the gay identity of the author(s). Michael Wood in the *London Review of Books* reminisces how Tóibín, himself an open gay, well before writing *The Master*, elaborated on the distinctive features of a gay artist's psychology:

> "The gay past," Tóibín wrote then, "contains silence and fear as well as Whitman's poems and Shakespeare's sonnets, and this may be why it is so easy to find a gay subtext in Kafka's novels and stories." These works, Tóibín goes on, "dramatise the lives of isolated male protagonists who are forced to take nothing for granted, who are in danger of being discovered and revealed for who they really are or who are unfairly whispered about or whose relations with other men are full of half-hidden and barely hidden and often clear longings [...] It is astonishing how James managed to withhold his homosexuality from his work." What he managed to do, Tóibín suggests, is depict the damage such withholding can cause, the waste and desolation it leaves in a life. (qtd. in: Wood 2004)

At first sight, the main import of *The Master* is exactly that. The Henry James of Colm Tóibín abstains from participation in politics (Civil War), from sexuality and from overt expression of emotions (both for men and women). The reader cannot but perceive that "the pillars of the narrative are failure, avoidance,

renunciation and withdrawal", structuring the narrative "round the missed opportunity, the faulty choice, the golden bowl with its latent crack, the 'beast in the jungle' whose annihilating leap is delayed and delayed" (Mars-Jones 2004). The main personage, i.e. Henry James, seems devoid of compassion and empathy, shunning active participation in life and deep attachments. Presumptive homoerotic motifs (James' long-ago feelings for the homosexual Paul Zhoukovsky and his mixed feelings for the handsome American Norwegian sculptor Henrik Andersen, as well as a queer attraction to the Irish valet Hammond) are described in the novel as an innuendo. While the whole chapter is given to James' reaction to Oscar Wilde's trial, the portrayed writer remains absolutely reserved about it. As a reviewer notices, "James listens attentively but without betraying any personal interest. Edmund Gosse wonders if James himself might not have some secrets to protect" (Mars-Jones 2004).

Eventually, however, Tóibín's version of James' life evokes a different conjecture: the main reason for Henry James' melancholy, coldness, and aloofness might be of a somewhat more complicated nature. As Hermione Lee puts it, "*The Master*'s structure is more interesting, and less obvious, than the outing of Henry James. It becomes apparent that James [...] has repeatedly resisted demands, controlled intimacy and avoided commitment in order to do his writing" (Lee 2004).

This appears to be one of the most unexpected and inspiring surprises for critics and readers. What actually happens is that the gay author does not confine himself to revealing the homoerotic propensities of his hero, but turns to more universal problems such as the genesis of art and to an unresolvable conflict between James' infinite devotion to art and personal responsibility "to live all you can". This effect is achieved largely through selection and silence.

Just like David Lodge in his *Author, Author* (Lodge 2004), Colm Tóibín limits himself to four years of James' life, called the "treacherous years" by Leon Edel – the years of deep crisis caused by the humiliating failure of James' play "Guy

Domville" in 1895. The novel ends with his brother William's family stay at Henry's house in Rye, in 1899. The prevailing tonality of the book is that of bereavement and loss. Among the numerous attachments of Henry James, Tóibín skillfully selects those which turned out to be most traumatic for him. The correlation of silence and trauma is quite evident: many a trauma has to be bound by silence, and "trauma theory has much to contribute to the issue of silence" (Belville, Dybris 2012: 15).

Though the plot develops in the late 1890s, the book deploys diverse and persistent movements in time – mainly flashbacks. The first phrase of the book sets the tone: "Sometimes in the night he dreamed about the dead – familiar faces and the others, half-forgotten ones, fleetingly summoned up" (Tóibín 2005: 1). Every trip backwards is fraught with a morbid discovery and self-revelation which, essentially, fuel Jamesian art. For example, according to some biographers, while in Paris, James fell in love with the Russian aristocrat and artist Paul Zhoukovsky. One of the first attachments touched upon in Tóibín's novel, it is presented in the form of reminiscences of a rainy night James spent on a Paris street watching the window of his friend instead of meeting him for a night *rendez-vous*.

> He wrote down the story of that night and thought then of the rest of the story which could never be written, no matter how secret the paper or how quickly it would be burned or destroyed. The rest of the story was imaginary, and it was something he would never allow himself to put into words. In it, he had crossed the road halfway through his vigil. He had alerted Paul to his presence and Paul had come down and they walked up the stairs together *in silence*". (Tóibín 2005: 10; italics mine – O.A.)

Characteristically, not only personages keep silent, but also the author. Appropriating James' technique of "central consciousness", Tóibín deftly hushes the situation, making his hero remark that "he had never allowed himself to imagine beyond that point" (Tóibín 2004: 10).

Other examples of traumatic experiences bound by silence include relations with Henry's sister Alice and his charming cousin Minny Temple (considered to be a prototype of Isabel Archer from *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Teal from *The Wings of the Dove*). Both of them died young, and this makes the "remembrance of things past" especially disturbing. Over the years, James comes to understand that Minny Temple's image "would preside in his intellect as a sort of measure and standard of brightness and repose" (Tóibín 2005: 111). Instigated by the words of an old American friend coming to visit him in Rye, James feels guilty for not taking Minny Temple to Italy when she was ill (Tóibín 2005: 119). While suppressing possible words of self-defence, James keeps turning these accusations over and over in his mind, only to come to the poignant understanding that "he had preferred her dead rather than alive, that he had known what to do with her once life was taken from her, but he had denied her when she asked him gently for help" (Tóibín 2005: 122).

Another dramatic episode is the suicide of Constance Fenimore Woolson, James's close friend and colleague (a granddaughter of James Fenimore Cooper, and a popular American author of the time). James perceives her as "the only person he had ever known who was fully skilled at deciphering the unsaid and unspoken" (Tóibín 2005: 256), which makes her a very special figure in the framework of Tóibín's semiotics of silence. This attachment is also depicted as a source of self-vindication "that he [Henry James] had abandoned his friend and left her to her fate in Venice" (Tóibín 2005: 221). Thus, Woolson is another victim of James's predilection for solitude.

The list may be continued. However, it should be emphasized that, for Tóibín, solitude and silence are the main sources and prerequisites of James' creativity. As an American critic rightly observes, "in each chapter, the present-day incidents and the memories they evoke are linked ingeniously to the genesis of Henry's art" (Mendelsohn 2004).

There is a complex concept of *solitude*, a close partner to silence, in the book; on the one hand – it is the thing James had

been craving for from his early years, on the other, solitude is perceived almost tragically, which is expressed by a sonic and oxymoronic metaphor (sound of silence, cry of solitude):

> Alice was dead now, Aunt Kate was in her grave, the parents [...] also lay inert under the ground, and William was miles away [...] And there was silence now in Kensington, not a sound in the house, except the sound, like a vague cry in the distance, of his own great solitude, and his memory working like grief, the past coming to him with its arm outstretched looking for comfort. (Tóibín 2005:152)

As it ultimately turns out, writing is the most important and life supporting activity for James, both his cure and consolation. In a striking episode in Tóibín's novel, James looks at the wall of books in his study at Lamb House – his own books, in their various editions. Henrik Anderson, who is staying with him at the time, asks James if this writing career was what he intended for himself: " 'Did you always know that you would write all these books? [...] Did you not say this is what I will do with my life?' [...] Henry had turned away from him and was facing towards the window with no idea why his eyes had filled with tears" (Tóibín 2005: 310). Alluding again to "the realm of the unnamed and unspoken" makes rather an ambiguous impression, very close to the effect James' own art induces. According to Michael Wood's comment on this episode, "his books are what he has done with his life, but they derive their mysterious authority from what he didn't do, and knows he never would have done" (Wood 2004).

It should be added, though (and this was not heeded by any reviewer), that the peculiar attitude of James towards life is brilliantly expressed in the recurring metaphor of a window through which the writer observes life (definitely deriving from James' preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*): "Already he missed the glow of pleasure which Hammond's calm face had given him. Soon, it would be lost to him, and this made him feel that he was a great stranger, with nothing to match his own long-

ings, a man away from his own country, observing the world as a mere watcher from a window" (Tóibín 2005: 47). Again, silence and window go together in the final phrase of the novel. After the guests left, "Lamb House was his again. He moved around it relishing the silence and emptiness. [...] He walked up and down the stairs, going into the rooms [...] from whose windows he had observed the world, so that they could be remembered and captured and held" (Tóibín 2005: 359).

3.2. Aesthetical premises of silence in *The Master*

In the analyzed biofiction, the rhetoric of silence strongly relates to the style of the portrayed author, to the renowned verbosity and opaqueness of his idiolect. Jamesian prolixity is definitely akin to silence in the sense that in his texts the meaning is hidden, deferred in endless syntactical periods just as it might be deferred by silencing.

Here it is pertinent to recall a famous evaluation of Henry James' style by his brother William, the great philosopher known, among other things, for his precise and transparent manner of speech. In May 1907, William James wrote in his letter to his brother about *The American Scene*, one of the latest nonfictional works of Henry James:

> You know how opposed your whole "third manner" of execution is to the literary ideals which animate my crude and Orson-like breast, mine being to say a thing in one sentence as straight and explicit as it can be made, and then to drop it forever; yours being to avoid naming it straight, but by dint of breathing and sighing all round and round it, to arouse in the reader who may have had a similar perception already (Heaven help him if he hasn't!) the illusion of a solid object, made (like the "ghost" at the Polytechnic) wholly out of impalpable materials, air, and the prismatic interferences of light, ingeniously focused by mirrors *upon empty space*. But you do it, that's the queerness! And the complication of innuendo and associative reference on the enormous scale to which you give way to it does so build out the matter for the reader that the result is to solidify, by the mere bulk of the process, the like

perception from which he has to start. As air, by dint of its volume, will weigh like a corporeal body; so his own poor little initial perception, swathed in this gigantic envelopment of suggestive atmosphere, grows like a germ into something vastly bigger and more substantial. But it's the rummest method for one to employ systematically as you do nowadays; and you employ it at your peril. In this crowded and hurried reading age, pages that require such close attention remain unread and neglected. You can't skip a word if you are to get the effect, and 19 out of 20 worthy readers grow intolerant. The method seems perverse: "Say it out, for God's sake," they cry, "and have done with it." […] For gleams and innuendoes and felicitous verbal insinuations you are unapproachable, but the core of literature is solid. Give it to us once again! (James 1920: 277—278; italics mine – O.A.)

In the context of our discussion, this quotation is remarkable for at least two things. First, the brilliant metaphor of mirrors focused upon empty space as an apt rendition of Henry James' "late (or third) manner". Actually, William James' metaphoric emptiness (or "lack of solid subject") is a visual analogue to silence (lack of material sound). Secondly, the philosopher acutely foreshadows the reception of his brother's prose in the years to come: considered "a perverse method" by many, Henry James' art still fills his readers with wonder just as it did his brother, who exclaimed: "But you do it, that's the queerness!" Being read "against the grain" paradoxically contributes to James' *postmodern* fame and commercialization. Viewing the author's writing from a sociological perspective, one of the British reviewers makes the point:

I think what attracts high bourgeois writers of a certain age to James, in our hyper-democratic era of confession and candour, is the supreme reticence of his fiction. To read James properly is often to read his books against themselves, as it were, to seek meaning in the aporias, the absences, and the suspensions of the text, in emphatically what is not said. (Cowley 2005)

Thus, the problem of Jamesian reception brings us again to the issue of "what is not said" in his texts.

4. Conclusions

Contrary to the expectations created by the sexual identity of the author and his previous declarations, silence in Tóibín's novel about James functions not to uncover the sites of oppression and suppression of a presumably gay protagonist. The deployment of the semiotics of silence is multifarious and relates both to the tenor of the book and to its structural and narrative strategies. Thus, silence acquires a universal, philosophical, and ontological meaning. It stands for the fatal solitude of an artist doomed to sacrifice what other people call life for the sake of his art. And this is very close to what was the main tenet of James' own writing. As such, it makes Tóibín's novel very congenial to its subject. Along with the aptly incorporated narrative technique of Henry James and a deft adaptation of his style to the tastes of the modern reader, it can be considered as a main factor for its best-selling status and favourable reviews.

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History and experience in Elena Mauli Shapiro's *13 rue Thérèse*: How do we get to know the past?

EWA FIUTKA

Abstract

Elena Mauli Shapiro in *13 rue Thérèse* asks questions about the ways of mediating the past. The problem is by no means new but the author attempts to present historical events through the category of historical experience as a valid manner of showing the past. Therefore, the novel is looked upon from the perspective of Frank Ankersmit's concept of experience as well as the theory of objects as tools which assist the recipient in mediating the past. Thus, both through the use of the category of experience and the presentation of history through objects, the past is presented as fragmented and unreliable, which in fact reflects how historical writing is perceived nowadays, especially if the ending of the novel suggests that the past is inevitably linked with the present.

Keywords

Historia i doświadczenie w powieści Eleny Mauli Shapiro *13 rue Thérèse*: Jak poznajemy przeszłość?

Abstrakt

Elena Mauli Shapiro w *13 rue Thérèse* stawia pytania dotyczące sposobów pośredniczenia przeszłości. Problem zdecydowanie nie jest nowy, ale autorka próbuje przedstawić wydarzenia historyczne poprzez kategorię doświadczenia historycznego jako jednego z możliwych sposobów ukazywania przeszłości. Dlatego też powieść jest analizowana z perspektywy koncepcji doświadczenia Franka Ankersmita oraz teorii przedmiotów jako narzędzi wspomagających odbiorcę w pośredniczeniu przeszłości. Stąd też zarówno dzięki zastosowaniu kategorii doświadczenia, jak i przedstawieniu historii poprzez przedmioty, przeszłość jest ukazana jako fragmentaryczna i niewiarygodna, co w istocie odzwierciedla obecny sposób postrzegania pisarstwa historycznego, zwłaszcza że zakończenie powieści sugeruje, iż przeszłość jest nieuchronnie powiązana z teraźniejszością.

Słowa kluczowe

Elena Mauli Shapiro, *13 rue Thérèse*, doświadczenie historyczne, Frank Ankersmit, przedmioty

The beginning of the twenty-first century is marked by a shift of focus in the perception of historiography and historical narrative. Although the findings presented by Hayden White in *Metahistory* (1973) are still valid for the theory of historiography, i.e. the concept of multiple accounts of the past none of which actually represents the correct image of this past, nowadays there is a new tendency, to look at history through the category of experience. This category does not exclude a traditional approach to history as a discipline but actually enriches it and gives an alternative means of mediating the past. Frank Ankersmit (2001: 152) emphasises that nowadays history as a discipline is disintegrating both ontologically and epistemo-

logically. The past is no longer perceived as a whole but rather as a sum of independent versions of it. As a result, one is unable to indicate which element of the past is significant or irrelevant as they could be both, depending on the historian's intentions and the concept of the work. An example for such a treatment of the past is provided by so-called microhistories that present the past from the perspective of an average person, unlike grand narratives which focus on leaders and great events, mainly of a political nature.

The trend to show history through experience is not solely confined to the discipline of history but has an even greater reflection in literature and literary studies. The issues of how to get to know and represent the past are highlighted in postmodern historical fiction, particularly historiographic metafiction which "destabilises received notions of both history and fiction" (Hutcheon 1988: 120). However, as Mitchell (2010) notes, nowadays there is a growing tendency towards what she calls "memory texts" (32) which mediate the past by means of memory objects. For this purpose, the category of experience is frequently used as a means of mediating the past which is more effective than language, as the latter is imperfect by its nature and may be less straightforward. Elena Mauli Shapiro in her novel *13, rue Thérèse* makes use of this approach and poses questions about ways of mediating the past. She also raises issues concerning the objectivity of historical accounts. The problem is by no means new but the author attempts to present historical events through the category of experience as a valid manner of showing the past. Therefore, in this article the novel is looked upon from the perspective of Frank Ankersmit's concept of historical experience. The theory of objects is also applied as it may serve as an analytical tool for the interpretation of the text since photographs of objects are provided in the novel to assist the recipient in mediating the past.

Shapiro in her novel presents the past through the vehicle of a text combined with images of artefacts which reinforce the message of the novel. The device is not new – Edward Bulwer

Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii,* one of the most successful Victorian novels, describes the events after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD. The story is based on the last moments of two characters whose real skulls can still be found in Lytton's house – the skulls of Arbaces and Calenus (Goldhill 2015: 10). They serve to corroborate the truth of the fictional story and to show history to the viewer and the reader.

A similar device is applied in *13, rue Thérèse*. The story of the main character of the novel, Louise Brunet, is inspired by that of a real person with the same name who indeed lived and died in the house at 13, rue Thérèse in Paris. As she did not have any relatives, her possessions were taken by her neighbours – Shapiro's mother took Louise's cardboard box with her personal belongings. The novel provides descriptions of these items, accompanied by images of the artefacts. They are mostly letters and photographs of the protagonists, but also a picture of a calendar, gloves, or such odd items as a bullet pencil case. The author presents a plausible version of Louise's life on the basis of the objects which make the story more alive but, most of all, more true-to-life. Such a device strengthens the reception of the past experienced by the reader who, contrary to an indifferent attitude which could result from contact with the textual version only, approaches the past more emotionally when faced with a story supported with the actual artefacts left behind by real figures. This type of encounter with objects might be called a historical experience of these artefacts.

The category of experience has been discussed in the literature since ancient times but historical experience is rather rarely mentioned, especially in literary criticism. Although Oakeshott (1933) had earlier called history a form of experience, and other historians, like Gibbon or Toynbee, mentioned their personal experience as being influential in their writing of history (van der Dussen 2016: 238), it is Ankersmit (2005: 124–125), inspired by Huizinga and his concept of historical sensation, who fully developed the concept of historical

experience as a moment of immediate contact with an artefact from the past. The subject (the receiver of the experience) and the object (be it a painting, sculpture, building, or everyday object from the past) do not form separate entities at the moment of this sensation but make up a unity. The separation takes place only after that moment. The experiential contact between the subject and the object is possible thanks to the senses of smell and hearing rather than eyesight. Another essential element of historical experience is its decontextualisation – the object should be little known or unknown to academia so that previous interpretations cannot influence a first unmediated contact with the object. This is why historical experience is virtually impossible with famous artefacts as they are already situated in the context of scientific research and evaluation. Historical experience also takes place unexpectedly so it is only possible with random objects and, therefore, the subject is not prepared in any way for this encounter. Historical experience, for Ankersmit (2005: 128), should also be distinguished from historical intuition in which the past is shaped by the historian while in historical experience it is the past that influences the historian.

Shapiro's presentation of the images of various artefacts in the novel seems to share some of the features of historical experience as seen by Ankersmit. First of all, the objects presented in *13, rue Thérèse* are random and decontextualised. They are not familiar to the modern character of the novel, a researcher called Trevor Stratton, who aims at discovering the story behind these objects. He endeavours to put together particular elements of the puzzle in order to organise them into a coherent early-twentieth-century story whose main protagonist is Louise Brunet. Therefore, the objects in the novel are not only unknown to the researcher but also deprived of any context which could equip them with meaning. This meaning is first given by Stratton who arranges the objects into a meaningful chronological unity and invents the story behind them on the basis of his research. Thus, the objects determine the

story so it is the past that influences the researcher, as in historical experience. Yet, as White (1973: 6–7) argues, the historian, through the interpretation of past events and their organisation into a meaningful story, partially creates these events as well. This, however, does not happen at the moment of historical experience but afterwards, when the researcher (the subject) is separated from the object and starts to think independently, also applying elements of historical intuition. In the novel, historical experience is mediated through Trevor's research and his presentation of the objects, but it is actually Shapiro as the writer who creates the past in the novel, thus facilitating historical experience for the reader. She makes use of the real Louise Brunet's personal possessions in order to introduce the reader to the period in which Brunet lived.

This experience is made possible through the introduction of the images of the artefacts both in the novel and the website devoted to *13, rue Thérèse* (13ruetherese.com). The focus, therefore, is on seeing the artefacts, unlike in historical experience which foregrounds the senses of smell and hearing. Nonetheless, the website also provides pieces of music, connected with the story, to be listened to. The novel itself also contains sheet music for these pieces which may later be played by the readers (Shapiro 2011: 193, 218). Moreover, on the website, the reader can find a recipe for *boeuf bourguignon* with potatoes served by Louise to her husband Henri, so not only the sense of hearing but also the sense of taste and smell may be satisfied, which concurs with Ankersmit's idea of historical experience, sensed in multiple ways.

Thus, thanks to the introduction of various forms of objects, appealing to various senses, the reader is allowed physical contact with the past even though, in the novel, artefacts are only represented by their images. However, the photographs themselves can also serve as objects mediating the past. As Roland Barthes (1981) observed, photographs represent death as they depict what has already happened but, at the same time, they render the photographed dead figure alive. Thus,

they bring the observer closer to the past they convey and become carriers of the story. This phenomenon finds its confirmation in the Afterword of the novel: "This box is the sepulchre of Louise Brunet's heart. The story behind the objects is lost; the objects are now the story" (Shapiro 2011: 275). This indicates the vital role of objects in retrieving the past, in particular when their story is otherwise left unrecorded. The reader's role (through the figure of Trevor Stratton), on the other hand, is to decipher the meaning of specific objects for their former owner, Louise Brunet.

Thus, the objects become essential tools, necessary in retrieving past events both by Stratton and the reader, and because of this the relationship between the objects and the observer is not passive. Pearce (1994: 26) argues that there is a constant interaction between the object equipped with certain properties and the viewer who, based on his/her past experience, reacts to the object and imposes certain meanings on it. What is more, the observer may approach the object differently at different times – therefore, artefacts are actually transformed into experience, they are like mirrors reflecting the changes of the observer's attitude to them. A similar approach is taken by Joyce (2002: 142) who believes that her role is "to evaluate, revoice, and to make a response" to objects. Thus, the major significance of objects from the past consists in their ability to enter into an interaction with present subjects. Wood and Latham (2014) also emphasise the mutual influence of the object and the subject. This relationship is called a "unified experience" (32), which suggests a temporary unity between the viewer and the object rather than an interaction in which two agents are separate. Such a presentation of the object-subject connection coincides with Ankersmit's concept of historical experience which also indicates a moment of unity between the two elements.

The idea of unity between the object and the subject is actually the concept which enables the unmediated contact of the present with the past in the novel. Objects evoke memories

from the past in the form of historical experience both in Trevor Stratton and the reader. Such a phenomenon is exemplified by the introduction of the cardboard box with Louise's possessions which Stratton uses to transfer himself to the year of 1928. Thus, Stratton is allowed unmediated contact with the past. Readers can also access the past through the objects which serve as carriers of past experience, e.g. letters from Camille, Louise's cousin and lover, to Louise. The sensation is reinforced by the fact that the letters are included in the novel both within the text and as photographs of them (e.g. Shapiro 2011: 63-65). Thus, the reader may actually see and experience the letters just as Louise did.

Although the reader is allowed unmediated contact with the past through the introduction of contemporary objects, the novel is still permeated with the belief that it is impossible to retrieve the past. Henri, Louise's husband, having seen two people lighting each other's cigarettes, wonders whether they ever finished the action and concludes: "There is no way to know, is there?" (Shapiro 2011: 266). His statement returns to the idea of the impossibility of retrieving the past, especially if there is no information about the event in question. Louise's answer strengthens this conviction: "That information is not in the documentation" (Shapiro 2011: 266). This suggests that there are gaps in our knowledge about the past and no evidence is provided for some past events. Interestingly, the statement repeats the words uttered by Stratton earlier in the novel: "[NB: This is not a part of documentation; it is just a page spread from a book.]" (Shapiro 2011: 98). This fragment refers to the photograph of a page from the book mentioned by one of the characters, Xavier. Although theoretically this fact strengthens the reader's experience of the past as the story is supported with a real object, at the same time the information about the book does not exist in the researched documents, which undermines the truth conveyed through this inclusion. A similar device is used in the case of the sheet music which Garance, Louise's student, gave her teacher. The novel pro-

vides an image of the page with the notes followed by such information: "[NB: This is a negative image of a document that does not exist.]" (Shapiro 2011: 218). This statement creates a sense of uncertainty in the reader who is no longer able to distinguish between the truth and fictional elements in the novel. Paradoxically, this uncertainty strengthens the intensity of historical experience in readers as the information comes to them unexpectedly and they become aware that they have access to knowledge which is otherwise inaccessible to others.

The strength of this historical experience is emphasised in one of the footnotes where Travis Stratton gives his personal comment: "I am sick again, [...] The images come and I am so frightened, but it is not my fear that I feel. It is yours. I am you on that day, November 3, 1915. We are Camille Victor [...]" (Shapiro 2011: 152). This quotation is followed by a footnote which provides a description of the First World War trenches and Camille's war experience. Therefore, again the readers are allowed access to knowledge which should not be presented to them as there is no historical evidence which would prove the veracity of this information. However, this time the historical experience is presented in its purest form – unexpectedly, the subject (the reader) becomes united with the object (Trevor Stratton and, through him, Camille) in their feelings and thoughts. This time it is not the artefact that mediates the experience but the act of reading and contact with the characters of the novel.

What is interesting in the aforementioned example is the fact that the historical experience is triggered by a footnote. Generally, footnotes are introduced in the novel to perform the same function as they serve in scientific discourse. They provide additional information which otherwise would not fit the arrangement of the main text. Yet, they also often contain information which does not have any reflection in historical evidence, e.g. Louise's father's violent reaction to Camille's request to marry Louise (Shapiro 2011: 75) which is not mentioned in any of the letters found in Louise's box. Therefore, on

the one hand, bearing in mind the fact that the novel is a fic-
tional genre, the footnotes give the impression of academic dis-
course and scientific objectivity, typical of non-fictional writ-
ing. On the other hand, however, the use of footnotes is anoth-
er element which questions the veracity of the presentation of
the events in the novel. The question arises in the reader's
mind as to the source of Travis Stratton's knowledge about the
characters. This puzzle is solved only later in the novel when it
turns out that Stratton is actually the creator of the whole sto-
ry and the characters are the invention of his imagination.

    In spite of the impossibility of retrieving the past, the novel
indicates solutions for this plight, namely the writer's imagina-
tion and the ability to creatively fill in the gaps in our
knowledge about the past. What is presented to the reader is
just an interpretation of past events which involves elements of
creation, more typical of literature than scientific discourse.
The case is exemplified in the novel by Trevor Stratton's con-
versation with Louise when he transfers himself to her times.
Stratton tells her he saw Camille dying in the trenches of the
First World War and read him a letter Louise had not actually
written. Stratton finishes his story with the comment: "I did
what I always do. I falsified" (Shapiro 2011: 257). Thus, he
emphasises the fictional aspect of history writing and indicates
that due to the lack of information and possible gaps in
his/her knowledge about the past, the historian (or the writer
of history) is forced to invent the story to arrange the events in
it in a logical and consistent manner. This conviction is
strengthened by the fact that, in the conversation with Louise,
Stratton calls her "his research" (Shapiro 2011: 253), which
indicates that he treats her as another object to be studied in
his endeavour to learn about past events.

    The Afterword of the novel further emphasises the fictional
character of any historical writing: "The Louise Brunet depict-
ed within it is a fiction; the real Louise Brunet is irretrievable.
Still, she gave me the stars. I merely drew the constellations"
(Shapiro 2011: 275). This indicates the impossibility of retriev-

ing the past and the writer's (historian's) task to somehow invent past events by imposing certain interpretations. In fact, past events may become solely an inspiration to writing a story, as is the case in *13, rue Thérèse*. This role is reinforced by the ending of the novel. Trevor Stratton turns out to have invented the story himself and the letters he writes to his principal to show progress in his research are in fact addressed to himself. Therefore, the ending of the novel emphasises the partly fictional nature of historical writing in the face of the irretrievability of the past. However, it also indicates that the past is inevitably linked with the present which shapes the image of the past.

The appeal of the story in *13, rue Thérèse* by Elena Mauli Shapiro is based on a mixture of real and fictional elements. The reception of this combination by the reader is strengthened through the use of the category of historical experience and the presentation of history through existing objects. As a result, the reader feels uncertain as to the course of events and their veracity. The introduction of historical experience through visual contact with real objects allows for the presentation of the past as fragmented and unreliable, which in fact reflects the manners of perception of the past nowadays. This phenomenon is emphasised particularly in the ending of the novel which suggests the inevitable link of the past with the present in any historical writing, be it a novel or historical non-fiction. This connection unavoidably means that fiction is also linked with reality just as it is in the case of *13, rue Thérèse*.

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"I wish I had kept on looking back then": The issue of epistolary communication in the film *The Lunchbox* (2013)

OLIVIER HARENDA

Abstract

The article examines the way in which a thread of communication is formed between two people from seemingly the same cultural background, but who differ in terms of age, gender, religion, and personal experiences. The analysis is done on the basis of the movie titled *The Lunchbox* (2013). Firstly, the article provides introductory information about the film. Next, culture-specific and historical information is presented so as to correctly establish the characteristics of the main protagonists. Then, the issue of the formation of epistolary communication is examined on the basis of objects from the film. Finally, the article proceeds to an analysis of the conversation-through-letters by exploring the personalities of the protagonists through the concepts of sentimentalism and individuality. The analysis aims to show that even in modern-day representations, the mode of epistolary contact is still popular and can also lead to new reinventions within the field of postcolonialism.

"Gdybym tylko nadal mógł tak patrzeć": problematyka komunikacji epistolarnej w filmie *Smak curry* (2013)

Abstrakt

Artykuł bada, w jaki sposób zostaje uformowana nić porozumienia między dwiema osobami pochodzącymi z na pozór tego samego środowiska kulturowego, ale różniących się wiekiem, płcią, wyznaniem oraz osobistymi doświadczeniami. Analiza jest przeprowadzona w oparciu o film pod tytułem *Smak curry* (2013). Artykuł przedkłada wstępne informacje o filmie, a następnie prezentuje informacje kulturowe oraz historyczne, tak by móc poprawnie określić cechy głównych bohaterów. Kolejna część poświęcona jest problemom kształtowania komunikacji epistolarnej na podstawie przedmiotów ukazanych w filmie. Na koniec artykuł przechodzi do analizy konwersacji-przez-listy w celu zbadania osobowości głównych bohaterów w perspektywie koncepcji sentymentalizmu i indywidualności. Celem analizy jest ukazanie, iż nawet w dzisiejszych reprezentacjach aspekt komunikacji epistolarnej jest nadal popularny oraz może również prowadzić do nowych kreacji w dziedzinie postkolonializmu.

Słowa kluczowe

komunikacja epistolarna, Indie dzisiejsze, postkolonializm, sentymentalizm, *Smak curry* (2013)

1. Introduction

The Lunchbox is a 2013, independently financed Indian motion picture which focuses on the issues of solitude, romance, and exchange of thoughts through letters in the modern world. Therefore, the topic which this paper addresses is concerned with the issue of epistolary communication in the film *The Lunchbox*. In particular, the article analyses how the inhabitants of contemporary Mumbai, who are living in the same cultural environment, communicate with each other. In other

words, the issue of the popularity of epistolary communication in contemporary culture is explored.

As the first feature film of director Ritesh Batra, *The Lunchbox* marks another entry in a rising trend of international co-productions with artistic potential.[1] Starring Irrfan Khan and Nimrat Kaur in the leading roles, the movie was a commercial success in India and overseas at the time of its release, and it was also considered for India's entry for the 86th Academy Awards Best Foreign Film Category.[2] "The morning premiere got us a standing ovation. [...] There were requests for more screenings [...] and people shouting out dialogues on the street. It was hard to believe that my little film set in Mumbai had resonated with so many people across the world," Batra recalled about the unexpectedly favourable reception of the film (Bhattacharya 2013).

With regard to the film's plot, *The Lunchbox* tells the story of Mr Saajan Fernandes, a widower who is trying to get by at his accounting job, and Ila, a housewife who is hopelessly attempting to attract the attention of her busy husband. On one occasion, Ila even prepares a special meal which she sends via the food delivery system of Mumbai's "dabbawalas" in order to surprise her spouse. Unfortunately, a mix-up happens en route and the lunchbox ends up on Mr Fernandes' desk. Ila discovers that the meals are not reaching her husband and writes a letter to the unknown receiver of her dishes. Mr Fernandes responds and, in consequence, a long-lasting corre-

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[1] Probably not as popular as the trend of *Heritage films* in the 1990s, international co-productions primarily serve to attract the Western viewers with interesting and exotic stories (often based on works of literature), ethnically-mixed cast and English dialogues. The examples of such films are *The Namesake* (2006), *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2012), and *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (2014) (Kuhn and Westwell 2012: 20).

[2] However, the Film Federation of India chose to select a different motion picture instead. The Gujarati drama film called *The Good Road* (2013) was selected as the Indian entry for the Oscars in spite of the fact that it was *The Lunchbox* which had wider audience recognition (<http://news.biharpra bha.com>).

spondence ensues. The unexpected communication through the lunchbox irreversibly changes the two characters.

2. The dabbawala network: Lunchbox delivery system

In an interview, Batra stated that he gained the inspiration to write the screenplay while making a documentary about the so-called "dabbawalas". The director accompanied "those who carry boxes," as we might call them (Roncaglia 2013: 13), and he listened to the stories of people who work in one of the most culture-specific professions (Bhushan 2013). A "dabbawala" is a person in India, most commonly in Mumbai, who is a part of a delivery system that collects hot food in lunch boxes from the residences of workers in the late morning, delivers the lunches to the workplace, and returns the empty boxes that afternoon (Roncaglia 2013: xi–xii). "We never make mistakes. People from Harvard came to study our system. They say there are no errors [...] The King of England in person came to observe our system," a dabbawala firmly asserts the credibility of his craft in the film (*The Lunchbox* 01:29:12–01:29:45).

As strange as it may sound, this system works solely in India and it originated in colonial times (Roncaglia 2013: 16). Allegedly, Indian office workers simply prefer to eat home-cooked food rather than rely on restaurants or local takeaways. Consequently, the dabbawalas serve as the middlemen between husbands and their housewives in a constantly active metropolis, "[conjuring] up the feeling of home for those away from home" (Roncaglia 2013: xii). They travel either by bicycles or railway trains and the usage of a highly complicated system of codes ensures a flawless delivery. "It was interesting to see how much they knew about the people for whom they deliver food everyday [...] who likes what kind of food or what sort of relationship they have with their families," Batra said when explaining his motivation to write the script (Bhushan 2013). Needless to say, the movie breaks the premise of perfect dabbawala service by creating a *what-if* scenario. A mistake in de-

livering the box turns the Mumbai reality upside down as it connects two complete strangers: Saajan and Ila.

3. Mumbai citizens and their relations

Apart from the uncommon phenomenon of the dabbawala network, the movie presents us with the idiosyncratic environment of Mumbai. Once known as the gateway of India, as described by E. M. Forster (Raghavan 2017), it is now a city with a population numbered in multi-millions, a wide social diversity and a rich history.

Mumbai serves as a refuge for people such as Mr Saajan Fernandes. As it was already mentioned, Mr Fernandes is a middle-aged widower, who lives in painful solitude after the loss of his wife. He works diligently during the days, yet spends his nights smoking continuously. Additionally, he is a reclusive, almost Scrooge-like character. For instance, when the ball of a group of children at play accidentally falls into his courtyard, he is not even willing to return it. In terms of religious affiliation, it is revealed that he is a Christian, as he visits the Catholic graveyard where his wife is buried. Even his atypical surname, Fernandes,[3] serves to indicate a connection with the dim and distant past, when Mumbai was ruled by the Portuguese in the 17th century (Pagden 1998: 38).

For readers unfamiliar with the role of religion in the Portuguese colonisation efforts of India, Francis Xavier was primarily responsible for laying the foundations for Christianity in the country. Nevertheless, the mission of cultivating religion was not initially aimed at the native inhabitants. As it is stated by an Indian historian Teotonio R. de Souza: "aside from the zealous and self-sacrificing missionaries and the few chosen authorities from the middle range of nobility […], the great majority of those who were dispatched as 'discoverers' were the riff-raff of Portuguese society, picked up from Portuguese jails" (de

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3 Literally: Son of Fernando (<https://surnames.behindthename. com>).

Souza 2008: 26). In consequence, an overwhelming majority of the Portuguese settlers formed relationships with native women and accepted Indian customs (de Souza 2008: 26). Needless to say, such practices angered the missionaries, who described their fellow countrymen as disreputable and uncontrolled in their attitude. Xavier knew that he had to bring the colonisers to the righteous path of proper self-conduct. Therefore, he began teaching Portuguese children first. Next, he attended the sick and dying in hospitals. Later, he attempted to convert high-caste Brahmins, yet they remained steadfast in their Hindu beliefs (de Souza 2008: 30). Ultimately, Francis Xavier had more luck with the lower-caste natives, who formed the base of the Indian Catholics in Goa.[4] Nevertheless, Xavier grew increasingly displeased with the racist attitude of other missionaries and the maltreatment of Christian converts so he suggested to the King of Portugal in 1546 the establishment of the Inquisition in Goa (de Souza 2008: 27).

The movie does not indicate at any point that Mr Fernandes is being persecuted for his religious beliefs. Instead of focusing on a modern social issue, his spiritual allegiance serves more as a subtle reference to the colonial past of Goa, which used to be a plain for multicultural exchange. Christianity as a religion conforms with the character of Mr. Fernandes as his attitude is all about the past and sentimentalism. Perhaps the best reflection of his longing for things long gone can be the following quote:

> Dear Ila, your grandmother's recipe was very good. Even better than my favourite, eggplant. Yesterday even I found something from many years ago. I found old TV shows that my wife used to record. You must have been a child when they played on TV or not even born yet. My wife used to love them. I don't know why I wanted to see them. I watched them for hours. I went through

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[4] Nowadays, Goan Catholics are suffering ethnic cleansing as they are culturally perceived as "agents" of the Portuguese colonisers. For instance, they are denied job opportunities or political posts in the local councils. (Eremita 2015).

them show by show, episode by episode. And then finally after staying up all night, I realised what it was that I was looking for. Every Sunday when she watched the shows, I was outside repairing my bicycle, or just smoking, and I would glance through the window every now and then just for a second. And I would see her reflection on the TV screen, laughing, laughing at the same jokes over and over... each time as if she was hearing it for the very first time. I wish I had kept on looking back then... (*The Lunchbox* 00:45:59–00:47:13)

In view of the quoted passage, we can infer that Saajan Fernandes is very much an *analogue* figure. That is to say, he is not only overwhelmed by an immense feeling of nostalgia, but he also relies on outdated means to continuously conjure up that emotional state. Some researchers would argue that Saajan's sentimentalism is the primary factor responsible for the clouding of his moral judgement (Schroeter 2006: 338). According to the sentimentalist school of thought, sentimentalism and free will are two contrasting phenomena. Sentimentalism relies strictly on feeling and, in consequence, it results in subjectivity, egoism, and passivity (Schroeter 2006: 340). In other words, human beings are so emotionally tied to the past that they are unable to move forward in their lives, instead they are forced to accommodate the subjective desire of longing. In turn, free will is connected to objectivity, thus, it enables an individual to be creative and pursue his own goals. Surprisingly, Saajan embodies both phenomena as sentimentalism is the driving force of his free will. In other words, the protagonist desires a change in his life through helping Ila.

Ila, on the other hand, is a young housewife and a mother who seeks to renew her relationship with her husband. She is in her mid-30s and practises Hinduism. Even though she is married, her world is limited only to her apartment. When her husband is out and her daughter is at school, the only activities she can enjoy are cooking and conversations with her aunty who never appears on screen. This is her everyday reality until the first lunchbox is returned: empty, not consumed

by her husband. Initially, she and Saajan exchange recipes, personal anecdotes and pieces of advice, but eventually their epistolary conversation becomes more intimate. It is she who opens herself up and confesses that, most probably, her husband is cheating on her. Gradually, she dreams of escaping with her daughter to Bhutan and, with the progress of time, this becomes Mr Fernandes' dream as well. Ila's unwavering romanticism is reflected when she writes: "I read somewhere that sometimes, the wrong train can lead you to the right station" (*The Lunchbox* 01:36:58–01:37:04).

What is more, we should also mention the third, supporting, character of the story, Shaikh. He is the office apprentice of Mr Fernandes, very outgoing in his manner, yet extremely naive. For instance, when he asks his mentor if it was true that he once kicked a cat on the street, Fernandes responds: "It wasn't a cat. It was actually a blind man. He was asking for directions, so I pushed him and a bus ran over him" (*The Lunchbox* 00:40:22–00:40:29). This was obviously an exaggerated joke, yet Shaikh dreads Saajan's inaccessibility. Fortunately, the two develop a father-son relationship. Shaikh's character is important for the fact that he eloped with his fiancée when her parents refused to bless their engagement. Thus, he symbolises the fulfilment of love, something which is not available for Saajan. Additionally, Shaikh is the only character who encounters both Mr Fernandes and Ila in the story. That is to say, Ila eventually tracks down the office where her lunchboxes were going, but Mr Fernandes is nowhere to be seen. Shaikh explains that his mentor has just retired.

4.   Epistolary communication: objects

As previously mentioned, there is a great variety of objects which play pivotal roles in the epistolary communication between the characters. At this point, it is important to recall that *The Lunchbox* was made as an international co-production because, as Ritesh Batra stated, the film had "the potential to travel" (Bhushan 2013). In other words, the culture-specific content could easily be understood by Western audiences. Interestingly, a film critic Trisha Gupta claims that the issue of the movie's "translatability" is its primary disadvantage (Gupta 2013). The "*Tiffinbox*", as she ironically writes: "tick[s] all the boxes that might appeal to festival audiences: quaint Asian urbanism [...], Indian home-cooking, romance. It provides local colour, without being demandingly untranslatable" (Gupta 2013). As a result, the story of Saajan and Ila becomes less exotic than a genuine Indian production. Nevertheless, *The Lunchbox* manages to convey a sense of *outdatedness*, a distinctly sentimental feeling of being in another time, through the following items:

(1) Lunchbox: an object which establishes communication between the characters, yet it is not the purpose for which it was designed.

(2) Letters: means through which the characters share their intimate thoughts. Gupta accurately notices the paradox of epistolary communication in a high-tech world of modernity (Gupta 2013). The lunchbox delivery mistake could be explained via cell phones, for instance.

(3) Food: meals transported in the lunchbox which serve as an enhancement of the communication between Saajan and Ila. As Batra explained, with the progression of the characters' relationship, the dishes would get simpler (Virani 2014). In addition, meals may be regarded as an emotional bridge between the act of eating and the act of feeling. Nevertheless, in view of Batra's statement, this was not the director's creative intention.

(4) VHS tapes: means of sentimentalism for Mr Fernandes in grief. Additionally, the tapes indicate not only Saajan's state of nostalgia, but also a longing for simpler times, for a quieter India, while watching a popular Indian TV show from the 1980s, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*[5].

(5) Song: even though the musical score is barely present in the motion picture, at one point, the viewers can see Ila listening to a song called *Saajan*. She asks her aunt to play it after learning Mr Fernandes' name.[6] In this way, the character is associated with a romantic hero of a Bollywood comedy from the 1990s.[7]

(6) Cigarettes: an indication of spiritual enslavement. Mr Fernandes quits smoking upon learning from Ila that her father died of lung cancer.

(7) Trains: means of transport symbolising the fate of the characters towards the end of the film, as conveyed in Ila's saying: "The wrong train can lead you to the right station."

5. Epistolary communication vs. epistemology

In view of the above objects, it is apparent that they serve to set up a different epistemological reality, the world as if from the 1990s, in which epistolary communication is still possible. In addition, the items indicate the change that occurs within the characters. For example, Mr. Fernandes transforms from a Scrooge-like person into a dreamer. In this manner, his character comes a full circle as he becomes a true individual through his sense of sentimentality. That is to say, he dreams of Bhutan, an imaginary utopia where he could be together with Ila. What is more, he even gives back the ball to the chil-

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[5] One of the first sitcoms on Indian television written by Sharad Joshi and starring Shafi Inamdar and Swaroop Sampat. For more information about *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi,* please refer to: <http://www.hindustan times.com/tv/what-made-yeh-jo-hai-zindagi-such-an-important-show/story-boYysrZZEnwgemlRVFVUFO.html>.

[6] Saajan literally means "Beloved" or "Friend" (<http://name meanings-dictionary.com>).

[7] *Saajan* (1991): an Indian romantic drama film directed by Lawrence D'Souza and starring Sanjay Dutt, Madhuri Dixit and Salman Khan. (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0102825/>).

dren playing on the street. However, he also realises that he is too old to be with Ila.

Ila, on the other hand, gains confidence. She wants to liberate herself from the patriarchal system of oppression by escaping from her husband, to break away from the grim prospect of serving him until her death. In addition to this, she does not want to repeat the fate of her mother who was forced to battle Ila's father's smoking addiction. Ila's mother found freedom only after the death of her spouse. Such a dismal state of affairs leads Ila to the conclusion that all she really wants is to be with Saajan Fernandes.

Consequently, the outcome is the epistemological clash between the characters. They resolve to *elope* together,[8] thus they set up a meeting at a local café, but Fernandes never comes, or, more appropriately, never approaches Ila. Instead, he observes Ila from a distance and explains to her in a subsequent letter:

> Life kept on going and lulled me with its motions. I kept rocking back and forth as it threw me left and it threw me right... And then, before I knew it... No one buys yesterday's lottery ticket, Ila. I came to the restaurant while you were waiting. There you were, fidgeting with your purse, drinking all that water... I wanted to come up to you and tell you all this in person, but I just watched you wait. You look beautiful. You're young. You have dreams. And for some time you have let me into your dreams. And I want to thank you for that. (*The Lunchbox* 01:20:48–01:21:51)

In view of the passage above, we might ask, what about Mr Fernandes' sincerity in his communication? He gives up the dream of being with Ila because of the enormous social gap between them. Nevertheless, he starts living anew. Initially he has the intention of leaving for Bhutan on his own, but eventually, he stays on in Mumbai and continues to work with Shaikh. Ila, however, still intends to escape. That is why she

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[8] To repeat the fate of Shaikh and his fiancée.

tracks down the office address, because she wanted to see Saajan just for once. She even writes an ambiguous letter to him towards the end of the film:

> You're probably at Nasik. You had to get up this morning make a tea. And maybe a walk afterward. This morning I woke up, and I sold all my jewellery. My bracelets, my earrings, my wedding necklace. It is not much. But they told me: 1 rupee is worth 5 in Bhutan. So we should be okay for some time. And afterward... we'll see. When Yashvi [the daughter] returns, the luggage will be ready. We will take the train this afternoon. I might send you this letter and your new postman will bring it to you. Or maybe I will keep it, and read in a few years... I read somewhere that sometimes, the wrong train can lead you to the right station. We'll see... (*The Lunchbox* 01:36:02–01:37:07)

With regard to Mr Fernandes, he liberates himself from the constraints of constantly looking back at the past, the primary cause of his solitude. Yet, was he right about not leaving with Ila? As Raja Sen argues in his article, unlike *The Lunchbox*'s predecessors, such as *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940) and *You've Got Mail* (1998), the epistolary communication between Saajan and Ila is "less conversational, more confessional" (Sen 2013). As we can see in the quoted passages, the heroes transgress the confines of surrounding reality by wholly opening themselves to one another. "[These] are letters written with the kind of comfortable candour one finds in the neighbouring seat of an airplane [...] candour that exists because the speakers are [not] likely to meet again and thus can speak their minds" (Sen 2013).

6. Conclusion

On the basis of *The Lunchbox*, it is evident that the mode of epistolary communication is still popular in contemporary representations. Nevertheless, its usage serves a different purpose. Rather than providing a stereotypical love story with a happy

ending, the process of writing letters is more about dealing with personal issues in the world of growing multiculturalism. Only by knowing ourselves can we accurately understand the surrounding reality. This is also the case with Saajan and Ila.

In the final scene, we see Saajan travelling with the dabbawalas. By doing so, Mr. Fernandes hopes to find Ila during the process of returning the lunchbox. However, the same day, Ila, as she stated in her letter, sells her jewellery and intends to escape as soon as her daughter returns from school. Will Saajan find her before she leaves? Unfortunately, this is a question which the viewers have to answer on their own. In consequence, the epistolary sincerity is very much overshadowed, or even taken over, by the epistemological uncertainty of the story's finale.

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A vision of postcolonial New Zealand
in Keri Hulme's novel *The Bone People*

EWA KROPLEWSKA-KUŚNIERZ

Abstract

Initially rejected by a number of publishing companies, Keri Hulme's book entitled *The Bone People* attracted public attention in 1985, when it was awarded the Booker Prize. The novel ponders the topic of isolation and the feelings and actions related to it. The characters build their own borders, physical or psychological, while living in a country whose multiculturalism is an inherent quality. The author presents a postcolonial vision of New Zealand by providing an example of three people of various origins who, despite being tormented by their troubled past and with a present marked by various forms of abuse, finally manage to overcome the boundaries in order to create bonds and become a family.

Keywords

Hulme, New Zealand, Maori, postcolonialism, borders

Wizja postkolonialnej Nowej Zelandii
w powieści Keri Hulme *The Bone People*

Abstrakt

Książka Keri Hulme zatytułowana *The Bone People* została odrzucona przez wiele wydawnictw, jednak przyciągnęła uwagę czytelników w 1985 roku, kiedy to Keri Hulme otrzymała za nią nagrodę Bookera. Powieść porusza temat izolacji oraz uczuć i czynów z nią związanych. Bohaterowie budują swoje własne granice, zarówno fizyczne, jak i psychologiczne, żyjąc w kraju, którego nieodłączną cechą jest wielokulturowość. W swojej powieści autorka przedstawia postkolonialną wizję Nowej Zelandii na przykładzie trojga ludzi różnego pochodzenia, którym, mimo iż są nękani trudną przeszłością i teraźniejszością pełną różnych nadużyć, udaje się przekroczyć własne granice tak, by wytworzyć więź i stworzyć rodzinę.

Słowa kluczowe

Hulme, Nowa Zelandia, postkolonializm, granice

1. Introduction

A number of publishing companies initially rejected Keri Hulme's book *The Bone People*,[1] but in 1984 it was finally published by a small publisher, Spiral. It attracted public attention in 1985, when it was awarded the Booker Prize. The novel is set in New Zealand, on the coast of the South Island, in the second half of the 20th century, although the exact time is never given. The main characters come from various cultural backgrounds and do not seem to belong together. Among them are:

– a woman named Kerewin, who lives in a spiral tower next to the beach. She is an artist, a painter who has lost her creative inspiration. She lives a solitary life, separated from her family

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[1] In some articles the title of the novel is written with small print.

due to a disagreement in the past. In appearance, Kerewin is European though her mannerisms are Maori;

– Simon - a mute boy, whose age is uncertain. He is lonely as well, because his peers do not understand his strange behaviour: he does not understand the meaning of personal property, he is afraid of needles and of getting a haircut. Simon's past is unknown – he was washed ashore on the west coast of the South Island during a storm and found by Joe. Yet, his whiteness suggests that he is of European descent;

– Joe, who is Simon's guardian and calls himself Simon's father. When Joe found Simon, he had a wife and a small child. Unfortunately, his wife and baby son died of the flu. Joe, left to take care of Simon alone, started drinking heavily and beating Simon. He has some identity problems, too – despite his Maori appearance he does not seem to belong to the Maori community.

The lives of the characters are turned upside down when Simon appears in Kerewin's house: he breaks into her tower and into her life as well. The woman is shocked by his presence but gradually becomes interested in the lives of Simon and his father. Throughout the novel, the three of them develop a complicated, yet eventually satisfying, relationship.

This article attempts to present the structuring of a postcolonial vision of New Zealand that Keri Hulme provides in the novel. The article is divided into five parts devoted to the introduction of the tenets of postcolonialism, the analysis of the theme of isolation presented in the novel, the depiction of abuse and violence as a means of communication and the influence of the past on the present, to finally arrive at the analysis of the resolution that the novel offers: a unitary vision of postcolonial New Zealand.

2. Postcolonialism

As Ralph J. Crane aptly observes in his article "Out of the Center: Thoughts on the Post-colonial Literatures of Australia and New Zealand", it is difficult to define the term "postcolonialism"

(1996: 21) exactly. Stephen Slemon also offers his explanation of the meaning of postcolonialism, underlining its need to confront the colonial relations:

> Definitions of the 'post-colonial' of course vary widely, but for me the concept proves most useful [...] when it locates a specifically anti- or *post*-colonial *discursive* purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neocolonialist international relations. (1991: 3)

In the chapter "Introduction: Points of Departure" published in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, Peter Childs and R. J. Patrick Williams also draw attention to the problems of setting this phenomenon in time and space, as they claim that in each region, colonisation took place in a different moment. This makes the beginning of decolonisation impossible to pinpoint. One may assume that the beginnings of post-coloniality in New Zealand coincide with the appearance of the movement called the Maori Renaissance – a revival period of Maori art and literature that took place in the 1970s (Sinclair 1992: 283, Williams 2006: 208), which corresponds to the date given by Ashcroft et al (2007: 168).

What is certain though, is that former colonies had to start dealing with their long-forgotten pasts. As Masao Miyoshi claims in "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State", "[o]nce the Europeans were gone [...] the residents of a colonial theory were thrown back on their old disrupted site that had in the precolonial days operated on a logic and history altogether different" (1993: 730).

Among the common aspects that Crane considers to be the tenets of postcolonial literature are: "the shared experience of colonization and the emergent interest in the effects of colonialism, an interest in the experience of the post-colonial condition itself" (1996: 21). As Childs and Williams suggest, "[t]he

question of identity traverses post-colonial thinking, [...] the problem of unsettled or unsettling iden-tities [...] is an issue at the heart of post-colonialism" (1997: 13). It is "much more to do with the painful experience of confronting the desire to re-cover 'lost' pre-colonial identities, the impossibility of actually doing so, and the task of construc-ting some new identity on the basis of that impossibility" (1997: 14). James Clifford explains in "The Global Issue: A symposium" that

> at least three processes are always going on. One is the disap-pearance of certain orders of difference. The second is a pro-cess of *translating* orders of difference. And the third is the creation of new orders of difference. This last, I would divide into two locally interconnected dimensions: first, imposed or neo-colonial forms, stemming from an economic relationship to the state or the wider world system; and second, emergent orders which are invented out of historical debris, moulded from indigenous and foreign ma-terial. (1989: 87)

It is by means of a "cultural translation", to use Homi K. Bha-bha's term, that a new identity is constructed (1994: 228). In the postcolonial world, elements of both native and foreign cul-tures are necessary in order to create a new, unique vision of the country. Crane also emphasises that it is worthwhile to consider literature's "desire to reclaim the histories of the in-digenous people, and to educate non-indigenous readers about Aboriginal and Maori cultures" (1996: 20). Gayatri Chakra-vorty Spivak, in turn, worries that postcolonial analysis is based on Western perceptions (1993: 66). Indeed, in "Who Can Write as Other?" Margery Fee underlines how difficult it is to rewrite the dominant ideology. Yet, Keri Hulme provides an insider's perspective on the culture of New Zealand. In her ar-ticle, Fee opposes C.K. Stead's argument that Hulme is not entitled to speak for the Maori people because of her mixed ancestry (2006: 169). She views Hulme as one of the few writ-ers who have attempted to "integrate Pakeha and Maori cul-ture in a way that transgresses the boundary between them" (2006: 170). And indeed, Hulme "produce[s] a different version

of reality" (2006: 171). She confronts the readers – both indigenous and non-indigenous – with Maori culture, provides an overview of the conditions of postcolonial New Zealand, and she also attempts to create a new Maori identity.

3. Isolation

The novel is abundant with various forms of isolation: both physical and psychological. The character of Kerewin is the most prominent example of a chosen isolation. After leaving her hometown, the heroine sets off on a journey to Japan. By distancing herself from her original world, she means to discover her own idea of a peaceful life. Upon her return to New Zealand, Kerewin wins a substantial amount of money in a lottery and builds herself a retreat on the beach. The place is rather peculiar: it is in the shape of a tower, with spiral stairs inside. It resembles the tower of an imprisoned princess: a place from which the woman is unable to escape. What differentiates Kerewin from a fairy tale princess is the fact that she has chosen such a prison for herself: she imagines it to be her own safe place, perfect for a recluse. In "Liminal Spaces and Imaginary Places in *The Bone People* by Keri Hulme and *The Folly* by Ivan Vladislavic", Marita Wenzel asserts that "[the way] of belonging [is] explored through the metaphors of houses as cultural constructs and places that either depict isolation from society or act as defined spaces that foster human contact and personal relationships" (2006: 82). In the case of *The Bone People,* both of these meanings are valid. The explanation of the shape of the house is provided in the novel itself:

> SHE HAD DEBATED, in the frivolity of the beginning, whether to build a hole or a tower; […] It was the hermitage, her glimmering retreat. No people invited, for what could they know of the secrets that crept and chilled and chuckled in the marrow of her bones? No need of people, because she was self-fulfilling, delighted with the pre-eminence of her art, and the future of her knowing hands. But the pinnacle became an abyss, and the driving joy ended. At last there was a prison. I am encompassed by a wall, high and

> hard and stone, with only my brainy nails to tear it down. And
> I cannot do it. (Hulme 1986: 7)

Kerewin isolates herself from the outside world by choosing
a location far away from any civilization. Her only means of
contact with people is a radiophone that she refuses to use
until the day when she discovers Simon in her house. She
considers him to be an intruder, but she hesitates before call-
ing for someone to collect Simon from her property. She does
not like people calling her and she is reluctant to communicate
with the outside world:

> It's her concession to the outside world, the radiophone. No one
> can ring her up unless they go through a toll-operator, kept by the
> Post Office especially for subscribers like herself, but she can ring
> anyone she likes. An expensive arrangement, but Kerewin has
> more money than she needs and likes privacy. (Hulme 1986: 23)

Kerewin is a self-sufficient woman. In her garden, she grows
her own vegetables, but she also enjoys fishing, and the two
activities enable her to obtain the basic provisions. She is
proud of her independence from the outside world, and is glad
she does not have to rely on anybody's support.

Kerewin spends the days and nights alone. In the solitary
evenings, she creates a ritual of drinking herself to sleep. She
takes pride in a cellar full of alcohol. At one point she ventures
there to get herself a drink and is surprised by the number of
bottles that she finds stored. On this occasion she says: "If I'm
going to sit here, I might as well drink and forget about bloody
Gillayleys" (Hulme 1986: 273).

The walls that Kerewin has built are not only made of brick.
She has created a safe zone for herself by preventing anyone
from maintaining contact with her. Yet, she seems to like her
solitude: "She frowns. She doesn't like children, doesn't like
people and has discouraged anyone from coming on her land"
(1986: 15). As Philip Armstrong claims in "Good-Eating: Ethics
and Biculturalism in Reading *The Bone People*",

> Kerewin represents the ego caught up in solitary contemplation of itself: she addresses herself as "my soul," or "Holmes"; she writes in a journal that she thinks of as her "paper soul" (96-99, 261, 431-37); her typical night's entertainment is to get drunk looking at herself in a mirror by the light of a candle (275). (Armstrong 2001: 11).

She may indeed display a certain amount of egotism, but the real reason why she chooses to be alone is different: Kerewin isolates herself because she fears being hurt. At some point, when she gets to know and like Simon and Joe more, she promises herself that she will not create a strong bond with them:

> But wait here a little longer, think about it a bit more. You're involved with two strangers, different and difficult people. You're different and difficult yourself, but strangely enough, you all get on well together. To the extent that there can be a real fight, forgiveness and renewed friendship after.
> To what end, my soul? Remember how horrifyingly painful it was when you and the family broke apart? So much so, that a brief meeting with one member is enough to put you in despair. The pain is back. Be wary. Keep it a cool friendship. Look out for the child by all means – it's the least you can do as a human being – but don't let them get too close. (Hulme 1986: 250)

Moreover, when Joe beats his son for the last time and Kerewin discovers her illness, she decides to set out on a journey once more. As previously, she travels alone, and does not want anybody's help. It is only at the end of this spiritual journey that she realizes her suppressed feelings and she comes to understand that she longs for a family. Up until that moment Kerewin is separated from her own family, her relatives by blood:

> 'I don't want to die, but I don't know why I live. So what's my reason for living?' she asks the mirror image. 'Estranged from my family, bereft of my art, hollow of soul, I am a rock in the desert.

> Pointing nowhere, doing nothing, of no benefit to anything or any-
> one. Flaking, parched, cracked... so why am I?' (Hulme 1986: 289)

Still, there is another barrier that separates Kerewin from oth-
er people: it is her language, educated and intelligent. She us-
es sophisticated vocabulary that she has learnt throughout her
life. Her utterances are full of neologisms and archaisms.
Sometimes she intertwines English with foreign languages,
such as French or Latin and she uses a lot of Maori which,
these days, is not fully understandable for most people.

However, as Chris Bongie suggests in "The Last Frontier:
Memories of the Postcolonial Future in Keri Hulme's *The Bone
People*", Kerewin is not the only solitary character: "[t]he three
characters, all painfully isolated in their own way, all of mixed
or unknown ancestry (Joe is mostly Maori, but had an English
father; Simon is clearly "white" but otherwise of undetermined,
possibly Irish and French, origins [...])" (1995: 234). All three of
the characters exhibit signs of estrangement, yet in a variety of
ways. Joe does not belong either to the Pakeha, or to the Maori
– he is situated in an in-between position, unable to identify
with any ancestry. Simon's uncertain past – his origins, par-
ents, familial relations – leaves him devoid of any background
that he could refer to. He is also closed in his own world as his
muteness prevents him from maintaining contact with his
peers. Isolation in the novel, then, takes the form of both phys-
ical and emotional barriers.

4. Disruption of communication: violence and alcohol

The barriers that the characters create around themselves are
also visible in the problems with maintaining verbal contact
with other people. Communication between the characters is
disrupted on a number of levels. Simon's muteness proves to
be problematic for Kerewin, as, at the beginning, she cannot
read his messages properly. In "The Silence of the Lambs:
Childhood Disabilities, Gender Ambiguities, and Postcolonial
Detectives in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and Peter Høeg's

Smilla's Sense of Snow" Richard Hardack proposes a theory that "[s]ilence or alternative forms of communication represent ways to elide a master('s) language. [...] If English remains at the center of Hulme's text, other forms of communication suffuse the margins" (2016: 148). What is interesting, though, is that it is Simon, the apparently European character, who does not conform to the rules of the English language, thus subverting its dominance. In "From Narrative Prosthesis to Disability Counternarrative: Reading the Politics of Difference in *Potiki* and *The Bone People*" Clare Barker proposes a short analysis of the meaning of Simon's communication method. In her opinion his disability must be viewed as central to the understanding of a new community:

> Simon's ability to communicate without speech offers a direct exposition of the interrelational alternatives to spoken English. His identity 'is confirmed not through its difference to and separateness from others, but through his interconnection with them',[2] therefore demonstrating the benefits of interdependence – a key concept in Hulme's vision of biculturalism – and simultaneously advocating the centralisation of disability in a re-defined notion of community. (2006: 136)

Simon's language of gestures plays yet another role: it initiates contact between people. As Barker observes,

> the face-to-face contact necessitated by Simon's muteness, combined with his insistence on physical proximity and touch, forces Kerewin to re-engage in reciprocal relationships, rendering Simon's muteness as a social ability rather than a communicational disability. (2006: 135)

Being mute, Simon's only means of expression is gestures. When he is angry, he begins to act violently as well. To attract

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[2] Quoted in the article from p. 83 of Susie O'Brien (1990) "Raising Silent Voices: The Role of the Silent Child in *An Imaginary Life* and T*he Bone People*". *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language* Studies 30: 79-91.

Kerewin's attention he even destroys one of her few valuable items – her most beloved guitar. What is more, at the beginning of their relationship, Simon attacks Kerewin by flicking matches at her. He also stabs his father in order to protect himself during the last of Joe's beatings. For Simon, violence is a means of non-verbal communication. Hardack analyzes the characters' resistance to touch, but additionally claims that in Hulme's novel "[t]ouch is also depicted as a form of violence" (2016: 146). When Kerewin meets Simon for the first time, she is surprised by how tight his grip is: "'Let go my wrist,' but the grip tightens. Not restraining violence, pressing meaning" (Hulme 1986: 17). Kerewin makes an attempt at analysing his behaviour: "The bird he killed... was it beyond help? Might he have a dark streak in him, as Joe seems to think? And that is why the violence? Flicking matches, throwing things... ah, I don't know. I don't know much about him at all" (Hulme 1986: 250).

Barker attempts to analyse Simon's violence in more general, social terms. Simon wants the world to look at his problems, but also at the problems of the whole community, even if his message is not easy to understand:

> Simon's own violent behaviour is constructed as a response to his oppressive social context. It is only when Simon is introduced into hostile social situations, when expectations of normalcy are imposed upon him and others are unable (or refuse) to read his signs, that his muteness becomes disabling: 'he'll fight to make you understand. It's his last resort, spitting and kicking... he'll do his damndest to punch into you what he wants to say' (p. 49). His destructive vandalism is therefore an effort to communicate; he smashes the windows of thirty shops, for example, after discovering that Binny Daniels has bled to death after falling on a smashed sherry bottle (p. 368). In his fear and rage, Simon departs from his own rule of referentiality, rendering his act of communication indecipherable. It is therefore Simon's behaviour, and not his muteness, that signals an inadequacy in communication, demonstrating how impairments can become disabilities in unaccommodating social contexts. (2006: 140)

Joe also exhibits violent, abusive behaviour. His actions are determined by the enormous amounts of alcohol that he consumes after a hard day's work. Although he refuses to admit it, Joe is addicted to alcohol and after each of his alcoholic indulgences he vents his frustrations on Simon by beating him. Each time he is more furious and more fierce in his attacks. Joe explains these actions to himself as an attempt to teach the boy what kind of behaviour is expected of him:

> Why should I feel guilty? Why does he always find some sneaky way to make me feel bad? He's the bad one. And you don't learn, Himi, that's why you get the hits. You won't learn. You shiver already, but as soon as it's over, you'll be out doing some other stupid thing and earn yourself another lot. (Hulme 1986: 136)

In *The Circle and the Spiral: A Study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maori Literature*, Eva Rask Knudsen provides an analysis of Joe's brutal behaviour towards his son: "Joe's violence towards [Simon] must also be understood in an archetypal sense which transcends the context of social outrage at child abuse" (2004: 158). Even though it may be seen as an overgeneralization, by beating Simon, Joe attempts to take control of the colonial oppression of the past.

Kerewin also exercises violence. During her expedition to Japan she learned to fight and considers it a useful skill. She beats Joe in retaliation for his beating Simon. Armstrong offers the following commentary upon Kerewin's behaviour, connecting it with another event of Simon's abuse: "Kerewin's standing in Simon's place, her decision to step into the violent relationship between father and son, anticipates the next and far more shattering moment of violence, when she participates in the final beating of Haimona that nearly kills him" (2001: 13-14). The protagonist cannot express her anger with Simon for destroying her belongings by means of words and she prefers to use violence instead: "Her voice trembled. Her hands trembled. He can see them still. Trembling to get hold of any part of him that can feel a hurt, and wreak vengeance on him" (Hulme

1986: 304). Yet, during a conversation with Simon, she is so angry that "she can't touch him physically, so she is beating him with her voice" (Hulme 1986: 307). Hardack comments that, in this case, "[s]ilence is safe, while language itself can become a manifestation of violence" (2016: 146). It is hence through language that Kerewin shows her anger and frustration towards the boy.

5. The troubled past

The past of all three main characters haunts them throughout their lives. Their problems with creating proper bonds and maintaining contact with other people are related to their unresolved issues from the past. Hardack proposes to view all the diseases and disabilities of the present as personifications of "the traumas that attend the legacy of colonialism, espe-cially in the context of disrupted childhoods, lost languages, dispersed and lost families, and a kind of internal narrative break – a loss of stories, continuity, kinship, and the language to transcribe those events" (2016: 149). As it shall shortly be demonstrated, all of the characters need to confront their past in order to recover their future.

Joe blames all the failures of his adult life on Simon. On her deathbed, his wife ordered Joe to care for Simon as their own son was already dead. They both die of flu, which Joe associates with the disease brought to New Zealand by colonisers. At one point during his spiritual journey to meet the *kaumatua*, a member of the elderly whose role is to teach and guide the younger generations, Joe has a dream about his wife and Simon. In the dream, his deceased son Timote appears, sucking the breast of Joe's late wife, Hana. Then Simon takes the place of Timote and when he proceeds to suck Hana's breast, Hana and Timote transform into moths and disappear. It seems that Hana's metamorphosis into an insect is a consequence of Simon's depriving Hana of her beauty and energy: "Her skin goes grey and begins to run with sweat" (Hulme 1986: 351), suggesting that Simon is responsible for Hana and Timote's illness

and death. The nightmare is a reflection of Joe's deep resentment towards Simon.

Joe does not contain his anger for Hana and Timote's deaths when he tells Simon: "you have just ruined everything, you shit" (Hulme 1986: 308). In her PhD dissertation titled *UNSETTLING WHITENESS: Hulme, Ondaatje, Malouf and Carey*, Antje M. Rauwerda presents the view that:

> In his accusation of the boy, Joe accuses the Pakeha for the destruction of Maori culture and of his own family. For Joe, everything Maori is ruined by Simon who represents everything Pakeha. Joe beats the boy and explains that he does it because "it's not like I am hitting you, my son" (171). It is more like he is hitting a symbol of colonial intervention. (2001: 63)

Joe's childhood experience is what has determined his future identity issues. In "The End at the Beginning: Spiral Logic in Keri Hulme's *The Bone People*", Megan Thurman speculates about the reasons for Joe's problems: "Joe struggles to translate his morals into a corresponding ethical course of action because he has been torn between two cultures since birth" (2016: 10). Joe himself admits: "'That's the way I feel most of the time.'" More loudly, 'My father's father was English so I'm not yet 100% pure. But I'm Maori. And that's the way I feel too, the way you said, that the Maoritanga has got lost in the way I live'" (Hulme 1986: 62). It is only through reconciliation with his past, and by creating bonds with the land, that Joe is able to overcome his problems. As Bongie comments: "[i]n the chapter of Part Four devoted to him, 'The Kaumatua and the Broken Man,' Joe comes face to face with the cultural past from which he has been estranged" (1995: 238).

Reimmersion in one's cultural heritage proves to be healing not only for Joe, but also for Kerewin. The woman would like to forget about her family, but the memories haunt her. She claims that her family "stomped on [her] heart". Joe wonders about the reason for her leaving her family: "that she had broken up with her family over a relationship they didn't approve

of. She didn't approve of? That her loneliness, being apart from her family, had driven her to this part of the country where none of them lived. He could understand that" (Hulme 1986: 101). Yet no true reason for the lack of contact between Kerewin and her family is ever given, apart from hints at the argument that estranged them:

> But my family is gone.
> I am alone.
> Why did I lose my temper that night and wound everybody with words and memories?
> ("It's the bloody horrible way you've remembered everything bad about everybody, and kept it and festered it all your life...")
> They started it. I finished it.
> They are gone beyond recalling. I am gone too. Nothing matters anymore. (Hulme 1986: 167)

Even though Kerewin is reluctant to admit it, she longs for family. This is visible in her conversation with Simon: "You know what, my friend Gillayley? A family can be the bane of one's existence. A family can also be most of the meaning of one's existence. I don't know whether my family is bane or meaning, but they have surely gone away and left a large hole in my heart" (Hulme 1986: 242). At the end of the novel, though, Kerewin comes to understand that in order to heal her wounds, she must reconcile with her relatives and create a new family herself.

Simon's origins are uncertain, as he was washed ashore during a stormy night and Joe found him by chance. Nothing is known about his background and the boy remains a mystery. Joe describes the peculiar behaviour Simon displays in the hospital after being found on the beach:

> He had obviously been in hospital before, and it was clear early on, from the way he reacted, that the other time had been bad. X-rays showed he had had widespread injuries to his pelvis and hips, and they would have kept him in hospital for quite a while, the medics reckoned. The other thing is, he never talked.

> Screamed, my God could he scream! He was, and is, a fluent
> screamer. But he never said anything, or acted like he was used
> to talking. The ENT bloke who examined him said there was no
> physical reason to prevent him from speaking. He's got all the
> gear needed, eh. But if he vocalises, he throws up, and violently.
> (Hulme 1986: 86)

Simon's past is the most vivid example of a traumatising expe-
rience, as he is taunted by a "vivid haunting terrible voice, that
seemed to murmur endearments all the while the hands skil-
fully and cruelly hurt him" (Hulme 1986: 5). Kerewin attempts
to investigate what events from Simon's past caused this and
she learns that his guardians were heroine dealers, who prob-
ably injected drugs into Simon, too (Hulme 1986: 378-379).

 The healing of all of the characters and their coming to
terms with the past is necessary for the creation of a joint fu-
ture. As Wenzel asserts, "Kerewin, Joe and Simon need to
overcome personal demons and find their spiritual feet before
they can attempt a future with any means of success" (2006:
88). Once they have done it, they can create a family.

6. From culture clash to unitary vision

The Bone People presents a new, postcolonial vision of New
Zealand. It works as an allegory, showing a potential way to
synthesise all the present cultures into one, new and unique
culture of New Zealand. All of the characters serve as symbolic
representations of different cultures. Simon is presented in the
novel as a typical European:

> There isn't much above a yard of it standing there, a foot out of
> range of her furthermost reach. Small and thin, with an extra-
> ordinary face, highboned and hollow-cheeked, cleft and pointed
> chin, and a sharp sharp nose. Nothing else is visible under an ob-
> scuration of silverblond hair except the mouth, and it's set in an
> uncommonly stubborn line. Nasty. Gnomish, thinks Kerewin.
> (Hulme 1986: 16)

Rauwerda holds the view that "Hulme exaggerates the paleness of the child, unsettling his whiteness by making it hyperbolic. She uses Simon to invoke the disempowered and disadvantaged colonial whiteness" (2001: 48). Simon's arrival in New Zealand is sudden and mysterious, referring back to the time when the Europeans started their settlement. His behaviour is also destructive, as were the actions of the colonizers.

Moreover, Simon is different because of his impairment: the muteness of the child has its symbolic meaning, too, as according to Barker "the disabled child [is] read in terms of possible narratives of indigenous disempowerment, survival and activism" (2006: 130). Yet, despite his different appearance, evident disability and mysterious background, he is taken into a family and is accepted as one of the people.

Joe, on the other hand, is a modern Maori. He has a Maori appearance, but he does not consider himself as belonging to Maori culture and says with regret "if I was proper Maori I'd..." His doubts about his Maori ancestry are related to his upbringing:

> Maybe I can blame my grandfather for that in me, eh. He was highly respected and that, an elder too, but of the church, not of the people. He avoided the marae... I think he was ashamed, secretly ashamed, of my Nana and her Maoriness. But oowee, was that old lady strongwilled! What she wanted, she got, me or anything else... but the old man, I think he took it out on me for being like her, for being dark, and speaking Maori first, all sorts of things... he always seemed fair about it, at least, he always gave me a reason, but he was hard on me. And my Nana wasn't one for letting kids take it easy. (Hulme 1986: 227)

Kerewin seems to be the binding character in the novel. She combines the features of both cultures. Her skin colour suggests that she is a descendant of Europeans, yet, deep inside she feels Maori. She speaks the native language and knows much about the traditions and Maori culture. Joe realizes that:

'You speak Maori, and know a bit about, about things. Are you Maori by any chance?' Kerewin, blue-eyed, brown-haired, and mushroom pale, looked back at him. 'If I was in America, I'd be an octoroon' […] It's very strange, but whereas by blood, flesh and inheritance, I am but an eighth Maori, by heart, spirit and inclination, I feel all Maori'. (Hulme 1986: 61-62)

Joe and Kerewin bond over their Maori ancestry – for both of them it provides a healing power that enables them to start their life anew. Kerewin builds the community's *marae*, a place for meetings, and Joe meets a *kaumatua* – a member of the elders who nominates him to take responsibility for protecting the land's gods.

The characters' physical illnesses and problems are symbolic representations of cultural illnesses, as in the text, "forms of disability personify the traumas that attend the legacy of colonialism" (Hardack 2016: 149). Joe's alcoholism, Kerewin's mysterious illness and Simon's muteness all refer back to the source of evil associated with the colonizers. It is only through immersion in culture and creating bonds between each other that they can heal both their physical and psychological impairments:

The Bone People emphasizes how the complete cycle of life-rituals represented by the social alienation, transition and integration (Van Gennep, 1960) has a healing effect on individuals and societies. […] Hulme expresses a reverential respect for myth and the past to act as guidelines for a new future. (Wenzel 2006: 81)

In "Postmodernism or Postcolonialism?" Simon During suggests that Hulme's aim is to prove the importance of Maoriness as necessary for the (re-)building of New Zealand identity: "*The Bone People* […] desires a postcolonial identity given to it in Maoriness. The heroine in rebuilding a marae, the hero, in guarding the remnants of the sacred ships of the tribe, heal their alienations by contact with a precolonial culture" (1985: 373). Indeed, Kerewin, as the in-between character, provides the ultimate resolution to the problems described in the novel.

She is the one who makes the decision to create a new family together with Joe, but she also includes Simon, the representative of the Pakeha, as part of their family and decides to build a new house for all three of them. Even before Kerewin sets out on her spiritual journey she realizes the inseparability of the three of them and she conveys her revelation by means of art: she creates a tricephalos, a sculpture comprising their face, "which becomes a symbol of their belonging and togetherness and wholeness" (Wenzel 2006: 88). Upon finding it, Joe confirms Kerewin's connection with him and Simon: "[s]he saw us as a whole, as a set" (Hulme 1986: 315).

The new house that Kerewin builds for her family takes the form of a shell. The heroine comments on the reasons for her architectural choice:

> I had spent many nights happily drawing and redrawing those plans. I decided on a shell-shape, a regular spiral of rooms expanding around the decapitated Tower... privacy, apartness, but all connected and all part of the whole. When finished, it will be studio and hall and church and guesthouse, whatever I choose, but above all else, HOME. Home in a larger sense than I've used the term before. (Hulme 1986: 434)

The creation of such a patchwork family suggests the creation of a utopian unity between the Pakeha, who were once the invaders, and the native people of New Zealand. As Hardack observes, in the text "surrogate parents are also bound to their adopted children in mutual dialogical hybridity and through a complex process of reflection and exchange" (2016: 153). The characters can finally create one new culture fit for the postcolonial reality, a so-called "composite" (Knudsen 2004: 177) picture of the new society:

> [T]he three people finally reunite as a prototype of a family and so stage their reintegration into society where the family unit functions as a necessary and valuable component. Whereas Kerewin's tower initially serves as a symbol of separation, her convoluted new house at the end of the novel represents and anticipates the

> eventual creation of a new social dynamic, thereby indicating that the present can learn from the past. (Wenzel 2006: 83)

The family thus needs to emerge as a part of community, enabling it to heal after the colonial times.

Kerewin Holmes, the protagonist, whose name reflects the author herself, shows that the borders of the new New Zealand are blurred, that the racial differences are no longer so visible, because no-one is purely Maori or solely European. According to Hardack, this perspective can be called "[i]ndigenous intra-culturality", as "Hulme write[s] from within and without [her society] and simultaneously inhabit[s] multiple positions, identities and genres" (2016: 140). As Wenzel states, "In *The Bone People*, Hulme uses fiction and the imagination to undermine static or conventional perceptions of identity. She proposes to reconcile, link or connect different cultures by means of literature and its close correlatives myth and art" (2006: 82). In this way, the author sets out on a journey to the beginning of Maori culture, abundant with the works of art and complex mythology.

Patrick Evans in "'Pakeha-Style Biculturalism' and the Maori Writer" acknowledges that "[Hulme] offers […] a suitably elastic concept of what she calls the 'numinous', something that enables her to replace the bicultural 'either-or' with what is, in effect, a sort of 'both-and'" (2006: 26). This hybrid character of her work is crucial in the understanding of the new emerging culture of New Zealand. Barker confirms Evans's views, also commenting upon Simon's role in the act of cultural unification:

> Hulme offers a […] vision of a 'commensal' bicultural nation, denoting a version of cohabitation in which differences can be maintained and respected. Within these contexts, the disabled child is seen to signal the future of Maori culture in New Zealand: Simon is the focus of T*he Bone People*'s commensal vision, representing the challenges to be faced in the movement towards a true biculturalism. (2006: 130)

Implementing the element of the western world in the construction of a new identity underlines the importance of Pakeha tradition and output in New Zealand. In the postcolonial reality, the social roles are subverted, the *status quo* is undermined:

> Each project already contains a part of the other within it: Kerewin's bit of Maori and Joe's bit of Pakeha problematize the categorical boundaries that might once have separated them. This creates the condition for a confusion of roles, a postmodern *mélange*, that not only threatens the idea of a single cultural identity – Maori, Pakeha – founded upon sheer difference, but ironizes the projects themselves. (Bongie 1995: 235)

As a matter of fact, the novel itself is bound neither by a clear beginning nor an ultimate ending as, according to Maori beliefs, the ending is always a beginning and the beginning is the ending (Thurman 2016: 9). Elizabeth Webby in "Spiralling to Success" confirms that "[the book's] structure is, indeed, that of a double spiral, where beginning and ending are in perpetual interchange" (qtd in Thurman 6). The book's prologue is titled "The End At The Beginning" and its epilogue ends with the Maori words "TE MUTUNGA – RANEI TE TAKE [Eng. The end – or the beginning]" (Hulme 1986: 445). Maori understanding of time as a spiral principle makes it possible to view the book in more universal terms. Also, this understanding proves that the novel's borders, whether generic or physical, are blurred.

The novel's fluid form suggests that clear-cut boundaries are not valid in the postcolonial world. To create a new society, the characters have to dismiss the categories of colour, race and background. Keri Hulme presents a vision of the world where binary divisions no longer serve as principles for creating a nation. In her eyes, the community of postcolonial New Zealand is blended, multicultural and diverse.

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Justification of multiple ecofeminist perspectives: Diversity really matters

DANICA MILOSEVIC

Abstract

Ecofeminism has grown, developed and transformed itself as a theory and made progress to encompass many different philosophical stances today. Cultural, social and radical ecofeminism are just some of the forms that ecofeminism can currently take. All of these sources of knowledge have contributed immensely to ecofeminist thought in general, although they have often been confronted by and supportive of different epistemologies. For instance, cultural ecofeminists have been accused of being essentialist. On the other hand, social ecofeminists relying on constructionism, as opposed to essentialism, have fiercely attacked capitalism as well as other *isms* (like classism, racism, sexism) aiming at the pillars of power upon which patriarchal society is constructed. This paper will try to reconcile the said opposing ecofeminist theories and highlight their importance in the development of ecofeminist perspectives. It will give an overview of ecofeminist viewpoints and show how they can be complementary.

Keywords

dualism, essentialism, constructionism, ecofeminism

Uzasadnienie dla mnogości perspektyw ekofeministycznych – różnorodność naprawdę ma znaczenie

Abstrakt

Współczesna teoria ekofeministyczna przeszła transformację, rozwinęła się i rozrosła, wskutek czego obecnie obejmuje wiele podejść filozoficznych. Ekofeminizm kulturowy, społeczny i radykalny to tylko niektóre z form, które przybiera ten nurt. Wszystkie wyżej wymienione źródła wiedzy przyczyniły się do myśli ekofeministycznej, mimo że często wchodziły w polemikę, bądź też popierały, różne epistemologie. Na przykład reprezentanci kulturowego ekofeminizmu byli oskarżani o nadmierny esencjalizm. Z kolei przedstawiciele ekofeminizmu społecznego, który, w przeciwieństwie do esenjalizmu, oparty jest na konstruktywizmie, zajadle atakują kapitalizm i inne -izmy (klasycyzm, rasizm, seksizm), mierząc w filary władzy, na których zbudowany jest patriarchat. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę pogodzenia teorii ekofeministycznych i podkreśla ich znaczenie w rozwoju różnych perspektyw. Zaproponuje przegląd stanowisk ekofeministycznych i pokaże, że mogą się uzupełniać.

Słowa kluczowe

dualizm, esencjalism, konstrukcjonizm, ekofeminizm

One of the founders of ecofeminist theory, the American theoretician and activist Ynestra King (1989: 120) defined ecofeminism as "a global movement that is founded on common interests yet celebrates diversity and opposes all forms of domination and violence". This has been the guiding principle of ecofeminism since its conceptual development in the mid-seventies of the 20th century till the present day. From the outset, ecofeminism has clearly stated that its goal is to question the injustices imposed by (1) the patriarchal regime (Starhawk 1999), (2) capitalism as the product of patriarchal society (Merchant 1995, Shiva 1993), and (3) patriarchal ideological

structures such as essentialism and dualism (Carlassare 1994, Warren 1996, 1997).

Dualism was introduced as a theoretical framework in ancient Greece by the philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Both of them saw the body and the soul as different and opposing categories. Aristotle treated the soul as one form of the body, "not a separate substance", and in this way managed to explain the presence of the soul in the body (Robinson: 2003). Unlike Aristotle, Plato separated the body from the soul by stating that "soul is a true Form", or "real substance" belonging to the superior immaterial realm, while the body was just a copy of this Form in the physical realm (Robinson: 2003). Rene Descartes, the French philosopher who remodeled the concept of dualism in the period of classicism, envisaged in his Cartesian dualism two different types of substances, "minds or thinking substances and bodies or corporeal substances" (Barker & Morris 2005: 22). Descartes was of the opinion that the mind and the body could interact under divine intervention and that the body operated like a mechanism according to its inner laws (Robinson: 2003). Levi-Strauss, a French anthropologist and structuralist also made a significant contribution to the system of dualistic thought. For him binary oppositions were "the basic structure of all human cultures, all human ways of thought, and all human signifying systems" (Mary Klages 2013: 2). Levi-Strauss made it clear that human culture and language are structured on binary pairs of opposites, where one term is always favored over the other. However, he was not so interested in the individual qualities of units, "but the relation between any two units compared in a binary pair" (Mary Klages 2013: 2). Aware of the discrepancies within the field of dualism, ecofeminists have attacked its core, that is, the insistence of dualism on the division of entities into binary oppositions, the creation of hierarchical relations, the imposition of a logic of domination and the underestimation of certain concepts.

The idea that phenomena in the world are divided into two opposing categories, by which process some entities are treat-

ed as superior while others are seen as inferior, or less valuable than their counterparts, has led the ecofeminists to embark on a project in order to impose the principles of equality, partnership and promotion of diversity through their work. Sandilands (1999: 195) qualifies this ecofeminist endeavor as "holistic understanding" which "emphasizes the interconnections among various aspects of human and non-human life", thus creating unity of the biotic and abiotic, necessary for the sustainability of life on planet Earth.

Value dualisms, i.e., disjunctive pairs, are seen "as oppositional (rather than as complementary), and exclusive (rather than as inclusive)" (Warren 1996: 20-21) through the ecofeminist lens. Val Plumwood (Warren 1997: 337-338), an Australian ecofeminist, noticed that there are five techniques behind the ideology of dualism that have been central to the maintenance of patriarchal stability in the modern culture of western society. These techniques are *radical exclusion*, *denial, incorporation*, *instrumentalism*, and *homogenization*. They are practiced by patriarchal authorities who use them to impose hegemony, exercise control, and strengthen their power over women, nature and animals. Thanks to these techniques male individuals and male virtues become the carriers and symbols of power that take central position in the patriarchal structure, while other non-male entities are pushed towards the margins and qualified as worthless, insignificant and imperfect. Thus, only that which demonstrates the male principle itself becomes important for shaping our reality. Even when a common feature is recognized in opposing concepts, this feature is seen as more representative in the concept that is defined by its male-like qualities. This leads to *incorporation* which creates a clear distinction between the entities that are above as superior, and the entities that are below as subordinate. In such a structure, the woman is "defined in relation to the man as central", not as "an autonomous being" (Plumwood in Warren 1997: 338). Nature is "perceived as disorder, as unreason, to be replaced where possible by human order in development, an assimilating project of colonization" (Plumwood in Warren 1997: 341).

All the entities that do not have a significant instrumental value are then considered irrelevant to patriarchal society since they cannot bring any concrete material benefit to it. Finally, the process of *homogenization* imposes the idea that non-male entities are perceived as non-specific and similar to one another, which gives justification for their classification under one category labeled as the *other*. This category eventually "becomes the repository of the bad, the mirror reflection of the good", or that which is discarded, neglected and oppressed by patriarchal authority (Sandilands 1999: 141). According to Lisa Kemmerer (2013), in patriarchal society women, people of color, children and the poor become "human Others", while animals, forests and the land turn into "earth Others".

This logic of domination hidden behind the concept of dualism assigns the central position to the male individual in patriarchal culture, confirms the hegemony of the male principle and deepens the gap between dichotomies such as center/margin, master/slave, and subject/object. Ecofeminism strongly objects to such divisions with a special focus on dichotomies such as man/woman, culture/nature, or man/animal. Such binary oppositions support the andro-centric idea that man is superior to and dominant over woman, nature, and animals, asserting that these entities need to be oppressed, manipulated and exploited in the name of male culture, which sees them as insignificant and powerless.

Through its effort, ecofeminism has shown the opposite. Unlike dualism which rejects what is different, ecofeminism embraces difference as something that is unique, valuable and significant. Ecofeminism pays respect towards each entity regardless of its instrumental value, putting focus solely on the inherent values that different entities possess, thereby disregarding any hierarchical value structures (Starhawk 1999).

Over the last four decades ecofeminism has expanded its epistemology to include liberal, radical, socialist, queer, native, cultural and social ecofeminism. All of these different streams of thought have managed to keep one thing in common and that is the determination to bring harmony to the dualistic way

of thinking, by promoting the ideas of tolerance, egalitarianism and justice, revealing the aggressive, violent and destructive practices of patriarchy along the way. Even if these forms of ecofeminism rely on different means, they still strive to achieve the same goal of ecofeminism, which is to recognize the value and importance of both woman and nature, and halt the processes by which woman and nature are marginalized, discriminated against and maltreated by western patriarchal society. Each form is, however, regarded as unique and valuable, since it gives a different perspective on ecofeminism as a theory.

Liberal ecofeminism is concerned with the laws and regulations that can protect both women and nature from a patriarchal practice that is harmful and destructive. Aware of the ecological crisis, liberal ecofeminism, "deals with the problems of the failure to regulate pesticides and other environmental pollutants" in view of the increasing consciousness of malicious agricultural and industrial practices that have a negative effect on nature and the health of people. Therefore, the grounds of liberal ecofeminism can be regarded as a political arena for women who are invited to give their full contribution to environmental protection and conservation of natural resources, while also claiming along the way, greater human rights for themselves (Merchant 1995: 9-10). Therefore, the concerns of liberal feminists encompass not only issues related to the well-being of the planet and non-human animals, but also issues of female needs, rights and freedoms that are still silenced, curbed and restricted by patriarchal laws. Although one era of emancipation has been completed (in the 1960s), emancipation as a whole is still needed to win justice for women who suffer from the oppression of the patriarchal regime in different ways. Karren Warren, therefore, (1996: 5) claims that the "liberation of women cannot be achieved until all women are liberated from the multiple oppressions that structure our gendered identities: women of colour from racism, poor women from classism, lesbian women from heterosexism, young and old women from ageism, Jewish women from anti-Semitism, women of the South from ethno-centrism". Therefore, liberal

ecofeminism advocates for the multiplicity of female voices that need to be heard, recognized, given the right of speech and appreciated in the political discourse.

Radical ecofeminism protests against patriarchal society and capitalism in order to find ways in which it is possible to struggle against the oppression of the patriarchal regime and liberate both woman and nature from the hardships of civilized society. Its approach is similar to that of liberal ecofeminists, but it asks for a more direct struggle and concrete acts of defiance "to dismantle those very structures" of patriarchy (Merchant 1995: 207).

Socialist ecofeminism "focuses on the relationship between production and reproduction and on women's work in the continued biological and social reproduction of life on Earth" to see how this reflects on the welfare of women and the natural environment in the capitalist paradigm (Merchant 1995: 207). It protests against reducing females to their reproductive role, and at the same time against exploiting female beings as a labor force. The latter especially refers to the domain of housework where women are treated as *shadow workers* responsible for chores that do not have any economic value and therefore need not be paid for or given any credit.

Queer ecofeminism supports the rights of the LGBT population, whose sexual behavior is labeled by different stigmas in a modern patriarchal culture which is homophobic. Greta Gaard (1997), a German ecofeminist, does not see homosexuality as an *unnatural act*. To her, the problem lies in patriarchal culture which has constructed the standards for acceptable sexual behavior and sees homosexuality as "trans-gressive in at least three categories: as acts against biblical morality, against nature or against psychology" (Gaard 1997: 141). Through patriarchal practice, queer identities are reduced only to their abnormal and perverse erotic aspect, which is seen as their "only salient feature". This way, patriarchy devalues, underestimates and depreciates the other aspects of queer personality, annihilating other human qualities in queer individuals (Gaard 1997: 139).

Native ecofeminism states that it is necessary to "live close to nature, nurturing sacred lands and re-consecrating degraded spaces" through a determination to cherish the traditional values and principles of ancient communities which lived in harmony with nature and treated land as a sacred ground (Merchant 1995: 207).

In a similar spiritual way, *cultural ecofeminism* "celebrates the relationship between women and nature through the revival of the ancient rituals centered on goddess worship, the moon, animals, and the female reproductive system" (Merchant 1995: 11). It draws its strength from the religion of the Great Goddess that inspires women to treat their bodies as sacred and their mother role as divine in celebration of life, nature, natural laws, cosmological oneness and *unity in diversity*. According to Merchant (1995: 11), "cultural ecofeminist philosophy embraces intuition, an ethic of caring, and web-like human-nature relationships" treating all entities as interconnected, mutually dependent and inseparable from nature as a whole. It insists on partnership with nature and the ethical behavior of each individual towards his/her natural surroundings in view of conservation of natural resources, encouragement of life affirming activities and the celebration of diversity which "assures survival and continuing evolution" and is therefore essential for the sustainability of life (Starhawk 1999: 219).

Social *ecofeminism*, on its part, starts with the idea that "dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human" (Merchant 1995: 13). Therefore, the main task of social ecofeminism is to eradicate all forms of hegemony in patriarchal culture that are responsible for the construction of a hierarchical society. This means that all forms of *-isms* have to be abolished – especially those constituting sexism, racism, classism, naturism or ageism. Moreover, social ecofeminism restructures the "oppressions imposed on women by marriage, the nuclear family, romantic love, the capitalist state, and patriarchal religion" (Merchant 1995: 14). Therefore, social ecofeminism tends to introduce changes in the patriarchal dis-

course out of a constructivist belief that language has the power to alter our reality and redefine ideologies that are guiding our everyday lives. It claims that dualism, as a social construct, that is, a product of patriarchal society can be, if not deconstructed, then at least modified, to establish a new discourse infused with new meanings and values that take voices of women and nature into account.

However, there have been some serious disputes among certain theoreticians within the ecofeminist framework. Namely, ecofeminists have started a debate concerning the level of implication of cultural ecofeminism in essentialism, which is another patriarchal ideology that has significantly influenced the distribution of power in favor of patriarchal authority. Essentialism "usually refers to the assumption that a subject is constituted by pre-social, innate, unchanging qualities" (Carlassare 1994: 221). It assigns permanent qualities or *essences* to different objects which thus become once and for all labeled by patriarchal stereotypical ways of thinking. Plato was the first philosopher who introduced essentialism and established *eidas* or essences as defined, constant, and unchangeable qualities that cannot be transformed (Delamater & Hyde).

In essentialism women and nature are perceived as known categories that are determined by their most conspicuous features. For instance, essentialists regard woman as a sensitive, emotional, hysterical and less intellectually endowed being, but most importantly as a reproductive being that has the capacity to give birth to children. Woman gets reduced to the physical aspect of herself, since her biological reproductive potential is considered to be her greatest value for patriarchal society. As Shiva (1993: 24) points out "reductionism also reduces complex ecosystems to a single component, and a single component to a single function". Nature, which woman is identified with through the analogy of reproduction, is also reduced to its capacity to yield, nurture, feed, shelter and provide for the civilized man whose appetites for her resources never get satisfied. Therefore, in essentialism, nature resembles woman in her mother-like qualities to bring forth new life,

while woman experiences nature as a space close to her sensibility that she can understand, sympathize with, live in harmony with and rely on.

Cultural ecofeminism, in fact, takes over only some ideas from essentialism and not the entire concept; therefore, it cannot be labeled as purely essentialist as some ecofeminists would like to contend. Among other claims, essentialism states that women and nature are tied to each other with special bonds. This idea is the only one that cultural ecofeminists find appealing. By no means does cultural ecofeminism try to internalize essentialist reductionism in order to simplify the identity of both women and nature and underestimate their integrity. Cultural ecofeminists are fully aware that "reductionist science is a source of violence against nature and women, in so far as it subjugates and dispossesses them in their full productivity, power and potential"(Shiva 1993: 24). Cultural ecofeminism rather, defies reductionism out of a belief that both woman and nature have various aspects that are praiseworthy and that should be respected and given recognition. In the religion of the Goddess "all people are already seen as manifest gods, and differences in color, race, and customs are welcomed as signs of the myriad beauty of the Goddess" (Starhawk 1999: 38). Therefore, the maintenance of the woman/nature relationship and respect to the affairs of the Great Goddess are perceived as quintessential to survival for both women and nature in cultural ecofeminism. As one of the leading cultural ecofeminists Starhawk (1999: 34) claims "Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, our own bodies, and celebrate our emotions. We can move beyond narrow, constricting roles and become whole". The strength of woman lies in her relationship with nature and her interconnectedness with the entire organic world in which the Goddess herself is imminent. Cultural ecofeminism therefore empowers women whose voices are silenced in patriarchal culture, and helps them to realize their full potential by recognizing the divine capacity in them. For cultural ecofeminists the connection between nature and wo-

men is seen as "a source of spiritual empowerment and political activism", the Goddess being the symbol of female power, experience, wisdom, creativity and political awareness (Chopin in Klein 2000: 3). More importantly, this connection is not considered as a by-product of patriarchal intervention, but rather as an inner guiding principle of female survival, something that women desire themselves and find satisfying in practice.

Social ecofeminists, however, refuse to accept the idea that woman and nature can be permanently defined by their essences. They claim that "Neither of the two entities have either innate essences or an essential connection" (Carlassare 1994: 223). In their opinion, both woman and nature are categories prone to change, development, transformation and growth. Therefore, it is impossible to define woman and nature as monolithic categories. It is their belief that "celebrations of the "feminine role", the "feminine principle", the "feminine values" of goddess spirituality homogenize and essentialize women, equating sex and gender while erasing critical differences like race and class" (Gaard 2011: 36).

Women differ from one another through their racial, social, sexual, religious and other backgrounds. Ecosystems differ from one another, so that the concept of nature in one culture or nation is different from the concept of nature in another culture or nation. Therefore, social ecofeminists urge the deletion of any possible analogies between women and nature that patriarchy imposes. By rejecting essentialism, social ecofeminism actually attempts to break the ties between women and nature, convinced that this relationship is another product of patriarchal culture or another social construct. In this school of thought, essentialism has been accused of "the exploitation of nature and animals ... by feminizing them" and "the exploitation of women .... by naturalizing them" (Warren 1997: 12).

Carolyn Merchant (1995), a social ecofeminist, states that woman is treated as a being closer to the natural environment in patriarchal culture, not because she has greater empathy towards natural processes, but due to her traditional social

roles that have confined her to the private space of her home
and limited her activities to the ones around the house. These
traditional roles of the housewife and the mother have made
women more attached to the environment, which has resulted
in more sophisticated female competences in interaction with
nature. This woman/nature link is thus an outcome of differ-
ent historical, economic and political factors that have left
a mark on the lives of women and their stereotypical roles in
culture. "The implication is that women are not necessarily
more natural than men but the conditions of their existence
allow them to know nature in different ways than men", ex-
plains Sandilands (1999: 24). Man in patriarchal society, on
the other hand, is associated with culture as its creator, repre-
sentative and defender, and therefore the values that he repre-
sents contradict the ones that are specific for women and na-
ture. The dichotomy man/culture is far too superior to the di-
chotomy women / nature. In such a mutual relationship, as it
seems "woman serves the interests of a man", while "nature ...
is sacrificed to culture" (Madsen 2000: 124).

Cultural ecofeminists such as Ynestra King, Starhawk, Su-
san Griffin, Cathleen McGuire, and Colleen McGuire insist on
the relationship between women and nature out of a belief that
woman can gain strength in contact with nature and switch to
her active state of mind. Unification with the Goddess and na-
ture is an "inner journey, a personal vision quest, a process of
self-healing and self-exploration" (Starhawk 1999: 225). Ac-
cording to these cultural eco-feminists, woman can draw ener-
gy from her natural environment to survive, oppose, and even
fight patriarchal authority. "For women, the Goddess is the
symbol of the inmost self, and the beneficent, nurturing, liber-
ating power within woman" (Starhawk 1999: 111). Such eco-
feminists turn to spiritualism, rituals that are performed in
praise of nature and the Goddess, believing that the further
survival of women and nature in patriarchal society depends
on forgotten matriarchal beliefs suppressed by patriarchal cul-
ture, which has for a long while been stricken by the process

of denaturalization, that is, a systematic alienation from nature.

   Although there seems to be a great difference in the attitudes of social and cultural ecofeminists, there are also certain similarities in these two opposing theories which indicate that social and cultural ecofeminism do not have to be exclusive, but rather supportive of one another. Both theories, even if contradictory, share the same logic of ethics and care. As a result, they can make a huge contribution to ecofeminist thought through joint effort. According to Merchant (1995: 216-217) "a partnership ethic of earth care means that both women and men can enter into mutual relationships with each other and the planet independently of gender and does not hold women alone responsible for "cleaning up the mess" made by male-dominated science, technology and capitalism". This idea finds its applicative use in both social and cultural ecofeminisms, since they both insist on the fact that it is not only women but the entirety of humanity that is responsible for protecting the natural environment and finding an appropriate pace for technological development. As Plumwood (in Sandilands 1999: 140) says "both men and women are both part of nature and culture. Both men and women can stand with nature and work for breaking down the dualistic construction of nature". Shiva (1993) also supports this viewpoint and provides a good example by combining both social and cultural teachings in her work. She attacks western society for its corruption, consumerism and merciless capitalist production, in an attempt to criticize patriarchal constructs and practices. Simultaneously she praises the Goddess culture of the East, paying tribute to her Indian cultural background, therefore making a perfect balance between the doctrines of social and cultural ecofeminism.

   It should be noted that although cultural ecofeminism promotes a woman/nature relationship, it does not exclude from its programme male intervention that is guided by the principles of love, life, creativity, respect towards nature and harmonious interaction with it. Therefore, both female and male en-

gagement in the process of environmental protection is expected and encouraged through cultural ecofeminism that rests on the ecological assumption that all living beings are interconnected and dependent on one another and therefore required to act justly and ethically towards their environment. The theories of both social and cultural ecofeminism rely upon the logic of ethics and, in fact, share four precepts that Merchant (1995: 217) solely assigns to social ecofeminism. These are: 1. equality between human and non-human communities, 2. moral consideration for humans and non-human nature, 3. respect for cultural diversity and biodiversity, and 4. inclusion of women, minorities, and non-human nature in the code of ethical accountability. Throughout the ethics of care once again, it is established that the principle of equality is the most important in both ecofeminist fractions. Woman, animals and nature are not to be treated as the *other*, but as equals to man and his culture, with equal rights to justice. Diversity seen as both cultural diversity and biodiversity is the second idea central to both theories. In cultural ecofeminism diversity is promoted through celebration of various aspects of the Goddess who is to be found in our deepest, inner selves as well as the natural world which is sacred. To Starhawk (1999: 36) "serving the life force means working to preserve the diversity of natural life, to prevent the poisoning of the environment and the destruction of species".

In social ecofeminism diversity is celebrated through reaffirming the value of all the oppressed human and non-human beings and their inclusion in the patriarchal reality in which patriarchal practices such as racism, classism, sexism, naturism and ageism are deeply shaken and thoroughly questioned.

Although social ecofeminists believe that the *naturalization of women* and the *feminization of nature* only deepen the repressed position of women and nature in culture, cultural ecofeminists see the relationship between women and nature, diametrically opposite, as crucial both for the survival of women and the survival of nature. For cultural ecofeminists, birth is a sacred act, a new life that is celebrated and glorified as

a special, divine gift that a woman possesses, therefore, it cannot be regarded as a simple reproductive function. Starhawk (1999: 158) says: "We say that our bodies are sacred, because they bring forth life, because they are life, because they give us pleasure, because with them we make, build, think, laugh, create and do".

The act of giving new life guarantees the continuation of the human race and the survival of humans on planet Earth, which constantly passes through the cycles of birth, death and regeneration. It is precisely in this creative role that cultural ecofeminists recognize the power of women, and even their potential for subversive action inspired by the worship of the Great Goddess, around whose aura the female collective is united. Having such a life-promoting engagement in mind, it is unfair to exclude cultural ecofeminism as an unsuitable doctrine that is involved in essentialism or that gives support to many of the patriarchal techniques that are destructive towards woman and nature.

As the ecofeminist movement gives support to cultural diversity and biodiversity, ecofeminism itself should nurture a pluralism that takes into account different attitudes, opinions and beliefs since they are all, no matter how diverse, part of the ecofeminist mosaic that is much more vivid and prolific when the polyphony of its voices can be heard. This also includes cultural ecofeminism.

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Beyond the canon:
Don Ihde and North American
philosophy of technology

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Abstract

The paper seeks to discuss the origin and development of North American philosophy of technology against the background of the phenomenological canon. More specifically, it traces the trajectory of Don Ihde's thought, whose *Technics and Praxis* (1979) is usually cited as the first North American book specifically described as a philosophy of technology. While the phenomenological tradition provided a firm foundation for Ihde's project, it has never acted as a rigid conceptual framework. Enriching his theoretical perspective with insights taken from the engagements with pragmatism, Ihde departed from Heideggerian-style traditional phenomenological analyses of technology in a number of ways, which this paper discusses. In most general terms, as I argue, Ihde has reversed the direction of Heideggerian inquiry that concentrates on how concrete tools and procedures disclose their underlying reality and thus moved towards the analysis of technologies in their particularities. This shift has allowed him to approach the multidimensionality of technologies as material cultures within a lifeworld and explore the different aspects of experience that result from human-technology relations as embedded in specific cultural and social dimensions.

Post-fenomenologia Dona Ihde'ego
a północnoamerykańska filozofia techniki

Abstrakt

Artykuł przedstawia początki i rozwój północnoamerykańskiej filozofii techniki na tle kanonu fenomenologicznego, analizując trajektorię myśli współczesnego amerykańskiego filozofa, Dona Ihde, którego monografia *Technics and Praxis* wydana w 1979 roku, jest powszechnie uznawana za jedną z pierwszych amerykańskich publikacji naukowych z dziedziny filozofii techniki. Chociaż tradycja fenomenologiczna dostarczyła Ihdemu solidnych podstaw do wyartykułowania własnych poglądów, nie stanowiła nigdy sztywnej, nieprzekraczalnej granicy dla jego myśli. Wzbogacając swoją teoretyczną perspektywę o koncepcje i podejście typowe dla amerykańskiego pragmatyzmu, Ihde odszedł już w swoich wczesnych pracach od tradycyjnej fenomenologicznej analizy „Technologii" w stylu Heideggera, koncentrując się na technologiach i technikach w ich konkretnych sytuacyjnych kontekstach. Ta zmiana perspektywy, jak argumentuje autor artykułu, umożliwiła Ihdemu przedstawienie wielowymiarowości poszczególnych technologii jako kultur materialnych i związanych z nimi praktyk społecznych oraz analizę różnych aspektów doświadczenia, wynikających z wzajemnej relacji pomiędzy człowiekiem a użytkowanymi przez niego technologiami.

Słowa kluczowe

Philosophy of technology, like many other domain specific subfields of philosophy, is a relative newcomer, especially to the North American scene. In 1979 the respected philosopher of science and physicist Mario Augusto Bunge somewhat contentiously observed:

> Technophilosophy [Bunge's term for philosophy of technology] is still immature and uncertain of its very object, and does not exploit the entire scope of its own possibilities. That it is an underdeveloped branch of scholarship is suggested by the fact that so far no major philosopher has made it his central concern or written an important monograph on it. (qtd. in Ihde 1993: 15).

Bunge's statement was exaggerated, but his sense of timing was perfect. One obviously finds philosophical works in the mid 1970s on technology, but it was only in 1979 that the first monograph with a deliberate focus on philosophy of technology came out. This was Don Ihde's *Technics and Praxis* (1979), which is usually cited as the first North American book specifically described as a philosophy of technology. In the same year *The History and Philosophy of Technology*, edited by George Budliarello and Dean Doner, was published, and shortly after Friedrich Rapp's *An Analytical Philosophy of Technology* (1981) rolled off the press. These three pioneering titles were followed by a virtual explosion of scholarly works, including introductory college-level textbooks. Over the course of the 1980s philosophy of technology emerged as an academic field and its importance has grown exponentially in the past four decades. One of its central thinkers has been Don Ihde, who has established himself as a major figure in the field of science and technology studies and produced a number of important works, his most recent being *Husserl's Missing Technologies*, published in 2016.

The aim of the present discussion is to plot the trajectory of Ihde's thought against the background of the pheno-menological canon. It is obvious to anyone who has read his early works that Heidegger and Husserl have been two strong

influences on Ihde. While the phenomenological tradition provided a firm foundation for Ihde's project and helped him to find his voice, it has never acted as a rigid conceptual framework. Enriching his theoretical perspective with insights taken from the engagements with pragmatism, Ihde departed from Heideggerian-style traditional phenomenological analyses of technology in a number of ways and developed his own version of a Husserlian approach. In what follows I will discuss some of the primary ways in which Ihde has moved beyond the phenomenological canon and developed his own post-phenomenological approach. I will focus in particular on two key concepts in Ihde's project, namely those of experience and of lifeworld technologies.

The idea of experience assumes a central position in Ihde's study. Drawing on the Husserlian and Heidggerian models of intentionality, Ihde has developed a relativistic account which takes as its primary phenomenon the structure of experience itself and seeks to examine the full range and multiple dimensions of that structure.[1] His method is directly derived from "the reflection in terms of the phenomenological understanding of intentionality as experience within a world" (Ihde 1979: 7), and as such it is to be taken as *rigorously* relativisitic. "The relationality of human-world relationships is claimed by phenomenologists to be an ontological feature of all knowledge, all experience" (Ihde 1990: 25). Phenomenological reflection recognizes also the actional dimension of human-technology relations as any use of technological artifacts implies human action or *praxis*, and rejects the view of technologies as isolated artifacts independent of the context in which they are placed. The presumed neutrality of technologies is an untenable abstraction as they are always contextualized and implicated in the human world-relation. "Not only are technologies artifactual but they are used (as well as developed, discarded, etc.) in their normative role. And although the use

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[1] For a comprehensive survey of the concept of experience in European and American philosophical traditions, see Jay (2014).

may be immediate, distant, occasional, or delayed, the human-technology relation implies human *praxis* or action" (Ihde 1990: 27). Analysis of technology must thus both recognize the dynamics of perceptual-bodily activity in actional praxis and elucidate the relational structures of intentionality involved in the use of technological artifacts. These two elements, Ihde argues, can be combined by extending and appropriating the Husserlian idea of the lifeworld for the inquiry into technology.[2] The Husserlian lifeworld comprises two different level of praxes, one material and practical, the other ideal and theoretical. "Both belong in some way to the lifeworld, for both can be familiarized within some praxical pattern" (Ihde 1990: 29). The tension between these two levels becomes apparent in an analysis of human-technology relations and can be productively articulated in terms of perception.

Ihde distinguishes two senses of perception: the first is a sensory perception related to bodily existence and activity, the second is interpretive as it discloses meaning in different cultural-hermeneutic contexts. These two dimensions of perception can be theoretically distinguished from each other, but they cannot be separated in praxis as their relation is not one of derivation, but more like that of figure-to-ground. Micro-perception always occurs within its hermeneutic-cultural context, and all such contexts, in turn, are actualized only within the range of microperceptual possibility. The study of technology thus requires "a double-sided analysis of the range of human-technology relations within the limits of micro-perceptual and bodily experience; the other side must remain that of a cultural hermeneutics that situates our existential life" (Ihde 1990: 29). These modifications of the original Husserlian notion allow for a clear account of how technology changes the lifeworld and transforms both experience and culture.

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[2] The other notion suggestive of technology in its praxical character is Husserl's recognition of "writing as a 'technology' that allows a new level of meaning development through its inscription process that can be repeatedly read" (Ihde 2009: 28).

Ihde pursues this double-sided analysis by inquiring into the forms of the lifeworld when technological artifacts are involved. He is particularly interested in the different aspects of experience that result from human-technology relations and distinguishes three general ways by which human beings can relate to technologies. The first is the relation of mediation, which occurs whenever perception is not directly related to the world but instead mediated through a technological artifact, as, for instance, whenever we wear glasses or make a telephone call. The second, the relation of alterity, is that to an artifact itself, in the form of confronting and being involved with a machine as a quasi-object or even a quasi-other (Ihde 2009: 43). The third kind of human-technology relation consists of background relations which shape the technological texture of our environment without becoming thematic in our relation to them. We find these "atmospheric" characteristics in nume-rous artifacts that make up the technosphere of our lives, such as air-conditioning or heating systems installed in our houses and offices. I will not follow all the subtleties of Ihde's analysis here, but will move on to sketch his encounter with Heidegger's thought and, in the concluding part of the paper, return to the concept of lifeworld technologies.

Building on insights from Heidegger's phenomenology of equipment, Ihde approaches technological artifacts as given within a context and endowed with specific intentionality. In Heidegger's idiom, each piece of equipment is a part of a mea-ningful whole, and each piece is "in order to". Technologies are thus "relative to concrete contexts-in-use" and characterized by what Ihde calls "an instrumental intentionality" (Ihde 2009: 33). Further, tools in our normal use of them are a means of experiencing, rather than objects of experience. To use Heidegger's oft quoted example, a hammer becomes prominent only when it fails to perform its function of driving in nails. Our very familiarity with tools obtrudes into the way we understand the relations we establish with them. Yet apart from explicating the peculiar "withdrawing" of technology from our experience, we should also consider how we are sensorily

and bodily related via technologies to the world. Ihde therefore deems it necessary to complement Heidegger's analysis of tools with Merleau-Ponty's study of embodiment in perception. As Peter-Paul Verbreek (2001: 126) has observed, "while Heidegger analyzes the ways in which artifacts are present to human beings, 'withdrawing' from their experience, Merleau-Ponty analyzes the relations to the world that can arise on the basis of the presence".

In a discussion of two examples of "the woman with the feather in her hat" and "the blind man with the cane", Merleau-Ponty shows in *Phenomenology of Perception* how technological artifacts can affect our body schema (schéma corporel) by stretching the spatiality of lived bodies[3] and even becoming a means of perception,[4] as is the case with the blind man's cane. When one has learned the skill of handling the cane, it becomes incorporated into the body schema and starts to function as one's bodily extension. "It is then experienced and used as part of the means by which one engages the world, rather than as an object in the world that one engages. It becomes a means through which skills are expressed, rather than an object of skilled action" (Brey 2000: 8).[5] Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the incorporation of an object into bodily

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[3] "A woman may, without any calculation, keep a safe distance between the feather in her hat and things which might break it off. She feels where the feather is just as we feel where our hand is. If I am in the habit of driving a car, I enter a narrow opening and see that I can 'get through' without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings, just as I go through a doorway without checking the width of the doorway against that of my body. The hat and the car have ceased to be objects with a size and volume which is established by comparison with other objects. They have become potentialities of volume, the [sic] demand for a certain amount of free space. In the same way the iron gate to the Underground platform, and the road, have become restrictive potentialities and immediately appear passable or impassable for my body with its adjuncts" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 165).

[4] Merleau-Ponty characterizes the body schema as an organizing structure which presents one with a unified understanding of one's body so that it is always experienced as a unified whole. For a more detailed treatment of the two examples within the context of the body schema, see Merleau-Ponty (1962: 142-147).

[5] For a detailed discussion of this and other examples from Merleau-Ponty, see for instance Brey (2000).

experience is of crucial importance to Ihde's project as it reveals how, in a more general sense, "bodily intentionality extends through the artifact into the environing world in a unique technological mediation" (Ihde 2009: 36).

Combining Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's perspectives on technology and embodiment, Ihde approaches the structure of perception in terms of mediation. He distinguishes two basic sets of relations with artifacts which mediate the intentional relations between human beings and the world. In the first set, which he calls embodiment relations, technological artifacts are an inherent part of the noetic correlate as they are taken into our very bodily experience and can thus extend and amplify human sensitivity. To give an example, our vision can be mediated by eyeglasses or contact lenses, our listening by the mobile phone, and so on. "In each of these cases, our sense of 'body' is embodied outward, directionally and referentially, and the technology becomes part of our ordinary experience of _____" (Ihde 2009: 42). These relations can be formalized as: (human-technology) → environment. In hermeneutic relations, the second set that Ihde distinguishes, "we have moved from experiencing through machines to experiences of machine" (Ihde 1990: 11). If in embodiment relations technology withdraws and becomes quasi-transparent, hermeneutic relations reveal technology as an object of experience in use as it engages one's linguistic, meaning-oriented capacities. In such circumstances technological artifacts provide representations of the world. An artifact such as a thermometer or a timer becomes something like a text which requires our interpretation. Hermeneutic relations can be schematized as human → (technology-world).

All technological mediations are inextricably linked with a transformation of perception and reveal the non-neutrality of technologies. Mediated and ordinary experiences in the flesh are never identical. While technologies obviously differ from one another, yet they all affect, in different gradations, the structure of perception by amplifying certain of its aspects and reducing others. "But *for every revealing transformation there*

is a simultaneously concealing transformation of the world, which is given through a technological mediation. Technologies transform experience, however subtly, and that is one root of their *non-neutrality*" (original emphasis, Ihde 1990: 49). The transformation of experience can take the form of low contrast when it comes close to a naked perception (as with the use of reading glasses) or of high contrast when it provides a percept that is not normally available to the unaided eye (a spectrogram or fMRI scan image).

Ihde's argument of the mediating role of technologies in our experience follows a different trajectory from Heidegger's analysis of technology, which emphasizes its "reductive" and "controlling" role in an interpretation of the world. While Ihde takes his departure from Heidegger's view of the primacy of technology and the importance of praxis for science and philosophy, he reverses the direction of Heideggerian inquiry that concentrates on how concrete tools and procedures disclose their underlying reality. As Verbeek (2001: 122) has pointed out, Ihde breaks in this respect with "the phenomenological tradition's conception of technology as stemming from a specific and limited way of disclosing reality". Unlike Heidegger, Ihde is interested not so much in distilling "the essence of Technology" as in its concrete presence in our daily existence in the form of various technological artifacts. He replaces the totalizing Technology of Heidegger with "technologies" in their relational and contextual implications. "Instead of questioning 'backwards' [Ihde] questions forwards; that is, instead of reducing technological artifacts to the technological form of world-disclosure that makes them possible, he asks what form of world-disclosure is *made possible by* technological artifacts" (original emphasis, Verbeek 2001: 122). In this way Ihde moves away from generalization about "technology überhaupt" towards the analysis of technologies in their particularities. This shift is intended as, he himself admits, as "the step away for a high altitude or transcendental perspective and an appreciation of the multidimensionality of technologies as material cultures within

a lifeworld" (Ihde 2009: 22). Furthermore, the use of technological artifacts, their mediation and pervasive presence in our lives do not necessarily result in what Heidegger calls "bestellen" that "en-frames" the world as a stock of goods stored up and made ready for manipulation and control. The non-neutrality of technologies, in Ihde's view, does not make them "good" or "bad" but rather reveals them as inherently ambiguous. It is in the subtle cross-sorting between naked perception and perception via technological artifacts that one becomes ambiguous in relation to the other. When mediating our relation with the world, technologies have as much reductive as strengthening impact on our experience. They transform perceptions differently and while they can indeed constrict our contact with the world, they also provide new modes of access.

It is important to note that technological mediation does not simply take place between subject and object but transforms them in their mutual constitution. Ihde (2009: 23) describes this constitutive mutuality in terms of interrelational ontology: "By this I mean that the human experiencer is to be found ontologically related to an environment or a world, but the interrelation is such that both are transformed within this relationality". In other words, mediating artifacts not only affect the noetic and noematic correlates, "the way a predefined subject relates to a predefined object or the way a predefined object can appear to a predefined subject" (Verbeek 2001: 131), but also transform the interrelation itself between the subject and an object, the experiencer and an environment. Technological mediation as such co-shapes subjectivity and objectivity:

> Formulation in terms of 'access to reality' offered by an artifact should be read as relating to the way in which an artifact makes possible the constitution of a world and a human in the very process of perception. Humans and the world they experience are the *products* of technological mediation, and not just poles

between which the mediation plays itself out. (Verbeek 2001: 131, original emphasis)

The mediation in its radical form can modify the relational structure of intentionality in such a way that "technologies can be the means by which 'consciousness itself' is *mediated*" (original emphasis, Ihde 2009: 23). In this way they can transform "the consciousness of_____ " by rising from the position of some object domain to occupy the "of" itself.[6]

As the above discussion makes clear, materiality and material mediations are central in Ihde's hermeneutic analyses of technoscience. In his recent works, Ihde defines his app-roach as a modified phenomenology incorporating aspects of pragmatism: "The enrichment of pragmatism includes its recognition that 'consciousness' is an abstraction, that experience in its deeper and broader sense entails embed-dedness in both the physical and material world and its cultural-social dimensions" (Ihde 2009: 19). If Ihde's early texts such as *Technics and Praxis* are rather closely patterned after a phenomenological analysis of intentionality, his later works re-think Husserl's idea of the lifeworld with its cumbersome conceptual apparatus by embracing the prag-matist emphasis on practice. Ihde finds important parallels between Husserl's and Dewey's version of experience and argues that the deconstruction of early modern epistemology made in pragmatism can enhance the rigorous pheno-menological analysis of the experiential. Ihde's argument is complex and defies a short summary. Suffice it to say that the pragmatist version of experience allows for the move away from the vocabulary of representation that Husserl had to struggle with and short-circuits the subject/object, body/mind, ego/consciousness conceptual pairs by replacing them with an organism/environment model. The human-technology rela-tions appear then "as an affair of the intercourse of living being with its physical and social environment" (Ihde 2009: 10). This

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6 See for instance Ihde's (2009) discussion of the postmodern technolo-gies used by science in chapter 3 of *Postphenomenology and Technoscience*.

shift in vocabulary is also visible in Ihde's project. For instance, the embodiment relations initially schematized as (I-technology) → world are subsequently formalized as: (human-technology) → environment. This pragmatist inflected approach allows, Ihde contends, for a more direct analysis of lifeworld technologies without raising the problems of subjectivism and essentialism. As such this post-phenomenological model is capable of addressing the human-technology relation in its experiential complexity and diversity.

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Ambrose Philips' *The Distrest Mother*: The myth of Andromache in English (Neo)classicism

MARÍA SEBASTIÀ-SÁEZ

Abstract

The focus of this paper is an analysis of the Ambrose Philips (1674-1749) neoclassical tragedy *The Distrest Mother* (1712). This play is an adaptation of Jean Racine's (1639-1699) *Andromaque* (1667), which is, in turn, an adaptation of the Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy *Andromache* (ca. 426 BC). Philips' tragedy is an example of an early English adaptation from Racine. Philip took Racine's play and moulded it to appeal to English taste. Therefore, this study shall analyse Philips' play focusing on his innovations, mainly in comparison with the Racine version, but also with the ancient Greek myth.

Key words

Ambrose Philips, Andromaque, neoclassical tragedy, Racine, moral plays

The Distrest Mother Ambrose'a Philipsa:
mit Andromachy w angielskim (neo)klasycyzmie

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł poświęcony jest analizie neoklasycystycznej tragedii Ambrose'a Philipsa (1674-1749) pt. *The Distrest Mother* (1712), będącej adaptacją *Andromachy* Jeana Racine'a, która jest z kolei adaptacją starożytnej tragedii Eurypidesa zatytułowanej *Andromacha* (ok. 426 BC). Tragedia autorstwa Philipsa stanowi przykład angielskiej adaptacji Racine'a, bowiem Philips wykorzystał sztukę Racine'a i dopasował ją do angielskich gustów. W niniejszym artykule analiza skupia się na nowatorstwie Philipsa, szczególnie w zestawieniu jego sztuki nie tylko z wersją Racine'a, lecz także ze starożytnym, greckim mitem.

Słowa kluczowe

Ambrose Philips, *Andromacha*, tragedia neoklasycystyczna, Racine, moralitet

The focus of this paper is an analysis of the Ambrose Philips' (1674-1749) neoclassical tragedy *The Distrest Mother* (1712). This play is an adaptation of Jean Racine's (1639-1699) *Andromaque* (1667), which was, in fact, an adaptation of the Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy *Andromache* (ca. 426 BCE) (Euripides 1913 and 2006).

Philips' tragedy is an example of an early English adaptation from Racine (Bredvold 1950). Philips is well-known for his *pastoral literature*; in this sense, he also writes *The Distrest Mother* as a *moral tragedy*. It is considered that Racine's *Andromaque* was his first great tragedy and, consequently, the first great French tragedy. For this reason, in the 18th century, Racine became the main model for tragedians around Europe and his *Andromaque*, in addition to his *Iphigénie,* became the paradigm of moral tragedies.

Philips took Racine's play and simplified the characterization, increased the emotionalism and sharpened the didactic emphasis, making it appeal more to English taste: more restrained and voluptuous than the French drama style, more moral and less aesthetic. Therefore, this study shall analyse Philips' play focusing on his innovations, mainly in comparison with Racine's version, but also with the ancient Greek myth. Consequently, this work shall begin by addressing some questions: Why *Andromache*? What is the reason for this classical myth being revisited by an English author in the 18th century? What is the context for Ambrose Philips wanting to translate as great a French author as Racine?

There are limited studies on Euripides' *Andromache,* as well as his *Iphigenia in Aulis,* and neither have been popular tragedies, either in the 20th or the beginning of the 21st century, compared to, for instance, Euripides' *Medea* or Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex.* Thus, it could be said that traditionally classicist literary critics have neglected them. Nevertheless, with the success of Racine's *Andromache* in the 17th century, the *Andromache* and *Iphigenia* myths achieved substantial popularity in the dramatic arts in the 17th century in western Europe: theatre, opera, as well as other subgenres.

Racine's *Andromache* is considered to be the first great tragedy of the French author, and consequently, the first great tragedy of the French *Grand Siécle.*[1] Despite the Andromache myth having been unsung, it finds its *floruit* in the 17th century with the French dramatist's work. The reason for this is that the masterpiece fits perfectly with the social and cultural context of this period. Racine recoups ancient classicism and brings it into the modern era, thus becoming the principal model – even more so than Euripides – for 18th century authors.

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[1] It must be noted that Rotrou (1640) as well as Leclerc and Coras (1675) wrote different versions of *Iphigenia* (Mahaffy 1895: 147).

In his tragedy, the French tragedian shows the predominant moral code existing in the court of France, in this way fulfilling the wishes of the monarch Louis XIV of France. He also makes it a *didactic* work – with this aspect of the tragedy being accentuated even more by Ambrose Philips in his *The Distrest Mother* – in accordance with court directives. In order to accomplish this, Racine endows the character of his tragedy with great dignity, noble goals and magnanimous passions (Pujol 1982: ix-xiii).

Why the English dramatist created his early adaptations from Racine has been a controversial subject for experts since the beginning of the last century (Wheatley 1956 and Macintire 1911). Therefore, this paper shall attempt to show how the author, Ambrose Philips, became linked, in the England of the 18th century, with the French tragedy from the 17th century. Naturally, this must be attributed to the general European literary panorama, without which this question cannot be understood.

As previously mentioned, Philips is well known for his *pastoral poems.* Indeed, he wrote six *Pastorals* and recreated ancient Arcadian scenes, which were surely a pleasing lecture for his contemporary readers.[2] The *bucolic poetry tradition* has a heritage leading from the Alexandrine poet Theocritus, whose *rustic poems* were "highly valued by the Greeks and the Romans" (Johnson 1817: ix),[3] while the literary genre was successfully followed by Virgil with his *Eclogae/Bucolica* ('Eclogues'/'Bucolics'). Later, in the 14th century, there was a revival in *bucolic poetry* in Italy, where Petrarch composed his *modern pastorals* in Latin, titled *Aeglogues*.[4]

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[2] It is known that he maintained a literary argument with Pope concerning this poetical genre (Johnson 1817: xi).

[3] Note the difference between Theocritus' alexandrine lyric and Hesiodus' Εργα καὶ Ἡμέραι ('Works and Days').

[4] Petrarch, not being ignorant of Greek supposed that the word "Eclogue" was corrupted by the copiers and that the correct word might be "Aeglogues" ('talk of the goats'), this new name was adopted by subsequent writers (Johnson 1817: ix).

From this perspective, it could be said that Philips had a deep knowledge of the classical literary tradition. Furthermore, he had great knowledge of the ancient Greek language as well as, and especially, the Latin language. He translated the ancient Greek lyric poets Sappho[5] and Pindar.[6] As a dramatist, Ambrose Philips wrote three plays, all of them tragedies: *The Distrest Mother* (1712), *The Briton* (1722) and *Humphry Duke of Gloucester* (1723).

The Distrest Mother is the most well-known and also the most popular and successful of all of them. Concerning *The Briton*, it is not known how it was received when it was performed on stage, as previous literary studies have overlooked this problem.[7] Finally, the story of *Humphry Duke of Gloucester* is only remembered by its title (Johnson 1817: xii-xiv).[8] Thus, in keeping with the dominating literary tendencies of the Augustan period, the most celebrated of his tragedies, as well as his most famous poems, are neoclassical. Philips wrote in an Era, the 18th century,[9] which is often considered to be a bridge between the two worlds.

The transition from neoclassicism, a movement beginning in the 17th century and aiming to return to ancient principles, finished with Romanticism.[10] In the last decades of the 17th century, court writers gave way to professional writers or "hacks", who wrote purely for financial gain and consequently

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[5] In 1711 his translations from Sappho were published in *The Spectator* 233 (Clark 1806: 211 and Prins 1996: 57-60).

[6] In fact, translating Pindar, he found the art of reaching the obscurity in his poems (Johnson 1817: xiv).

[7] Though one of its scenes, between Vanoc, the British prince, and Valens, the Roman general, is regarded to be written with great dramatic skill, animated by spirit truly poetical (Johnson 1817: xii).

[8] His happiest undertaking was of a paper called *The Freethinker*. At that point, it must be remembered that politically he was a Whig (Johnson 1817: vi-xii).

[9] We do not know when or where he was born nor do we know about his childhood. Concerning his education, it is known that he studied at St. John's College, in Cambridge, where he wrote some English verses in the *Collection* of poems published by the University of Cambridge on the death of Queen Mary (Johnson 1817: vii).

[10] Of course, there was a step prior to this: *Proto-Romanticism.*

for the market.[11] They heralded a different kind of literary culture to the older aristocratic one based on patronage, the one to which Philips belonged (Widdowson 2004: 60). He ended a period, the 17th century, when imagination and *geniality* ruled culture and literature and started another, the 18th century, when *judgement* and *reason* became increasingly empowered. He was one of the last keepers of the final phase of *Renaissance humanism* who entered the Enlightenment.

The intellectual movement of the Enlightenment shocked the traditional European beliefs. France led the movement with Voltaire, Diderot and d'Alembert – and other contributors – with their *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciencies, des Arts et des Métiers* (35 vols; 1751-76). In Germany, this movement was represented by Gotthold Lessing.[12] In Britain, it was represented by the philosopher John Locke, the scientist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton, the Scottish atheist and sceptical philosopher David Hume, the historian Edward Gibbon, and later, by the philosophers Adam Smith, William Godwin and Thomas Paine, and the feminist activist Mary Wollstonecraft.

As France was a reference point for all Europe and since Racine provided a *modern* tragedian model, it is hardly surprising that Ambrose Philips chose to transform one of Racine's great tragedies and create his own version. Racine's *Andromache* became a paradigm of moral and didactic theatre.[13] Nevertheless, Philips had to adapt it to the Augustan taste, recovering the classical precepts: the English neoclassical *de-*

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[11] It is remarkable that Philips still wrote under the patronage system. One of his patrons was Dr. Bouytler, who started his career as a minister of a parish in Southwark and became first Bishop of Bristol, secretary to the Lord Chancellor (1726) and judge of the Prerogative Court (1733). Dr. Bouytler was Philips' patron until his death in 1748, Philips died only a year later, in 1749 (Johnson 1817: vii-xiii).

[12] In Germany after the Enlightenment, in the second half of the 18th century, a new literary movement appeared: *Sturm und Drang* ('Storm and Stress'). This movement, the predecessor of Romanticism, contravened the Neoclassical style (Brugger 2014).

[13] *Andromache* also became a paradigm of *politic tragedy* (Collognat-Barès 1993 and Menéndez Peláez 2007).

corum, moderation and elegantia[14] versus the precious French exuberance.[15]

Like Racine, Philips dedicated his tragedy to a court lady. In the case of Racine, it was Henriette-Anne Stuart, *Votre Altesse Royale*, "Henriette of England", Duchess of Orleans (1644-1670), daughter of Charles I of England.[16] In the case of Ambrose Philips, it was the Duchess of Montague, daughter of the Duke of Marlborough. The reason for dedicating these kinds of plays to these ladies, and consequently obtaining their patronage, is well explained in Philips' dedication to the tragedy: "The principal action and main distress of the play is such a nature, as seems more immediately to claim the patronage of a lady: and when I consider the great and shining characters of antiquity are celebrated in it" (Philips 1817: iii). He also dedicated the tragedy to her father, linking him with the ancient world: "The name of Hector could not be more terrible among the Greeks, than that of the Duke of Marlborough has been to the French" (Philips 1817: iii).

The dramatists needed patronage, and the myth and character of Andromache – as well as, incidentally, the character of Iphigenia – fitted perfectly with the model of "proper" Christian women of the Court. However, the archetype of Andromache had to be changed from the classical one to the seventeenth-century one, and that was Racine's task.

It is important here to study Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy. The focus of this tragedy is the *love triangle* between Hermione – Neoptolemus – Andromache (Morenilla Talens 2013: 144-145). Andromache, a Trojan princess, is the widow of Hector, leader of the Trojans. After the Trojan War, Andromache is taken as a slave to become the concubine of the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus (Harrauer and Hunger 2008). Under these conditions, she has to compete for the love of her captor with

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[14] Regarding the subsequent *properties:* regularity and simplicity of form, order and proportion.

[15] This equilibrium allowed him to pass the censorship.

[16] It was she who suggested her mother present *Andromache* for the first time, in her apartment (Collognat-Barès 1992: 23).

the infertile spouse of Hector, Hermione, daughter of Menela-
us:

Χορός
οὐδέποτε δίδυμα λέκτρ᾽ ἐπαινέσω βροτῶν
οὐδ᾽ ἀμφιμάτορας κόρους,
ἔριν μελάθρων δυσμενεῖς τε λύπας.
μίαν μοι στεργέτω πόσις γάμοις
ἀκοινώνητον ἀμὸς εὐνάν.

(vv. 465-470)

['Chorus: Never shall I laud a double marriage among mortals nor
children with two mothers, quarrel for a house and hostile pain.
May my spouse be content with a marriage with no shared bed.'][17]

Euripides also emphasises the ravages of the war, how a Tro-
jan princess, King Eetion's daughter, had to suffer the humili-
ation of being part of the *spoils of war*, while she is waiting for
the terrible and irrevocable murder of her son Molossus by the
Greeks:

Χορός
ἔδειξενἡ Λάκαινα τοῦ στρατηλάτα
Μενέλα: διὰ γὰρ πυρὸς ἦλθ᾽ ἑτέρῳλέχει,
κτείν ει δὲ τὰν τάλαιναν Ἰλιάδα κόραν
παῖδά τε δύσφρονος ἔριδο ςὕπερ.

(vv. 487-490)

['Chorus: This was shown by the Lacanian woman, daughter of
the commander Menelaus: so, she came with her heart aflame
against the other wife and she put to death the wretched Trojan
girl and her son because of an odious strife.']

For his part, Racine shows Andromache mainly as the widow
of Hector and her role of the lover of Neoptolemus is no longer
relevant. Therefore, Racine, obviates the lover role of Andro-
mache and shows her as a vivid representation of *Mater dolo-*

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[17] All the translations from Ancient Greek into English by María Sebastià-
Sáez.

rosa et amantissima. She will always be the widow of Hector and appears in front of the audience broken by the depth of sorrow for his deceased son, Molossus.

In addition, Racine restructured the play and changed some characters in it. He divided the play into acts and different scenes,[18] omitting the Chorus as a classical character. He also took out supporting characters like the Slave, the Nursemaid, and the Messenger. In addition, other characters were eliminated: Menelaus, Peleus, Thetis and Andromache's son, who is a *silent character* in Euripides' play. Racine kept, of course, the main character, Andromache, and her antagonist, Hermione, as well as Orestes. On the other hand, he added Pylade and Pyrrhus. Finally, he added the new supporting characters Cléone – the confidant of Hermione, Cephisa – the confidant of Andromache, Phoenix – a senior official of Achilles and Pyrrhus' confidant, and the Attendants of Orestes.

For some authors (Cumberland 1817: xi), Ambrose Philips' *The Distrest Mother* is a translation, not a different version, although this work argues that this is not true: it is, in fact, a distinct version of Racine's play. Furthermore, it is worth remembering that the conception of "translation" in the 17th-18th centuries, was not the same as today: the translator was free to change some parts of the work and add or remove other parts (Sala 2005 and Ríos 1997). However, even if we take into account this meaning of "translation", Philips' *The Distrest Mother* is not a translation of Racine's *Andromache*.

However, Philips did follow Racine in one particular point: he remarked in his work that the main character of Andromache is the paradigm of a devoted and pious mother – which is shown in the title of the play:

Andromache: That were to wrong thee.
Oh, my Cephisa! this gay, borrow'd air,
This blaze of jewels, and this bridal dress,

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[18] The play is divided into five acts, while each act is divided into between five and eleven scenes.

Are but mock trappings to conceal my woe:
My heart still mourns; I still am Hector's widow.
<div align="right">(Act IV, p. 39)</div>

In terms of the structure, Philips's play respected Racine's division into five acts, but restructured the division of scenes for each act. Each of Racine's acts was divided into between five and eleven scenes, meanwhile Philips' play was divided into five acts, but there is only one scene per act. The purpose of this new division is to concentrate the dramatic action and have a more powerful emotional impact on the audience. This was common practice in the 18th century with new versions of classical tragedies. Some authors even condensed plays into one single lyric act (Metastasio 1754 and Lassala 1783), while it could be suggested that this "condensing" results in the monologues becoming even more relevant.

	PLAY STRUCTURE		
	Euripides	Racine	Philips
Prologue	1	——	——
Parodos[19]	1	——	——
Episode	4	——	——
Stasimon[20]	4	——	——
Exodos[21]	1	——	——
Acts	——	5	5
Scenes per Act	——	5-11	1

In relation to the characters, Philips does not change anything compared to the protagonists in Racine's play. All the main and supporting characters are the same:

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[19] Entrance Ode.
[20] Stationary Song.
[21] Exit Song.

	CHARACTERS		
	Euripides	Racine	Philips
Main characters	Andromache	Andromache	Andromache
	Hermione	Hermione	Hermione
	Orestes	Orestes	Orestes
	Menelaus	——	——
	Peleus	——	——
	Thetis	——	——
	——	Pylade	Pylades
	——	Pyrrhus	Pyrrhus
Supporting characters	Chorus	——	——
	The Slave	——	——
	The Nursemaid	——	——
	The Messenger	——	——
	Andromache's Son	——	——
	——	Cléone	Cléone
	——	Cephisa	Cephisa
	——	Phoenix	Phoenix
	——	Attendants on Orestes	Attendants on Pyrrus and Orestes

However, Andromache is performed even more like a great heroine, with Philips awarding her increased relevance in the play. Adapting the character of Andromache was the most enticing challenge for the English writer. She was equally admirable as mother, wife and widow, so Philips attempted to evoke the audience's admiration. She was *virtuous*, in distress and therefore sympathetic. She represented the *uncorrupted English woman*, an *English heroine*, suddenly becoming as vigorous as an "Old testament profetesse" (Parnell 1959: 16):

> Andromache: With open arms I'll meet him!—Oh, Cephisa!
> A springing joy, mixt with a soft concern,
> A pleasure which no language can express,
> An ecstasy that mothers only feel,

Plays round my heart, and brightens up my sorrow,
Like gleams of sunshine in a low'ring sky.
    Though plung'd in ills, and exercis'd in care,
Yet never let the noble mind despair:
When prest by dangers, and beset with foes,
The gods their timely succor interpose;
And when our virtue sinks, o'erwhelm'd with grief,
by unforessen expedients bring relief.
<div align="right">(Act V, p. 51)</div>

This Christianized image of Andromache differs from Racine's Andromache, who is more combative and powerful, the paradigm of a strong classical heroine. Racine's heroine uses more direct speech with words that evoke increased violence than Philips' Andromache. She is as strong and noble as a man and she is proud to show it:[22]

Andromache : […]
Je n'ai que trop, Madame, éprouve son courroux :
J'aurais plus de sujet de m'en plaindre que vous.
Pour dernière rigueur ton amitié cruelle,
Pyrrhus, à mon époux me rendait infidèle.
Je t'en allais punir. Mais le ciel m'est témoin
Que je ne poussais pas ma vengeance si loin,
Et sans verser ton sang ni causer tant d'alarmes,
Il ne t'en eût coûté peut-être que des larmes.
<div align="right">(Act V, Scene 3 [First version])</div>

['I have just experienced your wrath, Madam, more than enough: I would have more reasons to complain than you. Because of your final rigour, your cruel friendship, Pyrrhus, I was unfaithful to my husband. I was going to punish you, but as the heavens are my witness, I would not avenge so greatly and without shedding your

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[22] It should be remarked that this fragment is from the first version of Racine's *Andromache* (1668), with an ending. that was removed from the final version, which was set in 1697. In this final version, Andromache does not even appear in the last scene. It seems that Philips solves the problem of the ending with a speech by Andromache, who becomes an active protagonist.

blood or causing too many worries, that has only cost you your tears.']²³

On the other hand, Hermione, Andromache's antagonist, is the character that was best preserved in its classical essence. She represented a wronged woman with strong passions and a lack of self-control. With no father to guide her, and rejected by the man she loves, her lack of discipline could be excused, and yet in the end she was shown as the antithesis of virtue, as *the hysterical woman*, in a very pejorative sense:

> Hermione : C'est cet amour payé de trop d'ingratitude
> Qui me rend en ces lieux sa présence si rude.
> Quelle honte pour moi, quel triomphe pour lui
> De voir mon infortune égaler son ennui !
> Est-ce là, dirá-t-il, cette **fière** Hermione ?
> Elle me dédaignait ; un autre l'abandonne.
> L'ingrate, qui mettait son cœur à si haut prix,
> Apprend donc à son tour à souffrir des mépris ?
> Ah ! Dieux !
> (Act II, Scene I, vv. 393-401, emphasis added)

[This is love paid with too much ingratitude that returns me to this place with his rude presence. What a disgrace for me, what a triumph for him, to see my misfortune equal his worries! He would say: is this the proud Hermione? She has disdained me, others abandon her. The ingrate, who put his heart at a high price, learns so in her return to suffer disregard. Oh! Gods!']

> Hermione: That love, that constancy, so ill requited,
> Upbraids me to mysef! I blush to think
> How I have us'd him; and would shun his presence.
> What will be my confusion when he sees me
> Neglected and forsaken, like himself?
> Will he not say, is this the scornful maid,
> The **proud** Hermione, that tyranniz'd
> In Spata's court, and triuph'd in her charms?

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²³ All the translations from French into English by María Sebastià-Sáez.

> Her insolence at least is well repaid.—
> I cannot bear the thought!
> (Act II, p. 13, emphasis added)

In this scene it is shown that not only the main heroine, but also her antagonist is a strong and charismatic character. This feature is noticeable in both, Racine and Philips' versions. Note that in both cases, Hermione uses the same adjective to describe herself: 'proud' (*fière* in French).

Finally, and as previously noted, another important issue in Philips' version is the writing style. The style of verse was also modified, Philips leaves the *over-elaborated baroque* French style and recovers the classical *decorum*: regularity and simplicity of firm, order and proportion, elegance and polished wit, by encouraging emotional restraint.

While there is much left to be said on this subject, this work has sought to offer some insight into plays based on the Andromache myth and, as such, can draw some conclusions. There was a transfiguration of the Andromache myth, which was originally about war, jealousy, passionate love and power. Andromache turned into a loving mother, wife and widow, a moral archetype. It started with Racine, who Christianized the myth and transformed it into a didactic myth. Subsequent writers followed this trend and Ambrose Philips was not an exception. It is because of this transformation, and also, because of its classical background that in the 18th century, *Andromache, The Distrest Mother,* became a moral, even *political*, ethical and didactic tragedy.

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Lacking limit:
Desire and the absurd

XYMENA SYNAK

Abstract

The article attempts to analyze the existential idea of the innate conflict between me, a human being, and the world, set in the psychoanalytical context of the primary separation between me — a tragic emptiness — and the other who is introduced to me in the form of the m(O)ther's womb. (O) — from the French *l'autre* (the other) — literally marks the object-cause of my desire, *l'objet a* that escapes me *radically* (Latin *radix* meaning root), at the moment of me being born and separated from the mother. In this context, the radical separation made present in the primordial cut of the (O) is the very secret of both death and language.

Keywords

sense, desire, trauma, eroticism

Brakująca granica: pragnienie i absurd

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest analiza egzystencjalnej idei konfliktu pomiędzy człowiekiem i światem, a umieszczonej w psychoanalitycznym (Laca-

nowskim) kontekście pierwotnej separacji pomiędzy mną — tragiczną pustką — a innym, obecnym dla mnie w formie matczynego (*m(O)ther's*) łona. (O) — z francuskiego, *l'autre* (inny) — w sposób dosłowny zaznacza przedmiot-przyczynę mojego pragnienia — przedmiot małe *a* — który ucieka mi *radykalnie* (od łacińskiego *radix,* korzeń), w momencie moich narodzin i mojego oddzielenia od matki. W tym ujęciu, radykalna separacja uobecniona w pierwotnym cięciu (O) stanowi tajemnicę zarówno śmierci, jak i języka.

Słowa kluczowe

dotyk/sens, pragnienie, trauma, erotyzm

> *beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror*
> *which we are barely able to endure, and it amazes us so,*
> *because it serenely disdains to destroy us.*
> *Every angel is terrible.*
>
> R. M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

If we accept the fundamental existential idea that the absurd is, first of all, a dissonance within the coexistence of the human subject and the world, we have to make a reservation that it is a dissonance in the sense of life radically rooted in death, both (life and death) escaping the human subject's selfhood. While life and death intertwine, or rather hollow each other out, they turn the being into a space of radical disjunction, which results in the paradox of what may be called a "radical separation". It is a separation from the object-cause of my desire, the very separation becoming the strength of my desire; a resistance against the victory of the *signifiant*, the victory being a failure within the "absurdist logic" of desire.

Within this absurdist logic, the emptiness of sense, or of the symbolic, presents itself through the emptiness of the primordial cut within the m(O)ther's womb; of the incision that *gives birth* to the absurdity of existence. At this point one can risk the statement that the dissonance of the relation between me

and the world to a great extent overlaps with the Lacanian no-
tion of the real "in the form of" the emptiness of an imaginary
object, the object itself being the object-cause of desire, yet
escaping me *radically* (at the illusive core of my existence).
What remains is emptiness described as a Thing (that terri-
fies), which means – following Lacan – that the emptiness
(void) represented in the representation (the primordial cut of
the maternal womb described by Lacan as *l'objet a* or object-
cause of desire) is in itself nothing. What is more, this – let us
say – *radical* representation remains impossible without some
tremble, or tension, at the very limit of its being born, namely,
on the m(O)ther's skin.

Revealed at the moment of my birth, the Thing that terrifies
belongs to beauty as "the beginning of terror" as well as to
what Breton names "veiled eroticism" (*Manifesto of Surrealism*)
or explosiveness of terror. Although veiled, eroticism reveals
itself at the very limit where death and life converge. In this
context, we can say that Camus' absurd is the terror of truth;
truth devoid of meaning but carrying an intimate sense, as it
touches me and permeates my interiority, radically and mate-
rially. In a psychoanalytical vein, absurdist truth hinges on the
Lacanian notion of truth that proceeds only from what has no
meaning, from a non-sense, or from what Žizek calls "the sig-
nifier of pure difference" (2016: 43). Would it be the truth of
the maternal cut, or the split within the womb of the m(O)ther?
The place of the Lacanian primordial object-cause of desire –
l'objet petit a – materializes the non-being of desire, and, at the
same time, names the nothing, the very lack of meaning, or, in
other words, the metonymic space of desire itself: passing
through the incision of the womb and the split within the
symbolic of the m(O)ther, the split functioning as
a rupture within the symbolic order, deprived of meaning. This
significant void of meaning marks here the sense [from *tenir* to
touch]: the lack falling off from the symbolic.

Being split, the maternal womb is set in tension: stained
with the deciduous object-cause of desire, the primordial space
of sense becomes the space of a traumatic event of me being

born into the void. As *l'objet petit a* inscribes itself on this cutting line crossing the womb of the m(O)ther, it belongs to the unnameable truth of desire, which – absurdist in being death-driven and in its relation to the lack – is the root of terror. "The *object* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself, has separated itself as an organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but as far as it is lacking. It must, therefore, be an object that is, firstly, separable, and, secondly, that has some relation to the lack" (Lacan 1998: 103).

Related to the lack and identified with "libidinal negativities (*l'objet petit a*, *jouissance*, and sexual difference, […]), material meaninglessness both linguistic and non-linguistic, contingent traumatic events, unbearable bodily intensities, anxiety, and death" (Johnston), the emptiness of desire turns into the absurd of the unconscious; an absurd which is Camus' absurd *à rebours* – an absurd of the limit, or, of the split within the m(O)ther's womb. The absurd *à rebours* taking place at the moment of the primordial cut within the maternal womb, whether referring to thwarting the symbolic from within by the emptiness of the real or to the perceived lack within ungraspable otherness, or to the otherness as defining the ungraspable real/void, seems to be marked by a failure of representation, where the dissonance between me and the world can only be seen through the rhetoric of discontinuity that "subverts, or at the very least, contradicts the logical *continuity* of the grammatical model" (Felman 2003: 123).

Torn, on the one hand, by a desire for grammar, and, on the other, by a desire for rhetoric, psychoanalytical discourse struggles with its double, contradictory desire. In this perspective, the cut of the m(O)ther's womb instantaneously becomes discontinuous and figurative: as a figure of the object-cause of desire (*l'objet petit a*) and as a representation of the object lost or, rather, never possessed, the cut *reveals* the unpenetrable real. In existentialist terms, the cut/gap represents the unpresentable dissonance/discontinuity be-tween the human subject and the world; a dissonance thwarted from within

by the logic of continuity where the desire to speak takes over and substitutes the place of the lack.

If everything that counts takes place within a rupture, to live means to live against the impossible, which in this case undergoes subversion and becomes the attempt to live the very impossible, on the brink of exhaustion. To think within the rupture, at the same instance, is to subvert the very rhetoric of the discontinuous so that it presents itself to the consciousness. Thus, living and thinking are, paradoxically, found *meaningless*, in the real, as something limiting and not affected by the way I think about it, with the real consisting in a hole as a lacking or disrupting element inherent in any representation. This results in a lack whose truth is a lacking meaning; truth that terrifies and manifests itself inscribed on the body of the m(O)ther: on the body both of the symbolic and of the primordial space of desire. In a continual displacement, metonymy/desire defines *l'objet petit a: an object-cause of desire,* an object from which the subject separates in order to constitute itself – as well as revealing the impossibility of truth; truth as the impossible – as the real: "Stumbling, faltering, splitting. In a spoken or written sentence something slips [...] It's there that something else is asking to be realized — something which appears as intentional, of course, but partaking of *a strange temporality*" (Lacan, 1998: 128). This absence of the presence of meaning is the very sense of the rhetorical model of the most intimate discontinuity; of the womb's cut as its symbolic and material (the real) manifestation, where *to manifest* means (sic!) *to expose itself to the view without presenting itself.* What exposes itself is the nothing of desire, i.e. the limit, or the absurdist shattered passage between me and the world. As the most intimate of cuts, the primary incision is a condition of possibility for any sense to appear, as well as for the absurdist sense of the trauma of birth to enter any signification, devoid, however, of the non-absurdist (grammatical) logic of continuity.

The trauma of birth entering signification opens up the possibility of "the conflict between desire and representation": "the

essential drama of man having come to objective knowledge"
(Alquié 1965: 159). The very conflict can only be represented
à rebours, only through partial, oblique naked-ness, devoid of
the immediacy of touch, whereas "[t]he body conditions every-
thing that the imaginary register acco-mmodates by way of the
signified, meaning and signification, and the image of the
world itself. It is within the imaginary body that the words of
a language bring in representations, which constitute an illu-
sory world for us on the model of the body's unity" (Alain Miller
2014).

The illusion of unity creates a discourse of absence and of
separation; a discourse in which the impossible loss defines
the absurd of the erotic relation, or the erotic veiled experience
of nakedness – of the absurdist mis-encounter between the
body and the world. Defined by means of violence and pleas-
ure, eroticism conceals the intense, innermost fear of touching
the moment of abhorred nakedness; a nakedness through
which the division between interiority and exteriority is drawn.
Moreover, eroticism, as the pleasure and violence of a relation,
is the very act of passage, of transformation, transitivity, and
modalization. As a failure or a split, the subject of the relation
becomes an acting force, doomed to missing the encounter
with itself as well as with the outside. Although desire extends
the gap within the subject, this suspension – the tension of the
line of the primordial cut – constitutes the moment of the sub-
ject encountering its *own* lack, without which there cannot be
any touch. Never overcome, the tension undergoes a weaken-
ing and an illusive disappearance, inseparable from an open-
ing of the relation within the m(O)ther's body, where my pleas-
ure relates me in myself to a subject that "I" am not, which is
prior to and beyond me, to my desire and my pulsion, the
rhythm of my breath. The rhythm is difference, the impossible
line of appearance thanks to which desire as the relation with-
in its-self is transformed into a painful pleasure of disappear-
ance as becoming:

> [...] this pleasure is always a new version of the relation of the thing to its own appearance and disappearance. In effect, whether this "thing" consists in the representation of an object or a body from the perceived world, or whether it remains in a form without reference, what matters in it is the movement that detaches it from the formless in whose ground nothing is distinguished [...] The place that is estranged from all forms — a place, therefore, that is itself outside all place, a place without localization or consistence — is indicated in a special manner by two representations that act as representations of the unrepresentable — *that of death, and that of sex* [my emphasis]. These are not allegorical representations of the abstractions "death" and "sex" but representations of a dead person — a cadaver — and of organs of sexual reproduction. It is not by chance that these two kinds of representation are found posited at the beginning and end of the history of mimesis — Aristotle at the beginning, Freud at the end. (Nancy 2013b: 73-74)

Are not, however, first of all, death and Eros two moments (moments and not events, as they happen unnoticeably, within a blink of an eye) of the same, namely, of the impossible encounter with the trauma of birth? Are they not the very moment of convulsion where Bretonian convulsive beauty is born, veiled and contorted? In a continual, final (dis)(e)rup-tion? Disrupted at the very moment of drawing the line of the primordial cut that gives birth to the sense and the lost object-cause of desire – in the form of the abject (wound, blood, leftovers of flesh, spasmic cry) – the representations of death and sex are two sides of the veil. They both are present "in a disappearance of forms" (Nancy 2013b: 74), they make the incision within the m(O)ther's body possible: the formative cut "tames the formless" (Nancy 2013b: 75), thus giving birth to the world (*l'origine du monde*) and touching its own limit (Nancy 2013b: 75). The "fever of drawing" (Nancy 2013b: 78) pushing form to the limit turns into desire in the form of violence and pleasure, in a prayer exhaled through the lips of the m(O)ther's body; through the oracle of Eros and death.

> To draw a line — continues Nancy —is not to make a mark — as we know, it is "to follow one's desire," and in order to do this, to feel desire announcing itself, taking shape, complicating itself, dividing itself, and so on. [...] pleasure (which desires itself) encounters the impossibility of fulfillment (in other words, of pleasing itself) without itself being affected by excess or lack". (Nancy 2013b: 84-85)

The erosion of fulfillment – the subject's beginning with the primordial cut announcing death – inevitably leads to erasing the erotic veil: erasing as the unveiling of nakedness on the verge of death, or, rather, as the limit of touch [sense] being born. Yet, the cut does not *mean* death but announces it in the sense of self-distancing, in its "formless or the beyond-form of the origin-end" (Nancy 2013b: 78). Drawing the line, or following the desire of the self, of the very differentiation and not identity, brings it close to the Lacanian misencounter within the symbolic, within the m(O)ther's womb, and within the real trauma of birth itself:

> [...] birth itself? Is it itself? Can it merely be, can it be something like "itself"? (Nothing more than a sister to death.)
>   How then could "something" be the very thing that precedes and prepares the presence of something in general? It would have to be something that, as a result, can have no presence itself. Or could birth itself be something not born, the only thing that is not born but that is simply there, without remainder, without becoming, nothing more than that? It would be being itself, nothing but birth as it is, un-born in some way and so never born and never to be born. But this being cannot be identified with birth in any way. Birth is the figure that is opposite of being, and thus neither non-being nor becoming. Becoming is continuous passage and alteration. But birth is the coming that has not yet become. It precedes this passage and only opens the way for it. It is not the origin; it is not engenderment. (Nancy 2013b: 30)

Dehiscence of the line of the primordial cut, of the line of the letter of abjection – *petit a* – extends itself in the very act of exposing its mark, representation, its erotic and abhorred

form: of the sexual organs as well as of the dead body. The opening is seizure; it is nothing, or the *no* of the thing, as it demonstrates itself in the distancing from its own self and passing through the void of reference. *That* nothing enters form (separation, division, opening) is — as Nancy defines it — "reality of displacement by which *that displaces itself* and *that distinguishes itself*" (Nancy 2013b: 95; original emphasis). The line (of desire) is desire itself, paradoxically, unveiling the pure nakedness of form at the moment it (mis)encounters the real: the truth of the primordial cry.

What is left is the image of the real: the skin, bare and exposed, the place where *the truth of the cry* conceals itself; "[t]he secret is on the skin (the secret and the sacred)" (Nancy 2014: 3), the skin being the space of intrauterine life, "soft, immovable, warm, symmetrical, double and viscous" ((Nancy 2014: 3), or rather the very veil of the primordial exposition of *erotique-voilée* (Breton)*.* The veil of primordial exposition, the image of the real unveils the desire to take part in my own death, in the encounter with the primordial subject of the demand: "the Mother as Other [*Autre*]" (Lacan 1982: 12). However, satisfying no lack, but functioning in its excessive relation to the subject being born out of this relation, the object-cause of desire – *l'objet petit a* – "takes the place […] of what the subject is — symbolically — deprived of" (Lacan 1982: 15). Symbolic deprivation is always a deprivation *à rebours,* belated, and present in the shape of the m(O)ther's womb and the primordial cry. As the object *a* takes place of what remains veiled, it is eroticism itself that "initially" partakes of death, where the object *a* becomes the very object of abjection: the nothing of desire, the corpse, life's leftovers; the emptiness / hole through which the m(O)ther's body must pass in order to constitute itself as an object, naked and empty. Resulting from loss, the hole in the real initiates the movement of sense, or – to use Lacan's words — "sets the signifier in motion" (Lacan 1982: 38). Yet, sense here can only mean setting the signifier in motion if it is unveiled at the limit of touch, as touch exposes its limit. Hence, the line of the limit — the letter *a* being inscribed as a mater-

nal cut — is indissociable from the figure of death being born, namely of the secrecy of the letter, "the death's secret [which] is also the secret of language" (Das 2010: 17). In other words, death's intimacy which is also the intimacy of language, where "*discourse cannot escape discourse*" (Derrida in Abraham and Torok 1986: xxxii), coexists with the exposure of pure nakedness: the naked body unveils its edges, as if tracing the line of mournful desire; desire that can never be satiated. Mournful desire — a desire of the mournful, naked body — verges on the secret of language; a secret that comes to existence at the moment of the disclosure of desire: at the origin of the world, when the m(O)ther's thighs part and unveil death's secret: "a *demand*: call, incitation, excitation to go beyond utility and satisfaction in order to go toward the dismantling of self, abandon, to pass to the limit — a passage that does not clear a way but that brushes past, touching as it goes and in touching lets itself be touched by the outside (nothing-god)" (Nancy 2013a: 95).

Missed in the erotic experience, the nakedness of the encounter with the trauma of birth is eroticism-veiled: pure nakedness slits the border between the body and the world being born into indistinguishable moments of touch, i.e. the touching and being touched. Death's secret turns into death's shroud, which becomes the very name of language, the secret of which has been lost to the speaking lips. Eroticism-veiled unveils death's secret as the secret of language, but also as the secret of the lacking limit of desire: a lack of place where desire can be satisfied. *Erotique-voilée* thus provokes the very notion of relation that designates a thing:

> If relation is pursued from the angle of a "something," we can say that there is no relation *of* the sexual, or that the sexual does not relate anything. Maybe this is what Lacan wants to indicate when he says that a relation writes itself and that the sexual does not write itself, by which we should understand that writing is a matter of consigning rather than signifying, a matter of a graph or algorithm rather than literature. Maybe the question is: What is there of the sexual relation in all of literature, poetry in particular

(but perhaps also — who knows?— in all of philosophy)? (Nancy 2013a: 5)

There is no sexual relation makes *there is* the very space of relation that does not take (its) place; instead, *that* there is a relation makes the limit within the erotic misencounter with the trauma of birth possible. Blanchot's "essential solitude" (1989: 19-34) — *absolute solitude: that* there is *absolute solitude* establishes any possible relation, the erotic, convulsive relation turning out to be the primordial deferral of presence and all thought. *That* there is no relation is the differentiation that "shatters the one-in-itself" (Nancy 2013a: 10). This primordial separation — this cut, incision, the originating of the world — establishes the very trauma of separation that *takes its place* on the m(O)ther's body, and takes on the form of a deciduous object of desire: the corpse, blood, excretions of the body, and, finally, of the fetus itself. Yet, *taking its place* is nothing more than missing the place, or cutting across it. This is the secret of death and of language; absolute intimacy spacing out in the impossible form of the erotic mis-encounter.

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Exploring silence – exploring ourselves:
Sara Maitland's *A Book of Silence*

ANETA WADOWSKA

Abstract

What is silence? It is more difficult that it might seem to give an exhaustive definition of it in one sentence. Sara Maitland's *A Book of Silence* is an abundant source of reflection on various kinds of silence. It emerges from the author's own experiences and from those of other writers on whom she draws. Maitland's book, along with some of her literary and scientific sources which she refers to, constitutes the basis for the considerations contained in this article, the aim of which is to draw the reader's attention to the fact that silence is a relative phenomenon and that physical silence, understood as a lack of or muting of audible sounds, can be perceived by an individual either positively or negatively, depending on the circumstances in which the silence is experienced. Additionally, the way in which it is perceived can seriously affect a person's health and well-being and, in extreme cases, it may even decide someone's life.

Keywords

Maitland, silence, subjectivity of perception, solitary confinement

Odkrywanie ciszy – odkrywanie siebie:
A Book of Silence Sary Maitland

Abstrakt

Czym jest cisza? Zawarcie wyczerpującej definicji zjawiska, jakim jest cisza w jednym zdaniu jest zapewne trudniejsze, niż nam się wydaje. *A Book of Silence* Sary Maitland to niezwykle obfite źródło wiedzy na temat różnych rodzajów ciszy, którą autorka czerpie z własnych doświadczeń oraz z doświadczeń innych pisarek i pisarzy, których prace przywołuje. Książka Maitland oraz utwory literackie i prace naukowe, do których autorka się odnosi, stanowią podstawę rozważań zawartych w niniejszym artykule, którego celem jest zwrócenie uwagi czytelników na fakt, iż cisza jest pojęciem względnym oraz że cisza, rozumiana jako brak lub wyciszenie słyszalnych dla ludzkiego ucha dźwięków, może być postrzegana przez jednostkę jako coś bardzo pozytywnego lub negatywnego, w zależności od okoliczności, w jakich jednostka się a nią styka. Co więcej, sposób, w jaki jest ona postrzegana może mieć poważny wpływ na zdrowie i dobre samopoczucie jednostki oraz, w ekstremalnych przypadkach, może nawet decydować o czyimś życiu.

Słowa kluczowe

Maitland, cisza, subiektywność postrzegania, przymusowe odosobnienie

Sara Maitland is a well-known fiction writer, scholar, and feminist. *A Book of Silence*, published in 2008, is an account of her many personal experiences involving silence which resulted in emotional and spiritual enrichment and helped her to overcome obstacles associated with writing which, as she states, is immensely important to her, as it is "integral to [her] sense of well-being, even of identity […]" (Maitland 2008, 189). In the course of writing her book, Maitland also became aware that silence, and everything connected with it, can be perceived either positively or negatively, depending on the situation in which silence is experienced. *A Book of Silence* is a val-

uable source of knowledge about different kinds of silence, as well as about works by other authors who have silence at the heart of their respective works. Additionally *A Book of Silence* is an afterword of some of her earlier publications, such as "A Big Enough God: Artful Theology" (1994) which already contain reflections on silence and the role which it plays in the development of an individual. From the issues mentioned above, the main focus of the analysis in this article will be the subjectivity of the perception of silence and its possible implications. The first and the second part of this paper shall concentrate on analysing Maitland's positive personal encounters with silence. The third part will be devoted to some of her negative experiences and the more extensive research on scientific and literary sources focusing on silence which she mentions. Special attention here will be drawn to cases in which people involuntarily experience silence, as this always leads to significant changes in the way that they perceive both themselves and the outside world. The final part will draw attention to the cultural conditioning which also influences the way silent surroundings are perceived in general.

1.   Noisy youth and first positive encounters with silence

Maitland starts telling her story from the end, when she receives the completion certificate for her newly-built house near the village of New Luce in Galloway, in southwestern Scotland. Later, she goes back in time to tell the story of her life and reflects on the role that silence plays in it. As for her childhood, adolescence and the first years of her adulthood, the title of the first chapter ("Growing up in a Noisy World") speaks for itself. Born in 1950 in London, Maitland grew up in "an enormous early Victorian mansion house" (4) in south-western Scotland together with her five siblings. She recalls those first years as "jolly noisy" and describes her time at boarding school as depressing, with "no silence or privacy being allowed except as a punishment" (6). Skillfully putting everything into a historical context, later she writes about the three years she

spent at Oxford University (1968-71) when the noise that sur-
rounded her became more attractive, as it was the time when
she observed the development of such things as the Flower
Power Movement or "the brand-new Women's Liberation
Movement" (10) which she immediately joined.

At first it may be hard for readers to believe that throughout
the first twenty three years of her life Maitland experienced no
positive effects of physical silence,[1] for instance during a fami-
ly excursion in nature, or on a lone walk in the forest. How-
ever, later a reader may realise that the way he or she per-
ceives the impact of the external lack or muting of sounds on
his or her own mind may vary from the way that Maitland may
have responded to it at that time in her life. Indeed, when she
mentions her trip to the Grand Canyon in Arizona just after
finishing high school, she admits that it was too early for her
to be able to enjoy the profound silence of such a place (8). As
she herself later notices (187), "it is possible to experience ex-
ternal silence without any sense of interior silence […]". Hence
it was probably an inability to calm down mentally which pre-
vented her from enjoying the physical silence offered by such
experiences as the previously mentioned.

In fact, Maitland claims that her first positive encounter
with silence occurred in 1973, a year after she married an An-
glican vicar from the United States. It was during her daugh-
ter's night feeds that she had her "first experience of positive
nourishing silence" (11). The second place where she started to
experience the joy of a silent, peaceful life was a cottage in
Warkton near Northampton. Maitland bought the cottage in
1980, after her marriage disintegrated and she converted to
Catholicism. From then on, solitude and silence are intricately
connected for her, and examining different forms of silence
becomes an important part of her life. While describing the
advantages of living in Warkton, at the beginning Maitland
focuses on silence mainly as an exterior phenomenon, and
here we can see that the way she perceives it is indeed dictated

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[1] "Physical silence" as the absence or muting of sounds audible to the
human ear.

by her personal preferences, as she describes the sounds made by water and wind as far more "silent" than for example the sound of speech. However, shortly afterwards, she also starts to reflect on what can be described as inner silence, equanimity: "...as time passes I increasingly realise there is an interior dimension to silence, a sort of stillness of heart and mind which is not a void, but a reach space" (26).

2. Eight positive sensations

In order to explore this "reach space" which Maitland slowly started to discover within herself, in 2000, when she turned fifty, she decided to move to County Durham, to an "ex-winch engineer's cottage" (33) in the moorlands, above Weardale. She did this because life in the village had become too noisy for her, in the sense that everybody knew her and she felt that she had to be constantly involved in what was happening there. Moreover, Maitland gives four reasons for why she decided to move to Weardale: "First, I wanted to understand silence better. [...] I wanted to explore my own spirituality and deepen my growing sense of the reality of God, [...] I wanted more silence because I enjoyed the small amount I was getting. [...] I wanted to dig deeper into my writing. I had [...] reached a point where I no longer had the simple confidence in narrative and storytelling, which had sustained a steady flow of work for over twenty years" (32-33).

To achieve those goals even more immediately she decided to depart from her newly acquired house and spent forty days in a place which was yet more distant: the Isle of Skye in Scotland. To intensify this experience she decided to spend this time without saying a single word. The decision to spend this time alone and not in some religious community is well justified:

[...] at this point I wanted to separate prayer from silence. My imagination is so "Christianised" that I felt those sorts of ideas could have overridden other feelings in a monastic context with holy pic-

tures [...] on every wall. I did not want to go on a "retreat" [...] I wanted to explore my conviction that silence was something positive, not just an abstraction or absence." (37-38)

This is one of the places in Maitland's book in which she points out that Christianity is one of the religious traditions in which silence is largely perceived as a lack of something, as an "abstraction".[2] In order to enrich her religious practice by incorporating silence into it, she paradoxically distances herself from the religious community, focusing on getting to know herself and her own needs better.

After the stay on Skye, Maitland describes eight positive experiences (or "sensations") which are the outcome of this period. The first she calls the "intensification of physical sensation" (48) when all the senses sharpen as a result of the absence of sounds; the second is "disinhibition" (52), i.e. breaking with all possible social norms from the point of view of behaviour (she mentions for example walking naked around the house all day long, picking her nose while eating, etc.); the third, "hearing voices" (57), meaning experiencing auditory hallucinations; the fourth, the experience of an utter joy, a sense of "givenness" (62).[3] Fifth comes the "sensation of boundary confusion", which is clarified by the author in the following way: "If an individual is one with and a part of *everything*, then it is not going to be clear where the self begins and ends" (Maitland 2008: 66); sixth, "the exhilarating sense of peril that is associated with silence", an emotional response to silence that, as she notes, can be mistaken for insanity by some people (72); seventh, the sensation of "ineffability" of the

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[2] Obviously, within Christian tradition there are groups whose members incorporate silence in their daily religious practice, but these are mainly monks and nuns or followers of certain Christian movements, such as Quakers, whom Maitland mentions later in her account. What she has in mind is rather a certain general attitude of lay people towards silence which derives *inter alia* from the way it is presented in the Scriptures (the myth of creation). This shall be discussed further in the next section of the paper.

[3] The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1972: 1149) defines "givenness" as "the fact of being given or posited"; what Maitland has in mind here is experiencing a moment as a pure gift which is exceptional and cannot be repeated.

experience of silence (74); and finally, the experience of "the state of bliss – a fierce joy, far beyond 'happiness' or 'pleasure'" (72). As Maitland points out, all eight experiences derived from staying in a quiet and secluded environment positively influenced her perception of the external world and allowed her to develop emotionally and spiritually.

It should be added that each time Maitland relates her own experiences, she refers to the similar experiences of other people – writers, mystics, philosophers, travellers etc. She also ponders legends, myths and fairy tales in which silence is often the main focus. She mentions a variety of written works as she looks for inspiration and also for explanations of the mental and physical states that she finds herself in through exposing herself to silence in diverse places. For instance, in this chapter ("Forty Days and Forty Nights"), she gives the reader examples from the stories of other people who also spent a certain period of time in seclusion. Among these is Henry David Thoreau, who after staying two years, two months, and two days in a cabin, which he built with his own hands deep in the forest near Walden Pond, described his experiences in the book *Walden,* first published in 1854. Another is Richard Byrd, a polar explorer from the US who decided to spend the winter alone in the Antarctic and later wrote a book entitled *Alone: the Classic Polar Adventure* (1938). Maitland and the two aforementioned authors perceived the working of an external silence positively, as they themselves decided to stay in seclusion and could come back from the retreat whenever they wanted to. But what happens if one is forced to stay in a silent environment involuntarily?

3. Silence – best friend or worst foe?

Apart from the experiences that she perceives as positive, Maitland also mentions aspects of being exposed to silence, which had an adverse influence on her and thanks to which she slowly started to understand its subjective aspect. For instance, when still on Skye, she describes a seriously frighten-

ing experience that she had while walking from Luib to Loch
Slapin:

> I left the car and walked up the path, and after a couple of hun-
> dred yards it turned round a knoll and I walked into *nowhere.* It
> was a tight, steep-sided glen that I could not see out of [...] sud-
> denly I was 'spooked' [...] Gradually I became convinced I was be-
> ing watched [...] There were two dwarf fairy cows, with huge eyes
> [...] I thought, these were ghost cattle [...] I felt that the silence
> was stripping me down, desiccating, denuding me [...] What it was
> for me [...] was panic [...] I was not 'frightened of' or 'scared by' ...
> this was something from much lower down and further in, some-
> thing really visceral. I fled, literally. (81-2)

In fact she admits that after leaving Skye she went looking for
those negative experiences too: "I wanted to understand [...]
the dark disintegration, the howling emptiness, the demons of
the desert hermits" (83). Ultimately, she got what she asked
for. In March 2001, while she was staying in County Durham,
Maitland experienced an involuntary period of silence. One day
the road to her house was cut off by a blizzard. Since the
phone lines were down too, she became gradually more and
more anxious about her own safety and the safety of her fami-
ly. It was the first time that she had really become physically
and mentally tired of the silence that surrounded her, because
her brain began playing tricks on her. She writes: "One after-
noon I needed to break out and I took a walk up the undrivea-
ble road [...] Then, about half a mile from the house,
I started to hear the most agonised wailing noises – the wail-
ing, it seemed to me then, of the damned. I was completely
terrified" (85). Later, she noticed that the sound was coming
from "Aeolian harps or organ pipes" which were responding to
the wind with these sounds and concludes: "[...] I was lucky
that I identified the source of the noise fairy quickly, because
otherwise it would have driven me insane" (85).

Afterwards, astounded by the fact that the silence of the
place she was confined within, normally a source of joy and
tranquillity, had made her feel desperate and finally filled her

with terror, she started to search through some scientific sources to find information about the destructive influence that the absence of sound can have on people. Her search led her to Dr Stuart Grassian's publication ("Psychiatric Effects of Solitary Confinement") in which he proves that the mental problems of his patients (which often even developed into psychotic madness) were caused by solitary confinement involving exposure to physical silence and the experience of partial sensory deprivation.

Trying to compare her eight positive sensations with Grassian's discussion of "The Specific Psychiatric Syndrome[s] Associated with Solitary Confinement" (Grassian 2006: 335), Maitland notices that virtually the same states of mind which she initially viewed as positive were perceived by Grassian's patients as destructive, because they were exposed to them involuntarily. For instance, what she called "intensification of physical sensation", Grassian calls "hyperresponsivity to external stimuli" (particularly noise) (335). Similarly, for a prisoner, Maitland's "sense of 'givenness'" might very likely become "intrusive obsessive thoughts" (336). In turn, what Maitland experienced as a "thrilling sense of risk or peril", Grassian diagnoses as "overt paranoia" (336) etc.

Interestingly, other researchers working with people who stayed in solitary confinement for long periods and experienced sensory deprivation confirm Grassian's findings.[4] Additionally, according to numerous studies, the occurrence of symptoms like those enumerated by the American psychiatrist results in both mental and physical deterioration. As Elizabeth Palermo (2015, n.p.) notes, "Studies have linked this form of isolation to more physical symptoms, including chronic headaches, heart palpitations, oversensitivity to light and noise stimuli, muscle pain, weight loss, digestive problems, dizziness, and loss of appetite". She also recalls a theory of a Mich-

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[4] See, e.g. Brownfield, Charles (1965). *Isolation: Clinical and Experimental Approaches*. New York: Random House; Cota, G., & Hodins, S. (1990). "Co-occurring mental disorders among criminal offenders". *Bulletin of the American Academy of Psychiatry and Law* 18 (March 1990): 271-281.

igan University neuroscientist, Huda Akil, who believes that "the [human] brain actually needs positive human interactions to stay healthy. Social interaction may activate growth factors in the brain, helping brain cells regrow [...]" (n.p). Therefore, lack of mental nourishment in the form of social interactions may ultimately be fatal for people. As an example Emily Coffey (2012, 18-19) describes the case of John Jay Powers who after his arrival at ADX (a federal super-maximum security prison in Fremont County, CO) was forced to stay in a small dark, silent cell without windows for 23 hours a day where he, "amputated his testicle and scrotum, bit off two fingers, tattooed his entire body, and repeatedly attempted suicide". Finally the sentence drove Powers insane. Coffey also adds that because of the severe and often irreversible damage which solitary confinement has on people "Juan Mendez, U.N. Special Rappoteur on Torture, has declared it torture" (18).

Jason Breslow (2014, n.p.) mentions the results of yet another study carried out by researchers at McGill University on a group of male graduate students who were supposed to stay in small chambers and could leave only to use the bathroom. As he writes,

> They wore goggles and earphones to limit their sense of sight and hearing, and gloves to limit their sense of touch. The plan was to observe students for six weeks, but not one lasted more than seven days. Nearly every student lost the ability "to think clearly about anything for any length of time," while several others began to suffer hallucinations. "One man could see nothing but dogs," wrote one of the study's collaborators, "another nothing but eyeglasses of various types, and so on (n.p.).

On the basis of this study it is possible to see that even people who volunteered to stay in confinement suffered from serious negative side effects of sensory deprivation. At the same time it seems that the lack of stimuli in the form of sounds or images played only an indirect role in causing the psychic and physical reactions, both positive and negative. The key idea was an ability or inability to cope with one's own thoughts (images,

voices) and with the feelings that intensified as a result of staying in silent surroundings. That is why the voluntary or involuntary nature of one's exposure to silence is so important, because if the exposure is not voluntary, then the individual has no control over what happens to him or her and has no other choice but to face his or her personal problems, weaknesses and traumas, the "demons" from which one normally tries to escape. Additionally, as in Maitland's case, the brains of such individuals will play tricks on them and there is no one else to whom they can turn to and who can verify if what they are experiencing is true or just their vivid imagination. Moreover, in the case of someone who is imprisoned as a consequence of a crime, the reaction to a silent environment may be even worse, as stifling the voice of conscience may become impossible.

Later in the book Maitland starts to trace the descriptions of the experience of involuntary silence in prose narratives – legends, myths, documentaries, novels – and gives examples of circumstances involving this kind of silence in order to further investigate what factors make experiencing silence pleasant, blissful, or terrifying. Among such circumstances is marooning, an individual being set on an isolated island, as for instance in the story of Alexander Selkirk who became the "prototype" for Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Although the main character, Robinson Crusoe, is fortunate enough to be shipwrecked on an island abundant in animals, fruits and fresh water, he also has to face the fact that he is there all alone. Nevertheless, he manages to overcome all his fears and the inner doubts that he experiences as a result of living in solitude. He does this mainly by reading the Bible, contemplating its words and submitting himself to God's providence,

> I was earnestly begging of God to give me repentance, when it happen'd providentially the very day that reading the Scripture, I came these words, *He is exalted a prince and a saviour, to give repentance, and to give remission*: I threw down the book, and

with my heart as well as my hands lifted up to Heaven, in a kind
of extasy of joy, I cry'd out aloud, *Jesus, thou son of* David*, Jesus,
thou exalted prince and saviour, give me repentance!* This was the
first time that I could say, in the true sense of the words, that
I pray'd in all my life; for now I pray'd with a sense of my condi-
tion, and with a true Scripture view of hope founded on the en-
couragement of the word of God; and from this time, I may say,
I began to have hope that God would hear me. (Defoe 2012, 93)

In the extreme situation that Crusoe finds himself, he starts to
treat the Bible as a guidepost, which sets the direction for the
path he decides to follow. It provides him with the spiritual
support, which he desperately needs and which at this mo-
ment cannot be offered to him by another person.

Another example is isolation due to an accident; here Mait-
land references the story of Joe Simpson, an English moun-
taineer who, after being abandoned by his partner, Simon
Yates, in a situation which threatened the lives of both climb-
ers and left Simpson with his thigh broken, survived four days
in a crevasse below the top of Siula Grande (6,356 metres).
Simpson miraculously managed to make his way out of the
crevasse and then, unable to walk, crawled down the most in-
hospitable terrain, and succeeded in reaching the base camp
just before his crew planned to leave it. His account of the
physical and mental suffering caused by pain and exposure to
physical silence can be found in the book *Touching the Void*
(1988).[5] His story, like that of the fictional Robinson Crusoe, is
one of the examples from which the reader can see that the
effects of external absence of audible sounds on the mind of
someone who experiences the absence involuntarily are not
always destructive. Indeed, the main thing which occurred as
a result of the prolonged silence and lack of food and drink,
the thing that allowed Simpson to survive this extreme situa-
tion was the "*voice*". As he himself describes it:

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[5] On YouTube it is possible to find a full-time documentary with the same
title, in which Simpson himself retells this story.

> It was as if there were two minds within me arguing the toss. The *voice* was clean and sharp and commanding. It was always right, and I listened to it when it spoke and acted on its decisions. The other mind rambled out a disconnected series of images, and memories, and hopes, which I attended to in a daydream state as I set about obeying the orders of the *voice*. (Simpson 2004, 141)

But for this inner "*voice*", Simpson surely would have lost the battle against the feeling of excessive loneliness, the partial sensory deprivation, the enormous physical pain, hunger and thirst, the hallucinations and a permanent half dream state and loss of mental control he was experiencing while desperately trying to descend to the camp, "A cold clinical side of me assessed everything, decided what to do and made me to do it. The rest was madness – a hazy blur of images so vivid and real that I lost myself in their spell" (145). (A similar phenomenon is described by Maitland as "'stress voices', a kind of self-splitting which occurs under extreme and difficult circumstances" (58)). Therefore, despite the fact that Simpson's case sets a kind of a precedent in relation to what was stated earlier on the basis of scientific findings, it should be noted that, as a mountaineer, Simpson was accustomed to stillness, to the dead silence characteristically found high in the mountains, and to staying in solitude in very hard conditions. He was, therefore, used to being alone with himself, with his own thoughts and worries. If this had not been the case, the prolonged silence and harsh conditions could have become one of the causes of his death. Surprisingly, even this traumatic experience did not stop Simpson from climbing. He subsequently published books with the telling titles *Storms of Silence* (1997) and *The Beckoning Silence* (2002) about his other expeditions.

4.   Cultural conditioning

In the fourth chapter, "Silence and the Gods"⁶, Maitland points out that in various traditions silence is perceived differently and that it is closely connected with the story of creation. As she points out, "Judaism, Christianity and Islam – are highly verbal narrative faiths ["In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God."* (*Bible, the New Testament* 1998: Gospel of John 1:1, 147); emphasis added] […] Naturally a culture that sees power in speaking is likely to develop a creation-by-fiat story. And such culture will obviously see silence as lack, silence as absence, not merely as negative, but as blank" (120). Additionally, mentioning in this context the scientific theory of the Big Bang, Maitland finally comes to the conclusion that the "fear of silence is deeply embedded in the Western psyche" (128). Then she collates the myth of creation presented by those three religious traditions with Maori, North, Egyptian, Aboriginal and Greek myths according to which silence is an integral part of creation: "In all these stories, instead of having an abrupt singularity, a sharp-edged instant marking the beginning, a sound breaking the silence, the whole process is much more gradual. Time and silence come together in a slow, even piecemeal, creative drama" (125). In these traditions silence is perceived positively, as a "creative, generative power" (126). On the basis of this chapter, the reader can see that the way one perceives silence, for instance associating it with fear, danger, and lack, or else with peacefulness, joy, and pleasure, is to a great extent conditioned by the religious and cultural traditions and social groups that one belongs to.

   In the fifth chapter, "Silent Places", the author turns to nature writing, as she becomes interested in the harmony which nature is endowed with and which indeed is associated with silence, not only by her but also by other authors she men-

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⁶ One should note that "Gods" is spelled with a capital letter, as this is one of the hints that, while herself a devout Catholic, Maitland respects other religious traditions.

tions. Still, it is not only harmony that attracts her. Fear, too, is associated with the dark forest: "I knew there were wolves in the forest; there were witches in the forest; there were demons. I was haunted by the silence of the forest, which is the silence of the fairy stories" (175). She decided to go to Glen Affric in the Great Caledonian Forest in order to overcome this fear, as she knew it was to a great extent imagined, and most importantly, also because she knew that it was something which limited her as a writer:

> […] these stories had been my territory as a writer for a long time […] Thinking now about silence I had to accept that, along with feminist reinterpretation and my desire for fiction that explores universal human themes, I had been writing my own fears, my own darkness and my own profound sense that violence and beauty, risk and joy, are inextricably tangled together; and the roots lie in the forest". (175)

However, after the three days which she spent there, she admitted that in the end it "did not cure [her] of being scared of it" (284), but it made her sure that the silence of the wild, dark wood and stories associated with it were among the main reasons why some of us fear silence and see it as something negative.

5. Conclusions

All in all, as one reads Maitland's book and the other literary and scientific sources mentioned in this article, one realises that the spectrum of ideas that can be associated with silence is exceptionally vast, as well as that the notion of silence is relative and the way it is perceived by each individual is conditioned by various factors. For me, from the perspective of experiencing the dark side of silence as an effect of involuntary confinement and sensory deprivation (on which Maitland sheds much light), the most important conclusion the readers can draw is that depending on how well we are acquainted

with ourselves, how well we realise what our needs and feelings are, and how honest we are both with ourselves and with others, the exposure to such a simple and obvious thing as the absence of audible sounds can become either a pleasant experience or a nightmare. Furthermore, bearing in mind that experiencing a period of involuntary silence is something that can happen to anyone at any time, the reader may be encouraged to follow Maitland in her search for silence, or rather in her search for herself. As *A Book of Silence* implies, if we do this, if we show courage and make the necessary effort to know our own selves, to become aware of the things that disturb our peace of mind (and therefore body), then we will be able to trust more, as Hamlet would have it, to what appears "in [our] mind's eye" (*H* 1.2, 166) during extreme or difficult situations that any one of us might come across. Then, silence will most probably become our best friend, and not our worst enemy.

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