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Università degli Studi di Udine

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**POETICHE / POETICS**

Apirana Taylor. Poems  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 8-10

Lance Henson. Poems  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 11-14

Raphael D'Abdon. Poems  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 15-18

**ARTICOLI / ARTICLES**

Bill Ashcroft. A Climate of Hope  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 19-34

Paul Kane. The Limits of Environmental Writing: Thirlmere Lake, Hetch Hetchy Valley & Storm King Mountain  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 35-52

John Thieme. From the Personal Heresy to Ecocriticism: Moving Canons, Creating Reading Communities  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 53-62

Lyn McCredden. The Fiction of Tim Winton: Relational Ecology in an Unsettled Land  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 63-71

Antonella Riem. Places of the Imagination: Ecological Concerns in David Malouf's "Jacko's Reach"  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 72-80

Biancamaria Rizzardi. "A garden of green lace": P. K. Page's Ecolect  
*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 81-89

Rossella Ciocca. 'Hearts of Darkness' in Shining India. Maps of Ecological Un-Sustainability in the North-East

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 90-98

Nicoletta Vasta, Piergiorgio Trevisan. Who Cares About Children's Rights? Critical Multimodal Awareness and its Implications for the Design, Analysis and Use of Children's Online Educational Materials

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 99-125

Maria Bortoluzzi. Multimodal Awareness in Ecology Discourse for Children Education

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 126-139

Simona Corso. Robinson's Anthro-poiesis

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 140-150

Nicoletta Brazzelli. Postcolonial Transformations: the Forest in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 151-161

Carmen Concilio. Floating / Travelling Gardens of (Post)colonial Time

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 162-172

Maria Grazia Dongu. Natura e morte al tempo della guerra secondo Lawrence

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 173-181

Lucia Folena. *Contrées sans culture*: 'Nature' Across the Anthropological Rift

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 182-193

Milena Romero Allué. 'Thou retir'est to endless Rest'. Abraham Cowley's 'Wise' and 'Epicuræan' *Grasshopper*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 194-211

Alessandro Vescovi. The Uncanny and the Secular in Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* and *The Hungry Tide*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 212-222

Loredana Salis. "...so much immortal wealth": *Life in the Sick-Room* by Harriet Martineau as Eco-Sustainable Narrative

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 223-237

Manuela D'Amore. Communicating "Natural knowledge" for the "common benefit" of England: Science, Trade and Colonial Expansion in *Philosophical Transactions* 1665-1700

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 238-251

Paola Della Valle. Ecopsychology in J. G. Ballard's Fiction

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 252-262

Deborah Saidero. 'Violence against the Earth is Violence against Women': The Rape Theme in Women's Eco-Narratives

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 263-273

Daniela Fargione. "One thing does not exist: Oblivion." The Poiesis of Everness and the Wildness of Art in Anita Desai's "The Artist of Disappearance"

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 274-283

Sergiy Yakovenko. A Deceptive Initiation: An Ecological Paradigm in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 284-294

Arianna Antonielli. Paradigms of the Ecocritical Canon in T. S. Eliot's Early Poems

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 295-305

Jacopo Vigna-Taglianti. 'The Dimension of the Symbolic': Environmental Issues in David Malouf's "Jacko's Reach"

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 306-313

Angelo Monaco. The Aesthetics of the Green Postcolonial Novel in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 314-324

Caterina Guardini

'Hail, reverend Structure!' Questioning Patriarchal Parenthood in the Aquatic Imagery of Grottoes in Court Masques

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 325-337

Giovanni Bassi. "A little place in the neighbourhood of a great city": Landscape and Environment in Walter Pater's "The Child in the House", "An English Poet" and "Emerald Uthwart"

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 338-346

Martina Zamparo. "An art / That Nature makes": The Alchemical Conception of Art and Nature in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 347-360

Valentina Boschian Bailo. La costruzione dell'identità nelle pratiche giornalistiche: il caso dei rifugiati

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 361-369

## RECENSIONI / REVIEWS

Luisa Camaiora & Andrea A. Conti. *Medicine Matters in Five Comedies of Shakespeare. From the Renaissance Context to a Reading of the Play* (Elisa Fortunato)

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 370-371

Jan Kemp. *Dante's Heaven* (Peter Byrne)

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 372-374

Paolo Bartoloni. *Objects in Italian Life and Culture: Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality* (Danila Cannamela)

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 375-377

Tantoo Cardinal, Tomson Highway, Basil Johnston *et al.* *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past* (Giuseppe Barca)

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 378-381

## **INTERVISTE / INTERVIEWS**

Jaydeep Sarangi. In Conversation with Neerav Patel

*Le Simplegadi*, 2017, XV, 17: 382-387



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## Apirana Taylor

### Poems

#### south west Taranaki

where the wild wind whips your ears  
and hauls away at your scarf  
where driftwood lies strewn  
on black sand like stranded whales  
where the rocks bathe like beached seals  
in pools of dying light  
where night falls, one minute after midday  
shadows reach out from the foot of sentient cliffs  
where red veins bleed down the tear ducts of *whakapapa*<sup>1</sup>  
the creeks charge heedlessly to the ocean  
where waves froth and smash themselves  
on the shore  
where the under tow washes you away  
forever  
speaks the *mana*<sup>2</sup> of *Turuturumokai*

#### *Pohutukawa*<sup>3</sup>

untopped by the storm  
the roots of the *Pohutukawa*  
spread wide and delve deep  
the summer blossoms  
are red as blood  
the trunk is gnarled and weather worn  
like an old man  
the branches give shelter  
from the burning sun  
when the bulldozers chain snapped  
trying to uproot the mighty one

---

<sup>1</sup> *Turuturu Mokai* is an ancient Maori fortified village known as a *Pa*. There was a great battle here.

<sup>2</sup> *Whakapapa* is ancestry; *mana* means power, prestige.

<sup>3</sup> New Zealand coastal evergreen tree (*Metrosideros excels*).



and succeeded  
 only after it's third attempt  
 something more than just a tree  
 was lost, torn and uprooted from  
 the earth's heart

### *Ruamoko*

i rage in the molten  
 heart of this earth  
 i shake the mountains  
 i drive tsunami  
 across sea  
 i smash your  
 mighty cities  
 i am *Ruamoko*<sup>4</sup>

### rank

where once the mighty *totora*<sup>5</sup>  
 grew, the *rimu* the *ngaio*  
 and *puka*, now stands  
 rank upon rank like soldiers  
 an army of pines amassed  
 in the valley and on the hill  
 soon the man will fell  
 King Pinus Radiata leaving  
 a deep gouge on *Papatuanuku*<sup>6</sup>

**Apirana Taylor** is a nationally and internationally published Maori poet, storyteller, playwright, novelist, actor, painter and musician. He was 1996 'Writer in Residence' at Massey University and 2002 'Writer in Residence' at Canterbury University. His poetry and short stories, are studied in secondary schools (for NCEA Levels 1 and 2) polytechnics and universities, and have been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Norwegian and Russian. He has twice been invited to India to read his poetry, and is frequently invited to Europe

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<sup>4</sup> The Maori god of earthquakes and volcanoes.

<sup>5</sup> *Totora* (*Podocarpus totara*), *rimu* (*Dacrydium cupressinum*), *ngaio* (*Myoporum laetum*) and *puka* (*Meryta sinclairii*) are evergreen trees endemic to the forest of New Zealand.

<sup>6</sup> In Maori tradition she is the mother earth figure.

to tour and read his work at festivals, schools and universities. In 2012 he was invited to South America to present his work at the Medillen International Poetry festival in Meddilen, Colombia. He has written several books of poetry and short stories, a novel, and several plays, and won awards for his poetry and short stories. His work has also been published in most major New Zealand anthologies, and broadcast on radio and television. Apirana visits schools, prisons, libraries, universities, and tertiary institutions, doing poetry performances, storytelling and taking creative writing workshops.

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## Lance Henson

### Poems

#### I

Where are you looking for me ...  
With the forest burning

With the footprints of wolves escaping  
our nightmares ...

Something weeping in our eyes ...  
That believed we would remember it ...

And carry its bloodied stones  
Toward the sea ...

This darkness and its mirroring pain  
Is what we have become ...

Sitting by the frightened waning  
Breath of the forgotten ...

From *The Dead Zone Texts*  
5/8/17

#### II

Where the light mirrors through  
Broken glass

These are the ones who know silence  
Is their keeper ...

In what is mistaken for song

Is a scream in a language

Made of prayer

It will brush your hair  
With its wind  
It reaches toward you leaving its tracks  
Suspended in the air

Where children left their clothing ...

Before their shadows

Took them home ...

Psalm from *The Dead Zone Texts*  
9/2/16

### III

I am this pulsing motion of being

Waiting for dawn

Arriving from its one mother

To fill the world with light ...

Here in this desert

A strong wind moves the smallest stones ...

How as the way the heart moves

Toward the unknown ...

From *The Dead Zone Texts*  
New York 3/30/17

IV

Carrying things by their names

The passageways

Filled with shapes

We have loved ...

Not with this life...

But another life...

Whose shadow we are following...

From *The Dead Zone Texts*

New York 3/31/17

V

Dawn disguised as sorrow

Stands before the wintered plain

A wolf track fills with snow ...

Crow lands ...

Shaking its shimmering being

From the solitude of flight ...

Winter

Winter

The badger watching ...

Mahago domiutz ehiwoh

(Walking badger said this)

Bologna 14/01/17

**Lance Henson** is a poet of the Cheyenne nation of Oklahoma. He has published 43 books in 23 languages. An ex-marine and mixed martial artist, he has maintained a cultural indigenous world-view that opposes the mistreatment of indigenous peoples the world over. His literary project *Words from the Edge* has invited poets from endangered tribal peoples to Europe to share their stories and poems. He is an adjunct Professor of the Cheyenne Arapaho tribal college of Oklahoma. He lives in Bologna, Italy.

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## Raphael D'Abdon

### Poems

#### purple has style

my city, usually  
ugly, in spring  
becomes the  
prettiest place  
on the planet

sunday,  
6 am,  
i walk through the  
purple tunnels of  
brooklyn, thswane

prince  
on repeat  
in my earphones

purple is music  
purple is wind  
purple is rain  
purple is snow  
purple is the rising sun  
purple has a sound  
purple has a name  
purple has eyes  
purple has wings  
purple has ears  
purple has a voice  
purple has style  
purple pops  
purple yawns  
purple sings  
purple cries  
purple glides  
purple dances

purple rises  
purple falls  
purple lives  
purple dies  
purple on rooftops  
purple on cars  
purple on fences  
purple on sidewalks  
purple on road signs  
purple on dustbins  
purple on roads  
purple on flowers  
purple on my head  
purple on my shoulders  
purple on my shoes  
purple in my mouth  
purple in my lungs  
purple in my thoughts  
purple in my blues

and the old ladies walking their tiny dogs,  
and the runners in their fluorescent clothes,  
and the bougainvillea,  
oh yeah, the bougainvillea,  
make all this look  
even prettier.

fucking colonizers,  
i hate to say it, but:  
when you brought purple to this land  
you keep raping every day,

you nailed it.

**when dawn arrives**

she finds me between  
open windows  
behind a candle  
drawing hearts and flowers  
on the back of  
my grandma's pictures



she would have turned  
94 today

i hear the wind that  
took her away

in the curtains' swishing  
in the butterflies' flitting  
in the trees' rustling

half-silences  
where sound abounds

**mirror names**

mirror names with  
no word for religion

time does not count  
in the deep life

wherever we are  
shadows follow us

doors open for visitors

a silver owl glides in  
and speaks in a lost mother tongue

"the spirit does what  
spirits do"  
it says  
and then glides on  
into the future

and stories,  
oh well,  
stories must just end like this

sometimes

pretoria, 17 february 2017

**medicine pathways**

i am of the  
insomniac race

traces of songs  
stolen by winds  
have arrived here  
in a muted moon

medicine pathways  
clear  
as a note by coltrane

unveil

light  
mirrors

**Raphael d'Abdon** is a lecturer at the English Studies Department of the University of South Africa and the author of two poetry collections, *sunnyside nightwalk* (Geko, 2013) and *salt water* (Poetree Publishing, 2016). He has also edited the volumes *I nostri semi – Peo tsa rona. Poeti sudafricani del post-apartheid* (Mangrovie, 2008), and *Marikana. A Moment in Time* (Geko, 2013).

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**Bill Ashcroft**

## **A Climate of Hope**

**Abstract I:** L'ecocritica postcoloniale è emersa gradualmente nel corso degli ultimi decenni, a mano a mano che le differenze tra postcolonialismo e ambientalismo venivano superate. Tali differenze si sono incentrate sul presunto conflitto sul modo che ciascuna delle due correnti di pensiero ha di vedere il mondo. Tuttavia, le radici coloniali del degrado ambientale e la crescente critica postcoloniale sugli effetti dell'imperialismo hanno determinato una sempre più forte collaborazione tra le due correnti, sfociata nella disciplina dell'ecocritica postcoloniale. La critica postcoloniale e l'ambientalismo hanno trovato un interesse comune nel ruolo giocato dall'imperialismo e dal capitalismo nell'antropocene in rapida distruzione. Tuttavia, la critica non ha portato spesso ad una chiara visione di un mondo possibile. Il presente saggio suggerisce una nuova confluenza tra critica postcoloniale, ambientalismo e utopismo. Tale confluenza emerge dalla consapevolezza postcoloniale che nessuna trasformazione può avere luogo senza la speranza di una visione del futuro. Il saggio si interroga su che cosa la letteratura possa fare in un conflitto ambientale in cui i popoli colonizzati sono tra i più colpiti. Il ruolo della letteratura postcoloniale è quello di fornire un modello per trasformare lo spirito creativo in resistenza politica. Nessuna vera resistenza può avere luogo senza una visione di cambiamento e la letteratura è la più potente sede deputata ad accogliere quella visione – nessuna trasformazione può avere luogo prima di essere innanzitutto immaginata.

**Abstract II:** Postcolonial ecocriticism has emerged gradually over the last couple of decades as the differences between postcolonialism and environmentalism have been overcome. Those differences have centred on an assumed conflict in the way the two discourses see the world. However, the colonial roots of environmental degradation and the growing postcolonial critique of the effects of imperialism have seen a growing alliance focused in the discipline of postcolonial ecocriticism. Postcolonial critique and environmentalism have found common interest in the role of imperialism and capitalism in the rapidly degrading anthropocene. However critique has not often led to a clear vision of a possible world. This paper suggests a new alliance – between postcolonial critique, environmentalism and utopianism – one that emerges from the postcolonial realisation the no transformation can occur without the hope inspired by a vision of the future. The paper asks what literature can do in an environ-

mental struggle in which colonized peoples environmental struggle in which colonized peoples are among the worst affected. The role of postcolonial literature provides a model for the transformative function of the creative spirit in political resistance. No true resistance can succeed without a vision of change and literature provides the most powerful location of that vision – no transformation can occur unless it is first imagined.

The growing alliance between postcolonialism and environmentalism seems to have overcome several apparent incompatibilities to form what is now called postcolonial ecocriticism. But the discourses of postcolonialism and environmentalism have always been deeply united in the concept of place. Place is not merely physical location, but emerges out of the interaction of language, history, visual perception, spatiality and environment in a people's experience. The importance of one's 'place' in the business of forming cultural identity, the myriad cultural connections it evokes, its importance as a context for cultural knowledge, make it particularly resonant in the experience of colonialism. Similarly, despite the tendencies of some deep ecologists, the environment is not simply there – an a priori that transcends cultural construction, the environment is itself a product of human interaction and representation. Both the postcolonial and the environment hinge on a struggle over the very concept of place.

Postcolonial ecocriticism arose because environmental degradation – what colonisers would call 'improvement', the clearing of land and the creation of property – is one of the most prominent features of colonial invasion. But importantly this critical discourse recognises that the degradation of place and people go hand in hand. If we look to the history of human efforts "to subjugate nature", we find that this is also a history of humans subjugating humans. The "Domination of nature", according to Horkheimer, inevitably "involves domination of man" (1974: 93), such that civilization produces "the alienation" of human beings "from extrahuman and human nature" (169)

As the principle of the self, endeavouring to win in the fight against nature in general, against other people in particular, and against its own impulses, the ego is felt to be related to the functions of domination, command, and organization [...] Historically, it belongs preeminently to an age – marked by a cleavage – between conquerors and conquered (105).

The process of domination continues today in the consequences of capitalist imperialism. When the 2012 Marikana miner's strike in South Africa was broken up with violence not witnessed since the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, the legacy of colonialism became impossible to ignore<sup>1</sup> (Mason *et. al.* 2014: 2). The continuing degradation, and indeed destruc-

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<sup>1</sup> The Marikana platinum mine, owned by Lonmin, a British mining company, employed thousands of workers on very low wages who went on strike on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2012. South African police fired on the strikers on 16<sup>th</sup> August killing thirty-four miners and injuring seventy-eight. Astonishingly two hundred and seventy miners were charged with murder under an Apartheid law. The violence directed by white police at Sharpe-

tion of the environment by capitalism and the continuing exacerbation of global inequality are clear enough<sup>2</sup>. But what is the place of literature in this? What can literature do? Surely the reports of the death of coral reefs, of the increase in extreme weather events should make us aware of the urgency of an ever-warming world. Apparently not! Where climate change is concerned human society demonstrates the boiling frog effect. The destruction of the environment seems so gradual that for the majority of the population it goes unnoticed and will continue to do so until we are boiled. So do art and literature have a role to play?

There is a well-worn slogan in postcolonial criticism called “The Book or the Barricade” and this becomes intensified in ecocriticism: what works better, narrative or activism? Are writers only successful as activists? In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* Huggan and Tiffin ask “to what extent have postcolonial writers, in doubling as cultural and environmental activists been successful in pursuing an anti- or counter-developmental approach?” (2010: 29). Arundhati Roy is an interesting case in point: she is a writer activist and sees her fiction and political activism as being united in the business of telling stories (Barsamian 2001). But her imaginative fiction and political non-fiction are in entirely different registers. The creative imagination anticipates possibilities beyond the present reality in ways that critique the present, not by railing against it but by presenting the possibility of a different world. In the words of Ben Okri “writers are the dream mechanism of the human race” (1990: 77) and social dreaming is a key principle of the creative imagination.

### What can Literature Do?

Reading, says Ross Chambers, can change desire and recirculating desire can change the world (1991: 253). He proposes the potential oppositionality of reading that can reconfigure desire by operating in the interstices of the narrative. Working within the system, reading can introduce a degree of play or flexibility into the landscape of desire. The very marginality of literature, like that of the court jester, allows it to call into question the established order of things, and to attempt to recruit the power of the narratee in the interests of the narrator.

The most powerful instrumentality of the literary text may also be its most obscure. Australian critic Kate Rigby argues that it is in moments of revelation of a poem’s very inability to represent the outside world, its representation of the unrepresentable sublime, that the outside world is made manifest in the text. For her,

Only to the extent that the work of art is self-cancelling, acknowledging in some ways its inevitable failure to adequately mediate the voice of nature, can it point us to that which lies beyond its own enframing (2004: 437).

Some ecocritics suggest that it is by such deixis rather than mimesis that the natural world may be best represented. William Howarth writes that:

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ville had now been directed by black police at workers, a massacre carried out to protect the interests of multinational capital.

<sup>2</sup> See Marcuse 1966; Carlin *et al.* 2001; Foster & Brett 2009; Bellamy *et al.* 2010; Harvey 2011; Wright 2015.

Ecocriticism, instead of taxing science for its use of language to represent (mimesis), examines its ability to point (deixis). More developed in Asian than European languages (Liu), deixis locates entities in space, time, and social context. Through deixis, meaning develops from what is said or signed relative to physical space (Howarth 1996: 80).

This suggests a form of knowledge that exists beyond interpretation, one that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht calls an experience of unmediated Presence. In his *Production of Presence*, he challenges “a broadly institutionalised tradition according to which interpretation, that is, the identification and/or attribution of meaning, is the core practice, the exclusive core practice indeed, of the humanities” (2004: 3). Interpretation is so institutionalised in the Humanities, that we take its core function for granted. But Gumbrecht’s dissatisfaction arose from a sense that ‘materialities of communication’ were completely ignored in the Humanities.

To cover the range of textual formations in which this may occur we can call this the ‘material resonance’ of the text (Ashcroft 2014). Material resonance occurs in written, audible and visual texts, but it may be present in other sensory stimuli as well, such as touch and smell. It is obviously most pronounced in the auditory impact of music itself and I am tempted to call this particular quality the ‘music’ of the text, along the lines of Aldous Huxley’s claim that: “After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music” (Huxley 1949: 10). Material resonance illuminates the possibility of a postcolonial aesthetic in a transcultural space. More broadly, the power of literature for conceiving a different world lies partly in the fact that there are ways of experiencing, responding to, of ‘understanding’, the world apart from structures of meaning, that is, apart from the kind of interpretation that can be fixed in language.

But in all this, whether redirecting desire, employing deixis or enhancing the material resonance of the text, the key function of the literary text is to present a different world. This is where I believe a third discourse must be brought into play with postcolonialism and environmentalism – that of utopianism. Utopian theory has undergone a vigorous renaissance during the post-Cold War period of global empire. A curious combination of Marxist theory and science fiction has led the way in utopian thought in the latter part of the twentieth century. The concept of the utopian remains an anchor to any theory of a better world, any hope for social change and amenity. The issue is not what is imagined, the product of utopia so to speak, but the process of imagining itself. Climate change is an ideal topic for the utopian because no change can occur unless it is driven by a vision of a different world. Activism can only operate on the premise of a belief in the possibility of change. Utopia is a vision of possibility that effects the transformation of social life.

Imagination forms the basis of the utopian in literature and the process of imagining – the process of utopian thought – forms the basis of the utopian in postcolonial transformation. Simply by imagining the world differently the creative work shows the possibility of a different world and both utopia and dystopia share a common goal, that of critiquing the present. Any utopianism worth the name, says Zygmunt Bauman “must engage in a significant polemic with the dominant culture” (Bauman 1976: 47). By speaking of a different world this difference is the key to the importance of art and literature in summoning forth

the hope for a better world. Utopia is a vision of possibility that effects the transformation of social life.

But utopia is not only “eutopia”, it also includes dystopian visions of the future, which characterise the growing genre of ‘cli-fi’ or climate fiction, a term coined in 2007 by Taiwan based blogger Dan Bloom. Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam Series – Oryx and Crake; After the Flood and Maddaddam* – is among the best known example of this. But when we look closely, the future of the environment has been pervasive in most science fiction, whether utopian or dystopian. The rapid rise of cli-fi has come about as a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon because of the unprecedented vulnerability and rapid deterioration of the environment. As one commentator put it: “Cli-fi novels humanise the science of climate change” (Johns-Putra 2015). The problem is that the more literature insists the less effective it is. Literature can only inspire change by changing desire with a vision of hope.

In hoping for an environmental revolution we must remember that ‘revolution’ has two meanings: it is not simply a revolt but a revolving, a spiral into the future. Seeing this, we can understand that the belief in the future remains part of the continuous spiralling of hope, a hope that counteracts the apparently depressing downward spiral of climate change. Creative work continues to spiral into the future, continues the revolution, and that movement into the future must first be a movement of the imagination. Art and literature have a particular facility for projecting into the future. For Ernst Bloch, whose magisterial *The Principle of Hope* (1986) defined the utopian as fundamental to human life, literature has a significant utopian function because its *raison d’être* is the imaging of a different world – what he calls its *vorschein* or “anticipatory illumination”. Of course not all creative works are utopian, or even necessarily optimistic, but the anticipatory illumination is the revelation of the

possibilities for rearranging social and political relations to produce *Heimat*, Bloch’s word for the home that we have all sensed but have never experienced or known. It is *Heimat* as utopia [...] that determines the truth content of a work of art (Zipes 1989: xxxiii).

*Heimat* may lie in the future but the promise of *heimat* transforms the present. *Heimat* suggests but is not synonymous with the nation or the democratic state, but as the object of desire it can be foreshadowed by the imagination.

There are a number of ways in which the anticipatory consciousness may work in postcolonial environmental literature, ways that invoke the deep interrelation of people and place. Most of them are not directed at the future but all of them invoke a different world. Three of them are: a) hearing beyond the (indigenous) silence; b) thinking beyond the human world; c) inhabiting the future.

### **Hearing Beyond the Silence: Colonising Land and People**

The link that Horkheimer makes between subjugating the environment and subjugating people has been nowhere more evident, not more catastrophic than in the encounter with indigenous peoples. One form of the utopian process of conceiving a different world begins by penetrating the silence of the disappeared. The expansion of Aboriginal literature is a

significant intervention into this silence. The appropriation of English and the interpolation of literary discourse have led to a revelation way of relating to the land completely different from the ocularcentrism of European culture. The idea that an individual may be connected to country in ways that are inconceivable to the western consciousness is a powerful demonstration of the anticipatory consciousness at work. In Archie Weller's ironically titled "Aboriginal History" he says:

From the bottomless waterhole  
calling Pidja! Pidja!  
like the illusive wind, you came  
and you settled in my hair.  
As quiet as a thought  
you crept upon my woman's leg  
and we both dreamed a dream.  
Like a pounding kangaroo  
you kicked her to let us know  
and then I could remember

And now we watch you crawl, you crawl.  
in the ashes of the dying fire  
you leave your track.  
It is time for your Grandfather to come  
to name you from your mother's totem  
for now, child, you are a woman (Gilbert 1988: 65).

The belief that human life is conceived by the proximity of a Dreaming spirit is beyond modern experience but not beyond our understanding. This sense of embodiment breaks the silence of Aboriginal oppression with the view of an entirely different world, a view that is utopian in its presentation of a completely different way of being in place. A silenced people and a silent landscape are one.

The Dreaming is perhaps the archetypal demonstration of the infusion of the present and future with the hope of a mythic past, a fusion of time and place, because the Dreaming is never simply a memory of the past, but the focusing energy of the present. The Dreaming is a supreme example of the circularity of time in postcolonial visions of a future that are embedded in a cultural past. The utopianism in Australian Aboriginal novels such as those by Alexis Wright, *Carpentaria* (2006), and Archie Weller, *Land of the Golden Clouds* (1998), owes very little to the western utopian tradition, for the Dreaming is a radical infusion of the present by a myth that encompasses both past and future. But one thing all literary versions of postcolonial hope share is a vision of *heimat* whether in a geographical region, a culture, a local community, a racial identity – all conceived in a disruption of conventional boundaries, a dynamic operation of memory<sup>3</sup>.

The silence of the land and people has occupied historians and cultural critics for some

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<sup>3</sup> See Kelly 2007.



time. In a real sense silence is only silence to the colonizing society whose culture of subjugation has brought with them an inability to hear. Studies by scholars as varied as William Stanner, Paul Carter, Deborah Bird Rose and Val Plumwood all suggest that a silent landscape is not only grounded in an inability to speak about the land, but the absence of many of the voices that were once present to articulate it, and ignorance of the presence of those that remain. While historians Stanner and Carter, cultural critics Bird Rose and ecologist Plumwood all speak of the silence of the land, literature has an unmatched capacity to evoke a presence, a knowledge in the silence that cannot be spoken except by the creative imagination.

Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, a vast sprawling novel, addresses the range of issues that affect Aboriginal life in the north. But most interesting is the way in which it begins by inserting the Dreaming into the contemporary text as she describes country in terms of the rainbow serpent:

Picture the creative serpent, scoring deep into – scouring down through – the slippery underground of the mudflats, leaving in its wake the thunder of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys [...] This is where the giant serpent continues to live deep down under the ground in a vast network of limestone aquifers. They say its being is porous; it permeates everything. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin (2006: 1).

The description includes no concessions to the contemporary reader for the passage simply interpolates Aboriginal reality into the contemporary English text, breaking the silence with a transformative account of the environment as the place of the Dreaming.

One of the most resonant voices in breaking silence of place and people is that of Australian poet/activist Judith Wright. Wright's awareness of the indigenous silence comes very early in her childhood when she sensed the presence of the disappeared as she walked across her father's sheep station: "old men, dark-skinned and shadowy, standing with spears in their hands among the few trees left standing on our sheep-ridden land" (Wright 1999: 296). In the poem "The Bora Ring" she describes a squatter coming upon an abandoned bora ring. The "grass that stands up/ to mark the bora ring" the only physical remnant, still haunts the landscape. Tragically "the earth-sky- water-tree-spirit-human complex existing in space- time" is a spectral presence, overlaid with a concept of place as property, commodity and landscape. The poem implicates the squatter in the history of colonialism's "whirlwind destruction" and at the end

The song is gone; the dance  
is secret with dancers in the earth,  
the ritual useless and the tribal story  
lost in an alien tale [...]  
Only the rider's heart  
halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word  
that fastens in the blood and the ancient curse,  
the fear as old as Cain (Wright 1994: 2).

For Wright the ideology of progress and economics destroyed not only the indigenous population but also the environment and the poetic impulse it inspires. In “Two Dream-times” written for Aboriginal poet Oodjeroo Noonuccal she writes:

are you and I and a once loved land  
peopled by tribes and trees;  
doomed by traders and stock-exchanges,  
bought by faceless strangers.

And you and I are bought and sold  
our songs and stories too,  
though quoted low in a falling market  
(publishers shake their heads at poets) (Noonuccal 1994: 315).

The poet sees her role to expose the silence that falls across the indigenous presence. In “Space Between” she says:

however close our touch  
or intimate our speech,  
silences, spaces reach  
most deep, and will not close (1994: 315).

Silence, in Wright’s poetry is not simply absence but an opening to Presence as the poetry offers its version of material resonance, intimating “an interruption of the silenced colonial landscape by voices and beings that Wright is in turn unable to convey” (Kankahainen 2015: 2). In reading the silence Wright sees the possibility that indigenous culture might in time affect the settler’s relationship with place. Like Arundhati Roy, Wright’s imaginative writing intersects her activism and in her case the penetration of the silence, the ability to imagine the silenced world offers the possibility of a changed consciousness:

In Australia we could become something new in the world, “people who have seized the chance to make a new kind of consciousness out of new conditions” (*Preoccupations* xvii). In “Landscape and Dreaming”, she outlines what such a “new consciousness” might entail. In her desire to “live [her] own meaning”, as opposed to that of the Aboriginal meaning, the essay blends evolutionary ecology, archaeology, and reflections on conservation and indigenous rights. It is a contemporary form of inhabiting the land, which is radical in both its social and ecological import, dealing with environmental deterioration, the problematics of ownership, and the political insurgency of indigenous Australians (Clark 2006: 159).

So out of a deep sense of grieving for what has happened to Aboriginal society Wright generates the vision of a different world, a different form of habitation.

### Thinking Beyond the Human World

The inability to hear the indigenous world characterises the relationship with the non-human world as well and this area offers remarkable potential to imagine a very different way of being. In his environmental history of the Monaro, Keith Hancock quotes from the unpublished eulogy written by a forester Baldur Byles who was passionate about retaining an unspoilt environment and challenged people to think like a snow gum. We cannot “appreciate anything fully unless we understand it” says Byles:

until we pick up its wavelength so to speak, until we learn to think in the way it thinks [...] So, if we wish to understand this particular Australian tree we must try to understand its point of view, realising that it is a living organism just like you and me [...] We must try to understand its manner of living, its philosophy of life, its place in the world of natural things and the spirit that keeps it going in spite of great adversity (Griffiths 2016: 47).

We might raise an eyebrow today at such anthropomorphism but Byles’ admonition was very much like that of American forester and conservationist Aldo Leopold who, in the 1940s advocated ‘thinking like a mountain’ in order to understand the holism of ecology. And where is the most powerful, most strategic place for the exercise of such imagination, but literature. To think like a tree, a mountain or an animal we must find a place completely outside ourselves, we must find a future in which humans are one part of a complex environment. Perhaps only by imagining a world in which humans are not the beginning and end of all meaning can the catastrophe of the anthropocene be diverted. The literary imagination is not the only way but it is a powerful one.

Huggan and Tiffin give prominent place in postcolonial ecocriticism to zoocriticism, which, among other things, overturns the habit in literature for animals to represent humans, as in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Canadian writer Barbara Gowdy’s 1998 novel *White Bone* addresses this problem by telling the story from the elephant’s point of view. As she says “The White Bone is an attempt, however presumptuous, to make a huge imaginative leap [...] imagining what it would be like to be that big and gentle, to be that imperilled, and to have that prodigious memory” (Huggan & Tiffin 2010: 150). Gowdy’s techniques include lexical shifts that replace “he said” with “he rumbled”, descriptive language that imagines what it would be like to inhabit an elephant’s body.

But it may be the particular province of poetry to extend this level of imagining. In literary writing, poetry is one of the most obvious examples of the importance of materiality, producing a simultaneity of presence effects and meaning effects, for, as Gumbrecht says, “even the most overpowering institutional dominance of the hermeneutic dimension could never fully repress the presence effects of rhyme and alliteration, of verse and stanza” (Gumbrecht 2004: 18). Australian poet Les Murray describes his dialogue with nature in his Presence sequence as a shamanistic one, when he states in an interview that the animals ‘spoke through me’. In “Migratory” the words are justified along right-hand margin as though they themselves had migrated across the page, and Murray’s language seems to enter the consciousness of the bird:

I am the right feeling on washed shine,  
 in wing-lifting surf, in running about  
 beak-focussed: the feeling of here, that stays  
 and stays, then lengthens out over  
 the hills of hills and the feedy sea

I am the wrongness of here, when it  
 is true to fly along the feeling  
 the length of its rightness, while days  
 burn from vast to a gold gill in the dark  
 to vast again, for many feeds  
 and floating rests, till the sun ahead  
 becomes the sun behind (Murray 2002: 377).

The poem articulates the instinctual life of birds, particularly the impulse to migrate, where “I am the wrongness of here, when it is true to fly along the feeling the length of its rightness”. Importantly, the poem’s language makes no concessions to human consciousness or human experience. Understanding must bridge the huge space between us and the other.

A similarly adventurous imagining a different consciousness occurs in “The Cows on Killing Day” which attempt to view the world from the cows’ perspective:

All me are standing on feed. The sky is shining.  
 All me have just been milked. Teats all tingling still  
 from that dry toothless sucking by the chilly mouths  
 that gasp loudly in in in, and never breathe out.

All me standing on feed, move the feed inside me.  
 One me smells of needing the bull, that heavy urgent me,  
 the back-climber, who leaves me humped, straining, but light  
 and peaceful again, with crystalline moving inside me (Murray 2002: 367).

The cows experience is not rendered in terms of the lack of human qualities and therefore less important. The cow’s consciousness has its own poetic vision. In his essay “The Human-Hair Thread” Murray states that:

my abiding interest is in integrations, in convergences. I want my poems to be more than just national Parks of sentimental preservation, useful as the National Parks are as holding operations in the modern age. What I am after is a spiritual change that would make them unnecessary. And I discern the best hope for it in [...] convergence (1977: 569).

After suggesting that such convergence between Aboriginal and European “is a fact, a subtle presence, hard to discern often”, Murray states that the Jindyworobak poets “were

on the right track, in a way; their concepts of environmental value, of the slow mounding of all people within a continent or region towards the human form which that continent demands, that is a real process" (569). There is no expectation that we will or need to experience the animal's way of being in the world but the capacity of poetry to engage that way of being is a profound demonstration of possibility. More pertinently it engages with the reality of the human animal's way of being in then world by offering a presence, a material knowledge that exists beyond understanding.

### **Living Beyond the Present: Inhabiting the Future**

The vision of the future is in some respects the least of the utopian functions of literature, for *Vorschein* is captured in the resonance of the artistic or literary work itself. But with the question of climate change there is a very urgent need to disrupt the boiling frog syndrome. Despite the growing number of climate records being broken, the actual rate of climate change is almost imperceptible to the experience of ordinary people. Add to this the pernicious bombardment of anti-climate rhetoric and the result is deafness to any form of alarm or critical warnings. We can probably all confess to moments of helplessness in the face of our society's stupidity. But this is where the utopianism of the aesthetic work is most crucial, because no change is possible without social dreaming, the belief in the possibility of a different world.

Australian author James Bradley's *Clade* set in the late 21<sup>st</sup> century traces the lives of a family over three generations as collapsing family relationships mirror the collapsing environment. "Clade" is the biological term for an ancestor organism and all its descendants, and that ancestor is a scientist named Adam. Each chapter moves forward in time telling the story of a successive generation observing the intense personal upheaval of the characters against the backdrop of gradual global catastrophe.

The key strategy here is to record the human experience of a world in which extraordinary environmental tragedies become a matter of everyday experience, relentlessly worsening over the generations. Perhaps this is why the urgency of action is deferred. Early in the novel Adam identifies the problem in human consciousness:

One of his colleagues sometimes talked about the deep structures of intelligence, the way in which human brains had been shaped by evolution, "We don't change because we don't believe in the problem", he would say, at least not at that deep intuitive level we need to. We can see it when it's in front of us [...] we know we have to change [...] but as soon as we're away from it our old thinking asserts itself, our desire to reproduce, to build power (Bradley 2015: 14).

Knowing something has to be done does not lead inevitably to action. In many respects the novel's record of a collapsing world as everyday experience provokes the imagination. This is starkly revealed late in the novel when sixteen year old Li Lijuan keeps a diary in which she simply records:

These are the things we've lost  
Birds

Bananas  
Tigers  
Frogs  
Bees  
Coffee  
Polar Bears  
Coral

These are the things we've saved

Seeds  
Elephants  
Dolphins  
Each other (Bradley 2015: 163-164).

The simplicity of this is chilling. The future of this novel is uncompromisingly dystopian. In India "the rains that usually arrive in July or August failed to appear, leaving the subcontinent to bake in record heat. Crops failed, leading to food shortages and starvation. Then in November torrential rain and massive floods killed more than a million and left another hundred million homeless. And finally, in the aftermath, the economy collapsed" (Bradley 2015: 25). The disjunction between knowing and experiencing speaks directly to the present. Watching the television one night, reports of power cuts, stalled climate talks and unexplained fish deaths in Tasmania and Victoria are replaced by an interview with a newspaper columnist who has just published a book arguing that evidence for the planet's warming is flawed. This is a sobering thought: even when the environment is visibly collapsing the climate deniers will still be operating and still be given air time as they are now. The treatment of refugees in the time of the novel is a continuation of our contemporary neglect and abuse of refugees:

Where, after all, are those who have sought refuge here meant to go? The islands of the Pacific are disappearing, Bangladesh is gone, as is much of Burma and coastal India; hundreds of millions have been displaced and are in need of assistance. Yet in the face of their suffering, politicians do little more than posture and parrot slogans (Bradley 2015: 131).

In the chapter "Boiling the Frog" the frog is finally boiled when massive storms and floods in England nearly lead to Adam and his daughter Summer's death. The novel goes on to record the gradual deterioration of the planet as heatwaves, storms, the disappearance of birds, the expulsion of refugees show the collapsing world as linked to the present. Adam is plagued by the 'sense that things are breaking down, spiralling out of control', and he is powerless to do anything about it. On the face of it there is nothing optimistic about this record of environmental collapse. The different world of this future is a warning of the present. But the utopianism of the novel lies beyond the dystopian litany of disasters, as the novel not only inhabits the future, but seems to inhabit the flow of time itself, thinking beyond

the non-human world. A sense of possible survival emerges when Ellie comes across a hive of bees hidden away to avoid catastrophic disease. Tasting the honey the beekeeper Amir gives her Ellie is amazed by the taste “so sweet and rich and impossibly deep that without thinking she closes her eyes” (Bradley 2015: 125). There is something fascinating, about the idea of a substance that changes with the seasons in this way, a reminder of the time when the planet still moved on its own cycles.

The hope in this account of a collapsing human world destroyed by its own stupidity and greed is a planetary one and part of the hope of the novel is the vision of a planet outside human intervention. This is where the novelist, like the poet thinks beyond the human world. Adam first senses this on a research trip to the Antarctic where he realises ‘he is in a place of the infinite, a place that exists without reference to the human’. But the future belongs to Adam’s autistic grandson Noah. The gardens in which he stood as a child to look at the stars:

are gone now, vanished beneath the sea, yet still they exist somewhere, in some possible world. As a scientist he knows that experience of time is an illusion, that all times exist equally, all possible worlds are present in every moment. That in another universe those gardens are still there, he is still there the past never ended (223).

For Adam’s grandson, the astronomer Noah, hope for the planet lies far beyond it in other galaxies and when he receives a signal from outer space in what is clearly language we sense that a future beyond the disaster of a collapsing world might lie in different worlds, worlds beyond the human world.

In a larger sense it is remarkable to Noah that language should persist in this way. Being autistic language had always appeared atomised to him. But in reality it connects him, connects everybody, not just to each other but to the distant past. Yet what of the future, he wonders:

What will be here eons from now? The ice is almost gone, but while it may take millions of years, there is little doubt that one day it will return, creeping back to cover the land, and the world will change once more, the turmoil and destruction of the past century being little more than a spasm, an interregnum in the great cycles of the planet’s existence. Perhaps there will still be humans then [...] some of them will have spread outward, to the stars [...] Either way they will carry within them the memory of this time, this past [...] just as he bears the memory of those ancient travellers in him (224).

The hope for humanity lies not only in connection but also in the flow of time itself. They are all “part of a movement in time, a river flowing ever on, bearing them away from the past. They have lost so much: Shanghai and Venice, Bangladesh, all those millions of live”. This is a strange form of hope, the anticipation of a time beyond the anthropocene but what the novel celebrates is the undefeated utopianism of the human spirit

People sometimes describe *Clade* as a hopeful book, but I've never been sure that's quite right. For while it deliberately resists the seductions of despair, emphasising instead contingency and the depth of time ahead of us as well as behind, it is still a book that is suffused with grief (Bradley 2017).

Yet all that seems to fall away as Li Lijuan's daughter Izzie, many years after Adam's death, watches the Shimmer. The 'Shimmer' is an aurora caused by the incremental changes to the earth's rotation caused by the melting of the ice and the shifting of the crust as it adapted to its loss have destabilized the fields in new and unpredictable ways:

She has seen footage of satellites moving through the aurora, the way it breaks across them like water, rolling on and over, and as she watches the eaves of light she can feel herself moving with them, lifted up and on into a future that may be wonderful or terrible or a thousand things in between. And she realises that whatever else happens, this is not an end but a beginning.

It is always a beginning (Bradley 2015: 237).

Here then lies the vision of *Heimat*. Home is always up ahead, and the literary work generates that feeling of promise without which change cannot occur. The utopian power of the text lies not in the realisation of *Heimat* nor in the warning about a collapsing world, but in the process of imagining, of thinking – both ahead of and beyond the human. Only by thinking beyond global warming imagining different world can that world come about.

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Paul Kane

### The Limits of Environmental Writing: Thirlmere Lake, Hetch Hetchy Valley & Storm King Mountain

**Abstract I:** “Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?” Con questo verso si apre il sonetto di William Wordsworth “On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad”, pubblicato nel 1844, anno in cui fu insignito del titolo di poeta laureato. La protesta di Wordsworth contro la ferrovia non fu efficace ma fu d’ispirazione per una successiva campagna degli anni ‘70 del 1800 contro la costruzione della diga di Thirlmere Lake nei pressi della città di Manchester per incrementare la fornitura idrica. Neppure questo tentativo ebbe successo ma divenne un elemento di coesione per la tutela dell’ambiente in Inghilterra. Stesso discorso può essere fatto per il tentativo fallito – ispirato dal formidabile naturalista John Muir – di bloccare la costruzione della diga di Hetch Hetchy Valley nel 1913 progettata per la fornitura idrica nella California meridionale. In entrambi i casi, l’incontro tra letteratura e natura è stato cruciale per la lotta ambientalista, ma in ciascun esempio il risultato fu deludente. La scrittura e la cultura letteraria ambientali non si accordavano con il razionalismo politico ed economico. Come mai, dunque, lo sforzo di bloccare le forze congiunte dalla Consolidated Edison, del US Army Corps of Engineers e della Federal Power Commission – e il loro progetto di fornire alla città di New York energia idroelettrica a danno della Storm King Mountain nel 1965 – alla fine ebbe successo? La risposta a questa domanda ci dice molto sull’efficacia della scrittura e dell’organizzazione ambientale, e solleva interrogativi sui limiti e le possibilità della letteratura.

**Abstract II:** “Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?” So begins William Wordsworth’s sonnet “On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad”, published in 1844, the year he became Poet Laureate. Wordsworth’s protest against the railroad was ineffectual but his resistance inspired a later campaign in the 1870’s against the damming of Thirlmere Lake by the city of Manchester to increase its water supply. That effort, too, failed but it became a rallying point for environmental conservation in England. Much the same can be said for the unsuccessful attempt – led by the formidable naturalist John Muir – to stop the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1913 for purposes of supplying water to southern California. In both cases, the intersection of literature and nature was crucial to the conservationist struggle, but in each instance the result was disappointing. Environmental writing and literary culture were no match for political and economic rationalism. Why then did the effort to stop the combined forces of Consolidated Edison, the US Army

Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Power Commission – which were bent on supplying New York City with hydroelectric power at the expense of scenic Storm King Mountain in 1965 – finally succeed? The answer to that question tells us much about effective environmental writing and organizing, and opens up questions about the limits and possibilities of literature.

### 1. Thirlmere Lake

On the Projected Kendal and Windemere Railroad

Is then no nook of English ground secure  
 From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown\*  
 In youth, and 'mid the busy world kept pure  
 As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,  
 Must perish; – how can they this blight endure?  
 And must he too the ruthless change bemoan  
 Who scorns a false utilitarian lure  
 'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?  
 Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orresthead  
 Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:  
 Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance  
 Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,  
 Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong  
 And constant voice, protest against the wrong (October 12, 1844).

This sonnet by William Wordsworth, while not numbered among his best work, nonetheless does useful work for us in trying to understand the process and dynamic of organized resistance to modern instances of environmental degradation and exploitation. I will look at three case studies, beginning with the Thirlmere Scheme – as it was called in the 1870s in the Lake District of England – but before I do that I want to look more closely at the Wordsworth poem because it identifies a number of key issues that will recur in my discussion.

The poem was published in the *Carlisle Journal* on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1844, to protest the proposed railway that was to link the villages of Kendal and Windermere in the Lake District, where Wordsworth, famously, had long resided. Wordsworth had been appointed Poet Laureate on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1843, and he used his new position to lobby against the railroad, sending letters to W. E. Gladstone, then President of the Board of Trade, and to the *Morning Post* (Ritvo 2007: 468). His interventions were ineffectual and belated, since the planning was too far advanced to be undone, even by a poet. The sonnet, with its ringing opening – “Is then no nook of English ground secure/ From rash assault?” – identifies six entities: England, as a place to be defended; local residents native to the district; a utilitarian blight on the landscape; Orrest Head, a hill on the eastern shore of Windermere; a traveler walk-



Fig. 1. *Raven's Crag* by Elijah Walton

ing there; and Nature, with its winds and torrents. These six components – national interest, local residents, a utilitarian proposal, a special locale, visiting tourists, and Nature idealized – mix repeatedly in environmental controversies, in different ways and to different degrees. The little room of the sonnet turns out to be quite capacious.

While Wordsworth failed in his endeavor, he succeeded in establishing the notion that industrial progress in the Victorian era might be challenged not only when it contravenes the interests of stakeholders – landowners and people directly affected by large-scale enterprises – but also when it runs counter to aesthetic considerations, the “beautiful romance/ Of nature”. That was a novel idea, one without any cultural or legal precedent, for it was an invention of the Romantic period and largely depend-

ed on Wordsworth’s biocentric ecological vision. For Wordsworth, and for many of his subsequent readers, Nature, in the words of Geoffrey Hartman, “entices the brooding soul out of itself, toward nature first, then toward humanity” (Hartman 1970: 308). Keeping that in mind, we can now move three decades ahead to 1877 and the formation of the Thirlmere Defence Association (the TDA).

As a burgeoning center of textile manufacture, the city of Manchester desperately needed additional sources of clean water, both for the cotton industry and for consumption by the quickly growing population of workers. It constructed reservoirs in the 1840s but they soon became inadequate and the city was forced to look further afield for its needs. The Waterworks Committee identified Thirlmere in the Lake District 100 miles away as the ideal place for the construction of a dam. The lake had clean water; it was penned in by high cliffs that would contain the reservoir; it was at a high elevation, thereby enabling the use of a gravity-fed aqueduct; and there were comparatively few landowners to negotiate with and buy out. The Victorians were already used to large public projects, especially water works and railroads, and authorities were well versed in dealing with the opposition such projects spawned: it was simply a matter of compensating landowners and reassuring the public that the work was necessary for their welfare and that the money was being properly spent. Parliament authorized these projects through legislation but there was rarely any difficulty in getting approval; progress was unstoppable. So it was with some surprise that the city fathers of Manchester suddenly found themselves confronted with an organized resistance to their scheme.

About fifty landowners in the vicinity of Thirlmere banded together to stop the alteration of their land (Ritvo 2007: 461). Through newspapers, pamphlets and even a three-act



Fig. 2. *Thirlmere Bridge Looking North, Cumberland* by Thomas Allom

play they attacked the proposal primarily on aesthetic grounds. On the one hand, it was a desecration of nature – and the language here suggested a religious violation or sacrilege as well – and a despoiling of the beauty that was a national heritage, since harming any part of the Lake District was to degrade the whole of it. These arguments gained considerable traction amongst an influential segment of the population (including writers such as Ruskin and Carlyle, lawyers, educators, and bishops) and, in 1878, they were able to block the necessary legislation for the project.

The historian Harriet Ritvo, who has studied this controversy, notes that the key to the argument the TDA was making was the assertion that Thirlmere, and the Lake District in general, was an utterly natural and relatively pristine locale that needed to be protected for the enjoyment and edification of the English people. As she puts it:

The virgin or natural condition of the Lake District seems to have become not only a major component of its aesthetic and patriotic value, but almost a necessary precondition to its defense (Ritvo 2007: 469).

This was a powerful and attractive idea but, unfortunately for the TDA, it wasn't true, and demonstrably so. Human habitation of the Lake District went back almost ten thousand years and the landscape was altered radically through deforestation, mining, grazing, farming, the building of houses and villages, the construction of roads and bridges; in short, it was neither pristine nor an unoccupied wilderness. This contradiction was exploited by the proponents of the Thirlmere Scheme, who went further to argue that, in fact, by damming the river and increasing the size of the lake, they would be saving Thirlmere from further human encroachment and making it more available to tourists who would benefit from



Fig. 3. Thirlmere Lake before the dam



Fig. 4. Thirlmere Lake flooded

visiting it in precisely the ways the TDA was advocating. The inherent weakness in the argument against the project served to doom the resistance and the legislation was passed the following year and the entire undertaking completed in 1894, to great fanfare.

To many of the proponents of the Manchester scheme, the opposition seemed sentimental, narrow-minded and elitist. The domestic and pecuniary needs of over a million people were being ignored in favor of a nebulous notion of beauty that could only be enjoyed by a few wealthy landowners and a limited number of tourists. Utilitarianism was far more egalitarian and it drove the expansive progress that was making Britain the wealthiest nation in the Western world. The counter-arguments thereby looked trivial and finally of no account. And yet a new idea had taken root. Land owned privately could nonetheless be claimed as the property of the nation as a whole because of its aesthetic and historic value (Ritvo 2003: 1510). This would give impetus to the idea of setting aside land for public use and recreation, and it would strengthen the resolve of environmentalists to fight for the preservation of areas of unusual beauty or cultural significance. An age of environmental activism had begun.



Fig. 5. *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Albert Bierstadt (1874-80)

## 2. Hetch Hetchy Valley

"Dam Hetch Hetchy!" exclaims John Muir in 1908, "As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man" (Muir 1908: 220). The Hetch-Hetchy Project is one of the most infamous environmental controversies in American history, and John Muir the most prominent naturalist of the nineteenth century. When Muir threw himself against the project it was clear there was going to be a fight. By the end of the nineteenth century, the City of San Francisco needed new sources of water, especially after the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906, and the high mountains of the Sierra Nevada range were an obvious place to look. There were a number of possibilities but the engineers quickly settled on two spots for reservoirs, Lake Eleanor and Hetch Hetchy Valley, both of which were located within Yosemite National Park, then managed by the US Department of the Interior. The park was part of the Yosemite Grant (signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1864), and was the first land to be preserved for public use. The Yosemite Valley (a small part of the entire Grant) was given by the government to the State of California to manage as a park (in effect, creating a state park surrounded by a national one). In 1890, at the urging of John Muir, the Yosemite land (minus the state-owned Valley) was further protected by the federal government and finally made into Yosemite National Park in 1906 (Fields 1936: 591), by which time Muir had convinced Theodore Roosevelt, during a camping trip in 1903, to include the Yosemite Valley as part of the new National Park.

And that, one would have expected, should have been the end of any possible incursion into Yosemite. But San Francisco was a city thirsty for drinking water and hydroelectric power and it continued to take measures to secure the sites it coveted. Crucial to this effort was the passage of a bill in Congress in 1900 (introduced by a California Representative), that provided for the municipal use of National Parks.





Fig. 6. President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite, May 1903

Thus began a series of petitions from San Francisco to the national government to allow it to convert Hetch Hetchy Valley into a reservoir. The protracted legal and political battle, which involved many people, organizations and agencies, took place over the next thirteen years and ended finally with the passage of a bill allowing San Francisco immediate access to Hetch Hetchy in 1913. John Muir, who vigorously opposed the project – as did the Sierra Club, which he helped found – died the following year.

What Roosevelt said of Muir is worth noting, that “he was also – what few nature lovers are – a man able to influence contemporary thought and action on the subjects to which he had devoted his life. He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country” (Roosevelt 1915: 27). Muir had won many contests on behalf of environmental preservation. Like Wordsworth, he

saw Nature as a sacred presence, for “In God’s wildness lies the hope of the world – the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness” (Teale 2001: 315). This, of course, echoes Thoreau’s famous (and often misquoted dictum), “In wildness is the preservation of the world,” and, like Thoreau, Muir often takes a jaundiced view of his fellow man: “fresh” is a trope for “pristine” and “natural”; but what “blights” Nature is man; and “unredeemed” can only be ironical, as wilderness, in Muir’s view, needs no redemption except when seen through the dogmatic lens of a regnant Protestantism. The rhetoric of Romanticism is fully blown in Muir – as it continues to be in the publications of the Sierra Club – and it was from this position that he advocated preservation, particularly in the face of what he saw as the profane desires of benighted capitalists.

At the beginning of his defense of Hetch Hetchy, Muir writes, “it is impossible to overestimate the value of wild mountains and mountain temples as places for people to grow in, recreation grounds for soul and body. They are the greatest of our natural resources, God’s best gifts, but none, however high and holy, is beyond reach of the spoiler”. Muir goes on to extoll the extraordinary character of Hetch Hetchy as every bit as sublime and beautiful as the better-known Yosemite Valley:

The correspondence between the Hetch Hetchy walls in their trends, sculpture, physical structure, and general arrangement of the main rock-masses and those of the Yosemite Valley has excited the wondering admiration of every observer (Muir 1908: 215).



Fig. 7. O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy

Fig. 8. *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Isaiah West Taber, 1908

Having established, in considerable detail, the features of Hetch Hetchy, Muir turns to his main agenda, opposition to the dam:

Sad to say, this most precious and sublime feature of the Yosemite National Park, one of the greatest of all our natural resources for the uplifting joy and peace and health of the people, is in danger of being dammed and made into a reservoir to help supply San Francisco with water and light, thus flooding it from wall to wall and burying its gardens and groves one or two hundred feet deep (Muir 1920: 255-256).

At this point in the piece, any sympathetic reader is likely to read that sentence with incredulous alarm; Muir follows it up with a larger statement about the true utility of Nature:

The making of gardens and parks goes on with civilization all over the world, and they increase both in size and number as their value is recognized. Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike (Muir 1920: 255-256).

He calls this “natural beauty hunger” and sees it as a universal tonic – interestingly, recent research has, in fact, corroborated his claim<sup>1</sup>. “Nevertheless,” he says, “like anything else worthwhile, from the very beginning, however well guarded, they have always been subject to attack by despoiling gain-seekers and mischief-makers of every degree from Satan to Senators” (Muir 1920: 217). To align Satan with Senators is a move Americans of all stripes – and at all times – seem to entertain. Muir, though, follows through on the implications in this instance:

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: Shanahan, Danielle F. *et al.* 2016. Health Benefits from Nature Depend on Dose, *Scientific Reports* 6, Article number: 28551, <http://www.nature.com/articles/srep28551> (consulted on 16/8/2017).

Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park, strife has been going on around its borders and I suppose this will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however much its boundaries may be shorn, or its wild beauty destroyed (Muir 1920: 217).

To couch the controversy in terms of “the universal battle between right and wrong” is about as uncompromising a stance as one could take. It is not dissimilar to what the Thirlmere Defence Association proclaimed: faced with a choice between a utilitarian good and an aesthetic experience, they chose the latter without hesitation. Muir’s extreme rhetoric did give some of his supporters pause and it helped bring about a split within the Sierra Club over the issue. It also pitted Muir against the formidable Gifford Pinchot, Chief of the United States Forest Service and the primary advocate of what he called the “conservation ethic” that allowed for the controlled and profitable use of public lands. Gifford was instrumental in keeping San Francisco’s bid for Hetch Hetchy alive, though it had widespread support in any case. In looking at the detailed report supporting the reservoir, *The Hetch Hetchy Water Supply for San Francisco 1912*, put together by the engineer John R. Freeman, we can see that the Thirlmere experience was very much on the minds of the advocates. In citing the Thirlmere case, Freeman writes:

There was a great popular outcry in newspapers and elsewhere, in which bishops, baronets, actors and literary artists joined with great fervor, about the desecration of this beautiful lake for such a utilitarian purpose, merely, as it was said, to save the city the extra cost involved in going to some less beautiful spot (Freeman 2005: 46).

This is exactly what opponents of the Hetch Hetchy dam were claiming as well. Freeman goes on to say:

But in the course of their works the Water Board completed a beautiful macadam road encircling the lake, and giving along its westerly shore many beautiful views of Mt. Helvellyn, from points to which there had previously been no good road. The roads about this reservoir have come to be one of the most popular holiday routes in England (Freeman 2005: 46).

It’s clear Freeman and others studied the Thirlmere Scheme with an eye to seeing just how Manchester managed to succeed in thwarting the activists of the TDA. The dam advocates used the same tactics and strategy, and got the same result: the dam was built. Once again, it appears, utilitarianism vanquishes environmentalism. I want to come back to this conclusion later, but first, we will consider a very different story that takes place in the Hudson River Valley of New York in the 1960s.



Fig. 9. Storm King Mountain, looking west

### 3. Storm King Mountain

September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1962, seemed an auspicious day: Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* while Consolidated Edison Company of New York, the nation's largest electric and gas company, announced plans to build a hydro-electric plant at Storm King Mountain in the Hudson Highlands sixty miles to the north. Both intended to address ecological problems: Carson, the spread of harmful chemicals, and Con Ed the air quality of New York and the need for a non-polluting solution to the city's burgeoning energy requirements. This need became all the more urgent after the massive blackout in New York in 1965 that affected twenty-five million people. Con Ed had already put on line the Indian Point nuclear power plant and had plans for two more in the near future, but it desperately wanted a pumped-storage plant that could generate power during off-peak periods. Con Edison, it should be noted, was a powerful entity used to getting its way. There was no reason to suppose the Storm King project would be problematic: as an engineering solution it was elegant, efficient and cost effective. They simply needed to line up the appropriate landowners and local authorities of Cornwall, NY, and make sure they profited too. In fact, much of this work was done quietly beforehand with a good deal of forethought.

What Con Ed didn't anticipate, however, was that six private – and tenacious – individuals would band together to stop the project by forming a group called Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference to rally support for taking on the goliath Con Ed. Initially Scenic Hudson was no more than a gnat to be swatted away, especially once permits had been granted and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was brought in, but the story quickly becomes interesting when, in 1972, the U.S. Court of Appeals, 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit, rules, in *Scenic Hudson Preservation Conference v. Federal Power Commission*, that contrary to what the federal regulatory commission held, the individuals represented by Scenic Hudson had legal standing to challenge the government. As the judge put it:

In order to insure that the Federal Power Commission will adequately protect the public interest in the aesthetic, conservational, and recreational aspects of power development, those who by their activities and conduct have exhibited a special interest



Fig. 10. *Storm King of the Hudson* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1865)

in such areas, must be held to be included in the class of “aggrieved” parties under [...] We hold that the Federal Power Act gives petitioners a legal right to protect their special interests (Hays 1971: 20295).

This was a new and extraordinarily wide-ranging decision that has had implications for environmental activism ever since. In the first place, it established that citizens and citizen groups have the legal standing to litigate in environmental matters; and secondly, they can do so for non-economic reasons. As the court noted:

The Storm King project is to be located in an area of unique beauty and major historical significance. The highlands and gorge of the Hudson offer one of the finest pieces of river scenery in the world. The great German traveler Baedeker called it “finer than the Rhine”. Petitioners’ contention that the Commission must take these factors into consideration in evaluating the Storm King project is justified by the history of the Federal Power Act (Hays 1971: 20294).

In the same year, building on the example of Storm King, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that “Aesthetic and environmental well-being, like economic well-being, are important ingredients of the quality of life in our society” (Stewart 1972: 735), thus opening the way to further activism by environmentalists.

There is little doubt that the Court of Appeal was swayed by the many astonishing encomiums to Storm King and the Hudson Highlands, which ranged from praising its natural scenic beauty to underscoring its historical importance during the Revolutionary War. The famous Yale art historian, Vincent Scully, had this to say when asked why he thought Storm King was “one of the most valuable and unusual natural formations and scenes in the United States”:

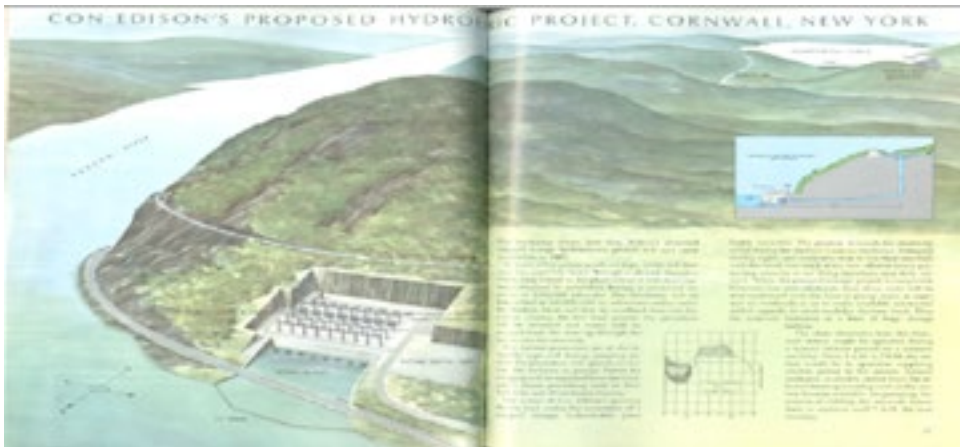


Fig. 11. Con Ed artist's rendering of the proposed hydro-electric power plant on Storm King Mountain

Storm King [...] is a mountain which should be left alone. It rises like a brown bear out of the river, a dome of living granite, swelling with animal power. It is not picturesque in the softer sense of the word, but awesome, a primitive embodiment of the energies of the earth. It makes the character of wild nature physically visible in monumental form. As such it strongly reminds me of some of the natural formations which mark sacred sites in Greece and signal the presence of the Gods; it preserves and embodies the most savage and untrammelled characteristics of the wild at the very threshold of New York. It can still make the city dweller emotionally aware of what he most needs to know: that nature still exists, with its own laws, rhythms, and powers, separate from human desires (Scully in Dunwell 1992: 220).

Meanwhile, Con Ed called its opponents "misinformed bird watchers, nature fakers, land grabbers and militant adversaries of progress" (Dunwell 1992: 223). Despite efforts to discredit it, Scenic Hudson was able to amass a formidable array of supporters from around the country and from fourteen foreign countries. Con Edison attempted to counter this rising tide by producing a full-color brochure with a dramatic and impressive rendering of the proposed facility against the backdrop of the Hudson Highlands. It's a beautiful picture but for that very reason it backfired: for the first time people could visualize just what the pumped storage complex would look like and they were appalled: a huge chunk of the mountain would be carved out and an enormous steel and concrete edifice take its place. The artist simply did too good a job.

The Storm King case did not end quickly; Con Ed continued to try to find ways to build at Storm King but finally, in 1980, after seventeen years of litigation, the company gave up and furthermore agreed to undertake remedial work at its other power plants in order to reduce fish kills. It was a resounding success for Scenic Hudson, but not for them only: Storm King is often referred to as the birthplace of the modern environmental movement in the U.S.

While I have glossed over a lot of the detail surrounding this case, I think we are in a position now to ask why there was success at Storm King but failure at Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy. The question, of course, is a bit naïve because there are so many complex factors to

take into account, including the historical development of environmental thinking in general and the peculiar contingencies surrounding each case. But I think the question is useful because certain overlapping considerations were at the forefront for all three, and that commonality, in itself, calls for some reflection.

#### 4. Conclusions

If we recall the Wordsworth sonnet that we began with, we noted six interwoven elements: a utilitarian proposal, a special locale, national or patriotic interest, local residents, visiting tourists, and an idealized view of Nature. In the three case studies we have looked at, all six of those considerations play a part to varying degrees. It is virtually a recipe for environmental activism. But when we ask why two prominent and celebrated struggles failed and one succeeded, we have to look at differences rather than similarities. Accordingly, I would like to suggest four interrelated reasons for the favorable outcome at Storm King (though I believe there are others too), and, also, two caveats by way of conclusion.

First, *demographics*.

Both Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy are located at a considerable distance from a metropolitan center. In 1871, the county of Westmoreland, in which Thirlmere resided, had less than 65,000 people, as compared to Greater Manchester, which had one and a half million. Yosemite lies within Mariposa County which, in 1900, had less than 5,000 people in it, while San Francisco at the time had almost 350,000. The village of Cornwall is nestled next to Storm King, with a population of about 8,000, but the Hudson Highlands is bounded by the cities of Newburgh, Beacon, and Peekskill, with the entire Mid-Hudson region having over 500,000 in 1970, and another eight million in New York City, sixty miles away. As Con Edison discovered, there were a



Fig. 12. Lower Hudson River Valley (showing the Hudson Highlands)

lot of citizens interested in what was going on in their backyard, especially once the people of New York City turned against Con Ed. The sheer size of the opposition became overwhelming. For all the support that Thirlmere and Hetch Hetchy garnered – and it included many prominent and even famous people – the activists had to rely more on rhetoric than numbers. On the surface, this does not bode well for environmental campaigns in more remote places, though I think it's reasonable to argue that the Internet can now offset such deficits.

#### Second, *sense of place*

This is related to demographics, but it's really a separate issue to proximity. Much has been written about sense of place but, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan points out, we're really talking about the relationship between space and place, and the way a space becomes an experiential place, a lived reality (Tuan 1977: 6). The Hudson Valley has been inhabited continuously for a long time, first by Native Americans and then by settlers, first the Dutch and then the English, and then, it seems, the rest of the world. When I referred a moment ago to people's "backyard", I had in mind the fact that the inhabitants of the region were deeply connected to it and *interested*, in all senses of the word. Another word for this might be *loyalty*, an emotional register that is untouched by utilitarian concerns; loyalty is what moves people to sacrifice themselves or, at least, to put themselves on the line. Storm King became a symbol of a certain love of place, and once that was activated, activism followed.

#### Third, *imaginative texture*

This is connected to a sense of place and is one of its causes. The Mid-Hudson has a rich history of aesthetic production. Americans, and New Yorkers in particular, are well aware of this texture, be it the stories of Washington Irving ("Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow") or the gorgeous paintings of the Hudson River School (by Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederick Church, Albert Bierstadt and others). Even the singer-activist Pete Seeger and his *Clearwater* sloop are part of that cultural history. This creates a deep pool of emotional reserve that can be drawn on when the region is perceived to be under threat. There was something similar happening in the Thirlmere Scheme, where the storied lives of Wordsworth and his circle played a role in the desire to preserve the lake as it was. But in 1870 that texture was not as thickly woven as it is now, and I suspect that any plan to dam one of the Lakes at this point would be met with fierce and general resistance. The same is clearly true for Hetch Hetchy, which is why there is a contemporary movement, Restore Hetch Hetchy, that advocates removing the dam.

#### Fourth, *environmental impact*

The Thirlmere opposition was mainly motivated by aesthetic considerations on the one hand and the desire to avoid disrupting the local community on the other. Hetch Hetchy was seen as a fight to preserve a unique and remarkable place as it was (and as it was being used), so it, too, engaged in polemics that had an aesthetic basis. All of this was true for



Storm King as well, but with one very crucial difference: the fate of striped bass. No matter how Con Edison revised its plans to make them palatable, it could never solve the problem of devastating fish kills that would occur in the river. The striped bass, in particular, was a rallying point for fisherman and conservationists. Emotions on this ran high, stoked in part by smart and eloquent articles by Robert Boyle, writing in such venues as *Sports Illustrated*. This was not a trivial issue; striped bass fishing was a forty-five million dollar a year industry and the Storm King project would eviscerate it. But it wasn't just fishermen who were concerned; the certainty that the project would do irreparable harm to the ecology of the river and the region was a crucial motivating factor in the campaign's effectiveness. Neither Thirlmere nor Hetch Hetchy had a similar issue as a rallying point. The lesson here seems to be that opposition to ecological damage per se remains a potent force in the movement for environmental remediation and justice.

There are undoubtedly other factors we might consider as well, but I want to leave these suppositions at this point and turn to my two caveats.

First, *aesthetics is universal*

What I mean by this is simply that the aesthetic arguments common to all three cases were not limited to the environmentalists or their point of view. Such environmental struggles are usually cast in the light of either/or, of good and bad. A rapacious utilitarianism is pitted against a virtuous ecological concern. In his study of Hetch Hetchy, Robert W. Righter came to understand how distorting the normative view of the controversy was. Wilderness preservation, he writes, "was not an issue in the Hetch Hetchy fight":

The defenders of the valley consistently advocated development, including roads, hotels, winter sports amenities, and the infrastructure to support legions of visitors. The land use battle joined over one question: Would the valley be used for water storage or nature tourism? (Righter 2006: 5-6).

Moreover, when one looked closely, it's clear that one of the reasons the engineers were so keen to select Hetch Hetchy and not some other possibility was because it "seemed to work a magical spell on those who encountered it" (Righter 2006: 52). As the mayor of San Francisco at the time put it:

The dam site and valley tended to 'completely hypnotize every civil engineer that sees it, and to render him forever after incapable of a rational consideration of the larger problem of public policy relating to it' (Righter 2006: 52).

In other words, aesthetics can cut in two directions; it influences both the engineer and the poet, though it can lead to diametrically opposite actions. It would be a mistake, then, to underestimate the impact of aesthetic responses overall, particularly as it might open up common ground for understanding what's really at stake.



Fig. 13. View from Storm King Mountain

### Second, *the rule of law*

All three of my case studies occur within the context of Western liberal democracies where the rule of law is clearly established and largely followed. It is an obvious but necessary point to make, since once we go outside that context, all bets are off. In terms of the risk to cultural heritage, the obliteration of the Buddha sculptures in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, and the systematic destruction of monuments at Palmyra, Syria, are the obvious examples. But, of course, beyond that we face the more dire consequences of environmental degradation worldwide and anthropocentric climate change. Global problems are also local problems, and, as we have seen, solutions at the local level can have much wider repercussions. Storm King tells us that.

Finally, I want to point out that the aesthetic dimension in our three examples extends beyond the physical realm of natural beauty and sublimity. What truly galvanized people was not so much the actual places themselves (relatively few visited them) but rather the representation of them by writers: Wordsworth, Muir, Irving, Scully and others, as we have seen. In both literature and journalism, it was the written word that carried furthest, for all of these cases turned upon the rhetorical strategies employed by both sides, not only in the law courts and but in the court of public opinion as well. There are limits to what environmental writing can do, but it's clear we can't do without it.

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### Figure Credits

- Fig. 1: "Raven's Crag" by Elijah Walton. In *English Lake Scenery* by Elijah Walton. London: W. M. Thompson, 1876. N. P. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
- Fig. 2: "Thirlmere Bridge Looking North, Cumberland" by Thomas Allom. From *Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham, and Northumberland, Illustrated* by Thomas Rose. London: Fisher and Son, 1833: 117. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
- Fig. 3: "Thirlmere: Before the Enlargement of the Lake" from *Cumberland* by John Edward Marr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910: 46. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
- Fig. 4: "Thirlmere at the Present Day" from *Cumberland* by John Edward Marr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910: 47. From Ritvo, "Thirlmere".
- Fig. 5: *Hetch Hetchy Valley*, Albert Bierstadt (1874-1880). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (CT).
- Fig. 6: President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite, May 1903. National Park Service.

Fig. 7: O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy, 2006. Inklein at Wikipedia.

Fig. 8: *Hetch Hetchy Valley* by Isaiah West Taber. *Sierra Club Bulletin*, VI, 4 (January) 1908: 211.

Fig. 9: Storm King Mountain. Photo credit: Robert Rodriguez Jr. From Guenther, n. p.

Fig. 10: *Storm King of the Hudson* by Sanford Robinson Gifford (1865). Private Collection. Public domain.

Fig. 11: Rendering of proposed hydro-electric power plant on Storm King Mountain. *Annual Report 1962: Consolidated Edison* (16-17). Image later published in the *New York Times*, spring 1963. In Talbot, 82.

Fig. 12: Map of the Lower Hudson River Valley, <http://www.explore-hudson-valley.com> (consulted on 14/06/2017).

Fig. 13: View from Storm King Summit. Photo credit: Nick Zungoli.

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**John Thieme**

### **From the Personal Heresy to Ecocriticism: Moving Canons, Creating Reading Communities**

**Abstract I:** Il presente saggio esamina alcune delle forme che gli studi letterari anglofoni hanno preso nel corso degli ultimi due secoli, ponendo un' enfasi particolare sulle comunità di lettori. Partendo dalla controversia su "The Personal Heresy" degli anni '30, si riassumono le origini dello studio istituzionalizzato della letteratura inglese, nella Londra del XIX secolo, per poi affrontare la Nuova Critica e i suoi vari approcci, 'teoria' che ha dominato lo studio accademico della letteratura negli ultimi decenni del XX secolo. Essa si oppone al formalismo con approcci eticamente impegnati, come il postcolonialismo e l'ecocriticismo, concludendo che, nelle loro iterazioni più altruiste, questi due approcci parlino a, e per conto di, una comunità di lettori inclusiva e planetaria e offrano la possibilità di un futuro eco-sostenibile.

**Abstract II:** This essay surveys some of the forms that Anglophone literary studies have taken across the last two centuries, placing a particular emphasis on reading communities. It opens with an account of "The Personal heresy" controversy of the 1930s, before moving back to a summary of the origins of the institutionalized study of English, in London in the nineteenth century. Subsequently it discusses New Criticism and the various approaches referred to as 'theory' that dominated the academic study of literature in the last decades of the twentieth century. It contrasts formalism with ethically committed approaches, such as postcolonialism and ecocriticism, concluding that in their most altruistic iterations, these two approaches speak for, and to, an inclusive planetary community of readers, and hold out the possibility of an eco-sustainable future.

This essay offers a selective overview of forms that Anglophone literary studies have taken across the last two centuries, demonstrating how the ways in which canons have been constructed reflect tacit, and not so tacit, assumptions about the reading communities to which the curricula on offer have been directed. Needless to say, the essay is itself implicated in the act of assuming a reading community, the audience of the Udine conference at which it was delivered and the readership of *Le Simplegadi*.

As a departure-point, I should like to revisit a controversy that took place eight decades ago. In 1934, C. S. Lewis published a polemical essay that took issue with the view of

literature expressed in E. M. W. Tillyard's book, *Milton* (1930), a work that argued that the real subject of poetry was the state of the poet's mind at the time of writing. Literature, Lewis contended, was what was on the page and it was heretical to suggest an extraneous personal alternative. Tillyard replied by saying that he was not proposing simple biographical readings of texts, but rather an approach that identified the mental pattern to be found in a poet's work, which was a reflection of the writer's personality. Further essays followed and the full debate was published at the end of the decade in a volume entitled *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (Tillyard & Lewis 1939). On the most obvious level, Lewis was proposing an objective hermeneutics to counter Tillyard's seemingly speculative subjective approach, but more was involved than just this. Lewis also saw Tillyard's reading of Milton as elitist, because it was founded on the belief that poets are superior beings, a belief that had reached its apogee in the Romantic period. Wordsworth became another touchstone in the exchange between the two men, though Milton, or at least the poetic persona who took it upon himself to "justify the ways of God to men" (Milton 1957: 212), confirmed classicist though he was, was clearly an earlier incarnation of a poet who addressed his readers *ex cathedra*. As part of his rebuttal of Tillyard's position, Lewis argued that poetry is "a skill or trained habit of using all the extra-logical elements of language – rhythm, vowel-music, onomatopoeia, associations, and what not – to convey the concrete reality of experience" (Tillyard & Lewis 1939: 108). This may sound something like formalism, and of course formalist approaches had been developed in Russia prior to the 1930s, but Lewis's supposed objectivity and his egalitarianism were predicated on the belief that all are equal *under God*. He opposed the notion that poets are spiritually superior beings in favour of a belief that saw them as the mouthpieces of a democratic deity who shared his favours evenly among the various members of the human race.

In some ways, the debate between Lewis and Tillyard was a controversy that was very much of its time and, as it was mainly conducted within the walls of Oxbridge colleges, where both were faculty members – Lewis at Oxford; Tillyard at Cambridge – it could be seen as a product of a particular reading community talking to itself. Nevertheless, dusting the cobwebs off this conversation offers a springboard for a consideration of what the subject of literature might be and the related issues of *how* it should be studied and *what* should be read – what might constitute a canon. To place this in context, I should like briefly to review how literature had been studied in British universities prior to this and then move forwards to review a few of the many constructions of canons and critical practices that have been in circulation in the decades since Lewis and Tillyard crossed swords. Piecemeal though this survey is, it illustrates the extent to which the construction of canons is linked with perceptions of what are appropriate objects of study for particular reading communities.

Prior to the personal heresy controversy, the constitution of English studies in British universities had been centrally concerned with Englishness and a belief in the discipline's power as a force for social engineering. The subject was originally introduced into the university curriculum at London University in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (Palmer 1965: 16). More or less simultaneously with this, it made an appearance in the curriculum on offer at working men's institutes, as a field that was supposed to have the socially beneficial function of providing the masses with a moral education. As a uni-

versity subject, it first appeared in the United Kingdom at the “godless Institution” (18) of University College London, which was founded in 1828. Convinced of the utilitarian benefits of language teaching, University College appointed a Professor of English *Language and Literature*. Shortly after this, the College’s rival, King’s College London, an institution founded by Anglican and Tory interests, which opened three years later, established a Chair of English Literature and History (16-18). In their different ways, both colleges disseminated an historical account of the evolution of Englishness. Queen’s College, an offshoot of King’s College established for the education of women, also played an important part in the early shaping of English studies, and in his introductory lecture there, no less a light than Charles Kingsley spoke of literature as a discipline that would equip women for *their* allotted role in life, while also referring to it as part of the “the autobiography of a nation” (39). So the emergence of English as a university discipline was linked with a nationalist mission, part of which was dedicated to the need to foster or, to take a less kind view, co-opt the energies of intelligent women and the socially less privileged. Marxist readings of nineteenth-century sport have seen the introduction of organized games as a means of controlling the aspirations of both the middle classes and the emerging industrialized proletariat (James 1969: 160 ff.), and arguably similar agendas were involved in the promotion of English studies. In any case, English made its academic *début* as a subject to be studied by workers and women. As Terry Eagleton puts it, it was “literally the poor man’s Classics”; and its “softening and humanizing” effects also made it “a convenient sort of non-subject to palm off on the ladies” (Eagleton 1983: 27-28).

Battles in the culture wars of the late nineteenth century were fought over the relative merits of teaching English and classical literature, but in the early twentieth century Greek and Latin lost ground to the parvenu younger sister of English literature, which secured converts across gender and class lines. The curriculum still nodded towards the Classics – the classical background to English literature would remain a London University paper until the 1960s – but the basic parameters established for the study of literature were historically and nationally grounded. The canon that emerged offered a supposedly definitive account of *English literary history*, creating an imagined community of academic readers, in which women characteristically had to interpellate themselves as men<sup>1</sup>, working-class students had to resocialize themselves as middle-class, and the linear development of both English literature and the English language formed the cornerstone of study. In short, a national canon was created, which constructed a very particular version of English studies and in the United Kingdom this underwent few modifications until the third quarter of the twentieth century. As late as the 1960s, the London University English Honours curriculum had eight compulsory papers, which took undergraduates on an earnest historical journey through English literature and language from the Anglo-Saxon period to 1880, and three of these papers dealt with Old English or medieval writing. The optional part of the curriculum was made up of

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<sup>1</sup> Eagleton points out that Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, appointed as the first Professor of English at Cambridge in 1912, characteristically began his lectures with the word ‘Gentlemen’, though the majority of his audience was female (Eagleton 1983: 28), and, of course, the use of the male pronoun to refer to the reader remained the norm until some forty years ago.

two further papers: Old Icelandic figured prominently here and the one 'modern' option on offer stopped in 1930. So a safe temporal distance was interposed between student and object of study and the paradigm that was followed was *historically* determined. Inevitably the writing being studied raised questions about spatial dislocation, translation and cultural connections, but the curriculum privileged history over geography and any emphasis on the intersections of time and space, as advanced in the work of cultural theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault, postmodern urbanists such as Edward Soja and cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey, was conspicuous by its absence. Foucault has said, "Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile" (Foucault 1980: 70; qtd. Soja 1989: 10), but if anything, this flatters the way the canon was shaped in nineteenth-, early-twentieth- and mid-twentieth-century English studies, since space was not really treated at all, even though a version of the English national imaginary was the cornerstone of the curriculum. It was to change in the 1970s and 1980s, with the advent of a multiplicity of theoretical challenges to this exclusivist status quo, and a broadening of awareness of what might reasonably be deemed 'literature', but before moving on to consider such developments, I should like to turn back to a highly influential school of criticism that came to the fore shortly after the personal heresy debate: New Criticism.

New Criticism, as represented by the work of American critics such as W. K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, was very much on the Lewis side of the personal heresy debate in that it rejected biographical and historical information in favour of an approach that concentrated exclusively on the text. Wimsatt was the co-author, with Monroe Beardsley, of the classic essay, 'The Intentional Fallacy' (1946), which argued that authorial intention was both an unknown entity and an irrelevant factor in any assessment of a literary text. Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) is arguably the finest example of New Criticism in practice. Its close readings uncover meanings that may not have occurred to the majority of its readers, but which, once they are foregrounded, are very persuasive. I remember reading Brooks's analysis of Tennyson's 'Tears Idle Tears' and thinking it was considerably better than the poem itself. Tennyson opens by saying "Tears idle tears / I know not what they mean" (Tennyson 1992: 38). Brooks finds a convincing meaning for the poem, detecting productive paradoxes, where many readers see only a muddle, or at best a vague attempt to make sense of puzzling subjective emotions. Paradox is at the heart of Brooks's approach in *The Well Wrought Urn*. He takes the view that "the language of poetry is the language of paradox" (Brooks 1968: 1), but as with irony, spotting paradoxes often depends on the critic discovering ambiguities by bringing culturally encoded assumptions to the text. Discussing *The Rape of the Lock*, Brooks argues that it is mistaken to ask the question, "Is Belinda [the protagonist of Pope's poem, who has a lock of her hair cut off in a prank in Catholic high society] a goddess, or is she merely a frivolous tease?" (Brooks 1968: 66), because this is a false dichotomy. Belinda is both. This may seem like a comment on a very narrow subject, the character of a particular woman in a particular social group at a particular time, but Brooks sees it as a metonym for a larger hermeneutic problem: the tendency to construct 'either-or' oppositions, when the two categories concerned are far from exclusive. The poem is mock-epic, but in its way it is an epic for its age, as well as a fine critique of the upper-class society to which Belinda belongs through the parodic use of the epic form. Yet, brilliant though the



essay is, it is based on the question that Brooks chooses to ask, and many readers will come to *The Rape of the Lock* without being troubled by the supposed dichotomy between goddess and frivolous tease. As for the works discussed in *The Well Wrought Urn*, they are all poetic texts that sit comfortably within what were then prevalent notions of the English canon: they range from verse in *Macbeth* to Yeats's 'Among School Children'. And they are all by male writers, Milton among them, who were active between the early seventeenth and early twentieth centuries.

There was an inevitable backlash. In the U.S. in the 1960s, archetypal criticism, taking its departure-point from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), found recurrent mythic patterns in texts across periods and cultures, at its best opening up new avenues for cross-cultural dialogue, at its worst reducing cultural difference to a glib universalism. The literary pendulum also swung away from close readings, particularly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as theoretical approaches such as structuralism, poststructuralism, Marxism, feminism and various schools of psychoanalysis travelled from mainland Europe, particularly Paris, into the Anglo-American academy. This congeries of discourses, frequently and reductively lumped together under the term 'theory', unsettled the older historical hegemony, enabling a shift towards a pluralist, more inclusive view of literature. It brought strange bedfellows such as pre-Althusserian Marxism and poststructuralism together, but, although these approaches may have cohabited uneasily, it opened literary studies up to new communities of readers. The wheel had come full circle from New Criticism. Far from being sacrosanct as objects that needed to be decoded without recourse to outside authority, texts were now healthily open to being read in a multitude of ways. To the best of my knowledge no one ever revisited Brooks's reading of *The Rape of the Lock* to say that it was not enough simply to replace 'either-or' interpretations with 'both-and', because the play of individual readers' minds could fashion numerous other responses to Pope's mock-epic mode, but pluralism replaced binarism in a majority of contexts. Along with the various theoretical '-isms' I have just been mentioning, reader response theory further democratized the study of literature, empowering individual readers to participate in a triangular relationship with writer and text in the production of meaning. And, after all, books remain closed and unread, devoid of meaning, until a reader opens them up and interprets them. People read books and books read people. Under this new dispensation, everyone was a critic. Wimsatt and Munroe had produced a second essay, 'The Affective Fallacy' (1949), a companion-piece to 'The Intentional Fallacy', in which they argued that readers' responses were as irrelevant as author's intentions, but this was debunked by the work of reader response critics such as Stanley Fish, who asked "*Is There a Text in This Class?*" (1980) and took the view that readers generate meanings as part of an interpretive community. Seen through this prism, C. S. Lewis's egalitarian community of readers became a reality, albeit without any of his sense of an overriding Christian message.

Curricular reform accompanied the various theoretical '-isms', to the point where Dead White Males were seen as *personae non gratae*. Now the issue was not so much what Milton was about and how he should be studied as whether he should be studied at all. There was a popular pun that the can(n)on had been fired and virulent culture wars raged through the late 1960s and 1970s, particularly in America. Those hostile to the broadening

of the canon argued that it had been infected by the shibboleths of political correctness, and this charge would also be levelled against the confederation of approaches that have most commonly been referred to as 'postcolonialism'. Nevertheless postcolonial approaches destabilized previous notions of *what* should be included in the canon in a more radical way than the French-dominated methodologies then widely being used for the study of literature, by upending the pro-Western and pro-Northern biases that had continued to dominate the discipline, even if postcolonial critics such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak drew heavily on poststructuralism. That said, the impulse behind postcolonialism was invariably ethical and in this respect it had affinities with feminism's challenge to androcentric views, and the emerging discipline of ecocriticism, which challenged *anthropo*-centric perspectives. Ethical approaches to literature were not exactly new in Anglophone literary studies, but in the pre-1970s curriculum, they had usually been rooted in notions of liberal or conservative individualism. In the Euro-American academy, that changed with the advent of 'theory' and, following in the wake of various schools of Marxist and feminist theory, postcolonialism and ecocriticism brought a new spirit of planetary ethical concern to the study of literature. Both were loose coalitions of discourses, and like Marxism and post-structuralism they have sometimes cohabited uneasily, but at their best they belong together as approaches that have contested inequitable power structures and the exclusion of alterity.

Postcolonialism has meant different things to different people, but, despite attacks, it continues as a term that denotes a range of preoccupations that address asymmetrical power hegemonies connected with colonialism, its legacy and other geopolitical inequities. For historians writing in the aftermath of Empire, the term referred simply to the era *after* colonialism, but in literary and broader cultural contexts it soon came to mean more. For the authors of the influential *The Empire Writes Back*, published in 1989, it signified "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day", since they argued, very reasonably, "there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression" and so, they suggested, it is "most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 2).

A little over a decade later Helen Gilbert summed up the term's widening currency, saying that:

In many contexts, the term indicates a degree of agency, or at least a programme of resistance, against cultural domination; in others, it signals the existence of a particular historical legacy and/or a chronological stage in a culture's transition into a modern nation-state; in yet others, it is used more disapprovingly to suggest a form of co-optation into Western cultural economies. What is common to all of these definitions, despite their various implications, is a central concern with cultural power (Gilbert 2001: 1).

Beyond this, Gilbert pointed out that in certain quarters postcolonialism had become "a convenient (and sometimes useful) portmanteau term to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppressions" (Gilbert 2001: 1), and in their more

socially committed articulations, postcolonial practices have represented a form of epistemic activism against unevenly balanced economies, whether in the heyday of European colonialisms, or in the late capitalist neo-colonial global order. Where literature has been concerned, the term 'postcolonial' has been used to demarcate particular texts and areas of study that are variously characterized by temporal and/or geographical and/or ideological orientation, and to refer to methodologies that contest asymmetrical power structures, wherever they occur.

In the wake of postcolonialism's impact on literary and cultural studies, ecocriticism became a significant critical force in the late 1980s, though green activism had, of course, been prominent in academia more generally from the 1960s onwards, and in canonical literary and theological texts in the East and the West, the North and the South it has a much longer genealogy. Among classic Asian texts, Kausalya's *Arthashastra* (from the fourth century BCE) embodies the ancient Sanskrit belief in the need for sustainable eco-systems, predicated on the belief that the earth is a shared inheritance (Rangarajan 2014: 528), and a similar communal vision is encapsulated in the widely quoted Native American proverb, "We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children"<sup>2</sup>. Similarly, ecological concerns figure prominently in numerous Western texts long before the Euro-American academy turned its attention to them. After all, the expulsion from Eden in the Book of Genesis can obviously be read as a trope for the loss of an idealized conception of nature and, at the risk of privileging Milton by referring to him once more, it is possible to read *Paradise Lost* as an ecological elegy for the disaster that ensues when imagined primordial natural environments are violated. And, to take a pair of further arbitrarily chosen literary examples, the two most obvious strains of ecocriticism, resistance to environmental damage and speciesism, can be seen in Thoreau's retreat to Walden pond and the killing of the albatross in 'The Ancient Mariner'. One should add that speciesism is itself a problematic category, involving far more than a binary opposition between the human and the non-human – without trying to recuperate the serpent in *Paradise Lost*, reptiles nearly always get a worse press than mammals. More generally, like postcolonialism, ecocriticism has embraced a wide variety of standpoints, with particular disjunctions between Northern and Southern approaches to environmental issues<sup>3</sup>.

Postcolonialism and ecocriticism have reshaped the contemporary canon through their shared ethically motivated concern to challenge asymmetrical power hegemonies and the exclusion of alterity, but they do not always sit comfortably together. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin fix on a significant example in discussing Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) as a response to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). As they see it, Achebe very reasonably offers a corrective to Conrad's virtual exclusion of Africans from his fable about colonial greed, but he fails to focus on the source of Kurtz's depraved materialism – ivory (Huggan & Tiffin 2010: 141-149). So his response to what he has viewed as Conrad's 'racism' (Achebe 1988) does not engage with the speciesism that, one could argue, is present in the text, which makes no mention of elephants. Elephants could be the "brutes" that need

<sup>2</sup> Quoted *inter alia* in Thieme 2016: 101.

<sup>3</sup> See DeLoughrey & Handley 2011: 20-25.

to be “exterminate[d]” (Conrad 1994: 71-72). Certainly they have been textually excluded, and Achebe’s failure to address *this* could be seen as not untypical of postcolonial texts and readings that remain locked within the Anthropocene, though there are obvious exceptions: a novel such as Barbara Gowdy’s *The White Bone* (1998), which locates itself entirely within elephant society, offers a striking instance of a contrary impulse. Literary work that is attentive to the despoliation of the landscape and the threat to endangered animal species along with human power imbalances does allow postcolonialism and ecocriticism to sit together comfortably. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004), which debates the inequitable treatment of subaltern minorities, the fate of species such as the Royal Bengal Tiger and the river dolphin of the Sundarbans area of West Bengal, and the threat to the unique eco-system of the region brings the two areas together fairly seamlessly. And in his more recently published polemic, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Ghosh provides a chilling clarion call for activism against the Anthropocene, among other things attacking the ‘realist’ novel for its reliance on “the calculus of probability”. As he sees it, such realism is built on a “scaffolding” that prevents it from “confront[ing] the centrality of the improbable” (Ghosh 2016: 23) in the form of sudden disasters that stretch the bounds of credulity by contradicting gradualist notions of meteorological change. *Pace* his own investment in realism in much of his fiction<sup>4</sup>, his position here could be said to be anti-literary, because it takes issue with commonly accepted notions of narrativization. It is beyond the scope of this essay to consider the possible ramifications of Ghosh’s position on the “calculus of probability”, but where reading communities are concerned, *The Great Derangement* comes across as a work that should appeal to an ecologically aware audience, providing it with a welter of information about the actual and potential effects of global warming, while also serving as a consciousness-raising catalyst for readers more generally.

By way of conclusion, I should like to ask whether there are any commonalities in the attitudes to the canon, explicit or implicit, in the various approaches I have been considering. It seems reasonable to suggest that a text such as *The Great Derangement*, along with other contemporary creative and critical writing that confronts ecological issues, is helping to shape new agendas, both by preaching to the converted and by endeavouring to win over sceptics. Such an approach may seem a long way from the tacit assumptions about reading communities that informed the work of critics such as C. S. Lewis and Cleanth Brooks, but they, too, both assumed some kind of consensual understanding of what literature might be doing and tried to persuade others of the right-mindedness of their way of approaching the subject. There, though, any shared ground ends. There is no appeal to activism in their mainly formalist approaches, and little more in the liberal and conservative attitudes of mid-twentieth century schools such as Leavisism and myth criticism that did embody ethical agendas. ‘Theory’ presented a diverse, if sometimes, confusing new set of orthodoxies in which ethics were sometimes to the fore and sometimes, in derivatives of formalism, shunned. Postcolonialism and ecocriticism have usually gone further by enfranchising new reading communities and sensitizing the Euro-American academy to issues which, while

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<sup>4</sup> *The Circle of Reason* (1986) and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), which have respectively been seen to draw on magic realism and science-fiction, are exceptions.

they have often been latent and sometimes been explicit in the literary texts that were admitted into the canon, seldom received attention as such until comparatively recently. The study of literary form remains as imperative as ever, as the way in which writing generates meaning. At the same time, a divorce between form and content now seems as unsustainable as the plundering of landscape and the annexation and appropriation of animal species that were commonplace in the colonial era in practices such as big game hunting and the transportation of animals to metropolitan zoos as trophies of conquest (Thieme 2016: 131-140). Ghosh's caveat about the "calculus of probability" deserves to be taken on board in the evolution of new forms and critical practices that embody sustainable agendas, but what perhaps stands out most where postcolonialism and ecocriticism are concerned is that at their best, in their most altruistic iterations, they speak for, and to, an inclusive planetary community of readers, holding out the possibility of an eco-sustainable future.

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Lyn McCredden

### The Fiction of Tim Winton: Relational Ecology in an Unsettled Land

**Abstract I:** A complicare il processo di appartenenza degli australiani non indigeni, c'è la consapevolezza di vivere in una terra sconfinata e composita, un posto di cui non sono nativi. La narrativa del celebre romanziere anglo-australiano Tim Winton riecheggia il pensiero della poetessa Judith Wright, per la quale "Due sentimenti sono diventati parte di me – l'amore per la terra che abbiamo invaso e il senso di colpa per averla invasa. È un luogo stregato" (Wright 1991: 30). Il presente saggio esplora i romanzi di Winton nei quali si avverte un intenso senso di malessere e perdita, in relazione ai luoghi e alla terra, da parte dei personaggi principali. I personaggi di Winton - Wueenie Cookson che testimonia dolorosamente alla cattura barbarica e alla mattanza delle balene; Fish Lamb quasi annegato in mare; Lu Fox alla ricerca di un rifugio nella natura selvaggia, da profeta, dopo la tragedia della morte della sua famiglia – sono tutti accompagnati da un senso spettrale di insediamento fallito ed esilio, in cui le forze naturali – il mare e le sue creature, le distanze e i rischi del posto – si contrappongono e fanno ravvedere gli aspiranti dominatori.

**Abstract II:** Complicating the processes of belonging in place, for non-Indigenous Australians, is the growing realization that they live in a huge, diverse land, a place in which they are not native. The fiction of popular Anglo-Saxon Australian novelist Tim Winton echoes the understanding of poet Judith Wright, for whom "two strands – the love of the land we have invaded and the guilt of the invasion – have become part of me. It is a haunted country" (Wright 1991: 30). This essay will explore Winton's novels in which there is a pervasive sense of unease and loss experienced by the central characters, in relation to place and land. Winton's characters - Queenie Cookson and her traumatic witnessing of the barbaric capture and flaying of whales; Fish Lamb's near-drowning in the sea, and Lu Fox's quest for refuge in the wilderness, prophet-like, after the tragedy of his family's death - are all written with a haunting sense of white unsettlement and displacement, where such natural forces – the sea and its creatures, the land's distances and risks – confront and re-form the would-be dominators.

Tim Winton, Australian novelist of place, land and identity, writes from a curiously ambiguous position in Australian culture. Winton is a literary author but also a popular one, writing in vernacular language, with a keen sense of earth and ecology, even as his prose simultaneously reaches towards what might be called a *transcendent* understanding of place

and human/extra-human relations. While Indigenous and white-settler figures are included in his novels, critics have argued that his Indigenous characters are often seen at a distance, as ghosts or troubled souls in the land. I will argue, in this paper, that the struggle to find oneself *in place*, humans in relationship to land, is a fraught, unfinished business for *both* Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, though in different ways. The honour and awe with which so many of Winton's characters hold a sense of place and belonging in Australia is informed primarily and necessarily by a white-settler, non-Indigenous set of understandings, but the writings, in their respect for place – oceans, deserts, the hugeness of Australian skies and distances – contribute powerfully to the dialogues around identity and land in Australia. Winton's are not, and *cannot be*, *Indigenous* approaches; but as this essay will argue, his works develop passionate and dialectical representations of land and place that speak with Indigenous beliefs and practices. They are crucial dialogues which are shaping Australians' understanding of relational ecology.

In Winton's early novel *Shallows* (1984), the scene is the fictional Western Australian town of Angelus, the last outpost of land-based whaling in Australia's 150-year history of whaling. The novel develops a plot that references the colonial 1830s and the postcolonial 1980s, at "the southernmost tip of the newest and oldest of continent, the bottom of the world" (Winton 1984: xi)<sup>1</sup>. Angelus: "this town, scar between two scrubby hills [...] not a big town [...] it has few sustaining industries. But against all odds, all human sense, by some unknown grace, Angelus prevails" (xiv). And in this nut shell we have characteristic Winton, son of white settlers in the land, aware of both the scarred, toiling struggles of whites in Australia, and even honouring them; but at the same time Winton, here and throughout his writing life, is aware that another element – "some unknown grace" – has brought non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians to live alongside each other – sometimes violently and brutally, sometimes for each other's good – *in this place*.

What sense can be made of these colonial struggles towards a post-colonial world, the desire to imagine a land *in balance*? What sense is *Winton* making with these historical, ecological imaginary landscapes? The two young white protagonists of Winton's early novel *Shallows*, Cleve and Queenie, are differently shaped by this history and this place. Cleve pores over the violent history of settlement and whaling through old diaries and novels, finding pleasure in the heroism of these tales; but Queenie, as "a little girl [...] [had] heard the voice of God calling from down in the bay [...] this thunderous splash and the whole farm shook and in the moonlight [when she] saw this glistening black [...] whale inching up towards the house" (1).

Winton weaves together, and at the same time questions, two grand narratives – of masculine, colonial heroism and imperial adventure, and feminine lyricism and empathy for otherness – through these two characters and their passionate relationship, as each seeks meaning and purpose in relation to the ocean, the land and the whaling history of Western Australia. We read that:

When she was a child Queenie climbed the windmill to see the whales surfacing in the bay, spouting vapour like gunsmoke. Up there among the winter green of the

<sup>1</sup> Tim Winton (1984). All quotations are from this edition.



farm, she had thought about the story of Jonah, how the whale was God's messenger, and she had hooked her limbs about the salt-stained legs of the mill and watched the big backs idling, and waited for a message from God, the one she was certain would come. She waited for the whales to belly up at the foot of the mill to attend to her queries. Each winter she climbed and waited, each year the questions were modified; one year the whales did not appear at all [...] (16-17).

Old and New Testament scriptural references ripple through Queenie's imagination, reflections of her grandfather's upbringing, personalized into an intimate but also vast god figure with a message just for her, the whales her own massive, glistening, angelic messengers. However, childhood gives way to a less enraptured fate for Queenie, with marriage to Cleve and his fixation on heroic tales of whaling and colonial versions of adventure. A startling scene occurs in *Shallows* shortly after the just-married Queenie has somewhat accidentally joined the anti-whaling activists. She is drawn in curiosity to the protests against the current-day whalers, but soon finds herself an enraged witness to bloody, visceral scenes as the whales are caught, hauled on land, disemboweled and cut into pieces. Winton depicts Queenie "settled into the pink slush" (38), lying prone and bloodied on the flenching floor of the Angelus whaling station. She has become a protester.

Going afterwards to visit her young husband at his night watchman's station, in order to explain to him what has happened, she finds him pouring over the colonial journals yet again, excited by their heroic tales of men conquering land and sea. Queenie, after her day of horrified protest, angrily knocks to the floor the hefty historical journal Cleve is reading admiringly. She is frustrated that he devours *Moby Dick* and the whaling journals with such relish, as stories of heroism, but fails to understand the present moment's political realities, the pointless, barbarous killing of whales. In the hut, perched above the deep-water pier, Queenie

[...] was suddenly on all fours with the book tight in the space between floorboards with all her weight pushing down on it and him screaming at the thought of years falling away unread, sinking into the Sound [...] and his fist came down on her back and she went flat (65).

The scene is a turning point in the novel. Queenie lies prostrate for a second time that day, "[h]er cheek rest[ing] against the upright spine of the bitter-smelling book", (65) and Cleve is immediately repentant. But Queenie departs, the word "unforgivable" echoing between them, and "the journal stuck up out of the floor, wedged between the planks, like a tombstone" (64). This is a scene reeling towards abjection. Words – writing and reading and speaking, and meaning-making – falter in the space between the two characters. The abject processes of flenching, stripping the whales of flesh and life fill Queenie's mind – "do you know how big a whale's brain cavity is?" (64) – and such practices have become increasingly horrific to her. However, for Cleve, "[t]hey're just animals you know" (64). Both characters are depicted as still in the process of formation, coming lurchingly into their adult identity, not yet knowing what that might mean. Both are confronting the anxiety of not being ful-

ly-formed, still in search of meaning and identity, starting here from the place of the abject, where meaning is unresolvable, in a place that threatens to obliterate meaning.

Abjection is also one way to describe the relationship of non-Indigenous, white Australians to the land. For colonial men and women arriving in Australia in the nineteenth century, the land and its *Indigenous peoples* were abject, divorced from any European sense of form and meaning, antipodean. However, *Shallows* explores white attitudes to the ocean and its whales which start to move beyond abjection, as it posits a dialogue between immensely violent whaling histories, and a new era which is beginning to *refuse* such savagery against the natural world. To understand this question of new relationships between the human and the other than human in Winton's imagination, we need to return to Queenie's childhood sense of the divine in nature, the whales as God's messengers; as well as to the choices – *ethical and spiritual* – of humans acting in concert with, rather than against nature. And we return also to Winton's resonant phrase, the need for "some unknown grace" to intervene in this question.

*Dirt Music*, Winton's 2001 novel, was reviewed in *The Guardian* by expatriate Australian poet Peter Porter in a wry mood. Porter placed the novel in the following ecological context:

For years now Australia has been the last frontier. Those who flock to its scattered wild places come from all over the planet, not least from within Australia itself. The crowds at Darwin or Broome, or scouting through the Red Heart, are as likely to start out from Macquarie Street Consulting Rooms or Collins Street Legal Chambers as from Detmold or San Diego. Only a few will be ecological pilgrims: most are attracted by the combination of rugged landscape and hi-tech convenience. Nature may still be bleaker there than anywhere on earth, but its visitors can expect the latest in aircraft, refrigeration, personal hygiene and haute cuisine (Porter 2002).

Porter's chary view of the popular modern sport of frontier tourism has some humorous justice to it, but it also forgets (or doesn't know) that many Australians who live in Australia, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are increasingly registering the material realities of the land in multiple ways, and arguably have a growing, grounded awareness of the *unsettled*, dynamic nature of living in this land. There is, of course, not *one* register of response but many. Australia is responded to in multiple ways by her peoples, with its always encroaching deserts and droughts, its volatile weathers and vast distances, its country-big city differences, and its unique mix of Indigenous/white settler/multicultural/refugee inhabitants. Not all Australians have visited Coober Pedy or Uluru or the Kimberleys, or the Great Barrier Reef, but living here, there are constant reminders in school curricula, in the media, on local television and film, in the literature, of the diverse attitudes towards place and land in Australia. There is arguably a growing recognition of the need to think about human and non-human ecological relations here.

For example, much respected Australian ecofeminist Val Plumwood was a strong proponent of the need to protect the interaction between land, humans, and non-humans. She argued passionately in 2008:

A rigid division that makes us choose between human and non-human sides precludes a critical cultural focus on problems of human ecological identity and relationship [...] It assumes a fallacious choice of self/other, taking an us-versus-them approach in which concern is contaminated by self-interest unless it is purely concern for the other. Most issues and motivations are double-sided, mixed, combining self/other, human and non-human interests, and it is not only possible but essential to take account of both. Both kinds of concerns must be mobilised and related (Plumwood 2009).

Porter's ironic attitude to the global tourist who can be seen "scouting through" frontier places, expecting the provision of modern facilities, is understandable. However, a newer, fuller awareness such as Plumwood's is growing in Australia, and is related to understanding the realities of global warming and the finiteness, fragility and wildness of land and weathers, as well as concern for the fate of Indigenous inhabitants of such so-called frontier places. Plumwood's is a pragmatic stance, not speaking from absolute idealism or absolute pragmatism, but from a philosophy that understands the desires of humans to be in relationship to place, acknowledging the intimate bonds between human and non-human, the needs and processes leading hopefully to a belonging *in place*.

In a more recent Winton work, the collection of short stories entitled *The Turning* (2005), another aspect of *grace* in response to the land and the forging of relationship is explored. In the poignant ending of the opening story "Big World", (1-15) Winton draws a complex portrait of place as both humanly perceived, but also as non-human. Biggie Botson, with "a face only a mother could love" (Winton 2004: 4)<sup>2</sup> and his mate, the unnamed narrator, are drifting from boyhood to adulthood, just as Cleve and Queenie are in *Shallows*. Having just finished school, they have no jobs yet, and things seem unpromising, with work offered only at the old whaling works in town; so they decide to head north along the liminal Western Australian coast, to escape for a while. In their precarious trip, with little money and no real destination, they are momentarily caught up beyond the human, in the "big world" of nature, and a powerful experience of transience, and even transcendence. Enjoying the last freedoms of their adolescence, escaping in their "gutless old Volksie" (4), at day's end, "two mad southern boys" (5) stand watching their fizzling car, as it implodes. They are stranded on the long highway between sea and desert,

taking in the vast, shimmering pink lake that suddenly looks full of rippling water. We don't say anything. The sun flattens itself against the saltpan and disappears. The sky goes all acid blue and there's just the huge silence. It's like the world's stopped [...] Right now, standing with Biggie on the salt-lake at sunset, each of us still in our southern-boy uniform of boots, jeans and flannel shirt, I don't care what happens beyond this moment. In the hot northern dusk, the world suddenly gets big around us, so big we just give in and watch (14-15).

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Winton (2004). All quotations are from this edition.

An understated, deflationary humor pervades this lyrical moment, as the young men register their pipe dreams of escape fizzing out in the shape of the collapsing old car, and the emptiness around them. As they stand gazing, there is a realization in them that time wavers and warps around them, beyond their control. The vast, rippling, illuminated lake at sunset provides the boys with a glimpse of peace, and a fitting sense of their own smallness in relation to the big world. They are two working-class boys without much clue, but in this final image they are paradoxically embraced and transfixed, as “the world suddenly gets big around us”. The present tense narration contributes to this sense of embrace, of time pausing. However, it is also the intelligence of the narrator that enables him to register his own growing sense of selfhood and its relation to the natural world. He is in fact drawn beyond himself, to observe and measure the world outside himself with a wry perspective on the comedy of their callow human situation. The narrator’s sense of becoming entails an intuitive understanding of the immensity of life beyond human self, stirred as he is for a moment by the huge acid blue sky and the beauty of the salt-lake at sunset. In this moment Biggie and his mate do not expect or look for bourgeois comforts, or solutions, or supremacy over the situation; they cannot express in words their understanding of this quiet, transforming moment in the embrace of the “big world”, but Winton can, and offers it to his readers.

*How* does place – the land and its non-, or other-than, or greater-than human agency in the human struggle to become – shape moral, ethical and spiritual selves? South African critic Bridget Grogan argues, in regard to place and Winton’s male figures, that

at their most complete and tender Winton’s men embrace transience and the inevitable loss this entails; simultaneously, they acknowledge the wide beauty of the temporal world and the love of and for others that is both impermanent and yet eternal [...] (Grogan 2014: 217).

What Grogan is suggesting here about the story “Big World” and its examination of place and the processes of becoming and belonging, is that Winton is no straightforward pantheist of place and nature. Nor is he simply an escapist moving Romantically *beyond words* to an unsayable transcendence which seeks to escape the world. The interchange between nature and humanity in Winton’s novels and short stories is an often fraught, tangled and traumatic one. But nature is also imagined in the Burkean sense, where:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature [...] is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other (Burke 1958: 58).

Nature in Winton’s fiction teaches stern and trenchant lessons about temporality, about the fierce, material, non-human power of earth, its oceans and deserts and creatures, and the demand that humans bend the knee, both in awe and in labor. “Becoming”, in this framework, is an entering into the irreducibility or unfinishedness of the self and its diverse relations with others, including the non-human other.

For *Indigenous* peoples in Australia, the dialogue with the land has sustained them and speaks to them of the deep past and of the future. For non-Indigenous Australians in a largely secular Australia there is much to be learned from Indigenous peoples about bending the knee, acknowledging human humility, and continuing to enter into that passionate debate which is centered on the land, the oceans, and non-human creatures. This, Winton shows us, is a conversation needing the constant intervention of “some unknown grace”.

More recently, Winton has written a graceful essay entitled “The Corner of the Eye” which appears in his memoir *Island Home* (2015):

At last it seems we’ve begun to see past Dampier’s infernal flies, to behold in our remarkable diversity of habitats, landforms and species the riches of a continental isolation that so long troubled us. Things once seen as impossibly homely, weird or simply perverse are now understood as precious. The irreplaceable organic estate informs our aesthetics and politics, our notions of pleasure and recreation. In short, it shapes our mentality. Not only have we started to integrate and internalize all these lessons, we’re learning to appreciate the fragility of what sustains us (Winton 2015: 111)<sup>3</sup>.

The often-painful processes of learning to belong to the earth, and to this land, particularly for European Australians, are evident in this passage, and are recurrently represented in Winton’s fiction of ecology and place. *Island Home* makes broad and, for some, over-idealistic claims about the general awakening of Australians to the value of what he calls “the irreplaceable organic estate”. However, such prophetic confidence here needs to be understood as emerging, for Winton, in tension with the unsettled nature of white Australia. Winton can make these claims to a new awareness, but he is still, in his latest fiction and his memoir, radically aware of the distance still to travel.

For all those who share Winton’s optimism and postcolonial sense of history, there are many who refuse to acknowledge or value such lessons. But Winton’s work is soundly in the spirit of Christopher Hitt’s influential essay, “Toward an Ecological Sublime”, which seeks to balance human awe at nature and wilderness, and a knowing humility in the face of earth’s non-human imperatives:

In an age of exploitation, commodification, and domination we need awe, envelopment, and transcendence. We need, at least occasionally, to be confronted with the wild otherness of nature and to be astonished, enchanted, humbled by it. Perhaps it is time – while there is still wild nature left – that we discover an ecological sublime (Hitt 1999: 26).

While Winton’s work resonates with Hitt’s here, he is also constantly asking what work (disciplined thinking, imagination, policy-making, changing of discourse) is still needed in order for non-Indigenous Australians to enter into a respectful relationship with the land and the other-than-human. Winton is direct in his criticism of white Australians who, for ex-

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Winton (2015). All quotations are from this edition.

ample, make claims to protect the integrity of the land, including the rock art of Aboriginal Australia, and who

are keen to preserve what they view as artefacts of antiquity, [but who are] far less passionate about the sacred power and ongoing cultural role these [Aboriginal] sites retain for living people [...] making a trophy of another people's living culture (149-150).

Winton is here calling for an openness to the knowledges and cultures of Indigenous Australia, cultures which embrace the land, and the more or other-than human, what is lived, believed, practiced, handed on. The imposition of European culture as only museum culture, or preservation culture, seems to be what he has little time for.

In the chapter of *Island Home* entitled "The Power of Place", Winton takes a further step, focusing on the ways in which European Australians, as well as Indigenous Australians, need to share in a *living* place, with an openness towards learning relationship to the land. He invokes a sense of sacredness, of energy in the land:

There are of course, many places in Australia where this primal energy has been known since time immemorial and where it continues to be refreshed by ritual visits and ceremonial relationship. My acquaintance with these kinds of places is largely restricted to the far north Kimberley, home to the world's oldest extant tradition of icon painting. In rock shelters throughout coastal archipelagos, behind mainland beaches and out into a rugged hinterland the size of California, the conjoined pasts of people and country endure and continue in sites of rare power (147-148).

For many white Australians, Winton's invoking of the "primal energy", even the sacredness of place, is challenging. His approach here can be appreciated as both audacious and humble. It is audacious in depicting himself as having the right to be in such places of "primal energy", and as possessing the capacity, even as an outsider, to experience the "rare power" of these places. But he is, arguably, not claiming aboriginality, or special access. He humbly describes his relationship as still only an "acquaintance", as "largely restricted" (148). He is bearing witness to places of power that he has not constructed or lived with, but which speak to him, enabling him to recognize his own smallness in the face of "the world's oldest extant tradition", "the conjoined pasts of people and country" (148).

Of course, this stance cannot reflect every Australian's understanding of what is needed, in coming to a place of balance between human and non-human forces in Australia. What Winton does achieve, I would argue, is a shaking of the deepest values and beliefs of both Indigenous and white-settler Australians. He seeks to find the mutual seams of ecological value, shared by many Australians, in relations between human and land, drawing on a deeply ecological, relational imaginary.

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Antonella Riem

### Places of the Imagination: Ecological Concerns in David Malouf's "Jacko's Reach"

**Abstract I:** Nell'opera di Malouf, in poesia e in prosa, è presente un'esplicita attenzione per l'ecologia e un forte interesse verso il mondo naturale, in particolare nel suo rapporto con quello culturale. Spazio e luogo, come la *wilderness* e il giardino, la steppa e l'Impero Romano, il *bush* e la città, sono elementi fondanti del modo in cui Malouf delinea i rapporti individuali, sociali, politici e culturali con la terra. Questo articolo si concentra sul racconto "Jacko's Reach" (Malouf 2002), dove, sotto l'etichetta del progresso, la globalizzazione impone lo "sviluppo" di un luogo di natura. Jacko's Reach, "la nostra ultima macchia di vegetazione", sarà distrutta da "pale meccaniche e gru", per costruire "un nuovo centro commerciale" (124), pubblicizzato in modo ingannevole come una necessità per il bene della comunità. La voce narrante in apparenza descrive un evento consueto, la costruzione di un nuovo centro commerciale, e contemporaneamente critica la distruzione del mondo naturale voluta dallo 'sviluppo' che porta alla disintegrazione della *wilderness* per poterla addomesticare e acculturare. L'articolo si focalizza in particolare sulle strategie narrative di Malouf, che, in modo più rilevante, enfatizzano il potere mitologico del luogo immaginato o ricordato come forma di resistenza alla distruzione dell'ambiente naturale. Nella "dimensione del simbolico" (132), attraverso il ricordo, l'immaginazione, la creatività e il sogno, la totale cancellazione della *wilderness* – sia nel mondo naturale che in noi stessi/e – non può essere compiuta del tutto. Costantemente re-immaginata e ri-configurata nella nostra memoria, la *wilderness* per sempre continuerà a "crescere con forza sotto il cemento" e "nella nostra testa" (133), in una profonda interconnessione visionaria e creativa tra mondo naturale ed essere umano.

**Abstract II:** Malouf's ecological concerns and interest in the natural world and their relationship with the cultural can be traced in most of his works, both in prose and poetry. Space and place such as the wilderness and the garden, the steppe and the Roman Empire, the Australian bush and the city are fundamental elements in Malouf's delineation of individual, social, political and cultural relationships with the land. This article focuses on "Jacko's Reach" (Malouf 2000), where, under the label of progress, globalisation is enforcing the development of a local natural place. Jacko's Reach, "our last pocket of scrub", will be destroyed by "mechanical shovels and cranes", to build "a new shopping mall" (93), deceptively advertised as a necessity for the benefit of the commu-



nity. The narratorial voice on the surface describes a usual event, the building of a new shopping centre, and at the same time criticises the destruction of the natural world for the sake of progress, which leads to the annihilation of wilderness in order to domesticate and acculturate it. This article focuses in particular on Malouf's narrative strategies, which, more relevantly, emphasise the mythological power of the imagined or remembered place as a form of resistance to the devastation of the natural environment. In "the dimension of the symbolic" (99), through memory, imagination, creativity and dream, the total erasure of wilderness – in both the natural world and ourselves – cannot be fully achieved. Constantly re-imagined and re-configured in our memory, it will be forever "pushing up under the concrete" (99), and "in our head" (100), in a profound visionary and creative interconnectedness between the natural world and the human being.

### 1. Partnership and Postcolonial

This article connects postcolonial criticism to Riane Eisler's socio-historical work, which the international Partnership Studies Group<sup>1</sup> applies to the study of world literatures, languages and education. Riane Eisler is a macro-historian who uses an interdisciplinary paradigm to examine cultural differences, gender relationships and, more extensively, creative processes of reinvention and re-imagination, in order to find new ways of making difference fruitful rather than destructive, as "diversity is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority" (Eisler 2002: 161). Eisler founds her work<sup>2</sup> on what she calls the Cultural Transformation Theory (Eisler 1987: xvii ff), tracing the cultural evolution of Western societies from a "gender holistic perspective":

The first [model], which I call the *dominator* model, is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy – the *ranking* of one half of humanity over the other. The second, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of *linking* rather than ranking, may best be described as the *partnership* model. In this model – beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species, between male and female – diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority (Eisler 1987: xvii).

Eisler's Cultural Transformation Theory shows the interaction of two cultural paradigms present in most Western and Westernised cultures: the *partnership* and the *dominator*. The *dominator* model centres on "ranking" and operates through "technologies designed to

<sup>1</sup> The Partnership Studies Group (PSG) was founded in Udine in 1998: [http://all.uniud.it/?page\\_id=195](http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195). On partnership and postcolonial, see also: Riem 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Eisler's seminal texts are: *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987); *Sacred Pleasure* (1995), which focuses on the biological rewards for loving and caring behaviours, representing a more evolved way of living on this Earth that is ingrained in our genetic system; *The Real Wealth of Nations* (2007), which proposes a "caring" economics as a response to the world economic crisis. See also: <http://centerforpartnership.org/>.

destroy and dominate" (Eisler 1987: xx). On the other hand, the *partnership* paradigm, works on the principle of "linking" rather than "ranking", and otherness and diversity (both in gender and cultural terms) are positive and enriching elements. Drawing from many scholarly fields, such as macro-history, intercultural studies, sociology, anthropology, archaeology, mythology, archetypal psychology, biology, economy and others, Eisler shows how our cultural paradigms are constructed, not only in literature and art, but also in our everyday reality, by what *stories* we are told and how these shape our frame of mind, culture and belief-systems (Eisler 1987: 75-77). Eisler's work, within the frame of Partnership Studies' literary criticism, forms my critical approach and methodology (Riem 2017: 12 ff), which, in this article, aims at highlighting *dominator* and *partnership* narratives and cultural belief-systems in Malouf's short story "Jacko's Reach" (Malouf 2000: 93-100).

I employ the words *partnership* and *dominator* according to Riane Eisler's perspective, where the word *partnership* is not related to the economic world of finance, but rather to the way we human beings are *partners* with one another and with the cosmic dance of life. Central to Eisler's perspective is also an investigation and study of stories, myths, archetypes and symbols as instruments for denouncing and rejecting the dominator-androcratic model and creating and supporting a cultural transformation towards a partnership-gylanic paradigm (Eisler 1987: 105, 198-203). This attention to the mythologising and creative function of *narratives* is central to Malouf's work.

*Dream Stuff* (2000), the collection from which my focus story "Jacko's Reach" is taken, displays an interesting ensemble of perspectives on postcolonial Australia. As usual in Malouf, the stories seem at a first reading simple, but they maintain till the very end a strong flavour of mystery, they envelop us in a sort of "luminous halo", engaging us from beginning to end. The narrative voice is often subtly ironical (but never cynical) and at the same time it enfolds us in an imaginative space and time where every contour and limit dissolve to create a *Dreaming* tapestry. Malouf describes "the little sacraments of daily existence, movements of the heart and intimations of the close but inexpressible grandeur and terror of things that is our other history" (Malouf 1990: 283-284). He focuses on the small details of everyday life and distils a profound essence from them, enabling the reader to understand, be there with his characters and feel like them: "Even the simplest objects are imbued with mystery, with an inner light" (Ashcroft 2014: 4).

Malouf's ecological and ecocritical concern against the global wreckage of our environment and planet and his interest in the natural world in its relationship with the cultural can be traced in most of his work, both in prose and poetry. Space and place, such as the wilderness and the garden, the steppe and the Roman Empire, the Australian bush and the city, are fundamental elements in Malouf's definition of individual, social, political, ecological and cultural relationships with the land, which is also "an emotional and philosophical landscape" (Lindsay & Griffith 2014: 2), and their reverberations on the self. The biosphere, human beings and all other creatures in it, sentient and so-described non-sentient, need to be preserved from human exploitation, enslavement and destruction. Malouf's vision of the Earth-as-sacred and a mystery is very close, if not coincident, with most indigenous ancestral traditions, like in Aboriginal lore, where humans are only custodians of the land, not proprietors, settlers, colonisers:

I think the sacred is entirely in this world [...]. I don't see this world as fallen or as less than sacred. [...] I think that to do that is to enter a very dangerous area where you think that the world and the people in it are not sacred and the sacred is somewhere else. That's what seems to me to allow evil in the world. I think that this world is the only world and it is utterly sacred. But the sacred, whatever that is, is *absolutely* in it (Malouf & Indyk 2014: 6).

## 2. Settling and Wilderness

Malouf's writing, together with its intensely poetic and imaginative beauty, presents an ethical and historical discourse aiming at analysing and unmasking Australia as a dominator settler colony, with its violence and absurd holocaust of the Aboriginal world, with its need to *rank*, map and organise an "unmapped" place: "Malouf describes a settler society which hasn't succeeded in settling" (Kerrigan 2000: 26).

The wilderness of the bush, also in the urban landscape, is presented as something that a part of white Australia wants and needs to dominate and colonise, to 'settle', creating borders, palisades, barriers of so-called civilisation. This attitude is typical of what Riane Eisler describes as the dominator model.

In "Jacko's Reach" the idea of *settling* the wilderness (in place and the self) is fundamental for white dominator society, represented by an anonymous 'council'. Under the label of progress, dominator globalisation and colonisation enforce the so-called development of a local natural place, which actually will mean its total destruction, as it often happened with the original/Aboriginal land in all postcolonial countries.

As Eisler says, dominator technologies are "designed to destroy and dominate" (1987: xx), and Jacko's Reach will be destroyed by "mechanical shovels and cranes", to build "a new shopping mall" (93), which is deceptively advertised as a necessity for the benefit of the narratorial we (i.e. us, the local community, the world). This leads instead to the annihilation of the wilderness in order to domesticate, neutralise and acculturate it. This is functional to a dominator undermining of the Aboriginals' natural and ancestral connection with the country, in order to deviously and treacherously annihilate their land-rights and their partnership perspective on life and place. 'Progress', evolution, advance, improvement, expansion and all the other fashionable terms connected to unlimited financial and exploitative growth require the council's action.

On the other hand, for the partnership model Malouf is enforcing in the mythical undercurrent of the story, sustainable economy, slowing down, caring for place and self, loving and playful relationships are the actions that truly matter and that should be focal to our world view. As an ancient Native American proverb says: "Treat the Earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our children"<sup>3</sup>.

"So, it is settled" (93), the first short and categorical sentence of "Jacko's Reach" deliberately gives the impression of something decisive and final, with no possibility of doubt or impediment. The conjunct adverb "so", meaning "therefore", "thus", "consequently",

<sup>3</sup> Native American proverb quoted in Smith 2006: 41.

implies a final and crucial decision, taken after long rational discussion and reasoning. The past participle of the verb settle, “settled”, has a whole series of echoes in Malouf’s narratives, where it refers to Australia as a land of “settlers”; a category often investigated in postcolonial criticism (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 133 ff).

The statement may seem to imply that the process of settlement will be completed soon, if not for the whole of Australia, at least for this small plot of bush, dangerously intruding into the city, for the place now “has been won for progress” (93). The council’s dominator idea, typical of a predatory colonising approach, is that “those four and a half acres” of bush “were an eyesore” (93) and must be levelled down and *developed*, because, being unkempt, wild, open, dark, strange, uncultivated, they represent a danger for white *civilised* people, so that now:

Our sterner citizens and their wives will sleep safe at last in a world that no longer offers encouragement to the derelicts who gather there with a carton of cheap wine or a bottle of metho, the dumpers of illegal garbage, feral cats, and the few local Aborigines who claim an affinity with the place that may or may not be mystical (93).

The narratorial voice is obviously male, and is seemingly expressing his satisfaction for what is happening, putting himself among the “sterner citizens” who approve the dominator idea of progress and “improvement”. However, already in this opening passage, there are obvious signals of another register and meaning, where the narrator’s imagination is at least curious and fascinated by the secret and maybe mystical events taking place in Jacko’s Reach. Only outsiders take refuge there – they are refugees, escaping from *civilisation* / globalisation, drug addicts, alcoholics, the few local Aborigines left (an obvious hint at their systematic extermination) and *feral* cats, which represent the uncultivated wilderness and the ferocity of the bush, of untamed, unsettled nature. This wild place in Nature, recollection and dreaming will completely captivate the narrator at the end of his journey in memory and imagination.

### 3. Unsettling the Settler

Typically in his work, Malouf immediately starts to deconstruct the absolute statement and assertion of the first sentence, and to instil doubts, counter-meanings, other possibilities in the reader’s mind. Until the council’s decision, Jacko’s Reach was a sort of recess, outside the flow of time and as yet untouched by the progressive concreting of the city. This thin line of wilderness acquires multifarious meanings in the minds and hearts of those who, like the narrator, now grown up, look back with nostalgia to the secret pleasures and mysteries of the place.

Jacko’s Reach, was “once known, and so marked on *older maps*, as Jago’s” (94). The Shakespearian reference connotes this last vestige of the bush as something that can betray *civilisation* as enforced by the council. It can *unsettle*, deceive, awaken dark memories, base instincts, unruly dreams, sex, violence. Mapping is another typical Maloufian *topos*, and it seems to be an action involving not only space and place but also time and the inner time of the self. Malouf here has in mind an older geographical, psychological and mythical map.

Jacko’s Reach is an area of nature, related to the sensual (and sexual) pleasures of the body, traversed by undaunted adolescent passions, adult fears and rage, vindictiveness, drunkenness, loose habits, sin. It is an area akin to the ancient Pagan world of medieval fes-

tivals and carnival days of licence, excess and sensuality, like "Fool's Day, when the spirit of mockery was let loose and a place found for disorder within the world of order and rule" (Malouf 2001: 115). Moreover, "Jacko's Reach" has a dangerous "affinity" with the local Aborigines, "which may or may not be mystical"; it is in communication with "native" animals and birds, and even "seeds", freely travelling "miles on a current of air" (93). The council needs to put an end to this proliferate life, its seeds flying freely in the air and wildly inseminating the carefully organised, civil *space* of the rational dominator mind. There is an implicit fear that Aboriginal seeds may travel freely to white girls and women, or vice versa, in a contamination of *purity*. In this sense Jacko's Reach is a clear reminder for the council that the land:

had received the imprint of culture long before we [non indigenous Australians] came to it. It had been shaped by use and humanised by knowledge that was both practical and sacred. It had been taken deep into the consciousness of its users so that all its features, through naming and storytelling and myth-making, had a second life in the imagination and in the mouths of women and men (Malouf 2001: 49).

The council, the law, wants to keep at bay this repressed knowledge of the existence of an Aboriginal Indigenous Australia and therefore also eliminate an unacknowledged sense of guilt for wanting to settle it. They aim at pulling down the area, because it is still full of Aboriginal storytelling and myth-making. It is an appropriative dominator act to destroy those stories and those myths, together with the more recent ones, belonging to the narrator and his friend's youths. These personal and collective stories and mythologies have been mixed together in an unorthodox and unacceptable fashion, thus presenting a permanent challenge and provocation to dominator stability and fixed law, as juxtaposed to partnership fluidity and interconnected creative intricacy. Jacko's Reach is also symbolic and evocative of an *uncontrollable* area of the unconscious, where old memories, ideas, hopes, phantasies, can slither into the characters' "unruly" dreams and *unsettle* the settlers (93-4). In the dominator idea of control, life needs to be restrained in its overgrowth and contained within the limits of what is *acceptable*, moral, *right*, decent, proper.

#### 4. The Mythic and Symbolic Dimension

However, from a symbolic and mythic perspective, if Jacko's Reach may disappear from the physical world, it will still resist complete forgetfulness and obliteration. It will become an inner place of darkness, a secret space, a sort of black hole in the cosmic spiritual realm of the soul. From there, stories, myths, legends, dreams will be allowed to seep through, flourish and thrive. These stories and dreams manifest repressed areas of the psyche, memories willingly forgotten as bearers of truths the civilised and "sterner" Ego does not want to see anymore: "Daydreams by themselves remain unproductive. But art and literature that has anything to say to people, by denying ideology's hold over their imagination, is utopian" (Ashcroft 2014: 2). Because art and imagination cannot be controlled, dominator ideology represses creativity and pushes it into the subconscious. However, from the partnership perspective, imagination is more powerful than any form of constraint and limitation.

All of Jacko's mythic force will come to the surface even when the place is destroyed. Myth will push upwards and forwards, upsetting the dominator order of the scientific mind, geared to control and repress. Myth will take things back into a sort of white Dreaming, lulling *citizens* into another understanding of the Self and others:

[the wilderness] still lies like a shadow over even the most settled land, a pocket of the dark unmanageable, that troubles the sleep of citizens by offering a point of re-entry to memories they have no more use for – to unruly and unsettling dreams. Four and a half acres (93-94).

Indeed, relevantly, the story focuses on the mythological power of the imagined or remembered place as a form of *eco-psycho-logical* resistance. The characters in the story well know that, in a "ghostly, dreamy area of [themselves]" (98), even if Jacko's Reach will disappear under concrete and *improvement*, its wilderness will forever stay, alive and present, in their hearts, dreams and memories:

The possibility of building over it was forestalled the moment it got inside us. As a code-word for something so intimate it can never be revealed, an area of experience, even if it is deeply forgotten, where we still move in groups together, and touch, and glow, and spring apart laughing at the electric spark. There has to be some place where that is possible.

If there is only one wild acre somewhere we will make that the place. If they take it away we will preserve it in our head. If there is no such place we will invent it. That's the way we are (99-100).

This intimate inner place / space is akin to the *mundus imaginalis* (Corbin 1977), situated between the pure intelligible world of the spirit and the sensible one of matter. Before entering creation, things reside in this middle world of imagination, and go back to it, once they dissolve from the physical plane. In "the dimension of the symbolic" (99), through memory, imagination, creativity and dream, the total erasure of wilderness – in both the natural world and ourselves – cannot be fully achieved. Constantly re-imagined and re-configured in our memory, subconscious mind and heart, it will be forever "pushing up under the concrete" (99), and "in our head" (100). As Ashcroft points out: "The name alone can secure a place in the imagination that remains protected from the destruction of its possibilities. It will be a 'wild place' not locked down by predictability, or 'development'" (Ashcroft 2014: 6).

In spite of dominator physical destruction, for Malouf it is the partnership mythic, symbolic, imaginative energy that prevails:

A land can bear any number of cultures laid one above the other or set side by side. It can be inscribed and written upon many times. One of those forms of writing is the shaping of the landscape. In any place where humans have made their home, the landscape will be made one. Landscape-making is in our bones (Malouf 2001: 51).

Landscape-making through the visionary power of the dialogical partnership word is more powerful and resilient than landscape-destroying. In Jacko's Reach, Aboriginal dreaming creatively intersects with non-indigenous memories, visions and imaginative pursuits, as Tóibín observes, "by imagining others in all their humanity, we are actually participating in something pure and strange and mysterious but also direct and powerful" (Lindsay & Griffith, 2014: 3).

Imaginative power is also what Eisler stresses as instrument for positive transformation and change:

[...] as evolutionary theorist Ervin Laszlo points out, "bifurcations in human social systems also involve a large element of choice". Humans [...] "have the ability to act consciously and collectively", exercising foresight to "choose their evolutionary path" (Eisler 1987: 186-187).

There is nothing that can stop us from imagining and ever creating things, myths and stories anew, that then become our *realities*, for that is the way human beings are. As human beings on a frail and ecologically endangered Earth, we should all remember and embody the following Aboriginal definition of our earthly passage: we are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love ... and then we return home. To say it with Malouf, from another intense story of this collection, "Closer": "Open your heart now. Let it happen. Come closer, closer. See? Now reach out your hand" (2000: 25-32).

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**Biancamaria Rizzardi**

**“A garden of green lace”: P. K. Page’s Ecolect**

**Abstract I:** Scopo del mio intervento è quello di analizzare una strategia retorica ricorrente in una scelta di poesie di P. K. Page che hanno per oggetto la natura. In generale, l’indubbia crescita di attenzione e sensibilità verso l’ecologia nelle opere più recenti e nella critica letteraria pare dimostrare che le analisi tematiche, orientate verso una concezione oppositiva tra natura e paesaggio, sono definitivamente sorpassate.

Molti sono gli scrittori che cercano di ridefinire il rapporto con l’ambiente utilizzando un approccio olistico che riconosce l’uguaglianza e l’interdipendenza tra le forme di vita umane e quelle non umane. L’analisi dell’*ecolecto* (Sykes Davies 1986: 274, 319) impiegato da P. K. Page in una selezione di testi esemplari, dimostra quanto la poetessa sia più interessata a cogliere il rapporto scrittore/natura piuttosto che a riflettere sul rapporto uomo/natura in termini oppositivi.

**Abstract II:** The aim of my paper is to analyse a recurring rhetorical strategy in some ecologically informed poems by P. K. Page. The growing amount of ecologically-informed writing and literary criticism seems to demonstrate the fact that thematically oriented analyses that regard nature and landscape as adversaries have been finally superseded. Many writers are now attempting to redefine their relationship with the environment by using a holistic approach that recognizes both human and nonhuman life-forms as equal and interdependent. The analysis of the *ecolects* (Sykes Davies 1986: 274, 319) employed by P. K. Page in some exemplary texts I shall discuss, shows her to be more interested in capturing the relationship between writer and nature than to reflect on the man/nature relationship in oppositional terms.

**Introduction**

The growing amount of ecologically-informed writing and literary criticism seems to demonstrate the fact that thematically oriented analyses that regard nature and landscape as adversaries have been finally superseded. In much recent Canadian poetry, nature is no longer seen merely as what Northrop Frye once called ‘a kind of existence which is cruel and meaningless [...] the source of the cruelty and subconscious stampeding within the human mind’ (Frye 1971: 141-142). Many writers are now attempting to redefine their relationship with the environment by using a holistic approach that recognizes both human and nonhuman life-forms as equal and interdependent. In her essay “Contemporary Ca-

nadian Poetry from the Edge", Gabriele Helms points out that there is a curious, to say the least, dichotomy between the amount of Canadian writers preoccupied with nature – from Robert Bringhurst to Don McKay, Anne Campbell and Fred Wah, to name just a few of the many possible examples of environmental visions in contemporary Canadian poetry – and critical analyses that seem almost dogmatic in reinforcing the idea of nature as an adversary (Helms 1995).

The aim of my paper is to analyse a recurring rhetorical strategy in some ecologically informed poems by P. K. Page. The texts that I will discuss (P. K. Page's "Summer", "After Rain", "Ecology" and "Planet Earth") all share common semantic fields that emphasise the relationship, reciprocal influence and interconnectedness between writer and nature. The analysis of the ecolects employed by the poetess shows her to be more interested in capturing the relationship between writer and nature than to reflect on the man/nature relationship in oppositional terms.

### The Ecolect

One of the notions I will employ in my eco-critical reading of some P. K. Page's poems is that of ecolect. The concept of "ecolect" as a language "variation peculiar to a particular household, or kin group" has been introduced to literary studies by Hugh Sykes Davies in *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Sykes Davies 1986: 274, 319) and has been slightly revised and expanded by James C. McKusick who, in a more global sense, considers the whole earth as the household or home (McKusick 2000: 243). In McKusick's expansion of the term, ecolect functions as a form of language that creates a linguistic analogue to the natural world and, in doing so, conveys a sense of locality and describes the interaction of writer and nature. The ecolect can thus capture a distinctive form of expression related to the conceptual paradigm of ecology. Detailed analyses of poems will be necessary to explore the specifics of a writer's/poem's ecolect, since ecolect not only implies subject-matter but also particular uses of language.

### P. K. Page

Author of over 30 published books of poetry, fiction, travel diaries, essays, children's books, and an autobiography, P. K. Page can be listed among one of the most prolific Canadian writers. Critics have praised her for the luminous precision of her language, for the vastness of her poetic imagination, for the profoundness of her poems about looking and seeing, for her exquisite sensibility, for the coherence of the imaginative world created by her. According with Rosemary Sullivan (Sullivan 1998: 16). I would suggest that Page's poetry moves between two worlds, the green world of myriad physical details (the sensuous detail of her poetry has a painterly exactness) and the white resonant space of those symbols which we use to suggest another dimension of reality. In Page's writing the world is thus integral, without being fixed or static; it is, quoting Branko Goriup's definition, a "compass rose" (Goriup 1998: 9, 11), which continually reconstitutes itself from all its existing components into new configurations. In reading P. K. Page's poems one can almost perceive some of Gregory Bateson's most profound reflections about the (frequently ignored) interconnectedness between the world and human beings (Bateson 1979). Page

offers a remarkable example of this connection in her poem “Kaleidoscope” (its two parts subtitled “A Little Fantasy” and “A Little Reality”), when she states, self referentially, that the kaleidoscope is “the perfect, all-inclusive metaphor” (Page 2010). A Jungian and familiar symbology is accompanied by Page’s well-known themes, especially her sense of the inexplicable coherence of life in all its forms: “each single thing is other - / all-way joined / to every other thing”. These lines echo similar ones from “Chinese Boxes”, published ten years earlier, in 1981. Both poems insist on the unity of the cosmos, a kind of Jungian individuation that unifies the heavens and the human consciousness. In short, the world’s reality cannot be pared down in a binary structure. Rather, P. K. Page’s texts often neutralize boundaries of all sorts.

In many poems the poetess blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, the whole and the part, and the highest and the lowest (it is worth remembering that her intellectual insights are rooted in the Cabbala, Gnosticism, Sufism, St. John of the Cross, seventeenth century metaphysical poets and the works of Jung). To mention but one example, the oneiric atmosphere of “Before Sleep”, which is sustained by metaphors rooted in the semantic field of water, underlines once again the interconnectedness between human beings and nature: “we stir / and stars swim in our arteries” (ll.1-2); “the silver room becomes a ‘pond’ / and I an object if removed from this / environment in which I act my part as frond or fish / then ‘pond’ becomes an ‘eye’ reflecting ‘sky’” – The human being is seen as a part of the universe and her/his role is not seen as superior to that of a frond or a fish.

As I have argued above, this interconnectedness between human and the natural environment results in a particular rhetorical device which may be observed throughout the work of the poetess and which consists in a double movement. On the one hand, Page attributes human terms to nature and describes nature through human traits and characteristics. On the other hand, while referring to human beings, she describes them through metaphors drawn from nature. Through the close analysis of a few examples, I will show that this particular use of language may be seen as a reflection of the mutual relationship between the writer and her environment, an expression of the reciprocal influence of writers and nature in the ecotone, and a clear sign of the need and desire to redefine the terms of human-nature interaction and to develop another mode of human behaviour.

If in “Personal Landscape” the poetical voice refers to the land as “A lung-born land, this, / a breath spilling, / scanned by the valvular heart’s field glasses” (*Poems 1944-1954* 1991), in the superbly embroidered “After Rain” Page goes a step further and invites the reader to participate in the transformation of the mutable world of nature (her “garden”) into a fabulous lacework, reminiscent of a woman’s “wardrobe”. Snails and spiders are depicted as talented designers who have made a “garden of green lace”:

The snails have made a *garden of green lace*:  
broderie anglaise from the cabbages,  
chantilly from the choux-fleurs, tiny veils-  
I see already that I lift the blind  
upon a woman’s wardrobe of the mind.

The perceptual shift from cabbages to “broderie anglaise”, from nature to art(efact), allows the speaker, before slipping in the mud, to see the garden as an “unknown theorem argued in green ink”, “Euclid in glorious chlorophyll”.

The attribution of human characteristics to nature can be most clearly observed in the ecologically informed poem “Planet Earth” (*Hologram: A Book of Glosas* 1994). Read simultaneously in New York, the Antarctic, and the South Pacific to celebrate the International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations in 2001, this poem is also part of a larger artistic project which reflects Page’s work on the glossa, a metrical form that consists of an opening quatrain written by another poet and of four ten-line stanzas with their concluding lines taken consecutively from the quatrain. Used by the poets of the Spanish court, this form dates back to the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

In “Planet Earth” the opening quatrain is taken from “Oda para planchar” (“Ode to Ironing” 1961) by the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, a poem in which an initial analogy between poetry and water is superbly interwoven with the semantic field of the gentle and compassionate smoothing of our planet’s crumpled skin:

La poesía es blanca:  
 sale del agua envuelta en gotas,  
 se arruga, y se amontona,  
 hay que extender la piel de este planeta,  
 hay que planchar el mar de su blancura  
 y van y van las manos,  
 se alisan las sagradas superficies  
 y así se hacen las cosas:  
 las manos hacen cada día el mundo,  
 se une el fuego al acero,  
 llegan el lino, el lienzo y el tocuyo  
 del combate de las lavanderías  
 y nace de la luz una paloma:  
 la castidad regresa de la espuma<sup>1</sup>.

In her poem P. K. Page reuses the semantic field of domestic activities already encountered in Neruda’s text and attributes it to the relationship that human beings should have towards the world that surrounds them:

*It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet,  
 has to be ironed, the sea in its whiteness;  
 and the hands keep on moving,*

<sup>1</sup> “In Praise of Ironing”: Poetry is pure white./ It emerges from water covered with drops,/ is wrinkled, all in a heap./ It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet,/ has to be ironed out, the sea’s whiteness;/ and the hands keep moving, moving,/ the holy surfaces are smoothed out,/ and that is how things are accomplished./ Every day, hands are creating the world,/ fire is married to steel,/ and canvas, linen, and cotton come back/ from the skirmishings of the laundries,/ and out of light a dove is born -/ pure innocence returns out of the swirl (translation by Alastair Reid 2001: 74).

*smoothing the holy surfaces.*  
(In Praise of Ironing by Pablo Neruda)

It has to be *loved* the way a laundress loves her linens,  
the way she moves her hands *caressing* the fine muslins  
*knowing* their warp and woof,  
like a lover coaxing, or a mother praising.  
It has to be *loved* as if it were embroidered  
with flowers and birds and two joined hearts upon it.  
It has to be *stretched and stroked*.  
It has to be *celebrated*.  
O this great beloved world and all the creatures in it.  
*It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet.*

The trees must be washed, and the grasses and mosses.  
They have to be polished as if made of green brass.  
The rivers and little streams with their hidden cresses  
and pale-coloured pebbles  
and their fool's gold  
must be washed and starched or shined into brightness, the sheets of lake water  
smoothed with the hand  
and the foam of the oceans pressed into neatness  
*It has to be ironed, the sea in its whiteness.*

[...] and pleated and goffered, the flower-blue sea  
the protean, wine-dark, grey, green, sea  
with its metres of satin and bolts of brocade.  
And sky - such an O! overhead - night and day  
must be burnished and rubbed  
by hands that are loving  
so the blue blazons forth  
and the stars keep on shining  
within and above  
*and the hands keep on moving.*

It has to be made bright, the skin of this planet  
till it shines in the sun like gold leaf.  
Archangels then will attend to its metals  
and polish the rods of its rain.  
Seraphim will stop singing hosannas  
to shower it with blessings and blisses and praises  
and, newly in love,  
we must draw it and paint it  
our pencils and brushes and loving caresses  
*smoothing the holy surfaces.*

The poem is imbued with a sense of urgency that derives from the iteration of verbs, as if to demonstrate the need for human beings to be aware of the necessity to change their destructive attitude towards the surrounding world. As emerges in the first stanza, the planet has to be “loved”, “caressed”, “known”, “coaxed”, “praised”, its skin has to be “stretched” and “stroked” and “spread out”, “celebrated”. What is implied in the first stanza, *a contrario*, is that our planet’s skin is crumpled and old and, what is more, that instead of knowing and celebrating it, we frequently tend to ignore and underestimate its needs.

In the second stanza, dominated by the accumulation of details, indicating the threatened richness of the natural world, the poetic voice stresses the need to “wash and polish”, “to wash and starch” into brightness the grasses, the trees, the rivers, the lakes, the streams and the pebbles. Again, what is implied is the contrary: that the environment, which needs to be washed, polished, shined into brightness and lovingly smoothed with the hands, is, instead, polluted, stained, contaminated.

The urgency of action (which is expressed not only through the rhythm of the verse but also by the last line of the stanza “and the hands keep on moving”) is also at the centre of the third part of the poem, in which the reader encounters again the analogy between cloth and nature and also the semantic field of “washing” (expressed here through the verbs “burnishing” and “rubbing”). What is implied in this case is the idea that human passiveness, indifference or carelessness can lead to a progressive darkening of the sky: “by hands that are loving / so the blue blazons forth / and the stars keep on shining”. Human beings are invited to “burnish and rub” the sky, unless they do not want to see the stars stop shining

This leitmotiv is positioned in the opening line of the last stanza (“It has to be made *bright*”), a sentence that concludes the poem with a sense of religious awe in front of the sacredness of the planet, and of the urgency for human beings to celebrate and take care of it: by coaxing and praising it as we usually do with a lover or a child, by keeping it clean as we do with the clothes that protect us.

The second rhetorical strategy I was referring to at the beginning of this paper looms large in the poem “Summer”. In “Planet Earth” the dominating metaphor was the one that saw the world as a cloth to be ironed (I referred to this linguistic strategy as “human characteristics applied/attributed to nature”), in “Summer” we see the metamorphosis of a human being into something which is thoroughly part of the natural world, a process which is charged with erotic connotations:

I grazed the green as I fell  
and in my blood  
the pigments flowed like sap.  
All through my veins the green  
made a lacy tree.  
Green in my eye grew big as a bell  
that gonged and struck  
and in a whorl of green in my ear  
it spun like a ball.

Orphaned at once that summer  
 having sprung  
 full grown and firm with green,  
 chorused with fern.  
 Oh, how the lazy moths were soft upon  
 my feminine fingers,  
 how flowers foamed at my knees  
 all those green months.

Near reeds and rushes where the water lay  
 fat and lusted by the sun  
 I sang the green that was in my groin  
 the green  
 of lily and maidenhair and fritillary  
 from the damp wood  
 of cedar and cypress from the slow hill,  
 and the song, stained with the stain of chlorophyll  
 was sharp as a whistle of grass  
 in my green blood.

The first stanza announces the beginning of the metamorphosis with the lines “in my blood/ the pigments flowed like sap” and elaborates the ongoing fusion between the poetic I and what surrounds her through images that are concerned with spreading. The green makes a “lacy tree” through the poetess’ veins and proliferates in her “eye”. The second stanza describes the poetic I from the “outside” and sees her perfectly at home in nature, surrounded by fern, moths and flowers, almost ripe (“firm with green”) to become something else, or to give birth to something else (it is interesting, in this sense, to observe Page’s painting that accompanies the poem). The third stanza makes more explicit the erotic connotations of the poem and leads the reader to visualise the complete fusion of nature and the poetic I, i.e. of nature and poetry. The poet, in whose veins flows “green blood” refers to her art as a song “stained with the stain of chlorophyll”, “sharp as a whistle of grass”.

Much more could be said on this topic, and many other P. K. Page’s poems could be quoted on the topic related to the interrelatedness of poet and nature. What I have tried to draw attention to in this paper is Page’s attempt to elaborate a form of art which investigates and celebrates the world and tries to speak about it from a point of view which is profoundly oriented towards the overcoming of oppositional or destructive attitudes. This element of P. K. Page’s poetics urges human beings towards a thorough awareness of the importance to preserve the intrinsic and systemic (to say it with Gregory Bateson) multiplicity of being (Bateson 1979: 128) and is firmly opposed to the danger of *single-mindedness* and to a homophonic vision of the world.

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Rossella Ciocca

### 'Hearts of Darkness' in Shining India. Maps of Ecological Un-Sustainability in the North-East

**Abstract I:** Il tema delle controverse prospettive dello sviluppo e della globalizzazione in India sono state recentemente oggetto di attenzione narrativa. In particolare questo articolo analizza il romanzo di Siddhartha Deb del 2005 intitolato *Surface* che mostra come nel Nord-Est della nazione una nuova generazione di scrittori stia cercando di costruire un contro-archivio in grado di contestare l'immagine dell'India come emergente super-potenza globale. Dando conto di tutte le contraddizioni che il modello neo-liberista di sviluppo sta producendo soprattutto nelle zone più periferiche e multi-etniche del paese, il romanzo di Deb, sulla falsariga del modello conradiano, mette a nudo il cuore oscuro del cosiddetto "India Shining".

**Abstract II:** A number of recent novels have chosen to variously address the existing conditions of the multi-ethnic mosaic of the Indian North-East. These works of fiction shed light upon a dramatic contemporary condition and propound an alternative historical archive able to perturb the current image of India as a neo-liberal, globalized super power. Indeed, in India's complex, uneven and contradictory patterns of economic and technological progress, perspectives of development prove highly controversial. In *Surface*, a novella written in 2005 by Siddhartha Deb, set in the Northeastern region and seemingly modeled upon Conrad's colonial archetype *Heart of Darkness*, a post-millennial social community of investors, executives, administrators, traders, politicians, journalists, social workers and rebels, inhabit a very complex, and 'dark', territorial reality.

A number of recent novels have chosen to variously address Indian economic modernization, conjugating fiction with a new environmentalist sensibility. These works shed light upon a dramatic contemporary condition and shape an alternative historical archive able to perturb the emerging image of India as a globalized super power encapsulated within the 2004 electoral slogan "India Shining"<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, in India's complex, uneven and often contradictory route towards economic and technological progress, perspectives of development, conceived under the aegis of global capitalism, prove to be highly controversial. *Surface*, a

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<sup>1</sup> The "India Shining" slogan was initially conceived as part of an official national campaign intended to promote India internationally. The expression was subsequently used as an electoral slogan in the campaign for the 2004-2005 national elections by the nationalist right-wing formation Bharatiya Janata Party.

novel written in 2005 by Siddhartha Deb, centers upon the idea of a voyage undertaken in the peripheral region of the Northeast. The reality described portrays a highly problematic situation in which rather than helping to incorporate these border lands into the post-colonial nation, the development programs in fact render their already conflictual life even more dangerous and explosive. On the basis of some textual traces which bring to mind Conrad's colonial archetype, *Heart of Darkness*, this paper aims to investigate how Deb's novella tackles the question of internal neo-colonialism exercised in India by the nation-state.

In India, recent global economic prominence has granted the country recognition as a confident player on the scene of trans-national capitalism thus substantiating its current rhetoric as an emerging superpower. India's contemporary fiction is often engaged in exploring the 'Indianness' of this neo-liberal swing (Varughese 2013: 5, 152) while underscoring the country's complex, uneven and contradictory patterns of economic and technological progress and highlighting the controversial nature of its development<sup>2</sup>.

The author of *Surface*, originally entitled *An Outline of the Republic*, grew up in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, and after an early career in journalism, wrote two novels set in India's Northeast<sup>3</sup>. This area has of late borne witness to a new narrative output, mapping in particular the transition from oral to written literatures after the alphabetization of tribal societies. A new and promising generation of writers tries, through narrative, to emerge out of the colonial-ethnographic passive framework of representation, and to build a new subjectivity fostering, through narration, the idea of a shared history and a regional identity. In Zama's words "changing times and its accompanying dynamics have necessitated the various communities of this region to seek new ways to negotiate, translate and expose their world views" (Zama 2013: xii).

Like other Northeastern authors, Deb qualifies as a novelist, a historian and a social observer, contributing to create what Baral calls the 'ethos of the region' (Baral 2013: 5). By construing his narration as a quest story in the Northeast, in fact Deb focuses upon a territorial reality which, far from being a neutral backdrop, is almost a subject in itself. The plot, triggered by the picture of a girl held captive by one of the many local insurgent factions, leads Amrit, a professional reporter in Calcutta, to discover that the girl had once been connected with a development program known as the *Prosperity Project*, located in the remotest corner of the Northeast region: "the backwaters of the backwaters" (Deb 2005: 57). The quest for the lost girl and the unraveling of her personal story are gradually transformed into a 'reportage' which, by mingling different perspectives of observation, both documentary and symbolical, becomes the exploration of a country caught in a highly problematic historical moment.

Basically a coinage of convenience, the term 'Northeast' figures in contemporary con-

<sup>2</sup> Enforced as it is by the IMF and World Bank, modernization in the Subcontinent is characterized by the creation of Special Economic Zones (SEZ), in which highly impacting infrastructural programs such as the construction of hydroelectric dams, mining, and other resource extraction activities, together with processes of deforestation and the massive use of chemical composts inherent to monoculture systems, have radically altered the environment and created ecological emergencies.

<sup>3</sup> He is also the author of *The Beautiful and the Damned. A Portrait of the New India* (2012), a non-fiction work on post-globalization in India.

sciousness either as an area of secluded natural sanctuaries or as an insidious land of insurgency and civil warfare. In the aftermath of Independence and Partition, the new independent state tried to convert not-yet-national borderlands into state-ruled areas. Delhi failed to control the Northeastern regions and progressively transformed them into an increasingly disenfranchised guerrilla zone. As Mara Matta convincingly explains:

The architects of Partition had insensitively ignored the fact that these territories were mostly inhabited by indigenous peoples: many ethnic groups shared cultural, religious, and linguistic affinities with others across the border, showing a weak affiliation to the newborn states of India, Pakistan, or Burma (Matta 2017: 199).

In his narrative reportage, Amrit recalls Indian post-independence history to explain the present condition of endemic civil strife in the Northeast. He represents this area's recent past as a process which saw, in the exceptionally diverse ethnic fabric of the district, the emergence of multiple competing forms of resistance on the part of "millions of riotous natives coming to terms with their dismembered freedom" (Deb 2005: 70).

As the novel illustrates, in the Northeastern regions an intricate mix of overlapping ethnic, religious, social, and environmental issues, fuel a political climate in which insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations become the very norm of an everyday 'state of exception' (Agamben 2005) progressively transforming a provisional state of emergency into a kind of permanent technique of government<sup>4</sup>: "the insurgents had been in the region in one form or another for nearly four decades, crystallizing around different ethnic and tribal identities as a distant government in Delhi alternated between complete neglect and brute force" (Deb 2005: 31). Indeed, in a series of landscape descriptions, the pristine, almost archetypal, green heart of the country serves to conceal the daunting presence of the military state: "that initial, aerial view of a green and fecund valley gave way to the camouflage of army uniforms and the dour faces of soldiers" (Deb 2005: 6).

What is more, these distant and sparsely populated territories, generally considered remote and somewhat 'alien', have recently been subjected to national programs based on the intensive exploitation of the local natural resources (timber and oil) thus engendering new forms of social tension. On the one hand, massive immigration flows, either internal (from the subcontinent) or external (from Bangladesh), produce latent and oppressive indigenous/settler tensions leading to a highly politicized dichotomy between tribal and non-tribal groups, with the latter portrayed as usurpers of the economic and socio-political rights of the indigenous people (Matta 2015: 51-52). On the other hand, developmental policies, connected to the privatization of the forests and subsequent damaging impact on tribals and other penurious categories, are generating ecological degradation as well as eco-

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<sup>4</sup> As Sanjib Baruah reconstructs in his study on the contemporary political condition of the Indian Northeast: "In order to maintain a permanent counterinsurgency capacity, India's democratic institutions have acquired certain authoritarian trappings. In recent years there has been significant protest in the region against a controversial law, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, that gives sweeping powers to security forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations. This law violates international human rights laws and norms and is strongly criticized by national and international human rights organizations" (2007: viii).

conomic pauperization while adding that particular predicament described by Rob Nixon as 'slow violence'<sup>5</sup> to the local varieties of turbulence.

In *Surface*, the protagonist observes and explains how in the post-liberalization era, the developmental thrust from the central state towards its northeastern peripheries, is locally resented as just another exploitative and insidious move to drain indigenous resources and supplement long-standing grudges with new disappointments:

insurgents had blown up a nearby pipeline. [...] Oil, in the middle of this nowhere? Not enough oil to quench the thirst of an entire country, but sufficient to justify expensive equipment and staff, and quite enough to create a grievance for the insurgents who claimed [...] that all the wealth was taken out of their region with nothing given in return" (Deb 2005: 77).

As the journalist Amrit shows, designated fund injections from the central government, often misused and illegally appropriated, give rise to a dangerous mix of bribery and competing interests which foster even more disillusionment among the local populations. With its endemic potential for conflict and its traditional economies and cultures impoverished by forced modernization, the Northeast, traversed and described by Amrit, casts a very dark shadow indeed upon the "India Shining" portrayal which had been coined by marketers to circulate India's official new image as an economic super power<sup>6</sup>.

In many descriptions the almost mystic beauty of the land appears sullied by the dismal ramifications of polluting modernization. As a result, a very old and mysterious land, through a peculiar mix of atavistic practices and the ecological byproducts of modernity, appears shrouded in a sort of uncanny atmosphere, which from the very start summons up the African jungle depicted by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*.

It was an old city, in the memoirs of a Chinese traveler nearly two thousand years ago. Not surprisingly, little of the place he wrote about had survived; just the wide, severe river that rested like a somnolent leviathan next to the shapeless modern settlement, and the temple up in the hills where they performed animal sacrifices throughout the year, the waters of its lake a dull red from blood or mercury deposits (2005: 7).

Evocative of Conrad's Congo river in the shape of an uncoiled snake entrancing the

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<sup>5</sup> "By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2011: 2). In Nixon's opinion we need to reconsider the conventional notion of violence as "a highly visible act that is newsworthy because it is event focused, time bound, and body bound" (2011: 3). Instead account needs to be given for the way in which diluted forms of social affliction, in particular environmental calamities, affect the poor resulting in the progressive impoverishment and stark destitution of entire communities. Even more so when, while ecological resources are progressively appropriated by multinationals, local inhabitants are usually not granted equitable access to the fundamental utilities of modernity. "Such communities, ecologically dispossessed without being empowered via infrastructure", Nixon concludes, "are ripe for revolt" (2011: 42).

<sup>6</sup> See here note 2.

young Marlowe<sup>7</sup>, this literary picture, and in general the natural imagery deployed throughout the narrative as it progresses from the centre to the extreme borders of *the republic*, contributes to create an oneiric, hazy environmental ambience. In effect, Deb's novella is not only built upon accurate reports and social and historical analyses. The narrator's voice achieves a peculiar stylistic blend in which the documentary merges with a level of symbolical connotation apt to endow the writing with a sort of mesmerizing quality, paying open homage to Conrad and his work.

The first convergence between the classic work of colonial literature and Deb's storytelling is represented by the picture of the map which in both narratives seems to perform a sort of symbolic initiatory function and in Deb's novel also that of a *fil rouge*<sup>8</sup>.

Conrad resorted to the colonial map and the blank spaces which still interspersed the dominant 'red' of the imperial British domain to define the sense of fascination – "delightful mystery" (Conrad 1987: 33) which would entice the child Marlowe to become, as an adult, one of the agents of the colonial enterprise and its mapping drive. Deb, instead, chooses to build his counter-archive of local history by adopting the image of a reversed map connected this time not with daydreaming and youthful desire but with a weird recurring dream which seems to anticipate the sense of dislocation and estrangement that would become the dominant mood of the real exploration. In this dream all the Indian metropolises and even the Bay of Bengal "the whole country [is] visible in an instant" (Deb 2005: 22).

I get entranced [...] because it seems to me that through the gap in the forest I am looking at a strange kind of horizon, something familiar and yet not entirely recognizable [...] I keep looking, and I feel dizzy as if the forest is turning on its axis, and then it strikes me that what I am seeing in the distance is really Delhi, but Delhi as it would appear if you were standing on a giant map of India and viewing the distant skyline of the capital from the dark forest of the region (2005: 22).

Indeed, advancing from the metropolitan centre towards dangerous forested peripheries, the voyager experiences an off-putting, disconcerting perspective in which progressively everything, including the centre itself, becomes not only distanced but somehow alien and increasingly incomprehensible. However, as the mystery which is at the base of the plot begins to unravel, the reader, following the traveler's transfixing experience, is able to retrace other elements explicitly suggestive of Conrad's prototype.

For example, while solving the case involving the developmental program to which

<sup>7</sup> "But there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird" (Conrad 1987: 33).

<sup>8</sup> Deb's treatment of the map motif is indeed so highly resonant of Conrad's model as to create in more than one passage, an almost *verbatim* coincidence between the two texts. See for example the following passage against the backdrop of Marlow's famous recalling of his passion as a child for maps (Conrad 1987: 33): "The road snaked down southwards on the map [...]. The space looked intimate on paper, an area thick with lines and dots and strange names, but when I followed Highway 39 [...] the map changed character. Across the border, in Burma, it was all blankness" (Deb 2005: 120).

the lost girl had been connected, Amrit comes across Malik, the director and main deviser of the ambitious *Prosperity Project*. Clearly evocative of Conrad's Kurtz, Malik is characterized and introduced as: "A creator of order in the wilderness. A messenger of hope for an area plunged in darkness" (2005: 35). Lexical connotations leave little room for doubt about the intentional Conradian pattern adopted by Deb. The woman, an enthusiastic follower of Malik, and possibly an updated version of the character of Kurtz's 'Intended'<sup>9</sup>, was in town raising funds for the project. Eager to reach her hero at the Community site, she was taken hostage by a local guerrilla group and apparently sentenced to death for having been involved in nothing less than 'pornography'. Her capture serves "to impress upon the people the importance of desisting from all corrupt activities encouraged by Indian imperialism" (2005: 71). It is a clear warning to steer clear of the emissaries of 'development', in turn reminiscent of Conrad's 'emissaries of light', as Marlow's aunt calls the men of the 'Company' (Conrad 1987: 39), although the 'colonial' power emerges here as internally exerted by the Indian postcolonial nation upon its own subjects.

Indeed, as Amrit proceeds in a liminal, foggy landscape of continuous frontier-crossings, patrol rounds, curfews, alerts and actual ambushes, the truth he hopes to uncover proves difficult to grasp, wavering on the sharp edge between appearance and disenchantment. In any case, everything progressively tends to converge towards the fascinating yet ambiguous figure of Malik, who, in a country mired in civil warfare and swept by all sorts of illicit traffics, is credited with having brought about a miracle of social equity, progress, and economic opportunity. The *Prosperity Project* presents itself as "an environmental project" (Deb 2005: 34) and makes much of its "completely integrated developmental set-up" (34), able to reintegrate maimed people into their traditional communities, and to introduce traditional economies to modern techniques. "All this [...] achieved without money from the government or interference from the insurgents" (148).

Increasingly Malik begins to appear not only as a "remarkable thinker [...] almost a visionary [...] an inspiring figure in a place where so much is bleak. [...] An emissary sent from the heart of the republic to its borders" (35), able to erect "a tower of hope in the very heart of despair" (241) but also as "a subtle man, an individual who understands ambiguity, and that may explain how he succeeded where all others had failed" (37), "the centre of gravity for whatever activity was being recorded" (147).

Of course at the end of the journey, just like that of Marlow in the African jungle – "as if I had sleepwalked my way to the edge of the republic" (255) Amrit says – at the core of this miracle there lies another hollow *heart of darkness*. Everything is fake. Malik, an impostor and a charlatan (165), a go-between for government and insurgency, probably an intelligence operator who, presiding over a counterfeit money business, connives with the insurgents with whom he shares the profits (133) of the whole artifice. The project turns out to be just "a carefully constructed narrative" (147). The station, the clinic, the rehabilitation center, all the structures and environmental activities are nothing more than forged accom-

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<sup>9</sup> As Jai Arjun Singh (2015) highlights, there are indeed many similarities between Conrad's Kurtz and Deb's Malik: from the words used by admirers to describe them as 'remarkable', 'extraordinary', 'genius', to the presence of a woman who never loses faith in the fallen figure despite all evidence to the contrary.

plishments, falsified reports, stolen pictures, and counterfeited videos. A feigned world of mere shadows.

In this dangerous performance, the girl whose picture had triggered the quest turns out to be, rather ironically “a small-town girl with big ambitions trapped by the turbulence of local politics and a bad decision in her choice of boyfriend” (156). When she begins to doubt the very existence of the *Prosperity Project*, Malik is ready to hand her over to the insurgents and to organize the fake trial of the fake porn actress she has been turned into<sup>10</sup>. But daring too much himself, Malik too is in the end abducted and killed. Amrit is informed that Mr Malik, like *Mista Kurtz*, “He’s dead” (212). Like Conrad’s Kurtz, Malik too is a man whose “imagination and genius” (187) had been diverted and corrupted by the intricacies of a *colonial* situation, with, in this case, the Indian central state playing the exploitative and pillaging role of the mother country.

In *Surface*, a post-millennial social community of investors, executives, administrators, traders, politicians, and even social workers and rebels, give life to a sort of tragic pantomime in which almost nothing is what it pretends to be. In the tangle of double, maybe even triple dealing, interests are disguised as commitments, political extremism is nothing more than a ferocious blend of hypocrisy conjoined with cynicism, and the region indeed resembles Kurtz’s empire of darkness. But the vague and slippery nature of Kurtz’s ‘horror’ is here transformed into a far more crowded universe.

With its governmental, corporate, police and guerrilla, and even NGO actors, the Indian Northeast is archetypical of the new social map of the contemporary Global South. Deb’s critical geography is born of the overlapping of a post-liberalization geography and a local or, as defined by Nixon, ‘vernacular’ landscape: “a vernacular landscape is shaped by the affective, historically textured maps that communities have devised over generations, maps replete with names and routes, maps alive to significant ecological [...] features” (Nixon 2011: 17).

By contrast, a neo-capitalist map of the global South retraces the landscape in a manner which is both bureaucratic and instrumental, giving rise to deeply estranging, unsettling effects. In this case, the Indian Northeast presents a series of exponentially complicated national, globalized and post-liberalization maps superimposed over a tribal, non-national borderland map transformed into an “apocalyptic end of the world” (100). The suggestive power of Deb’s novella, somehow following the path of Conrad’s paradigm, lies in his drawing a pitiless picture of such an ex-vernacular landscape, with the once luxuriant and awe inspiring nature transformed into an appalling palimpsest of national-global contradictions. An explosive assortment of badly handled issues involving private and public investments, capitalist assaults on resources, immigration, nationalisms, communalisms, religious fanaticism and gender discrimination<sup>11</sup> turn the so-called *Seven Sisters*<sup>12</sup> into a land of ecological and human disposability.

<sup>10</sup> At least the girl is not executed but ‘only’ injured and goes underground to continue her work with Burma dissidents who operate from the Indian side of the border (2005: 216).

<sup>11</sup> The novel for example records how “the traditional independence of the hill women had been eroded by the violence of the government and the insurgents” (139).

<sup>12</sup> Also known as “Paradise Unexplored”, are the contiguous states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura in Northeastern India.



In the third millennium, India is going through the throes of rampant modernization. Maps of ecological un-sustainability problematize the extent and the nature of its accomplishments. Confronting the effects of the nation-state's empowerment, *ecocritical* works of fiction, among which Deb's novel figures significantly, expose the other side of progress, denouncing how the enhancement of civil and military infrastructures often bring about the destruction of natural resources and injure the local population's right to autonomy and survival. Catalyzing alarm and encouraging reflection upon new forms of social, cultural and economic vulnerabilities, this kind of ecologically concerned fiction conveys environmental forms of anxiety in order to reveal, in the "alienating wake of globalization" (De Loughrey & Handley 2011: 9), so many inherent new *hearts of darkness*.

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### Who Cares About Children's Rights? Critical Multimodal Awareness and its Implications for the Design, Analysis and Use of Children's Online Educational Materials\*

**Abstract I:** Questo contributo indaga le modalità di costruzione del senso dal punto di vista visivo/verbale in un sottocorpo di siti web istituzionali progettati da adulti al fine di sensibilizzare i bambini delle scuole elementari e medie sui loro diritti. I materiali multimodali di questo sottocorpo sono stati testati, per mezzo di questionari ed interviste semi-strutturate, su 100 bambini dalla terza elementare alla terza media in una scuola del territorio in cui l'inglese viene utilizzato come lingua veicolare. Lo studio utilizza la grammatica sistemica funzionale nella sua declinazione socio-semiotica applicata ad altri 'modi' comunicativi. Si rifà al concetto di *empowerment* come processo sociale multi-dimensionale che è stato indagato per mezzo di liste che si concentrano sulle principali strategie verbali e nonverbali messe in atto dai bambini per creare il senso in testi multimodali. Più precisamente, questo contributo discute i risultati emersi da questionari ed interviste semi-strutturate in riferimento soprattutto ai concetti di usabilità, accessibilità, consapevolezza critica, ed impatto dei messaggi. Il focus principale risiede nell'interfaccia tra le esplorazioni (spesso inadeguate) dei siti da parte dei bambini, e le strategie (spesso 'difettose') di costruzione dei siti stessi da parte degli adulti. Le implicazioni di questa ricerca sono duplici: da una parte, fornire ai giovani discenti le strategie per estrarre il senso da questi materiali e sviluppare la loro autonomia e coscienza critica; dall'altro, creare liste e linee guida per la costruzione multimodale di materiali da parte degli adulti, così da porre le basi per configurare una pedagogia linguistica critica che ponga al centro il ruolo del 'discorso' nelle pratiche sociali.

**Abstract II:** The present paper focuses on strategies for making sense of image/text relations in a sub-corpus of institutional websites specifically designed by adults to sensitize primary and early secondary school children to the issue of human (viz. children's) rights. The multimodal materials of this specific sub-corpus were tested, by means of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, on 100 children from grade 3 to 8 in a local school where English is used as the main language of instruction. The research is informed by systemic functional linguistic theory in its social semiotic applications to other modes

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\* This article is a joint production and reflects the work and views of both authors. Sections 1 ("Introduction") and 5 ("Conclusions") are jointly authored. Section 2 was written by Vasta, and sections 3 and 4 by Trevisan.

of communication. It draws on the notion of (here, children) empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process, investigated through the analysis of checklists focusing on the main verbal and nonverbal strategies children enact to make sense of the multimodal texts and on some basic problematic areas in adult-generated materials creating barriers to informing and eliciting the participation of young learners. More specifically, this paper discusses the main findings of children questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with particular reference to issues of usability, accessibility, critical awareness, and impact of message. The main focus is on the interface between children's (often inadequate) website exploration strategies and adults' (often defective) strategies of materials design. The two-fold implication of the research is: on the one hand, to provide young learners with remedial strategies for making sense of such materials while developing greater autonomy and critical multimodal awareness; and, on the other, to fine-tune checklists for analysis and offer guidelines and best practices for the multimodal construction of adult-generated materials, thus potentially configuring a critical linguistic pedagogy centrally concerned with the role of discourse in social practice.

## 1. Introduction

The PRIN project<sup>1</sup> within which the present analysis was conducted focuses on the accessibility of educational multimodal texts produced for (and, more rarely, by) communities of children of different age-groups and mediated through Information and Communication Technology (ICT)<sup>2</sup>. For these e-communities of children, access to ICT-mediated texts can constitute both an advantage (providing a wider range of stimulating and valuable learning opportunities, as well as expert advice at a low cost and at all times) and a problem (posing safety risks, like invasions of privacy and intrusive commercial practices; reinforcing socio-cultural stereotypes; naturalizing biased role models and/or behaviour patterns imposed by hegemonic communities, or the like). Indeed, recent research (see Livingstone *et al.* 2012) has shown that, as children's access to online materials grows, so does their exposure to risk of harm and perception thereof<sup>3</sup>. However, although violence against vulnerable vic-

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<sup>1</sup> PRIN (i.e. National Relevance Research Projects co-funded by the Italian University Research and Education Ministry) 2009 – protocol no. 2009RL3NF4: ACT – *Access through Text* (Udine research unit's subproject title: MACE - *Multimodal Awareness for Children's Empowerment*).

<sup>2</sup> In this paper, the term 'accessibility' is not used to refer to web accessibility for people with special needs, but rather to digital multimodal texts, that are 'accessible' for e-communities of children, i.e. 'user-friendly', in terms of both message and ease of navigation.

<sup>3</sup> As Livingstone reports, "the EU Kids Online survey of 25,000 European children found that 30% of 9- to 16-year-old internet users had had contact online with someone not met face-to-face, and 9% had gone to a face-to-face meeting with someone first met online. Further, 21% of 11- to 16-year-olds had come across at least one type of potentially harmful user-generated content, while 15% (of 11- to 16-year-olds) had seen or received sexual messages on the internet. Next most common, 14% of 9- to 16-year-olds had seen sexual images on websites in the past year and 6% had been sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet (Livingstone *et al.*

tims (including their subtle manipulation) is rated by children among the three main concerns about the risks posed by the Internet, “it receives less attention than sexual content or bullying in awareness-raising initiatives” (Livingstone *et al.* 2014: 271).

Convergence in media is changing the way in which texts – especially those created for children by adults in order to convey informative/didactic contents imbued with argumentative/persuasive messages – are not only planned and produced (i.e. user-generated)<sup>4</sup>, but also accessed and negotiated by e-users. In exploiting the socializing affordances<sup>5</sup> embodied in the medium, children, who play a role in text fruition as active participants rather than simply ‘readers’ or ‘viewers’, are often at risk of being abused, manipulated or imposed upon. Therefore, paradigms of text design, analysis and user agency in e-participation on the web and in convergent media (films, cartoons, commercial adverts, social adverts, and the like) need to be re-assessed and reframed in the light of new, more flexible theoretical frameworks and guidelines which shift from a focus on text to a focus on action. At the same time, emerging multimodal web genres and practices and, consequently, new styles of accessing texts and learning through them, need to be systematically investigated and categorized (see e.g. Baldry 2011; Cambria *et al.* 2012; Campagna *et al.* 2012).

Against this backdrop, the sub-project conducted by the Udine research unit (entitled *MACE-Multimodal Awareness for Children’s Empowerment*) was aimed at investigating access, in public (namely educational) settings, to web texts in English across three thematic sub-corpora (children’s health, children’s rights, children’s environmental awareness). The *MACE* project set out to explore: i) whether and to what extent ICT-mediated texts/learning environments actually facilitate interconnections, creative skills and interactivity (Baron 2008); ii) how children can be helped to develop greater awareness of their multimodal skills and hypermedia potentialities in dealing with issues which are relevant to them and vital for the construction of their own social identity – which is the pedagogically-ecologic pathway to developing greater awareness of their right to self-expression.

Another important, related aim of the research was the creation of a data-bank of materials for education and language ecology, incorporating the latest developments and best practices in multimodal discourse and genre analysis, to be made freely accessible through

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2012). Of these risks, online bullying resulted in the highest proportion of children being upset; ‘sexting’ and pornography were perceived as less upsetting, and meeting new online contacts offline was the least likely to upset children” (Livingstone *et al.* 2014: 272).

<sup>4</sup> See Van Dijck: “[...] As the market for user-generated content further commercializes and is incorporated by new media conglomerates, the sliding scales of voluntarism are inversely proportional to the sliding scales of professionalism, resulting in new mixed models of labour. In order to understand the changes in user agency, it is important to scrutinize ‘human resources’ management of UGC sites such as YouTube. What characterizes the type of effort users put into creating and rating online content if this is not regularly paid labour? Why devote much time and energy to creating content and what to expect in return? The changes YouTube made in its policies towards users are typical of the current trend towards integrating amateur efforts into a capital- and technology-intensive media system” (2009: 49-50).

<sup>5</sup> The concept of affordances, used in studies of technological design to refer to what a technical environment offers relative to the person or group perceiving or recognizing that quality of the environment (Gibson 1979: 127), will be expanded upon below (see section 2.1.1.) in close connection with the concepts of user agency and empowerment.

a variety of convergent media to families, (CLIL and/or domain-specific English) teachers, health workers and social workers (e.g. professional trainers).

While adopting an ecological approach to English language learning in a critical awareness-raising environment, the present paper shall illustrate the main findings of the research conducted on children questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with particular reference to the “children’s rights” sub-corpus, and to the issues of usability, accessibility, critical awareness, and participation models.

## 2. Rationale, methodological bases and scope of the research

The research was informed by systemic functional linguistic theory and its social semiotic applications to other modes of communication. More specifically, a considerable part of the study was based on Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SF-MDA), an analytical practice which tests the applications of the key principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics to the analysis of semiotic systems other than, and/or synergically interacting with, language. In keeping with the overall focus of the Udine research unit within the PRIN project, the research dealt with children’s empowerment as “a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important” (Page & Czuba 1999). For the present purposes, empowerment will be investigated by analyzing the capability of children – facing problems and issues relevant to their own lives and socio-biographical situations – to discover and exploit the verbal and non-verbal affordances of ICT-mediated texts. These affordances are assumed to facilitate interconnections, creative capabilities and interactivity (Baron 2008) to such an extent that one-sided authoritative sources seem to become less and less acceptable, while the emphasis is shifted on a new ‘learning ecology’ based on participation and creative practice, content creation and interactivity (Greenhow *et al.* 2009).

Yet, as J. R. Martin perceptively reminds us, “a text” – whether ‘mono-’<sup>6</sup> or multimodal, printed or ICT-mediated – “is still a meaning potential [which] will be taken up and read in different ways, according to the interested social subjectivities involved” (2003: 215) and subject to risks (*viz.* ideological manipulation) that may compromise effective learning and the young learner’s autonomous growth, especially when children’s access to Internet sources and materials is not adequately monitored. The strong research focus on children empowerment thus accounts for the choice of Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>7</sup> as the methodo-

<sup>6</sup> As Kress and van Leeuwen rightly point out, “all texts are multimodal” (1998: 186 *et passim*; Kress 1996: 20, 23), in the sense that written language is always also a visual arrangement of marks on a page. Yet, in analysing texts in which different semiotic modes interact in the meaning-making process, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 18 *et passim*) have shown that, while images of whatever kind are never neutral in that they fall within the realm of ideology as any other mode of discourse, a multimodal text may carry differing and even conflicting meanings at the verbal and visual levels. What is more, “even a text that seems to speak a single ‘pure’ voice speaks and is heard in a community of many voices and its meanings are made in relation to them” (Lemke 1988: 30).

<sup>7</sup> As Teun van Dijk effectively notes, CDA is “analysis with an attitude” (2001: 96), in the sense that it “explores the relation between language and power and the ways in which language is being used to produce,

logical framework which is, on the one hand, potentially more apt to provide children with greater learner autonomy; and which, on the other, is perfectly in line with our professional engagement and responsibility, in our role as language-and/as-culture educators, to promote ecology of verbal and non-verbal communication, so as “to raise our students’ critical awareness of the ways in which people get manipulated, marginalized or silenced in and through texts” (Vasta 2005: 450), and ultimately to promote respect for the Other. The scope of investigation of the *MACE* project was threefold:

- i. within the broader field of research into the discursive (viz. intermodal/intersemiotic) construction of identity, the project investigated strategies for positioning potentially or actually marginalized/underprivileged social identities, such as those of children; besides, it offered an account of the intermodal (verbal and non-verbal) resources to construct agency and responsibility and to project interpersonal relations of solidarity or dominance;
- ii. within a critical-discourse, socio-pragmatic and interactional perspective, the research integrated existing analytical frameworks and models to explore the construction/manipulation of youth participation and consensus-raising; along these lines, it identified good practices in adult-child/peer-to-peer communication with a view to fostering critical awareness and thus contribute to empowering under-privileged e-communities in specific domains of their social interaction;
- iii. within the wider context of education and language ecology, the research identified guidelines and an educationally accessible metalanguage shared by students and teachers for the construction and analysis of multimodal texts addressed to children; materials and best practices were disseminated to a wide range of relevant stakeholders (parents, educators, etc.) nationally and internationally.

Young and Harrison’s words, the main reason for using a critical discourse approach to awareness-raising in language learning through the Web was “to use analysis not only to reveal structures of domination, but also to effect change in the way power is wielded, maintained, and reproduced in social organizations and relationships” (2004: 2), thus potentially configuring a critical linguistic pedagogy centrally concerned with the role of discourse in social practice (see Fairclough 1992, 2001; 2004: viz. 112-113) and inextricably intertwined with questions of (here, children’s) rights and identity.

### 2.1. *The research questions, foci of interest and outcomes*

The research questions for our analysis stemmed from an interest in exploring/categorizing the strategies children enact in making sense of complex new modes of discourse and discourse genres, namely those they encounter on the Web. More specifically, the main research questions were centered on a systemic-functional approach to intermodal competence (see, for instance, Painter, Martin & Unsworth 2013; Djonov 2007 & 2008) and systematized as follows:

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maintain, and reproduce positions of power through discursive means. [...] The intention of CDA is to move the linguistic field into a domain of social and political relevance and, thus, provide a social critique by documenting structures of inequality” (Young & Harrison 2004: 2).

- i. Can the students recognize the main topic and participants (Field of discourse) of a website on the grounds of the homepage alone?
- ii. What strategies do they use (if any) to retrieve information and identify the text function (or “website mission”), as well as participant role-relationships and attitudes (Tenor of discourse), especially when the image/text/sound interface is not congruent (in Hallidayan terms) or is definitely misleading/ideologically biased?
- iii. What are the design elements (Mode of discourse) that facilitate or hinder young user orientation in making sense of the logico-semantic relations and structure of a hypermedia text, namely a website homepage, and consequently evaluate it as “well-organized” / “interesting” or not?

Following the checklists used to identify some basic problematic areas in adult-generated materials and the related barriers to informing and sensitizing young learners to issues of public concern, the present paper focuses on the mismatch between: a) children’s inadequate website homepage exploration strategies – e.g. due to the necessity to do more inferencing to decode image-text relations on a webpage than when they use old media (see Martinec 2013: 168 *et passim*) – and b) adults’ defective / misfiring materials design strategies – e.g. due to semiotic overload, excessive pictorial density, or misleading visual hierarchy.

In other words, the paper aims to suggest potential solutions to barriers experienced by children as they try to make sense of the selected websites’ structure and intermodal meaning-making patterns at different yet integrated meta-functional levels:

- **Ideational**, with particular reference to visual transitivity structures and the resort to grammatical and/or visual metaphors.
- **Interpersonal**, namely as regards structures of agency and responsibility; engagement/disengagement; perceptual salience; axiological and evaluative meanings – or appraisal, for short – through which authors can “present themselves as recognising, answering, ignoring, challenging, rejecting, fending off, anticipating or accommodating actual or potential interlocutors and the value positions they represent” (Martin & White 2005: 2).
- **Textual**, mainly in terms of logico-semantic relations (LSRs), including hierarchy and framing of the various homepage constituents, its (verbo-visual) thematic development, global coherence and local cohesion, the presence of information overload, genre mixing and “minigenres” (cf. Baldry 2011).

The long-term goals of the research are: to foster a better understanding of multimodal literacy development in children of different ages; to promote youth digital citizenship (Jones & Mitchell 2016)<sup>8</sup> through education and ecology of language in fundamental areas of children’s well-being, safety and autonomous development; and, ultimately, to identify best practices in adult-child communication thanks to the mediation of peer-to-peer communication and to disseminate general guidelines and empowering packages for multimodal text creation addressed to children to a wide range of relevant stakeholders (parents, educators, etc.), nationally and internationally. Stated differently, if the above-mentioned long-term

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<sup>8</sup> Complementing digital literacy education, “digital citizenship education can be focused on using Internet resources to have youth (1) practice respectful and tolerant behaviours toward others and (2) increase civic engagement activities” (Jones & Mitchell 2016: 2065).



goals are achieved, young learners will be provided with remedial strategies for making sense of web-mediated materials, while developing greater autonomy and awareness of their own skills and potentialities, rather than being “acted upon” or, even worse, manipulated in relation to issues which are vital for their own identity formation and the exercising of their “right to speak” with a voice of their own.

### 2.1.1 *Critical Multimodal Awareness, User Agency, Identity Construction and Empowerment Strategies.* As Djonov observes:

Children’s websites provide a rich ground for studying hypermedia texts as they epitomize two key challenges for hypermedia designers and discourse analysts. One is understanding what Lemke (2002) terms ‘hypermodality’, the meaning-making potential of the interaction between the two defining features of hypermedia texts – their hypertextuality and their multimodality [...]. [The other] challenge is accounting for the ways in which hypermedia texts achieve complexly interrelated purposes and address different types of users. Most children’s websites aim to both educate or inform and entertain children as their overt addressees, and can therefore be described as ‘edutainment’ or ‘infotainment’. At the same time, like most products for children, they seek the approval of parents and educators, their covert audience of adult-censors (2007: 145).

In the course of the analysis, it will be argued that the dual (overt/covert) identity of the intended users of children’s websites, as revealed by inconsistencies in website (viz. homepage) design, structure and content organization, partially accounts for most of the barriers experienced by children when they autonomously try to make sense of the websites they are exploring. What is more, it will be shown that young learners do not read all modes as being meaningful: they often seem to rely more on the empirical evidence of the visual mode to make sense of the representations.

Before moving on to data analysis, however, it seems necessary to make reference, albeit cursorily for reasons of space, to the notions of empowerment, identity construction, user agency and autonomy.

These are closely interrelated constructs which substantiate the strong focus of the research on developing young learners’ critical multimodal awareness.

To start with, as Page & Czuba warn us (1999), “many have come to view *empowerment*<sup>9</sup> as nothing more than the most recently popular buzz word to be thrown in to make sure old programs get new funding”. In its application to management theory, empowerment is often simplistically equated with new approaches capable of delivering higher levels of individual performance. In fact, empowerment as a multidimensional construct must be connected to both individual and organizational and/or community goals: thinking empowerment as an individual endeavor or characteristic (self-empowerment through mind-

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<sup>9</sup> A construct developed within the field of community psychology and investigated by M. A. Zimmerman (e.g. 1984, 1990; Peterson & Zimmerman 2004; Zimmerman 2000; Wong, Zimmerman & Parker 2010) in close connection with his notion of resilience (Fergus & Zimmermann 2005).

set and/or knowledge change), or equating empowerment with greater autonomy, self-confidence and efficacy, overlooks the dynamic interplay of the psychological, organizational and sociological components. At the same time, such an oversimplified construal of empowerment, feeds on the misconception that people can be empowered without changing anything in the group / community / organization they are part of; in fact, real empowerment only occurs when the goals and interests of the group / community / organization are taken into due account and the individual is actively engaged in the life of a community. That is why, as opposed to what is the case in management theory, “user agency is cast by cultural theorists as participatory engagement, in contrast to the passive recipients of earlier stages of media culture” (van Dijck 2009: 42).

In what they describe as ‘media ecologies’, Ito *et al.* analyse as follows the determinants of the broader sociocultural context of youth engagement with digital media:

The everyday practices of youth, existing structural conditions, infrastructures of place, and technologies are all dynamically interrelated; the meanings, uses, functions, flows, and interconnections in young people’s daily lives located in particular settings are also situated within young people’s wider media ecologies. [...] Similarly we see adults’ and kids’ cultural worlds as dynamically co-constituted, as are different locations that youth navigate such as school, after-school, home, and online places (Ito *et al.* 2010: 31).

They distinguish genres of participation into two categories: ‘friendship driven’ and ‘interest driven’. These genres of participation are then interpreted as “intertwined with young people’s practices, learning, and identity formation within these varied and dynamic media ecologies” (Ito *et al.* 2010: 31).

For our present purposes, identity formation (or better, identity performance) will be referred to, following Tann, as “both the process and product of a discursive formation that presupposes an act of ‘identification’ by a social actor. It comes into play within a situated discourse to maintain a sense of consistency in the social order constructed through the discourse” (2010: 165). In this perspective, individuals are perceived not as fixed ‘end products’ but as social phenomena that emerge through processes of social interaction (Davies & Harré 1990: 46). This is all the more relevant in the case of young learners undergoing “education” in the etymological sense of *ex-ducere*, i.e. ‘bringing to the surface’ their own selves (including their goals and aspirations) in relation to the context in which they operate. This educational process is aimed at autonomously fulfilling their own potential for constructing one’s identity collaboratively and symmetrically (Cesarini & Regni 1999: 60-64 *et passim*), i.e. embodying Ryley’s (2007) conceptions of ‘identity as *ethos*’ and ‘culture as a social knowledge system’, whereby knowledge and identity should be constructed in pursuit of common interests, namely protection of one’s rights – including the right to self-expression – and respect for the Other.

In strictly communicative and interactional terms, helping young learners to collaboratively develop the meta-semiotic knowledge of the tools, processes and strategies they need to master in new media and ICT-mediated contexts is crucial to enact a pedagogical model fostering empowerment, user agency and, ultimately, learner autonomy. Said differ-

ently, such a pedagogical model can be translated into mastering strategies to recognize/avoid manipulation and to access, and ultimately “own” discourses – i.e. recognize “how people become unconsciously positioned within a discourse” (Fairclough 2001: 236 *et passim*) – and develop greater autonomy in the learning process.

Indeed, as Norris & Jones perceptively point out, “the discursive explanation and attribution of agency within social interaction, is, itself, a cultural tool for the construction of identity” (2005: 170). What is needed, then, is “a systematic model for web genre and web unit analysis, providing a stable, orienting framework through which to study the more volatile and subjective socio-cultural identities found in the Web” (Baldry 2011: 18). By the same token, “the teaching of literacy needs to pay explicit attention to the formation of learner identity” (Erstad *et al.* 2009: 105).

### 2.2. The “children’s rights” sub-corpus: methods and tools for analysis

The websites used with the children were chosen among a larger selection we had previously created and stored on LearnWeb2.0, a social platform developed by Leibniz University (Hannover) for the ACT project. All the materials are institutional ones, specifically designed for children and dealing with children’s rights. In order to make sure that they were suitable for the children’s age range and level of literacy / proficiency, the materials were previously submitted to their school teachers, who were also asked to fill in a questionnaire with critical observations or suggest some other websites from a list.

The selected materials were then tested on eighty-seven children from grade 3 to 8 in a local school where English is used as the main language of instruction (<http://www.themills.it/>) and most of the teachers are native speakers. The children involved in the study are all Italian, and generally come from socio-culturally privileged backgrounds. Ethics procedures were followed by obtaining parental permissions for all the different phases of the study: first the researchers met the school teachers and the principal in order to explain clearly how the study would be carried out and to negotiate with them which materials would be used; after that, the school principal wrote a letter or met the parents of the children involved to explain the aims and scope of the study. Only at the point did the parents sign the consent form.

The fieldwork, which was carried out in the computer room of the school, was organized as follows: students were initially asked to explore the homepage of the selected website for three minutes without clicking anywhere on the page; after that, they were asked to fill in the first part of a questionnaire<sup>10</sup>. At that point they were allowed to explore the other parts of the website at their will for about ten minutes; finally, the questionnaire was completed. All the questionnaires were filled in individually using pen and paper; all the data gathered were later digitalized and analysed by means of the ‘Lime Survey’ software program.

The sessions took about one hour per group and some 30% of the students in each class, picked out at random, were subsequently asked to participate in video-recorded semi-structured interviews. For ethics reasons, children were recorded from the back, so their face

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<sup>10</sup> The questionnaire is reproduced in the Appendix.

could not be visible. In addition, to preserve anonymity, they were only identified through numbers, never through their real names. The interviews expanded on their questionnaire answers and opinions on the website structure, contents and functions, the interplay of images and verbal text, and the educational and infotainment value of the materials in general. The following section will provide a detailed account of the questionnaire and interview data analysis divided by age group.

### 3. Classroom activities: questionnaire and interviews

#### 3.1. Grade 3

The study focused primarily on the websites homepage, starting from the assumption that homepages fulfill at least three crucial functions (cf. Krug 2000; Nielsen 2000; Nielsen & Tahir 2002; Reiss 2000):

- i. establish the identity and mission of the website;
- ii. show visitors its main parts;
- iii. reveal how the site is structured and what options for navigation it offers.

As website usability studies make clear, homepages are the ‘gateway’ for orientation into a website as a whole, and can be compared to the ‘hyperthematic shot’ or sequence in a film text (e.g. Thibault 2000; Vasta 2001). For this reason, starting an exploration by skipping the homepage (or the main page of a website subsection, for that matter) would be considered a “hypertextual ellipsis” (Djonov 2007: 148) and is likely to produce disorientation and/or lack of motivation. Indeed, “hierarchically well-designed” (Rosenfeld & Morville 1998: 37) webpages always include essential “anchors” (Djonov 2005) or “clusters” (Baldry & Thibault 2006) to the website’s main sections and to their mutual relationships – skipping them may make children lose track of the Field and the way the text is structured.



Fig. 1. Homepage of the website [www.humanrihtseducation.info/](http://www.humanrihtseducation.info/)

In order to investigate children's competence in recognizing the Field of the website, we asked them to observe the following homepage alone for three minutes without clicking anywhere (they still had the possibility to scroll the mouse up and down) and later answer the question "What is the website about?"

As can be seen in the shot above, the homepage chosen for Grade 3 is characterized by a very simple structure: it displays a low textual density, though it may appear a bit dull and naïve; it is clearly framed and quite consistent in the use of distinct colors indexing "content sections" – i.e. containing information on a given topic or activities of a certain type ("watch movies", "play games", "enjoy cartoons", etc.), as opposed to "functional sections" (informing about the content organization of the website, its sponsor and the institution it represents). The homepage also displays a represented participant (The Little Prince) whom the children are likely to be familiar with: its function or Role in the child's exploration activity is clearly stated (the noun phrase "Your guide" is placed in focal thematic position in the Welcome cluster and it functions as the Identified in the relational process in which "The Little Prince" is the Identifier, visually made salient through bold type and then rankshifted to Given information through reference to the picture on the left-hand side of the page). Moreover, the "mission" of this particular section of the website (which is "for kids only!") is also clearly stated (see "Discover the fun of learning") and, to make learning even more involving, empathy and complicity are established through an attitudinal token of Social sanction (see "If you don't tell your teacher, the Prince will show you..."), as if the playful activity in which The Little Prince is willing to engage the child was to be kept secret.

When the website was chosen, both the experimenters and the teachers predicted there would be no barriers in terms of orientation or Field recognition. However, after three minutes of scrolling the page up and down, most of the children provided a wrong 'Field' answer by stating that the website was about the Little Prince and not about human rights. Indeed, the first question in the questionnaire was: "What is the website about?", and 70.5% of the children answered by referring to the Little Prince and by not making any reference to human rights. In addition, the answer to the second question ("How do you know what it is about?") made it clear that such a mistake was not to be attributed to a lack of attention to the text/image interface or to its verbal component: indeed, 53% of the children pointed out that they retrieved this piece of information from the verbal text itself. Therefore, despite reading the text the children were not able to process and extract relevant information from the hypotactic enhancing clause "as he shows you his Human Rights planet". Because of this, they could not identify the Field of the website.

As a consequence, deeper investigations were carried out during the individual interviews, and it soon became clear that poor understanding was not due to poor reading alone, but was indeed the result of a misleading multimodal design of the page, and of *salience* in particular. On the one hand, children's own exploratory strategies led them to focus their attention and retrieve information only from those parts of the homepage foregrounded through typographical choices (size or bold character), disregarding all the rest. On the other hand, the wrong recognition of the Field by 70.5% of the children, which was evident since they never mentioned 'human rights' in their answers, was triggered by some misleading semiotic choices in design, namely the excessive salience and placement of the only human character on the screen.

A further decoding strategy for Field identification was to be found on the upper left part of the page (Human Rights Planet), however the children seemed to pay almost no attention to the elements outside the main frame, a fact which is related to the general role of *framing* in multimodal texts: childrens' explorations tend to be limited to the elements identified by a frame (a shape, a different color, a box), while all the rest is often disregarded. None of the children who were later interviewed, indeed, had noticed the text on the top left banner, and this also happened with the explorations of other websites in the other grades. Framing in general has a strategic importance for grouping together or separating content and functional elements in any website type, but young learners seem to be more 'sensitive' to it.

In addition to Framing, we were also quite interested in analyzing the role of 'Space proximity': in order to do so, we chose a homepage where visual elements (The Little Prince) and verbal ones (the sentences) were positioned close to each other, which gave us the possibility to investigate whether the association of the Little Prince with the words that designate him as a guide through the website could or could not be perceived as straightforward by the children. After interviewing them, it soon became clear that the two elements were not matched in children's minds, the reason being the lack of a key semiotic convention they would normally expect: a vector of some sort – usually a speech balloon – indeed represents the conventional tool for signaling *projection of locutions or ideas* in multimodal texts, therefore its absence created confusion and misunderstanding. Moreover, speech balloons are generally associated with a first-person narrator, a narrative strategy that favors readers/viewers identification with the characters and generates greater involvement and attention: again, the different choices in design collided with the children's expectations and created misunderstanding in the general recognition of the Field. Finally, children could not understand whether the character is gazing at the viewer or not: in other words, it was not clear whether this had to be interpreted as a picture activating *demands* at the interpersonal level of discourse – or not: a more explicit representation of the Little Prince gazing directly at the viewer, coupled with a first-person narrator in a speech balloon, might therefore have increased children's engagement while raising their degree of attention both for the visual and for the verbal modes (see Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Because of some inconsistent design choices, in other words, social actors (children), could not pursue what is generally referred to as 'identity formation', a phenomenon which comes into play within a situated discourse to maintain a sense of consistency in the social order constructed through the discourse (see 2.1.1).

### 3.2. Grades 4 and 5

Disorientation and misunderstanding that originate from the Home Page are the most common barriers that were found with children at all levels, therefore they had the strongest negative consequences for accessibility. The following website was used for grades 4 and 5:

The semiotic space is here shaped into modular structure which clearly separates 'centre' from 'periphery': central parts are generally used to convey crucial information about the website's mission and content, while more peripheral ones normally contain anchors to other internal/external webpages. Here, however, all the information about the website identity is positioned in the bottom left-hand section of the screen (violet bird anchor), therefore it is backgrounded.



Fig. 2. Homepage of the website [www.childcom.org.uk](http://www.childcom.org.uk)

When asked about the Field of the homepage, 71% percent of the students provided a wrong answer. Indeed, despite being a website about children’s rights, most of them provided answers like “it is a website about games” or “it is a website about ambassadors”. During the interviews, children made it clear they had not been reading the backgrounded verbal text properly, which is in line with the general tendency to only focus on the visual. The violet bird anchor occurs in each webpage in the same position (in hypermedia terms, an example of *repetition*), however this was not of any help for Field recognition. According to the kids interviewed, suggested changes in design could entail positioning this element more centrally in each webpage and, possibly, make it bigger - thus creating what Djonov (2005: 226) refers to as a logico-semantic relation of the *Elaboration: Reinforcement* type. Children added that this would also make the object look more tangible – therefore closer.

As stated above, in addition to establishing the identity and mission of websites, homepages serve two other main purposes:

- showing visitors their main parts;
- revealing how the site is structured and what options for navigation it offers.

As far as the first one is concerned, children generally found it quite difficult to orient themselves successfully in the website parts; this was mainly due to *chromatic incoherence*, i.e. inconsistency in choices pertaining to *color coding orientation*. What they expected was in fact a relation of *co-referentiality* between the colors of the sections in the vertical row and the boxes below, which sheds lights on children’s general development of a *sense of texture*

(cohesion and coherence) holding together multimodal texts. Indeed, the use of colors on this page shows little or no relationship with the contents and functions of the related boxes, which is very misleading when we consider that the colors are precisely the same ones. This is therefore an instance of confusing logico-semantic relations of '*directionality*' (Djonov 2005: 114), generally acknowledged among the most common causes of confusion and disorientation in website architecture, since norms of hierarchy and thematic development are completely flouted. Stated differently, young learners generally found it hard to make sense of these materials, and felt "acted upon", if not 'manipulated' by the confusion and inconsistency in design choices (see 2.1).

As regards the third function of a homepage, students found it quite useful to interact with the anchors at the top of the page, since they enlarged when the mouse was rolled over them. Besides conveying crucial information about the site content, such anchors also emphasize the site's ease of use, thus activating both the ideational and the interpersonal metafunction of language at the same time; users are generally more attracted by elements they can engage with, as these elements make them active agents in the exploration process: in Systemic Functional terms, children become 'Actors doing something', which is also a fundamental element in co-operative learning (Pratt 2003: 27).

Against all expectations, however, 76% of the students found this homepage well organized. A possible reason for this is the massive use of framing within the page, which provides the impression of organization/order/clarity: especially at this age, framing is processed more easily than cohesion and coherence phenomena, and is therefore likely to be confused with 'clarity' and 'ease of navigation'. Students therefore did not grasp the apparent semiotic overload and inconsistency in website design and hierarchy, and experienced the false impression of cohesion and coherence provided by the use of colors and framing.

### 3.3. Grades 6, 7, 8

Students from Grades 6-7-8 explored the following home page (Fig. 3).

Another modular structure has been deployed, which proved recurrent during our explorations of websites for children. Maximum salience is here ascribed to the "ipod nano" flashing colorfully at the centre of the screen. Interestingly for our analysis, children of different age groups provided very different answers to the question addressing the homepage Field: after scanning the page for three minutes, 70.6% of the children in grade 6 provided a wrong answer, 66.7% percent provided a wrong answer in grade 7, but the percentage decreased dramatically in grade 8 (28.6%). In the wrong answers, children said that the website was about the Apple product ipod nano, without making any reference to human rights (the website was indeed about human rights). In terms of image-text relations processing ability, this discrepancy confirmed the increasing weight and prominence of the verbal dimension in decoding activity (even when it is backgrounded) with the growing of age. Indeed, the only possibility for identifying the topic in the homepage was by reading the "welcome" section positioned above, again in a peripheral position (Fig. 4).

In the general 'semiotic economy' of the page, the salience of such crucial information is indeed very low, due both to typographical and to color choices, especially when compared to the big and colorful image of the ipod nano foregrounded underneath (Fig. 5).





Fig. 3. Homepage of the website <http://en.cyberdodo.com>



Fig. 4. Top part of the homepage of <http://en.cyberdodo.com>, <http://en.cyberdodo.com>

This is probably the reason why 100% of the kids who did not identify the Field, believed that the website was about the iPod nano. Referred to as *visual hierarchy* (Djonov 2005: 130), this choice in design is not rarely ideologically biased: the promotion of a product in a website for children is, indeed, an imposition of models and behavior patterns from hegemonic communities, made even more powerful considering that the kids are totally unaware of that. As anticipated in section 2.1.1, this is even more relevant in the case of young learners undergoing “education”, as their educational process is aimed at autonomously fulfilling their own potential for constructing their own identity. Ryley’s (2007) conceptions of “identity as *ethos*” and “culture as a social knowledge system”, whereby knowledge and identity should be constructed in pursuit of common interests, is therefore totally disregarded here. Moreover, the ipod nano image is repeated in other sections of the website and in bigger size, thus constituting an example of *reinforcement*: it reinforces the possibilities to address users’ attention on that particular element.



Fig. 5. Central part of the homepage of <http://en.cyberdodo.com> of <http://en.cyberdodo.com> <http://en.cyberdodo.com>

As far as the organization of the homepage is concerned, the feedback children provided showed an opposite trend from grade 6 to grade 8 compared to the question 'What is the website about?': while the understanding of the topic for the same website increases from grade 6 to grade 8, positive opinions about homepage organization tend to decrease (78% in grade 6, 62% in grade 7, 57% in grade 8) with age growth. Again, this confirms that at lower ages well-organization coincides with strong levels of framing, whereas older children from 12 onwards tend to become more aware of other semiotic factors such as *internal coherence*, *hypertextual potential*, *clarity of information*. Occasionally, as our oral interviews made clear, they also seem aware of manipulation attempts by means of commercial advertising: indeed, five children out of eight aged 12 or above told us they thought it was 'unfair' to use an electronic gadget, in such a foregrounded position, within a website devoted to children's rights.

Not surprisingly, the only question which aligned all the children has to do with methods for evaluating the websites in general: despite their age, and in line with other studies (Lemke 2013; Heins 2017), positive or a negative opinions about a website in general seem to strongly depend on the degree of engagement provided by the games embedded in the websites.

#### 4. Data discussion

##### 4.1. Critical points

The analysis of children's websites explorations has highlighted some criticalities which might create barriers to navigation and, more generally, compromise accessibility. The most common risk that children have experienced is disorientation, the cause of which is twofold: on the one hand, especially younger children were not familiar enough with the medium, on the other hand, most of them, independently of their age, experienced some difficulty in shifting from one semiotic mode to the other(s). and integrating the different semiotic modes. This section focuses on the first point; best practices are outlined in section 4.2.

Children of all grades experienced difficulties in identifying the Field of the website: when asked to refer about webpage topics, most of them provided wrong answers by saying that the websites were about topics not related to human/ children's rights; their answers were often elaborated after focusing on the most salient elements only. The main reason for this is to be ascribed to a bad understanding of inter-modal dynamics: indeed, students do not seem to read all modes as being equally meaningful, relying much more on the visual ones for their inferences; especially at lower ages, students tend to disregard the verbal dimension of multimodal texts, thus often missing crucial information for meaning-making. The range of modes that new technologies make available to the users impacts on learning in terms of the 'new' potential for engagement and sign making that these texts mediate, as well as in the construction of what has to be learnt (Jewitt 2008: 116): despite a predominance of the visual, most of the clues to identify the websites Field is often ascribed to the verbal mode, a reason why a high percentage of students gave a wrong answer to the question 'What is the website about?'

Not rarely, verbal parts are 'marginalized' through design choices which mainly focus on the visual dimension: common to students of all ages is, indeed, disorientation due to an excessive focus on framing: when a frame is present, students tend to concentrate exclusively on the elements contained inside it, and disregard all the information 'around'. Frames are generally realized through different colors or through the use of boxes or other shapes, and are used to 'isolate' some elements for many possible reasons. Problems arise when crucial information for Field individuation or for orientation is placed outside the main frame, as was the case with the websites we used and with several edutainment websites we analyzed before fieldwork. Indeed, home pages aim at presenting website content, typically in their main viewing area, which generally excludes both the anchors to the other website sections and the navigation bars or advertising banners.

Moreover, focusing only on the framed elements not rarely poses problems in the identification of users' position within the website, since this piece of information is usually contained on the top bar; failing to identify these elements makes it difficult *both* to experience website fluidity, namely the website's capacity for expandability and change, *and* the ability of hyperlinks to obscure its structure and transcend its boundaries (Djonov 2007: 144). By granting users freedom of movement, the anchors positioned outside the main frame are indispensable for orientation and, ultimately, for the website's attractiveness. A possible reason why a significant number of students declared they did not like the website they had explored might be ascribed to their too rigid exploration of framed elements, with consequent little or no attention to other parts that would prove fundamental for orientation and enjoyment. Framing is also responsible for the students' idea of what a 'well organized' website is: even in cases of inconsistent design, strong framing provided, at least in smaller kids, the idea of order and 'well organization'.

Another crucial key point which emerged from the data analysis is that students of all grades seem to have developed a sense of texture (coherence and cohesion) which they expect to hold together hypermedia texts: even smaller kids seem to have developed a sort of 'multimodal grammar' which they expect to be important for navigation and content interpretation. In case of chromatic incoherence, for instance, students found it quite hard

to orient themselves since they expected a relation of *co-referentiality* (or some other logico-semantic dependency) between the colors of the different sections to be present. Figure 2 above is an interesting example: inconsistency in the designers' choices pertaining to color coding orientation disoriented them, since the use of colors on the page displays little or no relationship with the contents and functions of the related boxes, a fact that students noticed and referred about. In addition, as already clarified above, such inconsistencies also created confusion in the logico-semantic relations of *directionality*, in that norms of hierarchy and thematic development are inevitably flouted.

#### 4.2. Best Practices

It is by now evident that the multimodal character of new technology requires traditional concepts of literacy be reshaped, since what it means to be literate in the digital era of the twenty-first century is different from what was needed previously (Jewitt 2008). This means, on the one hand, promoting children's education and development in fundamental areas like hypermedia texts, which represent the most common types of texts students of all ages deal with nowadays, but on the other hand it also means to identify better practices for multimodal text design, with the aim of making children's accessibility easier.

The following points summarize the observations about text design which were collected during fieldwork with a sample of about 100 children aged 9-14:

- Framing is crucial for children since it provides order and clarity: best practices in design should therefore entail using framing especially with the aim of separating *content* and *functional* sections. Students need to be aware of the specific purpose of the web pages they are exploring, and this also helps them develop better orientation in the website;
- The *logico-semantic* relations among the different web pages should also be made as explicit as possible: it is important that children understand how information is organized in the different sections; in other words it is important that they have access to the *ideational meanings* without obstacles and barriers. The parameters of logico-semantic relations in hypermedia, which have been adapted from Systemic Functional Linguistics – *explicitness, scope, dependency and directionality, recursion, orientation and semantic type* (Djonov 2005: 360) – should be signaled in design through the use of consistent hyperlinks and anchors; children, although unaware of the theoretical paradigms at the basis of website construction, can detect design inconsistencies which may result in lack of orientation and meaning processing;
- Although all modes have equal weight in hypermedia texts, not all of them are equally usable for a particular task: some meanings are more easily conveyed by means of images, others by means of verbal texts; the *Little Prince*, for example, is better understood through a visual representation of the character (the *Projector*), while his words (the *Projections*) are communicated through the verbal mode; yet, it would be crucial to employ common design strategies for representing 'projection of locutions, or thoughts', as it normally happens in cartoon bubbles. Children in Grade 3, for example, found it hard to attribute the words on the page to the represented character and felt disoriented; the disconnection between the two modes made it hard for them to recognize the Field of that webpage;

- Salience is crucial for meaning-making at all ages: students' interpretations of the ideational meanings have indeed been strongly influenced by non-consistent salient elements. Most students of grades 6 and 7, for example were misled by the image of the iPod nano (see Fig. 3), while children's rights were totally disregarded. In other words, an ideologically biased (commercial) choice was imposed by means of salience, and the authentic Field of the page was backgrounded. During the interviews, children made it very clear that they tend to focus most of their attention to salient elements, therefore design choices should be consistent from this point of view;
- Considering the great importance of the visual mode for children, it could be useful – especially for websites targeting lower age groups - to make the written text more visual. There are currently several options for making typeface more readable and enjoyable, encompassing choices in size, color, shape, etc. There are also fonts recommended for children with reading difficulties, see for instance <http://www.luzrello.com/DysWebxia.html>;
- As regards logico-semantic relations, research demonstrated that the multiplicative nature of meaning-making in hypermedia often disorients children and becomes a barrier to smooth accessibility. As a consequence, especially at lower ages, we believe it would be important to resort to logico-semantic relations of the *elaboration: reinforcement* and *elaboration: clarification* types (Djonov 2005: 232): reinforcement involves occurrences of the same elements (e.g. image or hyperlink anchor) that differ in their representations (e.g. their positions on the webpage, sizes, labels) and reinforce each other's meaning or functionality. This is more than mere repetition, thus it is not boring for children and helps them make sense of the complex relations among the represented elements. Clarification, on the other hand, involves *specifying* or *exemplifying* elements already introduced, and proves very useful to better understand the general information and to provide more concrete *visual* or *verbal* examples of a particular concept;
- Finally, good practices in design should always consider the role 'engaging strategies' play in children's explorations. Some hypertext objects, mainly anchors, icons, small images, have the potential for 'dialogic engagement with the reader' (Baldry & Thibault 2006: 148): while being very appealing by means of their enlarging, self-activating, interacting and animating potential, these elements can also construct dialogic positions – mono or heteroglossic – for their users (Tan 2010: 94), thus influencing them to adopt a certain point of view. Therefore, these multimodal elements are generally perceived as very powerful for influencing children to adopt a certain point of view and to convince them of the merits of a certain brand, strategy, ideal.

## 5. Conclusions

Starting from the assumption that contemporary conditions of communication and digital technology create the movement of images and ideas in ways that affect how young people learn and interact (Jewitt 2008: 243), and that literacy is therefore increasingly pluralized and multiplied in educational discourses, this study has analyzed children's interactions with hypermedia texts through field work observations, questionnaires and recorded interviews. In doing so, we have tried to contribute to some progress beyond the current state of the art, with the principal aim of fostering a better understanding of children's multimodal literacy development.

By studying children's interactions, we have been able to focus on the barriers they may experience and on the consequent difficulties in accessibility, therefore in the meaning-making process. This has also enabled us to contribute to promoting ecology of verbal and non-verbal communication by suggesting improvements in design choices, closely related to accessibility. In particular, advances may be traced in the following areas:

- Within the field of research into the discursive construction of identity, since we have observed how particular social groups may be privileged (those using/ wishing to use ipod nano, for instance) through choices of visual/verbal representation which portray those identities as the truly successful ones; these choices are likely to be made more powerful by the use of interpersonal meanings that exploit emotions and evaluative language that capture children's attention and desires.
- Within the field of hypermedia design, through a series of guidelines (see *supra*, section 4.2) for multimodal text creation aimed at fostering accessibility and promoting children's education in fundamental areas like children's rights. As discussed above, in particular logico-semantic relations between elements in the website seem crucial for children's construction of meaning; a 'grammar of hypermedia text construction' should be the aim, in our view.

Promoting ecology of verbal and non-verbal communication in fundamental areas of children's well-being, safety and education through access to ICT-mediated texts is undoubtedly a challenging and engaging way to foster young learners' identity formation and autonomous empowerment. The latter can only be achieved through critical multimodal awareness conceived of as the process of guiding the learner in the metadiscursive unveiling in the process leading to text interpretation.

In conclusion, helping young learners to collaboratively develop the meta-semiotic knowledge of the tools, processes and strategies they need to master in new media and ICT-mediated contexts is crucial to enact a pedagogical model fostering empowerment, user agency and, ultimately, learner autonomy. Such a pedagogical model can be translated into mastering strategies to recognize/avoid manipulation and to access, and ultimately "own" discourses – i.e. recognize "how people become unconsciously positioned within a discourse" (Fairclough 2001: 236 *et passim*) – thus developing greater autonomy in the learning process. In Bakardjieva's words:

The Internet can evolve into an inclusive and empowering communication medium if technical and content-related problems are defined and their solutions sought with conscious consideration of the users' perspective and, ideally, with the direct participation of everyday users (Bakardjieva 2005: 195).

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APPENDIX

PRIN PROJECT: "Consapevolezza multimodale e empowerment dei minori"

Università di Udine

NOME..... COGNOME ..... CLASSE .....

QUESTIONARIO BAMBINI SITO WEB

Look at the Homepage for three minutes without clicking anywhere, then answer the following questions:

1. What is the website about?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. How do you know it?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Do you think the Homepage is well organized?

Table with 5 columns: Very well, Well, Not very well, Bad, I don't know

4. Which elements attract your attention more? Why?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5. Do you think there are any parts of this page which are not addressed to children? If so, which ones?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

6. Are there any elements that let you interact with the website? If so, which ones?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7. What element would you like to click first?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Now explore the website for five minutes, you can click anywhere if you want! We will ask for your opinion afterwards.

8. Did you enjoy the website? (Choose one of the following options):

<i>Very much</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>It was ok</i>	<i>I did not like it</i>	<i>I don't know</i>
------------------	-------------	------------------	--------------------------	---------------------

Why?

.....  
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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

9. Would you like to explore it again in the future?

Yes

No

Why?

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.....

.....

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**Maria Bortoluzzi**

### **Multimodal Awareness in Ecology Discourse for Children Education**

**Abstract I:** Questo studio presenta i risultati di una ricerca qualitativa sull'interazione di bambini e adolescenti dagli 8 ai 13 anni con siti web creati da adulti per bambini per promuovere consapevolezza sull'ecologia e comportamenti eco-sostenibili.

Il quadro teorico di riferimento è l'analisi critica multimodale e la multiliteracy. Le domande di ricerca principali vertono sui seguenti punti:

1. Quali sono i livelli di consapevolezza critica in bambini e adolescenti dagli 8 ai 13 anni in relazione a testi multimodali sull'ecologia creati da adulti per sensibilizzare bambini e adolescenti su tematiche eco-sostenibili?
2. Come variano gli aspetti di consapevolezza critica multimodale tra gli 8 e i 13 anni?

Gli ambiti di interesse comprendono due aspetti principali: a) la competenza delle strategie multimodali e di multiliteracy per contesti di narrative eco-sostenibili; b) i livelli di partecipazione nell'azione sociale attraverso testi multimodali.

L'analisi qualitativa dei dati contribuisce a formulare linee guida per promuovere competenze di autonomia digitale e di multiliteracy. Lo scopo ultimo è promuovere in maniera efficace la comunicazione eco-sostenibile attraverso la consapevolezza critica multimodale per fasce d'età e comunità di pratica diverse (PRIN project: ACT MACE 2009-2011).

**Abstract II:** The present study focuses on ecological narratives for children as presented in websites. The paper summarises the results of a qualitative research study on the interaction of children and adolescents aged from 8 to 13 with adult-generated websites promoting awareness about ecology and positive action about ecological behaviour.

This study is carried out within the theoretical frameworks of critical multimodal digital literacy and multiliteracy. The main research questions addressed in the present paper are:

1. What are the levels of critical awareness in children and adolescents (from age 8 to 13) when engaged with multimodal texts about ecology produced by adults for the purpose of children education?
2. How do phenomena related to critical awareness vary within a developmental perspective from Grade 3 to Grade 8?

The key areas of investigation encompass two wide-ranging aspects: a) Awareness of multimodal/multiliteracy strategies to decode eco-sustainable narra-

tives; b) Levels of participation in social action through multimodal texts. The discussion of the qualitative data analysis contributes to guidelines for empowering children, promote safe child autonomy and multiliteracy skills, and foster ecology of communication across generations and communities of practice (PRIN project: ACT MACE 2009-2011).

## 1. Introduction

This study is part of the ACT MACE<sup>1</sup> project and focuses on 'the participation and interaction of children and young learners as stakeholders and opinion makers on issues of public concern' (ACT MACE 2009-2011). The overall objectives of MACE are investigating multimodal literacy development in children from 8 to 13 (from Grade 3 to Grade 8: Primary and Middle school) and identifying good practices of children-adult communication in multimodal digital texts.

The present study focuses on ecology for children and discusses the results of the qualitative research carried out on the interaction of children aged from 8 to 13 with adult-generated websites for children. These websites have the aim to promote awareness about eco-sustainable narratives and positive action about ecological behaviour.

First the research questions will be presented and the theoretical framework outlined. Then the methodology of data gathering will be introduced and the qualitative data results presented. The discussion will contribute to providing guidelines for empowering children 'in order to promote safe child autonomy and multiliteracy skills and to foster ecology of communication across generations and communities of practice' (ACT MACE 2009-2011).

## 2. Research questions and initial expectations

The research questions fall within the scope of the ecology section of the MACE project, namely investigating the reception and perception children have of websites about ecology created for them by adults.

The two main questions are:

1. What are the levels of critical awareness in children and adolescents (from age 8 to 13) when engaged with multimodal texts about ecology produced by adults for educational aims?
2. How do phenomena related to critical awareness vary in a developmental perspective from Grade 3 to Grade 8?

The key areas of investigation encompass two main aspects:

- Awareness of multimodal/multiliteracy strategies to decode eco-sustainable narratives
- Levels of participation in social action through multimodal texts.

The initial expectations were the following:

1. As 'digital natives' (Bennet, Maton & Kervin 2008; Li & Ranieri 2010) children tend to show semiotic and critical awareness towards the multimodal texts and the text/user interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> ACT: Access through Text; MACE: Multimodal Awareness for Children Empowerment.

2. Increasing levels of metasemiotic strategies contribute to adopting a critical stance towards the multimodal text (purpose, content and design); it also raises awareness about the issue at stake and empowers children in their relation towards multimodal texts (see Ala-Mutka 2011; Ananiadu & Claro 2009).

### 3. Theoretical framework of the study

The wider theoretical framework of the whole MACE project is multimodal discourse analysis as developed in Baldry & Thibault (2006), Baldry (2011a, 2011b), Bateman (2008), Jewitt (2013 [2009]); Kress & van Leeuwen (2006 [1996]), O'Halloran (2004a, 2004b), Unsworth (2006, 2008a, 2008b), Ventola *et al.* (2004). Another area of interest for the project is critical discourse and multimodal awareness studies which investigate media and ICT discourses as *loci* of power relations and ideology (Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema 2008; Fairclough 2003, 2006).

On the basis of this wider framework, the present paper focuses on multimodal literacy as critical awareness for a 'digital generation' (Bennet, Maton & Kervin 2008; Li & Ranieri 2010) and literacies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kress 2003; Dede 2009; Ananiadu & Claro 2009). The field is complex: ICT literacy, Internet literacy, media literacy, information literacy and digital literacy intersect and include the new challenges posed by a new 'learning ecology' based on participation and creative practice, content creation and interactivity (Greenhow *et al.* 2009; Ala-Mutka 2011). Literacy is thus viewed as complex social competences and not merely a set of cognitive or technical abilities (encoding or decoding spatial layout, organisational structure, pictures, etc.) (Jones & Hafner 2012; Rheingold 2012).

To underline the necessity of developing both traditional and new literacies in present-day contexts, the New London Group (1996, 2000) uses the inclusive term 'multiliteracies': traditional literacies are recontextualised to include multimodal awareness of text production and fruition (Cope & Kalantzis 2009a, 2009b, 2015). Ananiadu and Claro (2009) in their report on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills emphasize the human, social, educational relevance of complex and articulated skills which go well beyond ICTs skills and encompass new and traditional literacy skills and learning competences.

### 4. Methodology and data gathering

In order to explore the reception and interpretation children have of websites created for children and young adolescents<sup>2</sup> by adults about ecology, we selected websites of official institutions (i.e. the Canadian, U.S., U.K. governmental agencies for the environment) suitable (according to analysts and their class teachers) for children aged from 8 to 13.

The primary and middle school chosen for our research experiment was the Udine International School (Italy, <http://www.udineis.org/>). In this school English is the medium of instruction and all its teachers are English native speakers or near-native speakers. The majority of children comes from families of Italian extraction, while a few of them come from international families where languages other than Italian are spoken<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of brevity, I will only use 'children' to mean young people from 8 to 13 years old.

<sup>3</sup> Ethics procedures were followed throughout the data gathering: parental permissions to carry out the experiments were obtained and children privacy was closely pursued.



The questionnaire adopted for the MACE project was adapted to the specific characteristics of the websites and videos selected for data gathering in order to elicit information about user reception and interpretation of the websites and videos<sup>4</sup>. In the computer room of the school, children and students (monitored by the class teacher and two researchers) explored the website and watched the video; while doing so they individually answered the sections of the questionnaire related to what they explored or watched. The whole procedure, completely carried out in English, took approximately one hour per group. The total number of questionnaires administered to class groups in computer rooms is 106: 6 class groups from Grades 3 to 8 (from 8 to 13).

The present study focuses on the qualitative analysis of data resulting from the website section of the questionnaire (Part 1, see link in footnote 4). This choice was made to compare homogeneous data and obtain data-driven categories of multimodal behaviour about the relation between user and text in a learning context.

### 5. Data analysis and discussion

The children's written answers on the purpose of the website, its content and design were analysed bearing in mind the research questions (Section 2 above) and focusing on the suitability of the multimodal text in relation with levels of digital literacy and the age of the users (see Questionnaire, Part 1, footnote 4). Two macro-phenomena are investigated, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Multimodal macro-phenomena.

<i>Macro-phenomena</i>	<i>Focal macro-function</i>
Metasemiotic awareness	Textual macro-function
Levels of participation	Interpersonal macro-function

In this study, 'metasemiotic awareness' is the children's awareness regarding the relation between verbal and non-verbal meaning-making in the text and their interpretation of this relation. I call 'levels of participation' the features informed by the interpersonal macro-function, that is the expressions that establish a relation between the participants and the multimodal text. The three macro-functions (ideational, interpersonal and textual) are always present and interacting in the macro-phenomena; in the table, I highlighted the focal one.

The macro-phenomena analysed here, namely metasemiotic awareness and levels of

<sup>4</sup> The second link is the link to the website saved and stored by the L3S Research Center at the time of the experiment (January 2013).

Websites for children from 8 to 10:

<http://www.ecology.com/ecology-kids/>,

<http://prometheus.kbs.uni-hannover.de/archive/ecology/www.ecology.com/ecology-kids/>.

Website for students from 11 to 14:

[http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/kids\\_home.cfm](http://www.ecokids.ca/pub/kids_home.cfm),

[http://prometheus.kbs.uni-hannover.de/archive/ecokids/www.ecokids.ca/pub/kids\\_home.html](http://prometheus.kbs.uni-hannover.de/archive/ecokids/www.ecokids.ca/pub/kids_home.html).

The questionnaire about the ecology websites and videos can be found at [http://yell.uniud.it/?page\\_id=677](http://yell.uniud.it/?page_id=677).

participation are related to the wider field of metaknowledge (Oxford 2011: 19 *et passim*). Metaknowledge powerfully contributes to self-regulated learning whereby individuals are able to choose the most effective strategies for learning and hold positive beliefs about one's ability to learn (Schunk & Ertmer 2000). Some scholars maintain that metacognitive strategies include all the regulatory learning strategies; see for instance the working definition found in Anderson (2012) and derived from Flavell (1976) who first introduced the term 'metacognition': "Metacognitive knowledge refers to our acquired knowledge about our cognitive processes, knowledge that can be used to control thinking processes" (Anderson 2012: 170). Metacognition is the ability to make one's thinking visible, reflecting on what one knows and does (Anderson 2008) and it requires "a cognitive awareness and engagement with the awareness of one's thinking" (Anderson 2012: 170).

Oxford (2011: 17 *et passim*) believes that there are different types of meta-knowledge related to the three areas of cognition, affectivity and sociocultural-interaction. Metaknowledge underlying these three areas are: person knowledge (learning styles, goals, strengths, etc of the learner), group or culture knowledge (norms and expectations of the group), task knowledge (requirement of the learning task), whole-process knowledge (long-term requirements of the learning process), strategies knowledge (knowledge of strategies and metastrategies for learning), conditional knowledge (when and how to use a certain strategy) (Oxford 2011: 19-21). The two macro-phenomena of metasemiotic awareness and levels of participation cut across these 6 types of underlying metaknowledge.

In this paper I use the term 'awareness' rather than 'strategy' because I discuss how participants express through written language (in this case English as L2) their explicit awareness about what they do when accessing the multimodal text: participants write what they *think* they are doing when interpreting the multimodal text.

Since the whole interaction is mediated through language, the data show what the participants are aware of and what they are able to describe in written English. The children had to read the questions in L2, interpret them (at times with the help of the researchers and teachers) and express their answer in L2. As we shall see below, their greater or lesser competence in L2 is a variable to be taken into account in the data analysis.

The sections that follow describe the two macro-phenomena identified in the data analysis: 'metasemiotic awareness' and 'levels of participation'.

### 5.1. Metasemiotic awareness

Children show higher or lower levels of metasemiotic awareness, as summarised in Table 2. The definitions of sub-categories and the results of data analysis are given in the following sections.

Table 2. Awareness of multimodal text affordances.

#### *Lower-level awareness*

A. Transparency of medium or genre:	Transparency of traversals and transmedia traversals Transparency of dynamic text
B. Transparency of multimodal cues	

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 C. Transparency of purpose:

---

 Trusting-the adult effect

---

 Easy-to-understand effect

---

*Higher-level awareness*


---

 D. Multimodal verbal cues: keywords and headlines

---

 E. Multimodal spatial cues: semiotic space, framing and salience

---

 F. Colour coding as semiotic affordance

All quotes from the data are verbatim: no corrections are made to the children's/students' written responses in English as L2. To comply with ethics regulations, children are identified with initials which do not correspond to their real name and surname. Numbers from 3 to 8 correspond to the grade the children belonged to (in January 2013) and this gives an idea of their approximate age (with some exceptions, the children are from 8 years of age in Grade 3, to 13 years of age in Grade 8). The categorization in Table 2 is discussed in the sections that follow.

#### 5.1.1. Lower-level awareness

##### A. Transparency of medium or genre

The children/students, especially in lower grades (3 and 4) are aware of some characteristics of the multimodal text or, in some cases, they take them for granted. I call this 'transparency', e.g. some characteristics of multimodal texts become naturalised to the extent that they are not even noticed anymore. In particular, the data analysis shows the following phenomena:

- *Transparency of traversals and transmedia traversals* (Lemke, 2002)

Children take it for granted that by clicking on a hotspot, a hyperlink is activated and the user can access a different page (what Lemke 2002 calls transmedia traversals). Also, children know that the majority of images on the homepage gives access to a video: static images ('event photos', Baldry 2011a) are attractive for the children more as potential action (hotspots) to get to a video, than as images *per se*. Therefore, some children answer Question 4 (What elements most attracted your attention? Why?) writing that they are attracted by the photo (psychologically salient even though static), but they are attracted by the photo as representative of an event both in terms of narrative and in terms of potential hotspot to access videos (even when they are not there).

- *Transparency of dynamic text*

Children take for granted that websites are potentially dynamic texts. This will be commented on when dealing with the second macro-phenomenon in Table 1. Younger children tend to take for granted that a static image or a verbal cue can lead to a dynamic text such as a video and they are disappointed if this is not the case.

##### B. Transparency of multimodal cues

In all the grades, children are convinced that they understood the topic and purpose of the website because of verbal cues; in fact, their answers frequently reveal how influential visual and layout cues are in general comprehension. For instance, 7 UEZ (example below) thinks s/he understood topic and purpose because of verbal information (*I read, I read the informa-*

tions); in fact, his/her answer reveals the visual salience of the *title* and his/her ability to integrate different modes in text interpretation. The fact that children and students are not aware of this complex interaction of modes, called here ‘transparency of multimodal cues’, occurs throughout the data. This might be due to the overwhelming relevance of verbal input and traditional literacies of the school context. This is how 7 UEZ answers Question 2 (How do you know what [the homepage] is about?):

7 UEZ *because I read the title Ecokids and I read the informations about it.*

### C. Transparency of purpose

Throughout the grades, there are children who express their trust in aspects which are not trustworthy in absolute terms. The answers to Question 5 (In your opinion, are there aspects which are not for young learners? If so, which ones?) exemplify attitudes which might become a potential danger or problem if applied without guidance or control:

- *Trusting-the-adult effect*
- Throughout the data children express total trust in websites created by adults for children. In this case, the ideational macro-function intersects the interpersonal macro-function. In educational terms, raising awareness that the website producer (and initiator of the interaction with children) is not trustworthy by default if it is an adult is one of the most relevant competences to develop in children.
- *Easy-to-understand effect*
- Many children remark that the website is suitable for them because it is ‘easy to understand’. The problem in this case is rather similar to the previous sub-category, but here the ideational macro-function overtly intersects the textual macro-function.

8 DH *If the website can be understood, then it is for children.*

### 5.1.2. Higher-level awareness

#### D. Multimodal verbal cues: keywords and headlines

In Grade 3 very few children identify the topic ‘ecology’ as such, given the complexity of the concept. Almost all identify some of the aspects included in ecology (animals, plants, environments such as oceans and forests, etc.) and are mostly influenced by visual cues. However, only some of the children realise that their comprehension is due to verbal and visual cues together (as mentioned in the previous section):

3 M *I know what it is about from the images and because I read a lot.*

In Grade 4 the majority were able to identify the topic in a more accurate way. Some write that they mostly focus on verbal cues:

4 NB *It is written and I understand it because it talks of science.*

Other children tend to rely on images only. In this latter case, however, the comprehension of the ideational content of the website is not accurate since images on their own cannot convey complex concepts such as ‘ecology’ and ‘saving the environment’.

From Grade 5 onwards comprehension is more balanced and children accurately identify the verbal cues that help them understand what the website is really about (not only animals and plants). Frequently children refer to texts made salient by framing and central-

ity in the graphic layout; in many of these cases children are able to identify salience. In the example below the sections of text underlined are transcribed verbatim from the website where they are graphically salient headings (underlined in the example below) and perceived by the child as relevant:

6 AF *The website is about how children can help the environment and keep their families and friends healthy.*

#### *E. Multimodal spatial cues: semiotic space, framing and salience*

As mentioned, children are aware of the influence semiotic space has for the identification of website topic and purpose. Using simple metalanguage adapted from traditional literacy terms and general digital literacy, children manage to identify the main multimodal textual features that point to the ideational meaning: the following instances exemplify semiotic space (4EN, 6TD), framing and salience (6TD, 6UI):

4 EN *Ecology for kids: it is right on the top.*

6 TD *Because its written at the top of the page and, because its the thickest writing of all.*

6 UI *'Let's get started' I clicked it first because I wanted to see what was on the next page.*

#### *F. Colour coding as semiotic affordance*

As early as Grade 4, children are able to express the metaphoric meaning that colours might have in the context of the websites.

5 DT *colour green because it is the ecological colour, blue because it represents the same thing as the green.*

As age progresses, children show that they are able to recognise the function of colour as orienting interpretation on the interpersonal, textual but also ideational plane (van Leeuwen 2011). They also show the ability to interpret the metaphoric meaning of colour by establishing relations among shared cultural knowledge (green equals ecology, for instance) and other textual instances of the website.

In conclusion, the categories of metasemiotic awareness show a progression related to age in the ability to identify the affordances in multimodal texts and understand their meanings, topic and purpose. In the next sub-section, I will look at the relation between the participants and the multimodal texts.

#### *5.2. Levels of participation*

I call 'levels of participation' features informed by the interpersonal macro-function: they are the expressions of relation between participants and the multimodal text and its context. More specifically this macro-category includes the users as participants: their feelings, their competence, their attitude towards the text, their attitude towards other participants and the virtual community of the multimodal text. I also included in this macro-category 'the text as participated action': multimodal action on the text and action on other users and society through the multimodal text (see Table 3).

Table 3. Levels of participation.

*Levels of participation*

- |   |
|---|
| a. Receptive, self-referential and affectively overt                                  |
| b. Participation related to L2/FL competence  |
| c. Recognition of interactive sections as action on text: text in action and learning |
| d. Connecting with other children/people: text as social environment                  |
| e. Influencing others: text as social action – user-generated content                 |
| f. Challenging the multimodal text  |

*a. Receptive, self-referential and affectively overt*

This category is related to the levels of affective and self-centred participation of children with the multimodal text. Younger children (Grade 3 and 4) mainly tend to emphasise their individual relation with the multimodal text and explain their positive or negative attitude towards it in terms of liking/disliking its ideational content (verbal and non-verbal) in an affectively overt way. What is remarkable for this category, however, is that affectively-loaded expressions are used by younger children to give their opinion about the whole website. They are often not able to go beyond specific examples and self-centred expressions: in other words, their cognitive and affective development influences their ability to extract less impressionistic evaluative judgements. This can be linked to the cognitive ability to use specific or generic references. The following are two examples which well represent younger children's affectively loaded and self-referential answers to Question 9 (How do you like this site? Why?):

3 HQ [I like it] *Because I like a lot Rudoph and the reindeers.*

4 FB *the animals most attract me because they are so cute and I like them very much.*

*b. Participation related to L2/FL competence*

Levels of participation are influenced by the degree of multimodal text comprehension. Verbal aspects have a special relevance because the medium of instruction is L2 for the majority of children; only a minority of individuals have English as one of their native languages. A few students in the higher grades had just arrived in the International school and therefore, at the time of data gathering, English was still a foreign language for them. Whereas L2/FL competence is perceived as eminently verbal by the participants, children understand the L2 verbal sections also thanks to non-verbal cues. Some of the children/students who are less competent in English remark on their positive interaction with the multimodal text because they 'understand' it better. Some of the answers to Question 9b (Why do you like this website?) reveal the users' satisfaction in 'comprehending' what the multimodal text proposes:

3 DE *Because I understand everything!*

In a few cases, the limited verbal competence in English influenced some of the incorrect or incomplete answers in terms of the ideational content of the website. However, it is often impossible to differentiate linguistic competence from cognitive and metacognitive development. Child 4 ED, for instance, answering Question 5 (In your opinion, are there aspects which are not for children? If so, which ones?) wrote '*Anithing*'.

The answer shows low competence level in English as L2, but also limited control of cognitive and metacognitive variables such as generic/specific references.

In general, however, in the Udine International School, the competence of English as L2 of the children/adolescents was way beyond our expectations as far as the efficacy of communication was concerned, both in the written answers for the questionnaire and during the semi-structured oral interviews (which are not included in the present analysis).

*c. Recognition of interactive sections as action on text: text in action and learning*

As mentioned in the section about awareness of multimodal text affordances, children take for granted that a multimodal text consists of traversals and transmedia traversals (when multimodal texts are 'interactive' through hyperlinks). However, Question 6 (Are there elements which let you interact with the site? Which ones?) was one of the most complex for younger children to understand; most of them asked our help or the help of teachers to make sure they understood its meaning. In fact, we soon realised that the question is rather ambiguous and unclear. While younger children tended to take for granted the interactivity of traversals (Grade 3, 4), nobody in Grade 3 and only a few in Grade 4 noticed that there are sections that explicitly asked for interaction (for instance *Homework helpers*). From Grade 5, pupils show an explicit greater awareness of 'text in action':

5 BT *The photos in the 'kid power' if I click on them, will make me understand how the other children of the world live and what they think, it would be like knowing them.*

From Grade 6 children start recognising the call-for-action of the website:

7 WEB *I would click the take action section because I would like to see how the interaction works and how I can help the ecosystem.*

In the higher grades not only is 'text-in-action' overtly present in their answers, but games and activities are mentioned as the most desirable text-as-action and as a link to the community of the website. This takes us to the next category.

*d. Connecting with other children/people: text as social environment*

Children and students in higher grades (but as young as 10-year olds, see example 5 BT above) show awareness that website interactivity means relating to other children and people. Thus, the text creates a common social environment, an e-community that includes participants geographically distant and belonging to different cultural backgrounds.

7 DQ *All the website games and pictures are related to games or pictures that give more clues and explanations to the people (kids) watching the website.*

8 CT *Because it can be a quite interesting way to learn and relax at the same time. Also, i would check to see if there are any new articles by the Eco Reporter.*

Eco Reporter, mentioned in example 8 CT, consists of children/student-generated articles, namely articles by the e-community. This brings us to the next level of participation.

*e. Influencing others: text as social action – user-generated content*

From the last grade of primary school, children realise that using websites can have a social impact: one of the purposes of the multimodal text is precisely having an effect on the users'

behaviour promoting changes in their life and having a positive effect on the environment. The change is not only 'learning about' facts, but also taking positive action and 'empowering' participants: children explicitly quote these words directly from the website, since they were not prompted by the questionnaire or by the teachers:

5 DB *I think the website is about the love of nature and how children can use there 'power' without hearting [hurting] nature.*

6 BN *I think that every element is important for people like us because we should learn to save the world still when you are little*

8 DA *I want to know what else will be posted on how to help the environment and next time I want to post some comments, check more games and maybe even write an article or something.*

These users are aware that not only can they change the world, but, as shown below, they can also improve on the multimodal text: text as social action has an effect on the text itself. The affordance of updating digital texts is used by the respondent as part of social action.

#### *f. Challenging the multimodal text*

Some students in Grades 7 and 8 challenge the multimodal text explaining why it is not up to their expectations and it is not suitable for them as expert users:

7 HU *because games are for little kids which don't know how to use a computer, but info is ok.*

8 OU *I like it a lot how it is constructed but still, I think, needs some help.*

The process has gone full circle: the multimodal text becomes the aim of social action on the part of the e-community. The aim of the user is to transform the website into a more suitable one for expert participants and for their complex communicative goals and actions to be taken.

## **6. Discussion of findings**

The data, however limited, offer a remarkably complex view of the relation that children and adolescents are able to establish with digital texts. The level of awareness the participants showed towards their interaction with the multimodal text, and the level of competence in the L2 literacy to express it in a comprehensible and articulate way are surprising and noticeable. It must be mentioned that the school context is socio-culturally privileged and conducive to multimodal literacy because most teachers use ICT tools for teaching and promoting learning.

Expectation 1 in Section 2 mentioned that as 'digital natives' (Bennet, Maton & Kervin 2008; Li & Ranieri 2010) the children would tend to show semiotic and critical awareness towards multimodal texts and text/user interaction. The data only partly confirm this expectation. Children (especially younger ones, but not only) rely too openly on the fact that when the website looks as if it is made 'for children', it is trustworthy (trusting appearances). Unfortunately, easy-to-comprehend texts created by adults for children do not necessarily mean safe or suitable. Also, affective evaluation has an impact on the acceptance and use of websites especially (but not only) for younger children. 'Digital natives' need multiliteracy education to develop critical competences.



Expectation 2 is confirmed by the data: higher levels of metasemiotic awareness help users adopt a more balanced and critical stance towards the multimodal text (purpose, content and design), it raises awareness about the ideational issue at stake and empowers children in their relation towards the multimodal texts (Ala-Mutka 2011; Ananiadu & Claro 2009). The higher the levels of digital literacy, cognitive development and awareness of the relation text-user, and the more autonomous and critical towards the texts children become.

Metasemiotic awareness towards the text and towards text-user interaction positively correlates with key multiliteracy moves, and increases participation of young users with the digital text as social action. Children and adolescents increasingly perceive digital texts as participatory events and demand higher levels of direct involvement (text as action in context, user-generated materials, games and activities).

## 7. Conclusion and guidelines

The study shows the relevance of quality eco-sustainable multimodal narratives for children from an early age, and critical semiotic competence explicitly taught from primary school onwards. Children show the need to interact with multimodal texts and become active users in a participatory way. Therefore, they need to become autonomous and informed evaluators of websites in order to recognise their potential dangers but also to be empowered as active participants who enjoy and create eco-sustainable narratives for their peers and for adults.

The results of this study can be summarised in the following educational guidelines:

1. Levels of multimodal transparency should be lowered by explicitly guiding the children to recognise multimodal text affordances in different media and genres (in relation to the children's age and their cognitive and literacy development).
2. Levels of metacompetence for multimodal text affordances (verbal cues, spatial cues, colour coding, etc.) should be promoted, and actively taught.
3. Levels of informed participation should be carefully enhanced and discussed as action in text, action on text, and social action; this should include informed and careful participation of young users in virtual communities of users.
4. Levels of participation should be overtly discussed with young users.
5. Awareness should be raised about what 'seems to be' trustworthy and suitable for children is not necessarily so.
6. Criteria should be discussed with young users to decide whether a website is suitable for them or not (easiness of comprehension is not a sufficient criterion and neither are layout, structure and general attractiveness).

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Simona Corso

### Robinson's Anthro-poiesis

**Abstract I:** Dopo trecento anni dalla sua pubblicazione *Robinson Crusoe* continua a offrire una potente riflessione sul rapporto tra cultura e natura. Il romanzo ridisegna i confini tra umanità e animalità e insinua l'idea, molto moderna, che l'identità umana non è un dato naturale, bensì l'esito di un lungo processo di costruzione. Quest'idea viene ripresa ed esplorata in alcune riscritture contemporanee del mito di Robinson. Con esempi tratti dal *Robinson Crusoe* di Defoe e da due riscritture contemporanee del romanzo – *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* di Michel Tournier e *Foe* di J. M. Coetzee –, affronterò alcuni aspetti del dibattito sul binomio natura-cultura e proverò a dimostrare come alcune ipotesi avanzate da Defoe e dagli artisti da lui ispirati siano in sintonia con le teorizzazioni più recenti dell'antropologia.

**Abstract II:** Three hundred years after its first publication *Robinson Crusoe* continues to stand out as a powerful reflection on culture and nature. The novel re-draws the boundaries between humanity and animality and insinuates a very modern idea: human nature is not a given, but the result of a lengthy process. The idea is taken up and explored in some contemporary re-writings of the Robinson myth. By drawing examples from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and from two contemporary re-writings of the novel – Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* – I will explore some aspects of the nature-versus-culture debate and show how Defoe's hypotheses – and those of the artists who were inspired by him – are in tune with the most recent anthropological theories.

The title of my contribution refers to a theory that in Italy has found a sophisticated spokesperson in the anthropologist Francesco Remotti. It is the theory of anthro-poiesis, according to which human nature is not defined biologically, once and for all, but is rather the result of a process of cultural construction. According to this theory, man is a malleable being, which is continuously shaped by external forces: the natural and social environment, and, within the latter, traditions, religious models, technical and scientific discoveries (Remotti 2013: 4-59). This is in fact an old idea, rediscovered and re-elaborated in the twentieth century in various fields, from philosophy to anthropology and neuroscience. Remotti traces a grand genealogy from Plato to Montaigne, Pascal, Vico and Herder. A first formulation of the theory is found in Pico della Mirandola's *De hominis dignitate*, where Pico re-writes

the famous statement of Genesis that man was made in the image of God, thus opening to man an absolute freedom. Pico writes: “there remained no archetype according to which He might fashion a new offspring” [nec erat in archetipis unde novam subolem effingeret] (Pico della Mirandola 1941: 6). And then, in the voice of God speaking to Adam, he adds: “We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer” [Nec te celestem neque terrenum, neque mortalem neque immortalem fecimus, ut tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes et factor, in quam malueris tute formam effingas] (Pico della Mirandola 1941: 8, my translation)<sup>1</sup>.

Following a similar line of thought, Johann Gottfried Herder remarks, three centuries later, that “man takes shape depending on the hands in which he falls” (Herder 1992: 160, my translation). For supporters of the idea of stable and universal human nature, from Descartes to Kant, culture (or, to use a pre-nineteenth-century term, costumes) obscures the universal laws of human nature: ‘the rock in the sand’, as Descartes puts it. For the advocates of anthropo-poiesis, by contrast, culture or, rather, cultures are the only possible forms of humanity.

Herder’s theory of the incompleteness of human nature had a vast echo in twentieth-century anthropology. In the Seventies, Clifford Geertz linked this tradition of thought to the latest discoveries of paleo-anthropology and neurobiology, to conclude that the modern human brain (i.e. the brain of *homo sapiens sapiens*) is not a precondition for the birth of culture but rather a product of culture itself (Geertz 1987: 110). From a paleo-anthropological perspective it makes little sense to think of a biologically formed human being who then creates culture: instead Geertz evokes the idea of an incessant cultural process that gives shape to human beings, whose anatomical and cerebral structure develops in parallel with their cultural inventions. Or, to put it in the words of an influential book of the early Eighties, *Not in Our Genes*, written by a biologist, a geneticist and a psychologist: “[T]he only sensible thing to say about human nature is that it is ‘in’ that nature to construct its own history” (Rose *et al.* 1990: 14). Recapitulating his ingenious reconstruction of a tradition of thought that embraces several centuries, Remotti writes: “Non vi è l’uomo e poi le sue forme; l’uomo è invece e subito le sue forme di umanità, nessuna delle quali può pretendere all’universalità, proprio perché non vi è una natura umana che precede il lavoro dell’antropo-poiesi” (Remotti 2013: 31).

The natural environment in which man is born and lives is thereby recognized as an essential modeling factor that defines human identity. This is also not a new idea; although we have become more cautious about notions of natural and social environment, or nature and culture, and more aware of the difficulties of assessing the influence that nature exerts on man (and vice versa)<sup>2</sup>. And yet, it is commonly accepted that our relationship with the environment deeply reflects our identity, our beliefs and ways of life, and our idea of how future generations might live. In this article, I will explore some of these issues in relation

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Remotti 2013: 27-30.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the nature-culture divide as a problematic and historically contingent dichotomy, see Descola 2014: 83 and ff.

to *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe, a novel that, like many works of its times, seems obsessed with the need for a definition of human nature<sup>3</sup>. In a typically eighteenth-century manner, Defoe's novel is also a thought experiment: what remains of a human being when he is propelled into a natural world completely untouched by man? Can our form of life conceive of a truly uncontaminated world, or does our mere presence suffice to transform this world into something different? *Robinson Crusoe* still offers, after three hundred years, some very topical insights into the relationship between nature and culture, the boundaries of humanity and animality, and, last but not least, the very definition of humanity itself.

To sketch some possible approaches to these complex issues, I will start from two famous re-writings of Defoe's novel, Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les limbes du Pacifique* (1967) and J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), and then return to the source text. I have chosen these two among many because both focus on the relationship between nature and culture – a topic that is treated with great political urgency in these extremely political re-writings. I will suggest that the two novels offer distinctive models of possible relationships with nature, while Defoe's novel presents a different and in many ways more nuanced treatment of the same topic.

At the start of Tournier's novel, nature and culture are presented as two entirely separate and indeed contrasting realms. Thrust onto an island which at first appears to him impenetrable, covered by an overwhelming vegetation and populated by repellent animals, Tournier's Crusoe slowly loses the sense of his own humanity. At the mercy of every hostile element, he clings to the only remnant of civilization that is still in his possession, "ces pauvres hardes – usées, lacérées, maculées, mais issues de plusieurs millénaires de civilisation et imprégnées d'humanité" (Tournier 2008: 30). Soon, however, the elements have the upper hand: without his companions, alone in the wilderness, Robinson loses his sense of decency, the need for spoken language, the wish to adorn his person, his upright posture:

Robinson ne savait plus depuis combien de temps il avait abandonné son dernier haillon aux épines d'un buisson. D'ailleurs il ne craignait plus l'ardeur du soleil, car une croûte d'excréments séchés couvrait son dos, ses flancs et ses cuisses. Sa barbe et ses cheveux se mêlaient, et son visage disparaissait dans cette masse hirsute. Ses mains devenues des moignons crochus ne lui servaient plus qu'à marcher [...] il ne se déplaçait plus qu'en se traînant sur le ventre. Il savait maintenant que l'homme est semblable à ces blessés au cours d'un tumulte ou d'une émeute qui demeurent debout aussi longtemps que la foule les soutient en les pressant, mais qui glissent à terre dès qu'elle se disperse. La foule de ses frères, qui l'avait entretenu dans l'humain sans qu'il s'en rendît compte, s'était brusquement écartée de lui, et il éprouvait qu'il n'avait pas la force de tenir seul sur ses jambes (Tournier 2008: 37-38).

From this condition, which is later called "la souille", Tournier's Robinson emerges one morning when, in a fit of nostalgia, he finally decides to explore the shipwreck. The

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<sup>3</sup> On the relationship between Defoe and contemporary philosophical thought, especially with regard to the definition of human nature, see Novak 1963: 22-64.

sight of once familiar objects causes him pangs of longing. He strips the ship of everything that he can transport back to the shore. With a vulture quilt he writes the first words on a sheet of paper, and sheds tears of joy: “Il lui semblait soudain s’être à demi arraché à l’abîme de bestialité où il avait sombré et faire sa rentrée dans le monde de l’esprit en accomplissant cet acte sacré: écrire” (Tournier 2008: 44). Robinson begins to keep a diary and convinces himself that if he saves his language through writing, he will be able to escape “la souille”.

Je sais maintenant que chaque homme porte en lui – et comme au-dessus de lui – un fragile et complexe échafaudage d’habitudes, réponses, réflexes, mécanismes, préoccupations, rêves et implications qui s’est formé et continue à se transformer par les attouchements perpétuels de ses semblables. [...] Autrui, pièce maîtresse de mon univers. [...] Et ma solitude n’attaque pas que l’intelligibilité des choses. Elle mine jusqu’au fondement même de leur existence. De plus en plus, je suis assailli de doutes sur la véracité du témoignage de mes sens (Tournier 2008: 52-54).

Anthropo-poiesis is shown to be a very fragile process: being human is not a condition that one acquires once and for all, but a social construct which, to resist or even to exist, relies on the presence of other humans. It is impossible to remain human when we are alone – this is what Tournier seems to suggest in these early pages of his novel<sup>4</sup>. Nature, at this early stage, is “the mire”: a brute force that absorbs the human and transforms him into a beast. Robinson knows that there is only one way to resist the mire’s fatal lure: he must stage every single human ritual that he can recall. With superhuman effort he builds a hut, then a temple, acquires the habit of thinking aloud to recover the use of language, plows and cultivates the island. But these achievements now feel to him like empty rites; his desire is elsewhere. Thus begins Robinson’s metamorphosis. He discovers a cave where he crouches happily, like in the womb; he fertilizes the earth with his seed; he calls the orchids his *daughters*, born from the soil impregnated by him. He writes in his journal: “Je sais maintenant que si la présence d’autrui est un élément fondamental de l’individu humain, il n’en est pas pour autant irremplaçable” (Tournier 2008: 109). Robinson begins to split: during daytime, he wearily observes the rules of civilized society, with less and less conviction; but at night he slides toward the vegetal origin of life. “N’était-il pas – writes the narrator – le dernier être de la lignée humaine appelé à un retour aux sources végétales de la vie?” (Tournier 2008: 114).

The arrival of Vendredi, a naked and sensual Auracanian, seals Robinson’s new condition forever but not immediately. At first, it triggers a return to old habits. Robinson, who had begun to experience the proximity of nature no longer as degrading, like in the phase of the mire, but as vivifying and liberating, takes refuge in his old ways of life. He decides that he must dominate the native, and thus reproduces, in the form of a caricature, the ‘education’ of Friday in Defoe’s novel. Robinson becomes once again the white man who

<sup>4</sup> Critics are divided between those who argue that Tournier’s novel postulates a solipsistic stance, and those who claim that alterity is essential in the novel. Milne (1996: 167-181) argues that in the novel the need for the Other is irrepressible. Deleuze (1972: 277), on the other hand, writes that Vendredi does not function as a real Other. In a similar vein, Wilson (1996: 199-209) foregrounds narcissism and solipsism and refers to an “inalienable solitude, the very aspect of the Robinson myth which survives, intact, in Tournier’s retelling” (207).

forces Vendredi into a state of beastly captivity: he gives him foolish orders, punches him without reason, makes him suffer the frustrations of a white ruler who at the bottom of the heart knows that his power is void. Then comes a second phase in which Robinson studies his companion: he spies on him and follows him, unseen, on his solitary walks across the island. Sometimes he even plays with him. Finally, a great explosion, prompted by Vendredi, triggers the final phase of Robinson's transformation. When Vendredi distractedly starts a fire that destroys everything Robinson has built – the house, the temple, the hourglass, the crops and flocks – Robinson forsakes his civilization, which he had worn like an uncomfortable armour, and embraces Vendredi's creaturely mysticism. Guided by Vendredi, Robinson turns his back to the human condition he inherited from Western civilization and discovers a new form of humanity, in which human existence, plant life and the divine merge into a single, creaturely dimension. His attitude towards nature changes, too: Robinson abandons the overly human eroticism that drove him to penetrate the earth and the cavities of trees, and discovers an erotic asceticism, no longer genital but expressed through the pure contemplation of sunlight. Is this, then, Tournier's final word: a new beginning?

In Tournier's proto-environmentalist novel nature is initially seen as a threat to human culture but ultimately becomes a source of human regeneration. As Anthony Purdy (1996: 188-189) points out, the novel is a manifesto against the misery of *homo oeconomicus* and a hymn in praise of *homo ludens* who is able to break free from the iron cage of efficiency and productivity, and from the mechanical pace of time dictated by the industrial civilization. Western anthropo-poiesis is only one of many trajectories, and maybe not the most felicitous. And yet, the novel's unexpected and ambiguous ending casts a shadow on any exceedingly optimistic interpretation: Robinson rejects the English captain's offer, while Vendredi betrays his companion and leaves the island. The reader thus remains uncertain whether Robinson's new life – a happy primitivism that aspires towards an eternal present and a stylite's mystical immersion in nature – marks a fresh start or, tragically, a blind alley. When he discovers that Vendredi has abandoned him in favour of the "grand systeme", Robinson plummets into profound despair, and he only begins to feel better when he discovers a new fugitive on the shore of his island: Jan, the cabin boy, who has been brutally abused by the other seamen. Robinson takes him by the hand, leads him into the sunlight and feels, once more, "un sentiment d'assouvissement total". His mystical communion with nature has allowed him to overcome the empty rites of civilization, but it does not eradicate his primordial need for company.

The question of Robinson's relationship with nature prompts us to consider his attitude towards fellow humans. This is particularly evident in the second text I wish to consider, *Foe* (1986), by J. M. Coetzee, one of the most fascinating re-writings of *Robinson Crusoe* in recent decades. In *Foe* the story is told by a woman, Susan Barton, who was also shipwrecked on the island. She meets Cruso and his servant Friday, dumb because his tongue has been mutilated; she spends a few years on the island, then returns to England where she decides to entrust his memoirs to a successful novelist, Mr. Foe. Coetzee's re-writing of *Robinson Crusoe* challenges every assumption made by the source text. The figure of Friday, the muted servant, raises tragic questions about the privilege of speech and about what it means, in history and in literature, to be without a voice. The stratagem of the 'forgotten' female narrator draws our attention, with similar urgency, to the voices that have been silenced by



the canon. These two aspects of the novel have catalyzed critical attention, just like the typically Coetzeean themes of the boundaries of representation, the power and impotence of language, the ideological limits of realism<sup>5</sup>. In my reading, I wish to draw attention to a different concern, which is similarly dear to Coetzee: man's responsibility towards the land he inhabits, and from which he derives sustenance and hope. As we will see, this responsibility towards the land, for Coetzee, is always informed by a sense of obligation towards the other.

Coetzee subverts the myth of the industrious European and makes Cruso a man paralysed with apathy. After the shipwreck, he salvages nothing but a single knife; he does not keep a diary; he has lost track of time, because he never made the effort to build a calendar. In all his time with Friday he never bothered to teach him more than a few words – knife, wood, fire, sea – which he uses exclusively to give him orders. For Susan, who is likable, gentle and curious, Cruso remains a mystery until the end. When Susan suggests that they should send Friday to explore the wreck, Cruso responds: "We have a roof over our heads, made without saw or axe. We sleep, we eat, we live. We have no need of tools" (Coetzee 1987: 32). Coetzee's Cruso embodies a minimal anthropo-poiesis, where human needs are reduced to their bare essence. This systematic renunciation of all human prerogatives is also reflected in Cruso's refusal to engage with the natural environment that surrounds him. Cruso does not seem to have established any relationship with the island – neither exploitative nor communal. He neither hunts, nor cultivates, nor collects. He eats whatever Friday is able to gather: lettuce and eggs of fish or bird. The starry sky and the expanse of the sea leave him indifferent. At least this is Susan's impression, which is conveyed to us in the novel. For Cruso the island is an opaque world where one survives only if one remains hidden. In a novel published some years earlier, *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee wrote poignantly about 'the idea of gardening', which he described as an act of resistance against violence and a gesture of love, not only for the land but for the very ideal of a human existence: "there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once the chord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children" (Coetzee 1998: 109).

No wonder, then, that Cruso, who is deaf to the voice of his island, is also deaf to the voice of the woman who seeks to awaken in him an interest in the other, a foundation of human morality: "Cruso had no stories to tell [...] – says Susan defeated – He did not care how I came to be in Bahia or what I did there. When I spoke of England and of all the things I intended to do when I was rescued, he seemed not to hear me" (Coetzee 1987: 34). Cruso's indifference to the natural world is indicative of his indifference to humans. The only mysterious link that Cruso creates with the island are the terraces that he builds, with huge effort, on its slopes. When Susan asks him why he takes time to weed the ground if he does not intend to plant anything, Cruso replies: "The planting is not for us [...]. The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them" (Coetzee 1987: 33). As often happens in Coetzee's novels, the profound moral apathy of his characters, even when it appears entirely impenetrable, still offers us a glimpse of hope.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Thieme 2003: 63-71; Attridge 2004: 65-90.

This very twentieth-century form of apathy is a reversal of the proverbial resourcefulness of Defoe's *Crusoe*, of his extraordinary technical skills, which are widely discussed in secondary literature. Defoe's novel condenses millennia of human evolution in a matter of years: the transition from hunter-gatherers to early forms of agriculture, from nomadism to permanent settlements, from free-grazing cattle to enclosures. Elsewhere (Corso 2004: 19-32) I have stressed the importance of the objects saved from the wreck, without which, as Robinson himself declares, "[he] should have lived, if [he] had not perished, like a mere savage" (Defoe 1869: 88). Christopher Hill (1980: 12) similarly emphasizes the significance of Robinson's 'mental furniture', or rather of his memories and past experience which provide, so to speak, the instruction manual for his 'inventions'. But Defoe's understanding of anthropo-poiesis remains unclear unless we also pay attention to Robinson's intense relationship with nature.

In the novel there is no single term to denote the natural world. 'Nature', when it appears, indicates human nature. Yet, although there is no term to collectively indicate the natural world, this world is nevertheless vividly present. The island is an opulent ecosystem that keeps Robinson's senses alert and poses new challenges every day. Each of Robinson's small conquests, every step on his way back to 'civilization' is also a compromise with the ecosystem that surrounds him. With his formidable toolkit Robinson reassembles the world, but he never forgets that each fragment of this world is made of leaves, bark, dirt, mud, goat-skins. From day one, Robinson is surrounded by animals: some are killed unceremoniously, others become his friends and family. The novel is full of ominous encounters with animals of different species: the tenderness of Robinson's cheerful reunion with the dog who survived the shipwreck; the sudden appearance, in the cave, of the old billy goat, who seems almost human in his fear; the encounter with the hungry little kid that is fed and tamed by Robinson; his companionship with the parrot, the only living being who, for twenty-eight years, will pronounce words in Robinson's presence. While Robinson never hides the practical and often brutal side of his dealings with the animals, he also comes to see some of them as members of his family. In one of the novel's most famous passages, he describes himself at his table, in the company of Poll, "my favourite, [...] the only person permitted to talk to me", the dog to his right, and "the two cats, one on one side the table, and one on the other" (Defoe 1869: 100).

Virginia Woolf, notoriously, complained that in *Robinson Crusoe* nature does not exist and that there are only clay pots, tables, chairs, works of man (Woolf 1969: 21). It seems to me, by contrast, that Robinson's anthropo-poiesis – his desire for objects and artefacts – necessarily presupposes a thorough knowledge of the natural world, and an awareness that every human action is always a compromise with nature. The discovery of the island's fertile soil turns Robinson into a botanist. Full of regret that in his past life he paid little attention to gardening, Robinson now studies plants and roots, eager to discover their properties and their growth cycle. His meaty diet makes him a predator in the animal world, but his curiosity makes him a zoologist: he studies the habits of tortoises and the many varieties of seabirds; he observes how the wild pigeon builds its nest in the holes of the rocks and not on the branches of trees like the wood pigeon.

Defoe's long description of the cultivation of grain – from Robinson's accidental discovery of grain to his first real harvest – is a perfect example of this patient anthropo-poiesis, in harmony with the cycles of nature. Robinson needs to wait four long years until he can

enjoy his first loaf of bread. During these years, Robinson studies the land, the seasons, the succession of dry and wet periods, but also the ecosystem as a whole. He learns, for example, which birds are likely to ruin the crop and which are indifferent to the fresh shoots. There are other difficulties that cause further delay: Robinson needs to learn how to construct a plough, a spade, a scythe, a sieve, a furnace. Finally, gratification is deferred for symbolic reasons: Robinson decides not to consume the fruits of his first good harvest, but offers them to God. He remarks: "It might be truly said, that now I worked for my bread", since "it is a little wonderful [...] the strange multitude of little things necessary in the providing, producing, curing, dressing, making, and finishing this one article of bread" (Defoe 1869: 79). If we consider this 'working for the bread', where are the boundaries between nature and culture?

Friday's arrival on the island triggers many urgent questions, and it is hardly surprising that the second part of Defoe's novel has attracted the largest share of critical interest, and has in many ways eclipsed the rest of the story<sup>6</sup>. *Robinson Crusoe* has been read as a manifesto of 'good' English colonialism, in contrast with the Spaniards' "butchery" deplored by Defoe in one of the novel's more famous passages (Defoe 1869: 115). Peter Hulme (1986: 205 and ff.), among others, has convincingly laid bare the novel's political ideology by reading it as a colonial wish-fulfilment fantasy: a story in which the colonist *saves* the life of the colonized and in which the latter, out of sheer gratitude, submits *voluntarily* to his power. I have argued elsewhere (Corso 2004: 171-175) that Robinson's narrative of his life as a hunter, prior to Friday's arrival, deliberately blurs the boundaries between self-defense and a war of attack. When Robinson first seizes his rifle, he does so to defend himself against the wild beasts of the island (or at least this is what he tells the reader). As a result, the reader will assume (and Robinson will suggest) that, throughout the novel, the rifle is only ever used for 'legitimate defense'. The extreme conditions of life on the island, moreover, and Robinson's many hunting stories, encourage the reader to think of killing and death as matters of fact, "for there is no necessary wickedness in nature" (Defoe 1869: 342). After twenty-five years of heroic solitude, the shipwreck, who relied on his wit and on his rifle to subdue nature, is ready to subjugate men: the hunter can now become a colonizer. Alex Mackintosh (2011: 25) has argued that Robinson controls the natives in the same way in which he domesticates the animals on the island: a combination of brutality and proto-disciplinary power that replicates "the logic of cannibalism itself, which shocks precisely because of its failure to distinguish between the two [humans and animals]". And yet, this reading, which is close to what has become the standard interpretation of the novel, fails to capture some of its more subtle nuances.

In the earlier part of my essay, I suggested that Robinson's relationship with the natural world of the island cannot be considered purely in terms of exploitation or subjection. On the contrary, Robinson often shows a rather sophisticated form of eco-consciousness. I now wish to draw attention to the ambiguities present in the relationship between Robinson and Friday, and between Robinson and the Europeans, or, to put it differently, the tension

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<sup>6</sup> Since the publication of Hulme's groundbreaking *Colonial Encounters* it has become customary to read *Robinson Crusoe* through a political lens – an approach which James Joyce, incidentally, anticipated with his definition of *Robinson Crusoe* as a novel of imperial propaganda. In his useful guide to essential criticism Paul Baines (2007: 117-123) offers an overview of the political and postcolonial readings of the novel in recent decades.

between Robinson's thoughts and actions and his alleged historical role. Once again, the intrinsic ambiguity of Defoe's novel stands in the way of a straightforward political reading. The majority of Defoe's contemporaries did not object to colonial exploitation, which they accepted as the standard political practice of European states, nor to the slave trade<sup>7</sup>. With regard to nature, the dominant ideology, sanctioned by the Bible (Genesis 1.26), considered man the ruler over all other living creatures (Thomas 1983: 17 and ff). Against this background, some of Robinson's ideas appear more noteworthy and it becomes easier to appreciate his openness towards new ways of thinking. Robinson, in fact, often appears prejudiced, but also surprisingly willing to change his mind, and to swiftly dismiss assumptions that he previously upheld as undoubtable truths. His close relationship with Friday makes him the prototype of the British colonizer, as James Joyce already remarked. But at the same time Friday's presence compels him to revisit and revise preconceived ideas about 'savages' and, more generally, about human nature. The extreme experience of the shipwreck made Robinson realize that man depends on his environment: human civilization begins with the ability to listen to nature. Now Robinson has to face another problem: is a creature, whose culture differs radically from his own, still a human being?

Friday's presence re-awakens Robinson's well-known arrogance, but it also awakens in him what Remotti might call a certain anthropo-poietic awareness, namely the knowledge that the models of humanity are manifold. On many occasions Robinson seems convinced that his idea of humanity is superior to Friday's; sometimes, however, he appears disoriented by the new horizon of life that has opened with Friday. Robinson famously evokes cannibalism as a proof of the inferiority of the 'savages'; yet more than once he also deplors the brutality of Europeans: a trait which he thinks has been made more dangerous by their technological expertise<sup>8</sup>. "Cooler and calmer thoughts" lead Robinson to the conclusion that cannibalism is a cultural practice among others, not very different from the European habit of eating animal flesh: "[the natives] think it no more a crime to kill a captive taken in war, than we do to kill an ox; or to eat human flesh, than we do to eat mutton" (Defoe 1869: 115). "What is the earth and sea [...] Whence is it produced? And what am I and all the other creatures, wild and tame, humane and brutal? Whence are we?" (Defoe 1869: 63) ponders Robinson, thus manifesting what we would today call a certain ecological awareness – the intuition that land, sea, humans and other animals all belong to a single system or a single food chain.

After his encounter with Friday, Robinson comes to the conclusion that God "has bestow'd upon them [the natives] the same powers, the same reason, the same affections; the same sentiments of kindness and obligation; the same passions and resentments of wrongs;

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<sup>7</sup> There are some remarkable exceptions. See, for instance, the memorable condemnation of European colonialism in the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels*, or Voltaire's reiterated accusations against war, colonial or not (see the entry '*guerre*' in *Dictionnaire philosophique; Candide; L'Ingénu*). On these topics see Rawson 2002, and Corso 2004: 171-218.

<sup>8</sup> In a famous passage, cited above, the Spaniards' colonial enterprises in America are called "barbarities", "a mere butchery, a bloody and unnatural piece of cruelty" (Defoe 1869: 115). In *The Further Adventures* the English who settle in the colony are called 'barbarians' and the Spaniards "thought themselves much better among the savages [than among them]" (Defoe 1869: 227). The most shocking episode is probably the massacre in Madagascar (Defoe 1869: 315 and ff.). For an analysis of this episode see Corso 2004: 191-193.

the same sense of gratitude, sincerity, fidelity, and all the capacities of doing good, and receiving good, that He has given to us" (Defoe 1869: 140). The dividing line between *us* and *them* remains clear, but it coexists with the idea that we differ from each other because of distinct cultural practices (or 'customs', in Robinson's eighteenth-century vocabulary), that are always reversible and open to 'progress' as well as to 'degeneration'.

In the final part of *The Further Adventures*, Robinson reflects on his life and times and admits that he is traumatized by the massacre of Madagascar, where "our English butchers" committed horrendous crimes "with a fury something beyond what was human" (Defoe 1869: 324). At the beginning of his adventures, he was more afraid of being among 'savages' than of falling prey to lions, but now he thinks that "it were much better to have fallen into the hands of the savages" (Defoe 1869: 350) than to end up as a victim of the English or Dutch, "a parcel of rash, proud, insolent fellows, that neither know what belongs to justice, nor how to behave themselves as the laws of God and nature direct" (Defoe 1869: 346); "for the savages, give them their due, would not eat a man till he was dead; and killed him as we do a bullock; but these men had many arts beyond the cruelty of death" (Defoe 1869: 350). Exiled in the Indian Ocean, and deprived of all spatial and ideological coordinates, the alleged champion of the Western values distances himself from the 'arts' of the Europeans – and in a sudden and perhaps unintended outburst chooses to identify with 'savages' and with slaughtered beasts.

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Nicoletta Brazzelli

### Postcolonial Transformations: the Forest in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*

**Abstract I:** In *The Famished Road* (1991) Ben Okri rappresenta gli effetti controversi della decolonizzazione in Nigeria, rivelando le conseguenze devastanti delle innovazioni tecnologiche sui paesaggi naturali del paese. Attraverso i movimenti e le percezioni di Azaro, uno spirito-bambino, Okri indugia sulla spietata opera di deforestazione condotta dalle potenze occidentali e mette in evidenza l'incapacità della nazione di ristabilire un'armonia sostenibile con l'ambiente. *The Famished Road* sottolinea anche i legami ancestrali della foresta con il folklore e l'immaginario Yoruba. Nel romanzo di Okri la distruzione della foresta costituisce l'emblema dell'impoverimento progressivo delle risorse naturali e della vita spirituale della Nigeria postcoloniale.

**Abstract II:** In *The Famished Road* (1991) Ben Okri deals with the controversial effects of decolonisation in Nigeria and unfolds the devastating consequences of technological innovations on natural landscapes. Through the wanderings and perceptions of the *abiku* Azaro, Okri focuses on the ruthless enterprise of deforestation pursued by Western companies and exposes his nation's inability to restore a harmonious relationship with the environment. *The Famished Road* also underlines the ancestral links of the forest with Yoruba folklore and imagination. In Okri's novel, the forest acts as a reminder of the gradual disappearance of both natural resources and spiritual life in postcolonial Nigeria.

In the Western literary tradition, the African forest is the site of an impenetrable darkness but it also encompasses valuable resources and riches to be exploited by the European colonizers (Brazzelli 2015: 129-132). In nineteenth-century colonial discourse, rainforests embody the otherness of Africa, and, at the same time, they encourage the discovery of unknown natural and cultural worlds. Joseph Conrad's and Henry Rider Haggard's "African" narratives especially combine these conflicting approaches, although employing different textual strategies. However, both authors explore the white man's degeneration in the colonies and the disorienting, numbing effect of the forest wilderness captivating the European eye and mind (Mikkonen 2008: 302-303).

After the Second World War, postcolonial perspectives reverse imperial representations, reinserting the forest into its original, "native" sphere. On the whole, twentieth-century African literatures, and especially Nigerian literature, emphasize the role of natural environment and above all of the rainforest. Thus, in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) Amos Tutuola draws on Yoruba myths and folktales based on

fantastic creatures inhabiting the forests. Tutuola's narratives reveal the bush as the abode of spirits, a liminal zone that embodies the chaotic and mysterious forces of nature (Quayson 1997: 44-64).

In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) the Nigerian Igbo respect the sacred value of the earth and maintain the sustainability of their land, employing wise agricultural practices. The forest is crucial for the Igbo because it preserves their social and religious order, as well as the taboos of the community. In particular, the "evil forest" is the place where those who have committed abominations against the earth are dumped. However, the community of Umuofia accepts that the "evil forest" is intimately connected to its rituals and beliefs. After all, Umuofia means "people of the forest" (Gane 2007: 43-44). When the missionaries build a Christian church in the area, they subvert the physical and metaphysical geography of the Igbo community. By giving away the wilderness the natives give away the control over the "evil forest" which keeps dangers at bay; so they become its victims (Garuba 2002: 97-98).

In *The Famished Road* (1991) Ben Okri perceives the natural world in a different light from Achebe, though both novelists share motifs belonging to Nigerian traditions (Nwosu 2007: 102). Writing in the context of globalisation and neocolonial exploitation, with a new understanding of the fragility of the environment, Okri shows a sympathetic awareness of how human agency is a damaging force threatening natural processes. By highlighting the crucial role of the forest in African culture and economy, Okri especially pinpoints its ecological value as well as its strong connections with the spirit world. In *The Famished Road* the forest acts as a reminder of the gradual disappearance of both natural resources and traditional beliefs in postcolonial Nigeria. The use of the word "transformation" in the title of this article comes from Bill Ashcroft's notion of transformation in postcolonial cultures and recalls the imperial contradiction between geographical expansion, designed to increase the economical and political power of the nation, and its purported moral justification, its civilizing mission. This huge contradiction continues in the present-day practices of global power (Ashcroft 2002: 1).

Ben Okri is a novelist and poet born in Minna (West Central Nigeria) in 1959 and has been living in London since the 1970s. In his works the great African tradition (established by Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and also Wole Soyinka) and, more specifically, the Yoruba folklore interact with Western mythologies, literatures and cultures. A kind of "anti-realism", rather than magic realism, informs his narrations; a new worldview emerges, based on the coexistence of European literary forms and African beliefs (Cooper 1998: 15). *The Famished Road* is the first novel of a trilogy – the second is *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) and the third *Infinite Riches* (1998) – which aims at raising awareness about environmental degradation and in particular deforestation, while it traces the long and uneven movement of Nigerian history towards political independence, and suggests that independence will not bring the much hoped for freedom.

The spirits in the bush as well as the people living on the land define Okri's fictional construction. Azaro, a child originally named Lazaro (alluding to the biblical Lazarus), is both a "native" and a "nomad", lives on the earth and also in the spirit world; his wanderings often lead him into the bush, teeming with spirits. The *abiku*, or the spirit child, a recurrent figure of West African cultures, otherwise called *ogbanje*, struggles to stay among the mortals, thus



accepting a state of perennial suffering, continually swinging between the real world and the world of fantastic creatures generated by the collective imaginary of Nigerian Yoruba.

Azaro's double position between the visible and the invisible unfolds the repetitive pattern of *The Famished Road*, including the main character's meandering and his visionary perception of the world. The cycle of birth, death and rebirth of the *abiku* is similar to that of Nigeria, marked by endless repetition and arrested development (Lim 2005: 70). In Okri's novel the dominant perspective embraces the spiritual sphere; the alternative world is the Lagos ghetto, in which Azaro's Mum and Dad live. The spatial elements that contribute to model Okri's fictional world are the ghetto, the forest and Madame Koto's bar.

The first two places are the destinations of the *abiku*'s movements, the bar is the threshold between them, a kind of liminal junction (Costantini 2002: 173). The dirt and violence which characterize the ghetto are the consequence of colonial and neocolonial policies pushing towards a chaotic urbanisation. The forest instead is the site of resistance, the domain of vegetal power, energy from nature facing human violence. Azaro spends most of his time wandering around his ghetto, walking into the nearby forest, and sitting in Madame Koto's bar, as a witness of the changing scene of the neighborhood: the rivalry between the Party of the Poor and the Party of the Rich as the debate on independence increases, the poverty of the manual laborers like his parents and the relative wealth of property owners like Madame Koto, deforestation and the building frenzy that accompanies the destruction of the trees. Azaro's small neighborhood, the forest and the road demarcating it as well as the nearby big city (assumed to be Lagos) remain unnamed in the novel.

Vanessa Guignery (2013) remarks that "The homelands of *The Famished Road* are certainly 'imaginary' and invisible as the novel is not explicitly bound to a specific geographical and historical place or nation" (13). This lack of certainty on the location of the narrative plot encourages a metaphorical reading of this small community, making it any country in Africa, or any emerging postcolonial nation in the world. On the other hand – and I strongly support this approach – a "bioregional" reading of *The Famished Road* suggests the existence of a specific location for the novel by examining the meteorological events and the animal and vegetal species. Thus, despite the abundance of fantastic elements in the text, Okri's novel retains a sense of local environment we can call "local realism".

In fact, as Erin James (2012) remarks, the novel features over one hundred and thirty animal and vegetal species, ranging from those familiar to Western readers such as corn or tomato to those more firmly associated with a Nigerian setting, such as flame-lily, baobab, and yam. The flora Azaro finds as he explores the forest that borders his ghetto, such as mistletoe and palm, obeche, iroko, rubber, and mahogany, localize *The Famished Road* to tropical Africa. The fauna mentioned in the novel, including the antelope and the duiker, restrict the text further to the Yorubaland in the southwestern part of Nigeria's rainforest, which is particularly known for these two species, both endangered by hunting pressures (269).

The geographical location of the novel is relatively narrow, restricted to the neighborhood where Azaro and his family live, and to the journeys taken by Azaro on 'endless' roads. This limitations of the geographical area render the sense of change even more clearly:

Steadily, over days and months, the paths had been widening. Bushes were being burnt, tall grasses cleared, tree stumps uprooted. The area was changing. Places that were thick with bush and low trees were now becoming open spaces of soft river-sand (Okri 1992: 104).

Okri's novel opens with a cosmological image: "In the beginning there was a river. The river became a road and the road branched out to the whole world. And because the road was once a river it was always hungry" (3). The opening lines suggest a cyclical transformation questioning the chronological sequence of history; the origin of the "famished road" lies in myth, not in history. This narrative of beginning also deconstructs images of pastoral origins, while the road's perpetual hunger testifies to the earth's predatory violence (Ogunfolabi 2012: 277). Employing a (biblical) formulaic opening, Okri seems to put the events that follow beyond any recognizable time and suggests the mythic possibilities of the narrative, characterized by a mix of Christian and Yoruba mythopoeia. Moreover, the mention of hunger also explicitly alludes to the colonial and postcolonial exploitation of the land.

Not only cultural transformations have caused the ecological degradation of a whole country, swallowed by "the stomach of the road", but such an ecological degradation actually contributes to the indigenous Yoruba people's alienation from their traditional beliefs. In fact, local communities are endangered by the woodcutting activities, their forestry-related activities are reduced and their access to food is limited. The transition from the forest as lived-in space to alien territory implies its inhabitants' abandonment of traditional religious taboos relating to logging and farming practices and the loss of a long-established way of seeing the forest as life giving.

The terrifying destruction of the environment is reinforced by the fantastic imagination of the spirit child:

I had emerged into another world. All around, in the future present, a mirage of houses was being built, paths and roads crossed and surrounded the forest in tightening circles, unpainted churches and the whitewashed walls of mosques sprang up where the forest was thickest. I heard the ghostly wood-cutters axing down the titanic irokos, the giant baobabs, the rubber trees and obeches. There were birds' nests on the earth and the eggs half-formed and dried up, dying as they were emerging into a hard, miraculous world (Okri 1992: 242).

Both the road and the river embody the motif of the metamorphosis: cycles of life and death are connected with the nation and also the *abiku*. If Okri's major point focuses on the obsessive colonisation of nature, also the trauma of the Nigerian civil war or Biafran war (1967-1970) is transposed into a disfigured landscape, imbued with disorder, deformity, disease.

Okri's main character is born in one of the most precarious and chaotic times in the history of the African territory on the verge of becoming the modern, independent nation of Nigeria. The many events of the novel are indeed seen through the eyes of a child who straddles two worlds. The fate of the country on the eve of independence is constantly compared to that of Azaro, who has not yet decided whether he will go on living on earth.

Suffering is one of the main themes of the novel, as the wretched poverty that plagues Azaro and his family points out.

According to Olusegun Areola (1991), slums are not part of the traditional urban settlements in Yorubaland but rather are products of the colonial promotion of Nigerian urbanisation. The rapid development of urban areas under colonialism actually leads to the “disintegration of the family compounds and the rise of slum housing conditions” (202). In this sense, Okri’s representation of an urban slum in Yorubaland aims to criticize the way in which the colonial policy of Nigerian urbanisation weakens family and kinship ties that originally sustain traditional urban settlements.

In leading Azaro into the forest and showing him what “the new world” (post-independence Nigeria) will be like, Dad warns Azaro of how forests surrounding the city will be gone soon, due to the endless expansion of urban slums. Azaro’s father says to his child: “Sooner than you think there won’t be one tree standing. There will be no forest left at all. And there will be wretched houses all over the place. This is where the poor people will leave [...] This is where you will live” (Okri 1992: 34).

This prophecy suggests that Nigeria in the postcolonial era will suffer a cultural crisis as well as an ecological one. In other words, in the case of postcolonial Nigeria, the crisis of cultural hybridisation goes hand in hand with that of ecological degradation. If the expansion of urban slums is one cause of the disappearance of the forest in Nigeria, then the endless construction of roads in the name of unlimited development is another feature of the environmental deterioration (Wu 2012: 102).

The forest is identified as the boundary between the visible world and the spirit world. What Okri offers in *The Famished Road* is a redefinition of the notion of space and a representation that challenges the frontier between the visible and the invisible, between landscapes “within” and landscapes “without” (Guignery 2014). The inner spaces of the imagination are a kaleidoscopic world, fluid and shifting, in contrast with the confined area in which Azaro and his family live.

The division between inner and outer landscapes is destabilised in a novel in which the same space can be submitted to both a realistic and a fantastic treatment; in *The Famished Road* this ambivalent approach implies the author’s positioning between the European literary tradition of realism and the West African narratives based on mythology and the supernatural (Ogunsanwo 1995: 43). Being a multidimensional space, Okri’s forest is the best example of such a blurring of boundaries between inside and outside. Its edge marks the frontier between known and unknown:

The forest swarmed with unearthly beings. It was like an overcrowded marketplace. Many of them had red lights in their eyes, wisps of saffron smoke came out of their ears, and gentle green fires burned on their heads. Some were tall, others were short; some were wide, others were thin. They moved slowly. They were so numerous that they interpenetrated one another (Okri 1992: 12).

The forest is a magical “nowhere land”, where things change form, as in dreams. Also the instability of beings and the transformation from one state to another is constantly por-

trayed by Okri. Azaro finds refuge in the forest, where he collects a great variety of objects: "Sometimes I played in the forest. My favourite place was the clearing. In the afternoons the forest wasn't frightening [...] I wandered through the forest, collecting rusted padlocks, green bird-eggs, abandoned necklaces, and ritual dolls" (143). But the bush is teeming with fantastic beasts and other odd creatures, that represent Azaro's nightmares and hallucinations. He is both frightened and enchanted by these visions:

I saw a tiger with silver wings and the teeth of a bull. I saw dogs with tails of snakes and bronze paws. I saw cats with the legs of a woman, midgets with bright red bumps on their heads. [...] There was music everywhere, and dancing and celebration rose from the earth. And then birds with bright yellow and blue feathers, eyes that were like diamonds and with ugly scavenging faces, flew at me [...] (245).

Animals are ever-present in *The Famished Road*: insects, lizards, snakes as well as birds, cats and dogs, lions and jaguars; monsters and hybrids embody the motif of the metamorphosis and reveal the richness of the *abiku's* fantasy. The destruction of the forest clearly implies the collapse of the imagination, while a sense of wonder opens new possibilities of spiritual growth in the forest. Azaro's duality of vision mirrors Okri's double perspective: states of hallucination and alienation conveyed by Okri's impressionist prose reinforce the sense of physical transformation of the landscape. The narrator's voice establishes his participation in the collective consciousness of his society (Cezair-Thompson 1996: 39). The contemporary predicament of Nigeria is a critical preoccupation in Okri's narrative: it is a matter of survival and renewal, of replacing the unstable existence of the *abiku* with a more stable status. The apparently contradictory yet fluid discourse of *The Famished Road* explores conflictual relationships between colonial and postcolonial representations.

Okri draws on ancestral traditions and points to the ecological and also economical issues of the shrinking forest. His language belongs also to the technological present as the annihilation of the biodiversity is the outcome of machines cutting down titanic iroko:

In the distance I could hear the sounds of dredging, of engines, of road builders, forest clearers, and workmen chanting as they strained their muscles. Each day the area seemed different. Houses appeared where parts of the forest had been. Places where children used to play and hide were now full of sand piles and rutted with house foundations. There were signboards on trees. The world was changing and I went on wandering as if everything would always be the same (104).

This passage clearly focuses on the change that is happening in the nearby area, so immediately affecting Azaro's life. The forest and the trees are replaced by roads and houses; the children's playground is taken from them. Deforestation is represented in anthropomorphic terms: the trees scream and cry out, while their branches drip blood. Azaro reaches the edge of the forest:

I heard trees groaning as they crashed down on their neighbours. I listened to trees being felled deep in the forest and heard the steady rhythms of axes on hard, living wood.

The silence magnified the rhythm. I found a branch which seemed perfect. I broke off the long wood of the forked ends, lacerating myself on the splinter and bled (137).

The plants' groans are coupled with the pain Azaro feels when he is wounded by a branch. By acting as an unwilling torturer of a tree and suffering its pain, Azaro becomes a double of the vegetable beings that are being murdered in the woodland. The damaged nature is embodied by the trees of the forest, whose fragility questions their ancient existence. They seem great and strong but they are very easily destroyed. The bloodiness of the act of deforestation is emphasized when Azaro envisions the clearings: "In places the earth was red. We passed a tree that had been felled. Red liquid dripped from its stump as if the tree had been a murdered giant whose blood wouldn't stop flowing" (16).

Trees are personified and sap becomes blood. By identifying the various trees of Nigeria's rainforest and suggesting their diversity and density, Okri pays homage to the richness of his earth's vegetation, while at the same time denouncing its apocalyptic downfall. Okri's aesthetics is clearly rooted in the Yoruba homeland of Southwest Nigeria. This scenery, set in the 1960s (the time period of the novel), has proven true: Nigeria has the world's highest rate of deforestation, losing 55% of its primary forests between 2000 and 2005, and in Southern Nigeria, nowadays, only 4.9% of land is still covered by rainforest (Butler 2006). The spreading deforestation exposes the national inability to restore a sustainable harmony with its environment. Jonathan Highfield (2012) notes that there is a strong connection between deforestation and the lack of food portrayed in the novel: although deforestation usually means more spaces for agriculture, the situation has been different for West Africa because "a great deal of agriculture in West Africa was agroforestry, in which cultivated crops were grown alongside a variety of tree species" (144).

Okri's insistent images of deforestation spread through the novel exemplify Rob Nixon's "slow violence" and reveal a real problem of contemporary Nigeria which faces many big environmental problems due to colonialism and global capitalism (2011: 257). In addition, according to Okri's novel, the crisis is not only ecological but also cultural: the wood-cutters ignore the spiritual and magical dimensions of the forest, and the animist beliefs of indigenous people. Like their mythical counterparts, modern roads demand immense sacrifices. While the modernisation of the country is supposed to enhance progress, Okri insists on the endless repetition of a historical injustice: "I recognized the new incarnations of their recurrent clashes, the recurrence of ancient antagonisms, secret histories, festering dreams" (Okri 1002: 194). Conflicts remain unsolved. The famished road of the title of the novel does not lead to a new world but repeats colonial ways of destroying the native soil:

I heard the axes and drills in the distances. And every day the forest thinned a little. The trees I got to know so well were cut down and only their stumps, dripping sap, remained [...] Sometimes I watched the men felling trees and sometimes the companies building roads (143).

At a certain point, Azaro envisions how the world will be in a modern, urbanised future:

Skyscrapers stood high and inscrutable besides huts and zinc abodes. Bridges were being built; flyovers, half-finished, were like passageways into the air, or like future visions of a time when cars would be able to fly (113).

This passage reveals much about the process of development in the construction sector in an urban environment, showing us the progress of the road through its many stages and variations as well as contrasting the new and the old, the skyscrapers and the huts. It is noteworthy that Okri describes these developments as half-finished and half-constructed, which emphasizes a transitional period for his country.

The forest loses its war against progress: it seems that the trees, feeling that they are losing their battle with human beings, simply walk deeper into the forest:

I heard the great spirits of the land and forest talking of a temporary exile. They travelled deeper into secret spaces, weaving spells of madness round their arcane abodes to prevent humans from ever despoiling their transformative retreats from the howling feet of invaders. I saw the rising of new houses. I saw new bridges span the air (457).

The real damage is made by the contemporary modernisation much more than the previous colonial exploitation. Although Okri sets the action of the novel in the period leading to the independence of Nigeria, he reads that past from the vantage point of postcolonial disillusionment.

The new political class is clearly considered as responsible for the ongoing environmental disaster. African politicians are ruthless in their violation and abuse of the environment; the fact that they are extremely deceptive is also revealed when some of them distribute milk that cause food poisoning. It is not a case that food is involved in this process of degradation. Food is scarce and the new nation is always hungry. The replacement of the forest by infrastructures causes the decline of agroforestry and robs local people of vital resources. Food and medicine practices disappear.

The road represents the unequal balance of trade that defines African economies. It is through the character of Madame Koto that the transition from the forest to the road is captured and the allure of the global capital is represented. Her bar becomes the preferred hangout of politicians and then the food she offers changes, from peppersoup to Coca Cola; she also sells beer rather than palm wine (Costantini 2013: 97). Showing the replacement of traditional food with consumerism, Okri denounces Nigerian submission to the imperatives of the marketplace. Throughout the novel, food products originated from the forest have a positive connotation, such as dongayoro to treat illness (Highfield 2012: 150). References to alimentary practices abound in *The Famished Road*, whose plot is informed by the dynamics of feasting and fasting, nutrition and malnutrition.

The *topos* of the road which changes while crossing natural places is a symbol of the myth of progress viewed from a Yoruba perspective (Mahmutovic 2010: 5). The road embodies the obsession for modernity, technology, greed and the consequent destruction of nature. But, at the same time, it is the path into the wilderness built by Western invaders, so that it

exposes the environmental, economic and cultural damages produced by the previous colonists' penetration into Africa. Also the narrative of the "King of the Road" is included into Okri's text: it is the story of a fabulous giant that develops a monstrous appetite as a consequence of deforestation. He devours human beings and then people offer him poisoned food in order to kill him. He eats himself up until only his stomach remains, then this organ is washed away by a torrential rain (Okri 1992: 258-261). This hunger embodies colonial voracity but also the Africans' responsibility in starving their countrymen after decolonisation.

At the end of the novel, Azaro reiterates the problem of deforestation: "the forest was sleeping badly, the trees were wondering which one of them would become ghosts tomorrow" (297). Thus, the novel definitively demystifies the human history of progress that is a history of dominating nature. Through deforestation "the world became darker" (264).

In conclusion, Okri exposes the political aspect of environmentalism, and his novel not only acknowledges nature's overwhelming power but also shows a connection between environmental degradation (deforestation, floods, hurricanes, poverty, violence) and the recklessness of Nigerian and African leadership. Against such a darkening background, Okri suggests that a new awareness is needed, that seeing the world anew is indispensable. This is the last sentence of *The Famished Road*: "A dream can be the highest point of a life" (Okri 1992: 500). History is nurtured by dreams, and dreams construct reality. Azaro's artist-like vision shows that the forest in postcolonial Nigeria is disappearing, and this disappearance is not only connected with the destruction of local ecology but also with the forgetfulness of tradition, and, most of all, the loss of human imagination. Finally, what is at stake is human imagination. And the mythopoetic and visionary quality of Okri's main character is crucial. In this way, *The Famished Road* is a metaphorical act of reforestation, the reinvention of a forest of the mind.

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## Carmen Concilio

### Floating / Travelling Gardens of (Post)colonial Time

**Abstract I:** Questo saggio sui giardini galleggianti e viaggianti nella letteratura (post) coloniale contemporanea si apre con due immagini iconiche: l'isola-giardino di bio-plastica che salva Will Phantom nel mezzo di un ciclone in *I cacciatori di stelle* (Rizzoli 2008, ed. it.), della scrittrice aborigena Alexis Wright, e l'isola-giardino carnivora che non può salvare Pi dal naufragio, nel romanzo *Vita di Pi* (Piemme 2007, ed. it.), dello scrittore canadese Yann Martel. Questi giardini galleggianti e ibridi dell'Antropocene precedono i veri e propri giardini viaggianti di Michael Ondaatje e Amitav Ghosh. I quali, rispettivamente, nel romanzo *L'ora prima dell'alba* (Garzanti 2012, ed. it) e nella trilogia della *Ibis* (Neri Pozza 2008-2015) raccontano la storia di alcuni giardini botanici in Asia, e del trasferimento (*displacement*) di piante e semi, seguendo le implicazioni storiche ed economiche del colonialismo. Poiché, dopo tutto, i giardini botanici coinvolgono un senso molto particolare di "cura" (Robert Pogue Harrison 2009), e incarnano precisi disegni imperialisti di matrice scientifica ed economica (Brockway 2002; Johnson 2011).

**Abstract II:** This essay on travelling gardens of (post)colonial time opens with two iconic images of floating gardens in contemporary postcolonial literature: Will Phantom's bio-garbage rafter, which saves him in the midst of a cyclone in *Carpentaria* (2008), by the Aboriginal author Alexis Wright, and Pi's carnivore island-organism in *Life of Pi* (2001), which cannot save him from his shipwreck, by Canadian writer Yan Martel. These floating, hybrid gardens of the Anthropocene precede the real travelling gardens of both Michael Ondaatje's *The Cat's Table* (2011) and Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilog*y (2008-2015), two authors who both indirectly and directly tell the story of botanical gardens in Asia, and of plant and seed smuggling and transplantation ("displacement") also hinting at their historical and economic colonial implications. For, after all, botanical gardens imply a very specific version of care, *Cura* (Robert Pogue Harrison 2009), while embodying a precise, imperial scientific and economic project (Brockway 2002; Johnson 2011).

In this essay I would like to approach the topicality of gardens in the literature of the (post)colonial world, and in doing so, I would like to start with a couple of iconic images. The first image surfaces from one of those novels that Franco Moretti would define as *opera-mondo*: *Carpentaria* (2008), by the Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright, Miles Franklin award winner in 2007. The novel

displays the almost unique dream-landscape of the sweet-waters lagoon and the sea-washed Gulf of Carpentaria, with its red claypan and green mangroves, with its dusty plains and winding rivers of turbulent waters that flood the area in the humid season. It also displays a Multinational Mining Company which is polluting the area with plastic garbage, while pumping natural resources as well as economic profits out of the country: all things blasphemous on that Aborigines' sacred ground. Towards the end of the novel, Will Phantom, a young eco-activist who is constantly boycotting the Mine with acts of arson, saves his life from the corporation's thugs and from a hurricane, when at sea, thanks to a very extravagant type of floating garden:

The island home was, give or take, a kilometre in length after the final unhinging of those parts which, after bidding, Adios!, violently crashed to the ocean floor. Flocks of birds came and went. [...] covered the entire surface in a thick fertilising habitat, where over time, astonishing plants grew in profusion. [...] A swarm of bees arrived. [...] All manner of life marooned in this place would sprout to vegetate the wreckage. A peanut that had floated for perhaps a decade landed one day and grew so profusely it became a tangle of vine-like stems reaching out over the surface to find crevices in which to sink. A single rotting tomato containing an earthworm settled in the newspaper-lined base of a plywood fruit box, and grew. Within a season, tomato plants inhabited the island like weeds. The worm multiplied into hundreds and thousands of worms. The worms spread like wildfire into every pokey hole of rotting rubbish and soon enough, a deep, nutrient-rich humus covered the entire island. Well! What have you? Peach, apricot, almonds, all grew. Guava, figs – fruit that came with the birds, stayed, and grew into beautiful trees. A wasted banana root survived for months in the sea until it settled on the island where it sent up one big fat shoot after another, in between a mango tree and the figs, then drooped with the weight of large bunches of fruits. [...] He was a practical man in a practical man's paradise. He had food, shelter, and his catchments of fresh water were always full to the brim (Wright 2008: 494-495).

Will is without any doubt a novel Robinson on a happy deserted island. He builds a shelter, he gathers drinking water, he creates lines for fishing and survives thanks to his Aboriginal expertise about nature. He desperately hopes to be saved or reach the shore. Only, the island is a hybrid of biological self-sustaining life and a raft of plastic, wood and other debris of civilization. Half anthropic, half natural, the floating and precarious island is the perfect product of the Anthropocene and perfect definition of the term, that is to say, a man-made material culture that produces new geo-garbage-bio-morphic formations: "a floating island of junk" (Wright 2008: 502).

The second image that concerns an extravagant experience on a floating garden-island is to be found in the novel *Life of Pi* (2001) by Yann Martel, Man Booker Prize winner in 2002, and in the film derived from it by Ang Lee (2012), winner of the Golden Globe for its originality. Pi is a young Indian boy, surviving a shipwreck of a cargo liner, carrying his parents, his brother and the animals of their private Zoo<sup>1</sup>. The liner becomes a modern mock-Noah's

<sup>1</sup> Zoos are part of an (Imperial) network of "animal trading", too, and of a "regime of extractive capitalism". The novel starts with this act of violence against animals, as they are transported on board a ship, for too long

ark. Pi, his family and their animals were moving from Pondicherry, in southern India, to Canada. After months of adventurous floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean on a life-boat together with a Bengal tiger to be tamed and watched closely, Pi sees a green island, and soon thinks it is a mirage. Then he realizes it is a real green garden:

In the near distance I saw trees. I did not react. I was certain it was an illusion that a few blinks would make disappear.

The trees remained. In fact, they grew to be a forest. They were part of a low-lying island. I pushed myself up. [...] The trees were beautiful. They were like none I had ever seen before. They had a pale bark, and equally distributed branches that carried an amazing profusion of leaves. These leaves were brilliantly green. [...] The island had no soil. Not that the trees stood in water. Rather, they stood in what appeared to be a dense mass of vegetation, as sparkling green as the leaves. [...] this island was a chimera, a play of the mind. [...] an island, any island, however strange, would have been very good to come upon (Martel 2001: 256-257).

Its shore could not be called a beach, there being neither sand nor pebbles, and there was no pounding of surf either, since the waves that fell upon the island simply vanished into its porosity. From a ridge some three hundred yards inland, the island sloped to the sea and, forty or so yards into it, fell off precipitously, disappearing from sight into the depths of the Pacific, surely the smallest continental shelf on record. [...]. The fabric of the island seemed to be an intricate, tightly webbed mass of tube-shaped seaweed, in diameter a little thicker than two fingers. What a fanciful island, I thought. [...]. The smell of vegetation. I gasped, after months of nothing but salt-water-bleached smell, this reek of vegetable organic matter was intoxicating (Martel 2001: 258).

The monstrous, fictional island is a hybrid, too. Partly vegetal, partly carnivore, it shows both an exotic nature, for carnivore plants are usually to be found in tropical climates, and a kind of genetic mutation, that could well be the product of human activities affecting nature. Pi immediately understands that he has to leave that inhospitable and hostile island, preferring the company of a carnivore tiger to the permanence in a whole vegetal carnivore island-organism.

Let us consider that what happens here is not so different from what Amitav Ghosh sees as the epitome of the encounter between a human and another being:

It was a shock of this kind, I imagine, that the makers of *The Empire Strikes Back* had in mind when they conceived of the scene in which Han Solo lands the Millennium Falcon on what he takes to be an asteroid – but only to discover that he has entered the gullet of a sleeping space monster (Ghosh 2016: 3).

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a journey, and anyway they all drown. Then, the novel explores the possibility of “friendship” between the two only survivors of the shipwreck, the tiger, with a man’s name, Richard Parker, and Pi. Although he manages to save the tiger and they both end up stranded on the shores of South America, the tiger immediately disappears into the thickest forest and Pi is left desperate at the idea that the tiger has been indifferent to his friendship all the time. Animals in *The Life of Pi* would deserve a thorough treatment, had not this essay be specifically devoted to vegetal life.



Fig. 1. "Floating Park"

Both literary floating islands are situated in the Pacific Ocean, the largest Ocean on earth and the most mysterious. It is well known that in the Pacific there is also the largest swirling garbage patch, a circling island mainly made of entangled plastic, that is slowly dissolving into micro-particles, dispersing and trickling down, towards the bottom of the sea, with still unknown consequences on marine fish and birds, and therefore also on human alimentation.

The two floating garden-islands met by the two characters in the afore mentioned novels are porous self-sustaining ecosystems which may be considered as variations on this theme of monstrous aggregations of both un-disposable, polluting anthropic matter and biological matter that are the new hybrids of our present and future. Of course, at a macro-narrative level, those novels are also re-writings and variations of the theme of Robinsonian adventures. Maybe, those floating islands are the new gardens of our Anthropocene: aesthetically ambiguous the first one, yet usable, beautiful and alluring the second one, yet deadly dangerous.

Actually, such a project about floating artificial islands does exist in the Rotterdam harbour and it is called "Recycled Park". In 2016 a project was launched to entrap plastic litter from the river, before it could get into the North Sea. Thus, with the moulding of the plastic into hexagonal bowl-like bases filled with humus and plants, the river has seen the birth of floating islands of bio-plastic-garbage gardens<sup>2</sup>.

The first novel, *Carpentaria* is engaged with social, political and environmental concerns, for it explores the world of the Aborigines at war with both white Australians and with international multinationals. Both hostile forces are competing in (sacred) land grabbing, racist policies, and political and environmental injustice. *Life of Pi* is more of a *diver-*

<sup>2</sup> See official website: <http://recycledpark.com/news.html> (consulted on 20/06/2017).

*tissement*, for it is based on the post-modern model of the absolutely (un)reliable narrator and on his (in)credible adventures. Yet, it explores the possibility of survival on equal terms between a human and an animal, a man and a tiger, becoming part of the Oceanic food chain, at least for a while. Here, too, Amitav Ghosh's words echo in our minds:

Who can forget those moments when something that seems inanimate turns out to be vitally, even dangerously alive? As, for example, when an arabesque in the pattern of a carpet is revealed to be a dog's tail, which, if stepped upon, could lead to a nipped ankle? Or when we reach for an innocent looking vine and find it to be a worm or a snake? When a harmlessly drifting log turns out to be a crocodile? (Ghosh 2016: 3).

Both Will and Pi stick for a while to their marine floating gardens. Will Phantom luckily finds his island of bio-morphic garbage for he is hanging on some of its solid parts and comfortably settles on it. Pi, instead, sees the green island as a hope of salvation, but he is soon to be disillusioned.

The two well-known writers, Michael Ondaatje and Amitav Ghosh, although in different ways, have also explored travelling gardens in their works. Yet, the travelling gardens of both Ondaatje and Ghosh are not innocent enterprises. Rather, they show how gardens might become important scientific incubators at the service of the British Empire, promoting capitalist imperialism, economic profits and vegetal and human displacement, diaspora and environmental pillage, exploitation and systematic irreversible changes in the ecosystem.

One could agree with the critic Robert Pogue Harrison who claims that we humans are inevitably and "naturally" – but one could also say "culturally" – attracted by gardens. The scholar's poignant essay on gardens and the human condition introduces the opposition between history – "its rage, death, and endless suffering" – and human "religious impulses, our poetic and utopian imagination, our mortal ideals, our metaphysical projections, our storytelling, our aesthetic transfiguration of the real, our passion for games, our delight in nature" (Harrison 2009: ix). Even more daringly, he claims that:

More often than not in Western culture it has been the garden, whether real or imaginary, that has provided sanctuary from the frenzy and tumult of history. [...] such gardens may be as far away as Gilgamesh's garden of the gods or the Greeks' Isles of the Blessed or Dante's Garden of Eden at the top of the mountain of Purgatory; or they may be on the margins of the early city, like Plato's Academy or the Garden School of Epicurus or the villas of Boccaccio's *Decameron*; they may even open up in the middle of the city, like the Jardin du Luxembourg in Paris or the Villa Borghese in Rome, or the homeless gardens in New York City. [...]. Gardens stand as a kind of haven, if not as a kind of heaven.

Yet human gardens, however self-enclosed their world may be, invariably take their stand in history, if only as a counterforce to history's deleterious drives (Harrison 2009: ix).

Harrison goes on to identify in the mythological figure of Cura the ancestor of Adam and Eve. Cura in crossing a river took some clay and moulded a shape, then Jupiter passed

by and infused spirit in it. They started disputing on who should give it a name, Earth stood up to claim her right to give it a name for it was made of her own substance. Saturn, who was called to act as arbiter declared that Jupiter should have the spirit back after the death of the creature; Earth should have the body back once the creature was dead, while Care had the right to name it for she moulded it first. Thus the name was *homo*, named after *humus* (earth) (Harrison 2009: 6). It is interesting to notice that the garden-island that enables Will to survive in *Carpentaria* has got some humus, thanks to the birds' excrements, while the inhospitable green island in *Life of Pi*, where Pi hopes to be able to survive, does not contain humus at all.

Then, Harrison proceeds by affirming that: "the fall from Eden handed Adam and Eve over to a regime of care and the so-called *vita activa*" (Harrison 2009: 9), of labour, work and action, borrowing the formula from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1998). Thus, gardens become proofs of our biophilia and chlorophilia, our need for enclosed spaces of repose, but also of creative expression. Harrison maintains that "if humankind has to entrust its future to anyone, it should entrust it to the gardener, or to those who, like the gardener, invest themselves in a future of which they will in part be the authors" (Harrison 2009: 37).

On the one hand, Harrison speaks of disinterested acts of gardening, which exclude profit, interest and commerce: "domestication, as well as the gathering and selection of species to obtain types with exploitable characteristics, are practices that come to fruition only after several generations, hence they cannot be explained by the need to procure alimentation or other immediate benefits" (Harrison 2009: 40).

On the other hand, botanical gardens combine "the pursuit of science and the aesthetic display of nature", the scholar Nuala C. Johnson claims (2011: 2). The botanical garden is, instead, in Lucile Brockway's terms "a historic institution with worldwide connections whose nineteenth-century expansion resulted in a greatly accelerated process of plant transfers with consequent ecological, economic, social, and political changes" (Brockway 1979: 449). After all, Nuala C. Johnson reports: "Gardens also attempted to gather as many plants from around the world as possible" (Johnson 2011: 4).

In spite of the fact that Harrison analyses only classical gardens for one's retreat and pleasure, indeed there are gardens created for profit and indeed there is a literature that deals with them. When thinking of the Royal Botanical Gardens of colonial time, for instance, one cannot avoid mentioning Virginia Woolf's description of *Kew Gardens* (1919), which combines a eulogy of pleasurable sites with hints at exploitation of tropical plants. Here, the author guides us readers to admire its flower beds in July. Woolf just makes a passing reference to the greenhouses where the palm trees and plants from the hottest climates are preserved: "the glass roofs of the palm house shone as if a whole market full of shiny green umbrellas had opened in the sun" (Woolf 1991: 95).

Similarly, an old man, one of the passers by "began talking about the forests of Uruguay which he had visited hundreds of years ago. [...] he could be heard murmuring about forests of Uruguay blanketed with the wax petals of tropical roses, nightingales, sea beaches, mermaids and women drowned at sea [...]" (Woolf 1991: 93).

Virginia Woolf allows herself only this reference to the tropics, while those palm trees – that after all characterize Kew Gardens exactly as a Royal Botanical Garden of the colonial

time – took a long journey, similar to the one recounted by Michael Ondaatje in his novel *The Cat's Table* (2011).

In that novel, three boys are invited to look not so much at a floating garden, but rather at a proper travelling garden. In their teens, on their voyage from Sri Lanka to England, they are led by Mr Daniels, one of the passengers and a botanist (with whom they share the cat's table), into the bowels of the ship. They all climb down metal ladders, and meet locked doors, they feel the draughts of air fanned by turbines and hear sounds of water being de-salinated after being drawn out of the sea, and then:

Reaching the bottom level of the hold, Mr Daniels set off into the darkness. We followed a path of dim lights that hung just above our heads. [...]. Then we saw a golden light. It was more than that. As we came closer it was a field of colours. This was the garden Mr Daniels was transporting to Europe. [...]. How big was this garden? We were never certain, because not all of it was ever fully lit at the same time, for the grow lights that simulated sunshine turned on and off independently. And there must have been other sections we never saw during that journey (Ondaatje 2011: 52).

This incredible garden hits both characters and readers as a surprise. To the boys, it represents one of the steps of initiation rites to life turning them from adolescents into young adults. The setting is the early Fifties, not the heyday of colonialism, when botanic gardens and stations were flourishing in Britain's overseas colonies from St. Vincent in the Caribbean to Christchurch in New Zealand, reaching a total of 130 establishments at the height of Britain's empire:

This flourishing of botanical sites and agricultural stations reflected a demand for empirical and theoretical knowledge about the earth's flora and in particular the development of economic botany in the service of widening imperial interests. They were also a response, however, to a burgeoning Enlightenment ideology of 'improvement' which as Richard Drayton has observed was 'a concern shaping activity at the empire's periphery as well at its centre' (Johnson 2011: 15).

Here, economic profits are involved too. And Kew (1759) "came to be regarded as the nucleus of Britain's plant exchange network and the central node in the practice of economic botany" (Johnson 2011: 6). Thus, Ondaatje, too, shows how Europe seems to maintain its interest in exotic plants and in new medicaments:

'Don't touch!' Mr Daniels said, pulling down my outstretched hand. 'That's *Strychnos nux vomica*. It has an alluring smell. [...] It's a strychnine. These with their flowers facing down are angel's trumpet. The ones facing up, wickedly beautiful, are devil's trumpet. And here's *Scrophulariaceae*, the snapdragon, also deceptively attractive. Even if you just sniff these, you will feel woozy' (Ondaatje 2011: 52).

Mr Daniels manages to surprise the boys, mesmerising them with his knowledge. Although he is a loose personification of Care/Cura, they end up calling him "Noah". He does



not satisfy completely their curiosity about poisons, but he provides them with some leaves they can roll into a bidi and smoke, in spite of their being eleven years old. His botany lesson becomes even more fun:

He seemed suddenly keen on lecturing us about palms from all over the world. He imitated how they stood and how they swayed, depending on heritage or breed, how they would bend with the wind in their submissiveness. He kept showing us various palm postures until he had us laughing. [...] 'Do the palm trees again, Uncle!' And Mr Daniels proceeded to distinguish for us more of the various postures. 'This of course is the talipot, the umbrella palm,' he said. 'You get your toddy from it, and jiggery. She moves this way.' Then he imitated a royal palm from the Cameroons, which grew in freshwater swamps. Then something from the Azores, followed by a slender-trunked one from New Guinea, his arms becoming its elongated fronds. He compared how they shifted in the wind, some fussily, some with just sidelong twist of the trunk, so they could face the strongest winds with their narrowest edge. 'Aerodynamics [...] very important. Trees are smarter than humans. Even a lily is better than a human. Trees are like whippets' (Ondaatje 2011: 54).

Another interesting example might be the botanical garden at Leiden:

In the early decades plants were obtained through the Dutch East India Company from its trading posts and possessions in south Asia and thus many plants of exotic provenance as well as of medicinal value were in the collection. The guide to this and other early gardens indicates a desire to expand the reservoir of plants from around the world, and, in some instances, to have the four quarters represent the four continents of the earth, illustrating their diverse bounty. [...]. As these botanical spaces were developing in Europe, colonial equivalents were concomitantly beginning to be established in Europe's overseas possessions. Imperial gardens, which could meet medicinal needs, would also importantly nurture economic botany and a move towards the development of a complex network of plant exchange between the colonies and home (Johnson 2011: 5-6).

Reinforcing this view, Brockway detects some historical cases, when new plants are uprooted, dislocated, transported and transplanted from one continent to another. The case of tea, a British monopoly but only produced in China till 1834, is exemplary.

The demand for tea was high, but how was the company to pay for it without losing precious silver to China? The answer was found in opium.

Opium grown in Bengal under the auspices of the British East India Company and auctioned by the company in Calcutta was exchanged in Canton for Chinese tea, which was carried in company ships to Britain. The trade was lucrative but dangerous, because opium was contraband in China. It had to be carried out through intermediaries – private British traders and Chinese smugglers – and the trade suffered interruptions by the Chinese authorities who were trying to suppress the use of opium (Brockway 1979: 455).

Thus, a great plant transfer occurred after the Opium War (1839-1842) at the hands of plant collector Robert Fortune who brought 2000 tea plants and 17.000 tea seeds from China to India. From that moment on, tea should not be bought from China, but could grow on British soil (Brockway 1979: 455).

This is just an example of the implications of plant transfers in colonial history. For, according to Nuala C. Johnson, it is true that:

Drawing on post-colonial perspectives, scholars have treated botanic gardens as 'contact zones' or hybrid spaces where links between European science and its empire have been arbitrated and where the conventional leitmotif of centre-periphery relationships challenged. [...]. This mastery over the intellectual domain of natural history was matched by a European hegemony over the geographical terrain of the globe through the acquisition (formally and informally) of overseas territories (Johnson 2011: 7).

It is exactly in this context that Amitav Ghosh sets his *Ibis* trilogy, which among other things also provides a history of the South Asian botanic gardens of the British Empire, also portraying some incredible floating and travelling gardens. He places there a young French botanist, who grew up in India in an adoptive family. When the British Mr Frederic Penrose sailed on the *Redruth* to the island of Mauritius to pay a visit to one of the most legendary Botanic Gardens, The Pamplemousses Garden, he received a shock for he only found "a wild and tangled muddle of greenery" (Ghosh 2011: 34). Since the death of Sir Joseph Banks, the last curator of Kew Gardens, Britain's own botanical gardens had fallen into neglect. Yet, Penrose hoped to find some rare plants there, in this garden where "African creepers were at war with Chinese trees, [...] where Indian shrubs and Brazilian vines were locked in a mortal embrace. This was a work of Man, a botanical Babel" (Ghosh 2011: 35).

Once Penrose arrived there, he was surprised in finding a man at work transplanting a little sibling of *Euphorbia*, which he was hardly able to recognize, taking it for a cactus. And when the young man showed him his botanical drawings, he immediately understood the boy was a woman in disguise: Paulette Lambert, the secret caretaker of the garden, this Adam/Eve in disguise, personification of Cura and daughter of Pierre Lambert, a French botanist and inventor of glass nurseries. Thus, Paulette is offered the job of her life: "A gardening job – except that it'd be on a ship. Ee'd have eer own cabin, all fitted out for a young lady" (Ghosh 2011: 56):

But it wasn't any of this that set the *Redruth* apart from every other sailing vessel: it was the greenery on her decks. Plants were not of course an uncommon sight on sailships. [...]. But the *Redruth*'s stock of flora extended far beyond the usual half dozen pots: her decks were stacked also with a great number of 'Wardian cases'. These were a new invention: glass fronted boxes with adjustable sides, they were in effect miniature greenhouses. [...]. The greenest part of the ship was the quarter-deck, here stacked along the deck rails, and around the base of the mizzen-mast, were rows of pots and cases. To provide additional protection for the plants, Fitcher had designed

an ingenious arrangement of movable awnings; these could be adjusted, as desired, to provide shade, sunlight, and protection from rough weather (Ghosh 2011: 72-73).

Plants were provided with plenty of fresh water and also composting was practised on board in order to produce plant nutrition. What may look like an eccentric ship, was in fact an efficient machine for profit. With its rudimentary technology, this ship is not very different from the modern liner of Ondaatje's novel. Both are meant to feed the botanical gardens of Britain, which were responsible for plant transfers and seed trade all around the world, for the institutions of "cash crops" like those of rubber, sisal and much else.

Kew Gardens, Lucile Brockway observes, had a crucial role in this project of "successful botanical imperialism" and promoted the transfer and development of two new plantation crops of exceptional value, cinchona and rubber. Kew Gardens sent plant collectors to the forests of South America to gather seeds and siblings of the cinchona tree, from whose bark quinine, used against malaria, was extracted. The seeds and siblings were shipped from South America to Kew, where a special heated greenhouse was erected, and from there they were trans-shipped to Asia, that is to India, Ceylon and Mauritius. But the Dutch took over the monopoly of cinchona from Java where they established very successful cash crop plantations. All this was possible thanks to indentured labour, new forms of slavery and the work of convicts. As a consequence, the South American market collapsed in favour of a plantation industry totally controlled by Europe, which produced a drug for European consumers only. The production of rubber underwent a similar destiny. It was one more typical resource of South America, that Kew Gardens together with the India Office took control of around 1837. Henry Wickham, a plant collector, managed to smuggle 70.000 *Hevea* seeds from Brazil. In Kew Gardens, writes Lucile Brockway:

Orchids were turned out of the green houses at Kew to make way for the rubber seeds. Of those that germinated, nineteen hundred young trees were sent to the Peradenya Gardens on Ceylon, which sent twenty-two specimens on to Singapore (Brockway 1979: 458).

The botanic garden of Ceylon was crucial for the study and development of such a crop. Director Henry Ridley, also called "Rubber Ridley" or "Mad Ridley," improved gathering techniques and the treatment of rubber. In Ceylon rubber replaced tea bushes, the same happened in Malay and soon the South Asian production and profits on rubber overtook the South American production. In the turn of few years Ceylon became the capital of coffee plantations. Plant migrations brought cheap labour force migrations in the form of indentured labour. Tamils worked in the plantations of Ceylon, while Chinese coolies were brought to Malay. After these enterprises, Kew Gardens had no direct influence on the smuggling of seeds and plants, but it remained a scientific authoritative source of information. Thus, its bulletins on the Mexican sisal industry immediately triggered interest in this cultivation and set the Caribbean islands as new large-scale producers of sisal fibres. All these types of activities are in line with what Robert Pogue Harrison calls the paradox of our age: "Thus we find ourselves in the paradoxical situation of seeking to re-create Eden

by ravaging the garden itself – the garden of the biosphere on the one hand and the garden of human culture on the other” (Harrison 2009: 166).

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**Maria Grazia Dongu**

### **Natura e morte al tempo della guerra secondo Lawrence**

**Abstract I:** Mentre la propaganda pubblicizzava la Grande Guerra come una lotta metafisica contro il Male, l'evento epocale parve ben presto per gli inglesi un presagio della morte della civiltà occidentale. Immagini di morte ricorrono ossessivamente nel racconto "England, my England" di D. H. Lawrence. La morte di Egbert rappresenta la morte della Vecchia Inghilterra, legata ai ritmi della natura e alla civiltà dei *cottages*, ma anche il fallimento degli intellettuali, incapaci di creare un linguaggio del dissenso che possa sfidare la propaganda. In chiusa, la campagna è abbandonata da tutti i personaggi, turbata dall'azione delle macchine di guerra ed Egbert muore.

**Abstract II:** While the propaganda language strived to promote the Great War as a fight against evil forces, the event loomed soon above English people as an anticipation of the death of Western civilization. Images of death recur in the short story "England, my England" by D. H. Lawrence. Egbert's death stands for the death of Old England and its value system, but also for the intellectuals' failure to speak out and mould a new language, which could defy the propaganda. In the end, the rural world is abandoned by the characters. Egbert embraces dissolution as a relief from the agony of his own world.

### **Morte della natura, morte dell'Inghilterra nella cultura primo novecentesca**

Vi sono immagini ricorrenti nella propaganda e nella poesia pre-bellica che alludono alla guerra come ad una gioiosa celebrazione della vita, nei suoi aspetti sentiti allora come britannici: la realtà delle campagne verdi e dei *cottages*, con il suo armonico respiro, in cui l'uomo trovava facilmente un suo posto e le ragioni del suo essere. Lo scoppio della prima guerra mondiale non fu vissuto in Gran Bretagna come l'avverarsi dell'incubo della fine del mondo conosciuto, ma più che altro, con imberbe esultanza, come la possibilità di protrarre una festosa scampagnata in terre altrui, per poi far rapidamente ritorno a casa, riadagiarsi nei suoni, colori, odori conosciuti, riannodando i fili di una storia che si voleva narrare ripetendo uno stesso archetipo. Lucio Ceva, nel commentare una comune descrizione in letteratura dei mesi precedenti l'entrata in guerra della Gran Bretagna, nota come sia "significativo che si sia sentito il bisogno di attribuire alla natura la cortesia di spremere, alla vigilia della tempesta, le sue essenze più delicate e rassicuranti" (2005: 93).

In realtà, le certezze tenute insieme con fatica nei periodi precedenti, vittoriano ed edoardiano, si erano frante presto contro l'immane tragedia della guerra, che aveva turbato il

quieto vivere delle campagne, privandole di uomini, prima di tutto, e, nel Sud, propagando echi del suo angoscioso rumore. La guerra si era rivelata non un breve e allegro passatempo, ma un'incontrollabile macchina, pensata e voluta soprattutto da un vorace processo di industrializzazione, lo stesso che aveva di fatto modificato modi di vita arcaici, cui si continuavano ad applicare lessemi rassicuranti (pace/idillio/solidarietà/onestà/vita), in contrasto con l'ombra proiettata da nuovi sistemi alienanti, tipici della città. In quel punto della Storia d'Europa, "[h]orror fiction and real terror coincided, and the same audience read and reacted to both" (Tropp 1990: 2), mentre il *romance*, le ballate, la musica popolare, erano la voce di regioni remote, che non potevano narrarsi se non al passato, perché del passato non volevano essere che rassicurante riproposizione.

La frizione fra generi è evidente in "Glory of Women" di Sassoon (*Cambridge Magazine*, 8 December 1917), nella cui prima parte compaiono in larga evidenza termini usuali nelle storie romanzate di eroi, che le donne applicano a soggetti che solo con dolorosa finzione li accettano: sono i non-eroi della prima guerra mondiale, il cui prosastico e crudo vocabolario erompe nella seconda parte della poesia, come un'efficace denuncia della menzogna del linguaggio della propaganda. La natura non è amica, né madre: è il fango imbrattato di sangue, che nasconde il volto dell'ucciso.

L'alleanza con la natura, la terra, il villaggio, la comunità solidale e conoscibile, si rompe ben prima della catastrofe della guerra, ma questo evento l'enfatizza in modo tale da richiedere un nuovo linguaggio, nuove parole per dire il dolore della rottura di vecchi patti e il disagio a vivere una conflittualità perenne, in cui i valori della società rurale sono divenuti disprezzabili e pericolosi per la sopravvivenza propria e della propria famiglia, antitetici rispetto a quelli maschi, propagandati ed esaltati dalla guerra. La guerra avrebbe dovuto, a leggere certi anticipatori scritti edoardiani e la propaganda, curare dalla decadenza fisica e degradazione morale le classi lavoratrici e la *middle class*, eliminando i più deboli o rendendoli uomini, coraggiosi, fieri. Al loro rientro questi avrebbero rivitalizzato una nazione che si era eccessivamente femminilizzata, perdendo forza fisica e morale. Al contrario, gli uomini rientrarono spezzati da una guerra meccanizzata in parte, in parte combattuta corpo a corpo, che desensibilizzava o rendeva più permeabili al dolore. Difficile fu il loro reinserimento nella società e parca la loro forza di rinnovamento. Emergeva durante il periodo di belligeranza, ed anche alla fine delle ostilità, la forza delle donne e il loro attivismo, con un ribaltamento delle etichette generalmente associate ai due sessi (Meyer 2009: 3).

Le opposizioni campagna *vs* città, pace *vs* guerra, patrioti inglesi che proteggono le donne e i bambini *vs* belgi, le cui città e famiglie sono distrutte ad opera dei tedeschi, sono presenti in un poster, che apparve nel 1918, 'The Hun and the Home'. Il poster è composto da un'immagine bucolica della campagna inglese, cui fa da contrappunto un paesaggio belga urbano, devastato dalle truppe degli invasori. Le parole a commento contrappongono con parallelismo la sicurezza del territorio rurale inglese e la desolazione della guerra in città (Todd 2014: 137).

La ricorrenza di temi, immagini, parole, in testi diversi aiuta a meglio comprendere quanto natura-uomo-donna-nazione siano al centro di una ridefinizione del mondo e dei rapporti fondanti in esso, durante e nel periodo immediatamente successivo al termine della prima guerra mondiale. Come ha notato Williams (1973), la città è un testo in parte incom-

prensibile e intraducibile, mentre la campagna non solo era leggibile, prevedibile, nella scansione rituale e ciclica delle stagioni ed attività, ma anche conoscibile, grazie alla stratificata narrazione che la letteratura inglese ne aveva proposto. Non è un caso che nella propaganda, nella letteratura, e nell'immaginario collettivo, l'Inghilterra rurale sia idealizzata come "a powerful antithesis to the geography and war horrors of Flanders" (Neal 2009: 26), e come finisca per rappresentare *tout court* la nazione, un senso di *Englishness*, presente ancor oggi secondo gli studiosi. Come dice Joanna Trollope in *The Sunday Telegraph*, e riporta Sarah Neal, non si è ancora esaurita la forza simbolica del *countryside* quale luogo del contatto con la natura, dell'aggregazione sociale armonica, riconoscibile, rispecchiante altro ordine (31).

Due opere così diverse come la poesia "Soldier" di Rupert Brooke e "England my England" di D. H. Lawrence sono testimonianza degli esiti del contatto fra la realtà e la finzione idealizzata, fra la guerra e il mondo idillico delle campagne. Nel primo caso, per mantenere viva la sognante immagine dell'Inghilterra, la guerra va esclusa dal vocabolario, benché sottilmente le sue ragioni, non scevre da calcoli economici e di affermazione nazionalista, emergano proprio nel momento in cui l'individuo, il soldato, si smaterializza, perdendo la sua corporeità. In "England, my England", un giardiniere divenuto suo malgrado soldato, decide di perdersi nella guerra, perché esiliato dal suo idillio nella campagna segnata da una storia antica, assediato dalla civiltà del profitto, colpito a morte dalla disciolta solidarietà coniugale ben prima che dai tedeschi al fronte.

La morte come dissoluzione di sé nella natura, sia essa rappresentata come affermazione della nazione, oppure evanescenza dell'individuo e resa alla Storia, è l'immagine al centro di questo scritto, presente nei due testi appena citati, l'uno controluce dell'altro. In ogni caso, viene narrata un'esperienza di dismembramento e dispersione del sé, o in una più ampia idea di nazione e universalità, o nella consapevolezza di un cambiamento epocale che trascende l'individuo e la guerra fra nazioni, e rende perdente un'identità nella letteratura viva a dispetto dell'inesorabile contaminazione dei paesaggi rurali, già tema nel Dickens, per esempio, di *Hard Times* (1854). L'Inghilterra di cui alcuni romanzi profetizzano la perpetuazione è quella rurale, fedele alle sue tradizioni, cultura e riti, "a true England constructed 'on the basis of its aversion to the real one'" (Parrinder 2006: 294): la nascita di un bimbo sottolinea spesso la resilienza di un mondo che non cede alle sfide e agli orrori della modernità, quasi ad esorcizzare il senso di fine che percorre alcune opere letterarie di fine Ottocento, del periodo edoardiano, e della stessa *short story* lawrenciana che qui si analizzerà.

Lawrence, studioso di Hardy, lettore di Forster e Wells, in *The Rainbow* pare credere ottimisticamente che sia possibile una ricostruzione dell'idea di *Englishness*, della campagna descritta da Shakespeare, Milton, Fielding e George Eliot, che forse avrebbe potuto coesistere con l'industrializzazione, come nel Nottinghamshire natale, ove i minatori, non esposti alla letteratura, alla meccanizzazione, vivevano forti sentimenti di solidarietà, di riconoscimento e apprezzamento del proprio ruolo, e un senso della bellezza che era valore in sé, non monetizzabile, né simbolo di *status* (Lawrence & Boulton 2006: 289). Come Lawrence dice nel suo saggio, gli uomini amavano la campagna e amavano rifugiarsi, lontano dal gretto materialismo delle loro donne: "Very often, [they] loved [their] garden. And very often, [they] had a genuine love of the beauty of flowers" (290). Il racconto al passato è contrapposto all'alienazione del presente, poiché, come già aveva notato Hardy la campagna era

stata inevitabilmente contaminata dall'espandersi dell'industrializzazione, il vecchio ordine posto in discussione, la lettura del mondo confusa, nel contatto con modelli alternativi inconciliabili (Williams 1973: 166).

Come osserva Giulia Pissarello, gli stessi elenchi di antonimi vittoriani strutturano tanta narrativa lawrenciana: "Nature/Culture, Life/Death, Country/Town, Life/Intellect, Agrarian society/Industrial" (2010). Ciò che contraddistingue Lawrence è una maggiore consapevolezza della salvaguardia della natura e di ciò che rappresenta, dei danni inflitti ad essa da un'industrializzazione accelerata e non controllata se non dal profitto, i cui esiti svuotano ("dishearten"), privano di coraggio, speranza nel futuro, l'uomo. In "Nottingham and the Mining Countryside", la ripetizione martellante dei poliptoti "ugly", "ugliness", con riferimento alle ferite inferte al paesaggio rurale, e all'architettura moderna, ai rapporti sociali, alle ideologie diffuse, esprime la brutalità di forze che hanno reso l'uomo dimentico di sé stesso e della propria integrità (Lawrence & Boulton 2006: 290). La morte della natura e l'alienazione dell'uomo sono indissolubilmente legate.

### **"England my England": rappresentazione di una vita, profezia di una morte**

La *short story* di D. H. Lawrence allude sin dal titolo ad un'entità geograficamente e culturalmente circoscritta. L'aggettivo possessivo in posizione mediana rispetto al sostantivo, oltre a ripetere il ritmo rassicurante di una nota ballata della tradizione popolare, indica l'inglobamento del sé entro una piccola nazione, che non coincide con la Gran Bretagna, l'unione politica che entrerà in guerra e nella cui politica il protagonista, come vedremo, non crede, ma con l'Inghilterra del Sud. Questa, tuttavia, si rivelerà composta di due parti antagoniste, Londra e il *countryside*, due poli di attrazione verso cui diversamente sono attratti i protagonisti: il movimento oscillatorio fra spazi struttura l'intera narrazione. La sicurezza del legame identitario verrà posta severamente alla prova sino alla rescissione dell'io del protagonista maschile dal proprio corpo in terra straniera, come atto ultimo di un progressivo esilio dalla propria matrice culturale e l'ammissione del fallimento di un progetto di preservazione e conservazione. Giunti al termine della lettura, non si potrà non chiedersi se l'orgogliosa affermazione del titolo, non sia stata ironicamente incrinata dalla consapevolezza della presenza di due Inghilterre in conflitto, e del soccombere della più antica.

Il racconto origina da eventi realmente accaduti, tristemente anticipati, e radicati in un territorio inglese, il West Sussex e, in specie Greatham, il villaggio ove Wilfrid e Alice Meynell, la poetessa, possedevano dei *cottages*, uno dei quali offrirono come residenza a Lawrence e alla moglie nei primi anni della guerra. La versione iniziale del 1915 venne successivamente rivista, con un'espansione della parte pre-bellica, e interventi volti a meglio chiarire, nell'immediato dopo-guerra, quello che aveva, secondo Lawrence, condotto all'abbraccio della morte da parte di un'intera nazione (Cushman 2015: 2).

A Greatham Lawrence aveva superficialmente conosciuto i Lucas, una delle figlie e il genero dei Meynell, che diventano nell'opera Winifred e Egbert (nella prima versione Evelyn), come l'autore stesso dichiara, precisando, però, che essi sono stati rimodellati a rappresentare una tensione esistente fra molti uomini al fronte e le loro mogli a casa. Il conflitto era generato dal desiderio di trovare ragioni per vivere e modi per articolarle in



linguaggio: fallire davanti a questo compito, di cui le donne lo investono, significherebbe per l'uomo, secondo Lawrence, dover scegliere la morte (Ebbatson 2005: 179). Nelle programmatiche righe affidate alla corrispondenza privata, l'autore, suggerisce una lettura simbolica che rende i Lucas i rappresentanti di un mondo in trasformazione, che è necessario prevedere e descrivere, pena la vita. Nel 1916 Perceval Lucas muore in Francia, realizzando il disegno narrativo di Lawrence, dimostrando la sua previsione del declino e caduta dell'Inghilterra, o almeno dell'Inghilterra così come gli autori amavano rappresentarla, e non era più.

Nella revisione successiva alla tragica morte di Perceval, Lawrence enfatizza alcuni tratti di Egbert: il rifiuto di lavorare per guadagnare, l'amore non professionale per l'arte, ed in specie della letteratura orale e della musica popolare, l'autoesclusione dal flusso della vita moderna, l'isolamento nella remota campagna e in un passato che non sa far rivivere. Egbert manca, soprattutto, delle qualità tipiche del suo sesso: più che agire, pare agito dagli altri personaggi e dalla storia, benché abbia una così chiara e saggia visione delle cose.

Per questi motivi, pare non del tutto esatto definire il protagonista maschile di "England, my England" l'anti-Lawrence, perché molte sono le somiglianze fra i due: per tanti versi, anzi, Egbert è il portavoce dell'autore, solo in modo più tragico vive la propria incapacità di realizzare un'utopia. Se dalle analogie biografiche, poi, si passa a considerare il disegno storico, come lo intuiva allora l'autore, nella inattività di Egbert di far rivivere il passato, nella sua incapacità di creare vita, nella dialettica spezzata con la moglie, nella sua resa all'opinione della massa, deve essere letta la crisi culturale profonda dell'Inghilterra, che si auto-distrugge non sapendo come sopravvivere (Poplawski 1996: 314).

### **Conflitto di culture e le parole per dirlo**

Il riferimento ai modi possibili di narrare il mondo e la realtà è costante in "England my England". Non solo Egbert è legato alla narrativa popolare delle ballate, e Godfrey Marshal "had an almost child-like delight in verse, in sweet poetry" (Lawrence 2008: 9), ma la vita stessa dei due giovani protagonisti viene inizialmente classificata dal padre di Winifred come "a chapter of living romance", vale a dire la storia di un amore, ambientata in un passato lontano, "buried deep among the common and marshes, near the pale-showing bulk of the downs" (9). L'insufficienza dei modelli narrativi proposti si evidenzia man mano che si sviluppa l'intreccio: sin da subito, la famiglia di Winifred permette l'idillio iniziale, ma s'incunea fra i due giovani coniugi, non consentendo che Egbert assuma una funzione propria all'interno della nuova famiglia, né ne ottenga il riconoscimento da parte della moglie. L'idillio si rompe presto, quando in Winifred prevale l'istinto materno della conservazione della prole, che la spinge a riconoscere ancora nel padre "the pillar, the source of life, the everlasting support" (13). Quando si ricomporrà, sarà sempre temporaneamente, e nell'assenza o di Winifred o di Egbert, che non ha saputo tutelare le sue stesse figlie, non assicurando loro un adeguato sostegno finanziario, ed anche, esponendole per negligenza al pericolo. Sarà un idillio incompleto, cui si contrapporrà la realtà della vita in città, degli affari, che producono quel reddito che assicura la continuazione della vita delle due famiglie.

I due mondi, pur nella loro contrapposizione antitetica ribadita più volte, hanno tratti comuni: la coesistenza di vita e morte e il senso forte della lotta, fra volontà, esseri umani,

e nello stesso paesaggio. L'occorrenza di termini afferenti al mondo della natura per descrivere il mondo urbano e il suo intrico di relazioni basate sul danaro, il prevalere dell'istinto di potere e sopravvivenza, enfatizza queste somiglianze. Godfrey Marshal, viene sottolineato, rappresenta un uomo nutrito di una cultura simile a quella di Egbert, ma feroce-mente adattatosi alle nuove regole sociali, così restrittive, così fragili, se non riaffermate dall'azione dell'uomo. Il concetto è espresso prima con la metafora estesa dell'albero, che ciecamente si fa strada fra altre piante nella giungla, "pushing its single way in a jungle of others" (17), e, quindi, del "walled garden", le cui mura sono minate dal lavoro incessante delle radici.

Benché si affermi che Egbert non vuole partecipare a questo lavoro di costrizione delle forze naturali, di disciplina degli istinti che animano anche l'uomo, la scena di apertura lo mostra intento ad ordinare lo spazio intorno a lui, in un tentativo di ricreazione di un mondo perduto. La sua azione come giardiniere è distruttiva, poiché lascia il suolo arido e sterile, e non soddisfacente e duratura (7). Consapevole che la natura incombe sulla sua abitazione e che non può imporre il suo disegno, egli continua a lavorare, disilluso, ma convinto che "what was there but submit!" (7). La battaglia di Egbert è inane, perché egli tenta di ricreare un antico giardino, non uno spazio qualsiasi, ma un luogo scritto dagli uomini nel corso di molti secoli, e di difenderlo dalla natura selvaggia, popolata da presenze quali quelle dei serpenti, in Lawrence allusione agli istinti irrazionali (Mackey 1986: 122), e all'alterità che va rispettata: "He had made it flame with flowers, in a sun cup under its hedges and trees. So old, so old a place! And he had re-created it" (8).

Egbert è un prodotto culturale che crede nella possibilità di una coesistenza con la natura selvaggia che circonda il *cottage* in cui lui e Winifred vanno ad abitare. Nella moglie Egbert cerca la possibilità di rivitalizzare un modo di vivere, di cui entrambi subiscono il fascino, ma che può esistere solo nell'isolamento rispetto alla più invasiva azione della civiltà urbana, che è, come si è visto, guidata dalla volontà di affermare il potere dell'uomo sulla natura e sugli altri esseri viventi. L'intento creativo di Egbert è sconfitto, perciò, su molti piani: egli non realizza pienamente il suo progetto di natura ordinata nel giardino, la moglie diviene "closed as a tomb" per lui (25), non riesce ad affermarsi come uomo, in una morte ("tomb" ancora vien detto) della sua mascolinità e paternità (25). Sterilità e morte sono presenti come metafore dal valore prolettico nella descrizione iniziale dell'idillio, ma divengono letterali, quando Winifred, affranta per la malattia della piccola Joyce, non comunica più con il marito, e si allontana da lui, trasferendosi a Londra per poter curare la piccola. L'idillio è spezzato, la rivitalizzazione del vecchio mondo è fallita, anzi in sé conteneva già i tratti della morte e della finzione della vita, come preannunciava la struttura quasi ossimorica della già citata frase: "buried [in] a chapter of living romance" (11).

Tuttavia, al mondo della città, non è associata la vita, ma, ancora una volta la morte. È la cultura dell'industrializzazione ad imporre come scelta la guerra. La presenza di Egbert nei contesti urbani diviene minacciosamente segno di una possibilità alternativa di vivere, e vivere una vita più vicina alla natura, all'istinto primigenio, dal quale era guidata e vinta anche Winifred, prima che il suo senso del dovere di madre, il suo legame con il potere patriarcale si rafforzasse quando il marito manifestamente rifiuta di adeguarsi al modello costituito da Godfrey. Questi, infatti, realizza la sua mascolinità nella lotta per il profitto,

si arrende alla civiltà del danaro e ne segue le decisioni, finanche quelle che non approva, come la guerra. Come afferma, con un'ombra di dubbio, il narratore, Godfrey non crede in questa società così raffinata, ma che genera morte, autodistruggendosi: "Perhaps he had no very profound belief in this world of ours, this society which we have elaborated with so much effort, only to find ourselves elaborated to death at last" (14).

Egbert, al contrario resiste a tale prevalente ideologia, e lo fa in modo consapevole e definitivo: "[...] he simply *would* not give himself to what Winifred called life, *Work*. No, he would not go into the world and work for money" (14). Egli è "full of restrained life" (15) e, sperimentata l'impossibilità di vivere a Londra, o nel *cottage*, in cui "the old dark-marsh venomous atmosphere of the place" non è bilanciata dalla presenza della famiglia, subisce una degradazione, curando poco il suo aspetto, asserendo così un modo di vivere primigenio, eppure pieno di vita. Nella scrittura la presenza dei serpenti diviene ossessiva, segno dell'attrazione sempre più forte esercitata su di lui dal luogo selvaggio, che ancora dice un'altra storia e un'altra civiltà, che viveva in accordo con passioni primigenie: "His heart went back to the savage old spirit of the place: the desire of old gods, old, lost passions, the passion of the cold-blooded, darting snakes that hissed and shot away from him" (26). Perciò egli è una sfida e una minaccia alla civiltà di proibizioni e sacrifici cui si è affidata la cattolica Winifred, poiché rappresenta una civiltà così antitetica: "Had she not her own gods to honour? And could she betray them, submitting to his Baal and Ashtaroth? And it was terrible to her, unsheathed presence [...] Like a gleaming idol evoked against her, a vivid life-idol that might triumph" (28).

Per chi ha una certa familiarità con le opere lawrenciane e la sua complessa meditazione sulla storia non è difficile cogliere la morte della famiglia di Egbert, l'abbandono del *cottage*, come l'esito di una dialettica interrotta che contrappone creativamente individui e culture, sopprimendo istinti vitali, destinati ad erompere nella violenza della guerra. Nel vocabolario di Lawrence il Cristianesimo, con il suo fardello di censure, e l'eguaglianza predicata fra gli uomini, è un momento significativo di frattura nella Storia dell'uomo, che favorisce l'omologazione delle culture, e, quindi, la scomparsa dell'altro, in questo caso epitomizzato dallo spazio selvaggio ed un esperimento di vita umana in esso. I serpenti sono un richiamo potente a questa nascosta vita che si produce incessantemente, che si nutre del contrasto fra le cose, degli opposti che si attraggono, e compaiono significativamente in vari punti del racconto, suscitando tranquilla attenzione da parte di Egbert e paura in Winifred, rappresentanti due culture polarmente contrapposte.

Al di là di queste osservazioni, già presentate dalla critica, pare giusto soffermarsi su un'altra polarità lessicale che struttura "England, my England", sempre riconducibile al rapporto con la natura nella civiltà rurale e quella industriale. I lessemi usati per definire i personaggi sono tratti dal mondo delle campagne, in quella che pare un'armonica omologia tra elementi entrambi naturali: Winifred, per esempio, si muove "like a blossoming red-flowered bush in motion" (8); "Egbert was a born rose" (10), Joyce "frail pale and small and pale like a white flower" (24). Non è un caso che sia Winifred a contestare tale uso metaforico della lingua, sottolineando i bisogni che rendono dissimili esseri umani e fiori. Alla madre, che le ricorda il paragone evangelico che invita a considerare i gigli del campo, che non lavorano, né filano (Matteo 6, 25-33), eppure crescono, manifesta la sua difficoltà

a considerare il marito un bel fiore, libero dalle responsabilità del padre di famiglia (14). Winifred, infatti, appartiene alla natura, ma è stata modificata dalla cultura, così come il nido modifica la pianta portainnesto. Vi è una sofferente duplicità in Winifred e nella sua famiglia, prodotti culturali di una violenza che ne amputa parte per dar vita a virgulto più produttivo e adatto ad un nuovo ambiente: "Their culture was grafted on to them" (9-10).

Rispetto a loro, Egbert è "a born rose". Quando è immesso nel dramma della guerra, e perde la sua individualità, una volta indossata la divisa omologante (30), non si arrende ad un'ideologia nazionalista ed aggressiva nella quale non si riconosce, e lo dice ancora una volta ricorrendo al linguaggio dei fiori: "It was the distinction between blue water-flowers and white or red bush-blossoms", dice nel pensare a quelli che vengono chiamati nemici (29). Vi è una forza sovversiva in questo codice, che rifiuta di inglobare il lessico della propaganda, che pure filtra nel racconto, attraverso l'immagine della donna che ricompensa del suo amore il soldato che serve la patria, o è simile alla Vergine Addolorata, che piange suo figlio (Grayzel 2002: 113). Protesta vibrante contro la guerra disumanizzante, ultimo prodotto di una distorsione della natura, è anche il ricorrere dell'aggettivo "mechanical" a definire suoni o atti naturali, come quando Egbert reagisce al comando dell'ufficiale, e il suo corpo è come diviso dalla sua anima, in un preannuncio del suo perdersi (32).

Benché artista non in modo professionale, dell'intellettuale del primo Novecento Egbert sperimenta la difficoltà di descrivere una realtà drammaticamente mutata nell'assenza di strumenti linguistici adeguati. Perciò ripropone frammenti di un altro discorso che appartiene ad un mondo remoto. Perciò, nonostante il suo pensiero ci accompagni sino alla fine, egli si accampa nella nostra mente come Ismaele, il figlio della concubina di Abramo, esiliato nel deserto e chiuso nel suo silenzio, che è denuncia aperta e sfida (28).

Non solo Egbert non parla più, e significativamente noi ne conosciamo solo le meditazioni, che si spezzano in frasi nominali dal ritmo sincopato e ripetitivo verso la chiusa, ma subisce un processo di privazione, che è scandito dall'uso anaforico della negazione "No": egli perde la famiglia, il *cottage*, i suoni delle voci dei bambini, la sua identità. Coglie a sprazzi il paesaggio, ma questo è come dematerializzato, "the white church among the trees beyond seemed like a thought only" (32). Ciò prelude alla sua perdita di coscienza e doloroso rinvenire: la guerra sconvolge la natura, rivolta la terra, colpisce in "a conflagration of agony" (33) lo stesso Egbert. Egli ha perso sicurezza come relatore dei fatti, come testimoniano le tante domande dubitative che gli affollano la mente, e danno il ritmo al suo abbandono alla morte. Perché Egbert preferisce la morte ad una vita di ricordi appassiti: "better the agony of dissolution ahead than the nausea of the efforts backwards" (34). Smembrato dalla granata, egli muore alla consapevolezza della fine del suo progetto di rivivificare il mondo del passato, della convivenza di cultura e natura.

Vi è silenzio sospeso nella chiusa di "England, my England", non la pace e consapevolezza più grandi, ma colme delle risate, paesaggi, sogni, suoni d'Inghilterra, non la paradossale conquista di altri territori del soldato trasformato in polvere, come in "The Soldier", ma l'annullamento nello spazio della coscienza critica del racconto, enfatizzata dal brusco cambiamento di punto di vista, quello degli attoniti Tedeschi.

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Lucia Folena

*Contrées sans culture: 'Nature' Across the Anthropological Rift*

**Abstract I:** Questo saggio cerca di mettere in luce la differenza tra l'idea "umanista" di natura – in riferimento sia agli individui che alle immaginarie origini delle comunità umane – tra tardo Medioevo e prima modernità, e quella "antropologica" inaugurata a metà Seicento, tra gli altri, dal *Leviatano* di Hobbes. Lungi dal costituire uno dei termini di un'opposizione binaria la cui componente antonimica sarebbe variamente identificabile come civiltà, cultura, evoluzione, sviluppo, e così via, il concetto umanista incorporava largamente quelli che sarebbero poi divenuti i suoi contrari: conformarsi ai dettami della natura equivaleva ad acquisire ed esercitare quelle abilità comportamentali, morali e sociali che rendevano felice e pacifica l'esistenza collettiva.

**Abstract II:** This paper attempts to highlight the difference between the "humanist" – late-medieval and early-modern – idea of nature as applied to both human individuals and the putative original condition of human communities, and the "anthropological" one, inaugurated in the mid-17th century, among others, by Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Far from constituting a term in a binary opposition whose antonymic component would be variously identifiable as civilization, culture, evolution, development, and so forth, the humanist concept largely incorporated its later contraries: abiding by the dictates of nature amounted to acquiring and exercising those behavioural, moral and social skills which made collective existence happy and peaceful.

The duality of nature and culture, after being one of the most ideologically powerful master-tropes of ethnographic, anthropological and even psychoanalytical discourses between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, still surfaces as a commonplace in small talk and relatively unsophisticated communicational contexts. It tends to take the form of an antithesis, with the two states posited as phylo- and ontogenetically inevitable, chronologically distanced and mutually exclusive. A fundamental threshold – such as those dividing, for example, gathering/hunting from cultivation, or the raw from the cooked<sup>1</sup> – is imagined to separate the two irrevocably, making a community's transition from one to the other into a fateful event by which its History is inaugurated.

The whole setup is obviously no less mythical than the ancient narratives which placed

<sup>1</sup> On the former, see Harris 1991: 3-46; on the latter, Lévi-Strauss 1969.

the original inhabitants of the earth in the perpetual bliss of the garden of Eden or invested them with the flawless bonhomie of the Golden Age. Firstly, the original condition referred to as 'natural' can only be told – not to say conceived – from the vantage point of 'culture', in the form of a hypothetical 're'construction. For any attempt to tell, or even know, such a condition from within would inevitably result in a move out of it and the generation of an at least embryonic cultural context. Absolute 'nature' would not even be knowable as such, since knowledge requires instruments, categories and strategies which are eminently 'cultural'. Secondly, and more pragmatically, as is obvious no human or even animal group may exist without some form or degree of culture – meaningful sounds and gestures, codes, interdictions, symbolic systems, etc. A 'state of nature' characterized by the utter lack and absence of all this is a fiction, useful, if at all, as an admittedly unrealistic *terminus a quo* for comparing modes and directions of cultural development in different societies.

In fact, the nature/culture antithesis is a relatively recent invention. In the first place, the anthropological inflection of the notion of culture does not antedate the work of E. B. Tylor and Franz Boas from the 1870s onwards, or that of J. G. Herder one century earlier at the most<sup>2</sup>. More importantly, the fundamental shift in the idea of nature that was the precondition of the dichotomy only began to surface in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Not accidentally, this was the same phase in which, according to Michel Foucault, "a kind of rift in the order of things" brought into existence a new conceptual entity, a hitherto unheard-of object of science – something called "man". For the latter "is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge", and "he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form"<sup>3</sup>. The "man" referred to by Foucault is manifestly the creature, and construct, of the episteme that was establishing itself in this early modern phase when the 'human' sciences were dawning. It was in the interregnum between humanism – whose "man" was a remarkably different entity – and anthropology that a pivotal text like Shakespeare's *Tempest* was generated; it bears the marks of its transitional situation.

The proto-anthropological concept of nature, in one of its earliest occurrences, provides the prime support to Hobbes's plea for absolutism. Chapter 13 in *Leviathan* takes up two traditional applications of the term "nature" to fashion its dismal new picture of the "Natural Condition of Mankind" – that primeval abyss of irrationality and aggressiveness which is constantly threatening to engulf it again. The Scholastic figure of *natura naturans*, as revisited by Giordano Bruno and Francis Bacon, here infuses the inborn dispositions of humans with eminently antisocial traits:

*Nature* hath made men so equal in the faculties of the body and mind, as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man

<sup>2</sup> The debate over the role of Herder's *Yet Another Philosophy of History* (1774) in the formulation of the anthropological construct of culture is still lively. See for instance Denby 2005. On the idea of culture among British intellectuals from Edmund Burke to George Orwell, see Raymond Williams' influential *Culture and Society* (Williams 1983) and Mulhern 2009: 31-45.

<sup>3</sup> Foucault 1973: xxiii.

is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. [...] So that in *the nature of man* we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first maketh man invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue<sup>4</sup>.

The “natural condition” of humankind thus becomes undistinguishable from “that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man” (100). Hobbes pits this chaotic state of unrestrained violence, where even mere survival is virtually impossible, against the organization and repression which a strong central power is solely capable of implementing and which is the very precondition of a reasonably satisfactory social existence. Human nature is fundamentally irrational, and an external, higher authority must supply it with the reason it needs if it is to achieve a barely sufficient degree of “felicity”. Seventy-five years later, Swift's Yahoos embody the Hobbesian dystopia, in opposition to the Houyhnhnms, who “are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature, so their grand maxim is, to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it”<sup>5</sup> (Swift 1899: 257-258). Nature and reason, irreparably split in the repulsive anthropomorphic creatures, can only work symbiotically in beings that do not bear any resemblance to humans.

In the same historical phase in which Gulliver discovers the horror of belonging to the genus *homo*, Defoe has Robinson on his island lament his fall into “a meer state of nature” (Defoe 1988: 130), defined by the absence of all the tools (ploughs, spades, shovels) and the technological know-how that his contemporaries rely upon to make their lives comfortable and pleasant. True, a term representing the opposite of this situation – such as, if not ‘culture’, a predecessor like ‘civilization’ or ‘civility’<sup>6</sup> – cannot be found in the novel. Yet it is clear that the modern antithesis is at work in its protagonist's strenuous, constant efforts to recapitulate in himself, and later in Friday, what to Defoe and his contemporaries must have already appeared as the likeliest general pattern of human evolution. The state of nature has become an Outside to be fled. And it is only when his ontogenetic development has visibly distanced him from this margin that Robinson becomes able to see the yet-untouched portion of his environment as a miniature paradise:

<sup>4</sup> Ch. XIII, “Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery”, in Hobbes 1971: 98-99; italics mine.

<sup>5</sup> When the protagonist tells his Houyhnhnm master about Europe, the interlocutor comments that “our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature” (250).

<sup>6</sup> The adjective “civil” appears three times in the whole novel, twice in reference to behaviour (244, 287) and once in the expression “civil death” indicating the presumed decease of “a person not to be found” (279). According to Emile Benveniste, the earliest written occurrence in English of the term “civilization” in the modern sense dates from 1757 (Benveniste 1971: 289-296).



the country appeared so fresh, so green, so flourishing, every thing being in a constant verdure or flourish of spring, that it looked like a planted garden. I descended a little on the side of that delicious vale, surveying it with a secret kind of pleasure (tho' mixt with my other afflicting thoughts) to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession (113-114).

Having at least in part colonized his habitat, he can now appreciate its beauty. He has had, first and foremost, to write on land – mark, separate and specialize spaces, turning the territory, as it were, into its own map – and to manufacture tangible monuments (castles, fortresses, hutches, fences, walls) to the subjection of this former wilderness to the absolute rule of 'civility'. By such an intervention, he has appropriated even the areas he has not transformed, domesticating them into nature reserves of sorts. Only then, and with the support of the God with whom he has opened up an inner channel of communication, is his aesthetic sense awakened, along with his capitalistic flair.

Humanism had viewed things quite differently. Over the three or four centuries preceding the Hobbesian shift the relation between unrestrained wildness and a sustainable model of communal existence had largely been envisaged almost in reverse terms. The basic assumption was that a process of involution, rather than evolution, had characterised the whole of human history, which had begun with an abrupt descent from unspoiled 'nature' into a state of vicious disorder that demanded the mediation of 'culture'. Along with the biblical account, the Ovidian myth of the fall from the Golden Age probably remained the most eloquent and popular version of this narrative. In the *Metamorphoses* the goddess Ceres emerges as the provider of the material and symbolic means through which human society is able to survive:

Dame Ceres first to breake the Earth with plough the maner found,  
She first made corne and stover soft to grow upon the ground,  
She first made lawes: for all these things we are to Ceres bound<sup>7</sup>.

In Shakespeare's time, mythographers stressed the connection between these two kinds of culture<sup>8</sup>, positing the former as the precondition of a "civil" modality of existence whose continuance required the formulation and implementation of rules and behavioural codes. Abraham Fraunce, for instance, declares that Ceres

<sup>7</sup> *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 1567: V. 434-436). In the original, "Prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro, / prima dedit fruges alimentaue mitia terris, / prima dedit leges; Cereris sunt omnia munus" (Ovid 1994: V. 341-443). The imposition of the Law is in all likelihood coeval with the introduction of agriculture, which Ovid places in the Silver Age (I. 123-124).

<sup>8</sup> In application to Renaissance writers the use of the term 'culture', though obviously in part anachronistic especially in the figurative sense, may be justified in light of its etymology. The Latin verb whence it originates, *colere*, soon added to its original meanings – "to inhabit" and "to cultivate" – a series of more abstract ones, so that among its derivatives *cultura* was used in both physical and moral senses, and *cultus*, besides being referable to agriculture, signified "education, culture, civilization" (Ernout & Meillet 2001: 132). Another word stemming from the same root, *colonia*, was to acquire a further relevance in connection with the process of appropriation of the New World by European powers, a process which was then in its inaugural phase.

first found and taught the use of corn and grain, and thereby brought men from that wild and savage wandering in woods and eating of acorns to a civil conversing and more orderly diet, and caused them to inhabit towns, to live sociably, to observe certain laws and institutions, and for these causes was herself made a goddess<sup>9</sup>.

Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" places at the other end of the world a number of human communities capable of surviving "sans culture". Here, evidently, the immediate reference is to such populations ignoring – i.e. not needing to know – "the use of corn and grain", as is made manifest by John Florio's translation, which speaks of "countries that were never tilled"<sup>10</sup>. The absence of agriculture, however, is nothing but the most tangible and immediate aspect of a generalized lack. For these human groups possess none among the innumerable components – institutions, rites, practices, symbols, hierarchies, social differentiations, and so forth – whose operation and interconnection produce what late-19<sup>th</sup>-century anthropology will come to delineate as culture:

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society<sup>11</sup>.

Montaigne's cannibal societies are "encore fort voisines de leur naifveté originelle" (234), "yet neere their originall naturalitie" (72), differently from the rest of humankind, or at least from the Europeans, whose highly civilized and refined lifestyles expose their irreparable degeneration. If one considers the absolute impracticability of a return to that supposed origin, such a deliberately paradoxical demystification may be said to result in a further paradox, whose repercussions will manifest themselves fully some two centuries later. For Montaigne's essay postulates the possibility of a disjunction between the 'human' and the 'natural', thus taking a first step along the itinerary that will eventually lead 'nature' to become a margin or an outside of 'culture'. What Owen Barfield terms participation is beginning to disintegrate<sup>12</sup>.

The earlier perspective may be synthesized by means of the words used by Raphael Hythlodæus to outline the philosophical premises of Utopian society: "Uirtutem definiunt,

<sup>9</sup> *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch*, 1592: 26-27, cit. in S. Orgel, Introduction to Shakespeare, 1994: 48.

<sup>10</sup> "Des Cannibales", in Montaigne 1958: I, 234; trans. J. Florio, "Of the Caniballes", in Montaigne 1964: 72.

<sup>11</sup> Tylor 1920: I, 1.

<sup>12</sup> According to Barfield, participation is a "predominantly perceptual relation between observer and observed, between man and nature [...] which is nearer to unity than to dichotomy" (Barfield 1979: 26) and which characterized many traditional societies. In the West, the last great age of participation ended with the dawn of the early modern worldview. Before the scientific revolution, the "background picture [...] was of man as a microcosm within the macrocosm. It is clear that he did not feel himself isolated by his skin from the world outside him to quite the same extent as we do. He was integrated or mortised into it, each different part of him being united to a different part of it by some invisible thread. In his relation to his environment, the man of the Middle Ages was rather less like an island, rather more like an embryo, than we are" (Barfield 1988: 78). Thus the "universe was a kind of theophany, in which he participated at different levels, in being, in thinking, in speaking or naming, and in knowing", Barfield 1988: 92.

secundum naturam uiuere ad id siquidem a deo institutos esse nos. Eum uero naturae ductum sequi quisquis in appetendis fugiendisque rebus obtemperat rationi". The Utopians, that is, "define virtue as living according to nature since to this end we were created by God. That individual, they say, is following the guidance of nature who, in desiring one thing and avoiding another, obeys the dictates of reason"<sup>13</sup>. For a fully-grown human being, in 1516 as well as one century later, when *The Tempest* was being performed on the Jacobean stage, living in conformity with nature amounted to recognizing, and subjecting oneself to, the supreme authority of Reason – God's "viceroy" within individuals, to put it with John Donne<sup>14</sup>. Of course, the emphasis in that context was not on the purely intellectual component of the concept of reason, represented by the (inherently human) potential for understanding and learning, but on the moral function of such a principle, seen as the capacity of distinguishing between good and evil and regulating one's conduct accordingly.

It is precisely because it is so wholly based on reason that a way of life as highly civilized and codified as that of the Utopians is far more 'natural' than those of all other contemporary communities, be they formed by "fearsome, rough and wild" Zapoletans who relish warfare and ignore agriculture<sup>15</sup>, or by the refined and corrupt English upper classes which, having forgotten the primacy of reason and surrendered to the folly of covetousness and pride, devastate the environment and make "sheep [...] devour human beings" (24). Both of these opposite aberrations spring from distortions and obstacles impeding the full, linear actualization of the potential contained in human nature; both types of society refuse to invest reason with the leading role to which it is entitled in the human world.

By no means does the nature/nurture pair, in the manner in which it occurs in many early modern texts, constitute an antithetical precedent to the nature/culture opposition; far from that, it hinges on the assumption of a very large amount of complementariness between the two terms. Human nature is endowed with a distinctive propensity for learning, and for changing and developing on the basis of teachings which have a moral and ethical as well as an intellectual import. Acquiring the fundamentals of good conduct requires a remarkably shorter process than that through which a satisfactory stock of knowledge and sufficient mental capabilities may be attained by a growing individual. When Utopia's children reach the age of reason<sup>16</sup>, internalizing the values and priorities shared by the society in which they live, they spontaneously abandon the diamonds and rubies they play with in

<sup>13</sup> Latin text, More n. d.; Eng. trans., More 1964: 92-93.

<sup>14</sup> Holy Sonnet 14, l. 7, in Donne 1896: I, 165.

<sup>15</sup> If it were not for their enormous aggressiveness and greed, which make them an "abominable and impious people" (124) of proto-Yahoos, they might almost be described as precursors of Montaigne's cannibals: "They are a hard race, capable of enduring heat, cold, and toil, lacking all refinements, engaging in no farming, careless about the houses they live in and the clothes they wear, and occupied only with their flocks and herds. To a great extent they live only by hunting and plundering. They are born for warfare and zealously seek an opportunity for fighting. [...] The only trade they know in life is that by which they seek their death" (123).

<sup>16</sup> Even though the idea is certainly earlier, the *OED* actually ascribes the first occurrence of this expression, in the sense of the "age at which a child is held capable of discerning right from wrong; (more generally) the age at which a person is held to be mature, responsible, etc.", to J. Reynolds' *Flower of Fidelitie* in 1650 (*reason* 1, P1.d.a). Such an age is conventionally identified with the child's seventh year of life.

their early years (86). By so doing, they implicitly accomplish a rite of passage, signalling their having turned into full members of the community. For they have now secured a basic personal grasp of the behavioural code that will enable them to govern themselves adequately without relying on an external authority, thus becoming complete *cives*.

The City – *civitas* – is the anthropic space *par excellence*, the theatre of the collective existence of those to whom nurture has imparted the primacy of reason and the importance of constantly submitting to its control. The evolution from simple *mortales* into *cives* corresponds to the ‘natural’ growth of humans in society, when no negative influences or events interfere in the process; and the ‘natural’ place of men and women is among their likes, not in forests or wastelands<sup>17</sup>. Falling out of the City into the Wild due to some fortuitous event implies losing simultaneously, albeit not necessarily in a definitive way, the ‘civil’ acquisitions and the ‘natural’ attributes that identify the human as such.

Just a few years before the publication of *Utopia*, around 1510, Henry Watson translated from the French the prose romance *Valentin et Orson*, which had been printed in 1489 and was in turn based on a lost 14<sup>th</sup> century *chanson de geste* entitled *Valentin et Sansnom*<sup>18</sup>. The legend of the twin brothers lost in the wilderness had been circulating widely all over Europe throughout the late Middle Ages and remained extremely popular at least until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, providing inspiration, among others, to Edmund Spenser and John Bunyan, and offering fitting material for chapbooks<sup>19</sup>. The divarication in the upbringing of the two royal children, Orson, raised by a she-bear, and Valentine, educated at king Pepin’s court, is so radical as to make them embody two apparently irreconcilable models – the feral, lethally aggressive and totally instinctual monster “ledang the life of a wilde beast, without wering of any cloth, or any worde speaking” (38) versus the very incarnation of refinement, courtesy and chivalric virtues. This polar opposition, however, is shown to be insubstantial when the two – who still “knewe not that they were brethren” (69) – come to a confrontation. The fierce duel they engage soon gives way to a lecture delivered by the civilized twin to a very receptive sibling, whose utter ignorance of human language does not prevent him from understanding and complying:

Come on thy way with me & then shalt thou do wysely. I shall make the be baptized, and shall teach the holy faith. And shall geue [...] all maner of thinges that

<sup>17</sup> The ethics and aesthetics of communing with the undomesticated environment are absolutely unknown to the Utopians. Leaving one’s town or farm without official permission is a serious offence any relapse into which is punished with slavery (82).

<sup>18</sup> For a facsimile of the French prose narrative, see *Histoire de Valentin et Orson* XVIII c.; Low- and high-German and Dutch versions in verse and prose dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century are collected in *Valentin und Namelos* 1884. For an extensive discussion of sources and variants and an analysis of the differences among the various renderings of the story, see Dickson 1929. Watson’s English translation was first printed in 1550. References here are to Dickson’s 1937 edition of this text (V&O 1971).

<sup>19</sup> See “Valentine and Orson” in *Chap-books* 1882: 110-123. For the influence on Bunyan, see Dickson, Introduction to *V & O* 1971: lxii-lxiii. The account of the birth and education of the twin sisters Amoret and Belphoebe in Book III of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (III.6.1-29, 51-53) depends directly on the story of Valentine and Orson. The latter had also been used in the pageants for Edward VI’s 1547 coronation ceremony (Bernheimer 1952: 71).

appertayneth vnto a mannes body, and shalt vse thy lyfe honestly *as euery naturall body should doo*. [... Thus,] *after the course of nature that can not lye*, Orson fell downe vpon both his knees, & stretcheth forth his handes towarde his brother Valenttyne, in making hym signe that he woulde forgeue hym, and that he woulde obeye vnto hym in al maner of thynges for the tyme to come<sup>20</sup>.

Unlike those of Caspar Hauser or the other ‘wolf-children’ whose cases received great attention in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>21</sup>, Orson’s lapse into bestiality cannot therefore be seen in terms of a return to nature, nor as representing the inaugural move in a belated ontogenetic recapitulation of human phylogenesis, from infant wildness to adult civility. Once again, the ‘natural’ state of a grown human coincides with an educated and fully socialized existence, and a desire for such a condition is inscribed in the minds of all those who do not enjoy it. The bear-like brother is rapidly reassimilated by the community, to the point where in the time to come the twins, taking part side by side in a long series of adventures, become absolutely undistinguishable from each other in terms of behavioural and moral qualities, gentility and prowess<sup>22</sup>. Nature manifests itself again when Valentine feels its “force” on hearing of the misfortunes of the noble lady Bellisant, while he is still unaware that she is his mother (123). Thus, nature does have to do with one’s sense of one’s origin, but not as the hazy intuition of a pre-socialized and pre-subjectivized mode of being; rather, as the exact opposite – the blurred memory of an anterior state of perfect socialization, where the subject’s identity was stable and complete.

Caliban is the product of a peculiar evolutionary process. At the age of twenty-four, he is perfectly educated on the intellectual level – as is suggested by his usually expressing himself in verse, rather than in the prose which connotes the lower-class characters and recurrently conveys the baseness of Antonio and Sebastian. At the same time, he is no more inclined to control his primary instincts than a toddler or a brute. Given that he never manifests any particular desire to taste human flesh and seems far more interested in berries and fish (I.ii.334; II.ii.154-55), the anthropophagic penchant indicated in metathesis by his name should be read symbolically, as a generic aptitude to violate those primary boundaries and to break those taboos that regulate human interaction in societies. The attempted rape of Miranda (I.ii.347-48) constituted precisely one such infringement, and the punishment he received for it corresponds perfectly to that inflicted on criminals in *Utopia* – slavery as forced labour, and as a more lenient, humanist alternative to the death penalty or to perpetual imprisonment<sup>23</sup>. The disregard for the fundamental principles of solidarity and empathy for their fellow humans that both Caliban and Utopian offenders have displayed

<sup>20</sup> P. 70; emphasis added. In the German poem, likewise, the “force of nature” leads Namelos to surrender to Valentin; see Dickson 1929: 16, 179.

<sup>21</sup> See Feuerbach 1966: 277-365; Freud 1971: 153-262.

<sup>22</sup> A few years after Valentine’s death Orson returns as a hermit to the forest where he was raised and devotes himself to the contemplation of God; when he dies, he is “a saynt canonyzed” (327).

<sup>23</sup> “Generally, the worst offenses are punished by the sentence of slavery since this prospect, they think, is no less formidable to the criminal and more advantageous to the state than [... capital punishment]. Their labor is more profitable than their death, and their example lasts longer to deter others from like crimes” (112).

through their transgressions is thus counterweighed by their being sentenced to perform useful tasks in the service of the community.

Among the Utopians, misbehaviour debases individuals to a less-than-human status, highlighting the (at least temporary) defectiveness of their reason, hence their 'unnaturalness'. Their repentance and good conduct while in slavery entitle them to milder treatments and even to freedom (112). Repentance and a promise of good conduct also precede Caliban's liberation (V.i.294-297), even though no causal link seems to be here established between the two facts. While the other characters almost obsessively stress the unspecified physical deformity that gives this creature the monstrosity of a hybrid abnormally placed at the border between the human and the animal<sup>24</sup>, Prospero charges him with having been begotten "by the devil himself" (I.ii.319). In other words, he suspects his father of being an incubus – the kind of evil spirit that according to contemporary demonologies took the appearance of a man in order to engender half-devils with a witch<sup>25</sup>. Thus Caliban would literally be a "demi-devil", a "bastard" crossbreed of natural and supernatural (V.i.72-73); and the protagonist's synthetic – and presumably unrealistic – complaint about his slave's absolute impermeability to moral growth<sup>26</sup> should in all likelihood be read literally as a sort of humanist-grounded self-justification for his own educational failure. Nurture has been unable to transform him because he does not possess the plenitude of human nature: "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains, / Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost" (IV.1.188-190).

Antonio's previous and present hostility towards his brother and his having "[e]xpelled remorse and nature" to cultivate ambition justify his being defined "[u]nnatural" (V.i.75-79). Shortly thereafter, however, by acknowledging Caliban, the "thing of darkness", as belonging to him (V.i.275-276), Prospero seems to suggest that no fundamental antithesis exists between 'natural' and 'unnatural' – that there is no actual Outside, for even anomalous and deviant deportments ultimately pertain to human nature.

Generally speaking, in sum, the fullness of nature in a pre-Hobbesian adult consists in the perfection and plenitude of his or her nurture. Far from conflicting, the two components are inextricably linked together, to the point where they come, or should come, to form a single unit. In depicting his cannibals Montaigne is less distant from this perspective than one might think. Even though they do not till the land and exist without resorting to the majority of the symbolic objects and practices which will later contribute in forming the anthropological construct of culture, they do not live in "countries without culture" after all. For the happiness and peace of the communities they set up necessarily depend upon their ability to engraft a degree of nurture, however sketchy and primitive, on their instinctual urges, so as to control those which might lead to the destruction of social ties and impede the smooth continuance of their collective existence.

Even Montaigne would certainly not have contended that the only way of following

<sup>24</sup> On wildness and monstrosity before the Enlightenment, see White 1985: 150-182.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Krämer & Sprenger 1928, Part II, Ch. 1; King James VI/I, *Daemonologie*, Bk. III, Ch. 3, 52-70.

<sup>26</sup> The lines mentioned above, where Caliban expresses his regret and determination to change his behaviour (V.i.294-297), sound like a refutation of this judgment of Prospero's; perhaps – unlike Antonio and Sebastian, who obdurately refuse to speak words of contrition – the "demi-devil" is capable of some ethical improvement after all.

nature was remaining as close as the cannibals to the hypothetical original state of humankind. The problem of Europeans, in his view, was that their institutions, traditions, customs, social practices and rituals, instead of developing their natural potentials, had gradually taken them astray into the territories of depraved “art” — that kind of human intervention to modify the order of God’s creation which loses its legitimacy when, instead of helping its objects to accomplish their potentials fully, it needlessly alters or distorts them.

While his supposed savages *sans culture* remained close to their pristine perfection, Montaigne’s civilized world had wiped out nature through the abuse of art and thus fallen into corruption and degeneration – real savagery. Here, rather than reversing the assumptions of his contemporary readers, the French philosopher was simply taking them to their extreme consequences. Nature is good, and the more a community abandons it, the worse it becomes. No organisation at all is far preferable to a perverted organisation; lack becomes in itself positive. It is here, in the negation that precedes each item on Montaigne’s list of European essentials – taken up by his disciple Gonzalo in *The Tempest* (II.i.138-64) – that the formal reversal takes place: “It is a nation [...] that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle” (72).

It is particularly significant of the drastic change in the notion of nature which occurred in the sixty years or so during which late humanism gave way to proto-anthropology that Montaigne’s paradisiacal description should be turned by Hobbes, through the same use of negatives in application to analogous terms, into the picture of a living hell:

Whatsoever [...] is consequent to a time of war where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (100).

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Milena Romero Allué

**'Thou retir'est to endless Rest'. Abraham Cowley's 'Wise' and 'Epicuræan' *Grasshopper***

**Abstract I:** La lirica *The Grasshopper* di Abraham Cowley esemplifica magistralmente l'atteggiamento reverente e quasi animistico nei confronti della dimensione naturale che caratterizza la prima metà del diciassettesimo secolo: accanto al vasto processo di democratizzazione e all'interesse sempre più crescente per la scienza, un rinnovato entusiasmo per i classici apre la strada a una nuova sensibilità nei confronti del mondo animale. Accostandosi a Pitagora, Platone, Teofrasto, Ovidio, Plutarco, Porfirio e, tra i suoi illustri contemporanei, a Gassendi, Galileo e Montaigne, Cowley viene a negare indirettamente le teorie antropocentriche per sostenere che la natura esiste tanto per gli uomini quanto per le piante e gli animali. Cowley dedica numerosi saggi e poesie a piante e animali che non fanno parte del repertorio letterario classico e giunge a teorizzare e formulare un sistema educativo che include l'agricoltura, il giardinaggio e la zoologia. Nella lirica in questione egli associa obliquamente la cavalletta eponima, un insetto tradizionalmente assimilato alla cicala in ambito inglese, alle Muse, Apollo, Titono, Epicuro e alla figura del poeta: Cowley attribuisce all'"Insetto felice" tratti sia umani che divini e si identifica con esso per potersi ritirare, come fa il *grasshopper*, "in un riposo eterno", metafora della dimensione paradisiaca e immortale cui aspirano molti pensatori inglesi di questo periodo.

**Abstract II:** The lyric *The Grasshopper* by Abraham Cowley is a paradigmatic example of the reverent and almost animistic approach to the natural dimension that marks the first half of the seventeenth century: along with the vast process of democratization and the growing interest in science, a renewed enthusiasm for classic thinkers contributes to a mounting sensitivity towards the 'brute creation'. Close to Pythagoras, Plato, Theophrastus, Ovid, Plutarch, Porphyry and, among his illustrious contemporaries, Gassendi, Galileo and Montaigne, Cowley indirectly challenges anthropocentrism and believes that the earth equally exists for humanity, animals and plants. Cowley devotes numerous poems and essays to plants and animals that do not belong to literary tradition and even theorizes and formulates an educative system that includes agriculture, gardening and zoology. In the lyric under analysis, he obliquely associates the eponymous grasshopper, an insect traditionally identified with the cicada in English culture, with the Muses, Apollo, Tithonus, Epicurus and with the figure of the poet: Cowley endows the "happy Insect" with both human and divine features and connects himself with it in order to retire, as his *grasshopper* does, "to endless Rest", a metaphor for the paradisaic and immortal dimension to which many seventeenth-century English thinkers aspire.

**'New heav'ns, new earth, ages of endless date'. Changing perspectives on the world**

The scientific, religious, political, social and cultural 'revolutions' that marked Europe, and Great Britain in particular, in the first half of the seventeenth century gradually led to a vast process of democratization, to the reconsideration of ideas such as centralism, anthropocentrism, authority and slavery, to the popular chiliastic theories, to the agrarian revolution and, as a consequence, to a new relationship between man and the natural world<sup>1</sup>.

The philosophical debates aroused by the new astronomic theories strongly contributed to a mounting democratic attitude and to changing approaches towards nature. If the breaking of the circular pattern of the universe and, as a consequence, its lack of a centre, fostered the re-consideration of the ideas and roles of centralism, authority and absolutism, Galileo even abolished the hierarchical contrast between the earthly and the heavenly dimensions, or between the sublunary and the superlunary world, by establishing the identification between earth and moon: in *Sidereus nuncius*, published in Venice in 1610, the "Tuscan artist"<sup>2</sup> explicitly declares that "atque similitudo inter Lunam atque Tellurem clarius apparet" (Galilei 1993: 112). Parallel to the Copernican revolution, the religious Reformation rejected any form of intermediation between the believer and God and, therefore, shortened the distance between the human and divine dimensions and questioned the very concept of a moral and spiritual hierarchy. Considering that in his celebrated treatise on blood circulation published in 1628, *De motu cordis*, William Harvey demonstrated that the heart does not function as the 'king' of the body any longer, it can be argued that the concepts of centralism, authority and monarchy were disrupted even in the medical field (see Hill 1982). It is worth observing that Harvey studied at the university of Padua from 1600 to 1602 and that therefore he was in direct touch with the revolutionary teachings and personality of Galileo, who was there professor of mathematics from 1592 to 1610. Along with the above-mentioned upheavals, it goes without saying that the most sensational and shocking instance of how authority and absolutism were questioned and refused in the first half of the seventeenth century is the trial, condemnation and beheading of Charles I in 1649.

In this period of profound change and transformation, the popular chiliastic theories had a special meaning in Great Britain. John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, published in the previous century but now more popular than ever, contributed to the millenarian belief in the nearness of Christ's second coming and to the widespread trust that he would soon establish the earthly paradise for one thousand years precisely in Great Britain: this legend prompted the identification between England and paradise and between the English and the Hebrews, both mistreated by the Roman official religion. According to a recently-created myth, moreover, the English Church was older than the Roman one since it had been founded by Joseph of Arimathea just after's Christ's crucifixion: this myth claims that Joseph, one of Christ's disciples, built the first Christian church at Glastonbury, Somerset, in 63 A.D. and that the hawthorn that sprouted in the very place in which he planted his rod budded every year at Christmas (see Schama 1995).

<sup>1</sup> Lévi Strauss 2001 and Steiner 2010 investigate how the rejection of anthropocentrism fostered a more respectful and compassionate attitude towards animals.

<sup>2</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I: 288.

**'They also know, and reason not contemptibly'. A new attitude towards the animal world**

Both the chiliastic theories and the popular legends widely circulating in England in these years inspired the recovery of the original innocence of paradise and fostered ideals that today we would define as ecologist, animalist and vegetarian: as it is well known, in the paradises of all cultures humanity lives in perfect harmony with animals and is able to speak their language. If numerous seventeenth-century commentators were convinced that humanity became flesh-eater only after the Flood, after the degeneration of its constitution, Thomas Tryon even argued that the birth of wars and conflicts was the consequence of eating animal flesh, an unnatural habit that, in its turn, was one of the consequences of the loss of paradise: Tryon, a follower of Jakob Böhme's philosophical and mystic theories, had a deep humanitarian and ecologist spirit, was against slavery, strongly asserted vegetarianism and advocated a respectful attitude towards animals and plants. The link between the animal world and slavery is not surprising if considering that, from Pythagoras on, the status of animals was frequently associated with the status of slaves<sup>3</sup>, a socio-political theme of special importance in the English Renaissance, a period in which the number of British colonies in the New World was increasing and the ominous 'slave triangle' was reaching its peak. In his numerous treatises, as, for instance, *The Way to Health, Long Life and Happiness* and *The Way to make all People Rich*, both published in 1685, Tryon deals with animal dignity in such a convincing way that Aphra Behn did not wear animal furs any longer and, thanks to his writings, Benjamin Franklin would be converted to a regardful behaviour with the 'brute creation'. In the essay *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies*, issued in 1684 under the name 'Philotheos Physiologus', Tryon addresses and accuses his contemporaries (that could be ours) of enjoying cruelty to animals, almost quoting Pythagoras and Plutarch:

The inferior creatures groan under your cruelties. You hunt them for your pleasure, and overwork them for your covetousness, and kill them for your gluttony, and set them to fight one with another till they die, and count it to a sport and a pleasure to behold them worry one another (Tryon 1684: 183; Thomas 1984: 170).

Embracing the spirit of the age, also Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn, a convinced theorizer of abstinence from animal flesh for moral reasons, criticized the popular battles among cocks, horses, bulls, lions, wild boars and dogs and defined them as a "wicked and barbarous sport" (Evelyn 1901: vol. II: 30)<sup>4</sup>, as "a sport [...] of Barbarity" in which poor creatures "fight till they drop down" (Pepys 1995: vol. IV: 427-428)<sup>5</sup>. Consequent on the new democratic attitude and the changing perspectives on the natural world, in these years the animal theme was of crucial importance: the royal physician Walter Charleton, the botanist John Ray, the mathematician John Wallis, Thomas Tany, Roger Crab and Robert Norwood, among others, based their disquisitions on scientific and anatomic grounds (in particular on human dentition and intestine) in order to demonstrate that originally humanity was

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Sorabji 2001, Morus 1954, Arbuckle & McCarty 2015.

<sup>4</sup> 17 August 1667.

<sup>5</sup> 21 December 1663.

not carnivorous. As reported by Pepys in his diary, Charleton favourably commented on the theory of the original vegetarianism of man and declared that “Nature fashion[s] every creature’s teeth according to the food she intends them. [...] man’s, it is plain, was not for flesh, but for fruit. [...] all children love fruit, and none brought the flesh but against their wills at first” (Pepys: vol. VII: 223-224)<sup>6</sup>. Other thinkers reached the same conclusion by finding in the Bible an exhortation to abstain from animal flesh. According to interpretations most in vogue in this period, the Bible condemns eating flesh and unequivocally alludes to a vegetarian diet: “And God said [...] I have given you every herb bearing seed [...] and every tree [...]; to you it shall be for meat. [...] flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat” (*Genesis*, 1: 29; 9: 4). Drawing on this reading of *Genesis*, in *Paradise Lost* Milton excludes animal meat and explains that both in heaven and in Eden the diet consists of “ambrosial fruitage”, “nectar”, “melliflous dews” and “pearly grain” (V: 426-430). The poet, besides, refuses the Cartesian idea of animals as machines devoid of reason and feelings and believes that all the living creatures have a soul and a mind: when Adam complains about his solitude, God comforts him by saying that animals “also know, / And reason not contemptibly” (VIII: 373-374).

Along with the democratic attitude and the growing interest in scientific studies that marked this period, a renewed enthusiasm for classic thinkers, above all for Pythagoras, Plato, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Porphyry, Empedocles, Lucretius and Seneca, contributed to the mounting sensitivity towards the natural world. Many English authors, like Milton, rejected the Aristotelian, Stoic and Cartesian conception of animals as ‘mechanical’ beings lacking reason, challenged anthropocentrism and, close to most Classics, close to Montaigne, Galileo, Gassendi and Leibniz, believed that the earth equally exists for humanity, animals and plants. The debate on animal dignity and on the relationship between human and animal psychology was particularly animated in these years: among the most eminent disputers were René Descartes, on the one hand, and, on the other, Pierre Gassendi and Michel de Montaigne. Announcing his intention to complete a thorough essay on animals, in a letter to the marquis of Newcastle Descartes expresses his mechanist vision of the natural world and explicitly equates animals to clocks:

les bêtes [...] agissent naturellement et par ressorts, ainsi qu’une horloge [...]. Et sans doute que, lorsque les hirondelles viennent au printemps, elles agissent en cela comme des horloges. Tout ce que font les mouches à miel est de même nature, et l’ordre que tiennent les grues en volant et celui qu’observent les singes en se battant, s’il est vrai qu’ils en observent quelqu’un<sup>7</sup> (Descartes 2009: 2353).

Whereas for Descartes no animal, even the most evolved and intelligent, has anything in common with man, for Montaigne animals are endowed with intellect and thought and for Gassendi they even have a soul<sup>8</sup>: thanks to his theory of monads, Gottfried Wilhelm

<sup>6</sup> 28 July 1666.

<sup>7</sup> Letter to the marquis of Newcastle, 23 November 1646.

<sup>8</sup> For the relationship between man and animal in early modern England, see Fudge 2000, 2004, 2006. For

Leibniz would be the first thinker who broke down the barriers between the animal and the human world. The gradual rootedness of the new caring approach towards animals led to a regardful relationship between mankind and nature that anticipated David Hume's, Jeremy Bentham's and Charles Darwin's vision of the 'brutes' and foreshadowed recent moral philosophy on animals, such as Tom Regan's "respect principle" and the 'ecofeminist theories' formulated by Carolyn Merchant, Carol Adams and Josephine Donovan.

It is precisely in the central years of the seventeenth century that the democratic movements of the Levellers and Diggers tried to retrieve man's original 'state of innocence', now frequently identified with Amerindian societies and with American colonies, by promoting their innovative socio-agrarian and vegetarian theories: these two political movements advocated the abolishment of social classes and private property and endeavoured to create a society entirely based on agriculture and gardening. Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of the Levellers, suffered when seeing beasts of burden and working animals grieving for hard labour and suggested that every parish should deliver a weekly lecture on natural sciences instead of the Sunday sermon. Paradoxically enough, both Diggers and Levellers were defeated by General Thomas Fairfax, the champion of republican ideals and one of the strongest supporters of Oliver Cromwell: the final destruction of both movements took place in the last years of the sixties, with the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. As it had already happened during the reign of Charles I, during Charles II's government numerous groups of Puritans left Great Britain in order to found in the New World, in North America, a society entirely based on that primitive Christianity that in Europe seemed ineluctably lost. The English interpreted the westward voyage implied in the colonization of America, now perceived as the original Eden, as the continuation and perfection of a sacred process started with the Reformation: the westbound movement of the pioneers, strongly imbued with solar symbolism, completed, according to this reading, the triumphal march of wisdom and true religion from the East to the West. As the fact that America was unknown to the Europeans until the Reformation was read as a signal of divine providence, so the pioneers were aware of their being the first followers of the course of the sun in its journey towards the paradisaical gardens of the West and were convinced of their bringing salvation to the whole universe. The conflict between country and city, or the topos of natural and innocent life as opposed to urban and corrupted artificiality, became a central theme and a literary convention well established in England during the seventeenth century (see Eliade 1969): in this light, the American plantations were regarded as a sort of paradise, as an enlarged, and untainted, 'countryside' of the mother country (cf. Williams 1985).

### **'Happy Insect, happy Thou'. Poetry, natural philosophy and 'minor' animals**

Abraham Cowley concentrates all the features just surveyed: he was actively involved with experimental science and with the new botanical and zoological studies, advocated the foundation of a society for scientific research and enterprise, was imbued with classical culture,

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animals and philosophy in the Renaissance and early modern age, see Muratori & Burkhard eds. 2013. For the modern Western debate on animals, see Boas 1933. For animals and men from a historical and cultural perspective, see Morus 1954, Arbuckle & McCarty 2015, Brantz 2010, Raber 2013, Agamben 2002.

was deeply influenced by the myth of paradise and had a respectful attitude towards plants and animals. Moving from the new astronomic theories and from the consequent redefinition of the role and symbolism of the earth within the whole universe, he also reconsidered the relationship between humanity and animals. Cowley regarded with both enthusiasm and dismay the idea of a world without limits and expressed a relativistic standpoint that strongly evokes Giordano Bruno's principles: if the Italian thinker believed that man, in his *exilium in illo infinito*, can be compared to an ant that has lost its way in the boundless space and, at the same time, believed that a star is not greater than a man<sup>9</sup>, in the essay *Of Greatness* Cowley declares that "this whole Globe of Earth, which we account so immense a Body, is but one Point or Atome in relation to those numberless Worlds that are scattered up and down in the Infinite Space of the Skie which we behold" (Cowley 1906: 434). Pervaded by the relativistic and 'ecologist' spirit of the age and close to the Levellers' interest in natural philosophy, albeit utterly far from their political theories, Cowley idealized and formulated an educative system that included agriculture, gardening and zoology: juxtaposing the "genuine taste" of the countryside to the sophistications of the city and arguing that "the three first Men in the World, were a Gardner, a Ploughman and a Grazier", in the essay *Of Agriculture* he maintains that any father should "provide a Tutor for his Son to instruct him" in natural issues (Cowley 1967: vol. II: 321) and in his Baconian essay *A Proposition for the Advancement of Learning* stresses the importance of zoology as a university course.

As already said, the changing attitude towards the natural world that marked this period was not prompted only by compassion and by a democratic and sensitive spirit but also, and possibly above all, by the new scientific interest and empirical approach: Thomas Sprat, a founding member of the Royal Society and Cowley's literary executor and biographer, remarked the interrelation between the poet's works and his life, personality and scientific concerns. Deeply interested in the new experimental science and a distinguished natural philosopher, Cowley involved himself with the Royal Society: as reported by Samuel Johnson, "in 1657 Cowley was made a doctor of physic" and "in the commencement of the Royal Society [...] he appeared busy among the experimental philosophers with the title of Dr. Cowley" (Johnson 1961: vol. I: 7). Cowley followed Thomas Sprat's and John Evelyn's advice<sup>10</sup> and celebrated in verse the Royal Society. With the poem *To the Royal Society* he praised in particular the glories and merits of Francis Bacon, the "mighty Man" that inspired and was the moral founder of the Society: "Bacon at last, a mighty Man, arose / [...] and boldly undertook the injur'd Pupil's cause"<sup>11</sup>, i.e. the cause of natural philosophy. Permeated with the spirit of the age and with the scientific interests of the Royal Society, Cowley knew much about animals, both real and mythical: he was familiar not only with

<sup>9</sup> "Alla proporzione, similitudine, unione e identità de l'infinito non più ti accosti con essere uomo che formica, una stella che un uomo; perché a quello essere non più ti avvicini con essere sole, luna, che un uomo o una formica" (Bruno 1973: 60-61).

<sup>10</sup> Evelyn records in his Diary a letter written to him by Cowley on May 13, 1667: "my laziness in finishing y<sup>e</sup> copy of verse vpon y<sup>e</sup> Royal Society, for w<sup>ch</sup> I was engag'd before by M<sup>r</sup> Sprat's desire, & encourag'd since by yow, was the cause of this delay" (Cowley 1967: vol. I: lxxvii).

<sup>11</sup> Cowley, *To the Royal Society* (*The History of the Royal Society, 2<sup>d</sup> Edition*), ll. 37-38. The lyric is included in *Occasional Verses*, a collection of poems written between 1663 and 1668.

Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, Ulisse Aldrovandi's zoological studies, Edward Topsell's *History of Four-Footed Beasts* and Thomas Moffet's *Theatre of Insects*, but also with the more scientifically treated information in Francis Willughby's *Ornithology* and Johannes Goedaert's *Natural Metamorphoses, or, History of Insects* (cf. Hinman 1960: 298). Among the most influential early modern theorists on animals, it is worth mentioning (besides the already quoted Montaigne, Descartes, Gassendi, Leibniz and Ray), Bernard Palissy, Hyeronimus Rorarius, Baruch Spinoza and, later, Thomas Hobbes and David Hume.

Cowley's numerous interests and attitudes led to his peculiar way of mingling poetry and natural philosophy, his writing essays in a poetical language and, vice versa, his composing poetry with the condensation, clearness and economy of good prose: highlighting the poet's 'double' essence, Samuel Johnson wittily defined him as a "philosophic rhymers" and, convinced that one of the great sources of poetical delight is "presenting pictures to the mind", concluded that Cowley "gives inferences instead of images" (Johnson 1961: 28, 34). In his passionate celebration of natural peace and rural pleasures, Cowley demonstrated deep knowledge and respect for animals: in the lyric *The Garden* he compares the melodies of birds to the poet's song and wishes, as Montaigne did, that the "Birds that dance from Bough to Bough" (st. iv) were not the target of cruel sports. By declaring that "'Tis well if they [Birds] become not Prey" (*The Garden*, st. iv), Cowley can be aligned with Tryon and Margaret Cavendish, the strenuous defenders of animals that explicitly questioned men's right to kill birds for their fun: Cavendish's *Dialogue betwixt Birds*, published in 1653, and Tryon's *Country-Man's Companion* and *The Complaints of the Birds and Fowls of Heaven*, both published in 1683<sup>12</sup>, are a majestic and moving defence of "the Freeborn Nations of the Air", as Cowley would say<sup>13</sup>, that can be regarded as the basis of important cultural, social and legislative changes. Although the indifferent and utilitarian approach was still rooted, the increasing sensitivity towards birds led to a series of Acts that forbid hunting wild fowl in 1689 and, more than one century later, to the foundation of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in 1824<sup>14</sup>: the more and more responsible and respectful attitude towards the 'brutes' is precisely what would prompt Arthur Schopenhauer to write about Great Britain in his philosophical essay *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1839) and to consider the English as a 'happy exception' in Western culture (Schopenhauer 2012).

### 'Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing'. The insect of Apollo and the Muses

Embracing the new scientific approach and the new regardful attitude towards the brute creation, Cowley, as much as the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace, composed lyrics that demonstrate a deep interest in animals that do not belong to poetic tradition. If, around

<sup>12</sup> The complete title of Tryon's essay in defence of birds is *The Complaints of the Birds and Fowls of Heaven to their Creator for the Oppressions and Violences Most Nations on the Earth Do Offer Them*.

<sup>13</sup> Cowley, *Ode. Upon Liberty*, st. iii. Reformulating the same image, in the following century James Thomson would define birds as "plumy race, / The tenants of the sky" (*Winter*, ll. 137-138).

<sup>14</sup> For the compassionate attitude towards beasts, see Thomas 1984, De Levie 1947, Franklin 2005, Singer 1990, Regan 1983.



1649, Cowley wrote the lyrics *The Country Mouse*, *The Swallow* and *The Grassehopper*<sup>15</sup>, Lovelace included in *Lucasta*, published in 1649, the poems *The Grasse-Hopper*, *The Ant*, *The Snail*, *A Fly Caught in a Cobweb* and *The Falcon*: the title of Lovelace's lyrical collection, *Lucasta*, is the contraction of the Latin terms *lux* and *casta*, but it also evokes the noun *locusta*, i.e. grasshopper. Cowley's and Lovelace's interest in 'minor' animals was undoubtedly influenced also by the vogue of the so called *style rustique*, the artistic pottery created in the previous century by Bernard Palissy, the French zoologist, naturalist, alchemist, hydraulics engineer and architect of gardens profoundly admired by Francis Bacon: Palissy used to model in a most naturalistic way insects, serpents, fish, snails, lizards, other reptiles and various plants in order to decorate the dishes, grottoes and *Wunderkammern* of majestic country estates. If Bacon was fascinated by Palissy's innovative lessons of natural science (see Farrington 1952), Evelyn greatly admired his naturalistic pottery in the royal estate of Fontainebleau (cf. Evelyn 1901). Enraptured both by Palissy's ceramics and by doctor Wilkins's transparent apiaries<sup>16</sup>, Evelyn devoted a whole section of his monumental *Elysium Britannicum* to the breeding and study of insects, bees, fish and birds ("Of Aviaries, Apiaries, Vivaries, Insects, etc"). If the *Philosophicall Apiarie* is useful, according to Evelyn, both for recreation and contemplation<sup>17</sup>, the buzz and murmur of bees is pleasant and fascinating because the "industrious chymists" produce honey, a "delicious *Elixir*" and "*Panacea*":

Their very murmurs are agreeable and exceedingly charming, and if they rob our Flowers, it is but to gratifie us with their *Hony* & that delicious *Elixir* which these industrious chymists extract, no imaginary *Panacea*, but the richest most elaborate and admirable that nature produces, or arte can shew (Evelyn 2001: 273-274).

Although convinced, as all his contemporaries, that the *Commonwealth* of bees is governed by males ("They have a Citty, King, Empire, Society". Evelyn 2001: 274), Evelyn even declares, radically far from Descartes's theories, that bees are intellectually close to men: "The Bee is the wisest, the most artificial & approaching nearest to the understanding of men" (Evelyn 2001: 274). The celebrated *gardiner* embraced the biblical vision of grasshoppers as a devastating scourge, but regarded the insects as worth consideration and appreciation for their being, close to the bees, endowed with humanity and kindness: "a sort of [Grass-hopper] more humane, & so intelligent, as being asked of an erring Traviler the way to the next Towne, will by stretching out one of his legs direct the passenger & seldome deceive him" (Evelyn 2001: 308).

As Evelyn associates bees and grasshoppers with men in the light of their intelligence,

<sup>15</sup> Cowley's poems were collected in *Miscellanies*, published in 1656.

<sup>16</sup> As recorded in his diary, Evelyn was profoundly impressed by the complex architecture of the transparent hives constructed by Wilkins: "we all dined at that most obliging and universally-curious Dr. Wilkins, at Wadham College. He was the first who showed me transparent apiaries, which he had built like castles and palaces, and so ordered one upon another, as to take the honey without destroying the bees" (Evelyn 1901: vol. I: 295. 13 July 1654).

<sup>17</sup> "an ornament that cannot be dispensed withall, and the Bee itselife of such use for contemplation and diversion" (Evelyn 2001: 273).

so Cowley, in his Anacreontic lyric *The Grassehopper*, indirectly equates grasshoppers to humanity by presenting them as the link between heaven and earth. Thomas Browne's theory of man as an *amphibium* in between the divine and the material worlds was a concept well rooted in the seventeenth century: according to the doctor, "thus is man that great and true *Amphibium*, whose nature is disposed to live [...] in divided and distinguished worlds [...] betweene a corporall and spirituall essence" (Browne 1963: 44). If grasshoppers are for Cowley 'amphibians' between heaven and earth, like men, for Johann Jakob Bachofen they represent the union of light and darkness since, as the first autochthonous men, they were originally generated by the earth, by darkness, and aspire to light, to the sun (Bachofen 1988: 779): in the lyric *To the Cicada*, the source of inspiration for Cowley's poem, Anacreon refers to the insect's autochthonous quality when defining it as "Loving song, *earth-born* and prudent" (l. 16. Italics mine. Anacreon 1993: 26). It is worth noticing that both Anacreon and Bachofen actually deal with cicadas and that the English term 'grasshopper' most frequently stands for 'cicada', the celebrated τέττιξ of ancient Greece, the ornament worn by the participants in the Eleusinian mysteries – rites devoted to Demeter, mother earth<sup>18</sup>. Besides Cowley and Lovelace, also Edmund Spenser, Andrew Marvell, Robert Burton, James Thomson and Leigh Hunt, for instance, use the term 'grasshopper' to praise the cicada and the pleasure provoked by its musical chirping.

The grasshopper-cicada Cowley celebrates in the eponymous lyric feeds on dew, the nourishment of angels, and functions, as if it were a human being, as the *amphibium* that connects the heavenly and earthly dimensions<sup>19</sup>:

Happy *Insect*, what can be  
 In happiness compar'ed to Thee?  
 Fed with nourishment divine,  
 The dewy *Mornings* gentle *Wine!*  
 (*The Grassehopper*, ll. 1-4).

Considering that for the ancients dew was a trace of Iris, the swift messenger of the gods that symbolises the rainbow, i.e. the bridge that links heaven and earth, Cowley's reference to the "dewy Wine" sheds further light on the 'amphibious' substance of the insect. Dew was also read as a sign of Eos, the goddess of dawn that loved Tithonus, a mythological figure connected with the grasshopper-cicada. According to the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, Eos asked Zeus to make Tithonus immortal but forgot to request eternal youth for her beloved: Tithonus became older and older and extremely garrulous, to the point of shrinking and becoming an ever chirping grasshopper (see Càssola 1999: 270). In the English version of the myth, Tithonus is transformed into a grasshopper, and not into the original cicada. Noticing that in Greek there are at least three insects that mean 'grasshopper', Allen argues that the

<sup>18</sup> For the Eleusinian mysteries, see, among others, Càssola 1999, Jung & Kerényi 1985, Kerényi 1967, Eliade 1978, Frazer 1922.

<sup>19</sup> Lovelace' *amphibium* grasshopper is, in its turn, the link between air and earth: "The Joyes of Earth and Ayre are thine intire, / That with thy feet and wings dost hop and flye". *The Grasse-Hopper. To my Noble Friend, Mr Charles Cotton. Ode*, ll. 5-6.

very Greeks confused different singing insects: “The Greeks do not distinguish clearly between the various singing insects, and it is not always clear what they mean when they use τέττιξ, καλαμαία, μάντις, ἄκρις” (Allen 1960: 83n).

Close to the classical readings of the Greek τέττιξ, Cowley emphasizes the divine substance of the insect. Nature is anthropomorphized and presented as Ganymede, Zeus’s cup-bearer, busy at serving dew and wine to the “happy Insect”:

*Nature* waits upon thee still,  
And thy verdant Cup does fill,  
'Tis fill'd where ever thou dost tread,  
*Nature* selfe's thy *Ganimed*  
(*The Grassehopper*, ll. 5-8).

Although Cowley begins his lyric faithfully drawing on Anacreon’s poem, opened with the invocation “We may well pronounce thee happy, / Oh, Cicada that on tree-tops, / [drinkst] thy little *dew-draught*” (*To the Cicada*, ll. 1-2. Italics mine), soon he transforms the original source in a hyperbolic treatment of the insect. In his elegy for the death of Cowley, John Denham precisely dwells on the poet’s ability to emulate the ancients and on his being “no pick-purse of anothers wit”, as Philip Sidney would say<sup>20</sup>, thus alluding to Cowley’s classical culture, to his originality and, thus, to the lively debate on creation/imitation:

To him no Author was unknown,  
Yet what he wrote was all his own.  
[...] He did not Steal, but Emulate,  
And when he would like them appear  
Their Garb, but not their Cloaths, did wear  
("On Mr. ABRAHAM COWLEY. *His Death and Burial amongst the Ancient Poets*", ll. 28-29, 35-37)<sup>21</sup>.

In Cowley’s Anacreontic composition, Nature serves the *grassehopper* as Ganymede, humanity sows and ploughs for it and the very Phoebus is the insect’s father:

Man for thee does sow and plow;  
*Farmer He, and Land-Lord Thou!*  
[...] Thee *Phæbus* loves, and does inspire;  
*Phæbus* is himself thy *Sire*  
(*The Grassehopper*, ll. 15-16; 23-24).

Cowley embraces Anacreon’s idea that the insect is loved both by Phoebus and the Muses (“And the Muses truly love thee: / And thou art loved of Phoebus”)<sup>22</sup> but, by claim-

<sup>20</sup> Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnet 74, l. 8.

<sup>21</sup> The elegy is quoted by Grosart (Cowley 1967: vol. I: cxxi).

<sup>22</sup> Anacreon, *To the Cicada*, ll. 12-13.

ing that the god is the insect's father, hyperbolically stresses the connection between the grasshopper and Apollo, the god of the sun whose frequent epithet is Phoebus, 'the brilliant'. Among his many aspects, Apollo is the head of the Muses' games, is the god of music and poetry and generally composes in verses his oracles: in the *Homeric Hymns*, the cicada is associated with the sun and with music and, for these reasons, is one of the animals consecrated both to Apollo and to Demeter. By insisting on its activities, "drinking, and dancing, and singing" (l. 9), Cowley links the *grasshopper* also with the Muses, who gather at Hippocrene's fountain in order to dance and sing:

Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;  
 Happier then the happiest *King!*  
 All the *Fields* which thou dost see,  
 All the *Plants* belong to *Thee*,  
 All that *Summer Hours* produce,  
 Fertile made with early juice  
 (*The Grasshopper*, ll. 9-14).

In his dialogue *Phaedrus*, Plato confirms the links among the insect, the Muses and poetry. Socrates explains to Phaedrus that the grasshoppers were originally poets, human beings so enraptured by the music and songs of the Muses that died of hunger and thirst: now these poets live in the grasshoppers. In his celebrated English version of the dialogue, Benjamin Jowett respects the British tradition and translates the term τέτιξ as 'grasshopper' and not as 'cicada':

the grasshoppers chirruping in the heat of the sun over our heads [...] are said to have been human beings in an age before the Muses. And when the Muses came and song appeared they were ravished with delight; and singing always, never thought of eating and drinking, until at last in their forgetfulness they died. And now they live again in the grasshoppers (Plato 1928: 262 d).

Besides explicitly quoting Plato's *Phaedrus* and connecting the grasshopper with the Muses, in his most influential treatise on melancholy Robert Burton dwells on the myth of Tithonus, juxtaposes the singing insect to black bile and identifies it with poets, scientists and men of culture:

poets, rhetoricians, historians, philosophers, mathematicians, sophisters, etc., they are like grasshoppers, sing they must in summer, and pine in the winter, for there is no preferment for them. [...] About noon, when it was hot, and the grasshoppers made a noise, [Socrates] took that sweet occasion to tell [Phædrus] a tale, how grasshoppers were once musicians, poets, etc., before the Muses were born, and lived without meat and drink, and for that cause were turned by Jupiter into grasshoppers. And may be turned again, in *Titoni cicadas, aut Lyciorum ranas* (Burton 1948: vol. I: 307).

**'Prophet of the ripened year!'. The grasshopper and the poet**

Albeit the cicada is popularly related to rashness and foolishness, Cowley's grasshopper is wise and prudent, is the link between heaven and earth, is associated with Apollo, the Muses and Demeter and, close to Plato's, Callimachus's and Anacreon's τέττιξ, is identifiable with the very poet. If, as argued by Socrates, "the grasshoppers chirruping in the heat of the sun over our heads" are "the prophetesses of the Muses" that inspire men with the gift of oratory (Plato 1928: 262 d), it is clear why Cowley draws a subtle link between the poet and the "happy Insect", in its turn sacred to Apollo and, thus, connected with poets and poetry. Apollo's relationship with music sheds light on the choice of depicting the *grassehopper* as a singing insect and, indirectly, as a poet: it is worth observing that Apollo is generally represented as the god of music and poetry in mount Parnassus, where he heads the Muses' games, and that his oracles are often expressed in verses. I am convinced that, when presenting a shepherd as enraptured by the melodies of the happy insect ("The *Shepherd* gladly heareth thee, / More *Harmonious* than *Hee*", ll. 19-20), Cowley is emphasising the *grassehopper's* characteristic musical feature<sup>23</sup> and is wittily linking it with Apollo, sometimes represented as a solitary shepherd: Apollo as a shepherd was so fascinated by Hermes's music that even bartered his own herd of cattle to get Hermes's lyre in exchange. Subsequently, Hermes invented the flute, an instrument that Apollo, defined in the *Homeric Hymn* as "master of the Muses" and "singer with the flute", obtained by exchanging it with his golden rod (afterwards Hermes's caduceus).

In the light of the connections between the insect and music, Callimachus, as it is well known, regarded the cicada as an attribute of the Muses and as a symbol of the refined poet: for this reason, Anacreon ends his lyric by defining the τέττιξ as "nearly equal to the immortals" (*To the Cicada*, l. 18). After drinking, singing and dancing, in the last couplet of Cowley's lyric the "*Voluptuous, Wise*" and "*Epicuræan Animal*" (ll. 31-32) feels satiated with its summer banquet and decides to retire: "Sated with thy *Summer Feast*, / Thou retir'est to endless *Rest*" (ll. 33-34). The reference to Epicurus is most interesting since in this period the Greek philosopher was frequently evoked for his 'naturalist' spirit and for his democratic and relativistic vision of the world: Cowley composed an Anacreontic lyric entitled *The Epicure* and, between 1647 and 1649, Gassendi published two successful guides in Latin on Epicurus and his ideas – *De vita, moribus, et doctrina Epicuri libri octo* and *Syntagma philosophiae Epicuri*.

Close to the Epicure that banishes toils and suffering and leaves the worry of the future to the gods<sup>24</sup>, the *grassehopper*, after its summer feast, longs for retirement:

But when thou'st drunk, and danc'd, and sung,  
Thy fill, the flowry Leaves among  
(*Voluptuous*, and *Wise* with all,  
*Epicuræan Animal*!)

<sup>23</sup> Close to the classical myth, Evelyn claims that the *grassehopper* prefers music to food and loves singing when the farmers are at work in the field: "They sing most when they are in the field, & love it better than their meate, 'tis pretty to consider how when a man is neere, they will sing as if very farr off, & when he is at a distance, in so loude a note as if he were just by one" (Evelyn 2001: 308).

<sup>24</sup> In the final couplet of the poem *The Epicure*, Cowley exclaims "Let's banish *Business*, banish *Sorrow*; / To the Gods belongs *To morrow*" (ll. 11-12).

Sated with thy *Summer Feast*,  
 Thou retir'est to endless *Rest*  
 (*The Grasshopper*, ll. 29-34).

As the happy insect “retires to endless Rest”, that is to say to the eternal dimension of heaven, so Cowley explicitly refers to the myth of paradise when declaring his wish to “retire to some American plantation” in order to abandon forever labour and grief: in the *Preface of the Author* to his *Poems*, Cowley announces that

my desire [is] to retire my self to some of our *American Plantations*, not to seek for *Gold*, or enrich my self with the traffic of those parts [...] but to forsake this world for ever, with all its *vanities* and *Vexations* of it, and to bury my self there in some obscure retreat (Cowley 1905: 8).

Considering that for seventeenth-century English thinkers the westward voyage to America, perceived as the original Eden, was strongly imbued with the symbolism of the sun, Cowley and his grasshopper have in common solar features, a musical-poetical skill and a fervent wish to withdraw to paradise.

A poem by Giovanni Pascoli corroborates the interpretation of the grasshopper’s desire to retire to endless rest as the insect’s longing for immortality. By linking the music of the grasshoppers with the melodies of the sistrum and with “invisible doors / that perhaps cannot be opened any longer”, Pascoli indirectly alludes to the mystery cult of Isis, the Egyptian mother goddess, giver of life and patroness of nature, and, thus, to the idea of immortality and resurrection after death:

squassavano le cavallette  
 finissimi sistri d’argento  
 (tintinni a invisibili porte  
 che forse non s’aprono più? [...])  
 (*L’assiuolo*, ll. 19-22).

Isis was often depicted with a pail symbolizing the Nile in one hand and with the sistrum, or ‘rattle’, evoking the sound of the breeze blowing through papyrus reeds in the other hand. In the essay *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch dwells on Isis’s creating force and on the powerful role of her musical attribute: “The sistrum (rattle) also makes it clear that all things in existence need to be shaken, or rattled about, and never to cease from motion but, as it were, to be waked up and agitated when they grow drowsy and torpid” (Plutarch 1936b: 149). The sistrum is explicitly connected with Isis and with the perpetual cycle of life, death and rebirth: if the basic shape of the musical instrument resembles the *ankh*, the Egyptian symbol of life in the hieroglyphs, Plutarch explains that at its bottom “they construct [...] the face of Isis on one side, and on the other the face of Nephtys. By these faces they symbolize birth and death” (Plutarch 1936b: 149).

The grasshopper’s wish to triumph over death, i.e. its wish to return to the earth it comes from, to the womb of the universal mother, reinforces both its links with Isis and

Demeter and its autochthonous essence (cf. Bachofen 1988: 779), a quality Anacreon highlights by defining the τέττιξ as “earth-born” (*To the Cicada*, l. 16). As his chirping alter ego aspires to resurrection by returning to mother earth, so Cowley hopefully longs for the eternal bliss granted by the primitive Christianity of the New World and by the earthly paradise that will be soon established in England for one thousand years: after all, as argued by Anacreon, the insect-poet is associated with the brilliant sun and is “nearly equal to the immortals” (*To the Cicada*, l. 18).

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Alessandro Vescovi

**The Uncanny and the Secular in Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* and *The Hungry Tide***

**Abstract I:** In *La grande cecità*, Amitav Ghosh affronta una serie di questioni relative all'inadeguatezza della comprensione da parte dell'opinione pubblica del pericolo insito nel cambiamento climatico. Le spiegazioni di Ghosh per questa incapacità non possono essere facilmente riassunte perché tracciano una genealogia assai complessa tra cambiamento climatico, imperialismo e capitalismo. Tutte queste forze affondano le radici nell'Illuminismo europeo, così come il genere del romanzo realista. Il saggio che segue riprende alcuni degli spunti di riflessione proposti da Ghosh per collegarli al suo romanzo ecologico *Il paese delle maree* (2004), dove questi stessi principi, presenti *in nuce*, appaiono tuttavia meno evidenti, nascosti come sono tra le pieghe del discorso poetico di Nirmal. Dopo la pubblicazione di *La grande cecità*, appare evidente che il discorso poetico di Nirmal debba essere interpretato come una forma di resistenza al pensiero scientifico dominante e ai limiti imposti dalla stessa scrittura romanzesca.

**Abstract II:** In *The Great Derangement, Climate Change and the Unthinkable* Amitav Ghosh addresses a series of key questions about the apparent incapacity of the public opinion to envisage the imminent danger of climate change. Ghosh's answer to the question can hardly be summarized, as it traces a complex parallel genealogy of climate change, imperialism, and capitalism – all of them being rooted in European Enlightenment, like the novel itself. My paper will briefly trace these hints and link them to Ghosh's most famous eco-novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004), where they are equally inapparent, dissolved as they are in aesthetic digressions. Such digressions, it becomes evident after *The Great Derangement*, should be read as an alternative way of interpreting nature, which calls for alternative ways of thinking and novel writing.

Let's be optimistic and imagine that a hundred years hence all our concerns about the environment will come to an end and humans will find a way to live pacifically along with other species on this Earth of ours. Then *The Great Derangement* will be in many ways outdated, since its prime concern was with climate change, however it will still be of interest for literary scholars, who will utilize it to shed light on the thought and poetics of Amitav Ghosh, by then a classic master. In this essay, I shall go through a few pages of *The Great Derangement* in order to consider some episodes in *The Hungry Tide* where the sublime and the uncanny may resonate with the essay on climate change.

*The Great Derangement* is an important book in many respects, since it brings together science and humanities, ecology and literature, culture in general and the poetics of the novel in a worldwide scenario. Indeed, most of the book pivots around a question, namely why is it so difficult for the novel as a genre to talk about climate change. Ghosh contends that we are not dealing effectively with climate change not only because significant economic interests are involved, as intellectuals like Arundhati Roy (1999) or Naomi Klein (2014) among the others have convincingly claimed at a local and at a global level; he certainly does not underestimate the power of vested interests, political hegemony, or capitalism as driving forces, but he also blames a problem of culture and imagination. Most people know that a climate change is taking place, and yet we find it difficult to imagine what climate change actually means and entails. If only professionals of imagination, such as novelists or screenwriters, could give shape to it, it would be easier to take some effective course of action.

Curiously, the essay does not begin with scientific data or political or even philosophical analyses, but with an arresting image from *Star Wars*. Ghosh recalls a scene when the Millennium Falcon seeks refuge in what Han Solo and princess Leia believe to be an asteroid. Suddenly the 'asteroid' begins to burp, so they realize that in fact they are not in a cave, but in the gullet of a huge space monster; not unpredictably the twain makes a narrow escape. Ghosh remarks that this uncanny effect could only be created by Californian screenwriters of the 1980s, since

The humans of the future will surely understand, knowing what they presumably will know about the history of their forebears on Earth, that only in one, very brief era, lasting less than three centuries, did a significant number of their kind believe that planets and asteroids are inert (Ghosh 2016: 3).

The 'derangement' alluded to in the title consists in walking towards the climatic disaster without doing anything to stop or even slow down; so unprecedented is the scale of what is happening that we cannot even imagine it. Thus, part of the essay is devoted to imagination, connecting the poetics of the XX century novel with rationalistic philosophy and scientific modes of knowledge. One of the problems with realism as a mode of writing, Ghosh contends, is its dependence not so much on reality but on probability (Ghosh 2016: 16-17). Indeed 'improbable' has become a derogatory term for a fictional work and reviewers often look askance at coincidences in serious novels or films. Indeed, the modern novel has excised coincidences as bad writing; yet most people have gone through experiences that would actually be improbable if they were told in realistic fiction, and Ghosh lists some from his own life. Thus, like much scientific knowledge, the novel is based on probability; this is hardly surprising since, as Ghosh contends, the novel was born from the same protestant mentality and positivistic attitude that invented the scientific method, carbon economy, and began the large-scale overexploitation of natural resources. Therefore, it is very difficult to remain within the boundaries of the realistic novel and distance oneself from its premises. The realistic novel simply finds it too difficult to represent something so unprecedented – and therefore unlikely in the mind of the readers – as climate change. Other forms of fiction could do that, most noticeably sci-fi, but, like sensation novels, it is considered the

“outhouse of fiction”, as Moretti maintains (2001: 200), not serious enough to provide more than entertainment.

By ‘serious’ Moretti does not mean the opposite of funny or comic, but rather that kind of fiction or non-fiction that has been produced mostly by and for the middle-class that not only amuses, but has some bearing on the readers’ lives, providing information as well as cultural, political, ethical, spiritual, philosophical insights. Moretti’s observations on the ‘serious novel’ can easily be extended also to serious non-fiction. The essay as a genre, after all, struck its roots in the same soil as the novel did. A serious essay – i.e. an essay that wants to be taken seriously and affect the readers’ lives somehow – is subjected to restrictions akin to those of the novel.

As a humanist and an intellectual, Ghosh tackles the Anthropocene by exposing the philosophy that has made it possible and by pointing out the unsustainability of over-developed, mostly western, lifestyles. However, it is difficult to utilize the western philosophical discourse to counter its tenets, one of these stating that the Earth is there for humans to exploit its riches. This is probably one of the reasons why some deep ecologists have resorted to eastern philosophies and religions to advocate an alternative world-view (Guha 1989). But deep ecology is not a path Ghosh wants to tread; he stages a striking critique of it in *The Hungry Tide* (Jaising 2015). Therefore, he mostly remains within the realms of the secular scientific essay, where everything that is stated is supposed to be true and falsifiable. Ghosh has always been an enemy to boundaries, even those that divide fiction from non-fiction, so that he incorporates fictional techniques in his non-fiction and histories in his fiction (Aldama 2002: 86). Indeed, *The Great Derangement* stretches the limits of non-fiction almost to a breaking point, but even then, I feel, its author cannot quite turn the western episteme on its head. Apparently, the notion that the realistic novel cannot provide an alternative discourse to the dominant western epistemology is true also of the essayistic form. Reading the *Great Derangement*, one gets the impression that Ghosh struggles to find a language and a way to talk about non-humans and non-human agency which can be taken seriously. But, as he himself points out, the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which goes back to Descartes, makes it almost impossible to talk of non-human agency today. Still a recognition of the non-human standpoint is pivotal in environment protection. This is where Ghosh’s discourse drifts towards different languages, like the uncanny in *Star Wars*, the legend of Bon Bibi, familiar to the readers of *The Hungry Tide*, Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’*. The supernatural, myths and religion cannot easily fit in the discourse of the scientific essay, so *The Great Derangement* gives rise to some uneasy cognitive and rhetorical compromises. A case in point is Ghosh’s intimation that non-human nature possesses something akin to a will of its own; he quotes Timothy Morton’s and George Marshall’s ideas of wild weather as uncanny:

Writing of the freakish events and objects of our era, Timothy Morton asks, “Isn’t it the case, that the effect delivered to us in the [unaccustomed] rain, the weird cyclone, the oil slick is something uncanny?” George Marshall writes, “Climate change is inherently uncanny: Weather conditions, and the high-carbon lifestyles that are changing them, are extremely familiar and yet have now been given a new menace and uncertainty” (Ghosh 2016: 30).

The words quoted from Morton and Marshall are by no means new, strong, or unusual, Ghosh could have easily paraphrased them, but quotations put some distance between his own words and their claims. By citing two authorities he declines the responsibility of 'seriously' stating that weather has a kind of agency, if not a will. As an anthropologist, he goes then one step farther in pointing out how the humankind had once known that there is a non-human agency:

These changes are not merely strange in the sense of being unknown or alien; their uncanniness lies precisely in the fact that in these encounters we recognize something we had turned away from: that is to say, *the presence or proximity of non-human interlocutors* (Ghosh 2016: 30, my italic).

Can the timing of this renewed recognition be mere coincidence, or is the synchronicity an indication that *there are entities in the world, like forests, that are fully capable of inserting themselves into our processes of thought?* And if that were so, could it not also be said that *the earth has itself intervened to revise those habits of thought that are based on the Cartesian dualism that arrogates all intelligence and agency to the human while denying them to every other kind of being?* (Ghosh 2016: 31, my italic).

These words are not a citation, but it is not clear whether they are a summary of Morton's thought or rather the original statement by Ghosh. The rhetorical strategy of affirming something in the form of questions protects the author of the essay as he is tentatively foraying outside the realm of seriousness. Indeed, he hastens to go back to the serious writing as he contends that his main point does not need the notion of non-human agency to be driven home:

This possibility [of the earth communicating with us] is not, by any means, the most important of the many ways in which climate change challenges and refutes Enlightenment ideas. It is, however, certainly, the *most uncanny*. For what it suggests – a indeed proves – is that *nonhuman forces have the ability to intervene directly in human thought* (Ghosh 2016: 31, my italic).

Subtly Ghosh affirms and negates that the earth and the forests (not only animals) may have an agency of their own and that they have a bearing on the human way of thinking. Eventually he appears to endorse this idea, but he surprisingly dismisses it as unimportant. This is paradoxical: he is saying that non-human forces intervene in human thought, contrary to what everyone in the western tradition has thought for some 2500 years, but he claims it is not important! In fact he has no other choice: to affirm it would mean to go counter to the limitations set by the paradigms of western discourse. Ghosh cannot afford basing his critique on the will of non-human entities, but he somehow needs the notion. The paradigms of western episteme appear inadequate to tackle the Anthropocene, but just to turn one's back to western discourse would mean to give up the possibility to be taken seriously by a wide portion of his audience. Quoting someone else's ideas (the essayistic version of heteroglossia) is the closest the essayist can get to using an alternative discourse and being taken seriously.

Again, at the end of his text, Ghosh extensively quotes from the encyclical *Laudato*

*si'* by Pope Francis. Again, one has the impression that the essayist cannot, but wished to, resort to the kind of powerful and evocative language to which the Pope is entitled. Significantly, Ghosh praises the Encyclical because it "challenges contemporary practices not only in the choice of words, but also in the directness of its style" (Ghosh 2016: 155) and he quotes several passages like the following: "Francis of Assisi helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human" (Ghosh 2016: 155). Later he quotes again "a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in the debate of the environment, so as to hear both *the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*" (Ghosh 2016: 157, the italic is in Ghosh's text, not in the Encyclical).

While some of Bergoglio's words could have been written also by Ghosh, the latter could hardly use the metaphor about the cry of the poor without sounding melodramatic and therefore suspicious if not unreliable, while the Pope can write in this way and be taken seriously. This happens because Ghosh must write within the western epistemological tradition, which is conventionally secular, callous, unheeding of emotions, and wary of metaphors, whereas the Pope writes within the religious homiletic tradition, in which metaphors and empathy are a necessary and accepted part. When talking about environment protection the Pope has one advantage over Ghosh, namely that he does not need to suffer the restraints of the secular discourse, while the serious essay and the rationalistic tradition within which Ghosh writes are eminently secular and human-centred. Secularism is a kind of tacit agreement among scholars that has made communication and discussions possible between people with different convictions and backgrounds, indeed it is one of the major tenets of cosmopolitanism. If Ghosh had not been restrained by the convention of secularism, he might have used a clearer and more vibrant language, with more statements and fewer inverted comas.

However Ghosh did bring together the poor and the earth in his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004), linking them in a very vivid way. The novelistic medium allowed him to do away with inverted commas and footnotes, relying instead on the Bakhtinian inclusion of multiple discourses and network narratives with multifocal narrations (Mukherjee 2010). Oftentimes Ghosh left the narrative agency to the Bon Bibi legend and to Rilke, and to a lesser extent to the dolphins. True, all of them are either quoted or translated, but their voices merge with those of the western-educated focalizers: Piya, Kanai and Nirmal. All these three are sooner or later bound to experience some uncanny or sublime feelings in their encounter with the jungle of the Sundarbans.

Although scholars have favoured realistic and postcolonial readings of the novel, 'uncanny' is a keyword in *The Hungry Tide* as much in *The Great Derangement*, where it serves as a bridge between the rationalistic discourse of the essay and the non-rationalistic appraisal of non-human. Indeed, ever since Jentsch's and Freud's first theorization of the uncanny, the concept has been related to a sort of hesitation – very much like Todorov's hesitation about the fantastic – which Ghosh seems to read as a glimpse into a non-descript complexity that defies the power of rationalism<sup>1</sup>. While rationalism is usually dismissive of the uncanny,

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, we shall not follow Jentsch's and Freud's anatomies because the only kind of uncanny in which we are interested here is the "natural uncanny", viz. the uncanny generated in contact with wildlife phenomena.



Ghosh claims that we should take it much more seriously, as it denounces the inadequacy of rational paradigms. The Cartesian duality of *res cogitans* vs *res extensa*, much decried by Ghosh, doubles the dichotomy human vs natural, which is just another way of phrasing the opposition between myself and the other, us and them. Ghosh's natural uncanny is very much like the sublime, in that both entail the recognition that this duality is delusory. Humans are in fact part of nature and in no way essentially different. The difference between sublimity and natural uncanniness is simply a matter of viewpoint: when the subject contemplates the oneness with nature without fear, one speaks of sublime, whereas when one fears some damage or when nature claims human lives, one speaks of uncanny.

There are a few sequences of uncanny and fantastic in *The Hungry Tide*, which involve the three focalizers of the story: Piya, the American biologist, Kanai, the metropolitan entrepreneur, and his uncle Nirmal, the old Bengali Marxist and former headmaster of the local school. As Pramod Nayar (2010) points out, all three are culturally outsiders in the Sundarbans, they all think and interpret the world according to the western rational discourse, unlike the main local characters, Fokir, Kusum and Horen. The latter are therefore bearers of a non-rationalized knowledge of the place, which for them is 'canny' as much as the everchanging and dangerous nature of the Sundarbans is uncanny for the metropolitans. The locals may well suffer the heat, thirst, hunger and fear in jungle, but they are not out of place; in this respect they remain much closer to Rilke's animals, who "already know by instinct / we're not comfortably at home / in our translated world", as Nirmal writes in his journal (Ghosh 2004: 206). In this context 'translated' means rationalized, estranged from the natural language. Indeed, we could substitute 'translated' with 'secular' and the statement would still make sense. It is their non-secular perception of the jungle that makes Horen and Fokir feel at home, while Nirmal and Kanai are uneasy. Talking of the story of Luis Bernier, Nirmal tells Horen that the explorer had been caught by a sudden storm. Certainly an uncanny event in the travel of the European, whose viewpoint is shared by Nirmal. Horen however has a different explanation:

*That's what happened, then. They crossed the line by mistake and ended up on one of Dokkhin Rai's islands. Whenever you have a storm like that – one that appears so suddenly out of nowhere – you know it's the doing of Dokkhin Rai and his demons". I grew impatient and said, "Horen! A storm is an atmospheric disturbance. It has neither intention nor motive".*

*I had spoken so sharply that he would not disagree with me, although he could not bring himself to agree either. "As to that, Saar", he said, "let us leave each other to our beliefs and see what the future holds".*

*Here was a man, I thought, whom the Poet would have recognized: "filled with muscle and simplicity (Ghosh 2004: 147).*

Throughout the novel "the Poet", Rilke, is for Nirmal and Ghosh a way of evading the tyranny of their respective 'serious' genres. The fact that Nirmal comments upon the event

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The two forms of uncanny share a certain uneasiness at the sudden recognition that something is not quite as it seemed or not quite as one had imagined it. Both in the case of Freud and Ghosh one recognises an epistemic disproportion between our received knowledge and the evidence of our senses.

through Rilke signals that it has moved something akin to the uncanny or the sublime in his consciousness. À propos de Rilke, in an interview Ghosh once declared:

And yet, especially if you have children, you cannot see the world that way [nihilistic]. After 9/11 Rilke was an enormous inspiration for me – that’s what Rilke is about, about loving the world, about seeing it and loving it for what it is (Vescovi 2009: 136).

In a famous episode Kanai experiences the natural uncanny in the jungle when, after an altercation, he bids Fokir to go away and remains alone on Garjontola’s shore. This very long sequence cannot be quoted in full, however it is worth mentioning that the quarrel between the two men begins when Fokir challenges Kanai’s secular world-view. On approaching the island, Fokir asks Kanai if he is afraid, like himself, and explains that he is afraid because a tiger must be nearby. What Fokir implies is not that he knows about the tiger and therefore he is afraid, but the other way round: he is seized by fear and feels his own goose bumps, therefore, he concludes, a tiger must be nearby<sup>2</sup>. And surely Fokir has goose bumps, Kanai notices. Yet secular Kanai is not ready to follow this argument, and clings to his rationality which considers fear the consequence of a conscious act of perception<sup>3</sup>. Soon after this as he clumsily walks in the shallow water, the very land seems to attack him:

Then suddenly it was as though the earth had come alive and was reaching for his ankle. Looking down, he discovered that a rope-like tendril had wrapped itself around his ankles. He felt his balance going and when he tried to slide a foot forward to correct it, his legs seemed to move in the wrong direction (Ghosh 2004: 325).

Later Kanai remains alone on the island and he panics as believes that a crocodile is heading for him. He starts thinking disorderly of the hunting techniques of tigers and crocodiles, until he feels another danger as he spots, or believes to spot, a tiger. At that moment his rationality fails and leaves place to his natural pre-linguistic self:

He could not recall the word, not even the euphemisms Fokir had used: it was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language. The sounds and signs that had served, in combination, as the sluices between his mind and his senses had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation. The words he had been searching for, the euphemisms that were the source of his panic, had been replaced by the thing itself, except that without words it could not be apprehended or understood. It was an artefact of pure intuition, so real that the thing itself could not have dreamed of existing so intensely (Ghosh 2004: 329).

<sup>2</sup> The connection between fear, religion and ethics is only partly revealed in the novel. In brief, the fear of the tiger demon Dokkhi Rai is proof that men enter his domain only pushed by necessity and not greed, which is considered the principle of all sins and evils. Indeed although Dokkhi Rai is a fierce god, he shows mercy to the humans who enter his territory compelled by necessity and recognize his authority through fear among other things (Vescovi 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Incidentally it is interesting to note that the origin of fear and its connection with the material world (*Adhyasa*) is a classic *topos* of Hindu philosophy that goes back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century theologian Adi Shankara.

The vision is very much like a *darshan*, the earthly appearance of a divinity. As the deity of the island, the tiger, appears majestic and benign: “It was sitting on its haunches with its head up, watching him with its tawny, flickering eyes. The upper parts of its coat were of a colour that shone like gold” (Ghosh 2004: 329). The noun ‘tiger’ is never mentioned throughout the episode, because giving it a name would mean to ‘translate’ it, to secularize it<sup>4</sup>. On the contrary, in front of the tiger-deity, Kanai, awed, loses his ability to master language and logic. It is worth pointing out that the English language, rationalism, and secularism were all brought to India by the colonizers, and are reduced to nil by a divinity that is as much Hindu as Muslim (Jalais 2008). Paradoxically for a novelist, Ghosh seems to mistrust language – a “bag of tricks”, in Piya’s words (Ghosh 2004: 159) and mere “ripples and waves” on the surface in Moyna’s (260) – which rationalizes and pretends to be able to express what is in fact unspeakable (White 2013: 521).

In a way, the meeting in the centre of the jungle might remind of *Heart of Darkness*, with one crucial difference, namely that Kanai does not find “the horror”, but a salvific sublime. This encounter with the tiger, or Dokkhin Rai as it is called as a deity, will positively change Kanai’s life.

Commenting on this episode, Pablo Mukherjee (2010) contends that Ghosh inserted it because it is consistent with the *jatra* (Bengali folk theatre) form on which Ghosh moulded his novel. The idea is certainly suggestive, but I believe that Ghosh’s natural uncanny has a wider scope than the mere form of the novel. The narrative does not offer a rational explanation of what passed on the island and readers are left with the freedom to choose between some unusual but scientifically explainable event, Horen and Fokir’s religious interpretation, or Rilke’s. The text is obviously open to interpretation, but so far scholars have taken a secular implied author for granted thus favouring the first hypothesis; I am not ready to say that this is not the case, but, after reading *The Great Derangement*, an interpretation that considers the possibility that “nonhuman forces have the ability to intervene directly in human thought” must be taken into serious consideration. Also the words uttered by Ghosh on the difficulty of doing justice to his experience in the Sundarbans take on a distinctive meaning:

It was incredibly fulfilling, just living in those houses, to be on the boat at night: it was pure magic, pure magic. I just can’t explain how magical it was. If I was to write ten books like *The Hungry Tide*, it would never do justice to the absolute magic of being there at night with the tide changing, under the moon, and to hear the tiger nearby (Vescovi 2009: 140).

If we do not take ‘realistic’ to mean ‘probable’ and ‘explicable’ according to the western science, we must allow for an alternative realism that does not depend on western pos-

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<sup>4</sup> For the people of the Sundarbans the word *bāgh*, tiger, is taboo. This may be explained with the fear lest pronouncing the name might ‘call’ the animal (Ghosh 2004: 108). This is indeed coherent with the Vedic notion that *Vāc*, the Word, to which is dedicated one of the earliest hymns of the *Rigveda*, may summon the gods to the sacrificial altar. However, the silence about the tiger-deity in the novel may be an act of resistance against the blasphemous secularization of the feline, that is appropriated by white hunters first, then tour operators and western charities.

itivism, the same Horen reclaims in his discussion with Nirmal about the tempest. To deny or ignore this interpretation is to disavow the cultural richness of the people of the Sundarbans, to read only as tourists, albeit sophisticated<sup>5</sup>. *The Hungry Tide* is a novel where the land is the true protagonist, and where it purposefully influences human will.

I differ also from Nayar (2010) in that I do not agree that all the episodes he sets down as uncanny are significant as such. In fact, we should distinguish what may be uncanny for the reader and what is uncanny only for the characters. I am not interested in the instances of disorientation of the metropolitan characters, but only in the events for which the author does not provide a rational explanation. Losing her sense of direction as Piya falls in the muddy water is uncanny only for her; the reader finds it quite 'canny' (Nayar 2010). On the other hand, Piya experiences another uncanny situation when she is saved from a crocodile by Fokir, who had mysteriously sensed its presence. A different kind of uncanny occurs later as Fokir takes Piya to a pool where she finds exactly the dolphins she was looking for. It becomes apparent that although she and Fokir do not share a language – and they actually do little to communicate with each other – still they understand each other perfectly, she thinks, so much so that each can attend to his/her work at the same time without disturbing the other. The energy that they share is hardly explicable within a realistic context. I would rather call this second instance of inexplicable events “sublime”, because Piya feels rather elated and not uneasy. Also Nirmal witnesses a kind of sublime *darshan* when he is taken by Kusum and Horen to Garjontola, where they meet a school of dolphins, which Kusum calls Bon Bibi's messengers. Initially he scorns Kusum, but he concedes that she has a point when he beholds the intelligent animals, and again translates this experience with Rilke's words.

*“What is it?” I said. “Is it some kind of shushuk?”*

*It was Kusum's turn to smile. “I have my own name for them”, she said. “I call them Bon Bibi's messengers”. The triumph was hers now; I could not deny it to her.*

*All the time our boat was at that spot, the creatures kept breaking the water around us. What held them there? What made them linger? I could not imagine. Then there came a moment when one of them broke the surface with its head and looked right at me. [...] Where she had seen a sign of Bon Bibi, I saw instead the gaze of the Poet. It was as if he were saying to me: some mute animal*

*raising its calm eyes and seeing through us,  
and through us. This is destiny [...] (Ghosh 2004: 235).*

Beside this romantic sublime, Nirmal and Kanai are granted another experience, which is both natural and political; Giles (2014) aptly calls it postcolonial sublime. Kanai describes it as he tries to explain to Piya what 'historical materialism' meant to his uncle: “For him it meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature” (Ghosh 2004: 283). In order to explain this insight of his, Kanai recounts the story of the rise and fall of Port Canning as he had heard it from his uncle; it

<sup>5</sup> My reference here is both to the Sahara Pariwani project of building a touristic resort in the Sundarbans (Ghosh 2004, Jaising 2015), but also to the power relations of the globalization (Bauman 1998).

is a story that involves hubris, greed, capital, science, geology, meteorology and anthropology. The sublime part of it is in the complexity of the relations, and the incommensurability between humans and the environment. Nirmal awes and stops at that, but his nephew will go a step farther.

Initially Kanai responds to the sublime in a typically colonial way, *viz* trying to control it (Giles 2014: 9), but then, like Nirmal, he is overwhelmed. The combined effect of his discussions with Piya, the reading of his uncle's journal, and his own adventure on Garjontola island brings Kanai to the perception of the sublimity of complexity, where, as in the case of Nirmal, everything is connected with everything else, including the attitude of metropolitan cosmopolite middle class men like himself (and most readers), the fate of tigers, and the fate of the inhabitants of the Sundarbans. The interconnection includes science and religion, words and silence, the secular and the non-secular, humans and non-humans, the uncanny and the sublime.

In short, although Ghosh's prose is not religious in any traditional sense of the word<sup>6</sup>, he appears to have some problems with secularism, as it is the product of a scientific discourse that he has often tried to oppose (Luo 2012). A few fissures in the neat prose of in his recent *The Great Derangement* tell that our relationship with the Earth cannot be completely and truly described within the traditional western scientific paradigm. His frequent reference to uncanny episodes, which is initially introduced as an issue connected with the poetics of the novel, in fact testifies to a genuine though yet undeveloped attempt at moving beyond the scientific discourse and beyond the human vs non-human dichotomy. *The Hungry Tide* abounds with uncanny incidents, some of which find no rational explanation and are rather resolved into the realm of religion or poetry. Far from being literary embellishments, these elements must be interpreted as a way of moving the boundaries of the secular novel into the realm of the non-secular, in other words, from the modes of knowledge of colonizers to the modes of knowledge that are deeply embedded in the Indian culture that the novel describes, where everything is interconnected.

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<sup>6</sup> In *In an Antique Land*, where he is daily confronted with the piety of the fellahin, he is often asked whether he is religious and he mostly tries to dodge the question; at a pinch he answers: "'I was born a Hindu,' I said reluctantly, for if I had a religious identity at all it was largely by default" (Ghosh 1992: 47).

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Loredana Salis

**“...so much immortal wealth”: *Life in the Sick-Room* by Harriet Martineau as Eco-Sustainable Narrative**

**Abstract I:** Questo studio propone una lettura in chiave eco-critica di *Life in the Sick-Room* di Harriet Martineau (1844). Scritto a partire da un’esperienza personale dell’autrice, il volume si configura come trattato normativo sulla condizione dell’invalido in epoca vittoriana, e di fatto contribuì notevolmente al dibattito sulla riforma della professione medica e del sistema sanitario inglese del tempo. Martineau non ambisce a trasmettere un messaggio ecosostenibile, e tuttavia la sua concezione di natura in quanto funzionale alla salute fisica e spirituale del lettore riflette i valori promossi da discipline recenti quali i Green Studies e i Partnership Studies.

**Abstract II:** This study reassesses Harriet Martineau’s *Life in the Sick-Room* as an example of Victorian eco-sustainable narrative. Based on the author’s real-life experience as a long-term patient, the volume was conceived as a normative treatise on the condition of the invalid, and contributed significantly to ongoing debates on the reform of the medical system. Though the author does not deliberately provide readers with an ecological message, she advocates a remedial process that sees nature as a refuge and a redemptive space. A re-reading of *Life in the Sick-Room* today shows its value from an eco-critical viewpoint.

Harriet Martineau was a self-educated intellectual who became a journalist, a translator, an equal-rights activist, a theorist in political economy, a sociologist, and a prolific creative writer<sup>1</sup>. Highly influential in her time<sup>2</sup>, but somehow underestimated today, this eccentric and eminent Victorian woman turned to nature and to nature’s “immortal wealth” at times of personal sorrow and of profound reflections upon life and the necessities of human ex-

<sup>1</sup> Martineau’s bibliography includes novels, children’s books, short stories, essays, over 1,600 articles and a 3-volumed autobiography. See E. Sanders Arbuckle ed. 1994. *Harriet Martineau in the London Daily News. Selected Contributions, 1852-1866*. New York: Garland Publishing, xiv. See also Vv. Aa. n.d. Bibliografie Harriet Martineau. 50 *Klassiker der Soziologie* <http://agso.uni-graz.at/lexikon/klassiker/martineau/29bib.htm> (consulted on 17/03/07), quoted in Enrico Reggiani. 2007. *Beau Idéal. Harriet Martineau e una rappresentazione del capitalist*. Introduzione G. Vigorelli, Quaderno n. 21, giugno, n. 38: 33, <http://docplayer.it/23050744-Beau-ideal-harriet-martineau-e-una-rappresentazione-del-capitalist.html> (consulted on 27/06/2017), and Anthony Mandal *et al.* eds. Appendix 1 (Harriet Martineau Series). *The English Novel, 1830-1836* <http://www.romtext.org.uk/resources/english-novel-1830-36/> (consulted on 10/10/17).

<sup>2</sup> In the words of a Martineau biographer: “It is scarcely possible to read any book relating to the nineteenth century without finding in its index [...] the name of Harriet Martineau” (Wheatley 1957: 11).

istence. In these terms she can be viewed as a pioneer eco-critic, whose beliefs in nature as a refuge and a redemptive space are expressed most prominently in *Life in the Sick-Room*, a collection of essays published in 1844 (Martineau 1844).

Born in 1802, in Norwich, about 100 miles north-east of London, Harriet Martineau was the daughter of a manufacturer, and a sister to James Martineau, the Unitarian minister and Professor of moral philosophy. Brought up in an environment that failed to provide her with an adequate emotional and financial support (Martineau 2003: 16), Martineau had a turbulent adolescence, the details of which she recorded in her *Autobiography*<sup>3</sup>. In 1829, following severe financial losses incurred by the family, she had no choice but make a virtue out of necessity: she moved to London, and there became economically independent through knitting and especially through writing – at the start, primarily with journal articles for the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* of W. J. Fox. Hardship and early-life experiences shaped the woman and the writer she was known to be, a liberal-minded, resilient and strong-opinionated individual, who never married, nor had children, but placed significant value upon friends and family ties, and who committed herself to the causes of freedom and equality in a just world<sup>4</sup>. Crucial to Martineau's formative years were the several journeys that she took across North America (1832-1834), Egypt, Palestine and Syria (1846) as well as continental Europe, most notably Italy (1839) and Ireland (1852). It was during a visit to Venice that she fell severely ill and was forced to return home, subsequently leaving London and moving to the Lake District, in Tynemouth at first (1839-1844), and then Ambleside (1845), the place where she found “an innocent and happy life [...] pure air, a garden, [and...] superb natural scenery” (Webb 1960: 254)<sup>5</sup>.

A self-defined “delicate child” (Martineau 1877: 7), Martineau suffered from poor health throughout her life, as a result of which she developed an obsession with death that haunted her for years. At the age of 12 she experienced “a gradual exclusion from the world of sound” (Martineau 1877: 57); by 16 she became hearing-impaired and started using an ear trumpet<sup>6</sup>. At 37 she was diagnosed with cancer, a condition believed to be incurable, and which caused Martineau to live as a terminally-ill patient within the four walls of her sick-

<sup>3</sup> Written in 1855, at a time when Martineau thought she would die soon, the 3-volumed autobiography was published posthumously in 1877. Cf. H. Martineau, 1877. *Autobiography, with Memorials*. Maria Weston Chapman ed., 3 vols. London: Smith, Elder & Co <https://archive.org/details/harrietmartinea01martgoog> (consulted on 20/07/2017).

<sup>4</sup> The following titles are indicative of her major concerns: “On Female Education” (1823); “Poor Laws and Paupers Illustrated” (1832); several editorials on the Divorce and Matrimony Causes Acts (1853-1857); “Married Women Property Laws” (1856); “British Rule in India” (1857); “Cotton Supply/Slavery” (1859). In 1866 Martineau campaigned for women's suffrage and in 1869 she opposed to the Contagious Disease Act.

<sup>5</sup> Life in the Lake District, her love of the area and the wish to disclose knowledge of those natural beauties to residents as well as the wider audience inspired her to write the first *Complete Guide to the English Lakes* (1855). Modelled upon Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), the volume represents another significant example of Martineau's creativity and enthusiasm. It includes a geological map, illustrative views of the places described, botanical contributions, and a comprehensive Directory, the latter being an innovative feature for tourist guides at the time: <https://ia800805.us.archive.org/25/items/completeguidetoe1855mart/completeguidetoe1855mart.pdf> (consulted on 20/03/2017).

<sup>6</sup> Martineau's early disabilities included the loss of taste and smell. For a detailed account, cf. Deegan 2003.



room. Frustrated by the inadequacy of traditional cures, in 1844 she decided to try alternative healing, namely mesmerism or animal magnetism, and was (or convinced herself that she was) temporarily cured (Conti Odorisio 2003: 153)<sup>7</sup>. The five-year confinement between 1839 and 1844 marked a turning point in her private as well as her public life. She gradually came to disavow her Christian faith, and started looking differently at her present state as the culmination of an existence that had “begun with winter” (Martineau 1877: 484)<sup>8</sup>. That peculiarly distressing period, characterised by physical pain and psychological fragility, prompted her to write what would become a collection of ten “Essays by an Invalid”. Published anonymously with the title *Life in the Sick-Room* and soon recognised as a Martineau piece, in 1845 the volume was followed (and thematically completed) by another collection, *Letters on Mesmerism*, an enthusiastic and controversial account of the author’s mesmeric experience, which sparked more debates on the actual efficacy of unorthodox medicine as well as the limits of traditional therapies (Martineau 1845b). The *Letters* were penned “to lift up the subject [of Martineau’s recovery] of the dirt into which it had been plunged – because of the way in which it had been unfairly portrayed in the press – and to place it on a scientific ground”. They first appeared in the widely read periodical *Athenaeum* in 1844 (Martineau 1877: 475)<sup>9</sup>, only a few months after Martineau was “universally detected” as the author of *Life in the Sick-Room* (Martineau 1877: 597).

Formally conceived as a treatise on invalidism, the collected essays bear the traits of a memoir proper, being a first-hand first-person account of a secluded patient (and effectively an early draft of Martineau’s posthumous *Autobiography*). The volume is one of numerous texts belonging to the so-called “invalid literature”, an array of nineteenth-century literary works by bedridden writers<sup>10</sup>. A precious testimony to aspects concerning patients and the medical institution within Victorian culture, *Life in the Sick-Room* stood out among invalid poems, letters, novels, essays of the period as it contributed to an understanding of invalidism in ways that other publications on the theme did not. The peculiarity of Martineau’s

<sup>7</sup> In fact she was not, and the situation got worse ten years later. Some critics have suggested that Harriet Martineau may have suffered from hysteria (Postlewaite 1989: 585-589; Roberts 2002: 122) or that she was somehow a hypochondriac, who actually suffered from a psychosomatic illness (Postlewaite 1989: 588). But as Frawley argues, “retrospective diagnosis [remains] fraught with problems” (Martineau 2003: 21). What is relevant in the present context is that in 1844, believing herself to have fully recovered, Martineau bought some land in Ambleside and had a house built there, a place which she named “The Knoll” after a small hillock near the river with commanding views across the valley. The Knoll exists to this day as a grade 2 listed building converted into quality tourist accommodation: <https://www.cumbrian-cottages.co.uk/central-southern-lakes/ambleside-area/1-the-knoll-cc123182> (consulted on 22/07/2017). On the Ambleside years, cf. Todd 2002.

<sup>8</sup> The 5-year confinement was when, in Martineau’s words “a large portion of the transition from religious inconsistency and irrationality to free-thinking strength and liberty was gone” (Martineau 1877: 467).

<sup>9</sup> It was Martineau’s decision to publish in the *Athenaeum*, a literary magazine, through which she sought to address what Caroline Roberts calls an “Establishment readership and not just the converted”. The serialisation of those letters was successful at the start, but it then gave way to a nasty response on the part of the editor, Charles Wentworth Dilke, who publicly denied Martineau’s competence on medical matters and doubted the efficacy of the mesmeric treatment she was undertaking. Cf. Roberts 2002: 126.

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of Victorian “invalid literature” see Frawley 2004, especially chapter 5, 200-244.

account is confirmed by its immediate success: the volume was remarkably popular with both critics and Victorian readers, the former prising the “gifted author” of a “wise and thoughtful book [that was] the offspring of a lofty mind” (Martineau 2003: 26). To the average reader – from an upper or a middle-class milieu – Martineau’s essays proved immensely thought-provoking, recommending radical changes in the way family and friends administered a sick person’s daily exigencies and thus claiming an important place in the English cultural and intellectual landscape at the time. To this day, *Life in the Sick-Room* remains in many ways an innovative text, a pioneering example of narrative medicine, which is known essentially within Anglophone literary and academic circles, but is almost unknown beyond them as evidenced by the fact that none of the ten essays have been translated or edited in another language. Critical attention has focussed on the way writing helped Martineau cope with her condition (Conti Odorisio 2003: 148), the extent to which *Life in the Sick-Room* contributed to the reform of nineteenth-century medicine and medical profession (Winter 1995), how it impacted on the “sociology of the patient-caregiver relationship” (Hoecker-Drysdale 2003: 146) and influenced literary reflections on invalidism in the twentieth century (Martineau 2003: 28). Scholarly interest has also been drawn towards the “dominant representation of illness in the literary imagination of Victorian England” (Bailin 1994: 9) and to aspects of identity and identity construction in relation to invalidism (Frawley 2004).

Nineteenth-century sick-room narratives tend to rely on “metaphors of confinement” (Frawley 2002: 202) in response to the preoccupations and pressures of the wider world. For invalids writing about their experience, the literary sick-room came to represent a retreat, a hiding place, a haven or a sanctuary, a privileged space which was also depicted in negative terms as a “prison”. This was partly the case with Martineau (Martineau 1844: 36, 44, 60, 61, 89), who saw herself like a gaoler with little privacy or freedom (43, 44, 49, 58, 59, 130, 166, 191). And yet, she admitted to “the comfort of being alone in illness” (30), and like other sick-room writers of the time she found temporary refuge from the “anxieties” and the “troubles” of domestic life (namely her conflict with her mother, as well as of public life, which had long been hectic as a consequence of extended travelling and of her publishing commitments)<sup>11</sup>. Whether a prison or a haven, the literary sick-room became “a legitimised site for the representation of an alternative society and mode of existence”, providing authors and their readers with “a utopian order” in response to “a powerful desire for coherence at a time when economic, political, and social relations were undergoing profound reorganization and differentiation” (Bailin 1994: 9, 13)<sup>12</sup>. To Martineau it gave a vantage point

<sup>11</sup> While feeling ‘in chain’ she also claimed to be “comparatively happy” in her sick-room (Martineau 1877: 146). Martineau’s use of terms such as ‘happy’ and ‘alone’ is often ambivalent. At times she gives them a negative connotation, at times the reverse is true. To be happy, for her, is also to be free; being an invalid she claimed to feel like a prisoner but also a privileged person, free to live her life in ways that had been unimaginable before her Tynemouth days. Solitude would be crucial to her happiness in the second case. By contrast, the term ‘happy’ is sometimes used alongside ‘healthy’ in the expression “the healthy and the happy” (ix; 17, 220, 221) and in opposition to “the sufferer” (150, 151).

<sup>12</sup> Martineau’s decision to be treated with mesmerism defied the institutionalised medical authority in a field which she, being a long-term invalid, claimed to be her own just as it was of an established and professional domain. In this respect, it is interesting to note that “the nineteenth-century upper and middle classes were

to “declare” her views, to “recommend” changes, and “warn” her readers, “confident” as she felt, and by virtue of her “superior wisdom” (Martineau 1844: 60, 57, 167, 192). It ought to be noted that as a bourgeois cultural institution, the Victorian sick-room also had powerful gender connotations, thus giving women an opportunity to recount and voice what Martineau terms “spontaneous revelations” (211). Accordingly, gendered notions of the sick-room view it as the place where conflicting desires could be mediated, and “relief from the discontinuities in the ideal of womanhood” may be attained (Bailin 1994: 27)<sup>13</sup>. Bailin’s emphasis on the creative potential of the sick-room, and the “acute gap between inner and outer experience, between self and other” rests with her investigation of “the art of being ill” (Bailin 1994, 13-14), but in this context it proves useful from an eco-critical perspective and therefore for a rethinking of *Life in the Sick-Room* as an eco-sustainable narrative. No such reading, nor an eco-critical reassessment of Martineau’s work appears to be currently available. To this double aim I shall dedicate the remainder of this study<sup>14</sup>.

Eco-sustainable narratives view art as an integral part of the natural order, thereby challenging the modern separation of culture from nature, and reconfiguring the sometimes hidden connections between the animal and the non-animal worlds, between the observer and the observed nature. Literature, including creative as well as academic writing, is eco-sustainable for as long as it concerns itself with “listening to and seeking for what is secluded, the *oikeion*”, that is to say with “the thing that has not become public, that has not become communicational, that has not become systemic” (Lyotard 2000: 137). Eco-sustainable narratives provide a language to articulate uncharted experiential territories, therefore enabling new ways of comprehending the environment in which we live. As such they represent creative acts of discovery, or re-discovery through which we “come forth into the light of things”<sup>15</sup>, and thus we see and understand them anew. It may be contended that any piece of literary work potentially lends itself to eco-critical interpretation, and indeed Green Studies hold a distinctively broad theoretical approach that can be “re-defined daily by the actual practice of [...] literary scholars around the world” (Slavic 2000: 160). The apparent lack of a dominant doctrine accounts for its early dismissal within academia, but in recent times environmental studies have been acknowledged their capacity to offer valuable critical tools. Accordingly, in the present context, *Life in the Sick-room* is revisited with a view to showing

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treated at home [...] by a doctor whose professional qualifications resided as much in his relations to the family [...] and personal charm, as in his technical skill and knowledge” (Bailin 1994: 9).

<sup>13</sup> The literary sick-room thus becomes an arena where cultural paradoxes can be mediated. It is here that women can “go beyond one’s designated and restrictive social role”. As Bailin contends, “in works by women of the period, illness occurs when the desire to reject the characteristics and narrow range of functions considered appropriate for women threatens a profound loss of identity, whereas to accept them conventionally defined would result in a return to frustration and self-attenuation” (Bailin 1994: 27-28, my italics). Martineau’s account does not explicitly claim for a room of one’s own, nevertheless it succeeds in constructing a narrative from which her feelings, aspirations and frustrations can be articulated.

<sup>14</sup> The eco-critical reading offered in this study does encompass aspects of eco-feminism, which can be traced across Martineau’s work and are well worth investigating, but remain beyond the present scope.

<sup>15</sup> Line 15 in “The Tables Turned”, a much-quoted poem by Wordsworth (1798): “Come forth in to the light of things/ And let Nature be your teacher” (Coleridge & Wordsworth 1969: 105).

how Martineau's language and concerns are consonant with issues that have become the object and subject of relatively recent eco-scholarship. I shall argue that Martineau's volume represents a creative act of discovery and self-discovery, which explores, articulates and gives prominence to the interdependence of the animal and the non-animal worlds while also revealing how invalidism puts one's identity on trial, facilitating self-scrutiny for the author as well as her reader.

Emerging as a focal point in Martineau's holistic aesthetics, nature becomes pivotal to such a dual process, and while the writer does not deliberately convey an ecological message as such, she certainly gives nature a significant place. In *Life in the Sick-Room* the term is used to indicate "the essential quality and character of something"; and most importantly "the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both", and "the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings" (Williams 1983: 219). Raymond Williams' conceptualisation of the "perhaps most complex word in the language" indicates the inextricable link between nature and culture (211); in other words it shows that "notions of nature are socially constructed and determine our perception of our direct experiences, which, in turn, determine our direct communication about them" (Gifford 2000: 174). In this respect, an eco-critical reading of *Life in the Sick-Room* evaluates Martineau's uses of nature as time, place and culture specific, at once reflecting and being a reflection of her status as a middle-class invalid writer in nineteenth-century Britain. At the same time, a rethinking of this particular mid-Victorian sick-room narrative as eco-sustainable sheds light on the legacy of Martineau's belief in nature's social and cultural value and how this affected her pursuit of education on the spiritual and psychological dimensions of chronic suffering.

The first signs of a gradual shift towards environmental awareness can be traced in works predating *Life in the Sick-Room*. As early as 1832, Martineau had published *Illustrations of Political Economy*, an experimental 9-volume study in which the will to narrate underlies a specific didactic aim: Martineau deals with a difficult subject – Thomas Carlyle's "dismal science" – that is of a predominantly male-upper-middle class interest, and she makes it widely accessible to the general public (to include both women and the lower classes) through the popular medium of the literary short story. *Illustrations* brings together 25 tales, small anecdotes, the first of which, interestingly for us here, bears the title of "Life in the Wilds" and which is followed by "Hill and the Valley" (Martineau 1836). Both place significant attention to the necessity of interaction between man and nature. Similarly, Martineau's first novel, *Deerbrook* (1839), a realist tale *à la Austen*, essentially recounts a story of rural life whose protagonists are immersed in beautiful scenery. The 1841 children classic *Feats on the Fjord* further displays the skilfully "picturesque pen"<sup>16</sup> of the author, and her ability to depict and share with readers breathtaking descriptions of the Norwegian landscape, with its lagoons, the walls of rock, the wildlife, the midnight sun, the "charming crystalline" beauty of the Arctic circle (Martineau 1841)<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Anonymous review. 1848. Eastern Life, Past and Present. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August: 185-189. Quoted in Martineau (2006: 23).

<sup>17</sup> For a critical assessment of the tale see K. Walchester, 2014. *Feats on the Fjord* was the first and remains one of the few among Martineau's texts to have been translated in Italian. Cf. Martineau 1925.

Time and the sick-room experience reinforced Martineau's faith in the healing force of nature, and although she retained a Romantic and sometimes idealised conception of it as a "kind of universal home" (Hazlitt 1970: 7), she eventually came to conceive of nature as a "way of thinking"<sup>18</sup>. A Unitarian like Martineau, Hazlitt was influenced by the Necessarian doctrine, or physical determinism, according to which nature is determined by universal laws<sup>19</sup>. This possibly gave Martineau a new method of interpretation of reality in that when "incidents occur, they produce effects, and [that those] effects should be understood". The notion that "all action might be determined by antecedent causes, but one's own actions and discriminations were *necessary links* in the chain of cause and effect"<sup>20</sup>, may have nurtured Martineau's belief in the interconnectedness of *all* beings – animal and non-animal – and the possibility of recovering universal harmony<sup>21</sup>. However she came to that resolution, there is little doubt that her view of nature as an "immortal wealth" was a consequence of her infirmity. Forced to spend her days and nights within her sick-room, she had come to believe that "disobedience to the laws of nature" would manifest itself in the ill body; therefore healing was a matter of 'redress', literally, of reconnecting and re-harmonising with nature (Martineau 1877: 441)<sup>22</sup>. It is not fortuitous that these ideas recur most evidently in works written in or after 1844, the year when Martineau "found herself under the hands of a Mesmerist", and like many at the time she placed her trust in an unorthodox medical practice that pursued and claimed to restore harmony between man and nature<sup>23</sup>. In *Dawn Island*, a

<sup>18</sup> The expression owes to Americans Roderick Nash and Max Oelschlaeger, and it is used by Gifford to define nature (Gifford 2000: 174). Martineau's debt to Romanticism has been debated by several scholars (eg. Todd 2002; Hutcheon 2003; James 2009; Harding 2009) and it can be witnessed in references to Romantic literature in *Life in the Sick-Room* (cf. annotated version of Martineau's Essays, Frawley 2003). In this respect, it can be argued with Harding that Martineau "carried forward the *essential Romantic debates* about the self and the universe, the citizen and the polis, gender and political rights for women, into a more populated, industrialized, complicated, and globally interconnected world" (2009: 28, my italics).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy, online reference: [http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405106795\\_chunk\\_g978140510679515\\_ss1-42#citation](http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405106795_chunk_g978140510679515_ss1-42#citation) (consulted on 27/07/2017). On the impact of Unitarianism upon Martineau's life and thinking see Hutcheon 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Linda H. Peterson. 1986. Martineau's Autobiography: the Feminine Debate over Self-Interpretation. *Victorian Autobiography: The Tradition of Self-Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale University Press (consulted on 20/07/2017) <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/peterson/5.html#nec>. In her *Autobiography* Martineau claims that "All the best minds that I know are Necessarians; all indeed which are qualified to discuss the [religious] subject at all" (Martineau 1877: 110).

<sup>21</sup> Martineau believed in the existence not of the individual, but rather of a "man within society, who is subject to the eternal and never-changing laws of nature" (Conti Odorisio 2003: 331).

<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in the *Autobiography* Martineau writes that a "new obedience to a new law of nature raised me up, and sent me forth into the world again" (Martineau 1877: 443). The reference is to the practice of mesmerism.

<sup>23</sup> In his thesis, *Dissertatio physicomedita de planetarum influx* (1766) Franz Anton Mesmer investigated what he termed "animal gravity", that is to say the "influence of celestial bodies on humans", a disruption of which would cause disease. The healing practice that he developed – mesmerism – sought to restore "the natural harmony of magnetic fluid in the patient's body" (Roberts 2002: 122-123). See also R. Darnton. 1984 [1968]. *La fin des lumières. Le mesmerisme et la Révolution*. Paris: Perrin, 18 (quoted in Conti Odorisio 2003: 150); R. K. Webb. 1960. Tynemouth: Mesmeric Wonders. *Harriet Martineau. A Radical Victorian*, chapter 8. London: Heineman, 226-253. For Martineau's own account, see: H. Martineau, 1845. Letter I (12 Nov. 1844). *Letters on Mesmerism*. London: Edward Moxon; Martineau 2003: 242 and Martineau 1877: 490.

short novel completed in 1845, she explores the disruption of their accord in the opening and closing chapters, entitled respectively “Nature and Man at War”, and “Nature and Man at Peace”. Asserting the importance of making contact with the “unfathomable quietness” of the sky and “the transparency of the atmosphere”, Martineau persuasively told her readers how “the leap and gush of the mountain streams lulled the senses of the observer”, and granted him, or her, an incomparable “abode of peace” (Martineau 1845a)<sup>24</sup>.

By that time Martineau was already a secluded patient with a strong sense of nature’s healing powers. Writing became a way of coming to terms with a taxing condition, both physical and psychological, literally easing the burden of her confinement – may that be idleness, boredom or fear – and giving her a mission to accomplish – to educate her readers. She built her discourse around notions of fellowship and community – an imagined community she calls “the whole mind of society”, which includes both the sick and the healthy (Martineau 1877: 457). In the Dedication of *Life in the Sick-Room*, for instance, Martineau addresses a nameless recipient – “some fellow-sufferer who had attained these experiences before me or with me” – aiming for “the comfort of companionship” and the “fellowship” of anybody who is in the same circumstance, and whose existence, directly or not, is affected by the reality of illness<sup>25</sup>. To her special readers and for them, Martineau tailored her prose as she set out to illustrate the “perils” and “pains” of being ill, unveiling, at the same time, the “gains” and the “sweets of invalidism”<sup>26</sup>.

Negotiating opposites, *Life in the Sick-Room* brought the *oikeion* onto the public domain, openly and for many unexpectedly, thereby challenging the separation between those two realms through the generative (and regenerative) power of invalidism<sup>27</sup>. Martineau’s readers could (imaginatively) enter the private space of her sick-room, and from that privileged area they would gain a different perspective onto their medical condition. The use of a permeating ‘rhetoric of seeing’ is highly significant in this respect. In the text, acts of seeing en-

<sup>24</sup> Repr. in H. Martineau, *L’isola dell’Aurora*, cit., pp. 79-80. In the introduction to this volume, Marcella Romeo offers an interesting reading of Martineau’s descriptions and “picturesque pen”. The exotic landscape of the Island as a heavenly uncontaminated place, a “safe abode” for the traveller, allows for the author’s discussion of colonial violence, war and alterity. See especially pp. 21-24.

<sup>25</sup> The dedicatee was possibly Elizabeth Barrett [Browning], herself an invalid, whom Martineau had never met (Postlewaite 1989: 601) but with whom she exchanged letters while in Tynemouth. From a narrative perspective the omission of Barrett’s name reflects Martineau’s pursuit of fellowship of her readers.

<sup>26</sup> Indicatively essays no. 9 and 10 bear the titles of “Some Perils and Pains of Invalidism”, and “Some Gains and Sweets of Invalidism”. Class and gender distinctions have little prominence in Martineau’s invalid essays, though her sick-room model was clearly accessible to upper and middle class patients having equal privileges (private nursing, and a dedicated room within the domestic realm). As regards gender, it has been observed by several Martineau scholars that “she was less distinctively affected by her sex than any other, male or female, of her generation”, to the point of being defined as a non-feminist, if not a “masculine” writer (Margaret Oliphant, cited in Postlewaite 1989: 584). A dedicated eco-feminist reassessment of her work is worth pursuing; but for the present purposes, and without trying to de-gender Martineau’s invalidism, nor her narrative strategies, I shall concentrate exclusively on aspects of healing as an expression of her ecological thinking.

<sup>27</sup> Martineau conceives of the sick-room as a place where cooperation can be achieved once constructed notions of invalidism have been exposed and deconstructed. A rethinking of nature, for her necessary to healthy living, stems from a radical rethinking of the concept of nature as a whole.

able Martineau to establish “the connection between invalids’ opportunities to observe and their propensity to understand”; most importantly they provide her “with a basis for philosophical understanding” (Frawley 2004: 226). Unlimited access to observation ultimately enabled her to confront and expose the power and peril of socially constructed notions of invalidism, and to promote among her readers the notion that the mind of the sick person is powerful and it is for such reason that “ideas are essentially good” (Martineau 1844: 47)<sup>28</sup>. Faced with the dangers of “becoming inured” (this is the eloquent and cautionary title of the seventh essay), Martineau’s readers were invited to re-consider their perception of what invalids *really* need, and in that context they learnt to value the place nature could, and should have, in the life of the sick. This particular idea is fully examined in the essay entitled “Nature to the Invalid”. Adding value and originality to Martineau’s account, the third section in the volume is exemplary of the tone and mode of the collection as a whole, while also representing a precious example of an eco-critical narrative.

The essay is divided into sub-paragraphs, each of them contributing to establish Martineau’s recommendation that nature *ought to* be given to the terminally ill. As the title suggests the author contemplates what nature means *to* (i.e. for) the invalid, consequently posing as necessary for the sick person an unmediated contact with nature on the basis of Martineau’s personal experience and convictions. Here, as elsewhere in the collection, the writer shifts from using the authorial/authoritative voice to prescribe actions that are to be taken, to launching a communal plea, alongside her fellow sufferers, for those among her readers who are “healthy and happy”. The opening is a dense and peremptory statement worth citing in full:

When an invalid is under sentence of disease for life, it becomes *a duty of first-rate importance* to select a *proper place of abode*. This is often overlooked; and a sick prisoner goes on to live where he lived before for no other reason than he lived there before (Martineau 1844: 43, my italics).

There is a rift between the world of the invalid, to which Martineau belongs and on whose behalf she is writing, and that of the healthy, whose duty – she warns – is to provide a “proper abode” for the terminally ill. The writer’s priority is to address both, and to inform the healthy reader that it is also his, or her, responsibility to help create an adequate sick-room. Lending itself to multiple readings, not least considering Martineau’s construction of a readership she aims to console and educate, this passage can also be looked at from an eco-critical perspective, that is to say as functional to the author’s message that an invalid’s exposure to landscape is a uniquely redemptive experience, therapeutic for the spirit and the body alike. By advocating as necessary a radical architectural transformation of the sick-room<sup>29</sup>, Martineau anticipates what Terry Gifford would term, a century later, a “semiology

<sup>28</sup> “The power of ideas in the sickroom” is the title of the eighth essay (Martineau 1844: 155-175).

<sup>29</sup> This is what Martineau did as soon as she moved into her sick-room, whose interiors were redecorated and adapted to suit her requirements. Her innovative view was in stark contrast with the then current medical characterizations of the sick-room, an example of which is found in Anthony Todd Thompson’s influential text *Domestic Management of the Sick-Room* (1841). Cf. Winter 1995: 608, and 608 n. 51.

of nature”, which “keeps us sane and reminds us that we are animals” (Gifford 2000: 174). The “proper abode” must be surrounded by a natural landscape, its windows should overlook “the widest or the most beautiful view that can be had [...] *We should have* the widest expanse of sky, for night scenery [...] the widest expanse of land or water, for the sake of a sense of liberty” (Martineau 1844: 45, my italics). Martineau lets her reader know that she has chosen the sea as “the best kind of view for a sick prisoner’s window to command”, and that “a telescope may be called in” since this would really make “*the* difference to us” (Martineau 1844: 45, my italics). From the opening impersonal subject sentence, the writer’s perspective shifts to the plural *we* – hers becomes a collective demand. The waving of the trees, the ever-changing aspects of mountains are good and beautiful, she maintains, but there is nothing as “life-like” as the “going forth and return of ships, the passage of fleets, the never-ending variety of a fishery”. An antidote to the conscriptions of invalidism, motion of the sea – the “perpetual shifting of objects” caused by the waves – would defy the stillness and gloom of life in the sick-room (Martineau 1844: 45-46).

Having requested ‘nature’ for the invalid, she proceeds to give a practical definition of it through a meticulous description of what she sees from her window. A combination of a highly evocative language suggests the supreme beauty of a landscape stretching across the miles in which plants, rocks, the sea, the beach, humans, and even the rail-road coexist in full harmony:

I survey the harbour and all its traffic, the view extending from the lighthouses far to the right, to a horizon of sea to the left. Beyond the harbour lies another county [...] where there are frequent wrecks – too interesting for an invalid – [...] and] I watch troops of boys flying their kites; lovers and friends [...]; the sportsman with his gun and dog; the washerwomen [...]. Behind the village and the heath, stretches the rail-road; and I watch the train triumphantly careering along the level road, and puffing forth its steam above edges and groups of trees [...] till it’s lost between two heights, which at last bound my view (Martineau 1844: 46-47).

This idyllic scenario is what Martineau had recreated for herself in her Tynemouth abodes; however romanticised and possibly sanitised (neither the rail-road nor the gun interfere with her picturesque account) the landscape she portrays is never “flat and still” as Conti Odorisio maintains<sup>30</sup>, but is rather “full of life”, inspirational to the author, and wholly beneficial to the sick. The telescope surveys the environment outside, capturing trees, birds, bees, horses, the moon, the sea, the wind, the sociable farmer and the sociable horseman, vivid images which Martineau’s readers are made to share, as if they were looking out of the same window. The writer’s idea of a regenerative shared infirmity culminates with a unique moment of interaction between the observer and the observed nature where “the white horse [makes] his progress visible [...] through the dusk”, writes Martineau. And “if the

<sup>30</sup> For Conti Odorisio it was for such reason that Martineau ‘abandoned’ the Lake District once she had been cured (2003: 148). In fact, she left only temporarily the place she considered as her homeplace, and where she would die in 1876.



question arises which has most of the gossip spirit, *he or I*, there is no shame in the answer" (49). This experience is "amusing" and therefore "salutary" since, in her view, "it carries the spirit of the sick prisoner abroad into the open air, and among country people" (49). The pictorial quality of Martineau's prose betrays her operation within the text and by way of the text itself: the performance of an act of seeing enables a communicative act in which the author summons, almost ritualistically conjuring up, the kind of *nature* she aims to give to *the invalid*. The process develops further in the paragraph that follows where (visual) contact is established between the inside and the outside world of the sick-room:

I believe that *my interest in these spectacles of Nature has created a new regard to them in others*. I see a looking out for the rising moon among the neighbours, who have possessed the same horizon-line all their lives, but did not know its value until *they saw* what it is to me. I observe the children from the cottage [...] when *they see me* on the watch in the window (55, *my italics*).

The gap between the (narrating) self and her other is challenged, the observer becomes the observed and "a new regard" for nature has been created "in others". This outcome is in keeping with the Green Studies agenda, and if, as Jhan Hochman has it, eco-criticism aims to foreground "potential effects representation might have on cultural attitudes and social practices which, in turn affect nature itself" (Hochman 2000: 187), the relevance of Martineau's words above is unequivocal. To put it differently, the exercise of writing becomes an act of creative discovery that pursues a reconnection with nature and obtains sympathy towards it, also becoming a means to spiritual healing and moral edification for all. Emphatically, Martineau poses two rhetorical, nonetheless provoking questions: "How is it that so many prisoners are *needlessly deprived* of all these sights?"; "How is it that the long-suffering sick, already *deprived* of so much, are ever *needlessly debarred* from natural and renovating pleasures like these?" (Martineau 1844: 71, 73, *my italics*). As the secluded writer reflects on the "renovating" and "recreating" power of landscape watching, she also discovers that life would not be worth living unless one can enjoy nature: the healthy and the happy take it for granted, but invalids learn to "feel an interest [for it] which [they] should otherwise not dream of" (49)<sup>31</sup>. Nature is beautiful all year round, and it is "meant to abound to all" (63), she reiterates, confident that it can nurse "one's health of soul", and give the onlooker a "cordial for future sickly hours" (56). Having illustrated the "unequalled refreshments" nature affords to "the thirst" of an invalid's soul (44, 54), Martineau admits to its "drawbacks" and "set-offs" (which are nevertheless "salutary on the whole", 50-52), and thus describes a typical stormy day: "the horror of the wind is great"; the sight from the window is "omi-

<sup>31</sup> Years later, another eminent invalid, Virginia Woolf, would reflect on the way becoming ill heightened her sympathy towards nature: "Let us examine the rose – she wrote in an essay entitled "On Being Ill" – We have seen it so often flowering in bowls, connected it so often with beauty in its prime, that we have forgotten how it stands, still and steady, throughout an entire afternoon in the earth. It preserves a demeanour of perfect dignity and self possession. The suffusion of its petals is of inimitable rightness" (Woolf 2008: 105). To Martineau Woolf acknowledged the merit of paving the way for women entering the writing profession like herself.

nous" and "painful", man is helpless against the fury of the sea. On such days the sick-room truly becomes a haven.

The closing paragraphs introduce the concept of love as another gift of nature to the invalid. Martineau depicts her relationship as a *liaison* proper which implies desire and grievance, and which is curiously, yet significantly, defined in economical terms as a "property":

I have often smiled in detecting in myself this *sense of property* [...] in becoming aware of a sort of resentment, of feeling of personal grievance when the sky is not propitious; when I have no benefit of the moon for several nights together, though the malice of the clouds [...]. I have a *sense of property* too in the larks which nestle in all the furrows of the down [...] If the yellow butterflies do not come to my flowerbox in the sunny noon, I feel myself wronged (Martineau 1844: 55-57, my italics).

Martineau's "sense of property" is not based on ownership, it is never selfish, nor is it exploitative of nature, but rather reflects the writer's sense of duty towards creatures which she sees as 'careless', and which she longs to protect and "to warn that they must not reckon yet on spring" (Martineau 1844: 57). This is a distinctive mothering attitude which adds to the delight and sensual response seen at the start of the collection, and which is fully coherent with Martineau's pre-occupation for her fellow sufferers. The epilogue is an exhortation to them and to the healthy reader to "watch", "observe" and "mark the value of presents" nature unconditionally gives (73-74). And there is also an expression of gratitude to travel writers – Christopher North (1785-1854) most prominently – whose narratives are a consoling to the soul and nourishing to the imagination of the invalid reader: "He has recreated us [...] and opened our prison-doors" (61-62). Martineau thinks of the Scottish explorer not simply as a capable author but rather as someone to emulate so she can lead her own readers "over mountain and moor, lake and lea, and [drop them] again on [their] beds, refreshed and soothed, to dream at least of having felt the long-lost sensation of health once more" (62). Her yearning for nature is somehow revolutionary, not merely contemplative, possibly an anticipation of the kind of "caring economy" advocated by Riane Eisler about a hundred and fifty years later. Speaking in favour of an eco-sustainable cultural model based on partnership, Eisler envisions a society in which "human needs and capacities are nurtured, our natural habitat is conserved, and our great potential for care and creativity is supported" (Eisler 2015: 13). Her words resonate with Martineau's analogous "claim to Nature's nursing", and with her notion of nature as a communal immortal wealth, a resource to be discovered, shared, enjoyed and protected – ultimately as a way of thinking. This "method", Martineau believed, could work well and it could well "be made a system" (Martineau 1844: 33).

"Any full history of the uses of nature would be a history of a large part of human thought", as Williams contends (Williams 1983: 221), and in this sense *Life in the Sick-Room* represents a precious example of mid-Victorian invalid literature in which the observation and the re-discovery of nature becomes crucial to self-scrutiny, to the genesis of a new self and to the making of environmental consciousness. Liberating the invalid from the physical confines of the sick-room, by way of a visually and spiritually active engagement with nature, Martineau insists on the necessity to build and fortify the link between the animal

and the non-animal worlds, between the observer and the observed nature, ultimately challenging the rift between them and achieving – however imaginatively – full harmony. Her conception of nature’s immortal wealth, the need to re-connect with it, to observe it and be observed by it challenges socially constructed notions of nature while also undermining socially constructed notions of invalidism typical of her time. Martineau enjoyed privileges that other fellow sufferers did not – her social class, for instance, and the advantages of being a popular public persona from a Unitarian (Dissenting, free-thinking, progressive) cultural milieu, whose “business in life was [...] to speak with absolute freedom [what she] thought and had learned” (Martineau 1877: 120). These aspects underlie *Life in the Sick-Room*, a narrative by a long-term invalid who was “qualified” to speak by “the experience of years” (1844: 32). Writing helped her create a sense of shared infirmity for herself, but it also enabled the creation of a shared sense of responsibility towards invalids and invalidism on the part of her readers. Nature was crucial to that design and to Martineau’s inclusive narrative strategy. In this respect she was a voice ahead of her time, and today she can be read effectively through the lens of eco-criticism. The term, as noted, refers broadly to a theoretical approach towards creative and academic literary works that may not be explicitly or deliberately ‘environmental’, but nevertheless bear ecological implications, committing themselves to our present dissociation from nature, and investigating the place of readers as it is implied within the narratives themselves. Accordingly, this study revisits Martineau’s invalid essays and suggests the eco-stainable potential of their message, while also asserting the cultural value of a lesser known text and the importance of a mutual contribution of literary and scholarly works in our contemporary quest for a new politics of solidarity and environmental consciousness.

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Manuela D'Amore

**Communicating “Natural knowledge” for the “common benefit” of England: Science, Trade and Colonial Expansion in *Philosophical Transactions* 1665-1700**

**Abstract I:** Questo saggio si incentra sulla Royal Society e sulla sua capacità di promuovere la conoscenza della Natura nei primi anni dalla fondazione. Centrale l’apporto della prestigiosa rivista *Philosophical Transactions*, fondata da Henry Oldenburg nel 1665. Ricca di descrizioni di paesaggi unici, in particolare di studi innovativi in materia di geologia, botanica e agricoltura, questa ha contribuito non solo al progresso tecnico-scientifico, ma anche all’apertura dell’Inghilterra verso l’Europa e le più lontane terre d’oltremare. Ancora oggi trascurati dalla critica, e idealmente divisi in due macro aree tematiche, gli articoli apparsi nel periodo 1665-1700 rappresentano insieme la base testuale e strutturale di questo saggio: l’intento è quello di dimostrare come, partendo proprio dallo studio di quei campi del sapere, i Fellows siano riusciti a modificare l’idea stessa di viaggio, rafforzando soprattutto il rapporto tra scienza, mercantilismo e imperialismo.

**Abstract II:** This paper concentrates on the early Royal Society, on its idea of Nature, and on the impact that it had on the advancement and circulation of agricultural knowledge. Rich in descriptions of beautiful landscapes, in “Enquiries” on “curious” geologico-botanical phenomena and innovative plantation systems, *Philosophical Transactions*, the prestigious journal founded by Henry Oldenburg in 1665, effectively contributed to Britain’s techno-scientific progress as well as its openness to Europe and far-off lands. Still neglected by academic criticism, and ideally divided into two macro thematic areas, the articles which appeared in the years 1665-1700 will represent this paper’s textual and structural basis: our aim is to show that the Fellows and their correspondents also changed the idea of learned travel as they linked natural knowledge, trade and imperialism.

Natural resources represented the basis of economy in Stuart times (Coward 2014). Crops may be significantly hit by unfavourable geological conditions or disruptive climate events, yet it is undeniable that at the outbreak of the Civil War, England was almost self-sufficient in food production (Muldrew 2011), and that it was ready for a profound agricultural revolution. The gradual substitution of continuous cultivation, the application of new fertilizers, as well as the practice of convertible husbandry would be essential in the development of the industrial sector in the Enlightenment (Overton 1996).

Rooted in the most advanced theories and practices of the time, this innovative trend would be enhanced by the early Royal Society (Hunter 1989; Purver 2013). Hard science and the main branches of medicine were at the heart of the Fellows' research interests, but the way the land could best be studied and exploited was considered to be crucial: the country's progress was still too vulnerable to short-term natural disasters, so it was necessary to acquire a deeper knowledge of the living world, and to provide effective solutions to problems.

Most of them could be found in *Philosophical Transactions*, the Society's prestigious journal, and an icon of New Science. Founded by Henry Oldenburg (1618-1677) in 1665, it was initially made of his personal correspondence with distinguished intellectuals, but when it grew – printing over 1,000 copies of each issue, and distributing them throughout Europe – it became a powerful vehicle of scientific communication. Its main topics were the latest discoveries in most fields, which also offered examples of successful farming in distant countries (McDougall-Waters *et al.* 2015: 7-8).

In fact, the years 1660-1700 were those of Britain's development and proto-imperialist expansion. The Society was awarded the Royal Charter in 1662, which means that, especially in Restoration times, it would always support the Stuarts' policy of international prestige (Coward and Gaunt 2017: 511): both its commitment to enhance the tools of long-distance travel and its wide network of far-flung correspondents greatly helped to promote scientific and commercial interests abroad (D'Amore 2017a).

The Fellows' study of Nature would thus soon include the remotest parts of the globe, which reinforced the link between knowledge and progress. Published on 1 January 1665, however, the anonymous "Enquiries concerning *Agriculture*" showed that the main focus was Britain, and that creating a national network of "skilful" specialists would be highly beneficial for its regions:

Whereas the *Royal Society*, in prosecuting the *Improvements of Natural knowledge*, have it in design, to collect *Histories of Nature and Arts*, and for that purpose have already, according to the several Inclinations and Studies of their Members, divided themselves into divers *Committees*, to execute the said design: Those Gentlemen, which do constitute the *Committee* for considering of *Agriculture*, and the *History* and *Improvement* thereof, have begun their work with drawing up certain Heads of *Enquiries*, to be distributed to persons Experienced in Husbandry all over *England*, *Scotland*, and *Ireland*, for procuring a *faithful* and *solid* information of the *knowledg* and practice already obtained and used in these Kingdoms. [...] Now to the End, that those *Enquiries* may be universally known, and those who are skilful in Husbandry, publicly invited to impart their knowledg herein, for the *common* benefit of their Countrey (*Phil. Trans.*, 1, 1665: 91-92).

A form of scientific manifesto, whose contents are divided into two sections – "For *Arable*" and "For *Meadows*" – this article reveals the Fellows' principles and work systems: the twenty-five technical questions that they raised on the preparation and use of the different types of "Soyls" in England, Scotland and Ireland were clearly related to the Galilean method, what is more important, they initiated a lively scholarly debate, which would contribute to the development of domestic economy.

It may be for this reason that in the following years, the Society's journal was literally swamped with similar writings. Apart from the anonymous "Queries concerning Vegetation" (*Phil. Trans.*, 1668, 3: 797-801), which perfectly overlaps with the above-mentioned "Enquiries", other articles carefully illustrate geomorphological features and land use both in England and overseas countries. The ideal boundaries of these two macro- thematic areas of investigation are decisive in discerning the Fellows' plans of development in the closing decades of the seventeenth century: this paper will show that they were related to all aspects of Nature, including the most advanced instrumentation and technical devices.

Cultural agency, though, was not a question of scientific excellence only. Research results had to be communicated effectively (MacLeod *et al.* 2016), so Henry Oldenburg as the Editor of *Philosophical Transactions* aimed at stylistic precision and clarity, and created a link between words and images. Interestingly, the corpus of articles, that he and his successors agreed to publish from 1665 to 1700, parallels the countless pictures and geological samples which were housed at the Royal Society's repositories at the time, and which can still be found at its Centre of the History of Science: a sign of man's need to systemize learning and promote change, it was one of the most distinctive features of the early history of this scientific journal.

### **From Geology to Botany: the Fellows' Observations in Europe and in the Indies**

Therefore, issues 1-22 were the product of the Fellows' geological and botanical studies. There was room for the spectacular beauties of Italy and of most regions of Central Europe<sup>1</sup>, which were described in full, and were rich in data and technical explanations. "Extract of a Letter concerning the Icy and Chrystallin Mountains of *Helvetia*, call'd *Gletscher*", for instance, listed the colours of the "Crystals" in that part of Switzerland – "darkish and troubled" and "transparent, very pure and as clear as *Venice-glass*" – even though it dedicated a long paragraph to the "Thunder-like" noise that the local population could hear when the ice cracked in Summer (*Phil. Trans.*, 1669, 4: 982-983). The author, the Swiss physician Johan von Muralt (1645-1733), could have written more about the fear and terror that this phenomenon caused, but at this stage, he seemed to be more interested in science, and determined to ignore its cross-cultural implications.

Appearing in the fourth volume of the *Transactions*, this article was continued a few years later, when Muralt completed his second contribution with a beautiful picture of "a very high Mountain", a "pretty deep and extremely cold [...] rivulet" and a few "Hutts" (*Phil. Trans.*, 1673, 8: 6192). Showing learned Britons the unique features of one of the most remote areas in Switzerland, this further combination of words and visuals certainly aroused curiosity for the Continent. It was still early for the eighteenth-century mode of the Grand Tour, yet the new conception of learned travel already appealed to Restoration men of letters and natural philosophers<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In those years, the Fellows could also read about a "remarkable Spring about *Paderborn* near *Germany*", about "the *Aponensian* Baths near *Padua*" and "the wonderful lake of *Zirknitz*". See, respectively, *Phil. Trans.*, 1, 1665: 133-144; 7, 1672: 81-91; and 16, 1686: 411-426.

<sup>2</sup> Academic research has showed that the emergence of New Science, especially the cultural exchanges within the European Republic of Letters, contributed to shape a new idea of learned travel in Restoration times. From this point of view, diffusing information about the treasures on the Old Continent, *Philosophical Transac-*



The early *Transactions*, however, were not only rich in purely descriptive articles: the anonymous “Some *Hortulan* Communications about the curious engrafting of *Oranges, Lemons, or Citrons*” clearly suggests that in that period Nature had curious mysteries to unveil. As an “*Intelligence from Florence*” reported, in fact, some special orange trees could “bear” both citrons and oranges, which showed that, even though they could be found in the poorest and most dangerous regions in Italy, Mediterranean flora deserved English specialists’ attention (D’Amore 2015):

1. We have here *Orange-trees*, (saith the *Intelligence from Florence*) that bear a fruit which is *Citron* on one side, and *Orange* on the other. They have not been brought hither out of other countries, and they are now much propagated by Engrafting.
2. This was lately confirmed to us by a very ingenious *English Gentleman*, who asserted, that himself not only had seen, but bought of them *An. 1660. in Paris*, whither they had been sent by *Genoa Merchants*; and on some Trees he had found an *Orange* on one branch; and a *Lemon* on another branch (*Phil. Trans.*, 2, 1666: 553-554).

The author of *Aphorisms Concerning Cider* (1662) and a Fellow of the Royal Society, who utilized grafting to expand orchard cultivation in England (Roos 2015: 538), Dr. John Beale (bapt. 1608-ca. 1683) also attempted to promote England’s products of excellence abroad. His new “agrestic” observations were centred on mulberry cider: it was made in Devonshire, and, although it seemed to be in the “highest esteem in *Italy*”, it had not “spread into other Countries”. For him, it was imperative to call for an effective solution to this problem (*Phil. Trans.*, 12, 1677: 818).

Reinforcing the concept of Nature as an economic resource, which New Science could help to empower, John Beale’s articles testify to the Fellows’ commitment to Britain’s domestic growth and openness to other countries. Europe was a major reference point in a period when the Royal Society was an active member of the Republic of Letters (Van Dixhoorn and Speakman Sutch 2008), but the immense, unknown territories on the other side of the Atlantic equally represented an irresistible point of attraction (D’Amore 2017a).

An English colony since 1655, Jamaica was certainly one of the most popular islands among the Royal Society’s Fellows. It grew sugar and other tropical staples, so most of the articles in the early *Transactions* were centred on its watermelons, prickly pears and cacao trees. One of the latter in particular was described as “an old tree”, “not at all beautiful”. Still, it was painted from life by an anonymous correspondent, who had just sent his picture to the Society for further investigation:

I send you on this Ship a box, that hath in it a Cacao tree painted to the life. ’Tis certain, nothing was ever more like; and this Picture contains the whole history of the Cacao. It’s of an old Tree; the body of which (as they commonly are,) [*sic*] is about 4 inches in diameter, 5 foot in height, and above 12, from the ground to the top of the Tree. These

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*tions* aroused his readers’ curiosity for its richest regions, thus paving the way for the Grand Tour. See D’Amore (2017b).

Trees are exceedingly different among themselves; [... t]hey are not at all beautiful, nor so agreeable to the Eye, as the Fruit is to the Palate of them that love Choccolato. The number of Cods the Tree produces is uncertain: But we reckon, a bearing Tree yields from 2 to 8 pounds of nuts a year; and each Codd contains from 20 to 30 nuts (*Phil. Trans.*, 8, 1673: 6007-6008).

Three more articles about Jamaica appeared in *Philosophical Transactions* between 1673 and 1695. One of them was written by Hans Sloane (1660-1753), the future President of the Royal Society from 1727 to 1741. It was the product of his expedition to the Caribbean Islands in 1687, and it provided precise information about the main botanical features of “the *Pimienta*, or *Jamaica Pepper-Tree*”, also about the season when it flowered. Its references to the “*Negro’s*”, who were in charge of “curing and preserving” its “Fruits for use” (*Phil. Trans.*, 16, 1686-1692: 463), clearly show that Henry Oldenburg was utilizing the new colonial experiences on the island as exceptional opportunities to carry out scientific observation and experimental research. First, on its natural products, and then, in the following decades, on meteorology and astronomy<sup>3</sup>.

Newfoundland and its nearby countries were not the Fellows’ only foci of attention. Thirty-eight anonymous “Enquiries” on Surat in India appeared in the second volume of the *Transactions* in 1666, which also detailed the exotic “*Lignum Aloes*”, the botanical features of its “best *Tea*” and the “poisonous *Mangas bravas*” (*Phil. Trans.*, 2, 1666: 417). As for the years 1698-1700, readers could learn about Richard Waller’s observations of the Indies (*Phil. Trans.*, 20, 1698: 273-277), together with Samuel Brown’s and James Petiver’s description of a collection of “Curious Plants and Drugs” (*Phil. Trans.*, 22, 1700: 579-594). Written in a dry and lucid style (Preston 2015: 186-188), these articles testify to Britons’ determination not only to list and illustrate these regions’ “*Seeds*”, but also to “raise” them in the most “*Curious Gardens in England*” (*Phil. Trans.*, 22, 1700: 580). Their priority was still to expand orchard cultivation, thus spreading special plants’ “*Use*”:

Some years ago, I think, ever since the year 1672, a *Root* was made great *Use* of with some Success in *Epilecttic*, *Convulsive* or Head Diseases; ’twas call’d by Dr *Peachy*, a Physician since dead, *Cassumuniar*, and a sheet of Paper was printed of its *Vertues*. [...] When I saw this *Collection* at the *East-India-house*, I found among other things this *Root* by the name of *Bengalle*, and an account that it was much used by the Natives in the *Indies*. I told some *Drugsters* of this discovery, they sent for it, and have receiv’d it from the *Indies* by that name, and now it is better understood, as will appear by these papers, and to be had in greater plenty, so that even the *poorer* sort of *People* may receive the benefit by it at a moderate price (580-581).

Centred on the above-mentioned collection, which had just been donated by the East India Company to the Royal Society, the long article written by the botanists Samuel Browne

<sup>3</sup> In the eighteenth century, Jamaica continued to be at the heart of the Fellows’ interests. The early *Transactions* show, however, that it was also considered a basis for the study of moon eclipses and of the climate. See among others *Phil. Trans.*, 32, 1722: 370-380; 46, 1749: 235-236; and 78, 1788: 53-55.

(d. 1698) and James Petiver (1663-1718) discusses how herbs and roots could best be employed. Medicine, as has been argued, represented one of the Fellows' principal areas of study, and its development was considered highly beneficial for man, yet even stronger emphasis was given to the exchanges between Britain and the Indies. In fact, this was the period when it was necessary to go beyond the appropriation of land and natural goods, and to acquire further agricultural and commercial skills. From this point of view, the Fellows knew that they could not ignore the riches and know-how on the other side of the Ocean.

The *Transactions* were immediately flooded with articles about these new – or unknown – farming methods and tools. They were definitely more numerous than the purely descriptive ones, even though these latter represented the most significant contribution to the empowerment of scientific knowledge. Providing detailed information about the geomorphological and botanical features of the most hidden regions in Europe and in the Indies, they showed that natural resources could bring about change. Both in research perspectives and economic strategies.

A new vision of the living world was thus being shaped. It would not only mark the perception of larger and larger geographical areas on the globe, but it would also satisfy modern man's growing needs and ambitions. Britain's plans of cultural, political and ecological control were soon transferred elsewhere: early America and the Far East represented the first immense lands to start from (Grove 1990: 21-22).

#### **Letters from Distant Lands: The Fruits of the Earth as "Merchantable Commodities"**

Learned travel and the emerging imperialistic trends were thus closely related to the country's growth. Cristina Malcolmson in her recent *Studies of Skin Colour in the Early Royal Society* (2016) confirms that there was a direct link between the Stuarts' foreign policy and the Royal Society's systematic support of Britain's progress in agriculture, husbandry, and trading: expanding and diffusing knowledge of Nature on a global scale could be highly beneficial to the domestic economy, so it was essential to enhance scholarly research, and divulge its best products effectively.

From this point of view, the first issues of the *Philosophical Transactions* provide evidence of the Fellows' wide interests and network of relations. These could be associated with any special fruit of Mother Earth, as well as with any learned correspondent who could write about new plantation and work systems. Located in Europe or in far-off countries, they actively participated in the ambitious national programme of development.

"Of the way, used in the *Mogol's Dominions*, to make *Saltpetre*" was published in the first volume of the journal, and centred on a chemical compound which was typical of India, "chiefly [of] *Agra*", the then capital of the empire (*Phil. Trans.* 1, 1665-1666: 103-104). The anonymous author explains that it was drawn "out of three sorts of Earth: black, yellow, and white", and that the indigenous population followed a series of complex procedures to work it (103). Clearer references to saltpetre as an economic product, though, could be found at the end of the article, where it was reported that the "Country People" sold the English "a *Maon* of 6 pounds for two *Rupias* and a half, which [they, the English] had formerly for half of that price" (104).

It was only the beginning of a new process. From this moment on, and for almost three centuries, Britain would be commercially and politically tied to India as one of the richest lands in the Far East. Indigo and saltpetre in particular were among the most important bulk goods: the first one ceased to be imported regularly after 1712, whereas saltpetre, “a non-perishable chemical, and impervious to rough handling”, continued to be in demand throughout the period (Chaudhuri 2006: 328-330; Cressy 2013). Apart from gum resins, aloes, myrrh, lac and frankincense, which, thanks to commercial exchanges, were becoming more and more popular on the Continent, other regular imports from the region included precious stones and textiles. The East India Company greatly contributed to balance the lack of silk-production centres in Britain (Chaudhuri 2006: 343), even though skilled voyagers like Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-1689) systemized knowledge about that part of the world, also mapping its wide range of “Merchantable Commodities”. He may not be English, but a detailed report of his discoveries could be found in the anonymous “More Observations of Monsieur *Taverniers’ Voyages*”, which appeared in the *Transactions* in 1676. Divided into fifteen thematic sections, it drew the readers’ attention to the immense riches in the Empire of the Great Moghul, as well as in the Kingdoms of Golkonda and Visapour in Southern and Western India:

6. That the Author affirms to have given us an exact List of Merchantable Commodities, furnish’d by the Empire of the *G. Mogol*, and the two kingdoms of *Golconda* and *Visapour*, and other neighbouring States; and all what Nature and Art afford there: *viz. Silks*; various *Cloths*, white and painted, *Cottons*, spun and unspun; *Indigo*, *Saltpeter*, *Spices* (*Cardamum*, *Ginger* and *Pepper*), *Diamonds*, *Rubies*, *Pearls*, *Bezoar*, *Musk*, *Sugar*; besides some *Drugs*, that indeed are found at *Suratte*, but are brought thither for sale from other Countries, as *Sal Armoniack*, *Borax*, *Gum-lac*, *Saffron*, *Cumin*, *Mirrhe*, *Frankincense*, *Opium*, *Lignum*, *Aloës*, *Licorish*, *Cassia*, *Coffe*. To all which he hath annexed an account of the Cheats used in divers of these Commodities, especially in *Silks*, *Cloths*, *Cottons*, *Indigo* (*Phil. Trans.*, 11, 1676: 753).

The author’s concrete and specific language may be defined as a distinctive feature of this new type of scientific prose. Devoid of any references to the Classics<sup>4</sup>, it was meant to list and illustrate special natural resources, as well as to stimulate both readers’ and prospective voyagers’ interest. It was, in fact, during the initial phases of discovery of these far-off countries that the relation between science and commerce was even given greater emphasis: Charles Howard’s 1677 “Account of the Culture or Planting and Ordering Saffron”, for instance, confirms that its best quality derived from South-West Asia, and that in those years, it was never sold “at so low a rate as 30 shillings per pound, frequently at three pounds per pound and upward” (*Phil. Trans.*, 12, 1677: 947). It was clear that learned correspondents from the Far East insisted on the monetary value of these products as they were still virtually

<sup>4</sup> From a stylistic point of view, these articles did not include any references to the Classics. The Fellows and their correspondents felt the emerging Neoclassical mode in the closing decade of the century, when the *Transactions* diffused the news about the latest archaeological finds in England and in Italy. See D’Amore 2015: 147-151.

unknown to the English, and they would soon change their habits and food culture. It may be of interest to know that in 1727, James Douglas (1675-1742), the then Secretary of the Royal Society, could already report on the “culture and management” of such an important spice – saffron – in England (*Phil., Trans.*, 35, 1727: 566-574).

Still, the Fellows’ correspondents provided little or no information about agriculture and husbandry in those regions. This was the period when the East India Company was expanding its area of influence, so Britain’s main concern was to create an efficient trading system, where imports and exports could be as balanced as possible (Judd 2005: 21-24). These complex phases were closely followed by the Royal Society, whose intellectual circles, however, derived knowledge about plantation techniques from other parts of the globe.

Newfoundland, with its vast territories and indigenous populations, was one of them. A letter “concerning an *unusual* way of propagating *Mulberry trees*, for the better improvement of the *Silk-Work*” appeared in the *Transactions*’ opening volume, which showed that there was also room for those learned Britons who were experimenting with new agricultural systems on the other side of the Ocean.

In this case, it was Sir Robert Moray (1608-1673), the first President of the Royal Society, who exhorted “his friend to prosecute what he had begun” (Birch 1756: 75). His correspondent’s name always remained unknown, but the colony of Virginia was proposed as the ideal setting for a story of commercial success:

I have planted here already ten thousand *Mulberry trees*; and hope, within two or three years, to reap good silk of them. I have planted them in an unusual way, which advances them two or three years growth, in respect of their being sown in seed. [...] I intend likewise to plant them all, as if they were *Currant’s* or *Goos-berries*, so thick as hedges; whereby one man may gather as many of them, as otherwise, when they are planted in trees at distance, four persons may do. Expedient is the benefit of this Trade Having discoursed of this new way to all here; they are generally inclinable to it; considering that the Planting their Trees, as before, at distance, and letting them grow high, has been the main obstruction of that work hitherto, and the loss of their time and gain: but being in hedges, they will be always young and tender plants; and consequently will be easily cut in great quantities with a pair of Garden Sizzers (*Phil. Trans.*, 1, 1665-1666: 201-202).

Thomas Purvis in *Colonial America to 1763* confirms that at the time the Natives lived on hunting and fishing, and that they periodically moved to other regions as “fields lost fertility” (Purvis 2014: 21). Although they were not skilled enough to develop any special agricultural practices, in 1676 Thomas Glover’s account of his discovery of Virginia dedicated an entire paragraph to the “manner of planting and ordering Tobacco”. This would soon become a boom crop there (Duke & Jordan 2015: 26), and he, an “an ingenious Chirurgion”, was eager to share the results of his observations with his readers:

In the Twelve daies they begin to sow their seed in beds of fine Mould, and when the Plants be grown to the breadth of a shilling, they are fit to replant into the Hills; [...]

These Hills being prepared against the plants be grown to the forementioned bigness (which is about the beginning of *May*,) they then in moist weather draw the plants out of the plants out of their beds, and replant them in the hills, which afterwards they keep with diligent weedings. When the plant hath put out so many Leaves as the ground will nourish to a substance and largeness that will render them Merchantable, then they take off the plant (*Phil. Trans.*, 11, 1676: 634-635).

Glover's detailed report was preceded by a long section on American Indians, who were depicted as "well-shaped" but intellectually inferior creatures (631-634), and who could thus be easily subjugated by more advanced civilizations: the colonial experience had begun early in the century, so the Royal Society also utilized the latest race theories to justify Britain's plans of land appropriation in that part of the world. Eminent scientist Robert Boyle (1627-1691), for instance, was firmly convinced that one of the goals of natural philosophy was to restore Adam's original dominion over nature, and that English colonists participated in this restoration by making the earth fruitful and providing information on its products. His views were very influential, and the Fellows largely supported them (Irving 2008: 190).

There were other articles similar to Glover's in *Philosophical Transactions* in those years. In 1677, for instance, John Winthrop (1637-1707), the English Governor of Connecticut since 1657, reported on "the Culture and Use of Maiz" in New England, where the newcomers' use of the plough was said to greatly facilitate planting (*Phil. Trans.*, 12, 1677: 1065-1069). This would be highly beneficial for the English both at home and in those regions: from this moment on, they realized that the Natives' traditional products could be enhanced by the most advanced tools of the Western world.

It was not the first time that the *Transactions* referred to the latest discoveries in this field. A few years earlier, in 1670, John Evelyn (1620-1726), the famous diarist and one of the most active Fellows since the Society's foundation, had written extensively on Don Joseph Lucatello's "Spanish *Sembrador*": "fastn'd to the Plough" – he posited – "[it] Plough[ed], Sow[ed] and Harrow[ed]" (*Phil. Trans.*, 5, 1670: 1058). Pictures of it and of other agricultural "Instruments" in pre-industrial times were immediately housed at the Royal Society's archives, which showed that Britain was also progressing from a technological point of view.

Other learned correspondents reported on Nature in Transatlantic regions on the eve of the eighteenth century. In 1685, for instance, there was news about how to extract "a sort of Sugar of the Maple in *Canada*" (*Phil. Trans.*, 15, 1685: 988), yet the articles included in volumes 16-22 in the years 1686-1700 clearly testify to a tighter network of relations in Virginia: John Clayton (1656-1725), Rector of Crofton at Wakefield, was certainly the main contributor, even though John Banister (1654-1692), a naturalist, Allen Mullen (d. 1690), a physician, and the above-mentioned apothecary James Petiver, combined memories of their adventurous maritime journeys with detailed information about most of the natural elements in the region. Building upon the conviction that "the Parts of *Virginia* inhabited by the *English*, [were] in general of a very Fertile Soil, far surpassing *England*" (*Phil. Trans.*, 17, 1693: 978), they drew the readers' attention to a new entrepreneurial approach to agriculture. It was 1693, and Clayton's description of the region dedicated a long passage to a "very acute

Ingenious Lady”, who, at the time of his stay, was planning the “ensuing Year’s Crop” with “the Overseer of her Servants”:

The Overseer was naming one place where he designed to Plant 30000 Plants, another place for 15000, another for 10000, and so forth the whole Crop, designed to be about 100000 Plants: Having observed the Year before he had done the like, and scattered his Crop up and down the Plantation, at places a Mile and a half asunder, which was very inconvenient, and whereby they lost much time (980-981).

Rich in theoretical discussions on how to best exploit such fertile lands, Clayton’s account proposes crops as an invaluable source of economic wealth, and even mentions the term “business”: Britain’s plan to create a maritime empire of commerce including larger and larger areas in Transatlantic West and in the Far East, and “emulat[ing] the Portuguese and Dutch reliance on costal entrepôts rather than Spanish inland conquest and settlement” (Colàs 2007: 82), would greatly benefit from the Royal Society’s research and promotional activities.

In fact, mapping, charting and surveying unknown territories was obviously important, but divulging the latest acquisitions also in the field of applied science would mark the difference between the past of Elizabethan times and the present. From this point of view, the articles in the early *Philosophical Transactions* show that advanced tools and new plantation techniques could implement the agricultural sector, while inviting specialized readers to appreciate other customs and traditions. Eager to overcome the limitations of the English soil and of its products, those readers gradually changed their conception of long-distance travel, and connected it with natural knowledge and commercial development.

### Writing on Nature in the Enlightenment: An Overview

This trend became even stronger at the turn of the new century. In a period when every major European power had trading companies seeking to penetrate the markets of Asia, Africa and America, the Fellows learned to consider the East India Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company as reliable sources of scientific information. Reinforcing the link between natural philosophy, travel and commerce (Hayden 2012), their members’ contributions consolidated the bases of a mercantilist world where “profit was generated by the transfer of goods from one market to another” (Colàs 2007: 82-83), while providing rich and detailed information about other, even more distant countries.

In fact, in the years 1700-1750 there was great curiosity for the adventurous journeys to New Caledonia, for the unique geomorphological features of the Cape of Good Hope, and for the sea treasures in the Maluku and Philippine Islands. As for Brazil, which had only been considered as an astronomical observation point in 1674, it was specially mentioned for its coati in 1722<sup>5</sup>. Covering the Fellows’ major areas of study, the new correspondents’ writings represented a *continuum* in the Royal Society’s cultural policy.

<sup>5</sup> The articles on such distant countries did not mention any agricultural products, but focused on precious corals, diamonds and rubies, as well as their special fauna. See, among others, *Phil. Trans.*, 22, 1700: 927-946; and 23, 1702: 1419-1429.

Interestingly, though, a much larger number of *Transactions* concerned the American colonies. Apart from illustrating their unique flora and fauna, together with the Natives' plantation systems, they divulged the natural history of Carolina and the Bahamas Islands, which was divided into sections, and which was published between 1736 and 1748. It was a form of proto-scientific series with a solid diachronic basis, but what is more important, it showed that close observation was still at the basis of the Fellows' experimental method.

Time passed by, and the improvements in long-distance navigation took learned mariners even further. Complete with dense technical descriptions, their articles continued to be published by the Royal Society, which had a great impact on the way English visitors and settlers penetrated – and changed – new lands. In some cases, deforestation and intensive land exploitation could be recognized as forms of “ecological [proto-]imperialism” (Griffith and Robin eds. 1997): they were among the worst possible attacks against Nature, but they had their roots in the technological and economic challenges of pre-industrial England.

Science and the need of higher profits were thus marking the evolutionary phases of British colonial expansion. In the Age of Enlightenment, thanks to the Fellows' network of relations and to their publications, the English intellectual elite developed a far more comprehensive vision of the living world, and became far more open to “Otherness”.

### Conclusions

The textual path that we have followed has showed that it is time to re-consider the Royal Society's contribution to Britain's cultural and economic development. Offering detailed scientific information, and employing effective communication tools, it helped modern man to acquire a deeper sense of geographical and cultural awareness, while supporting the country's growing colonial ambitions.

In fact, most of the articles that appeared in the first issues of its prestigious journal derived from far-off lands, particularly from America and the Indies. At a time when agriculture represented the main source of economic wealth, its authors offered new insights into geology and botany, which helped learned travellers and specialized readers to enlarge their knowledge, and overcome the limitations of the English soil. The extracts that we have read suggest that close scientific observation always paralleled a more practical reflection on new farming methods and tools. As a result, the Natives' special know-how started to be taken into consideration, and it was combined with the latest technology in the civilized West. John Clayton's description of the rich crops in Virginia, for instance, may explain why on the eve of the new century an increasing number of Britons engaged in long-distance travels, and moved to the richest transoceanic regions: it was there that agriculture could be associated with the idea of 'business', which made especially America even more appealing.

It was the beginning of a new process. There was still a great interest in geology and botany, but the Fellows could not ignore that the international market was imposing more intrusive forms of land use and acquisition. For this reason, in the years 1700-1750 they went beyond the pure elaboration of commercial strategies, and showed British settlers how to re-design natural spaces, thus adapting them to their necessities. The first traces of what the academic community has termed as 'ecological imperialism' can be found in most of their contributions, even though its devastating effects were felt in the following centuries.



The Royal Society and its correspondents did not initiate a debate on such a gradual, but violent attack against Nature and the local populations in America and in the Indies, yet the exceptional value of their contribution to British culture and economy cannot be diminished. Apart from empowering all the branches of natural philosophy, they managed scientific communication effectively, and supported the main mercantile trends: in pre-industrial times, the history of thought, of travel and of imperialism could not have been more closely interconnected.

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### Ecopsychology in J. G. Ballard's Fiction

**Abstract I:** Con la sua famosa tetralogia pubblicata negli anni '60, J. G. Ballard segnò una svolta nella letteratura distopica allontanandosi da temi socio-politici a questioni ambientali. Appassionato di psicologia e psicanalisi, amava studiare gli effetti dell'ambiente (naturale o urbano) sulla psiche umana. Ballard credeva che vi fosse un sottile rapporto tra l'uomo e i suoi possibili habitat, la cui messa in crisi ne avrebbe minato l'equilibrio psicofisico. In romanzi come *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975), lo scrittore analizza le reazioni della psiche umana a spazi iper-tecnologizzati, inaugurando così le tematiche dell'ecopsicologia, una disciplina emergente che studia la relazione tra ambiente e salute mentale.

**Abstract II:** J. G. Ballard prompted a turn in dystopian literature from political/social issues to environmental concerns with his famous tetralogy in the 1960s. Fascinated by psychology and psychoanalysis, he was interested in the effects of urban and natural surroundings on the human psyche. He believed in the interconnectedness of humans and the environment, and was convinced that an unbalanced relationship could affect people's psychological equilibrium. Novels like *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975) investigate the reactions of the human psyche to hyper-technologized habitats, which makes him a forerunner of ecopsychology, an emerging discipline studying the connections between mental health and the environment.

#### 1. The Human Psyche in a Changing Environment

In the obituary for James Graham Ballard's death, written by Martin Amis in *The Guardian* on 25 April 2009, Amis wrote that

[Ballard] kept asking: what effect does the modern setting have on our psyches – the motion sculpture of the highways, the airport architecture, the culture of the shopping mall, pornography and technology? The answer to that question is a perversity that takes various mental forms, all of them extreme (Amis 2009).

J. G. Ballard (1930-2009) is mainly known as a science-fiction writer. His position in this genre, however, has always been anomalous. After relatively conventional beginnings in the American and British science-fiction tradition, he developed his own style and angle of vision. He never really won the favour of the critics or the public in the U.S. and was ostracised by American mainstream science fiction and pigeon-holed as a 'new wave' writer.

Ballard had more success in South America, Britain and Europe in general, where he was recognised both as a science-fiction and a literary writer (Brigg 1985: 12). His surrealistic settings, his concern with the exploration of the human psyche in changing existential conditions and the ambiguous endings of his stories (conveying scepticism towards an idea of science and technology as all-powerful) account for his status of non-canonical science-fiction writer. Jeannette Baxter underlines his prescience, namely, his ability to anticipate “the myriad realities of our disturbed modernity”, also noticing what the adjective “Ballardian” has come to signify in common speech, as recorded in the Collins English Dictionary:

BALLARDIAN: (adj) [...] resembling or suggestive of the conditions described in Ballard's novels & stories, esp. dystopian modernity, bleak manmade landscapes & the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments (Baxter 2008: 1).

As Amis underlined, Ballard was particularly interested in the impact that the environment (natural or urban) could have on humans and their mental sanity. This is already manifest in his famous tetralogy of the 1960s, four “disaster novels” describing major upheavals in nature and the human response to them. In *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962), what begins as an inconvenience to shipping and air travel grows into a cataclysm stripping away the Earth's topsoil. *The Drowned World* (1962) and *The Drought* (1964) depict the possible effects of climate change. In the former temperature increases due to solar storms cause the melting of ice-caps, leading the world into a pre-historic tropical era. In the latter radioactive waste from prolonged industrial dumping has covered the offshore waters of the world's oceans, thus preventing the formation of rain clouds. The novel illustrates the growing aridity of the Earth over a span of ten years and the ensuing consequences of violence and insanity among mankind. Finally, *The Crystal World* (1966) offers an apocalyptic vision of a world undergoing a process of crystallization. Only three months are described, but the phenomenon is forecast to cover one third of the Earth's surface within a decade.

Critics have underscored that Ballard's focus is on human reactions to natural disasters rather than the reasons for the disasters themselves. Unlike most science-fiction novelists optimistically relying on man's resourcefulness and promoting faith in original scientific solutions, Ballard presents humans as unable to overcome the inexorable modifications in natural conditions and simply adapting to them. This is where the writer's analysis of their reactions starts. The stress inflicted to human nature by the various catastrophes is his main concern. He explores the individual's fight for survival but also the pathological patterns of human behaviour that arise in changed conditions of existence, ranging from increasing self-perception to lack of affectivity, from the development of bizarre traits to the rise of brutal violence and primitive instincts. Two of Ballard's later novels are particularly interesting in this respect: *Concrete Island* (1974) and *High-Rise* (1975). They belong to the so-called “urban disaster trilogy”, which also includes *Crash* (1973), made into an award-winning film by David Cronenberg in 1996. Like the tetralogy they belong to the disaster genre, but, instead of dealing with reactions to vast catastrophes, they investigate the effects of urbanisation and complex technology on man.

## 2. The Pathology of Civilisation

The interconnection between surrounding physical space and mental equilibrium is the research field of ecopsychology, an emerging discipline seeking to establish how our links to the natural world (in a wide sense) affect mental health and how re-forming them might improve it. In an article on the online journal *Vivid* Vanessa Spedding enumerates a series of publications connected to this topic, all of which are grounded in the conviction that humans and nature are deeply bonded and the former's alienation from the natural environment can be the cause of mental instability or diseases<sup>1</sup>. In fact, she writes,

Ecopsychology proposes that the study of the mind should encompass the world in which that mind exists, including the physical environment [...]. It suggests that Western society's presumption of a separation between humans and nature is a dangerous illusion that denies us the experience of these bonds and provokes in us a degree of mental suffering that manifests in the psychological illnesses and imbalances we experience today (Spedding 2009).

Spedding in particular insists on the rising spread of depression in the affluent West, quoting figures provided by the World Health Organisation: "Depression [...] affects about 121 million people worldwide and is a 'leading cause of disability'. By leading, it means that depression is expected to be the second highest contributor to premature death or incapacitating disability by 2020" (Spedding 2009).

This is in tune with the point made by Erich Fromm sixty years ago in *The Sane Society* (1956) that the highest suicide and alcoholism rates were in affluent Northern European countries such as Denmark, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden and in the United States, with the main difference that the U.S. had the fifth place in the category of suicides while they were leading in the estimated number of alcoholics. These figures are read by Fromm as symptoms of diffused "mental disturbance" in countries that are among "the most democratic, peaceful and prosperous" in the world (Fromm 1956: 10). Two key concepts in Fromm's study are relevant to our analysis of Ballard's fictions: the "pathology of normalcy" and "consensual validation". Many psychiatrists and psychologists, he holds, object to the idea that society as a whole might be lacking in sanity. According to them "the problem of mental health in a society is only that of the number of 'unadjusted' individuals and not of a possible unadjustment of the culture itself" (6). On the contrary, Fromm will not investigate individual pathologies but the "pathology of normalcy" (6), in particular the pathology of contemporary Western society. In this context, "consensual validation" (14) is the mechanism transforming wrong or unhealthy behaviours into socially acceptable ones. "It is naïvely assumed", says Fromm, "that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings proves the validity of these ideas and feelings. Nothing is further from the truth" (14).

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<sup>1</sup> Spedding mentions the pioneering work of Theodore Roszak *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (1992) and the peer-reviewed online journal *Ecopsychology*, edited by Peter H. Kahn (University of Washington), <http://www.liebertpub.com/overview/ecopsychology/300/>. She also refers, among others, to two seminal essays: David Edwards' *Free to Be Human: Intellectual Self-defence in an Age of Illusions* (1995) and Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1956).

Socially constructed patterns are promoted (in particular through the mass media) in order to enable people to live with a defect without becoming ill. A “socially patterned defect” (15) does not threaten the security of the individual, who doesn’t feel inadequate, isolated or different from the others. Of course, this might not work with a minority (people more sensitive or of greater integrity) who are then perceived as outcasts or become prey of neurosis (14-18).

Fromm develops and integrates an issue raised by Freud in his *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), namely that the evolution of society and civilization has striking similarities to the development of the individual and is based on instinctual renunciation: “In actual fact, primitive man was better off in this respect, for he knew nothing of any restrictions on his instincts. [...] Civilized man has exchanged some part of his chances of happiness for a measure of security” (Freud 2000-2005: 26). The repression of instincts into the domain of the unconscious is a necessary condition of civilisation, which offers sublimatory activities (ideological, artistic, scientific) in exchange for the loss of instinctual satisfaction: “sublimation is a fate which has been forced upon instincts by culture alone” (18). So, for Freud civilisation is based on a “cultural privation” (18), elsewhere better translated as “frustration”<sup>2</sup>, which humans compensate with gratifications in other fields, including their mastery over nature and increasingly technological development. This leads Freud to finally wonder if “many systems of civilization – or epochs of it – possibly even the whole of humanity – have become *neurotic* under the pressure of the civilizing trends” (39). The diagnosis of collective neurosis – only hypothesised by Freud, who does not venture into research on the pathology of ‘civilised’ communities – is reinforced and further investigated by Fromm in *The Sane Society*.

If Freud’s aim was to highlight the contradictions inherent in the concept of civilisation, weighing its advantages and disadvantages to human beings, Fromm’s analysis contemplates what has been lost in the civilising process throughout the centuries. The promise of a bright future for humankind, prompted by the advance of science and technology, industrialisation and capitalist economy worldwide, has not been kept. Fromm depicts the modern world in gloomy terms, as a regression in man’s evolution<sup>3</sup>:

Happiness becomes identical with consumption of newer and better commodities [...]. Not having a sense of self except the one which conformity with the majority can give, he is insecure, anxious, depending on approval. He is alienated from himself, worships the product of his own hands, the leaders of his own making, as if they were above him, rather than made by him. He is in a sense back where he was before the great human evolution began in the second millennium B. C. He is incapable to love and to use his reason, to make decisions, in fact incapable to appreciate life and thus ready and even willing to destroy everything. The world is again fragmentalized, has lost its unity (356).

<sup>2</sup> In the edition of *Civilisation and its Discontents* included in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XXI, 1961: 97, it is translated “cultural frustration”.

<sup>3</sup> In this paragraph I am using the term “man” instead of the more politically correct “humans” to be consistent with Fromm’s wording.

Freud's and Fromm's analyses introduced and anticipated many themes later developed by environmental scholars in pointing to the threat of new forms of regression for mankind generated by the triumph of the mechanistic order. Environmental philosophers and ecocritics have increasingly referred to the modern age as "post-natural", stressed the alienation of humans from the non-human world and analysed its consequences. In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Carolyn Merchant traces the passage in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from an organic to a modern mechanical order, according to which the earth is an inanimate object to be manipulated. Merchant laments the loss of a holistic view, grounded in the idea of "cyclical processes, of the interconnectedness of all things, and the assumption that nature is active and alive" (1980: 293) in favour of the dominant mechanistic mode of thought, which has brought an unbalanced and ethically unfair system of natural, social and gender hierarchies. In *The End of Nature* (2006) Bill McKibben highlights how humans are no longer tossed by larger forces but have become those larger forces. Referring to the effects of climate change, he views the end of nature as synonymous with technocratic faith, leading to disastrous consequences for the earth's ecosystems and humankind. The present trend of environmental studies is therefore confirming Freud's and Fromm's intuitions in pointing to the uneasy position of human beings, bound by "instrumental reason" to be "tools of their tools", to use H. D. Thoreau's words (Iovino 2016: 32-34). Environmental studies and ecocriticism, deep ecology and social ecology question the grand myths of modernity and progress, affirm post-materialist values and lifestyles, and underline that "the unit of survival is an organism-in-its-environment" (Mathews 1991: 74), stressing the bonds of individuals to their natural and cultural environments. Therefore, they promote ethical interactions between the human and non-human world, reject vertical hierarchies, support values of reciprocity and communality, and focus on the rehabilitation of one's particular "habitat" regarded as one's "home" (according to the etymology of the Greek word "eco"), as promoted by the radical school of thought of bioregionalism fighting against global homologation (Glotfelty 2006: 7).

*Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* offer a dystopian depiction of such regression as a reaction to habitats created by insane societies. Both novels take to their extreme consequences the results of a hyper-technological world that has lost sight of the essential needs of human beings and seems to have become an end in itself. It is also a world where repressed primordial instincts are destined to be set free in order to fill those needs, in a fatal process of devolution.

### 3. An Ecopsychological Analysis of *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise*

*Concrete Island* tells about the marooning of an apparently well-established wealthy architect, Robert Maitland, on a traffic island on the outskirts of London after a front-tyre blow-out. This "non-place" of Western technology – a triangle of waste ground under the elevated junction of a highway – is incredibly close to the city but also extremely isolated and impenetrable, because it has no precise function in the complex motorway system: it is a forgotten and anonymous terrain, surrounded by concrete, ringed by wire-mesh fences and sealed off from the world around by steep embankments. It is also insulated against social surveillance and external assistance, as in a glass jar, due to the loud noise of motor engines covering any possible cry for help and the indifference of careless drivers running at full speed along the highway.



The secluded environment engenders a series of reactions from the injured and then disabled protagonist. Trapped in a no-man's land of "civilisation", Maitland first engages in a struggle for survival, then tries to escape by climbing the embankment and attracting the drivers' attention but to no avail. He finally decides to stay, falling into a regressive primitive state. Like Robinson Crusoe, Maitland takes possession of his territory and its resources, and invests the "capital" he rescued from the accident to thrive. He subjugates the other two inhabitants of the traffic island (two outcasts of society: Proctor, a brain-damaged ex acrobat, and Jane, a young prostitute), without whom he would not have survived, and becomes the king of the place. Two highly symbolic gestures epitomise Maitland's power and his regression into a primordial state: his urinating on Proctor – a way to mark the territory as in animal behaviour – and his using the man as a means of transport to be carried around. Moreover, Maitland's sexual appetites are satisfied by the young prostitute, who becomes a substitute for his unsatisfying affective life. Philip Tew has read *Concrete Island* as a reworking of *The Tempest*, with Maitland exhibiting "an increasingly Prospero-like self-assertion" and becoming "increasingly aggressive towards the others". His "concluding sense of self is one of dominion", while Proctor's accidental death is seen as a sacrifice which reinforces Maitland's self. In Ballard, adds Tew, "the sacrificial impulse illuminates either a kind of regression (a reaching for that which is absent, lost and recollected dimly) or an archetypal sense of the self" (Tew 2008: 114).

Ballard's surrealist setting can also be read as a metaphor of contemporary society. Quoting sociologist Marshall Berman writing at the end of the 1970s, Samuel Francis describes the problem of modernity as "the destruction of a vital form of public space" that has been replaced by "an aggregation of private material and spiritual interest-groups, living in windowless monads, far more isolated than we need to be" (Francis: 123. Quoted from Berman 1983: 34). This condition is epitomised by Maitland's inability to draw the drivers' attention. In Western highways, says Reyner Banham, each driver has acquired the freedom to travel long-distance at the price of an "almost total surrender of personal freedom" and "a complete surrender of will to the instruction" on the road signs: a statement directly referring to the American motorway system (Francis: 123. Quoted from Banham 1971: 217, 219). As a consequence,

Maitland is here rendered insignificant in the eyes of passing drivers by the scale and speed of a purposeful technology. In *Concrete Island* the cityscape repeatedly interposes inhuman distances and hard, opaque barriers in the way of human contact (Francis 2011: 123).

The rationalised technological landscape is in fact dehumanising and annihilating. In this context Maitland has turned into a lifeless puppet. The traffic island also recalls a post-modern landscape, in its carrying anthropogenic signs everywhere, despite its wilderness. The place is full of scattered waste and debris: cigarette packs, confectionery wrappers, used condoms, discarded tyres and cables. An exploration of the site reveals to Maitland a sort of archaeological stratification. Parts of the islands dated much before World War II, with worn headstones of an abandoned churchyard and ground-courses of demolished Edward-

ian terraced houses. There are also ruins of air-raid shelters and a post war cinema, together with the remains of a more recent Civil Defence post (Ballard 1994: 41, 69). The place is the epitome of consumer society: its overproduction, excessive waste and inability to reintegrate waste in the natural cycle. And the relics of human history are treated as garbage: their memory is erased.

An alienating environment cannot but produce alienated responses. Francis links the responses of Ballard's characters with the theories of psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1927-1989) – a major influence on Ballard, together with Freud and Jung – who saw “alienation as the normal condition of modern man” (Francis 2011: 120). Laing was a member of the anti-psychiatry movement, whose basic argument was that “psychiatric illness was ‘not medical in nature but social and legal’, that it was in fact a socially constructed myth” (Francis 2011: 62. Quoted from Shorter 1997: 274), a position close to Foucault's theory in *Histoire de la Folie* (1961). Laing underlined the ontological insecurity of modern man, the psychotic potentials inherent in every human and the fine line between sanity and insanity. Maitland's regression can therefore be read as the release of repressed primordial instincts triggered off in his new condition. At the end of the novel an emaciated Maitland seems to have purposely renounced escaping. As Brigg explains:

The events have a growing meaning for Maitland as he finds his civilised and socialised self being peeled off to reveal the survivor who actually glories at having left behind him a complex web of family, career, and upbringing, which have fettered him without his conscious knowledge (73).

Despite its ambiguous ending, the book warns us of the fragile balance on which our technologized reality is founded, a world where sophisticated structures have subverted the natural order and can produce unpredictable voids, bugs of a system, dangerous holes into which we can fall. The microcosm that is recreated in the traffic island reproduces a tribal structure. It is a regressive state which however satisfies primeval, physical and affective needs: those needs that were probably not satisfied in Maitland's life, as epitomised by his wife speeding off on the motorway, without noticing him. A “windowless monad” among others.

*High-Rise* is another metaphor of contemporary society and it is also an even more explicit and iconic in showing the results of artificial environments on the human psyche. The novel chronicles the rapid changes that take place in a vast forty-storey apartment tower (a high-rise) east of central London as its inhabitants “shed their pretences of upper-middle-class civilisation and become hunters and hunted in a struggle for survival within the closed environment of the building” (Briggs 1985: 68). The area where the luxury high-rise stands is part of a larger futuristic project of urban development, including five identical tower blocks (four of which under construction), an ornamental lake, concrete plazas, an auditorium and television studios. The site under development has covered a district of abandoned dockland and warehousing along the north bank of the river.

At the very beginning the protagonist, Dr Laing<sup>4</sup>, appreciates the impeccable and reassuring geometry of the complex, in contrast with the “ragged skyline” of the city in the distance, which “resembled the disturbed encephalograph of an unresolved mental crisis” (Ballard 2016: 5). Yet, in the course of the novel its regularity becomes more and more associated with images of disease, paranoia, obsessions, war, prison, anarchy and disorder. We learn that “insomnia [was] a common complaint in the high-rise, almost an epidemic” (10); Dr Laing’s studio apartment on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor is called “an over-priced cell” (1); and the project is described as being based on “an architecture designed for war” (5).

The high-rise is like a vertical town with 1,000 apartments and 2,000 inhabitants. It contains a restaurant, a supermarket, a shopping centre, a bank and a hairdressing salon, two swimming-pools, a gymnasium and even a junior school for the few children in the block. Its structural perfection and (apparent) self-sufficiency are ghastly because they are unnatural. The complex hasn’t grown organically, as it happens in urban territories. It is the result of cool architectonic rationalisation and depends on highly technological mechanisms that are meant to replace human labour and satisfy each resident separately.

The high-rise was a huge machine designed to serve, not the collective body of tenants, but the individual resident in isolation. Its staff of air-conditioning conduits, elevators, garbage-disposal chutes and electrical switching systems provided a never-failing supply of care and attention that a century earlier would have needed an army of tireless servants (6).

The image of the “windowless monad” emerges again in this picture of a collective body made of parts that don’t communicate. One of the architects of the project, the elusive Anthony Royal, lives on top of the building, in one of the best apartments at the 40<sup>th</sup> floor. His evocative name recalls the figure of “lord of the manor” (100) in a sort of contemporary feudal system. The tower structure, which was supposed to form a homogeneous community of well-to-do professional middle-class tenants, engenders a new type of social conflict. Individualism prevails and cooperation is completely lost. A crazy system of privileges and precedence, based on floor height, is established. Disputes arise between people from different floors (lower-floor residents against upper-floor residents) or people with different life-styles (parents with children against dog-owners). The high-rise is not an organism, where every part is in the service of the whole, but an aggregate of multifaceted egoisms. Ballard’s vertical city is a metaphor of a non-ecological world, in that it soon reveals its unsustainability and encourages competition, social divisions and hierarchical verticalism. The hyper-technological structure is the triumph of instrumental reason, which leads its inhabitants to become “tools of their tools”.

The increasing disputes grow into a war of everybody against everybody else, the *homo homini lupus* condition that civilisation should have resolved (according to Freud) thanks to instinctual restriction. So, the high-rise turns into the emblem of a regression to a pre-civilised status where instinctual satisfaction dominates again. Some characters do come to the

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<sup>4</sup> The choice of his surname and his being a doctor are possibly a homage to R. D. Laing.

conclusion that this type of artificial environment has devastating effects on its inhabitants. Dr Laing realises that “this was an environment built not for man, but for man’s absence” (28) and Helen Wilder, points to the transformation undergone by the residents exclaiming that “It’s almost as if these aren’t the people who really live here” (18). Helen is obsessed with the idea that she and her children can be physically attacked at any time. Once more, while leaning against the parapet on the roof deck, Dr Laing describes the landscape in front of him as a projection of a psychic condition:

The cluster of auditorium roofs, curving roadway embankments and rectilinear curtain walling formed an intriguing medley of geometries – *less a habitable architecture*, he reflected, than the conscious diagram of *a mysterious psychic event* (28, my emphasis).

Previously, the skyline of the city of London, in its irregularity, had appeared as an “unresolved mental crisis” as opposed to the reassuring geometrical perfection of the complex. Now the futuristic architecture begins to appear unsuitable to human habitation and mysterious. The high-rise increasingly comes to embody the dystopian realisation of an architect’s experiment, functional on the paper but in fact detrimental to the vital necessities of human beings, which imply cross-cultural exchanges, cross-class socialisation, cross-generational encounters, and contact with natural elements.

Confined in this technocratic paradise, the residents undergo a de-humanising process which strips any trace of civilisation off them. Little by little any restraint is lost: altercations, retaliations, raids, looting, clan-formation, acts of vandalism, illicit liaisons, incest, violence of any kind are the norm. Ballard demonstrates that a hyper-technological development is no guarantee of an equivalent evolutionary process in its human beneficiaries. In this anarchic context the building turns into a dysfunctional structure, showing the extreme frailty of sophisticated mechanisms. Elevators and air conditioning are constantly out of order, the garbage chutes are blocked and the disposal system gets soon overloaded. The result is a life in extremely unhealthy conditions marked by suffocating heat, stagnation and miasma. In a short time Architect Royal has to admit that the building is moribund. However, this does not change his experimental attitude, which turns into a detached observation of the birth of a new social and psychological order (or disorder) within the structure. The architect, defined “a fallen angel” hovering over the residents (13) and a “lord of the manor” (100), is also frequently described as a colonial figure, wearing a white safari-jacket and accompanied by his Alsatian dog, an image recalling an imperial governor. It is no accident that the construction of the tower block is referred to by a resident as “an attempt to colonise the sky” (20): an indirect criticism of a hyper-scientific and technologised attitude towards the environment that has detrimental effects on humankind. The references to ruling figures of previous times (the feudal “lord of the manor” and the colonial governor) seem to underline a regression in patterns of political organisation. As in *Concrete Island*, the characters don’t leave their habitat but adjust to it. Instincts are set free. New aggregations and hierarchies are formed. The high-rise becomes an enclosed experimental microcosm of primitive regression.

Critics have often mentioned two major influences on Ballard’s fiction: his interest in psychology and psychoanalysis (Freud, Jung and R. D. Laing) and surrealist painting (Dalí,

Magritte, Ernst, De Chirico). As in surrealism, in Ballard's novels the "real" external world mirrors and evokes important patterns of human meanings: the inner, personal, often subconscious, self. This accounts for Ballard's depiction of reality in exaggerated and distorted images, his obsessive repetitive style, plots left hanging, and suggested rather than revealed underlying ideas. However, Ballard's paradoxical reality also evokes the inner crisis of a collective mind, a society that suffers from a "pathology of normalcy" and thanks to "consensual validation", in Fromm's terms, continues to perpetuate it.

In *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise* J. G. Ballard has imaginatively depicted reactions of the individuals to the pressures of technologised insane environments. The novels are "extreme metaphors", to use the title of a 2012 collection of interviews with the author. While posing problems, however, they don't offer solutions. But this was not Ballard's aim, as he said in an interview: "I am not offering a grand answer to all society's problems. I leave that to others. I'm issuing warnings" (Tew 2008: 118; quoted from Litt).

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Deborah Saidero

### 'Violence against the Earth is Violence against Women': The Rape Theme in Women's Eco-Narratives

**Abstract I:** In letteratura la connessione metaforica tra donna e terra viene spesso esemplificata attraverso il topos dell'abuso sessuale. Spesso infatti l'atto dello stupro viene equiparato allo sfruttamento coloniale della terra. Oggi molte attiviste si impegnano a sovvertire i comportamenti colonialisti e capitalisti che sottendono la preoccupante normalizzazione della violenza contro le donne e contro la terra. In quest'articolo ci si propone di analizzare il tema dello stupro nelle opere di Lee Maracle, , Dionne Brand e Margaret Atwood, tre scrittrici canadesi che promuovono un senso di giustizia ambientale attraverso il recupero di un ethos di rispetto per la connessione tra la terra e le donne.

**Abstract II:** The metaphorical connection between women and the Earth is a recurring literary trope which is often articulated through the theme of rape. In many narratives the sexual abuse of women is, for instance, equated with the colonial penetration and conquering of the land. Today many women writers have undertaken a plight to subvert destructive colonialist and capitalistic attitudes that have normalized violence against women's bodies and against the Earth. This essay analyses the theme of rape in the works of three Canadian novelists (Maracle, Brand and Atwood) whose eco-narratives summon environmental justice by retrieving an ethos of respect for the woman-land connection.

Women and the Earth have always shared a special connection. In earth-centered mythologies the bond between the female body and the land is considered sacred and vital for the well-being of all living beings. The Indigenous Peoples of North America, for instance, believe that "women are earth" since "from the bodies of women flow the relationships of generations both to society and the natural world" (Cook 2003)<sup>1</sup>. It is, however, impossible to ignore, as Native writer Lee Maracle states, that there is also "a direct connection between Violence against the Earth and Violence against Women"<sup>2</sup>. This dangerous intersec-

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<sup>1</sup> Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook explains that women are connected to Mother Earth through the waters of the female womb which is "the first environment [...] the doorway to life" and that "at the breasts of women, the generations are nourished and sustained" (Cook 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See the lecture "Connection between Violence against the Earth and Violence against Women" delivered to the First Voices! First Women Speak! Gathering in Ottawa on August 24, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdxJYhbTvYw>.

tion is particularly apparent in today's scenario of unmatched environmental degradation in which we are also witnessing a worrying increase of various forms of violence against women, which include, but are not limited to, the violation of women's bodies through sexual assault. Since the 1990s rape victims worldwide have, in fact, increased by 240 percent – an escalation which ecofeminists connect to globalized capitalistic economic policies that unjustly violate the Earth (Mies & Shiva 2014: xiv).

Rape as a physical and symbolic form of violence has a mythical status<sup>3</sup> and is ubiquitously present in literature and popular culture<sup>4</sup>, permeating narratives of dominance and mastery over women, nature and the feminine. The rape trope has, for instance, upheld the colonial mindset through narratives in which the metaphorical envisioning of conquering a virgin land as an act of sexual penetration is used to justify colonial expansion and the exploitation of the land<sup>5</sup>. In practice, the legacy of such culturally engrained colonialist views has often resulted in the raping of women in contexts of war and, today, in male workers' camps set up on oil extraction sites near Native reserves<sup>6</sup>. Undeniably, therefore, as ecofeminists claim, "rape of the Earth and rape of women are intimately linked both metaphorically in shaping worldviews and materially in shaping women's everyday lives" (Mies & Shiva 2014: xvi).

In an attempt to culturally transform the destructive attitudes which have normalized violence against women's bodies and against the land, thus leading to the current epochal environmental crisis, many activist women writers are spinning eco-narratives that subvert the dominant predator-prey relationship which, according to Vandana Shiva, has transformed "nature from *terra mater* into a machine and a source of raw material" and excluded women "from participation *as partners* in both science and development" (Shiva 1988: xiv-xv). Working within an ecofeminist critical framework<sup>7</sup>, this essay analyses how the rape theme is culturally reclaimed and employed by three well-known Canadian women writers – Lee

<sup>3</sup> In westernized societies 'rape culture' stretches back to ancient Greek mythology where abuse of the female goddesses by the Olympic gods is common. In these narratives rape serves a key role because it facilitates the creation of a new hero, divinity or institution. By associating rape with the gods, these myths normalized the coercive act making it seem tolerable, if not even admirable and contributed to establish the dominance of male-centered religions and values. See Deacy & Pierce 1997.

<sup>4</sup> See Projansky 2001.

<sup>5</sup> The metaphor of rape is widely present in colonial discourse where "the forced penetration of the virgin land" is seen as a positive and rewarding phenomenon (Sharkey 1994: 18). Postcolonial feminist criticism has amply highlighted the insidiousness of the woman=land equation since it results in a dispossession of women's bodies and a silencing of their voices in colonized and post-colonial nations. See, for example, Godard 1988; Irvine 1986.

<sup>6</sup> In the tar sands of Alberta, Canada, for example, the rate of Indigenous women who have been reported victims of sexual violence or who have gone missing over the past two decades is the highest in the country and about 3.5 to 7 times higher than that of non-indigenous victims. See the report issued by Statistics Canada (2011), *Violent Victimization of Aboriginal Women in the Canadian Provinces*.

<sup>7</sup> Since the 1970s ecofeminism has explored the intersections between ecology and feminism in order to reveal and debase the oppressiveness of the woman/nature analogy and to put forward emancipatory strategies which may alter the historical, empirical, conceptual and symbolic equitation between the domination of women and the domination of nature. See, for example, Mies & Shiva 2014; Vakoč 2012; Shiva 1998; MacKinnon & McIntyre 1995.



Maracle, Dionne Brand and Margaret Atwood – to jointly focus on gender and environmental issues and to summon a call to action against abusive relationships between the sexes and with the land. It will be argued that by overtly denouncing and naming rape as such, their narratives constitute an important tool for undoing violent attitudes and spurring the retrieval of an alternative paradigm based on caring which can promote more equitable relationships and environmental justice for the health and survival of all humans on this planet.

In spite of their commitment to different political agendas, all three writers subversively incorporate the rape theme into their narratives with the shared goal of debasing the patriarchal ideologies that uphold patterns of domination and victimization. The first, Lee Maracle, from the Stó:lō Nation in western Canada, re-appropriates the rape trope in *Daughters Are Forever* and *Celia's Song* to denounce the devastating physical, emotional, psychological, socio-economic and cultural effects of colonialization on Indigenous communities, as well as its catastrophic impact on the land and our relationship with Mother Earth and the feminine. An activist for the rights of the Indigenous Peoples and an environmentalist, Maracle debunks the rape rhetoric of colonialism to show how, far from being just a metaphor for colonization, rape is integral to the patriarchal capitalist system which perpetrates violence on Native women and lands. In her 1996 novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, the second writer, Caribbean-Canadian Dionne Brand, draws attention to the double legacy of sexual abuse that women of colour often experience vis-à-vis both the Black and white communities and the various forms of environmental racism this entails. As she investigates the intersections between sexual violence and racism, Brand re-inscribes the woman/nature analogy from a lesbian perspective which undercuts female victimization motivated by both race and sexual orientation. The third writer, ecofeminist and human rights activist Margaret Atwood, shows us what environmental destruction can lead to if we are not careful, as well as the dire effects that failing to recognize the connection between women and the land can have. In her well-known novel *The Handmaid's Tale*<sup>8</sup>, she depicts a dystopian scenario in which rape becomes an institutionalized practice in a white, upper-class totalitarian regime that forces women into the role of surrogate mothers in order to save humanity from extinction. All three writers, as we will see, address the urgency of undermining the socio-political, economic and cultural environments in which victimization paradigms that uphold rape are rooted.

In colonial rhetoric rape has a longstanding history of being used as a celebratory metaphor to exalt man's conquering of and domination over new territories and their 'uncivilized' inhabitants. From an Indigenous perspective, however, rape has much more than a mere metaphorical relevance<sup>9</sup>. It is an embodied sexualisation of violence and power which

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<sup>8</sup> A TV series based on the novel and starring Elizabeth Moss was recently created by Bruce Miller and broadcast in the US in April and May 2017. The great reception and commentary it has encountered so far (it won the 2017 Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Drama Series) bears witness to how relevant Atwood's novel still is today. Although this article was written before the release of the series, it echoes many of the views on women's abuse shared by spectators and reviewers of the TV drama.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Deer, for instance, states that "Rape is more than a metaphor for colonization – it is part and parcel of colonization [...] Sexual assault mimics the worst traits of colonization in its attack on the body, invasion of physical boundaries and disregard for humanity" (2009: 150).

is played out on both women and the Earth to disrupt the fundamental land/body connection, which today seems more in jeopardy than ever with the intensification of extractive activities on and near Native lands and the correlated increase of sexual assault against Native women<sup>10</sup>. For Maracle rape has, thus, both a historical and contemporary pertinence and is indissolubly identified as the physical abuse of women's bodies, the desecration and pillaging of the land and cultural genocide. Historically, as she shows us in *Daughters Are Forever* (2002), rape is the material – not just metaphorical – tool of colonialization, which she sees as the root cause for the demise of Aboriginal tribal nations and cultures<sup>11</sup>. In the novel's prologue, the poignant description of the collective rape and massacre of the Native women upon arrival of the brutish white colonizers subverts any mythical status of rape as a facilitator of new creation. Instead, the Indigenous perspective through which it is told re-inscribes the coercive act as the barbarous and much uncivilized aggression that brought about the destruction of the Native way of life, matriarchal societies and harmony with the Earth:

The songs in the women's throats halted as hairy faces filled with lice, skin oozing with sores, and bodies caked with ship's filth came into view [...]. Ashore, the strangers' swords flashed. Their bodies swung hatred. Woman after woman, confused, fell under the lash of decadent rage carried by these men [...].

From between the legs of the skirtless bronze bodies shame rose, musty, dank and foul-smelling. The watching woman saw her body misused. In perfect stillness she saw the lout who had taken her, leave her for dead [...]. The next man arrived. He paused, slapped her lifeless body, helped himself to her sex and moved on (Maracle 2002: 17, 19).

The demystification of westernized male-centered rape myths, symbolically inscribed by the image of "the strangers' swords"<sup>12</sup>, is skillfully achieved not only by admitting the woman's point of view, but also by contrastively framing the horrific gang rape within the beautiful Aboriginal creation myth about Star Woman and Westwind, from whose tender liason the people of Turtle Island derive. While providing an alternative to violence, the creation myth emphasizes – through its personification of the natural elements – how the violation of the female body and the violation of the land are inexorably intertwined. Seeing the Native women being misused by man after man, Earth too weeps and grieves, knowing that this violence is the beginning of doom for all her creatures: "Westwind screamed

<sup>10</sup> The dangerous intersection between the extractive industries' exploitation of Native lands, their inconsiderate release of harmful environmental toxins that threaten human health, and violence against Indigenous women, girls and future generations has been recently termed "environmental violence". See Women's Earth Alliance 2016.

<sup>11</sup> In *I Am Woman*, Maracle writes: "the aims of the colonizer are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of co-operation among the colonized" (Maracle 1996: 91).

<sup>12</sup> As Bourke (2007) points out, the sword as a symbol for the male penis that is sheathed into the vibrating vaginal scabbard has recurred in rape myths at least since the 1800s not only to inscribe the female as a passive receptacle but also to legitimize the perpetrator's act as something not completely unwanted by the woman.

in desperation [...]. The birds stopped singing and the very air above the women began to die. Sweetgrass was still [...]. The earth did not move" (Maracle 2002: 12). The stillness and silence that overcome both Woman and Earth mark the beginning of their dispossession and victimization, which generates a never-ending spiral of pain, commodification and destruction. The women, once the pillars of their communities, lose their spiritual connection with nature and become deaf to its teachings. Grief-ridden, they plunge into an apathetic paralysis which is passed down to future generations and tragically hinders their ability to "listen to the optimistic potential of love" (Maracle 2002: 24). At the same time, the inability to retrieve that loving and sacred connection with the land results in a failure to protect Mother Earth from relentless imperialistic and industrial exploitation and ravaging.

Addressing both the individual and collective dimension of rape, Maracle also draws attention to the devastating long-term socio-cultural effects that it has on the entire Indigenous community. Somewhat like the biblical fall from Eden which casts mankind into a world of sin, the colonizers' abuse disrupts the unison between the human, spiritual and natural worlds. It thereby marks the shift from the harmonious, rape-free<sup>13</sup> matriarchal societies based on mutual respect among all living beings to a warrior society in which the loss of respect for the feminine brings on intraracial rape. Burdened with guilt and shame for not having been able to save their women from the slaughter, the men too are, in fact, so devastated and passionless that they "float from one woman to another, leaking manhood into their wombs", often without bothering "to seek the women's consent" (Maracle 2002: 25). Perpetuated violence fuels a proneness to self-destruction through alcohol and substance abuse which further contributes to the decline of Indigenous family structures. The children, often neglected, grow up feeling "love as the absence of chronic spiritual hunger" (Maracle 2002, 27) and, what is worse, as Maracle denounces in *Celia's Song* (2014), they can also become victims of horrific physical and sexual abuses by members of their own community:

There are two men with the child. Each holds a bottle [...]. They take turns torturing the child. They poke her with a rod [...]. Her body goes limp. Jacob can see that they have shoved the poker up between her legs [...]. Someone is passed out on the floor. It looks like a woman [...]. Her soiled dress is up over her hips; she has no underwear on. After the child faints or dies [...]. both men help themselves first to the child's vagina and then they help themselves to the woman's (Maracle 2014: 115).

However abhorrent pedophilia may be, Maracle's narrative does not simply condemn Amos, the child rapist, for his despicable act, but ambivalently presents him as a victim-turned-victimizer, since, like many Indigenous children, he too was physically, psychologically and culturally abused of by the whites in Canada's residential schools. While not attempting to provide any sort of justification for male violence against women and

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<sup>13</sup> Various scholars suggest that in pre-colonial times sexual violence was extremely rare in Indigenous communities where women were respected and influential spiritual and political members of the community and enjoyed sexual autonomy and control over their bodies since they were not considered the property of men (see Deer 2004: 129-130).

girls, Maracle acknowledges, nonetheless, that abusive and violent behaviours within the community stem from the historical legacy of colonialism, which, in the case of the Indigenous Peoples, has involved a loss of lands, culture, health and nationhood. As part of her decolonizing strategy, she thus embraces an Indigenous theory of rape which, as Sarah Deer states, conceives “of rape as an unlawful ‘invasion’ of the body, mind and spirit [...] as a violation of a person’s humanity” (Deer 2004: 137).

The response to rape that Maracle puts forward in her narratives equally draws on the cultural beliefs of her People who confide in the importance of ceremony and healing to overturn historical trauma and its present-day effects on Indigenous communities, lands and bodies. Healing involves, on one hand, finding redemption for one’s broken spirit by coming to terms with pain and the self-harming and lateral violence that spring from it. Both the rape victim and the rapist thus need to be healed before the community as a whole can recover and have a possibility of survival. On the other hand, it entails restoring the land-body-spirit connection by recognizing our mutual interdependence with the land. Since our health depends on the health of the land, as humans we need to embrace an ethos of caring and respect, or, in other words, what eco-social scientist Riane Eisler calls a feminine “ethos of partnership” (1987: xvii).

Colonial dynamics and the intersection between sexism and racism which uphold interracial and intraracial violence against women of colour are similarly debunked in Brand’s novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, where Elizete, the young Caribbean protagonist, is raped both by her Black husband Isaiah and by her white employer in Toronto. In both cases sexual abuse is denounced as a weapon of subjugation used to enforce power inequalities and establish male dominance and possession over women’s bodies and desire, thereby challenging traditional assumptions that sex between intimate partners or between master and slave cannot be considered rape. In the abusive marital relationship between Elizete and Isaiah, the Black female body is, for instance, repeatedly violated and desecrated through rape disguised as sexual intercourse and other forms of domestic violence which include battering, whipping and psychological pressuring, so as to perpetuate a master/slave-like relationship. Having been given to Isaiah by the woman who raised her, Elizete is, in fact, considered simply as a property to exploit for pleasure and labour. Dehumanized and reduced to the status of an animal, she has no choice but to succumb to lying beneath this older Black man, whom she envisions as a malevolent demon: “Isaiah ride me every night. I was a horse for his jumbie”<sup>14</sup> (Brand 1996: 10). Although compliant with the intercourse, like rape victims, however, Elizete estranges herself from her body and imagines taking refuge in the soothing depths of the Earth: “in the dust tunnels of wood lice” she covers herself in “their fine, fine sand” and slides down to the place “where they live” (Brand 1996: 10).

When Elizete is sexually assaulted by a white man in Canada, the trauma of gender-based violence is heightened by the historical weight of white/black power dynamics. As Brand’s powerfully iconic language suggests, the aggression racializes the Black female body and occasions an even greater erasure of identity:

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<sup>14</sup> In Caribbean English the word “jumbie” indicates an evil spirit (Allsopp 1996: 317).

A man you don't know bends you against a wall, a wall in your room. He says this is the procedure. He says you have no rights here. His dick searches your womb. He says you girls are all the same, whores, sluts, you'll do anything. His dick is a machete, a knife, all the sharp things found on a kitchen table, all the killing things found in a tool shed [...] He shakes the blood off his knife and leaves. This time they searched her skin, this time they found nothing and took it, too (Brand 1996: 89).

The vulgar term "dick", for instance, used to describe the man's phallus, which is sharp as a knife or a machete, emphasizes the sordidness of an act that lacerates and violates the female womb. Notably, the imagery of sand, which previously offered the illusion of escape, returns to convey first a feeling of suffocation and then a feeling of crumbling as if Elizete's body were made of sand: "She felt her lungs fill up and stiffen with sand. She felt her breath thicken, dense to sand [...]. If she lifted her head she knew that it would fall off grain by grain and so she lifted it and it fell and crumbled" (Brand 1996: 90-92).

The colonial position of Black women, and of people of colour in general, is also symbolically evoked through the description of Elizete during the rape as spread out "flat against the immense white wall, the continent" (Brand 1996: 89) – an image which alludes to the colonial exploitation of Africa and the historical displacement of the African slaves. By decolonizing rape myths, Brand thus opposes the historical "territorialization" of the black female body as "rape-able" by virtue of its embodiment as "a naturally submissive, sexually available, public reproductive technology" (McKittrick 2006: 39) which derives from the white ownership of black bodies during transatlantic slavery. Like Maracle, she also shows us how colonial oppression has led to lateral violence within the Black communities and to environmental racism, that is, the disproportionate hazards, such as exposure to polluted air, water and soil, that racialized minorities are subjected to and which affect their health and well-being<sup>15</sup>. In Toronto, for instance, Black immigrants inhabit unhealthy downtown apartments, in degraded areas along the rusty Canadian National railroad and near intoxicating factories; they tread through the maze of streets that "devastate you" as "the concrete-grained deserts high and wide sap your will" (Brand 1996: 63); and their labour is exploited for the humblest and less paid jobs. Belittled by the whites, like Indigenous men, Black men become violent against their women, who also learn a self-hatred that they then project onto their daughters: "they beat us abused us terrorized us as they had been terrorized and beaten and abused" (Brand 1996: 231).

A strategy of resistance that Brand suggests adopting against the violence occasioned by patriarchal colonialist attitudes is to embrace love and bonding among women, as implied by the lesbian love relationship between Elizete and Verlia, by Verlia's plight for sisterhood during the Revolution, and by Elizete's recovery of a matriarchal lineage. Discursive inscriptions of the female body as a territory to be exploited, which are upheld by the woman/nature analogy, can equally be subverted by re-evaluating the connection with the Earth. Although the environmental dimension is subordinated to gender and racial dynamics, the undertext of Brand's narrative stresses, in fact, the affinity between the feminine and

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<sup>15</sup> See Women's Earth Alliance 2016: 64.

natural worlds. Water imagery is, for instance, abundantly used to describe homosexual love and desire which favours Elizete's emancipation; the lush volcanic gardens of the Caribbean provide an imaginative space of escape from violence (Brand 1996: 105-107); and the samaan tree is like a mother for the orphaned Elizete (Brand 1996: 17).

A re-appropriation of the woman = nature metaphor in non-imperialistic terms is also undertaken by Margaret Atwood, who, like Brand and Maracle, deconstructs rape narratives to advocate a return to the feminine as an alternative to patriarchal violence. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the institutionalized rape of women is presented as a direct consequence of – and as a faulty male-centred measure against – the inconsiderate rape of the land, which has rendered the Earth a toxic, radioactive and infertile wasteland. Paradoxically, in fact, in the theocratic Republic of Gilead, which was created to contrast environmental doom and human extinction, women are sexually exploited as Handmaids for procreation like in the biblical story of Jacob. Deprived of their human rights, dignity and freedom, they are legally enslaved by a fundamentalist, military regime that hypocritically admits and justifies coercive sex not only for procreation but also to satisfy male desire. In Jezebel, the secret brothel, forced prostitution functions, for instance, as a means of control over women who refuse to comply with the role of handmaids. Reduced to sex slaves, their bodies are commodified for male pleasure, just as the handmaids' bodies are commodified as “two-legged wombs” (Atwood 2010: 146) to ensure the survival of the species.

Challenging such male-dominator attitudes, Atwood questions the legitimacy of the sociocultural, political and religious dictates that uphold the commodification of women's bodies and fuel (self-)victimization patterns. Her extensive intertextual parodic play with the Bible thus exposes the insidiousness of Judeo-Christian narratives which favour patriarchy and mythicize sexually abusive relationships. During the monthly impregnation ceremony, for instance, the Commander ritually reads out passages from the Old Testament to remind the Handmaids of their religious role as surrogate mothers for the survival of the community. Like the maid Bilhah who in Genesis is said to “bear upon [Rachel's] knees” (Atwood 2010: 99), they too are forced to lie between the legs of their Commanders' wives. Offred, the narrating protagonist of the tale, notices, however, that the orgiastic ritual functions to enforce power-over dialectics, not only of male over female, but also of social status among women:

I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers [...]. Above me [...]. Serena Joy is arranged outspread. Her legs are apart, I lie between them, my head on her stomach, her pubic bone under the base of my skull, her thighs on either side of me [...].

Her arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any. The rings of her left hand cut into my fingers.

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body (Atwood 2010: 104).

Indeed, in this odd *menage a trois* the handmaid is at the complete mercy of both the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy, who equally inflict pain on her. Yet, having been brainwashed with the idea that it is her duty to “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth*” (Atwood 2010: 99), Offred refuses to name this mating ritual as rape. After all, she tells us, “nothing is going on in here that I haven’t signed up for. There wasn’t a lot of choice, but there was some, and this is what I chose” (Atwood 2010: 105). In her typically ironic style, Atwood, however, wittingly parodies standard definitions of sexual assault and shows us that, like rape victims, Offred recurs to denial merely as a means of survival against the physical, psychological and emotional violence she is submitted to. Her thoughts, sensations and reactions tell, instead, a different story, one that implies that if this is not rape, then what is? Like Elizete, Offred, in fact, feels repugnance towards her assailant and experiences a sense of detachment from her body which, on one hand, allows her to imagine drifting away on the large white canopy placed above the bed and, on the other, makes her wonder if she has gone mad. “Maybe”, she ponders, “I’m crazy and this is some kind of new therapy. I wish it were true; then I could get better and this would go away” (Atwood 2010: 105). Moreover, as “the Commander fucks, with a regular two-four marching stroke, on and on like a tap dripping”, her only wish is to be released from this folly, which, she admits, is neither definable as “making love” nor “copulating” but only as vulgar “fucking” since it “has nothing to do with sexual desire” but only with the violation of the female body (Atwood 2010: 104-105).

Against Gilead’s male exploitation of women Atwood poses Offred’s feminine resistance strategies which refer not only to emotion but also to the natural world. Frequently, for instance, she refers to flowers and gardens, which symbolically counter the chemically poisoned and dying landscape: “I’ve tried to put some of the good things in as well. Flowers, for instance, because where would we be without them?” (Atwood 2010: 279). When Offred thinks of her own body she also uses natural imagery versus the Commander’s mechanical fucking: “I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland [...] I become the earth I set my ear against, for rumours of the future” (Atwood 2010: 83). Like Brand and Maracle’s narratives, Atwood’s tale thus re-inscribes the woman-earth connection to show the redeeming potential of loving and caring attitudes against the destructiveness of preying attitudes inherent in domination. As Coral Ann Howells has suggested, Offred, for instance, “finds her way to emotional survival” in Gilead thanks to her love relationship with Nick, the Commander’s chauffeur, “who turns out to be her rescuing hero at the end” (Howells 2005: 106) and enables her to finally become pregnant. Likewise, in the Historical Notes, Atwood points to the earth-centred beliefs of the Denai Peoples of Nunavit and the empowerment of women as a viable means to survival.

In the eco-narratives of all three writers rape is overtly named, described and condemned as an act of dominance that has harrowing physical, psychological, cultural and ecological consequences. All three narratives, however, also present heroines that remind us of what Joplin has described as “the embodied, resisting woman” who can resist her “status as privileged victim” thereby interrupting “the structure of reciprocal violence” (Joplin 1991: 55). Indeed, these Canadian female authors, from completely different ethnic back-

grounds, offer us a similar alternative to dominance, violence and environmental degradation. They show us that if violence against women is to be stopped, their bodies can no longer be considered as *terra nullius*, but cherished, valued and respected for their sacred life-giving qualities. Equally our relationship with the earth can no longer hinge on systems of power and domination which uphold environmental degradation. Instead, a more loving and caring attitude must be embraced in order to stop the destructive behaviours brought on by capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. If humanity is to avoid Atwood's apocalyptic world marred by toxic chemicals, radiation, infertility and disease we ought to, indeed, start the healing, as Maracle suggests, and protect the sacred land-body connection, since if we poison the land we also poison our bodies. Likewise, if women are to be empowered rather than enslaved, rape paradigms need to be replaced by caring and partnership models. Maybe then, like Elizete in Brand's novel, we will enjoy female desire, sexuality and love "like a drink of cool water" (Brand 1996: 3).

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Daniela Fargione

**“One thing does not exist: Oblivion”. The Poiesis of Everness and the Wildness of Art in Anita Desai’s “The Artist of Disappearance”**

**Abstract I:** Il primo verso di “Everness” di Jorge Luis Borges che Anita Desai sceglie ad epigrafe de *L’artista della sparizione* sta a indicare che niente può essere dimenticato tranne ciò che non ha forza a sufficienza per diventare memoria. Se l’oblio è il tema principale del libro, il racconto eponimo si concentra sull’urgenza di preservare le opere d’arte di cultura e natura. Il ruolo etico dell’artista come portatore di valori e il lavoro artistico quale strumento di conservazione sono particolarmente evidenti nel cameo destinato a Nek Chand e al suo “Giardino di pietra”, opera mai autorizzata. In questo articolo si esplorano: le eredità naturali e culturali profanate e le loro rappresentazioni letterarie; la distruzione della biodiversità *naturalculturale* nell’India postcoloniale; la decentralizzazione dell’umano e la forza d’azione della materia.

**Abstract II:** Anita Desai’s *The Artist of Disappearance* opens with the first line of “Everness” by Jorge Luis Borges to suggest that nothing can be forgotten except for what is not strong enough to become memory. If oblivion is the main theme of this collection, the eponymous story illustrates the need to preserve (mainly from forgetfulness) both cultural *and* natural artworks. The ethical role of the artist as transmitter of values, together with artistic travail as a tool of preservation are particularly evident in Desai’s reference to Nek Chand’s unauthorized “Rock Garden”. In this article I explore the literary representation of desecrated natural and cultural heritage, postcolonial India’s destruction of *naturecultural* biodiversity, the decentralization of the human, and the agency of elemental materiality.

In a series of conversations that took place on various occasions in the United States between 1967 and 1985, Jorge Luis Borges offers precious insight about his fascination with death, which in one of his stories he defines as “the oblivion that awaits us all” (Burgin 1998: 125). In an interview with Willis Barnstone, the poet reveals how his late blindness, “which resembles an eternal present” (Borg 2009: 111), compels him to live in memory: “[...] I suppose a poet should live in memory because, after all, what is imagination? Imagination, I should say, is made of memory and of oblivion. It is a kind of blending of the two things” (Burgin 1998: 181). But if the common notion of memory implies an empirical adherence to a past reality or experience, a conformity to veracity, in many of his writings Borges emphasizes the unreliability of the act of remembering, its selective and failing nature that inextricably

ties it to forgetting. And yet, in the first verse of his poem “Everness” (1964), he pens a staggering statement: oblivion does not exist.

One thing does not exist: Oblivion.  
 God saves the metal and he saves the dross,  
 And his prophetic memory guards from loss  
 The moons to come, and those of evenings gone.  
*Everything is: the shadows in the glass*  
 Which, in between the day’s two twilights, you  
 Have scattered by the thousands, or shall strew  
 Henceforward in the mirrors that you pass.  
*And everything is part of that diverse*  
*Crystalline memory, the universe;*  
 Whoever through its endless mazes wanders  
 Hears door on door click shut behind his stride,  
 And only from the sunset’s farther side  
 Shall view at last the Archetypes and the Splendors (Borges 1972: 207, my italics).

Still, how can we deny the faltering gait of human memory? With no doubts, we *do* forget, but Borges seems to suggest that we are unable to remember only what is not strong enough to become memory, eventually positing that our incapability to recollect might depend more on a conflict between the various modes of our *ars memoriae* rather than on the dialectic relation of memory and oblivion (Bottiroli 2012). Moreover, the universe itself is conceived as a “crystalline memory”, an immense archive, which eventually defies the possibility of and, ultimately, the need for a total categorization of knowledge and systematized recording: since “Everything is”, nothing can be obliterated.

Similarly, oblivion is the main theme of Anita Desai’s three novellas in *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011), which in fact opens with the first line of “Everness” by Jorge Luis Borges. This is not the first time that the writer devotes an epigraph to memory, as in *Clear Light of Day* (1980), for instance, she uses the line of a letter that Emily Dickinson wrote soon after her mother’s death in 1882: “Memory is a strange bell – jubilee and knell”, emphasizing the disrupting force of remembrance of which she had a “remarkably concrete understanding” (Lundin 2004: 8). This holds true for Anita Desai as well, whose novels are often concerned with something that is vanishing, although in a recent interview she states that her attention to what is passing and disappearing is not theoretical to her, but central to her experience as it is “an Indian obsession” (Menozzi 2015: 30). “Born in India”, she continues, “one is poor in so many ways but I always feel we are, or have been, rich in time. I would say it is the fourth dimension of life, and a dimension to which I am a witness. My role is as of a witness” (*ibid.*). Both epigraphs, then, illustrate the relation between life and the ability to remember, but “memory”, Desai affirms, “contains the writing one does” which, more than an antidote to transience and the custody of what is vanishing, is “a way of seeking order and meaning in what is of its essence chaotic, haphazard, even meaningless” (31).

In the eponymous novella of *The Artist of Disappearance*, chaos is the condition the world has been dragged to by the ruthless attitudes of human beings who chiefly view the planet as an inexhaustible reservoir to be exploited to the substantial detriment of the biotic life, of poor and marginalized people, and of indigenous communities (human and nonhuman). However, Anita Desai does not limit herself to “witness” environmental devastation; rather, “The Artist of Disappearance” is a complex exploration of a process of decolonization of nature through the restoration of heritage and ecological habitats via memory, creativity, and imagination. This reclamation is made more challenging by the fact that the land has already been sacked and ravaged by the violence of history, so that, to say it with DeLoughrey and Handley, “place encodes time” (2011: 4), thus suggesting that the exhuming of a traumatic past embedded in a specific land discloses the transformative entanglement of both human and natural histories. Desai’s attempt at coming to grips with the relationship between landscape and colonization is far from being a mere recovery of the pastoral India, or a nostalgic idealization of a bucolic landscape. In her novella, in fact, she offers new perspectives on environmental change as embedded in material, historical, and discursive practices of commodification.

“The Artist of Disappearance” is set in Mussoorie, a resort in the Himalayan foothills that, due to growing capitalism and commercialization, suffers from a massive devastation of natural diversity. The main character is Ravi, the adopted son of a prosperous but neglecting couple that spends more time abroad than in India. While travelling, the child has to stay behind with servants and tutors, and when he wonders why his parents never take him with them, he realizes that they believe he “belonged at home”<sup>1</sup>, a space that he can hardly identify with family bond and love: “they [Ravi’s parents] did not belong to his life because they did not belong to the forest and the hills [...] he knew the family thought him freakishly backward, *a wild creature* of the mountain” (114, my italics). Even when they are present, Ravi is compelled to respect “a set of rigid rules” (108), which require his complete invisibility and silence. The sense of suffocation that he feels at home is opposed to the comfort that he finds in natural spaces, where he can freely roam as a “wild creature”:

Outdoor was the life to which he chose to belong – the life of the crickets springing out of the grass, the birds wheeling hundreds of feet below in the valley or soaring upwards above the mountains, and the animals invisible in the undergrowth, giving themselves away by an occasional rustle or eruption of cries or flurried calls; plants following their own green compulsions and purposes, almost imperceptibly, and the rocks and stones, seemingly inert but mysteriously part of the constant change and movement of the earth [...] collected and arranged according to size and color in an infinite number of patterns and designs, none of which were ever repeated or fixed (101, 103).

Wildness, the chaotic inconstancy of the material world and of its agencies that resist human systematization and control, is a constant in the complex entanglement of beings

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<sup>1</sup> Desai, Anita. 2011. *The Artist of Disappearance. Three Novellas*. London: Chatto & Windus, 106. All subsequent quotations or page citations from “The Artist of Disappearance” refer to this edition.

and their environments, and Ravi seems to be particularly interested in the “variations and mutations of the living, their innumerable possibilities” (103) that he can find only at Himalayan altitudes. As Gary Snyder affirms reminding Thoreau’s famous dictum, “Wildness is not just the ‘preservation of the world,’ it is the world” (1990: 168-169).

Desai’s engagement with the more-than-human epitomizes recent international investigations on the long-standing notions of human nature and conservative practices that have repeatedly led to human control and domination of nature and natural resources. Human and zoo-anthropology, ethnography, and animal studies, for example, have contributed to analyze interspecies relationships while exploring the ways of “multinaturalism” and “internaturalism”<sup>2</sup>. “Species interdependence”, affirms anthropologist Anna Tsing, “is a well-known fact – except when it comes to humans” (2012: 144). This supposed exceptionalism has sprung from the assumption that humans are “autonomously self-maintaining – and therefore constant across culture and history” (*ibid.*). This is a conservative idea that has favored preservation rather than innovation, eventually nurturing an ideology of human mastery over other species and of a special kind of domestication that “tends to be imagined as a hard line: You are either in the human fold or you are out in the wild” (Tsing 2012: 145). Animated by Donna Haraway’s ideas of a *dynamic* species companionship<sup>3</sup>, Anna Tsing’s study of matsutake mushrooms, illustrates the multiple interlacings of the human and non-human while taking into account discipline and cultural specificities, regional and local factors and, especially, various temporalities within fluctuating landscapes. Wandering and contemplation offer Tsing an impression, a *memory* of “a familiar place in the landscape” to return to, a memory that is strong enough to guide her future walks, since one is generally driven to the very geographical spots of previous interspecies encounters. “Familiar places”, concludes Anna Tsing, “engender forms of identification and companionship that contrast to hyper-domestication and private property as we know it” (Tsing 2012: 142).

The main character in Desai’s novella seems to be delighted by surrounding natural places that he acknowledges as his *oikos* as well as his family. Mushrooms, for example, are the companion species that give him the pleasure of the unexpected: “And there was always the unexpected – [...] an eruption from the tobacco-dark leaf mould of a family of mush-

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of “perspectival multinaturalism” has been theorized by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. It postulates that “the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (1998: 469). An “ethnographically-based reshuffling of our conceptual schemes” (470) – mainly the demise of dualistic paradigmatic sets collected under the rubrics of “Nature” and “Culture” – is urged to embrace the Amerindian conception of the world which supposes a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity, as opposed to the Western notion of “multiculturalist” cosmologies which imply a unity of nature and the plurality of cultures. Similarly, in his essay *Addio alla Natura* (2011) semiologist Gianfranco Marrone concedes that if we can talk of “interculturalism” as a practice that contemplates cultural diversity and hybridization, in the same way we might hypothesize a viable “internaturalism,” that includes “not only our knowledge or common sense, but also social practices” (136). Marrone reaffirms the urge of an intersectionality of different cultures, i.e. of systems and processes that engage “people, but also beasts, plants, spirits, totems, dreams” (132. My translation). Cfr. Fargione 2013; Cravero 2015.

<sup>3</sup> “Syntactically and materially worldly embodiment is always a verb, or at least a gerund. Always in formation, embodiment is ongoing, dynamic, situated, and historical” (Haraway 2008: 249).

rooms with their ghostly pallor and caps, hats and bonnets, like refugees that had arrived in the night" (102). Desai's words perfectly echo Donna Haraway's statements that remind us of the value of Anna Tsing's arguments about the Holocene, "the long period when refugia, places of refuge, still existed, even abounded, to sustain reworlding in rich cultural and biological diversity. [...]. Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge" and she wishes for a reconstitution of refuges, "to make possible partial and robust biological-cultural-political-technological recuperation and recomposition, which must include mourning irreversible losses" and a communal effort: "We need to make kin [...] sym-poetically" (Haraway 2015: 160-161).

In "The Artist of Disappearance", Ravi treasures enduring wildness and instability, but at the same time he cultivates constants such as energy and creativity that inform both the human and nonhuman worlds of their impermanence and porosity. Energy flows and their disruptions remain inseparable from life, from living organisms and, finally, from *poiesis* – the generative praxis that combines randomness, unpredictability, and design – eventually proving how poetic travail links the wild artistry and creativity of nature to human imagination, in a continuous compositional and transformative process that contemplates inter-/intra-actions of making and unmaking<sup>4</sup>. In this scenario, the complex participation of nonhuman agency generates further challenges because "nature's own processes of regeneration and change often contribute to the burial of postcolonial histories" (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011: 4), thus foregrounding different temporalities and political and economic interests. Ravi finds this out when he returns to Mussoorie from a study period in Bombay – "years he did not count [...] they did not belong to his life because they did not belong to the forest and the hills" (114) – and while traveling in a bus he notices a "line of huge trucks loaded with rocks, logs, sacks and bundles and men perched on top, their mouths and noses wrapped in scarves against the dust and fumes of exhaust" (116), clearly a hint at the gradual pollution and deforestation of the mountains, a new violence that adds to a past one.

When the family mansion burns down in an accident, Ravi decides to live an increasingly hermitic existence, eventually becoming a recluse. He opts for a life of invisibility in the remains of his family's home now turned into a forest-dwelling that local children say has ghostly powers. However, what might seem just the relic of a glorious past destined to rotting decay, is also the sign of a resistance to oblivion, an enduring permanence against the inexorable passing of time marked by the signs of history. It is Desai herself who explains her predilection for ruins and ruination: "I find ruins wonderfully conducive to thought and impulse. [...] Abandoned, empty, such ruins compel one to create a history for them, tell their stories. They invite imagination to enter and inhabit them" (34). "The Artist of Disappearance" is thus a meditation on the recuperative dimension of art and, especially, on the crucial role of art and writing as transmitters of history. As Filippo Menozzi states referring to Anita Desai's "The Museum of Final Journeys", the opening novella of *The Artist of Disappearance*:

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<sup>4</sup> Considerable scholarship has been published on material ecocriticism, including Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Barrett & Bolt 2013; Iovino & Oppermann 2014.

In a contemporary world defined by the culture of 'commodity and memory' proper to late capitalism, an ethics of the authentic ruin testifies to the possibility of a way out of the impasse between obsolescence and commodification. The ruin indicates a different mode of dealing with the past, which in Desai's story becomes the ethical work of the literary imagination: a literary history able to avoid becoming commodity or forgetfulness (Menozzi 2015b: 11).

This is particularly visible in Ravi's secret and inaccessible work of art, a private garden built in a hidden glade that reflects complex patterns of plants and pigeon-colored stones, broken branches, wild berries and "the family of pallid mushrooms of the day before" – a blending of intuitiveness and symmetry, perception and design, a project of imagination that engages him strenuously but that "no one witnessed" (126).

Ravi's solipsistic existence is interrupted when modernity bursts in through a film crew coming from Delhi with their own "project" (128): to document environmental degradation in the Himalayas. If many directors go to the hills to shoot images of lush hinterland and forests – "Scenary, they all like scenery" (131, 143) – these filmmakers instead are interested in what is spoiling them: "Soil erosion, cattle grazing, deforestation" (129), the agenda of unbridled capitalism. During an inspection, Shalini, a woman from the film crew, stumbles into Ravi's secluded garden, which she describes as an "undiscovered and untrodden [...] wild place," maybe "the lair of a wild animal or perhaps even a secret hermitage. [...]. It seemed totally deserted, as composed and still as a work of art. Or nature. Or both, in uncommon harmony. The place thrummed with meaning. But what was the meaning?" (138-139). The garden is suddenly recognized as a text scripted with both human and nonhuman interminglings, a materiality that Jane Bennett defines as "a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota. It draws human attention sideways, away from an ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans" (Bennett 2010: 112). The 'vibrant matter' that constitutes Ravi's garden does not simply refer to substances, but it also includes multiple discursive practices and meanings, so that the very concept of interpretation extends beyond the conventional categories of 'text'. As a consequence, the entire structure of the world appears as endowed with a narrative agency that depends on the interactions of different composites; not a uni-verse, but rather a "pluri-verse", as Bennett calls it, "traversed by heterogeneities that are continually *doing things*" (Bennett 2010: 122). Intuitively, the documentary director understands that the garden synecdochally "contained the essence [of the Himalayas] [...] as one glittering bee or beetle or single note of birdsong might contain an entire season" (144), and starts musing on the commercial possibilities of its filming. Ravi, could interpret the role of "someone who is different, someone who is not destroying the land but making something of it, something beautiful" (146). Not surprisingly, Ravi has no intention to become a celebrity and perceives the intrusion as a threat: "their gaze alone was a desecration" (152)<sup>5</sup>. Only

<sup>5</sup> The sacred secrecy of the artistic endeavor is well expressed by Anita Desai in an interview: "I have an intuitive and deep fear that by speaking of something subterranean and sub-conscious, I will destroy it – it is

then, the director concludes that without him, the garden is “dead, a dead loss” (154) and he even suspects that the artist might not even exist.

In the end of the novella, Ravi lets his “bower” revert to wilderness and eventually begins a new project by putting bark, moss, and quartz into a matchbox – “a crib, a cradle” (153), thus a new life container – while fabricating new secret collections of *naturecultural* compounds in a recombinant and procedural eco-aesthetics. His kaleidoscopic assemblage and re-arrangement of this vital matter is also a transmutation of energies and a re-appropriation and custody of a cultural heritage, since his collected fragments belong to a national identity and to its native communities. As philosopher Mark Sagoff posits, by comparing the natural environment to the artistic patrimony of an entire collectivity, the safeguard of nature becomes an obligation towards our cultural tradition and diversity (Sagoff 1988: 124-125). To turn to the forest to recover the suppressed signs of landscape history is all the more ontologically powerful, since capitalism’s despoliation of nature simultaneously becomes an act of violence against the collective memory of an entire country and of its *naturecultural* biodiversity. As Donna Haraway reminds us: “assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too” (2015: 159).

The ethical role of the artist as transmitter of values, together with artistic travail as a source of preservation (mainly from forgetfulness), is offered by a little cameo that Anita Desai devotes to Nek Chand and his illegal and unauthorized sculpture garden.<sup>6</sup> Now a symbol of successful transmutation, the Garden was made out of stones, debris, and pilfered construction materials left over after more than fifty villages were destroyed to build the city of Chandigarh after the partition of colonial India in 1947. The project’s aim was to create a new modern capital for Punjab, which could reflect the concept of “visual order” pursued by his appointed builder, the French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier, who used a measuring system based on the human body and evoking Leonardo da Vinci’s “Vitruvian man,” clearly a symbol of an anthropocentric vision of the world (cfr. Haraway 2008). Le Corbusier’s plan, moreover, completely effaced the indigenous mixtures of vernacular building styles and architectural folk traditions, a form of oblivion of cultural diversity that sparked Nek Chand’s artistic project. With no formal education in art or sculpture, he started his rock collection in 1958 when he also claimed that “all the stones have a soul,” thus suggesting that a new life form could take place out of a broken past (Wojcik 2016). Space, light, form, and beauty convey both a sense of loss and the strength of imagination to re-create natural indigenous scenes in a forbidden place.

Since Chand was an employee for the Public Works Department, he was aware of the

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something so very frail. This feeling I cannot subject to reason. I cannot explain it, but I know the creative act is a secret one. To make it public, to scrutinise it in the cold light of reason is to commit an act of violence, possibly murder” (Kumar 2002: 70).

<sup>6</sup> When Shalini stumbles on Ravi’s secret garden, she informs her colleague (whose name is, in fact, Chand) about the work of “Some kind of artist perhaps. Now artists were species for whom Chand had a grudging but profound respect” (141). Shalini asks: “[...] you have heard of that man in Chandigarh, a road engineer or something, who collected all the scrap from his road projects and built a kind of sculpture garden of it? Kept it hidden because the land he built it on didn’t belong to him? Then it was found and he became famous? What’s his name, do you know?” (142).





Fig. 1-2. Sculptures in Nek Chand's Rock Garden (Photos by Rod Waddington for Wikimedia Commons)

perils of his endeavor: if caught, not only would he lose his job, but he could also face imprisonment. Chand used tiles, pottery pieces, bicycle frames, broken bathroom sinks, fragments of glass, a whole assemblage that he holistically re-arranged and re-ordered while in solitude and certainly not for personal recognition. His enterprise could rather be seen as a therapy that eventually offered him and his discarded objects a new agency within a process of renewal. His Rock garden later became an open-air shrine, a place devoted to religious diversity and innumerable manifestations of the divine. Of course, his project had to meet different forms of hostility and in 1990 local authorities even sent a bulldozer to destroy part of the garden in the attempt to build a new way for the city (Wojcick 2016). When several attacks of systematic vandalism damaged his sculptures, the reaction was a massive grass-roots response that the authorities could not ignore so easily. A Foundation on his name was eventually established and a new recycling program was inaugurated to clean Chandigarh of its waste, proving the meaningful, transformative, and restorative value of this experience, which could affect a whole community (cfr. <http://nekchand.com/>).

In conclusion, Desai's artists of disappearance, far from being advocates of oblivion, invite us to reconnect with our past to re-create our future, and eventually to nonhuman bodies, forces, forms, and – to evoke Borges again – to the universe (or, possibly, pluri-verse) which is itself energy, vitality, memory, and consciousness. "Everything is".

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Sergiy Yakovenko

### A Deceptive Initiation: An Ecological Paradigm in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*

**Abstract I:** Il romanzo *Tay John* di Howard O'Hagan è stato ampiamente dibattuto come un lavoro modernista di decostruzione, che mina alle basi i concetti consolidati di mitologia, narrativa e genere, così come sono normalmente intesi. Nel presente saggio, analizzo uno degli aspetti del dramma mitologico del romanzo precedentemente trascurati – lo scontro tra le epistemai ecologiche pre-moderne e moderne, che rivela un evento precursore dell'ingresso nella modernità. Io sostengo che l'ironia drammatica di un mito indigeno ricodificato presenti gli Shuswaps aborigeni alla percezione colonialista dell'ambiente, rendendoli ingannevolmente ostaggi delle loro stesse convinzioni e, così, modificandone drasticamente il continuum spazio-temporale.

**Abstract II:** Howard O'Hagan's novel *Tay John* has been widely discussed as a modernist work of deconstruction that undermines the established concepts of broadly understood mythology, narrative, and gender. In this article, I focus on one of the previously neglected aspects of the novel's mythological drama – the clash of the pre-modern and modern ecological epistemai, which unfolds as an originary event of entering into modernity. I argue that the dramatic irony of a recoded indigenous myth introduces the aboriginal Shuswaps to the colonialist perception of the environment, deceptively making them hostages of their own beliefs and thereby drastically changing their temporal-spatial continuum.

The titles of all three chapters in Howard O'Hagan's novel *Tay John* (1939) – “Legend”, “Hearsay”, and “Evidence – Without A Finding” – are suggestive of the problem with the narrative's trustworthiness. The first and the shortest part of the novel, “Legend”, which will be the focus of this essay, in addition seems to exploit the rich semantic potential of the titular word: it is a story of the mysterious birth and the early years of the legendary figure Tay John, the son of the white missionary Red Rorty and a native Shuswap woman; it is a legend of Red Rorty as a pseudo-saint or a pseudo-apostle; and it is also “legend” as the wording on a map – the map of Western Canada at the end of the nineteenth century. Prior to becoming a popular tourist destination and a mine site, the Rocky Mountains of Western Alberta and British Columbia were a part of central Canada's hinterland, which “was shaped separately to a greater extent and tied in loosely to Confederation with a railroad” (Harrison 1977: 74). Still, the Canadian Pacific Railroad, which was launched in 1885, lay two hundred miles to the south of Yellowhead Pass – one of the central geographical points

of *Tay John*. Even the prairies to the East from the Rockies, before acquiring the image of the archetypal garden in the works of George M. Grant, Ralf Connor, Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer, and R. J. C. Stead, were, in Dick Harrison's words, "hardly more than a source of land, markets, and raw materials" (Harrison 1977: 74). It means that at the beginning of the narrative, in 1880 – according to "men's time" (O'Hagan 1989: 11), as opposed to the cyclical time of myth and nature – the Athabasca valley as the main setting of the novel was largely a land scarcely populated by trappers and fur-traders and visited by prospectors and surveyors as well as missionaries. At the same time, this wilderness, necessarily viewed as such by colonizers from Ontario, was home for a few indigenous peoples (Crees, Stoneys, Shuswaps), whose habits and mythologies O'Hagan studied from the "White" anthropological sources such as Diamond Jenness's *The Indians of Canada* (1932).

The application of these studies to a vivid artistic imagination resulted in the kind of a 'legend' which combined a generally trustworthy account of the rite of initiation with an imposed on the Shuswap worldview myth of a white-haired messiah, destined to lead his people to a better life on the Pacific coast. The hybrid mythological basis of the legend is fully mirrored in the figure of the novel's protagonist, Tay John, the subject of the rite of passage and the ostensible messiah, who himself has a hybrid and murky provenance, being a child of a failed white missionary and a married Shuswap woman. During his manhood vigil ritual Kumkleseem (Tay John's Shuswap name) fulfills the expectations of his tribe and becomes one with nature, acquiring the bear-spirit as his guardian spirit, thus confirming his messianic leadership among his people, but at the same time brings from the valley a seed of destruction in the form of dark sand that shines at night. Gold sand changes the natural environment of the valley by bringing prospectors and miners, yet its lethal 'magic' begins well before the influx of the white colonizers: Kumkleseem breaks the Shuswap custom by refusing to share the sand with his tribesmen and later, having received a rifle and other valuables from the colonizers for his guide service, alienates himself from his people even further by perpetuating his proprietary mode. On their way to the coastal Salish, a cousin tribe on the Pacific coast, the Shuswaps forget their habits and ecological worldview and turn into lazy fur-traders, constantly on the brink of survival. The fate of the tribe is magically tied to the disposition of its leader, Kumkleseem, who adopts a French nickname *Tête Jaune* (yellow head) and later its Anglicized version Tay John, and, refusing to sacrifice his personal happiness for the sake of his people, abandons them altogether. The demise of the Shuswaps and their land reads first of all as ecological deterioration, precipitated by a series of 'magic' coincidences, misinterpretations, and misrecognitions, among which the merging of the Judeo-Christian messiah mythology with the Shuswap beliefs in a yellow-haired leader, paralleled by the very appearance of Kumkleseem-Tay John, a progeny of a native woman and a Christian missionary slash rapist, seems the most important. Kumkleseem's rite of initiation, mirroring all the ambiguities of its hero and of the mythologies behind him, becomes an embodiment of these misrecognitions – as a just a story, a "legend", a ritual, and an originary scene of entering to modernity.

In his novel, O'Hagan mixes the narrators and their versions of the events, thereby concealing the otherwise ungraspable passage from a pre-modern mythological state to the realm of modern ideologies in a convoluted time-space continuum, described by Jack Den-

ham, the main narrator of the novel, as “the country of illusion”: “Remember that I speak to you in the country of illusion, where a chain of mountains in the distance seems no more than a dog might leap across” (O’Hagan 1989: 163). The blurred vision and uncertain hearing to which the reader of the novel is subjected are fortified by a mosaic of time patterns, which features modernity’s straightforward thread interwoven into the multilayered mythical substance, much like a railroad penetrating a mountain country. As Ronald Granofsky notes, “Vision is so problematic in this borderland country because different versions of time are operative in the various worlds adjacent to it and among the various inhabitants” (Granofsky 1992: 110). Articulated as an ambience of any story that unfolds in the novel along the lines of myth, this illusory environmental time-space is not a mere background but the very fabric of the narrated reality. It renders most of the story “untold”, to the effect of arriving at the mode of fiction that Michael Ondaatje labels as “mythic realism” (Ondaatje 1989: 265). In his “making the point that no story is complete”, O’Hagan, as Margery Fee argues, creates a “new world myth” by also “undermin[ing] to varying degrees several dominant and interconnected Western ideologies” (Fee 1986: 9), which Jack Robinson defines as “the Christian division of spirit and flesh, the egocentric self, the use of language and story as means of subduing nature, the process of knowing through intellectual dominance, the myth of the world-dominating male, the centralist and imperialist concepts of culture, and ideology as *teleos*” (Robinson 1988: 173-174). These very ideologies are described as prevalent epistemological and behavioral modes of the anthropocene in the works of Bruno Latour (1993), Donna Haraway (1991), Timothy Morton (2009), Adrian Ivakhiv (2001), Jedediah Purdy (2015), and other scholars of ecocriticism and modernity.

This all-penetrating suspicion of mythology makes it possible for O’Hagan to wield what Ondaatje calls “that raw power of myth” (Ondaatje 1974: 24) precisely by means of exploiting the mechanics of its creation and of exhibiting this mechanics in a postmodernist manner. One of the novel’s stories that is particularly interesting in this regard is the story of the originary event that – through its inscription in myth (the myth of exodus) and rite (the rite of passage) – introduces the Shuswap people into modernity, represented by white men, their values, capitalist relations, and colonial enterprise. In what follows, I argue that the paradigm of the originary event runs contrary to the circular, insular mythology of the natural cycles. The very event represents a breakthrough from that closed time-space of pre-modern religiosity toward historical time, and the ecological implications of this change for the indigenous people in the novel are disastrous.

Due to the special role, inscribed to Kumkleseem by his people, the magic impact of his initiation is expected to influence the fate of the whole tribe rather than his personal life only. Therefore, the time-space of his initiation moves from the personal sphere to the realm of the sacral and the collective. The essence of initiation itself is an environmental experience: a boy should go away from people into the wilderness and spend several days there without food until he sees a vision that shows him “the spirit that would guide him” (O’Hagan 1989: 45). In their expectations for Kumkleseem’s initiation, the Shuswaps waited for a specific place that he would choose, and that very space would serve as a sign for them; accordingly, his prospective vision would be an indication of the path before them. The fact that Kumkleseem-Tay John chooses for his initiation a taboo place testifies to a special role

that he himself ascribes to his personality, and becomes an omen for his tribesmen: if someone breaches the taboo and encroaches into the prohibited area, spirits should punish him; or, if he is a great man, the life of the whole tribe should drastically change.

The taboo place where Kumkleseem went for his trial has all the appearances of the valley of evil. It is

a valley into which no man went. The water that came down from that valley was turgid, dark, and flowed silently, with no rapids. It was said that if a man drank of that water he would lose his voice and go from the sight of his fellows, roaming the hills at night to back at the moon like a coyote (45).

The taboo space is marked by the mystic quality of the environment of the evil valley that casts a spell and thus distorts the natural creation within its boundaries. But the real fear that the valley provokes in the Shuswaps is the threat that the evil spirit of the place presents for the whole community:

The spirit of the valley was cruel. Men feared that one night, taking the form of a great white bear, it would come down upon them in their sleep and leave them with a coyote's howl for voice and only a coyote's claws for hands, and each man would be forever a stranger to his neighbour (46).

As the expectations of Kumkleseem's initiation vision were so high that his tribesmen hoped to obtain a vision for the fate of the whole tribe, their fear of his going to the evil valley becomes even more understandable: the spatial transgression could be interpreted as an apocalyptic prophecy, as a prediction that the evil spirit would overpower all men and thereby ruin the whole community forever.

Although Tay John-Kumkleseem already goes to the taboo land, he nevertheless has to set some temporal-spatial limitations for himself. He was going along the valley for four days until he could "go no farther", then he listened for four days more, and on the ninth day, he turned back. At some point it seems that the landscape and its evident physical signs – the beginning of the river or the high mountain ridge – served as postmarks for his journey: "On the end of the fourth day my eyes told me I could go no farther. I had come to where the river is born and where a man could step across it. Rock walls were before me. Ice hung upon them – white, and cold as an old woman's breast. One place there was where man might still go on, but I knew I had come to the end of my journey" (48). The secret symbolism of those limitations comes to the open only after Kumkleseem returns to his people and tells them his story.

The narrator – along with Kumkleseem as a story-teller who relates his adventure to his tribesmen – is pushing the reader to the understanding of the importance of those limitations gradually, developing the environmental experience of the hero from the personal significance of his initiation toward the collective meaning with metaphysical, and even apocalyptic, implications. The personal dimension of his initiation experience unfolds in the field of sensual environmental perception, which deploys along the temporal axis of the day-and-night cycle with prevailing visual experience during the day and hearing ex-

perience during the night accordingly. The completely passive, contemplative mode of this experience is definitive of the principal existential attitude toward the natural environment that the Shuswaps represent in all the aspects of their life. This chthonic mode is a striking opposition to what the modernizing spirit of the colonizers has to offer: accepting instead of imposing, patiently looking upon instead of restlessly changing, reading instead of dictating, and just diligently noting instead of actively interpreting:

Against a spruce-tree, withered by lightning long ago on some sand the river had fallen away from, I sat and waited and my ears listened. Close to me I saw in the green coarse grass a place where a cow moose had borne her calf three days before. Closer to me still, so that I could see the broken tips of the willows in the sun, an old moose had browsed. Earlier, when the snow had just left the ground, a she-bear and her two cubs had crossed on the sand past my feet, for the marks were there before me. On the ledges above my head goats came when the day was warm and lay down in the sun. The rest I saw was grass trembling in the wind, and the roof of the forest bending when the mountains breathed, and sun shining on running water (48-49).

This description is worth special attention because it is not a white-narrator's poetic landscape portrayal, crafted in accordance with the romantic or any other tradition of nature-writing; rather, Kumkloseem himself presents it as an account of his initiation. At some point in his story, when the temporal-spatial limitations are all set, the active role of the subject ceases and what follows is his all-encompassing as well as all-respecting position of a receptive organ that records the environment with minimal interpretation and later relates everything without discrimination or selectivity. "Grass trembling in the wind" has much more active and acting power and energy than Kumkloseem himself, whose perceptive organs organize the surrounding environment into the world first in his mind and later – as a confirmation of his sanity – in making sense of it through the narrative. A natural change reflected in the capacity of his receptive organs uncovers still different aspects of the environment and calls for new personification metaphors that employ his keen sense of touch and hearing against the backdrop of the weakened nightly vision:

At night in the darkness I felt the mountains come closer so that they were against my elbows, and my bones that could not move were sore and aching. At night the river spoke loudly. An owl, the soul of a departed woman, was in the tree above me, and my ears, become lonely, were tender to its message. Mice ran over my toes (49).

It then becomes clear that the narrative acquires a mythical pattern, and through a gradation of animals – from the smallest to the biggest – which fulfills the number of days Kumkloseem spent in a receptive position, he leads the story to the conclusion that his tribesmen expect from him. After the mice, the first morning he realizes that a marten was beside him under the spruce-tree; the second morning he had a visit from a lynx; a "great black wolf" came on the third morning; and, ultimately, the fourth morning brought him an old bear, who made his bed beyond Kumkloseem's feet and stayed there the whole night to watch him.



As the climax of Kumkleseem's story matches what his people expect from it, the oldest and the wisest of the tribesmen, Squeleken, rose and said: "It is well. You have spoken with the words of a man. The bear spirit will be your guardian spirit" (49). Squeleken's concluding remark nicely wraps up the conventional part of the initiation story, which results in determining the guiding spirit of a newly-baked man or warrior, thereby securing for him a double connection, necessary for both present and after-life: a special personal connection with an animal, with a piece of a non-human natural environment in which he lives, and with a divine entity that this animal symbolically represents. Of course, Tay John's connection with the bear spirit does not appear accidentally.

The bear spirit was suggested for Kumkleseem as the right choice before the trial, as an opportunity to choose the moral instead of the immoral, the collective instead of the individual. When the time of Kumkleseem's initiation came, people were saddened because he was constantly "sitting on a ridge and gazing up" the horrible valley, whose "cruel spirit" is able to induce irrevocable transformations in human souls. To fathom the dubious character of the bear spirit with regard to Kumkleseem and the Shuswaps, we need to remember the shape that the cruel spirit of the valley takes for them. Probably, upon seeing the boy aspiring to the bear spirit, old Smutuksen decided to present him with an alternative bear spirit. The night before Kumkleseem's trial, the old man takes him outside the village and in a forest clearing shows him the Big Dipper: "That is The Bear. You see him, and he sees you" (46). The Bear that sees Kumkleseem is an alternative concept of the omnipresent God, to whom Smutuksen introduces the boy, full of pride in his desire for transgression – to enter the country of the "white bear". This white bear has its spatial limitations: it dwells in the horrible valley; its localization makes it possible to evade it, to avoid the horror by simply not encroaching upon the cursed land. The Bear, by contrast, cannot be disregarded: "he sees you" anywhere, even in the land of the "white bear", which is what the old man seems to be trying to convey to Kumkleseem. The bottom line of that warning is a matter of conscience, etymologically *co-knowledge*, shared between the two participants of the intimate connection that excludes the third party: "You see him, and he sees you" (46).

An ambiguous philosophical implication of the bear image develops gradually throughout the novel and ultimately acquires a polar metaphysical meaning of both dark and light, predator and victim, power and weakness. The Bear is going to watch what kind of a bear Kumkleseem is becoming himself during his initiation. Additionally, there is a fear, a helplessness before the eyes of a bear that charges "out of the dark" (243): a fear of the unknown. There is also the imagery of the dark compared with the inside of the bear, and the bear as an allegory of wilderness that constantly vies with man. "An epic battle: man against the wilderness" (86) was a generalizing characteristic of the narrator John Denham's first meeting with Tay John. In the battle scene, Denham is merely an onlooker, whose position at the opposite side of the river gives him a passive, contemplative, and philosophizing capacity to generalize the battle as an object but never to approach it from the point of view of Tay John himself. Tay John's victory over the she-bear thus becomes Man's victory over darkness, which Denham immediately associates with the wilderness, yet does Kumkleseem endow the episode with the same meaning? He himself comes from the darkness of

the earth and disappears – at least for the white onlooker – into the womb of the earth at the end; the wilderness is the home where he lives, and the bear is his guiding spirit, acquired during the initiation trial. Ultimately, there is also a bear that Tay John kills out of mercy: the bear cub, mutilated by a European woman, Ardith Aeriola. The cub is also a small piece of wilderness, taken as a pet by a civilized woman, who out of ignorance cuts the cub's nails off so that the creature cannot walk. All these bear episodes point to the fact that Tay John is not only closely tied with the bear image but also shares its collective fate: as the she-bear, he also impersonates the wilderness, killed by Man; he mutilates himself when he falls prey to the horse passion; and he symbolizes the darkness, the unknown, the unfathomable that lures and scares the Europeans.

"His mark will be upon you, and your mark upon him" (50), says the old Squeleken to Kumklessem about the bear-spirit. While Squeleken is satisfied with the expected outcome of the initiation, Smutuksen, who had shown to Tay John – before the trial – The Bear who was going to watch him from above, suspects that there is more to Kumklessem's story. And, urged by this suspicion, Kumklessem tells his tribesmen about a temptation that he struggled with far away in the mountains: "There was a word. There was a voice. I heard speech in the trees. It called me farther than I had gone. Still I returned my face from it for I had gone as far as my return would let me" (50). This is the second part of the story, the one that fulfills not the collective, tribal expectations of the initiation, but Tay John's personal quest for self-identification.

The result of this quest, however, is as ambiguous as the image of Tay John at large. The whole of Kumklessem's initiation enterprise was based on breaching the taboo of the evil valley. A spatial restriction that Kumklessem imposes upon himself in spite of all the luring voices seems to suggest that The Bear, an allegory of a higher overseeing divinity, overpowers Tay John's urge toward transgression: when reaching the point of no return, he stops himself and does not cross the Rubicon that would separate him from his tribesmen and probably call down afflictions upon them. But the reaction of his people to his story proves that separation has already taken place: some of them were wondering "if the valley had cast its spell upon Kumklessem so that he no longer spoke to them wholly with a man's tongue, for these were words they did not understand" (50-51). Although, at least this time, Kumklessem curbs his desire for transgression, his frightened tribesmen in their apprehension are not far from the truth: the evil spirit of the valley has already been unleashed, and Yellowhead-Kumklessem unknowingly brings it to their lives.

As a proof of his unusual journey, Kumklessem brings a bag with sand from the bank of the river where he was fasting. Mirroring the dichotomy of Kumklessem-Yellowhead, who comes out of the dark of the earth but has remarkably light hair, this sand combines the qualities of darkness and lightness. "It is the dark sand where the dark waters come from" (51), says Kumklessem as he presents his trophy. "It is dark, yet the light of the sun has entered into it so that it shines even now at night" (51). However, his tribesmen, who lay their tongues upon the heavy sand, associate its bitter taste with "a mountain goat long dead" and suspect some dark magic in it (51). Along the line of that dichotomy, during the celebration of the happy outcome of Kumklessem's initiation, three white men arrive; they surprise

Tzalas with a map showing geographical intelligence of the Shuswaps' country and reveal that their final destination is the same tabooed dark valley. The clash of the two epistemological systems, with their respective languages of ecology, happens right at that point. The white men are not at all discouraged by Tzalas's admonition that it is an evil place with bad water or by Kumkleseem's affirmation that "there is nothing up the valley" (54). A dichotomy also hides in white men's representation of themselves – "We are peace-lovers, and no harm rides with us" (53) – and their actual threat to the Shuswap community, apparent in their reaction to the gold sand, which is produced by Kumkleseem as material evidence from the evil place: "They laughed. They hit each other upon the shoulders until the people thought they were fighting. Tzalas stood close and wondered at the magic of the sand" (54). The dramatic irony of this description foreshadows the tragic consequences this seemingly shared wonder at the magical qualities of the sand will bring to those who interpret them from non-Western, "child-like", "innocent" perspective.

The white men steal Kumkleseem from his people and hire him as their guide to the evil valley, promising him "a rifle that would kill a moose with its voice [...] and a coat to wear, red as bear's blood" (54). Not the Bear's spirit but the coat of "bear's blood" becomes the real, ultimate initiation of Kumkleseem. That is why "when Kumkleseem returned he was no longer Kumkleseem" (55). White people called him "Tête Jaune" (accommodated to the local pronunciation as "Tay John"), Yellowhead, mimicking the nickname of the historical Pierre Bostonais, an Iroquois-Métis fur-trader and trapper who at the beginning of the nineteenth century crossed the Rocky Mountains through the pass known later as Yellowhead. As this name, uttered by the white men in relation to Kumkleseem, was combined with praise for his good eye and knowledge of the mountains, the Shuswaps decided that the name has been given to him for his good qualities and deeds. Thus, the whole figure of Tay John, following the above array of misinterpretations, becomes a product of deception, of internal, essential falsity that undermines him as a chthonic demigod and thereby also weakens the temporal-spatial ecological integrity of his land. Together with Tay John, the Shuswaps unwillingly and unknowingly become involved in an alien symbolic system, which, as though in a curved mirror, distorts and contaminates their mythical, pristine world of harmony between the human and non-human and of the direct ontological correspondence between the name and the thing.

A number of scholars have been attracted to the mystic significance of naming in *Tay John* (Fee 1986: 10; Davidson 1986: 37; Zichy 2004: 197; Hingston 2005: 183), which Fee qualifies as "analogous to mythmaking" (Fee 1986: 10), yet the main focus has been on the naming of wilderness as the way of appropriating it. The fake name "Tay John", mimicking the name of another person, depersonalizes Kumkleseem and brings upon the name the functional, not mythical, meaning that it has with people of a different cultural system. This clandestine enemy, deception, ruins the long-established homeostasis of the Shuswaps' life and corrupts the people's morals. The hunters become traders and hunt only for animals that can be sold profitably to the white buyers: "Days came when the young men, following Tay John, failed to hunt meat and hides for the village. They began now to hunt other animals than the moose, caribou, goat and deer — smaller animals deep in the timber; the

martin, the lynx, the mink and the fox, and to pack the fur on their backs to traders across the mountain" (O'Hagan 1989: 56-57). The young Shuswaps come back to their village with rifles and other perks of civilization, but the ecological balance of their land has already changed: the game retreated into the mountains, famine crawled into the life of the village, and "black sickness" (58) took many Shuswaps' lives. A medicine man, Kwakala, mentions "new shadows" that are cast upon their land: "Your fathers lived where you live for many, many winters. They were friends with the place where they lived. They were gentle. They spoke to a deer before they killed it that its spirit might not be offended. They did not boast [...]. Their women sang songs to the berry spirit" (59). With the advent of the new epistemological order, the ecological equilibrium of the land changes drastically: "The young men shake their rifles and boast. Still young bellies are empty. The women have become lazy and do not sing. Their berry baskets are empty" (59). In the face of this apocalyptic picture, Kwakala tries to resuscitate an old Shuswap myth of the Promised Land across the mountains, where their cousins still live and wait for them to come back, and where there are game and berries in abundance. It is a common belief among his tribesmen that Kumkeseem is the prophesied messiah, who will lead his people to that paradise. If the spatial dimension of this mythical land lies somewhere across the mountains, "south, yet more to the west than the dark river" (60), its temporal dimension is directed not toward the future but toward the past, for this is the modernity that the Shuswaps are fleeing in their journey, and this is their pristine, prelapsarian past that they are pursuing in their flight.

The Shuswaps' journey to the Promised Land resembles, in its main shape, the biblical exodus of the Jews from Egypt. The people are first encouraged by the abundance of food just days away from their village. Later, the exodus becomes more challenging: the Shuswaps face tribulations, hunger, diseases; many of them die, and the rest start to doubt. Tay John, who becomes a figure of Moses, has to deal with small riots and complaints similar to those the historical Moses faced: "Have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Were there not graves enough where we were?" (61). The road to perdition is embellished, though, with improvised miracles that the nature of the land offers to the travelers. From time to time they find spots full of game and berries, and one of these stops becomes an ultimate challenge, which the people cannot take, ultimately forgetting about their spiritual goal: "They stayed there, and forgot that they had been on their way to their cousins across the mountains, for now game was around them and the bushes bent with their summer berries [...]. It had come about as Kwakala said, and Tay John was the leader who had led them [...]. Smutuksen smiled to have seen this before he died" (63). But this was a false Promised Land, and Tay John was a fake Moses. There is no way to run from modernity and colonization; the return to the modus of life of their forefathers is only temporary.

O'Hagan employs dramatic irony by recoding the scene of the Shuswaps' initiation to their Promised Land onto their accelerated passage to modernity, represented by the white westerners and their mythologies of human dominance. Displaced from their native land and deprived of their, established by custom and traditional beliefs, eco-friendly attitude of coexistence with the environment, the indigenous people fell easy prey to the market economy, which made people dependent on the precarious fortunes of trade and re-coded the

landscape from a mythologized time-space to raw materials of profit. Being a wide-ranging satire of Western ideologies at large and of their implementation at the forefront of colonization in particular, *Tay John* makes it clear that at the beginning of the twentieth century the colonizers not only overlooked the very existence of culture in indigenous peoples but were also bedazzled by their own culture's suspicious virtues – not much different from the civilizing agenda of the first explorers of the Canadian west two hundred years previous. In his account of the failure of the missionaries to “civilize” the aboriginals, Alexander Mackenzie (1801) insisted that “a savage people” should have been introduced to agriculture as one “of those useful arts which are the inlets of knowledge,” leading to objects of higher comprehension” precisely because “it gives [“the wandering tribe”] a sense of property, and of lasting possession, instead of the uncertain hopes of the chase, and the fugitive produce of uncultivated wilds” (*Voyages*, cited in Harrison 1977: 14-15). In the light of this advice, *Tay John* looks subversively ironic. Skipping the step of agriculture, the Shuswaps were immediately introduced to the “sense of property”, which spread from their leader to the rest of the tribe and which, if anything, had a demoralizing and pernicious effect on the whole people. Being a progeny of Red Rorty, who came to the Shuswaps as a missionary but ended up leaving his semen in a married native woman, Tay John also – unconsciously – becomes a victim of his descent and of historical circumstances. In the ritual of his manhood vigil, he does justice both to his native part, in its spiritual unity with the natural environment, and to the hubris of his yellow hair, which brings him and ultimately his people to the “civilizing” ways of the sense of “lasting possession”. In the ironic twist of his initiation, Kumkleseem degrades to Tay John, and the bear-spirit that he supposedly acquired turns to be the evil spirit of the tabooed valley. This spirit, or the spirit of civilization, subverts the Shuswap ecological mentality, which deteriorates from sympathetic coexistence to apathetic exploitation. Driven by their origin fantasy, the Shuswaps arrive at the wasteland instead of the promised Eden and meet their future of bondage and demise. Their ecological episteme, marked for generations by the recurrent cycles of nature and chthonic mythology, is presented in the novel in the process of the originary event of their entering into the linear time of modernity. This ironic substitution is mirrored in Tay John's initiation resulting in a series of misinterpretations in the wake of which the Shuswaps fall prey to their own fantasies: the taboo valley becomes the colonizers' entrepreneurial investment object, and the westernized appellation of their leader renders them apathetic victims of the new episteme.

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**Arianna Antonielli**

### **Paradigms of the Ecocritical Canon in T. S. Eliot's Early Poems**

**Abstract I:** A partire da una prospettiva ecocritica, questo saggio intende analizzare alcune delle oltre 40 poesie che T. S. Eliot scrisse tra il 1909 e il 1914 in un taccuino dal titolo *Inventions of the March Hare*. Pubblicati per la prima volta nel 1996 da Christopher Ricks, i primi componimenti eliotiani offrono uno sguardo critico sul degradato ambiente urbano quale strumento primario dell'esperienza stessa della modernità. Obiettivo di questo studio è quello di individuare come il fatiscente *cityscape* eliotiano sia già espressione di una consapevolezza ambientale che coincide, per certi versi, con la scoperta da parte di Eliot della poesia simbolista francese.

**Abstract II:** Taking into consideration T. S. Eliot's early poetry from an ecocritical perspective, this article investigates a few of the more than 40 poems he wrote in the years 1909-1914 in a notebook he called *Inventions of the March Hare*. Edited in 1996, the volume includes poems which highlight his concern with the (un) natural world and his implicit critique of the degrading environment caused by the spoiling consequences of modernity. Focusing on the representation of the wasted urban landscapes portrayed in these poems, emphasis will be given to Eliot's environmental awareness, which coincided to some extent with his encountering the *maudite réalité* of French symbolist poets.

The idea that we humans are completely immersed in a self-enclosed sphere of our own we can call "culture" while non-humans are part of a non-ethical sphere of "nature" is the leading assumption [...]  
(Val Plumwood 2002: 51).

[...] non c'è orizzonte oltre la città  
(Bacigalupo 1991: 500).

A "study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment", better known as ecocriticism, which opens up to the representation in texts of the environmental crisis and its deep connection with the cultural crisis is a recurrent theme in literature, assuming with Timothy Clark "[t]he inherent greenness of the literary" (Clark 2011: 19). From Emerson's *Nature* (1836) and Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), widely recognized as the archetypes of a cultural process aiming to explore "all facets of human experience from an environ-

mental viewpoint" (Adamson, Slovic 2009: 7), by way of Carson's manifesto of the environmental movement, *Silent Spring* (1962), up to William Rueckert's first recorded use of the word "ecocriticism" in his *Literature and Ecology* (1978), the model of literary and poetic texts "that speaks about nature and points to nature" (Maran 2007: 280) often fixes itself rightly in that intersection between the environmental crisis and the cultural crisis.

It was in 1992, with the founding of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment and in 1996, with the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader*, that ecocriticism gained his first definition and was finally recognized as an intellectual movement<sup>1</sup>. "[D]efined more by its issues and challenges than by any particular method" (Clark 2011: 165), ecocriticism does not try to adhere to any stringent methodology. On the contrary, as Salvadori properly highlights in his in-depth overview of ecocriticism, at issue are not ecocritical approaches but *trends* or *waves* of the ecocritical idea (2016: 677).

Focusing on the specific wave of ecocriticism which considers literature as functional to the emergencies posed and caused by the environment crisis on the one hand and an exemplification of modern man's interior void on the other, Modernist poetry presents a lively view on modern society, and is often concerned with urban landscapes as *one of the factors responsible for the generation of* human alienation. In particular, attention will be devoted to T. S. Eliot's early poems as an instance of the spiritual *malaise* he identified in modern society, foretelling many ecocritical analyses. Trying to investigate what seems most distinctive about Eliot's environmental concern with and commitment to the (un)natural world, this article pinpoints his implicit critique of the degrading environment produced by the destructive consequences of modernity in a selection of his juvenile poems entitled *Inventions of the March Hare* (henceforth *IMH*).

Edited by Christopher Ricks in 1996, the volume includes Eliot's formerly unpublished poems, which he had written since November 1909 and decided to transcribe in a brown leather notebook in 1910, during his summer vacation in East Gloucester. A task he also accomplished "during the following year in Paris, on his return to Harvard and, finally, on arrival in London in 1914" (Gordon 1998: 33)<sup>2</sup>. A few months before *The Waste Land* was published, Eliot gave the manuscript to John Quinn, his American benefactor, including Ezra Pound's conspicuous deletions and emendations. At the same time, he sold him the *IMH* notebook with about fifty poems for the sum of 140 dollars, on condition that it should remain unpublished since, in Eliot's words, it was a "private poetry-workshop" (Eliot 1957: 196) and, as such, "unpublishable" (Reid 1968: 540). In 1958, the New York Public Library

<sup>1</sup> "Ecocriticism, also known as literary ecology or environmental literary studies", in Alfred K. Siewers's words, "is a field of criticism that emerged in the late twentieth century as a slightly delayed response in the humanities to the global emergence of the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s" (2010: 205).

<sup>2</sup> "The span of time during which they were written took Eliot through graduation at Harvard, a 'romantic year' in France, Cambridge postgraduate classes in Sanskrit philology and Buddhist philosophy, study in Europe, the writing of a doctoral thesis on the idealist F. H. Bradley, a decision – to Eliot's family's intense disappointment – not to become a Harvard professor but to remain in Europe (his father died in 1919 thinking his youngest son had wasted his life), grueling early years of schoolteaching and lecturing in England, his crucial friendship in wartime London with Ezra Pound, marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood, the publication of his first book" (Jenkins 1997, April 20).



bought the notebook from Mr. Quinn's nephew, Mrs. Conroy, but it was not until October 25, 1968 (three years after Eliot's death), that the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library announced its rediscovery, together with *The Waste Land* manuscript. The announcement was amplified in December of that same year, when Donald Gallup published a detailed review of Eliot's first poems, entitled "The 'Lost' Manuscripts of T. S. Eliot", in *The Bulletin of the New York Public Library* LXXII.

Written in direct language characterized by ironic tones, the *IMH* collection is made up of complete poems, parts of poems, and early versions of a number of Eliot's main poetical works (later included in the volume *Prufrock and Other Observations*, 1917)<sup>3</sup>, taken both from the notebook and Ezra Pound's papers at Yale<sup>4</sup>. Attracted by the symbolist poets' thematic array<sup>5</sup>, which opens to humanity's neurosis, sickness and hypochondria, cityscapes and urban interiors are the real settings of these *juvenilia* – as they were to be of Eliot's later compositions, among them: *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*, *Preludes* and *The Waste Land* –, permeated by a decadent atmosphere given by yellow smoke, foggy horizons, vacant lots and blind alleys.

The *IMH* poems display a sequence of demystifying images steeped in autobiographical perspectives gained from Eliot's journeys in America and Europe: "My urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed" (Eliot 1960: 422; see also Crawford 1987: 6; Gordon 1998: 24). The short poems collected under the title *Caprices* (1909-1910) are a case in point. The first two are set in North Cambridge, whereas the third<sup>6</sup> dates to his stay in Paris, and was subject to a change of place. Eliot modified its title, and replaced the original setting (North Cambridge) with Montparnasse (Paris). Just like North Cambridge, Montparnasse is figured as another grim and decaying place in the poem, a location with no clearly discernible reference points. Eliot's cityscape appears like a suspended place, due to the absence of any connection with the external world. The only connection established is that with his inner mysterious spaces, which expresses the sense of displacement experienced by modern man:

"Fourth Caprice in Montparnasse"

We turn the corner of the street  
And again

<sup>3</sup> The notebook displays the first versions of the poems included in the collection of *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917): "Humoresque (After J. Laforgue)", "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "Portrait of a Lady", "Preludes", "Rhapsody on a Windy Night", "Morning at the Window", "Mr. Apollinax", and "Conversation Galante"; and the early versions of the poems found in the "loose leaves" and later published in *Poems* (1919), *Ara Vos Prec* (1920) and *Poems* (1920): "Gerontion", "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar", "Sweeney Erect", "A Cooking Egg", "Mélange Adultère de Tout", "Lune de Miel", "Dans le Restaurant", "Whispers of Immortality", "Mr. Eliot's Sunday Morning Service", "Sweeney Among the Nightingales" and "Ode".

<sup>4</sup> The latter were removed from the notebook probably by Eliot himself before they were bought by Quinn. See also Lyall 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Eliot was studying at the Harvard Union Library when he discovered, in 1908, Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Eliot 1928: 5).

<sup>6</sup> The "caprice" set in Montparnasse is the fourth, according to the poem title. Actually, there is no mention in the notebook of the third, which was probably lost or destroyed (cf. *IMH*: 111).

Here is a landscape grey with rain  
 On black umbrellas, waterproofs,  
 And dashing from the slated roofs  
 Into a mass of mud and sand.  
 Behind a row of blackened trees  
 The dripping plastered houses stand  
 Like mendicants without regrets  
 For unpaid debts  
 Hand in pocket, undecided,  
 Indifferent if derided.  
 Among such scattered thoughts as these  
 We turn the corner of the street;  
 But why are we so hard to please? (*IMH*: 14).

The apparent action characterizing the first line of the poem comes to a sudden interruption in the second line, where the pedestrian's vision of a grey landscape appears to disappoint his quest for a different landscape: "And again / Here is a landscape grey with rain". "Scattered thoughts", as the "minor considerations" informing the "First Caprice in North Cambridge" (*IMH*: 13), stand out against a movement merely going to be an illusion and preceding one's renewed fall into inactivity. The sound of rain falling is replacing the sinister humming of the piano played on the street by the poor musician of the "First Caprice". As a sort of subterranean hissing, rain is the only element of movement within this landscape. Falling with its monotonous continuousness on umbrellas and roofs, finally forming a mush of mud and sand on the street, rain is functional to the sense of paralysis and griminess of Eliot's picture of Montparnasse. And the *promeneur* realizes, in his unstructured attempt to search for a different vision, that the immutability of the cityscape he is observing, exemplifies the inalterability of his own existence, which finally engenders indecision and indifference. Yet, it is the very vision of the urban environment that increases the wanderer's *malaise* and paralysis, leading him to the potential discovery of his own self. Eliot's poem dramatically suggests a world in which material and inner realities are felt as one both by the anonymous "we" and by the reader, and the city reflects exactly the psychic disintegration of the modern soul.

As a man of his own century, Eliot realized fairly early that only by living within this historical reality would he be able to make his own poetry the most accomplished representation of the urbanized soul, sweeping from virtue to vice. He became an urban poet wandering alone through the dirtiest and most squalid streets of his city, observing and translating his sensations into his poetry: "I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry" (Eliot 1965: 126). Subsequently, he forged the inhabitants of his "Unreal City": a paralytic "we" existing in a lifeless state, leading an alienated existence survived to "hibernate among the bricks / [...] / Indifferent [...] / And apathetic", even "Careless, [...]" to the rebirth of nature and life ("Interlude in London")<sup>7</sup>; or the *promeneur solitaire*, Eli-

<sup>7</sup> Eliot's rejection of traditional associations of spring, as the symbol of the rebirth of nature, with regeneration and new life remains a leitmotif throughout his poetry.

ot's key symbol of the crisis of the modern I, who lives and rambles through shabby streets on urban nights (Bacigalupo 1991: 500). The *promeneur's* eyes dwell upon the most sordid aspects and elements of the modern metropolis he is crossing, inhabited by "lonely men in shirtsleeves", "women spilling out of corsets", and "children whimpering in corners", who recall in the reader's mind the prostitutes, drinkers, and smokers portrayed by Baudelaire in *Les fleurs du mal*<sup>8</sup>. It is widely attested to what extent the French poet shaped Eliot's poetic vision from the beginning up to his mature works, infested with images of urban decay and hellish landscapes. Eliot continued to pay his respects to Baudelaire more than any other symbolist poets, such as Laforgue or Corbière, whose influence he ascribed to a limited period of his youth. Eliot considered Baudelaire as the only poet to have grasped the sense of his age in the "ennui of modern life":

Baudelaire perceived that what really matters is Sin and Redemption [...] and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief in a world of electoral reform, plebiscites, sex reform and dress reform, that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation – of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at last gives some significance to living (Eliot 1999: 422).

From Baudelaire Eliot learned how to perceive the awfulness and dissolution of the modern city, exemplifying the symbol of the seductress who leads "her" victims inside the domestic walls or along alleys, squares and lots of sin and alienation. Instead of preserving a meaningful contact with nature, Eliot's protagonists are unable to understand its flow, which determines the coming of spring after winter and that of new life from death. They are incapable of taking part in nature rituals, and the cycle of birth and death is somewhat psychically interrupted<sup>9</sup>. Eliot was not oblivious to primitive rituals, like those described in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), feeling their mysterious allure and cathartic function<sup>10</sup>.

Eliot's city dweller suffers the images conveyed by the metropolis and remains astonished, unarmed in his own paralysis, as an expression of his own disillusionment and, in Butler's words, he reveals himself as a "parasitical city dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, [...], unfruitful" (1994: 136).

In "First Debate between the Body and Soul" (January 1910), shattered and scattered images suggest the disintegrated state of modern humanity and sensibility:

The August wind is shambling down the street

A blind old man who coughs and spits sputters  
Stumbling among the alleys and the gutters

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noticing that Eliot had probably acquired *Les fleurs du mal* during his stay in Paris in 1909-1910. Furthermore, Baudelaire had already theorized the influence of urban landscapes on the contemporary poetic production in his *Le peintre de la vie modern* (1863).

<sup>9</sup> For an insightful analysis of Eliot's vision of modern society, see also Serpieri 1985: 69-99.

<sup>10</sup> In 1933 he wrote that "poetry begins, I dare say, with a savage beating a drum in a jungle, and it retains that essential of percussion and rhythm" (148).

He pokes and prods  
 With senile patience  
 The withered leaves  
 Of our sensations –

And yet devoted to the pure idea  
 One sits delaying in the vacant square  
 Forced to endure the blind inconscient stare  
 Of twenty leering houses that exude  
 The odour of their turpitude  
 And a street piano through the dusty trees [...] (*IMH*: 64).

Written shortly after the three *Caprices*, the poem was originally entitled *Reflections in a Square* (*IMH*: 228). The current title clearly evokes seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry<sup>11</sup> and, in particular, Ricks sees Andrew Marvell and his “A Dialogue between the Soul and Body” as a possible source (cf. *IMH*: 228). Centred on the insolvable dialectics between matter and spirit, the text is enriched with numerous images that the poet draws from his own philosophical background. Its structure, on the contrary – the interpolation of quatrains made up of terms repeated in the whole text, recalls Jules Laforgue’s *ritournelles* or refrains. Worthy of note is again the debt to Baudelaire. The most evident example is the image of the old blind beggar – an anticipation of Gerontion – which frequently appears in the notebook poems. The landscape prevails through a series of personifications – the wind, the houses, the piano, life itself in the antepenultimate stanza that materialises and evaporates – characterized by a sinister meaning and forerunners of unhappy premonitions:

Absolute! complete idealist  
 A supersubtle peasant  
 (Conception most unpleasant)  
 A supersubtle peasant in a shabby square  
 Assist me to the pure idea –  
 Regarding nature without love or fear  
 For a little while, a little while  
 Standing our ground –  
 Till life evaporates into a smile  
 Simple and profound.

What clearly emerges here is the juxtaposition and incompatibility between the triviality of the physical element (from the “houses that exude / The odour of their turpitude”, to the refrain), and the spiritual one. The absolute, the pure Idea (“And yet devoted to the pure idea”), which the poetic voice addresses to find a place of salvation against materiality, dies

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<sup>11</sup> The metaphysical poets, especially John Donne, were a great influence on T. S. Eliot in his early life. Eliot recalled that he was introduced to Donne as a student at Harvard and reviewed Herbert Grierson’s *Metaphysical Poetry* (Eliot 1965: 21). In 1921 he wrote the essays “The Metaphysical Poets” and “Andrew Marvell”.

of tediousness (“The pure Idea dies of inanition”). Condemned by its own missed action it will indeed be a source of frustration:

Imaginations  
Masturbations  
The withered leaves  
Of our sensations –

As well as frustrating and vain will it be to scrutinize devitalized feelings in search of answers.

Uncertain city dweller of an unknown metropolis of the beginning of the century, Prufrock begins to take shape in the *IMH* poems as that passive and disoriented observer whose eyes build Eliot’s urban environments. The origins of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” may be discovered in an early untitled manuscript, included in Eliot’s notebook between “Morning at the Window” (leaf 51) and “The Little Passion From ‘An Agony in the Garret’” (leaf 52):

Of those ideas in his head  
Which found me always interested  
Though they were seldom well digested –  
I recollect one thing he said  
After those hours of streets and streets  
That spun around him like a wheel  
He finally remarked: “I feel  
As if I’d been a long time dead”.

Upon those stifling August nights  
I know he used to walk the streets  
Now diving into dark retreats –  
Or following the lines of lights  
[...]  
And knowing well to what they lead  
To some inevitable cross  
Wheron our souls are spread. And bleed.

As suggested by Oser, the poem probably “belongs to the early draft material of ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’” (35), since he notices that Eliot’s handwriting is still the same as that of his Paris period (“elongated and spiky”). It was possibly included by a curator of the Berg Collection in the notebook from the “loose leaves” and, in Oser’s hypothesis, the “Agony in the Garret” may constitute a revision of its “middle strophes” (*ibid.*). Implicated in the *promeneur’s* wanderings, the narrator suggests how their walking through “streets and streets” promotes moments during which they share ideas. Night remains the privileged moment of wandering. Differently from “Prufrock among the Women”, the first draft of the famous poem, in “Of those ideas in his head” the streets walked by the wanderer

lead not to an “overwhelming question” but “To some inevitable cross”, where souls bleed. Yet, the thought processes of the wanderer remain achievable only “through dilapidated streets” as suggested by Ackroyd (1984: 38).

Thus, in “Prufrock among the Women”, as the poem was titled in its earliest version, wandering becomes a necessity, a proposal:

Let us go then, you and I, [...]  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table.

The cityscape appears as a symphony of colours, lights and images combined in a visual, tactile, and sensual alchemy, and evoking, in the reader’s mind, the colours, smells and sounds they are related to. But it is in the “Pervigilium”, the long section excised from *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917)<sup>12</sup>, that “urban squalor and dilapidation” (Ackroyd 1984: 37) perfectly mould with the symbols of the street and the night, and with the “Prufrockian I”. Prufrock imagines himself being finally alone, a single entity, and his journey already happened. The absence of “you” (standing for the sensitive self) possibly implies his reconciliation with “I” (his public mask); but reconciliation can only happen after the journey experience:

*Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And seen the smoke which rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirtsleeves, leaning out of windows.  
And when the evening woke and stared into its blindness  
I heard the children whimpering in corners  
Where women took the air, standing in entries –  
Women, spilling out of corsets, stood in entries  
Where the draughty gas-jet flickered  
And the oil cloth curled up stairs.*

Isolation is the privileged condition: it is pursued during the afternoon but can only be achieved at sunset, when man finds shelter inside his dwelling, leaving the corrupting vapours of the world outside. At this moment, he feels free, physically imprisoned only in his body. He can finally sink into darkness, which prevents him from hearing his “madness singing” (l. 29).

Nicholas Jenkins, in his *New York Times* review of Ricks’s edition, emphasizes how in this first version of Prufrock “Eliot describes in clammy detail Prufrock’s tramping ‘through certain half-deserted streets’ [...]”, adding that “Here Prufrock relates more of his erotic forays into the ‘narrow streets’ of a social and emotional underworld”. Schuchard (1999: 11), Seymour-Jones (2001: 46) and Miller (2005: 155) have also pointed out the sexual element in the “Pervigilium”. However, what appears to be worthy of note, besides sexual attempts or

<sup>12</sup> “Prufrock’s Pervigilium” was a 38-line insertion in the middle of the “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”.

imagination, is Prufrock's apocalyptic vision in the last stanza, culminating in his madness and the dissolution of the physical world:

- I have seen the darkness creep along the wall  
I have heard my Madness chatter before day  
I have seen the world roll up into a ball  
Then suddenly dissolve and fall away (*IMH*: 43-44).

The penultimate line of the "Pervigilium" ("I have seen the world roll up into a ball") survives, with minor changes, in the last version of the poem: "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" (l. 92). Yet, if the "Pervigilium" overtly emphasises the disintegration of physical reality ("suddenly dissolve and fall away"), in the "The Love Song" the reader's attention is directed from the universe squeezed into a ball to Prufrock's fatal inadequacy to state his overwhelming question: "To roll it toward some overwhelming question" (l. 93).

"This Eliot", writes Jenkins, "the Eliot of nervous disease and sexual terror, is a hypercultivated sufferer, a poet whose writing articulates with dreamlike clarity not the perfections of European and American culture but its chronic anguish, a medium who transmits through his trembling fingertips not the music of personal evil but of fantasies and sicknesses widely shared"<sup>13</sup>. He drew upon symbolist poetry to create his own poetry. He added irony and grotesque images to portray his own century and used more philosophical insights than feeling in his early poetry, building off of what he learned from Baudelaire. Pondering on the blind alleys and vacant lots of the metropolis, investigating the mystifications of the individual consciousness, and experimenting with several poetic forms, Eliot's early poems form a kind of 'ecosystem' that invite a non-linear reading, a process taking place both within the text and in relation to other texts, contexts and places. They constitute a juvenile, but explicit critique of modern society together with a dramatization of modern sensibility, whose philosophical insights display the otherness of the natural world, even though what 'natural' may finally mean to the Prufrockian I is definitely hard to gauge in this context.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/04/20/reviews/970420.20jenkint.html> (consulted on 26/10/2017).

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Jacopo Vigna-Taglianti

**‘The Dimension of the Symbolic’: Environmental Issues in David Malouf’s “Jacko’s Reach”**

**Abstract I:** Nelle opere di David Malouf il paesaggio naturale ricopre spesso un ruolo cruciale: lungi dall’essere un semplice sfondo narrativo, esso diventa il vero e proprio protagonista della sua indagine del rapporto tra l’uomo e la natura. Nella presente analisi di “Jacko’s Reach”, il più breve dei racconti contenuti nell’antologia *Dream Stuff*, ci si concentra in particolare su due preoccupazioni ambientali che emergono da una lettura approfondita dell’opera: il rapporto tra spazio e identità (e il passaggio dalla dimensione fisica a quella simbolica) e il problema della deprivazione territoriale quale politica neocoloniale e delle sue possibili soluzioni.

**Abstract II:** In David Malouf’s works natural landscape often plays a crucial role: rather than being a simple narrative background, it becomes the main protagonist in his exploration of the relationship between man and nature. In my analysis of “Jacko’s Reach”, the shortest story in the *Dream Stuff* collection, I will focus on two different environmental concerns that emerge from a close reading of this work: the question of space and identity (and the passage from the physical landscape to the ‘dimension of the symbolic’) and the issue of territorial deprivation as a neo-colonial policy with its possible solutions.

Don’t it always seem to go that you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone?  
They paved paradise, and put up a parking lot.  
*Joni Mitchell (1970)*

David Malouf has been successfully defined as a “landscape artist” (Kellaway 2000): in his works, be they verse or prose, and in particular in the collection of short stories *Dream Stuff*, “the setting is at least as important as characters and plot” (Aykroyd), since “[h]is characters exist in a landscape that is bigger than they are, against a horizon that seems to go on forever” (Kellaway 2000). In this particular aspect, he is a faithful representative of his homeland’s literature, since natural landscape tends to play a crucial role in Australian poetry and narrative. In their search for identity and “quest to belong to [the] country” (Leane 2014: 2), settler authors such as Malouf “continually play on the motifs of boundaries, borders, frontiers, fringes, edges, unknowns and ‘unsettled places’” (*ibid.*); the main point, in their works, is “man’s place in relation to nature itself, but also other things like the phenomena of nature [...] are very basic and ancient questions”, as stated by the author himself (Autero 2004: 17). In exploring this relationship between man and nature, one peculiar en-

vironment looms against the blue Australian sky: the bush, a vast and uncharted wasteland which often assumes a symbolic dimension, since “Australians live and work in cities, but [their] ‘spiritual home’ is still the bush, or what lies beyond it in that unpopulated and once unimaginable terrain which used to be called the Never Never” (Conrad 2000: 7).

Following Sharrad’s statement that “[i]t is perhaps in [Malouf’s] shorter prose that the real experiment and the directness of ideas can be found” (2000: 759), I am here analysing the representation of landscape in Malouf’s short story “Jacko’s Reach” both as a physical space and as the “dimension of the symbolic” (Malouf 2000: 125). In this analysis, I shall focus on two environmental issues that arise from a close reading of this work: on the one hand, the question of space and identity, which takes the shape of a collective sense of belonging that derives from the common experiences and memories of the narrator’s generation and is destined to survive the physical existence of the place itself; on the other hand, the issue of territorial deprivation in the light of neo-colonialism and globalisation, alongside a possible resistance to these phenomenon as expressed by Malouf himself.

### **1. Space and identity, from landscape to mindscape**

On a physical level, Jacko’s Reach is characterised in Malouf’s description by an element that often recurs in the depiction of the bush, i.e. a sense of overwhelming vastness. Although the Reach is precisely limited in space through the specification of the area it covers, “four and a half acres” (Malouf 2000: 118, 119, 122, 126). Through the eyes of the narrator as a child it becomes a somehow immense, almost unconceivable space:

It seemed enormous. Just crossing it from the main road to the river gave you the idea, at the back of your knees, of the three hundred million square miles and of Burke and Wills (Malouf 2000: 121).

The spatial dimension of the Reach shifts here towards the symbolic, becoming “the space of the country (or colony) as a whole”, while “[t]he boy’s entry into the bush play-space becomes the foolish explorer’s entry into the wilderness” (Noske 2013: 7). The idea of exploration is further highlighted by the author in his reference to the precolonial past of the Reach and “the few local Aborigines who claim an affinity with the place that may or may not be mystical” (Malouf 2000: 118). In addition, this excerpt lays the foundation for a postcolonialist analysis of this work by creating a parallel between the colonial past and the present, in the sense that we can consider the new occupation of this specific portion of land, i.e. the construction of a shopping mall, as a form of neo-colonialism, carrying on the same “desire to create and control opportunities to generate wealth and control international markets” (McLeod 2010: 8) that brought the colonisers to settle in Australia.

Another recurring element of bush depiction is represented by its darkness: an unknown and untamed shadowy presence seems to be in ambush amidst the stark vegetation of this plot of land, “a chilling sense of primeval mystery” (Aykroyd) that inflames people’s instincts, awakens their animal impulses, and provokes emotional turmoil. To convey such a feeling, the narration of the story of the Reach is imbued with figurative isotopies of darkness, haunting and nightmares:

The wilderness that by fits and starts, in patches here and great swathes of *darkness* there, still lies like a *shadow* over even the most settled land, a pocket of the *dark unmanageable*, that *troubles the sleep* of citizens by offering a point of re-entry to memories they have no more use for – to *unruly and unsettling dreams* (Malouf 2000: 118-119; my emphasis).

Following Taylor, I am here arguing that these excerpts show us how nature becomes landscape only in relation to a human factor, since “[l]andscape [...] is what results when that lack within the apparent completeness of nature is in this way fulfilled – a fulfillment which, needless to say, is also a human one” (Taylor 2000: 716). Concepts such as vastness and darkness, though apparently intrinsic in nature itself, become meaningful only thanks to human perception, and thus the boundary between proper landscape and mindscape seems to be very difficult to be drawn. Furthermore, this dependence of landscape on human perception is what makes the ultimate occupation and dispossession of the land, in a certain way, inescapably destined to failure: when it is destroyed, Jacko’s Reach “will enter at last into what a century and more has already prepared it for, the dimension of the symbolic” (Malouf 2000: 125). In fact, through the narrator’s voice, the physical landscape transmogrifies into a totally ethereal and symbolic mindscape: it contributes to the foundation of a community, composed by people of his generation and older, and to the fixation of its collective identity. Only local people seem to fully understand the true nature of the Reach, since – in Malouf’s own words – “local experience has to be interpreted in terms of a sort of deep performance of things” (Autero 2004: 16):

It is a place you have to have seen and been into if you are to have any grasp of it. Most of all, you have to have lived with it as the one area of disorder and difference in a town that prides itself on being typical [...] Or you have to have been hearing, for as long as you can recall, the local stories about the place, not all of them fit to be told [...] Or you have to have lost something there [...] Or you have to have stumbled there on something no one had warned you of (Malouf 2000: 120).

The word choice in this passage is, in my opinion, very accurate and meaningful: the unfitness of the stories told, the loss, and the unforeseen discovery of a generic ‘something’ can indeed be related to a fully individual (and at the same time common) experience – the passage from childhood to adolescence, from innocent games to the loss of innocence, that becomes collective in that it is narrated as a kind of rite of passage, or initiation.

When I was seven or eight years old we used to play Cops and Robbers there. [...] Later it became the place for less innocent games, than later again of games that were once again innocent, though some people did not think so (Malouf 2000: 121).

On the one hand, rites of such kind usually concern “[i]nitiation into knowledge of sex and into sexual desire” (Marcus 1960: 224): with the turn of puberty, Jacko’s Reach would become “a place, enticing, unentered, for which the old name, to remain appropriate, had to be interpreted in a new way, as if it had belonged all the time to another and secret lan-

guage" (Malouf 2000: 122). Even this utterly personal experience is represented as a collective ritual shared by a whole generation, when in the heat of the summer the Reach, "dark under the moon on even the starriest night" (*ibid.*), became the place where one could cross "the boundary of something too vague for the moment to be named" (Malouf 2000: 123). As a place of sexual initiation, Jacko's Reach is characterised by a halo of secrecy and mystery, with its name becoming "a code-word for something as secret as what you had in your pants" (Malouf 2000: 121), and by a heat that, despite its totally earthly objectiveness – "the heat of Christmas and the months towards Easter" (Malouf 2000: 122) – reflects the vehemence of the most deep sexual fantasies and desires.

On the other hand, initiation presents itself as the discovery of evil, or death, with its permanent effects (Marcus 1960: 222-223); that is the case of a quarrel between two teamsters (or 'bullockies', as Malouf defines them) which happened in a not-so-remote past. As a result, the first teamster was "found, the next day, with his skull smashed", while the second one, at first at large, was found "two days later, [...] hanging by his belt from a bloodwood" (Malouf 2000: 120) by a local boy named Jimmy Dickens. The matter, in this particular episode, is not really the event itself, but the reaction to it: "it was the awe of that dumbstruck eight-year-old as he continued to look out, in a ghostly way, through the eyes of the gaunt old-timer, that was the real story" (Malouf 2000: 121). In fact the experience of the eight-year-old Jimmy represents a passage from childhood to maturity, literally through the discovery of death, which becomes in a certain sense collective: "That particular patch of Jacko's, that tree, had been changed for ever, and become, for all of us who knew the story, the site of something you could touch (Malouf 2000: 121)".

The discovery of a more generic evil, or better still of that fear which is the most spontaneous reaction to evil, is well-represented by another traumatic event occurred in the Reach, i.e. the disappearance of the thirteen-year-old Valmay Mitchell, whose story retraces a recurring *topos* in Australian literature and art, that of the child lost in the bush, "with its powerful and poignant memento mori message" (Taylor 2000: 716):

Every fellow of my generation knows Valmay's name. If she were to come back here, to take a last look at Jacko's for instance before it goes under for ever, she would be astonished at her fame (Malouf 2000: 123).

Valmay, we are informed, was an ordinary girl, perhaps too eager to please other people, "the sort of girl that acts of violence, which haunt the streets like ghosts on the lookout for a body they can fill, are deeply drawn to" (Malouf 2000: 123). When she went missing one night in the Reach, everyone began to expect the worst; in a sort of choral action, underlined by the repetition of generic subjects such as 'people' and 'we all', they participated with dedication in the fruitless search for the poor girl. Luckily enough, Valmay was actually somewhere else, safe and sound, but this event left a deep mark in all those who had lived it, as the narrator confesses:

They are middle-aged now, my generation. One is our local baker, another a real-estate agent, another a circuit judge. Our lives these days barely cross. One of them does

odd jobs out at the golf course and we exchange a few words now and then. *Not about Valmay* (Malouf 2000: 124; my emphasis).

Both these events became collective turning points in the life of local people: the initiation of Jimmy Dickens affected the approach everyone had to that particular spot, whereas Valmay Mitchell's disappearance gave rise to a new awareness and a choral sense of belonging, that is well-represented in the collective actions performed by the people in order to solve this mystery. To put it in Malouf's words, "it's an older fellowship we share than ones we belong to now, Rotary, or the Lions, or the BMA; and in a ghostly, dreamy area of ourselves, some of us are still willing to acknowledge it" (Malouf 2000: 124-125). In addition, the two episodes exemplify a recurring initiation theme of the *Dream Stuff* collection, the acknowledgment of "a world view in which violence is one of the elementary structures of experience" (Scheckter 2000: 743).

## 2. The threat of globalisation, and how to resist it

So it is settled. Jacko's Reach, our last pocket of scrub, has been won for progress. It is to be cleared and built on. Eighteen months from now, after the usual period of mud pies and mechanical shovels and cranes, we will have a new shopping mall (Malouf 2000: 118).

From this excerpt, the very beginning of the story, the transformation of the local landscape into the most trivial symbol of contemporary global society, i.e. the mall, clearly points out some issues which are nowadays pivotal in postcolonial studies: "the neo-colonial operations of globalisation, cultural transformation, and the necessity and challenge of resistance in the face of a new form of international power" (McLeod 2010: 304). The new colonisers, in the name of an alleged progress, are desperately trying to tame the untameable, to control the darkness and vastness of nature by pouring concrete all over this plot of land and reshaping it in their image. Yet, to paraphrase Milton, what though the Reach be lost?

As Sharrad noted, "Jacko's Reach" is "a meditation on the significance of what is lost and the retentive power of memory when the local council turns a wasteland into a shopping mall" (2000: 762). Such terms of loss and retention, "[t]he concept of gap – together with slight variants like discontinuity, disjunction, severance, and lack" (Buckridge 1986: 49) and the "notion of substitution" (Buckridge 1986: 51), considered as leading motifs in Buckridge's analysis of Malouf's prose, surface between the lines. The sense of loss drawn forth by territorial deprivation is intensified by the symbolic meaning of the Reach, by its dark and mysterious stories, like Jimmy Dickens's and Valmay Mitchell's, by the common experiences that everyone seems to have lived there, like the discovery of sexuality and of evil: "[i]t is this, all this, that will go under the bars of neon lights and the crowded shelves and trolleys of the supermarket, the wheels of skateboards, the bitumen walks and solid, poured-concrete ramps" (Malouf 2000: 125). Yet the policies of neo-colonialism and globalisation *can* be overwhelmed, and loss overcome, in two different ways: by transcending at last in a fully-symbolic dimension, or by appropriating of what will have been built by the new colonisers.

The first solution is possible especially for those who experienced Jacko's Reach, i.e. most notably the people belonging to narrator's generation. The Reach is indeed destined to finally go beyond its physical limits and become "a hyper-reality, no longer dependant on physicality to exist. The space is them, they are of the space, and hence it cannot be destroyed" (Noske 2013: 8).

So it will be gone and it won't be. Like everything else.

Under.

Where its darkness will never quite be dispelled, however many mushroom-lights they install in the parking lot (Malouf 2000: 126).

If there is only one wild acre somewhere we will make that the place. If they take it away we will preserve it in our head. If there is no such place we will invent it. That's the way we are (*ibid.*).

Jacko's Reach will live forever in their memories and thoughts, and its life will be perpetuated through their tales, which will create a sort of new local mythology. In his interview with Autero, Malouf stated that "[w]e are always turning [the world experience] into stories or into myths that deal with the way we read life" (2004: 15). That is what the anonymous narrator is doing with the Reach, transforming it into a national myth, imbuing the place "with legend – of how one bullocky killed another and then hanged himself; of a girl who went missing, titillating all with the thought of murder until she turned up in Sydney having a baby; of nocturnal trysts and unruly imaginings" (Pierce 2000: 753).

As regards future generations, they will instead choose the way of re-appropriation and "reinvent the urbanized emptiness of poured-concrete ramps as their own site of adventure and raffishness and conflict with civic regulation" (Sharrad 2000: 762), thus re-taking possession of the place and making it their own, making it once again a symbol of group identity rather than of global homogenisation. In this sense, Malouf seems to compare the new colonisation with the previous one, which tried in vain to "damag[e] if not dissolv[e] relations built up over thousands of years between the land and its Aboriginal inhabitants and impos[e] on it a model developed elsewhere" (Brady 2010: 16). Driving from his awareness that "the words we speak, the feelings and ideas they express, have a significant impact on the way we imagine and then actualise what we call reality" (Riem Natale 2014: 24), Malouf notes how the very name of the Reach underlines the failure of the white-man's colonisation:

Jacko's Reach: once known, and so marked on older maps, as Jago's. How, and at what point, by what slip of tongue or consonantal drift, did the name lurch backwards into an earlier, not-quite-forgotten history, so that the white man's name became a black one and the place reverted if only in speech, to its original owner's? Jacko's (Malouf 2000: 119).

Just like the black have figuratively re-gained possession of their land, at least in its name, the descendants of the narrator and his generation will re-take possession of the place, creating their own rites of initiation, making it once again – just like Jacko's Reach was – "a code-word for something so intimate it can never be revealed" (Malouf 2000: 126).

As a consequence, neo-colonisation will never be ultimately achieved, and Jacko's Reach will survive, either in its physical or symbolic dimension, reinventing itself and becoming anew a place of old and new memories and initiation. Drawing on Buckridge's aforementioned analysis, I would argue that, while territorial deprivation is clearly an example of 'gap', each possible solution represents a peculiar form of the 'substitution' motif, which (like in other works by Malouf) "is ambivalent in its effect; it is at once a deterioration, and an enabling condition of creativity" (Buckridge 1986: 51). As for the first form of substitution, which I would label as 'transcendence', it is deterioration since the land will be lost forever, but it is clearly creativity at its highest peak, since the Reach will become sheer imagination; as for the second, which can be considered a form of 'metamorphosis', although the replacement by cold and sterile concrete is an instance of deterioration and loss of the once arid yet flourishing nature, it will also be a spark for human creativity, as new generations will have to reinvent its symbolic value.

At the end of the story, we are reminded that we are nothing but transient beings, and that traces left by humanity are only ephemeral. Even though the damage caused by overbuilding is tangible, there seems to be no point in hiding the undomesticated, the wild, and the dark. Jacko's Reach "will go on pushing up under the concrete, reaching for the wilderness further out than its four and a half acres have always belonged to and which no documents of survey or deeds of ownership or council ordinances have ever had the power to cancel" (Malouf 2000: 126).

### 3. Conclusions

In "Jacko's Reach", "[u]nder the pressure of Malouf's imagination, a dismal tract of land becomes a parable of possession and dispossession, a zone of vital secrets, a microcosm of Australian history and, ultimately, of the human condition" (Hassan 2000: 39). Throughout the story, Malouf remarks "the significance of such a play-space to the development of a young person [...] in a manner which brings home heavily the nature of the place as wild, dangerous, incontrollable" (Noske 2013: 3). Far from being an ordinary plot of land, the Reach is first of all a symbolic mindscape, the importance of which lies in the peculiar meaning it has acquired for the local community even more than in its natural dimension. It is the place of rituals of initiation and common memories, and in a certain sense a place of myth, too. Now the Reach is threatened by the dangers of globalisation and doomed to become a shopping mall, a fate which is shared by many other beautiful and meaningful landscapes in the contemporary world. Yet, by reading Malouf's exquisite and highly lyrical lines, one is left with a sense of hope: the hope that, despite physical destruction, global and neo-colonial policies are never destined to win since a community will always find a way to resist and preserve its own symbolic dimension. This can be achieved by carving out a new landscape/mindscape (be it tangible or more ethereal), or by occupying what the new colonisers will build on the ruins of what they will have destroyed. As for nature itself, it really does not matter: whatever men may do, it will always struggle (and manage to) survive.



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Angelo Monaco

### The Aesthetics of the Green Postcolonial Novel in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

**Abstract I:** Sulla scia della convergenza tra ecocritica e postcolonialismo, il mio articolo analizza *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) di Kiran Desai, un romanzo che unisce il senso di perdita umana al degrado ambientale. Si sostiene che l'estetica del *green postcolonial* anima il complesso romanzo di Desai che intreccia narrativa, storia, realismo e immaginazione. Attraverso la descrizione della brutalità umana, di paesaggi dalla vegetazione lussureggiante e di una ricca gamma di flora e fauna, *The Inheritance of Loss* critica le posizioni antropocentriche, sfocando il confine tra umano e non-umano.

**Abstract II:** Drawing upon the convergence of ecocriticism and postcolonialism, my article explores Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a novel that bridges human loss and environmental degradation. It is my contention that a green postcolonial aesthetics animates Desai's complex novel that weaves fiction, history, realism and imagination. By staging human violence, gleaming landscapes and a rich ecological wealth of flora and fauna, *The Inheritance of Loss* exposes a critique of the anthropocentric positions, blurring the border between human and non-human.

"In a world obsessed with national boundaries and belonging, as a novelist working with a form also traditionally obsessed with place, it was a journey to come to this thought, that the less structured, the multiple, may be a possible location for fiction, perhaps a more valid ethical location in general" (Rochester 2007). In this interview for the Man Booker, Kiran Desai suggests that the ethical role of a novelist is to provide insights into fluid identities and multiple locations by paying attention to the inequalities that have resulted from globalization and to the effects of environmental degradation. In this regard, Desai's narrative style interrogates realism by staging an ethical component that tackles ideals of sustainability and preservation in postcolonial India. Her debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), revolves around globalization and ecological care in a world affected by the exploitation of natural resources and global warming. In *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), too, environmental concerns are juxtaposed with diasporic displacement and postcolonial conflicts. Desai's second novel, winner of the Man Booker prize, gives a fictional account of the devastating ecological impact of the colonial project in India and, as Jill Didur explains, it provides a form of "counterlandscaping" that "offers an alternative mode for imagining the Himalayan landscape that takes up essentializing colonial tropes and subverts their neutralized status" (Didur 2011: 59).

Desai's lyrical and satiric prose draws the reader's attention to the fact that human loss and environmental degradation are entwined and their convergence entails "the inseparability of current crises of ecological mismanagement from historical legacies of imperialistic exploitation and authoritarian abuse" (Huggan 2004: 702). As Graham Huggan puts it, the critical intersection between ecocriticism and postcolonialism may grapple with a set of theoretical limitations of the two fields<sup>1</sup> and serve as a transformative means "of addressing the social and environmental problems of the present, but also of imagining alternative futures (Huggan 2004: 721). Following the engagement of third wave ecocriticism with postcolonial theory<sup>2</sup>, my article explores how Desai's novel is redolent of conflicts and abuses posed by the British colonial power through a green-aesthetically attuned reading. To do so, I address the hybrid texture of the novel that crosses the borders of fiction, history, realism and imagination. By blending human violence and ecological decay, I claim that the novel challenges human-centred positions and questions the legacies of colonization through an aesthetics of fluid borders between human and non-human, local and outsiders, human and animal, nature and culture. My use of the green postcolonial key discloses Desai's ethical concern with the consequences of economic colonization and environmental venture in a landscape where borders are transgressed, reassessing the importance of sustainability and coexistence beyond anthropocentric positions. The purpose of my analysis is to unveil the complex amalgam of historical fiction, realism, ecological stance and postcolonialism under which Desai's novel is evocative of a mutually constructive dialogue between mankind and environment.

### **"Shadow places", postcolonial pastoral and historical flows**

*The Inheritance of Loss* is a tale of loss of cultures, identities, relations, values and faith, especially attentive to the themes of violence, decay and fragility of both human nature and environment. While the Indian side of the novel is set in the Himalayan region against the backdrop of the 1980s political insurgencies for an independent Gorkhaland, the American storyline centres around the invisible urban world of Manhattan's basement kitchens, where migrants experience "traumas of negated citizenship, humiliation and compete absence of rights" (Concilio 2010: 108). Despite the juxtaposition of the two stories, all the main characters share an inheritance of loss in that they bear the traces of a complex postcolonial legacy. The Indian strand of the narrative features Jemubhai Patel, an old former judge, who lives in

<sup>1</sup> In his seminal article on postcolonial ecocriticism, Huggan discusses some intellectual hurdles between the two critical areas. While he acknowledges that ecocritical analysis may reveal the "historical insufficiencies" (Huggan 2004: 720) of postcolonial discourse, he also comments that the postcolonial commitment to environmental issues opens to the global and the transnational since it offers "a valuable corrective to a variety of universalist ecological claims" (Huggan 2004: 720).

<sup>2</sup> The first wave of ecocriticism is concerned with the nostalgic evocation of nature in literary texts that "speak for" (Buell 1995: 10) nature. By studying mainly Wordsworth and Thoreau's poetry, early ecocritics see nature and human beings as distinct and opposed to one another. The second wave, which started in the 1990s, promoted a dialogue between human and non-human, challenging the deep ecological stance of the first wave. Buell adopts the metaphor of the wave (Buell 1995: 17) to illustrate the ever-changing movement of the critical field. Accordingly, Scott Slovic proposes a "third wave" of ecocriticism. Not only does he take into account the commitment of the green agenda to postcolonialism, globalization and feminism, he also remarks a "critique from within" (Slovic 2010: 7) that was lacking in the two previous ecocritical waves.

a house in Kalimpong, North India, with a view over the Himalaya. The Anglophile judge, who was educated in Cambridge, shares the house, Cho Oyu, with a cook and with Sai, his westernized Indian granddaughter who is addicted to English novels and has a crush on Gyan, her Muslim-Nepalese mathematics tutor. The American plot, instead, follows the illegal immigration of the cook's son, Biju, from West Bengal to New York, and it zooms in on his miserable living conditions as a cook in the American metropolis. Not only does Desai's novel shuttle between the urban area of New York and the foothills of north-eastern Himalaya, it also oscillates between present and past. A postmodern novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* resorts to most of the ingredients of the genre and, more particularly, it mixes historical realism and chronological disarray.

The interaction of distant landscapes and non-linear chronology with a third-person narrative perspective alters the register of the novel. What appears to be a sad story of loss can be read as a tale of dispossession of a different kind where the Indian environment plays a central role. Despite Desai's realistic portrayal of places and historical events, the novel engages the question of the "aesthetic transformation of the real" that, as Ursula Heise argues, "has a particular potential for reshaping the individual and collective ecosocial imaginary" (Heise 2010: 258). While ecocritics have tended to investigate wild and rural places aiming at valuing "ideas of purity with regard to ecosystems and places" (Heise 2010: 253), postcolonial theory is concerned with an "emphasis on historically varying definitions of the human" (Heise 2010: 253). With such issues in mind, the theoretical interplay between ecocriticism and postcolonialism in *The Inheritance of Loss* offers a counter-narrative to the historical tensions in the area. The ecocritical themes, like the pastoral, embody a material environment that fuses with human displacement in a complex flow between fact and fiction, human and non-human. From the point of view of the fluid rural landscapes, violence has been committed against the local flora and fauna and Desai depicts natural sites as "shadow places" (Plumwood 2008) exploited first for the colonial project, and later for trade and tourism.

Historically, the area around Darjeeling, the Himalayan region where Desai locates the Indian story of the novel, had been run by the Gorkhas<sup>3</sup>, an ethnic and linguistic enclave between the territories of Nepal and West Bengal. With the treaty of Sugauli, which signed the end of the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816), these lands were passed to the East Indian Company and Darjeeling was annexed to the British Empire. During the British colonization, Darjeeling, a restorative hill station where British elites could enjoy the vista over the Himalaya, was turned into a symbol of "shadow places", areas that are materially altered in order to provide food and resources for non-native people since they are "marred by intensive economic extraction, degradation, and displacement" (Besky 2017: 19)<sup>4</sup>. The legacy of the colonial experience continued with the drawing and redrawing of borders between India

<sup>3</sup> The name *Gorkha*, or *Gurkhas*, derives from the toponym of a hill district located in the Kingdom of Nepal which was later annexed to British India in the wake of the Anglo-Nepalese wars.

<sup>4</sup> Besky draws upon Val Plumwood who used the phrase "shadow places" to describe sites that in our globalized world serve as "places that produce or are affected by the commodities you consume, places consumers don't know about, don't want to know about, and in a commodity regime don't ever need to know about or take responsibility for" (Plumwood 2008: 146).

and Nepal in the aftermath of the Indian independence in 1947, with thousands of Nepalis expelled from the region despite their ancestral claims to the land. In the wake of Partition, regional separatist parties in Darjeeling district fought for the independence of Gorkhaland, which would comprise the local majority of Indian Nepalis. The agitation culminated in the creation of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in the 1980s, a political militarized group whose main aim was not only the protection of the ethnic and linguistic boundaries of the enclave, but also the preservation of the natural resources of the area.

On these foothills bordered by Nepal to the east, Bhutan to the west, Bengal and Bangladesh to the south, and the Indian state of Sikkim to the north, the British modified the mountainous region into an “extractive landscape” (Besky 2017: 22): tea, timber and cinchona plantations were intensified, while forests were replaced by roads and buildings, such as schools and sport clubs. With the creation of botanical gardens, the colonizers introduced new taxonomies of plants: not only did they set up a business with tea plantations, they also remade the Himalayan physical landscape in accordance with their own vision of nature. While tea cultivations, roads and houses stood as a reminder of the colonial presence, the purity of the air contributed to turn Darjeeling into a “space of leisure, good feeling, and relaxation” (Besky 2017: 30) for British administrators and anglicized Indian elites, in line with such basic ecocritical concepts as the pastoral. Darjeeling came to epitomize the quintessential colonial hill station where picturesque mists and lush vegetation coexisted, as we can see in a painting by the famous Victorian illustrator and poet Edward Lear (Fig. 1).

But while the painting portrays Darjeeling as a place of sublime beauty, shadow places, as Besky reminds us, are sites of “danger and anxiety” (Besky 2017: 25) and Desai’s integration of postcolonialism and ecology exposes the condition of ecological fragility of the area.

*The Inheritance of Loss* is steeped in the representation of fluid spaces with an insistence on shifting borders, hazy landscapes and ecological exploitation. The narrative opens and ends with the description of the Himalaya, specifically of the Kanchenjunga’s peak that, with “its wizard phosphorescence” (Desai 2006: 1), epitomizes the gloomy past buried in the characters’ lives:

All day, the colors had been those of the dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit (1).

In the *incipit*, Desai captures the changing moods of nature. The murky landscape of dense forests, lush vegetation and snow-covered mountains present both the celebratory and minatory manifestations of nature. Away from the chaos of the world, the place serves as a sublime backdrop against which the main characters and the historical tensions are introduced. The mountain, covered with snow, vapour and fog, creates a blurred atmosphere that seems to encompass the whole area, while the mist, “twisting and turning, twisting and turning” (4), gives a “human” (2) halo to the landscape around Cho Oyu. Such a vision of hazy confusion is particularly evident in the highly evocative natural *tableaux* that can truly “raise the human heart to spiritual heights” (12). The physicality of the space is meant to ex-



Fig. 1. *Kanchenjunga from Darjeeling* by Edward Lear (1879)

pose the inner landscapes of the characters, who perceive the place as a site of identification, while the “immensity of the landscape” (36) accentuates the silent and alienated existences of Sai, Patel and the cook.

The novel opens with Sai’s perspective and the young girl develops a positive connection to the place. A flashback suddenly goes back to Sai’s arrival at Cho Oyu on a dark gloomy day marked by a natural setting where “Kanchenjunga glowed macabre, trees stretched away on either side, trunks pale, leaves black” (19). Even though the narrative conjures up the uncanny beauty of the Himalayan landscape, it is also concerned with stressing the vital force of nature. This feeling is further exemplified by Sai’s evocation of her parents’ love affair that is embedded “in this grassy acre” (26) where cows used to graze near a Mughal tomb. Likewise, the romance between Sai and Gyan takes place in a peaceful pastoral scenario. For Sai, the landscape is a luxuriant space where “dozens of snakes lay roasting on the stones, and flowers bloomed as plushy and perfectly as on a summer outfit” (65). While sitting on the veranda, she enjoys the vista over the Himalaya and the celebratory mood of the landscape. The remote place seems to be indicative of a harmony between man and nature that postcolonial conflicts come to threaten. Depiction of birds, animals, insects, pastoral and georgic life alternate with violence and decay, presenting the minatory manifestations of the natural world. By offering a view of the Himalaya in stark contrast to the colonial

trope of pastoral retreat, the narrator seems to warn his readers against the threatening force of nature which is the consequence of anthropocentric violent activities. While Didur argues that the novel's counterlandscape "displaces normalized notions of the land, garden, and nature" (Didur 2011: 43), I claim that it also moves beyond nostalgia, highlighting a green postcolonial aesthetics where the idea of the pastoral is undermined and endangered by anthropocentric ownership and economic exploitation.

The initial harmony is disrupted by the appearance of the GNLF rebels at Cho Oyu who stop the circulation of cars and upset the natural balance. Though at first sight the Himalayan region seems to reveal an ahistorical and mythical perspective, such a nostalgic view turns away from the pastoral tradition towards a more transformative vision of the place that encompasses a plurality of narratives, traditions, postcolonial legacies and environmental ventures. While Nepalis ask for independence, contesting the borders drawn in India in the aftermath of Partition, the landscape of the region conveys the porous spatial boundaries and the densely multilayered history of the area. Cho Oyu, for instance, located in an area where "lush ferns butted into the windows [...] colored birds swooped and whistled, and the Himalayas rose layer upon layer until those gleaming peaks proved a man to be so small that it made no sense" (Desai 2006: 29), had been built by a Scotsman. The fact that Patel buys the house from a Scotsman explains the vortex of history, imagination and ecology around which the protagonists of the novel gravitate. Desai infuses the pastoral depiction of the land with a note of irony: the Scotsman, who is presented as a passionate reader of the local accounts, epitomises the quintessential image of the coloniser, "wild and brave" (2), who exploits the area for its natural resources such as quinine, sericulture, cardamom and orchids. The judge, by contrast, who has just returned from Cambridge, "was not interested in agricultural possibilities of the land" (28). When Patel buys the house in 1957, he views the place in pastoral terms, feeling he "was entering a sensibility rather than a house" (28). The return of the native, the judge, to his motherland inscribes a new perspective upon the Himalayan landscape. While the Scotsman embodies the colonial project of taming the land, Patel's imaginative vision foregrounds an act of resistance that shifts the focus from colonial abuse to a sense of dwelling that implies "the solace of being a foreigner in his own country" (29), a stance through which Desai hybridises the colonial motif with a native pastoral perspective.

*The Inheritance of Loss* revolves around the dynamism of colonial entrepreneurship and the feeling of diasporic vulnerability. The Himalayan region discloses its fragility inasmuch as nature pays its debt for the brutality of human actions. The continuous landslides, for example, reflect the greed of human action: while a new law allows for the edification of an extra story for the houses in Darjeeling, "the weight of more concrete pressing downward had spurred the town's lopsided descent and caused more landslides than ever" (197). The collapse of the land stands for the minatory force of nature that tries to resist the effects of commodity-driven, anthropocentric culture. The initial pastoral fantasy, hence, is contradicted by the postcolonial tensions that spoil the sacredness of nature. With their violent assaults, the GNLF rioters turn the sublime natural scenario into a landscape "gouged by termites from within" (233). Kanchenjunga is presented as a metonymic signifier of the wounds inflicted by human beings on nature. When "a report of new dissatisfaction in the Hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns" (9) spreads across the region, the Himalaya re-

veals its vulnerable side and natural harmony is violently undermined by the insurgencies. The narrative resorts to images of decay and destruction that draw the reader's attention to the fragility of the environment: the "garnet lines of fire pouring down the mountain" (45) and the bloodshed imaginary disrupt the tradition of the pastoral setting contributing to the apocalyptic vision of a desecrated land.

### **Human versus non-human: the pathetic fallacy and natural resilience**

In postcolonial India, a variety of overlapping histories are embedded in the construction of places, but their presence is constantly remoulded by the unpredictability of the natural force. *The Inheritance of Loss* amplifies the atrocities inflicted upon the environment by highlighting the binary relationship between nature and culture. Such attentiveness to the active role of the environment chimes with the agenda of postcolonial ecocriticism that should reflect "a complex epistemology that recuperates the alterity of both history and nature, without reducing either to the other" (DeLoughrey & Handley 2011: 4). On the one hand, Desai's Himalayan landscape registers the consequences of the British imperialism; on the other, the environment also positions itself as an entity which undergoes change and acts beyond it. The narrator reveals the overpowering physicality of a place that seems to dominate humankind: across the vapours of the mist and the flames of the insurgencies, "[a]bove was Kanchenjunga, solid, extraordinary, a sight that for centuries had delivered men their freedom and thinned clogged human hearts to joy" (Desai 2006: 277). The prodigious power of the mountain regulates the lives of human beings and seems to eclipse the efforts of mankind, weaving a tale of violence to land and human fragility.

Desai's descriptive prose employs the elements of personification. At times, the mood of the characters is articulated by the natural background which is personified as a character and can be seen interacting with the subjects that populate the story. Desai hybridizes the rural scenario of Kanchenjunga with anthropomorphic creatures that destabilize the peacefulness of the landscape: "the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (Desai 2006: 9). The portrayal of the environment is infused with an ecocritical stance as it represents an untamed landscape where vapours and mists seem to be able to control time and elude colonial domestication. In the novel, the interface between nature and culture, an "urgent and never more pertinent" (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 6) question in postcolonial ecocriticism, serves as a metaphor for the complex amalgam of human and non-human in the ecosystem. The mist moves like a water body across the flanks of the mountains, while the thick bamboo trees in the forest are personified as "moss-slung giants, bunioned and misshaped, the roots of orchids are compared to tentacles and the "caress of the mist seemed human" (Desai 2006: 2). In the same vein, the Teesta river<sup>5</sup> "came leaping" (31) like a living body through the invisible lines of the remote valley in North India, throwing back the echoes of its "ssss tseu ts ts seuuu" sounds.

According to Garrard (2012: 36), pathetic fallacy is an old pastoral trope that "wrongly locates feeling (*pathos*) in, say, mountains or trees". The attribution of human features to the

<sup>5</sup> The Teesta river (192 miles) flows through the border between Sikkim and West Bengal, carving out the Himalayas.



environment, a strategy that John Ruskin first introduced in his *Modern Painters* (1856)<sup>6</sup>, refracts the transgression of the border between human and non-human, thus bridging man with nature. Yet, Desai's personification of the landscape conjures up anthropomorphic entities that try to resist human exploitation, in an echo of Buell's comments on natural personification as an ecocritical strategy where "what counts is the underlying ethical orientation implied in the troping" (Buell 1995: 217). Buell finds that personification and pathetic fallacy are relevant in eco-sustainable writings which speak for an entity that cannot communicate verbally. Desai's novel shows a striking tendency to give voice to the non-human world: the ways in which the banana trees "began to flap their great ears" (Desai 2006: 105), the bamboo trees display a "hollow-knuckled knocking" (34) and the "swollen presence of the forest" (34) dominate the story unveil the author's interest in building a language for nature that borrows the material from the human world.

The Bengali-American author does not merely attribute human traits to the land, she also endows the Himalayan landscape with its own language through which nature can be said to naturalize and mock human beings. Just as the landscape is rendered as a tactile presence, human beings are transfigured as animals or landscape, a solution that subverts the idea that the human is the standard. The old judge, for example, is described as "more lizard than human" (32) and his dog, Mutt, as "more human than dog" (32), a transfer of qualities between human and non-human that may be interpreted as an attempt to set an ecological equilibrium. Mutt is portrayed as a human presence and she is eventually kidnapped by the GNLf insurgents. The silence about the destiny of Patel's pet generates a sense of anxiety in the judge who eventually comes to the awareness that

Human life was stinking, corrupt, and meanwhile there were beautiful creatures who lived with delicacy on the earth without doing anyone any harm. "We should be dying," the judge almost wept. [...] The world had failed Mutt. It had failed beauty; it had failed grace (292).

Patel grieves the loss of his beloved dog, one of the many victims outraged by the conflicts in the area. The novel, hence, defies the negative charges of Ruskin's concept, readdressing the relevance of the pathetic fallacy as a form of connection between the self and the place. Not only does the formal combination of personification and zoification refuse the perspective that humans are a blueprint for non-humans, it also notably envisions a creative dialogue between mankind and environment.

The emphasis on physicality encourages esteem for all forms of life, both human and non-human. The novel is replete with images reinforcing the interchange between different ethnic cultures and the vibrant wealth of the flora and fauna, like the flowers that are an emblem of the region "for everyone in Kalimpong loved flowers" (254). In an area where people used to live on the natural resources and where food is genuinely made from "fresh

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<sup>6</sup> Ruskin's discussion of the pathetic fallacy explains the distortions between art and emotions. Accordingly, the animation of inanimate objects is "a sign of the incapacity of his human sight or thought to bear what has been revealed to it" (Ruskin 2000: 28).

butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo" (103), Desai highlights the convergence of natural beauty and human agency. While natural disasters, storms, thick fog, extreme cold and wet climate contribute to make human life harder, the author also portrays the rich fauna of the place with birds, like bats, eagles, butterflies, and pet animals, such as buffaloes, horses, elephants, donkeys, snakes, and caterpillars, enriching the ecological beauty of a place that "had seemed unreal – so full of fairy tales, of travelers seeking Shangri-la" and that "it had proved all the easier to destroy, therefore" (128). Wounds seem to be embedded in nature whose beauty is clearly scarred by tensions and conflicts:

India had swallowed the jewel-colored kingdom, whose blue hills they could see in the distance, where the wonderful oranges came from and the Black Cat rum that was smuggled to them by Major Aloo. Where monasteries dangled like spiders before Kanchenjunga, so close you'd think the monks could reach out and touch the snow (128).

Despite such pains, the Himalayan region rejects the anthropocentric and colonial attempts of domestication insomuch as the place is portrayed as changing and metamorphic. Desai's invocation of a liquid natural world is also conveyed through what Sai reads in the *National Geographic*. In an old issue of the journal, she learns that giant squids are able to scope the dark of the ocean thanks to their big eyes, but "theirs was a solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe" (2). Sai is an admirer of the immense and sublime manifestations of natural beauty and, after reading about the squid and wondering at the silver phosphorescence of the Himalaya, asks herself "[c]ould fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss"? (2). This central question interweaves the various losses Desai's tale stages: economic, political, social, cultural and ecological. Though the novel is also about globalization, terroristic violence and social injustice, ecological concerns connect the various fragilities of the story. Caught within the contradictions of postcolonial histories and ontological fragility, the protagonists of Desai's novel seem to have lost the ability to find pleasure in their lives and they are doomed to a sense of incompleteness and anxiety. In this respect, Kanchenjunga's gleaming peak embodies a timeless beauty that contrasts with the condition of ontological marginality of Sai and the other characters who lose what they used to possess, in a place where the destruction of nature eventually leads to the destruction of man. By echoing Jorge Luis Borges' poem "Boast of Quietness", quoted in an epigraph to the novel, the narrative conveys the universal theme of alienation and displacement. Whilst Borges sees boasting and quietness as antonyms and his poem deals with the universal motif of human homelessness, Desai's tale expands the sense of human loss to the wounded Himalayan nature.

In the conclusion of the novel, however, Desai places the emphasis on the resilience of the natural force. Despite the blood which ignites ethnic tensions on the Bengali-Nepalese border and the identity quest that affects all the main characters, the beauty of the Himalayan region well illustrates how this place may be interpreted as "a contested space where different spatial fantasies and histories are accumulated, and the land is revealed both as a speaking subject and as disputed object of discursive management and material control" (Huggan & Tiffin 2015: 20). Biju returns home, feeling "exhilarated by the immensity of

wilderness" (Desai 2006: 315): the frogs are cracking in the *jhora*, and he realizes that the political upheavals have wreaked havoc with their violence. Yet, the final embrace between Biju and his father occurs under the Kanchenjunga's peak turning golden, "with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent" (324). Symbolically, the gleam of light from the Himalaya seems to illuminate the social and economic divisions between cultures, while the mountainous region, with its golden peaks, sheds light and offers hope in the face of losses. Desai's narrative finally reconciles past and present, men and place, alerting the reader to the deep significance of the connection between the native environment and identity. By readdressing the opposition between men and nature, *The Inheritance of Loss* seems to suggest that one way to survive in a wounded and fragile world is to become aware of the connections between human and non-human. The novel ends on an ambivalent note, echoed by the idea that "truth was apparent" (324). Though nature still provides nourishment with mushrooms, bamboo shoots and pumpkin vines still growing copiously in a place where humans kill each other, the condition of human recuperation seems to be unattainable before the luminous presence of the Kanchenjunga. In the light of this sense of elusiveness, the diaphanous presence of the mountain reflects the way in which the domains of human and non-human intersect.

To conclude, *The Inheritance of Loss* appears to edge towards the aesthetics of the green postcolonial novel in that it echoes Huggan and Tiffin's prescription that there is "no social justice without environmental justice" (2007: 10). As the two scholars point out, the green postcolonial fiction calls for a function of "social and environmental advocacy" (2015:12) that does not exclude the aesthetic qualities of a literary text. In Desai's novel, pastoral and romantic visions of the land are interwoven with the portrayal of historical frictions and diasporic anxieties which contribute to a dynamic interaction between place and displacement. Through the use of pastoral motifs, historical realism, chronological disarray, personification and zooification, Desai depicts a world where social inequities and environmental degradation go hand in hand. Her engagement with the ways in which aesthetic forms may establish an ethical care attuned to global and local questions of justice demonstrates that the novel is a fertile genre for a fruitful allegiance between the two theoretical frameworks. If postcolonial novels can "provide vital perspectives on how we narrate, understand, and respond to environmental conflicts" (Carrigan 2010: 96), *The Inheritance of Loss* exhibits an eco-sustainable mode of writing that enhances restorative potentialities in the shared awareness of living in a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the ecosystem of the planet. Ecological vulnerability and postcolonial loss include and exceed humanity and, as I have argued, this reminds us of the limitations of the anthropocentric view in the face of the non-human world. Confronting a fragile environment, the reader is invited to envisage the creative power of literature that might arise ecological awareness and promote new understandings beyond human-centred positions.

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Caterina Guardini

**'Hail, reverend Structure!' Questioning Patriarchal Parenthood in the Aquatic Imagery of Grottoes in Court Masques**

**Abstract I:** I masque *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (Jonson, 1624), *Tethy's Festival* (Daniel, 1610), e *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (Jonson, 1631) mettono in scena, in modi diversi, la rappresentazione del potere patriarcale nelle corti Stuart di Giacomo I e Carlo I, sia sul piano privato che su quello politico. A partire dall'analisi della rappresentazione di genere e genitorialità, questo saggio si propone di confrontare le immagini acquatiche di grotte manieriste che compaiono in questi tre spettacoli al fine di ricostruire la complessa ricezione, alla luce dei ruoli materni e paterni di Anna di Danimara e Giacomo I, da parte di Carlo I, e di come essa ne abbia influenzato l'iconografia nei successivi spettacoli di corte.

**Abstract II:** Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624), Daniel's *Tethy's Festival* (1610), and Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (1631) explore the representation of royal private and political patriarchy within the Stuart courts of James I and Charles I. By questioning the representation of gender and parenthood, this paper aims at conjecturing the conflictual variety of audience-responses to the aquatic imagery of Mannerist garden grottoes at work in these shows in order to investigate whether the motherly agency of Queen Anna is really erased by James I's imagery of aquatic patriarchy or if it survives in Charles's mnemonic reception during his later performances on the masquing stage.

In 1603, James I Stuart was saluted by the English people not only as king, but also as the father of a royal dynasty. The new monarch applied a patriarchal model to both his reign and his family: by opposing his iconography to that of the previous 'virgin queen', in several speeches to Parliament James presented himself as the husband to "the whole Isle" and compared the king of a nation to a *parens patriae*, "the politique father of his people" (McIlwain 1918: 271; 307). However, James I confronted conflicting interests in matter of both parenthood with his wife, Anna of Denmark<sup>1</sup>, and of foreign politics with his two sons: Henry, who prematurely died in 1613, and Charles, who would succeed his father in 1626<sup>2</sup>.

Among Renaissance festivals, Stuart masques were a private form of court theatre

<sup>1</sup> Following C. McManus (2002: 1) and other scholars, the queen will be referred to as Anna, as she used to do herself, rather than by the English version of her name, Anne.

<sup>2</sup> For a biographical insight on the personal relationships at work within the royal family of James I, see Bergeron (1991).

organized for the king and a select audience and were characterised by rich stage settings, light, music, and dances. The Banqueting House in Whitehall was explicitly designed by architect Inigo Jones in order to introduce the perspective stage, an architectonic device that conveyed both symbolic and narrative functions because the king, sitting at the centre of the scene, was both the main spectator and the main spectacle of the show. The masque was usually structured into three main sections: an anti-masque, acted by professional actors; the proper masque, set in a more allegorical dimension and impersonated by masquers, that is to say, non professional dancers (usually members of the court or of the royal family itself); and the final revels. As a dramatic form, thus, the masque exploited the conflict between nature and art, a contrast that was resolved by the direct or fictionally evoked intervention of the king and was dissolved in the achievement of harmony in the final revels, during which audience and masquers mingled, coalescing reality and fiction. As a matter of fact, by actively taking part to the performance of masques, the monarch and the court engaged themselves in complex dynamics of negotiation and dialogue, that would have been otherwise unacceptable off the stage (Butler 2008: 4-5)<sup>3</sup>.

Water is a constant element in the representation of British national identity in Renaissance literature and, not surprisingly, English monarchs were often associated to or represented by means of aquatic allegories and mythologies<sup>4</sup>. Water symbolism and settings abound in court masques and, in particular, aquatic grottoes – important architectonic features of Renaissance gardens linked with the symbolism of water – appear in three shows hinged upon the representation of parenthood and power: Tethys's underwater cave in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys's Festival* (1610), the Palace of Oceanus in Ben Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624), and the fountain of Neptune and the Muses in Ben Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis* (1631)<sup>5</sup>. By questioning the representation of gender and parenthood, this essay aims at conjecturing the conflictual variety of audience-responses to the aquatic iconography of Mannerist garden grottoes at work in these shows in order to investigate whether the motherly agency of Queen Anna, as outlined in *Tethys Festival* and curiously resumed and reversed in *Neptune's Triumph for the return of Albion*, is really erased by James I's imagery of aquatic patriarchy or if it survives in Charles's mnemonic reception during his later performance of *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*.

In 1624, Ben Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* was commissioned by James I in order to celebrate the intended betrothal of Prince Charles to the Spanish Infanta Maria Anna, the daughter of Philip III of Spain. This political match was pursued by James

<sup>3</sup> On Stuart court masques, see, among others, Gordon (1975); Orgel (1975); Strong (1984); Lindley (1984); Ravelhofer (2006); Butler (2008); Knowles (2015).

<sup>4</sup> On general concepts of national identity in early modern Britain, see, among others: Helgeson (2002); Mceachern (1996); Willi (1997); Gordon & Klein (2001); Backer & Maley (2002); Brocklehurst & Philips (2004); Baratta & Equestri (2016). Kevin Curran offers a useful overview on further bibliography on James I's policy of union of England and Scotland (2009: 7); for a more detailed investigation on aquatic themes linked with national identity in early modern English literature, see, among others: Herendeen (1990); Schama (1995); Klein (2002); Ackroyd (2007).

<sup>5</sup> Jonson (1969); Daniel (1995). Henceforth, quotes from the masques will be referred to by a short title of the show and number of the page of the edition included in the final bibliography.

I by means of long and prudent negotiations that Charles tried to cut short by embarking on a seven-months mission to Spain, in order to accelerate the negotiation. Despite the failure of the expedition, the masque was supposed to be danced by the prince himself and was adjusted to the circumstances and rehearsed until the very last moment. However, it was eventually cancelled, officially due to diplomatic issues: in this way, the tensions between father and son were resolved by withholding the ambiguous plurality of voices that would have potentially emerged from the show (Lindely 1995: 255-256; Butler 2008: 266). The masque survived, circulated as a pamphlet, and in 1625 was re-elaborated into *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*: although resuming the stage settings and the same verses of its earlier version, the whole fable of the masque was updated to the evolved political situation. The aquatic iconology of both versions illustrates Neptune's pride on and responsibility over Albion's safe homecoming and promulgates a hierarchical and patriarchal representation of the court of James I.

The opening proscenium arch, described in the written record of the masque, celebrates Neptune as homeward guide (*Neptuno reduci*) and as a second Jupiter (*secundo Iove*): "All that is discovered of a scene are two erected pillars dedicated to Neptune, with this inscription upon the one, NEP. RED.; on the other, SEC. IOV" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 409). The association between the king and Neptune, defined as "mighty" over a "large command of waters and of isles" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412), recalls an Elizabethan iconography of maritime power (Orgel 1971: 75)<sup>6</sup>. However, in Jonson's attempt to negotiate with the representation of James's pacifism, Neptune is depicted "Not as the lord and sovereign of the seas / But chief in the art of riding" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412-413). For this masque, Jonson chooses a Platonic myth, according to which Neptune is the inventor and tamer of the horse, a variant certainly closer to James's scholarly and Solomonic persona rather than to Elizabeth I's imagery of nautical power (Orgel 1971: 67-77). Jonson's retroactive presentation of history pictures Neptune and Albion as cooperative sharers of the intentions and aims behind the enterprise: "The mighty Neptune [...] / late did please / To send his Albion forth, [...] / Upon discovery" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 412-413). However, their purposes are acutely skirted by being defined as "best known to themselves" (Butler 2008: 267) and the official theme of the masque shifts from the actual perils of Albion's homeward journey to his rescue, "His great commands being done / And he desirous to review his son / He doth dispatch a floating isle from hence", and to the celebration of his safe return by focusing on "What the triumphs are, the feast, the sport / And proud solemnities of Neptune's courts" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 413) – a meta-literary description of the Banqueting House itself, later allegorised as the 'Palace of Oceanus'. After the revels, the masque ends with a representation of the fleet, celebrated as Neptune's compact instrument of peace and richness: "ready to go or come

<sup>6</sup> In his personal marginal notes, Jonson points at money dating from the empires of Vespasian and Hadrian, along with Statius, as his sources for these attributes of Neptune: "In the money of Vespasian and Hadrian we find this put for *Neptuno Reduci* [to Neptune the guide home], under *Games in Honor of Neptune, Six Holidays Consacrated to Neptune*. SEC. IOV. That is, *Secundo Iovi* for so Neptune is called by Statius in *Achilleis* I. [48-9], 'the second Jupiter': 'and as for the rest, clinging to the right hand of the second Jupiter [...], as Pluto is called the third Jupiter" Orgel (1969: 554).

/ Or fetch the riches of the ocean home / So to secure him both in peace and wars" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 423). By asserting that Albion "knows the compass and the card" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 423), the text hints at Charles's ability and pleasure in navigation, but it simultaneously tames his policy of naval intervention against Spain, since the fiction of the masque compares his rescue to mythical and quasi-divine antecedents (Leucothea, Arion, Castor and Pollux), more linked with Neptune's will and command over the oceans rather than with Albion's actual maritime abilities (Lindley 1995: 258).

*Neptune's Triumphs for the Return of Albion* is generally praised for Jonson's ability to overlook the negative contingency of the mission's failure by finding a way to develop a commendation of the court and of James's will (Orgel 1975: 71; 77; Butler, 2008: 265). In the present analysis, however, I would like to focus on the ideal underwater environment of the 'Palace of Oceanus' and on its architecture, an elaborate "unitary perspective set" designed by Inigo Jones (Peacock 2006: 86), described as a "reverend structure", whose splendour, mirror of Neptune's magnificence, is boasted to the eyes of the audience and praised for "being able all the gods to feast" (*Neptune's Triumph*: 422)<sup>7</sup>. In 1623, James had ordered architect Isaac de Caus to redecorate his Privy Cellar, which lay below the Banqueting House, with maritime features according to the fashion of Mannerist grottoes: according to Roy Strong, the new appearance of the king's rooms would have provided the source for Jones' stage design. A surviving example of what the grotto in the Privy Cellar must have looked like can be observed today in the basement cellar built by Isaac de Caus at Woburn for Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford, sometimes before 1627 (Strong 1979: 139-140)<sup>8</sup>. Usually placed at the centre of Renaissance gardens, grottoes could take the shape of both fountains and proper rooms, and were aquatic symbols of fertility which reunited opposites, since, by imitating nature, they were decorated with real and fabricated minerals and shellfish in order to reproduce an aquatic environment on land. As a matter of fact, the cave was opposed to the masculine architectonic and natural element of the mountain and, in classical mythology, it was considered as the dwelling of river and sea nymphs, mythological figures that performed educational roles during important stages of transformation of human life: birth, youth, marriage, motherhood, and death. In the Renaissance, the symbolism of grottoes also overlapped with the classical and Christian tradition of the *fons sapientiae*, further strengthening its meanings linked with both fertility and knowledge. Thus, by entering a cave in the middle of an initiation journey, the traveller symbolically died and was re-born to a new life, ready to complete the second half of the circular pattern through the garden<sup>9</sup>.

In 1610, Queen Anna had appeared as Tethys in an aquatic grotto in Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival*, a masque she had commissioned and performed at Whitehall to celebrate the

<sup>7</sup> A reproduction of Jones's drawing for the House of Oceanus can be found in Orgel & Strong (1972: 378).

<sup>8</sup> Pictures of the grotto at Woburn Abbey can be seen here: <http://thespasdirectory.com/images/bruce/248pic10.jpg>; <https://media-cdn.tripadvisor.com/media/photo-s/0f/46/fb/fd/the-grotto-at-woburn.jpg>.

<sup>9</sup> On hydraulic engineering in Renaissance mannerist gardens, and grottoes in particular, see, among others: Bachelard (1942); Guénon, (1962); Fagiolo (1981); Cosgrove & Petts (1990); Medri & Ballerini (1998); Fagiolo & Giusti (2001); Cazzato *et al.* (2001); Morgan (2007); Calzona & Lamberini (2010). On the same tradition in early modern England and English literature, see in particular: Macdougall & Miller (1977); Strong (1979); Romero Allué (2006); Lees- Jeffries (2007).



Creation of Prince Henry Stuart as Prince of Wales. In the masque, Tethys appeared with her nymphs – including her daughter, Princess Elizabeth Stuart, as the nymph of the Thames – in an underwater cave, “made of modern architecture in regard of room” (*Tethys Festival*: 60), divided into five niches decorated with precious stones, minerals, and seaweeds, whose colours were refracted by artificial lights and characterised by the visual and aural dimension of real and fabricated water running through the many fountains within the cave:

On the top of this was a round globe of gold, full of holes, *out of which issued abundance of water, some falling into the receipt below, some into the ovall vase borne up by the Dolphins; and indeed there was no place in this great aquatick throne that was not filled with the sprinkling of these two naturall-seeming waters.* The neeces wherein the Ladies sate were foure, with pillasters of gold mingled with rustick stones, shewing like a minerall to make it more rocke, and cavern- like, varying from that of Tethys throne. [...] On the rustick frontispice lay two great figures in rileve, which seemed to beare up a garland of seaweeds, to which from two antick candlesticks which stood over the pillasters, were hanging labells of gold [...]. Aboue this were three great Cherubines heads *spouting water into the bowle* [...]. The rest of the ornaments consisted of maske-heads *spouting water into the bow* (*Tethy's Festival*: 60-61. My italics).

Furthermore, Tethys's scene is introduced by Zephyrus, impersonated by Prince Charles, then aged nine, as the wind of spring and husband to Flora, a symbol of youth and air: an element which, along with water, usually ran musical automata. Although no draft of this particular scenery survives, Roy Strong connects the underwater cave richly described in *Tethys' Festival* to the octagonal fountain – the typical architectural shape of every baptismal font – that represents Mount Parnassus designed by Isaac de Caus's brother, Salomon, at Somerset House for Queen Anna (Strong 1979: 89)<sup>10</sup>. Both contexts allude to the queen's patronage of the arts, a further form of motherhood, and transpose the queen's identity into the physical space of the king, celebrated in the masque. The cave resonates with the symbolism of the maternal womb, where Tethys, mother of the rivers, and Anna, whose presence was denied during Henry's baptism in Scotland in 1597, symbolically deliver Henry's new life as heir to the throne (Trevisan 2011:158-174). The role of Tethys further associated Anna with Queen Elizabeth as an aquatic goddess (Berry and J. E. Archer 2001: 120-121), but, compared to the virgin queen, Anna's role of mother endowed her with a real educational force to create an heir to the throne (Leeds Barroll 2001: 1269; Butler 2008: 134; Guardini 2016: 96)<sup>11</sup>. At this point, it is worth recalling that one of the bathrooms in the Privy Gallery at Whitehall was given the aspect of a grotto during the reign of Elizabeth I (Thurley 1999: 65; 88): the evidence of such an architectonic continuity testifies to the legacy of the memory of a recognisable iconography, linked first with Queen Elizabeth; and then with Queen Anna, but also with James's newly decorated Privy Cellar and the masque's stage design of the 'House of Oceanus'. Tethys/

<sup>10</sup> A reproduction of Caus' engraving can be seen at the following link: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/ef/ce/73/efce735a81cb96b3253694d3caa1c493.gif>.

<sup>11</sup> On women and water in Renaissance theatre see also Kern Paster (1995: 23-63).

Anna's grotto and Neptune/James' House of Oceanus resume the imagery linked with Elizabeth I/Cynthia, queen of the Ocean, from two different but simultaneously ambivalent points of view. Elizabeth I's female imagery of motherhood and of alchemical and artistic delivery, implicit in her private grotto and predominant in the womb-like and baptismal dimension of *Tethys Festival*, is transformed into a celebration of patriarchy in *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*. In the light of this iconographic correspondence, it can be suggested that, since he could not allow himself to erase the imagery linked with Elizabeth I from the memory and the language of his court, James I wanted to legitimise his place on the throne of England by undertaking a metamorphosis from Cynthia to Neptune. At the same time, as a parental and educational figure to his son and heir to the throne, the king also needed to resume Anna's maternal dimension, derived from an Elizabethan iconographic tradition, in order to take on the double roles of father and mother. The same aquatic grotto re-created in the real palace of Whitehall and in the fictional world of masques delivers an ambiguous and complex multitude of symbolisms and readings that cannot be put into a unique and unalterable perspective, but rather changes according to the point of view from which it is observed.

Until 1625 James was never explicitly associated in masques with aquatic divinities, but rather to the Sun of a separate world, while Anna, on the contrary, was more often linked with different aquatic goddesses<sup>12</sup>. Since Anna, when still alive, had opposed the idea of Charles marrying so young, but saw with favour a Catholic match (Bergeron 1991: 139; Leeds Barroll 2001: 168), it can be further suggested that in *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* her memory is not just erased or ignored, but symbolically absorbed into James's self-fashioning. Contrary to Anna, James never danced in masques, and *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* can be considered as the first and last show that most insistently addressed James I by means of such a defined aquatic iconography, as if he were one of the masquers on the stage. The water symbolism present in Stuart early masques is generally read in terms of James's appropriation of Elizabethan imagery, but I think that it is possible to assert that in this particular scene the House of Oceanus works as a fictional underwater picture of Whitehall, associated with a garden-grotto, where Neptune replaces Tethys as much as James replaced Anna in the aesthetic process of parental, and in particular maternal, self-affirmation on the masquing stage. Although not estranged from hermetic and natural philosophy, why would James adopt an iconography that in 1625, when Anna was already dead, could resonate with such ambiguously motherly and female dimensions to the eyes of Charles, in a masque that was supposed to overshadow the conflict between father and son? Did James need or wanted to resume a mother-like iconography in order to seek alliance with Charles rather than just impose his patriarchal model? And what could have been Charles's mnemonic response to his previous role as a child on the masquing

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<sup>12</sup> Queen Anna was a river nymph in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Backness* (1605) and *Masque of Beauty* (1608): a coloured picture of a costume designed by Inigo Jones for this role can be found in Orgel & Strong (1972: xv). Queen Anna impersonated Bel-Anna, the Queen of the Ocean, a character created by Ben Jonson for her in *The Masque of Queens* (1609). A drawing by Jones of a headdress for this character is reproduced in Orgel & Strong (1972: 151). No sketches for costumes of Tethys survive for Samuel Daniel's *Tethys Festival* (1610), although Orgel and Strong identify a drawing that possibly reproduces a headdress (1972: 198).

stage with his mother? These questions challenge Grahams's reading of Jacobean masques as lacking "the language of paternal love" (2001: 394), and, albeit destined to remain unanswered from a historical point of view, the only fact of asking them uncovers alternative, and somewhat cooperative narratives that would otherwise be silenced.

Interestingly, in Ben Jonson's *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, the first masque of the Caroline reign performed in 1631, the parade of Heroic Love through the streets of Callipolis – a fictional rendition of Charles's programme of aesthetic and moral renovation of London – culminates in a sea-triumph, "upon the sight of a work of Neptune's, being a hollow rock filling part of the sea-prospect, whereon the muses sit" (*Love's Triumph*: 459). The description alludes to the traditional iconography of Mount Parnassus, and the fact that the rock is explicitly described as "hollow" seemingly identifies it with a fabricated mannerist grotto, once again transposed to a maritime setting. Since, according to myth, Neptune is the father of Pegasus, from whose hoof Mount Parnassus's main spring originates, the association between the maritime god and the Muses is not uncommon in Renaissance gardens and fountains, where he often substitutes Apollo and represents "the source from which the muses emerge at the feet of the ruler" (Metzger 2013: 588-589). A fountain representing the same subject is present in the *Hortus Palatinus*, the garden designed by Salomon de Caus at Heidelberg, where in 1613 he followed Princess Elizabeth Stuart, James I's daughter and Charles's sister, after her marriage to the Elector Palatine, Friederich of the Rhine. In particular, Metzger analyses the fountain of Neptune and Mount Parnassus, in the light of the association between the (absent) statue of Apollo and Friederich V, where, as the scholar suggests, the maritime god does not properly substitute Apollo in such an architectonic *ensemble*, since he is in his turn replaced by the real presence of the Elector Palatine (Metzger 2013: 589). Likewise, in *Love's Triumph through Callipolis*, the Muses, presented by Neptune, emerge at the feet of Heroic Love/Charles, who, like Friederich V in his *Hortus Palatinus*, can be further identified with the otherwise absent Apollo. In 1631, Neptune as a benevolent and protecting figure could also remind Charles of his father James, who was last addressed as the maritime god linked with Pegasus only five years earlier in a masque danced by the very prince. However, as already said, the iconography of Neptune linked with the muses first appeared, although obliquely reversed, in *Tethys' Festival*. In Daniel's masque Tethys emerges from her octagonal fountain, whose architecture is based on Salomon de Caus's fountain of Mount Parnassus for the garden in Somerset House. Thus, in this Caroline masque, although Tethys is not explicitly resumed, it seems to be Queen Anna's iconography, rather than James's, to be re-elaborated upon the imagery of Neptune as a tribute to Charles's patronage of the arts. Or it can be possibly further argued that the iconographies of both James and Anna are combined in the same imagery.

Mannerist grottoes staged in court masques somewhat testify to the amphibious co-existence, typical of the Seventeenth century, of modern science and natural philosophy, respectively based on the cooperative communication of knowledge and secrecy, as exemplified by Francis Bacon's fable *The New Atlantis* (Romero Allué 2003: 97-120)<sup>13</sup>. As a matter

<sup>13</sup> "Contemporary critics, still rooted in a post-Romantic perspective, have regarded Bacon, the founder of modern science in England, as a sort of second Cain, as the responsible for the moral decline of European

of fact, as reproductions of artificial landscapes, grottoes testify to the holistic and cooperative attitude of modern science, since the Jacobean Mannerist garden was “a walled enclosure within which nature tamed by art is made to fulfil the wildest of Mannerist fantasies, above all by means of the new hydraulics” (Strong 1979: 134; 136). Likewise, masques not only transposed the court onto an allegorical level, but actually moulded it and re-created it anew, and the exclusiveness and privacy of their performances somewhat mirrored the secrecy of Hermeticism. In the fictional dimension of court festivals, man gains all the power and control over nature in an ideal and idealised world:

The world of the court fête is an ideal one in which nature, ordered and controlled, has all dangerous potentialities removed. In the court festival, the Renaissance belief in man’s ability to control his own destiny and harness the natural resource of the universe find their most extreme assertion. In their astounding transformations, which defeat magic, defy time and gravity, evoke and dispel the seasons, banish darkness and summon light, draw down even the very influences of the stars from the heavens, they celebrate man’s total comprehension of the laws of nature. The Renaissance court fête in its fullness of artistic creation was a ritual in which society affirmed its wisdom and asserted its control over the world and its destiny (Strong 1984: 40-41).

*Neptune’s Triumph for the Return of Albion*, and, even more so, its later alternative re-elaboration as *The Fortunate Isles and their Union*, represented a one-way father-son relationship, transposing the Stuart court – and, by extension, the whole reign – onto a mythological aquatic landscape where water’s symbolism is forced to allude to the masculine features of fatherhood and patriarchy. Notwithstanding, the setting of the “Palace of Oceanus” also ambiguously evoked the feminine, womb-like, motherly, and esoteric iconography of Tethy’s underwater cave, outbound to birth, knowledge, and discovery, as a tool of empowerment for Charles rather than for James. Moreover, the iconographic memory of Queen Anna’s aquatic symbolism of motherhood and patronage of the arts survived in Charles’ later performances on the masquing stage. In particular, the aquatic grotto appearing in *Love’s Triumph through Callipolis* seems to reunite opposites and, by coalescing the masculine and feminine dimensions of James and Anna, king and queen, father and mother, power and art, nature and culture, it seems to overcome, rather than stress these polarities.

It has been observed that masques generated, rather than pictured, contents, and that by including the audience in the revels, masques belonged to ritual rather than to theatre (Limon 1990: 64; 89)<sup>14</sup>. In these terms, the coexistence of both dramatic and ritual dimen-

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society and as the killer of spiritualism. [...] But Cain, besides being the first killer and the first *homo faber* – the first technological man – was also a farmer and gardener. Closely connected with Cain, Bacon’s works display an interesting combination of science and nature, chemistry and agriculture, new experimental method and hermetic tradition, modern technology and traditional philosophy, science and religion, secrecy and divulgement, individualism and partnership: the New Atlantis, an organized scientific community placed in an ideal island, solves and reunites the whole series of contraries.” (Romero Allué 2003: 197). For a comparison between Renaissance gardens and Stuart masques, see also Guardini (2017 – forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> “Ritual, unlike theatre, does not distinguish between audience and performers. Instead, there is a congregation whose leaders may be priests, party officials, or other religious or secular ritual specialists, but

sions in masques relied almost exclusively on the active agency of the audience, as Butler highlights by stressing the role that spectators had in both detecting and interpreting the meaning of the performance, as well as the ritual dimension of court behaviour (Butler 2008: 4). In a study on the original readership of masques, Lauren Shohet explicitly advocates for the necessity of looking at these shows also from the point of view of the audience, and, by quoting Roger Chartier's ideas on the composite mechanism of conventions and perceptions in the process of the readership's apprehension of contents<sup>15</sup>, she invites us to "move beyond what masque producers may have intended of their masques to also include what receivers can make of them" (Shohet 2011: 8). According to Orgel, it was the power of the audience that fully gave meaning to court shows: "whether the pageant constituted celebration or satire lay ultimately not in the power of the actor or the intention of the inventor, but in the eye and mind of the beholder" (1985: 120). In the light of the determining role of the audience, it can be further asserted that, like the religious emblematic tradition of the seventeenth-century, masques performed a strong mnemonic and didactic, or better to say, persuasive function by means of visual images<sup>16</sup>.

When introducing her theories and ideas on a "partnership model" as opposed to a "dominant model" as a tool to re-imagine and re-shape society, the social scientist Riane Eisler observes that "no society orients completely to one or the other of these models", but that hierarchies can be defined in terms of a dominator's "power over" subjects as oppose to a community's reciprocal "empowerment", depending on how much one model prevails on the other (Eisler 2003: 22; 29). In these terms, Charles' reception and personal synthesis of the imagery and symbolisms of grottoes during all his life on the masquing stage can be read as an example of his unconscious and somewhat pioneering proto-advocating the practice of a partnership model, according to which "the recognition of autonomy and difference, together with the equal status amongst sexes, is the premise for their interwoven evolution: a polarity is transformed and nourished by the connections and communications occurring with the other polarity" (Riem Natale & Albarea 2003: 10)<sup>17</sup>.

Susan Bennett insists on the primary role of audience and readership in theatre, both in performance and print, by arguing that "in the theatre every reader is involved in the making of the play" and that "no two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement" (Bennett 2002: 21). The same ideas can be applied to masques, especially because of the occasional and unique nature of their performance, even though it is almost impossible to retrieve the whole of their multimedia dimension today, since only little textual evidence (some manuscripts, printed editions, music sheets,

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all share formally and substantially the same set of beliefs and accept the same system of practices, the same set of rituals or liturgical actions. A congregation is there to affirm the theological or cosmological order, explicit or implicit, which all hold in common, to actualize it periodically for themselves and inculcate the basic tenets of that order into their younger members, often in graded series of life-crisis rituals" (Turner 1982: 112).

<sup>15</sup> See Chartier (1995).

<sup>16</sup> On memory and persuasion in emblematic tradition, see: Innocenti (1983); for an explicit investigation on the relationship between the masque as a dramatic form and emblems, see also: Limon (1990: 52-91).

<sup>17</sup> See Eisler (1987; 1996; 2000).

and stage designs) survives. Lauren Shohet suggests that the study of how these texts were received in their historical contemporary context, both by audiences in performance and by readers in print, “reveals masques working in a diffuse and complex nexus of elite and quasi-public culture” (Shohet 2011: 10). By uncovering the complexity of political and cultural categories that underlie court masques, we – Shohet insists – “can draw together the scrupulous contextual research we already are practising with a perhaps less verifiable, but in the end equally important, notion of reception as a locus – a place situated in history, but not completely or reductively determined by history – where meanings are made” (Shohet 2011: 10). Therefore, whereas the response of the original audience of masques (i.e. Charles) can only be conjectured by retrieving the complexity of the aquatic imagery performed in the performances analysed above, we, as the contemporary audience of these texts, can also apply a partnership model, meant as “the intention [...] to contribute to the building of new cohesive contexts in which diversity is fundamental to the creation of another history” (Riem Natale & Albarea 2003: 9).

It can be observed that the qualities of adapting, moulding, and filling shapes that are peculiar of water work on both physical and allegorical levels: as much as a patriarchal system will always try to impose its model of power to any iconography, contemporary audience – and readers – of masques should always adopt the plurality of points of view of their original performers and receivers in order to retrieve their fully aesthetic and cultural value as works of art (both verbal and visual), and, at the same time, enable masques to keep generating multiple, dialectic, often conflicting, and possibly new, narratives that would otherwise be silenced.

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Giovanni Bassi

**“A little place in the neighbourhood of a great city”: Landscape and Environment in Walter Pater’s “The Child in the House”, “An English Poet” and “Emerald Uthwart”**

**Abstract I:** Il mio articolo indaga il ruolo del paesaggio in tre racconti di Walter Pater tradizionalmente legati tra loro: “The Child in the House”, “An English Poet” e “Emerald Uthwart”. Dopo aver mostrato la rigogliosità fisica e visionaria del paesaggio pateriano attraverso la sua *imagery* sinestetica e mitopoietica (giardini e fiori sono tra le immagini più ricorrenti in questi ‘ritratti immaginari’), analizzerò dunque la peculiare dialettica e fusione, in queste narrazioni, tra l’ambiente umano e quello naturale, tra arte e natura. Letto da questa prospettiva, “An English Poet”, testo ancora poco studiato, pare impostare un confronto tra l’idea ruskiniana di natura e quella pateriana, offrendo così proficue aggiunte tanto alla complessa relazione tra i due autori quanto all’ecocritica vittoriana.

**Abstract II:** My paper will consider the function of landscape in Walter Pater’s short narratives, focusing on three texts traditionally grouped together: “The Child in the House”, “An English Poet” and “Emerald Uthwart”. I will investigate the physical and visionary plenitude of the Paterian landscape through its synesthetic and mythopoeic imagery (gardens and flowers are among the most recurrent tropes in these ‘portraits’). Consequently, I will examine the peculiar dialectic and fusion, in these narratives, between human and natural environment, art and nature. Seen from this perspective, the still overlooked “An English Poet” suggests that Ruskin’s idea of nature may be juxtaposed to Pater’s and this may fruitfully add to the complex relationship between the two authors as well as to the subject of Victorian ecocriticism.

As it is honestly acknowledged at the very beginning of one of the most recent and fertile contributions to the subject of Victorian ecology, “The notion of applying principles of ecocriticism to Victorian literature has been relatively late in developing” and “the field is still being shaped” (Mazzeno & Morrison 2017: 1). Indeed, over the last fifteen years, while general critical and historical questions, such as ‘Was There a Victorian Ecology?’ and ‘Where Is Victorian Ecocriticism?’, have been raised and discussed, much has also been done to bolster the development of ecocritical readings of Victorian authors, works and literary genres<sup>1</sup>. Within this growing tradition of studies, Aestheticism and Decadence have nevertheless

<sup>1</sup> For the debate on Victorian ecocriticism and a fuller bibliography, see Parham 2002, Parham 2011, Taylor 2015 and Mazzeno & Morrison 2017: 3-5.

remained, strikingly, an unchartered field. My paper aims to help fill this gap by focusing on one of the founders of the Aesthetic Movement, Walter Pater. I will primarily survey three of Pater's short narratives: "The Child in the House" – published in 1878 and the first piece of proper fiction to be printed by Pater –, "An English Poet" – probably composed alongside or shortly after "The Child", but left unfinished – and "Emerald Uthwart" – published in 1893, one year before Pater's death. These three narratives have been traditionally grouped together by Paterian critics for their common autobiographical elements (reflecting Pater's infancy and school days) and their shared attention to the growth of a sensitive intellectual mind – a pervasive motif in Pater, but here at its purest<sup>2</sup>. Such affinities, evident in many textual parallels, will all be reinforced by my reading.

The most noticeable feature of the natural environment as depicted in these narratives is its extreme, in fact almost unnatural, luxuriance. Seemingly suspended in a Edenic time when the flowers of April intermingle with the fruits of autumn ("and the blossom of an old pear-tree showing across it in late April, against the blue, below which the perfumed juice of the find of fallen fruit in autumn was so fresh" [Pater 2014: 84]), nature is often an inexhaustible source of pleasurable and refining sensations for the subject. In "The Child in the House" natural elements play a pivotal role in the "brain-building" of the protagonist (84), who remembers how one evening, as a child, having broken into a hitherto undiscovered garden, he chanced upon a grand fiery-coloured tree, the vehicle of his aesthetic initiation:

And lo! within, a great red hawthorn, in full flower, embossing heavily the bleached and twisted trunk and branches, so aged that there were but few green leaves thereon – a plumage of tender crimson fire out of the heart of the dry wood. The perfume of the tree had now and again reached him, in the currents of the wind, over the wall, and he had wondered what might be behind it, and was now allowed to fill his arms with the flowers (91).

The vision of this flaming mass of flowers, which demanded the exertion of all the senses ("perfume", "fill his arms" [...]), haunts Florian Deleal in the years to come with the reds of the "old Venetian masters or old Flemish tapestries" (91). The plenitude of nature enhances the individual perception, triggering a more intense, i.e. synesthetic, relation to the world. Florian, now obsessed by "beautiful physical things" and moved by a "tyranny of the senses over him" (91), is able to associate "all thoughts to touch and sight, as a sympathetic link between himself and actual, feeling, living objects" (92). Once the highest aesthetic faculty, the 'imaginative reason'<sup>3</sup>, is properly awakened, inner and outer, soul and body can successfully merge – as Pater would say of Plato's genius – "by a gymnastic "fused in music"" (Pater 1974: 236). This "intensity" of vision connected with nature, closely described in Pater's essay on Wordsworth (1874), entails a kind of sceptical and sensuous animism, a

<sup>2</sup> See the Introduction in Pater 2014: 1-66. For the analogies between the three narratives, see Bini 1993 and Bini 1996. See also Bizzotto 2001: 65-95 for a comprehensive account of Pater's short narratives.

<sup>3</sup> To my knowledge, Pater uses the phrase 'imaginative reason' twice in his writings, both in the 1874 essay on Wordsworth (Pater 1874: 455) and in "The School of Giorgione" (1877) (Pater 2010: 122). This expression is omitted in the revised version of "Wordsworth" which was later included in *Appreciations* (1889).

“sense of life in natural objects” (Pater 1974: 130). As Paul Tucker has brilliantly explained in his analysis of Pater’s fragments on the French painter Corot, such a thriving landscape can result in actual mythopoesis inasmuch as it brings back to the observer that primitive aura “in which the old Greek gods were first begotten” (130)<sup>4</sup>. Lush images of nature like “The Child in the House”’s red hawthorn or the redolent tuberose evoked in “An English Poet”, are built on a Romantically-derived naturism and on vivid synaesthesia, and, tellingly, are all flower-based. As observed by Catherine Maxwell in her recent study of scent – which, therefore, necessarily also extends to flowers – in Pater’s *œuvre* (Maxwell 2012), synaesthesia becomes indeed a fundamental trope, with his language constantly looking for “words compact rather of perfume than of colour”<sup>5</sup>.

This rich natural imagery, however, is by no means exclusively the province of wild flowers. Rather, these “strange blossoms”, as the ones loved by Pater’s Leonardo (Pater 2010: 66), are always cultivated and arranged by an attentive florist. As hinted at in my description of the red hawthorn, Paterian flowers grow and bloom in dainty gardens, not in the wilderness. Indeed, gardens are structural elements in the narratives under examination and the most tangible sign of the artificiality of nature as represented by Pater.

In “The Child in the House”, we are told at the very beginning of the story that the home where the protagonist’s mind experiences its first artistic awakening is located, in “a little place in the neighbourhood of a great city” – more precisely, “not far beyond the gloom and rumours of the town, among high garden-walls” (Pater 2014: 83-85). This tranquil garden and the other “neighboring gardens” (85), which represent a liminal place between the city and the countryside, the ideal fusion of the artificial and the natural, do not isolate the child from the urban landscape; its effects on him are described in a passage which it is worth quoting at length:

for the house, as I said, stood near a great city, which sent up heavenwards, over the weather-vanes, not seldom, its beds of rolling cloud and smoke, touched with storm or sunshine. But the child of whom I am writing did not hate the fog for the crimson lights which fell [...].

For it is false to suppose that a child’s sense of beauty is dependent on any choiceness, or special fineness, in the objects which present themselves to it, though this indeed comes to be the rule with most of us in later life; earlier, in some degree, we see inwardly; and the child finds for itself, and with unstinted delight, a difference for the sense, in those whites and reds through the smoke on very homely buildings, and in the gold of the dandelions at the road-side, just beyond the houses, where not a handful of earth is virgin and untouched, in the lack of better ministries to its desire of beauty (85).

To a certain extent preserved from the most detrimental aspects of city life and alien to moral prejudice, the child can learn how to appreciate beauty even in the suburban envi-

<sup>4</sup> See Tucker 1996. See also Evangelista 2002. For Pater’s assessment of Wordsworth, see Daley 2001: 17-50, Ward 1991 and Østermark-Johansen 2011: 277-290.

<sup>5</sup> The quotation is from “Emerald Uthwart” (Pater 2014: 241).

ronment, either in the colour patterns of the architecture that emerge through the foggy air or – and the flower imagery returns – in the sudden appearance of golden dandelions “at the road-side”. Going against a long-established literary and cultural tradition which posits children as true natural creatures and glorifies wilderness as the most authentic source of inspiration, Pater shows how the urban environment may also provide fertile ground for the aesthetic refinement.

Pater’s opinion was not shared by all his contemporaries. John Ruskin, the Victorian champion of the ecological tradition that stems from Wordsworth<sup>6</sup>, was notoriously hostile towards modern industrialised cities, “to the rest of the world what the larder and cellar are to the private house”, and deprecated the “ghastly houses” of their suburbs (“The Study of Architecture in our Schools” [1865], quoted in Mallett 1995: 44). While Ruskin contends that the modern city “destroys the possibility of art” (Mallett 1995: 46) and stifles any aesthetic arousal, the urban environment depicted by Pater throws the child into a positive “imaginative mood” and marks him with “a kind of comeliness and dignity, an urbanity literally, in modes of life, which he connected with the pale people of towns, and which made him susceptible to a kind of satisfaction in the trimness and well-considered grace of certain things and persons” (Pater 2014: 85). The same graceful “urbanities” reappear in *Marius the Epicurean*, where the contact of the protagonist with the “old town of Pisa” causes his first sensual turmoil and, as the red hawthorn did for the child, makes him aware “of the reality, the tyrannous reality, of the things visible” (Pater 1985: 60-62).

Irreducible to a nature-centred ideal of landscape such as that described by Jonathan Bate, the representation of the environment in “The Child in the House” is consonant with more integrated approaches to the subject of literary ecology, such as Ashton Nichols’s ‘urbanatural roosting’, a model that emphasises a less rigid separation “between cities and the wilderness” and “recognizes close ties between those who live within the city limits: in the suburbs, the small towns, rural areas” (Nichols 2011: xviii). Nichols’s perspective is even more relevant to Pater’s depiction of aesthetic development in that it observes how “many of the great “nature” poems of the Romantic era were actually written” – almost an echo of “The Child in the House” – “in suburbs, in the back gardens of great cities” (xviii).

The synthesis of nature and artificiality reoccurs in “Emerald Uthwart”, although in a less optimistic way. Gardens and flowers loom large in the whole narrative, with Emerald himself associated, to the “*flos parietis*” (Pater 2014: 242), the wall-flower of Florian Deale’s house (85), a perfect symbiosis of human architecture and vegetal growth. Emerald was born and raised among the verdant Sussex lands, from a long lineage of gardeners – scholars have linked the Uthwarts to the Tradescants, the prominent seventeenth-century family of gardeners and importers of exotic plants (240-241, note 7). He leaves this planted landscape of “velvety fields” (241), a Sargent-esque “native world of soft garden touches, carnation and rose” (243), to begin his education at ancient school in Canterbury<sup>7</sup>. Even though the school’s milieu is initially seen, probably through Emerald’s first reaction to it, as a hard “world of grey stone” (243), it is nevertheless depicted as a venerable “place of ‘great

<sup>6</sup> For which see chiefly Bate 1991.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Sargent’s floral imagery in its cultural context, see Syme 2010.

matters', great stones, great memories out of reach" (243) whose strong "*genius loci*" is almost mythopoeic (246): the narrator compares its influence on the protagonist to the Spartan "*ascêsis*" (247), a practice particularly dear to Pater. The simple sight of the students in the school premises is able to "harmonise present with past" (244). As the green universe of his childhood – to which he tragically returns at the end of this quasi-nihilistic story – the stony world of Canterbury proves equally fundamental to the fate of the enigmatic Emerald<sup>8</sup>.

If in "The Child in the House" the crucial role of the urban environment in the aesthetic development of the protagonist may be slightly downplayed by the mention of the "lack of better ministries" to its fulfilment (85), in "An English Poet" pure and traditional wilderness is unequivocally dismissed as adverse to the creative mind<sup>9</sup>.

As with the other two texts that I have examined, this narrative also opens on a thriving natural scene, the sunny French district of the Pays de Caux, where every farm "is isolated by the outer world by a dense enclosure of trees" and "there is room for a garden also" (101). After his mother died giving birth to him, the "languid child" goes "early away to be reared in the braver air of its English relations among the stern Cumberland mountains" (103). Here he suffers from a violent kind of cultural seclusion; the mountainous landscape, which visitors to the Lake District traditionally idealise, is a hostile "barrier" to the sensitive souls who dwell there:

For in these scenes, however beautiful, there are, over and above, those absolutely suffering, under whose windows we pass so ignorantly, waiting there so longingly for the reliever who comes not, those who in full possession of their powers are in some sense bondmen there, those for whom the beautiful restful valley is but the barrier which shuts them from a possible happier field they know or dream of for the exercise of gifts felt slumbering within them. The solemn girdle of hills which seem to raise our jaded thoughts to themselves for a moment, does but shut them off from opportunity, from the city, the university, the brave gathering place of art, where the business of the mind is done, and the sacred fire is kept up whence their minds also might take sacred fire (103).

Untouched nature – the "secluded valleys" of the essay on Wordsworth (Pater 1974: 132) – is here portrayed as a "place of exile or punishment" (Pater 2014: 104), whereas the cultured urban environment represents the shrine of "the sacred fire" of Art. Such an emphasis on cosmopolitan artificiality against the immaculate Romantic scenery is characteristic of many French – and later English – post-romantic poetics, all of them influential on Pater and resonant in the Anglo-French story of "An English Poet", from the Parnassian cult of verse form to the Baudelairean *surnaturalisme*, which dreams of banning "*Le végétal irrégulier*"<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> See Bini 1996: 194-202 and Shuter 1990.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the narrative, see Bini 1993 (with reference to the mountainous landscape and its effect on the protagonist) and Østermark-Johansen 2011: 277-290.

<sup>10</sup> The quotation is from Baudelaire's "*Rêve parisien*" (Baudelaire 1975: 101). See also his 1853-1854 letter to Fernand Desnoyers: "je suis incapable de m'attendrir sur les végétaux [...]. J'ai même toujours pensé qu'il y avait dans la Nature, florissante et rajeunie, quelque chose d'impudent et d'affligeant" (Baudelaire 1973: 248).

Even John Addington Symonds, a British contemporary of Pater, both recognized and to a certain extent shared this condemnation of the brisk mountainous environment when, speaking of *Marius the Epicurean*, he stated that he would appreciate the style of the book better in the refined Venetian lagoon rather than in the Swiss valley where he was sojourning, a place polluted, as it were, by the “larger air of the mountains, where everything is jagged & up & down & horribly *natural*” (Maxwell 2012: 37).

Not only does the narrator deplore the “horribly” natural landscape, he also dwells on mocking the innocent ardour of its advocates. The hard and dreary Cumberland of the young aesthete is contrasted, from the very start, with its majestic appearance in the eyes of those visiting “some celebrated spot among the mountains, Swiss or English even, to admire the deep lake or the precipice with its rose at twilight” (Pater 2014: 103), travellers that may be identified with William Wordsworth or John Ruskin (both of them are alluded to among the protagonist’s formative readings, the latter as “the master of imaginative prose who might seem to bear on his single shoulders the whole Alpine world” [108-109]). Ironically, the enthusiastic travellers walk the region only in the clement summer weather, even then often “shuddering” at its coldness, and candidly ignore that not all the inhabitants are at ease with their “hard mechanical existence” (104). “I never visit these places” without feeling their misery (104), is, on the contrary, the narrator’s sour and surprisingly open confession (the bold first person pronoun strongly evidencing his own and, possibly, the author’s opinion). Like the narrator, the young poet is afflicted by “the really dominant note of mere inclemency in a scenery supposed by summer visitors simply grand” (104-105).

Strange though it may seem, this satirical corrosion of the mountainous environment presents, at least superficially, several analogies with Ruskin’s “The Mountain Gloom”, the penultimate chapter of *Modern Painters IV* (1856). In this chapter, Ruskin tears down the stereotypical glossy picture of the Alpine villages, by exposing and investigating with a disenchanted gaze the peculiar suffering which occasionally infects their inhabitants. As with “An English Poet”, the essay ridicules both the naive traveller “on his happy journey” (Ruskin 1904: 388) through those isolated districts and the “poetically minded” intellectuals “in London or Paris” (390): deluded by their hypocritical utopia of a “happy life led by peasants” (390) and chasing the chimera of a primeval and peaceful “fellowship of the human soul with nature” (388), they fail to perceive “that gloomy foulness that is suffered only by torpor, or by anguish of soul” (388), an endemic psychophysical disease. While Ruskin speculates that this local gloom is apt to plague only sufficiently “intellectual” and sensitive individuals (405), and indeed mentions the absence of books among the privations of the villagers, his “proto-ethnographic approach” (Sdegno 2015: 43) differs widely from Pater’s narrative focus on the growth of a singular artistic mind. Ruskin argues that the mountainous environment may, among other symptoms, cause an impairment in its inhabitants’ appreciation of beauty, ranging from absolute insensitivity to an “unnatural”

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For a concise introduction to Baudelaire’s idea of *surnaturalisme* see Pichois & Avicé 2002: 449-451. For the influence of Baudelaire and other French post-romantic poetics on Pater, see chiefly Østermark-Johansen 2011: 113-160, Clements 1985: 77-139 and Conlon 1982: 17-135.

perception of the sublime<sup>11</sup>. Less concerned with this alleged pathology than with the crueler fate of those who, conversely, “are in full possession of their power”, Pater stresses that there cannot be any aesthetic fulfilment in that “physical hardness” (Pater 2014: 104). The poet’s artistic faculties are not originally compromised by the environment, but his tragedy consists in their not being able to fully blossom in the place where he is forced to live. In “An English Poet”, even the purely aesthetic value of the “beautiful” mountainous landscape, which is never questioned in Ruskin<sup>12</sup>, is disparaged through the impressions of the protagonist: the clichéd “rose after sunset” on the rocky peaks is nowhere sublime and in no way changes their arid monochrome; the lake, instead of fantastically blending with the sky above, is seen as “a little wanting in celestial blueness”; the streets of the village are repellently “sunless” (104)<sup>13</sup>.

It is in this light that we should also reconsider what is both the emblem of this narrative and the enduring stylistic ideal of its protagonist, the “metal honeysuckle” (111) embodying the only two things the poet liked in his little town – the red honeysuckle “over the gateway of the grange”, an “exotic from France” (105), and the metal screen work of the old church. This image, which is the synthesis of the many dichotomies of the story – and, more generally, of Pater’s work – (“sweetness-strength”, “female-male”, “soft-hard”, “taste/smell-touch” and the more linguistic opposition “Romance-Anglo-Saxon”, [28, Introduction]), also symbolises the unique blend of nature and culture as expressed in the natural and the urban environment. By de-idealising Romantic pantheism and yet eschewing Ruskin’s moralism, by compounding, as Harold Bloom says, “the idealistic naturalism with a corrective materialism” (Bloom 1974: xv), Pater subverts the Romantic ecological tradition: his flowers are indeed artificial, but their remnant organicism is nevertheless essential for the growth of that ‘crystal’ form of subjectivity which, once fused with the most brilliant products of human culture, can lead a to “regeneration of the world”<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Ruskin’s discussion of this morbid recognition of beauty occasionally resembles some of Pater’s aesthetic formulations: “the corpse, borne with the bare face to heaven, is strewn with flowers; beauty is continually mingled with the shadow of death” (Ruskin 1904: 396). While the first part of this passage chimes with the description of Emerald Uthwart’s corpse covered by flowers, the second is strikingly similar to the Paterian association of beauty and death as expressed both in “Aesthetic Poetry” (“the sense of death and the desire of beauty” [Pater 1974: 198]) and in “The Child in the House” (“for with this desire of physical beauty mingled itself early the fear of death” [Pater 2014: 93]).

<sup>12</sup> Before concluding the book with “The Mountain Glory” chapter, Ruskin ends his exceptionally tentative discourse on “The Mountain Gloom” with a strong religious note. He explains the possible coincidence, in the mountainous landscape, of the “perfection of beauty” and the “extreme of ugliness” (Ruskin 1904: 409) as a postlapsarian condition where “no good or lovely thing exists in this world without its correspondent darkness” (416). Needless to say, this view of the world is incompatible with Pater’s.

<sup>13</sup> It is not by chance that Kenneth Daley begins his monograph on Pater and Ruskin (which remains the only one on the subject) by mentioning this anecdote: “Walter Pater’s early biographer, A. C. Benson, reports that Pater used to pretend that he shut his eyes when crossing the Alps so as not to see those “horrid pots of blue paint”, his standard epithet for the Swiss lakes” (Daley 2001: 1). On the relationship between the two authors see also Bloom 1974, Marucci 1994, Keefe 1986, Brake 2001 and Riquelme 2013.

<sup>14</sup> The quotation is from Pater’s “Diaphaneitè” (Pater 2014: 82).



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**Martina Zamparo**

**“An art/That Nature makes”:** The Alchemical Conception of Art and Nature in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*

**Abstract I:** Questo saggio si propone di discutere il ruolo di arte e natura in uno degli ultimi drammi di Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, alla luce della simbologia alchemica rinascimentale. Partendo dal celebre dibattito tra Perdita e Polissene, dal quale sembra emergere una visione del rapporto tra arte e natura riconducibile alle teorie alchemiche note all’epoca, la discussione includerà anche il significato del tempo e dell’acqua. Presentando un mondo in cui “cose che muoiono” sono la fonte di “cose appena nate”, il *romance* shakespeariano sembra seguire le tappe dell’*opus alchymicum*, noto come *solve et coagula*, ovvero ‘distruggere’ per ‘ricreare’.

**Abstract II:** The aim of this paper is to discuss the conception of art and nature expounded by Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale* in the light of Renaissance alchemical imagery and language. Moving from the debate between Perdita and Polixenes – a dialogue in which the two characters present a vision of the relationship of art and nature that is highly evocative of the alchemical notions widespread at the time – the discussion will also include the significance of time and water. Displaying a world in which “things dying” are the source of “things new-born”, *The Winter’s Tale* seems to follow the alchemical pattern known as *solve et coagula*, i.e. ‘destroy’ in order to ‘re-create’.

**“Good goddess Nature”**

It has been argued that “the grand Shakespearean theme”, particularly developed in the so-called ‘last plays’, or ‘romances’, is “the sanctification of Nature and the natural” (Power & Loughnane 2013: 243). Given that this is a key topic that recurs throughout Shakespeare’s canon, *The Winter’s Tale* is the drama that most significantly celebrates the role of “good goddess nature” (2.3.102). In the age in which the romances were composed and performed, there existed a specific kind of cultural mindset that conveyed a reverential attitude towards nature: the approach typical of alchemical and Hermetic philosophy. In the Prolegomena to the anthology of alchemical treatises entitled *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, Elias Ashmole, antiquarian and, later, alchemist under King Charles II, announces that he will disclose “the Language in which they [our Hermetique Philosophers] woo’d and courted Dame Nature” (Ashmole 1652). In view of the fact that in the late sixteenth century alchemical beliefs reached their utmost dissemination in both England and Europe, one is prompted to wonder whether the conception of art and nature expounded by Perdita and Polixenes in the fourth act of the play might have been influenced by the notions deriving

from alchemical literature.

Although “it has not generally been considered in this context, alchemy was an important manifestation of the Renaissance debate on the relative powers of ‘art’ versus ‘nature’” (Linden 1996: 19). As a case in point, Roger Bacon’s *The Mirror of Alchimy*, whose first English translation from Latin was published in London in 1597, devotes a large section precisely to “a most excellent and learned discourse of the admirable force and efficacie of Art and Nature”. Taking into account that *The Mirror of Alchimy* was “an Elizabethan digest of basic alchemical theories” (Nicholl 1980: 25), the concepts developed in that treatise were undoubtedly familiar to Shakespeare and his public. In particular, alchemy fell within the discussions concerning the boundaries between the artistic and the natural spheres since it was conceived of by its adepts as a *ministra naturae*, a nurse, and a handmaid of nature (Tymme 1605), helping the latter in its effort to reach “a gradual attainment of perfection, and [...] approximation to the highest standard of purity and excellence” (Waite 1893: 8). The Swiss physician and alchemist known as Paracelsus, whose writings were widely circulating in late sixteenth-century England, amplified the significance of the ancillary role played by alchemy in bringing the products of nature to perfection: “She [nature] brings nothing to the light that is at once perfect in itself, but leaves it to be perfected by man. This method of perfection is called Alchemy” (Paracelsus 1894: 148). That Shakespeare and his audience were acquainted with Paracelsian beliefs is attested by the comedy *All’s Well That Ends Well*, in which the Swiss-born alchemist is explicitly mentioned, along with Galen, thus alluding to the ongoing dispute between Paracelsians and Galenists. The ideas fostered by Paracelsus on both alchemy and medicine “were widely disseminated in single-text and collected editions and translations that began to appear about 1570” (Linden 2003: 151). Shakespeare, in particular, might have been in contact with the theories of Paracelsus also via his son-in-law, doctor John Hall, a renowned physician in Straford-Upon-Avon. Hall was among the “most successful practitioners” who, despite the disapproval of the Royal College of Physicians, employed the new Paracelsian chemical remedies (Iyengar 2011: 247).

In his dialogue with Perdita, the legitimate daughter of the king of Sicily, Leontes, the king of Bohemia Polixenes discusses the ‘perfecting’ of nature by means of human art and exclaims that “Nature is made better by no mean / But Nature makes that mean” (4.4.89-90), thus enigmatically suggesting that this kind of art that improves nature is itself ‘natural’. It should be recalled that when *The Winter’s Tale* was staged, alchemy was usually defined as “the true and sublime Art of Nature herself” (Paracelsus 1894: vol. 2, 167). To best illustrate the conflation of the artistic and of the natural dimensions at the core of alchemical theory, it is worth recalling the treatise *Splendor Solis*, published in 1582 and attributed to Solomon Trismosin, an adept of Paracelsus:

Nature serves Art with matter, and Art serves Nature with suitable Instruments and method convenient for Nature to produce such new forms; and although the before mentioned Stone can only be brought to its proper form by Art, yet the form is from Nature (Trismosin 1582: 18).

The above-quoted words seem to bear a certain relevance to the lines spoken by Po-

lixenes in his endeavour to persuade Perdita, who refuses every form of artistic intrusion into the realm of “great creating Nature” (4.4.88). According to the king of Bohemia, there exists an art that does not violate or surpass nature but, rather, mends it, by reproducing its mechanisms: “This is an art / Which does mend nature – change it rather – but / The Art itself is Nature” (4.4.95-97). If alchemy is “a method of perfection”, an art that has been created to lead nature to its “highest standard of purity and excellence”, then one can read Polixenes’s lines as an allusion to the alchemical conception of the relationship between the artistic and the natural world, alchemy being precisely “Nature co-operating in a wonderful manner by a witty Art” (Philalethes 1669: 4).

Focusing on the mutual correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, the world of man and the world of nature, Polixenes concludes that “over that art, / Which you say adds to Nature, is *an art / That Nature makes*” (4.4.90-92, my italics). Again, I believe that the conceptual apparatus related to alchemical philosophy might be useful to throw light on the words pronounced by the king of Bohemia. An excerpt from the celebrated treatise *Pretiosa margarita novella*, by the Italian alchemist and physician Petrus Bonus of Ferrara, illustrates the widespread notion that alchemy as a perfect synthesis of art and nature:

The substance of Alchemy – though called by a perplexing variety of names – is the substance of Nature, and the first substance of metals, from which Nature herself evolves them. Were it otherwise, it would be impossible for Art to imitate Nature (Bonus 1963: 117).

Arguing that “the substance of Alchemy [...] is the substance of Nature” Bonus clearly equates alchemical art with nature. And indeed alchemical authors maintain that their art is a microcosmic reproduction of the metamorphoses performed by nature, i.e., the transmutation of metals occurring within the womb of Mother Earth and the constant alternation of the seasons, in a never-ending cycle of death and rebirth: in Polixenes’s words, alchemy is “an art / That Nature makes” (4.4.91-92). The Elizabethan alchemist Edward Kelly, among others, affirms that the *opus alchymicum* is a reflection of the marvellous palingenesis displayed in the natural world: “That the aspiration of our Art is no Utopian dream, is proved by the innumerable and stupendous metamorphoses which Nature daily exhibits on every side” (Kelly 1893: 60). Shakespeare himself, in Sonnet 33, praises the alchemical virtues of the sun that, “Kissing with golden face the meadows green” and “Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy” (33: 3-4), accomplishes daily transmutations. Taking into consideration that the *opus alchymicum* is a process “in which Art assists Nature and Nature assists Art” (Kelly 1893: 127), Polixenes’s lines about an art that cooperates with nature might have been highly reminiscent of alchemical concepts. A plate belonging to a sixteenth-century manuscript collected in the Rylands University Library, in Manchester, showing a lady representing ‘Nature-Alchemy’, testifies to the close connection between art and nature that characterizes alchemical imagery: with her feet resting on some alchemical tools and her head made of thriving boughs, the lady symbolizes the perfect accord between nature’s and alchemy’s objectives.

In order to exemplify the process by means of which art fosters the natural tenden-

cy to attain its highest degree of completion, Polixenes alludes to the practice of grafting, which was at the centre of lively debates at the time:

You see, sweet maid, we marry A gentler scion to the wildest stock, And make conceive a bark of baser kind By bud of nobler race (4.4.92-95).

It is worth pointing out that alchemists most frequently refer to grafting as a proper metaphor for their attempts to 'mend' nature, as attested by the following passage from Basilus Valentinus's *Twelve Keys*: "When a tree is found to bear sour and unwholesome fruit, its branches must be cut off, and scions of better trees grafted upon it. The new branches thereupon become organically united to the trunk" (Waite 1893: 160). Alchemy, as well as horticulture, represents a way to place art at the service of nature, providing the latter with suitable instruments to produce new forms. The alchemist, in fact, is like a gardener: "We [the alchemists] help the metals to arrive at maturity, just as a gardener may assist fruit, which by some accident is prevented from ripening, or as a seed or grain of corn may easily be multiplied by being sown in the ground" (Waite 1893: 56). Perdita, however, whose garden is devoid of any kind of "streaked gillyvors" (4.4.82), which she defines as "Nature's bastards" (4.4.83), protests about the existence of a kind of "art which in their piedness shares / With great creating Nature" (4.4.87-88). Although the girl's reference is primarily to grafting, it should be recalled that in the same years alchemy, regarded as "The Art of Arts, the science of sciences" (Bonus 1894: 138-139), was conceived of as the discipline that, more than others, attempted to rival nature. In this respect, it should be recalled that in the masque *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1616), Ben Jonson satirizes what he considers to be the alchemists' propensity to act "against the excellence of the sun and Nature" (l. 139).

Perdita's and Polixenes's use of horticultural metaphors can equally be related to alchemical beliefs. Since "the Garden is the Vessel or Glasse" (Ashmole 1652: 467) where transmutation occurs, the 'philosopher's stone' is often described as a 'flower' that blossoms thanks to the cares of the alchemist-gardener. Paracelsus actually remarks that "the matter of the stone shews most beautiful colours in the production of its flowers" (Paracelsus 1894: vol. 1, 18). Colours assume a peculiar significance in alchemical imagery because, by indicating the three main phases of the process, namely *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*, they guide the alchemist throughout the *opus alchymicum*, as suggested, among others, by Kelly: "These colours the Sages have used as a kind of cynosure to steer their course throughout Nature, and especially in the investigation of the secret Medicine" (Kelly 1893: 68). To black, white, and red, a larger range of shades is added and the 'peacock's tail', or *cauda pavonis*, specifically represents the moment preceding the albedo. Considering the centrality of colours in alchemical language, Perdita's reference to a sort of art that "in their piedness" competes "With great creating Nature" (4.4.87-88, my italics), where "piedness" means "variety of colour", might be seen as another indirect allusion to alchemy, the art that aimed at imitating and, according to its detractors, surpassing nature. The considerations presented so far do not imply that the conception of art and nature developed in *The Winter's Tale* rests exclusively on alchemical notions but, rather, that Shakespeare's audience might have interpreted the debate *also* in the light of the alchemical background



Fig. 1. *Splendor solis*. © British Library Board (Harley 3469)

of the time. Acknowledging the relevance of alchemy to the dialogue between Perdita and the king of Bohemia, Linden observes that alchemists “might well have gone on to agree with Polixenes that the very means by which man ‘improves’ Nature result from the operations of God and Nature” (Linden 2003: 12).

Wilson Knight defines the debate between Perdita and Polixenes as a “microcosm” of the entire play (Knight 1965: 105), since it presents some of the central issues of the drama. When discussing the union of a “bark of baser kind / By bud of nobler race” (4.4.94-95), for instance, Polixenes is metaphorically alluding to the reconciliation of contraries, a concept that is at the basis of the events in the romance and one of the most important principles of alchemical theory. The alchemist has to transcend the dualism of the Fallen world, by achieving the so-called *coniunctio oppositorum*, and “accomplish the miracles of one thing” (Linden 2003: 28), as one can read in the first principle of the *tabula smaragdina*, the sacred text of alchemists along with the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

In alchemical treatises the conjunction of opposites, the crucial operation in the course of the *opus alchymicum*, is usually represented as a ‘chemical wedding’ between a king and a queen (Fig. 1), first separated and finally reunited, according to the phases of the *solue et coagula*. Interestingly enough, *The Winter’s Tale* is built upon a series of dichotomies such as art and nature, death and life, winter and spring, tragedy and comedy, male and female, youth and old age, Sicily and Bohemia, and it evidently longs for the fusion of contraries, both from a structural and thematic point of view. The romance is actually closed by the *coniunctio* between Leontes and Hermione, the king and the queen of Sicily, reconciled after a “wide gap of time” during which they were “dissevered” (5.3.154-155), thus recalling the allegory of the ‘chemical wedding’, a kind of imagery that was well known owing to the wide diffusion of alchemical iconography. Since the chemical marriage symbolizes the agreement of all divisions, one can infer that the conflation of art and nature coveted by Polixenes in the fourth act of the play is symbolically accomplished at the end of the drama, when life is restored thanks to Paulina’s healing art and harmony is recovered at all levels. As will be discussed below, *The Winter’s Tale* seems to be structured as an alchemical, circular, journey of death and rebirth, division and reunion, in which nature, as much as time and water, performs a key role.

## Time and Water

The alchemical adept is constantly prompted to revere nature and follow her footsteps, since “upon such is based and founded the Art of the Philosopher’s Stone; for it originates in Nature, thence follows a natural end in a just form, through just and natural means” (Trismosin 1582: 16). The *opus alchymicum* is usually associated with the work of the farmer, who organizes his activities following the natural cycle of decay and renewal, in the same way as alchemists describe the time of their operations in terms of the alternation of the seasons:

As to the (length of) time required for the preparation, you must begin it in the winter [...] and extract the moisture until the spring, when all things become green, and when our substance, too, should exhibit a variety of colors. In the summer the substance should be reduced to powder by means of a powerful fire. The autumn, the season of ripeness, should witness its maturity, or final redness (Waite 1893: 131).

Time is so important in alchemical imagery that in a Renaissance alchemical allegory entitled *Bloomfields Blossoms*, Father Tyme leads the adept into the “Campe of Philosophy”, another metaphor for the ‘garden’ in which the ‘stone’, or ‘flower’, grows: “I am, said he, Tyme, The Producer of all thing; / Awake and rise, prepaire thy selfe quickly / My intent is to bring thee to the Campe of Philosophy” (Ashmole 1652: 305).

In *The Winter’s Tale* Time plays a central role: it appears on stage as a real character, as Father Time, at the beginning of the fourth act. In the same way as Time in *Bloomfields Blossoms* guides the reader to the “Campe of Philosophy”, where there are “Bloomes and Blossomes plentifully [...] flourishing [...] with Collour gay” (Ashmole 1652: 305), Time in *The Winter’s Tale* leads the audience to “th’ freshest things now reigning” (4.1.13), in “fair Bohemia” (4.1.21), after sixteen years have passed from when Perdita was abandoned by her father, King Leontes. Functioning as a Chorus, Time warns the audience that he will turn his hourglass, leaving the wintry and death-like world of Sicily and introducing the spring-like world of Bohemia:

It is in my power  
To o’erthrow law, and in one self-born hour  
To plant and o’erwhelm custom (4.1.7-9).  
[...]  
I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing  
As you had slept between (4.1.16-17).

This inversion evidently corresponds to the passage from winter, in which the first half of the drama is set and that, in alchemical imagery, denotes the beginning of the *opus alchymicum*, to spring: it indicates a transition from death to new life. However, before allowing the coming regeneration, the wheel of Time, as the alchemical wheel, also known as *rota alchemica*, has first to be turned backwards. The alchemist George Ripley, in his *Compound of Alchymie*, tells his reader that: “Thys done, go backward, turnyng thy wheele again” (Ashmole 1652: 133). One of the epithets of the *opus alchymicum* is actually *opus con-*





Fig. 2. *Splendor solis*. © British Library Board (Harley 3469)



Fig. 3. *Splendor solis*. © British Library Board (Harley 3469)

*tra naturam*, since alchemical rebirth occurs only if matter is dissolved and brought back to formless chaos or to the so-called *prima materia*, the original stuff of Creation. In *Bloomfields Blossoms* the alchemist learns that “Chaos is all thing / That we begin of, the true way of working” (Ashmole 1652: 317). As a matter of fact, alchemists believe that it is necessary to destroy in order to re-create, following a paradoxical and retrograde movement, as clearly suggested by Paracelsus for whom: “dissolution is a kind of retrogression. Whatever things Nature has gradually formed by composition, those things you ought to be able to dissolve by a reverse process” (Paracelsus 1894: 154).

Somehow following the pattern of the *solve et coagula*, *The Winter's Tale* is organized as an alchemical journey of ‘re-creation’: the movement towards death and chaos at the end of the first half of the drama is followed by an ‘ascent’ or an “anastrophe”, that is to say a reversal and a counter-movement leading to the final regeneration (Frye 1965: 73). Leontes himself, the king of Sicily, employs the term “recreation”, that focuses on the idea which echoes the notion of ‘re-making’ and ‘creating anew’, when he acknowledges his faults and decides to repent, in the third act, thus paving the way to his imminent ‘rebirth’: “Tears shed there shall be my *recreation*” (3.3.236-237, my italics). Interestingly enough, numerous

Fig. 4. *Atalanta fugiens* (embl. 28)Fig. 5. *Atalanta fugiens* (embl. 31)

alchemical writings of the time employ precisely the trope of the ‘death’ and ‘rebirth’ of the ‘chemical king’, or *rex chymicus*, as a metaphor for the alchemical process of transmutation (Fig. 2). The parable of the king is intended as an allegory of “alchemical soteriology” (Gabriele 1986: 31): denoting the golden, ‘royal’, state hidden within physical matter and the divine nature of the human soul, the chemical king stands for a condition of inner and outer perfection that is released only when he is healed from his ‘sickness’, as much as metals are cleansed of their corruption.

The healing process the ‘chemical king’ experiences is usually depicted as a passage through water: as an immersion into a cleansing bath or in the sea (Figg. 3, 4, and 5) or as a *regressus ad uterum*, an image that further dwells on the idea of going back to the origins:

Into his Virgin-Mothers Wombe,  
 Againe he enter must;  
 Soe shall the King by his new-byrth,  
 Be ten times stronger just (Ashmole 1652: 343).

Water is fundamental in the alchemical journey of transformation, since, alchemists argue, “unless there be a dissolution into water, our work cannot be brought to a successful issue” (Waite 1893: 129). The purifying power of water is usually represented in the shape of tears, rain, dew, sea or flood, and signals the phase of ‘ablution’, when “the blackness of the nigredo is washed and purified into the whiteness of the albedo” (Abraham 1998: 1). Leontes’s ‘tears’ are a harbinger of his purgatorial journey, that will last sixteen years and that begins only after the king acknowledges his inner ‘blackness’. Referring to lord Camillo, Leontes exclaims: “How he glisters / Through my rust! And how his piety / Does my deeds

make the blacker!" (3.2.167-169). The king of Sicily realizes that Camillo's goodness glistens to his 'black' self as gold does if compared to a rusty metal, "rust" being a term employed by alchemists to indicate the infection of the metal before purification (Abraham 1998: 175). Rather than being a negative sign, the appearance of the colour black during the *opus alchymicum* is regarded by alchemical philosophers as the key of the work and as a prelude to the phase of *albedo*. In a paradoxical way, alchemical writers argue that it is only "by the Gate of Blacknes thou must cum in / To lyght of Paradyce" (Ashmole 1652: 150). As far as the symbolical cleansing of the *rex chymicus* is concerned, it is worth mentioning the parable of King Duenech, a text of Arabic origin that is the source of emblem XXVIII in Maier's *Atlantia fugiens* (Fig. 4). The parable recounts the story of a king who suffers from melancholy, or "black bile", of which he is cured by the physician Pharut: "The latter [Pharut] promises him [Duenech] health and has a steam-bath prepared, / Herein he bathes and bathes again, under the glass arch, / Till, by the wet dew, he is freed from all bile" (De Jong 1969: 206). As King Duenech is healed from his 'blackness' by means of dew, tears usually function as the alchemical water that cleanses 'black' matter of its corruption, thus regenerating and reviving it: "'Tears' are literally the drops of moisture that condense at the top of the still and rain down upon the blackened body lying at the bottom of the alembic, cleansing it of its impurities" (Healy 2011: 76).

In the light of the alchemical belief in the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm, the healing process the chemical king undergoes is usually reflected in the restoration of his own realm, as expected from the first principle of the *tabula smaragdina*: "That which is above is like to that which is below, and that which is below is like to that which is above" (Linden 2003: 28). In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes's inner re-creation is mirrored in the re-creation of the outer world: immediately after the king announces his 'dissolution' into tears and, therefore, the beginning of his cleansing journey, the scene shifts to the coast of Bohemia, where Perdita is abandoned by Lord Antigonus at Leontes' behest. When the ship arrives to Bohemia, one of the mariners exclaims, "We have landed in ill time. The skies look grimly / And threaten present blusters" (3.2.3-4), thus prompting the audience to see that Leontes's disease is reflected in the illness of the cosmos. In fact, a storm hits the ship on which lord Antigonus has arrived with the newborn girl, later called Perdita. The death of the lord, devoured by a bear in a "savage clamour" (3.3.55), precedes that of the mariners, who die in the shipwreck, so that the 'old' world is destroyed by the "birth-and-death-bringing sea storm" (Sokol 1994: 118) that, conversely, saves Perdita, symbol of renewed life. That the scene of the shipwreck might have appeared to Shakespeare's audiences as a clear image of primordial chaos is suggested by the emblem "Sine iustitia, confusio", collected in Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblemes*. The emblem, based on the one by the French Barthélemy Aneau, represents order out of chaos. In the epigram accompanying Aneau's illustration, chaos is described in the following terms: "If with earth heaven should mingle and the sea with heaven, / Into ancient chaos at last all things would be confounded" (Green 1870: 449). These words recall the lines pronounced by the Clown, after witnessing the dreadful death of the mariners: "I have seen two such sights, by sea and by land! But I am not to say it is a sea, for it is now the sky; betwixt the firmament

and it you cannot thrust a bodkin's point" (3.3.81-84). *The Winter's Tale* clearly displays "a world dissolving into chaos" (Frye 2011: 8) before being regenerated, in the same way as, in the course of the *opus alchymicum*, the retrograde movement towards total dissolution is followed by a rebirth. The water of the shipwreck destroys the old order of things and reinstates a regenerated dimension, namely the reborn world of Bohemia, where Perdita, seemingly 'lost', has "grown in grace / Equal with wondering" (4.1.24-25), thus allowing the regenerative part of the drama to begin.

Alchemical 'rebirth', or 're-creation', is always preceded by a return to the source of life, to original chaos, whence true creation occurs (Fabricius 1976: 17). Believing in the necessity to 'destroy' before 're-creating', alchemists describe their 'mercurial water' as 'the water which killeth and reviveth [...] the water which dissolveth and congealeth" (Abraham 1998: 126). The destroying and preserving power of alchemical water is explicitly highlighted by George Ripley: "Thys water ys lyke [...] Poyson most stronge [...] But no man shall be by hyt intoxycate, / After the tyme yt ys into Medycyne Elevate" (Ashmole 1652: 141). Since 'mercurial' water kills in order to revive, alchemists also employ the Biblical parable of Noah's flood: Ripley argues that matter should "passe the Waters of Noyes flud / [...] For in lykewyse shall follow the floryshyng of our Stone" (Ashmole 1652: 151). Noah's flood stands for the chaotic state of the *prima materia*, the so-called phase of *ablutio*, as shown in a plate from the seventeenth-century text *De Goude Leeuw*, or *The Golden Lion*, illustrating "the biblical waters of destruction and salvation inundating the alchemical laboratory" (Fabricius 1976: 19). In *The Winter's Tale*, water is equally deadly and healing at the same time, either as the tears that signal the death of Leontes's old self and the beginning of his regenerative journey or as the sea that kills the mariners and saves Perdita. Focusing on the connection between the loss of Antigonus and of the crew and the recovery of Perdita, between a world dying and a world that has been reborn, the Steward remarks that "all the / instruments which aided to expose the child were even / Then lost when it was found" (5.2.69-71, my italics). The dichotomous structure of *The Winter's Tale*, in which life and death, as much as tragedy and comedy, are conflated, recalls "the tragi-comic art of the *Magnum opus*" (Simonds 1998: 156), a process that is usually described as a descent into death and chaos and as an upward journey of renewal. As the alchemical *prima materia*, that represents the turning point of the *opus alchymicum*, so the scene that portrays the shipwreck in *The Winter's Tale*, occurring precisely in the middle of the play, is a "battle-ground of opposing forces" (Fabricius 1976: 17), a conflict that ends with the triumph of life over death: Perdita, whom everybody believes to be dead, is miraculously recovered and the play's journey of renewal begins. Considering that in alchemical imagery the retrieval of primal matter "denotes an act of creation and one of destruction, [...] a retrograde movement and a progressive movement" (Fabricius 1976: 23), one might read the scene of the storm in *The Winter's Tale*, in which "things dying" are the source of "things newborn" (3.3.110-111), in the light of the alchemical phase of *ablutio*, a stage of dissolution that, by means of water, leads to new life.

Initiator always presuppose the retrieving of the origins of Creation in order to reproduce, by means of a reversal of all values, the fusion of the contraries, the *coincidentia*

*oppositorum*, and promote new life, thus recreating the primeval condition of the cosmos (Eliade 1989: 19). Eliade specifically refers to the Saturnalia, the ancient Roman celebrations organized in honour of the god Saturn and characterized by a suppression of all sorts of rules and boundaries. In the light of Eliade's theories, the sheep-shearing festival in the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale* might appear as a sort of saturnalian rite, a phase in which everything is "preposterous" (5.2.145), reversed, with royal characters dressed like peasants and vice-versa, and with the younger generation attempting to supplant the old one, as in the case of Florizel's rebellion against the authority of his father, Polixenes. The Saturnalia rites were notoriously based on topsy-turviness, derived from the dualism inherent in the mythological figure of Saturn, the Roman version of the Greek Cronus, traditionally known as "the god of opposites" (Klibansky, Panofsky & Saxl 1964: 134). One of the elements on which the festivity rested was the contrast among generations, since, according to the myth, the Titan Saturn devoured all his children for fear that they would eventually dethrone him (Grimal 1990: 146-147). Besides being the god of harvest and seedtime, Saturn was also conceived of as a negative divinity, as suggested by the tools with which he is usually represented, the sickle and the scythe, instruments of both life and death. Moreover, since Plutarch's times at least Saturn came to be erroneously identified with the god of time, Chronos, thus inheriting the latter's negative features as the 'devourer of things', according to the ovidian formula *Tempus edax rerum*. Taking into account that the sheep-shearing scene immediately follows the speech of Father Time, who announces a 'reversal' and a movement towards rebirth, the identification of Perdita's festival with a saturnalian kind of ritual seems to be plausible. Time, until the fourth act a destroying and 'wintry' force, turns into a renewing one. Alchemists themselves employ the figure of Saturn to highlight the ambiguous features of the *opus alchymicum*, a cycle in which regeneration is achieved only by means of a retrograde movement of dissolution, in the same way as Father Time, or Saturn, destroys the 'old' to let the 'new' ripen (Abraham 1998: 178). In emblem XII from *Atalanta fugiens*, showing Saturn with a scythe, Maier observes that "He carries a scythe because, just as Time, he mows everything he produces" (De Jong 1969: 120). However, Maier also highlights the restorative virtues of Saturn-Time and employs the myth as a metaphor for the alchemical process of transmutation. As Saturn's children were finally restored to life, so the philosopher's stone, also known as 'philosophical child', is extracted from Saturn's belly, regeneration being inherent within the initial blackness of the *nigredo*: "For below the blackness the true whiteness is hidden and the latter is taken out, i.e. taken out of the small belly of Saturn" (De Jong 1969: 120). Perdita herself might be identified with 'the daughter of Time', reunited with her parents after "a wide gap of time" (5.3.154), and, at the same time, with the 'philosophical child', the product of the chemical wedding between the king and the queen, a stage that is achieved only at the end of the *opus alchymicum*, when the *rota alchemica*, as the wheel of time, has accomplished a complete rotation. Interestingly enough, Pernety lists the term "Saturnales" in his dictionary of alchemical and mythological imagery, noticing a relation between alchemical symbolism and the Saturnalia: "Ces fêtes étaient instituées en l'honneur de Saturne, d'où les Philosophes extraient leur mercure [...] pendant le temps du

régne de Saturne, c'est-à-dire pendant le temps de la couleur noire où de la putréfaction" (Pernety 1972: 326). In the language of alchemists, Saturn represents the *prima materia* and, therefore, the deadly stage of *nigredo*, the state of dissolution and chaos that is paradoxically the source of the subsequent renewal.

Considering that "the *prima materia* appears as a clash between the progressive and regressive forces struggling in the *massa confusa* to build a new cosmos out of an old one" (Fabricius 1976: 23), *The Winter's Tale*, by displaying a world "destroyed" and one "ransomed" (5.2.15), can be read as an alchemical, redemptive, journey of re-creation in which what is lost is finally recovered. Moreover, by presenting a world that can be mended thanks to the cooperation of nature and art, and by assigning such a prominent role to time and water, Shakespeare celebrates the natural, and obliquely alchemical, cycle of dissolution and renovation, in which life and death are closely connected. As the Shepherd tells the Clown in the third act, when the tragic half of the play ends and new life begins: "Thou met'st with things dying, I with things newborn" (3.3.110-111).

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**Valentina Boschian Bailo**

### **La costruzione dell'identità nelle pratiche giornalistiche: il caso dei rifugiati**

**Abstract I:** Questo articolo si propone di analizzare il processo di costruzione dell'identità nelle pratiche giornalistiche. Prendendo in considerazione una selezione di articoli tratti da due siti web di famosi media in lingua inglese, BBC e CNN, si analizzano le rappresentazioni dei rifugiati in cammino lungo la Rotta Balcanica. L'articolo paragona le rappresentazioni proposte dai due canali allo scopo di individuare come vengano proposti al pubblico le figure dei rifugiati nel mondo occidentale oggi. L'analisi verte sul concetto di identità e sulla sua espressione linguistica in ambito giornalistico.

**Abstract II:** This essay aims to analyse practices of identity construction in news discourse. By taking into consideration a selection of news items collected from two online mainstream English-language press websites, namely the BBC and CNN official websites, I investigate how refugees walking the so-called Balkan Route are represented. I proceed by comparing how migrants are represented by the two different media channels in order to look for portrayals of refugees in the Western world in present-day news media. The discussion revolves around the concept of identity and its linguistic construction in news.

#### **Introduzione**

Nell'epoca della globalizzazione, gli spostamenti umani sono diventati un fenomeno pressoché strutturale delle società contemporanee, siano esse luogo di partenza o punto di arrivo, e stanno acquisendo sempre maggior rilievo e proporzioni. Le crescenti disuguaglianze, la delocalizzazione produttiva e la cosiddetta "guerra al terrore", ovvero l'intervento interessato in conflitti in nome della pace e della giustizia (McLeod 2010: 308), concorrono alla destabilizzazione delle strutture ed organizzazioni sociali esistenti e contribuiscono all'insorgere di nuovi flussi migratori da zone di crisi verso l'Occidente. Il notevole influsso di migranti nel territorio europeo ha recentemente portato alcuni Paesi ad assumere un atteggiamento d'indifferenza, chiusura o ostilità nei confronti delle persone in arrivo, prendendo a volte misure drastiche e intolleranti nei confronti del fenomeno migratorio e causando in tal modo disguidi e disfunzioni a livello di applicazione e rispetto dei fondamentali diritti civili. La diversità etnica e culturale delle persone migranti, infatti, pur costituendo un valore aggiunto alle società di destinazione, può anche tradursi in una fonte di conflitto e la differenza percepita fomenta preoccupazione (Simpson & Mayr 2010: 22). L'inevitabile impatto che il fenomeno dello spostamento forzato, involontario o volontario di persone ha sul

tessuto sociale globale, la sua crescente importanza e la moltitudine di esseri umani in esso coinvolti sono la principale ragione alla base di uno studio sul tema.

Questo articolo si propone di inserirsi nel cuore delle problematiche e circostanze attuali allo scopo di indagare le modalità di rappresentazione dei migranti da parte di alcuni prestigiosi media occidentali; le migrazioni, infatti, non costituiscono più un evento occasionale, bensì un fenomeno strutturale della società odierna di cui mette in discussione gli assetti sociali (McLeod 2010: 306; Blommaert 2010: 13). Nello specifico, questo studio indaga da un punto di vista prettamente linguistico il fenomeno delle migrazioni di persone procedenti dall'Asia, dal Medio Oriente e dall'Africa e dirette verso l'Europa attraverso i Balcani, prendendo in esame gli strumenti linguistici e le strategie discorsive adottate in una selezione di notizie giornalistiche. Le figure la cui identità viene presa in esame includono, dunque, persone in fuga dalla guerra (come nel caso della Siria) o dalle sue conseguenze, effetti e/o sviluppi (come nel caso dell'Afghanistan). Scopo di quest'analisi è di tracciare un profilo dell'identità che viene quotidianamente attribuita a tali migranti da parte di media occidentali. Il materiale selezionato consiste di sei articoli pubblicati da due prestigiosi canali di comunicazione ed informazione online in lingua inglese, ovvero la BBC e la CNN, trattanti tre diversi argomenti. Gli articoli sono stati scelti in base a due principali criteri: da un lato la facile fruizione delle notizie pubblicate in Internet, svincolate da limiti spazio-temporali e, spesso, economici di accessibilità garantisce un discreto pubblico di lettori; dall'altro la lingua utilizzata, ovvero l'inglese, permette l'accesso alle notizie ad un numero molto alto di utenti. La scelta dei dati si basa sulla supposizione che più ampio è il pubblico di fruitori, maggiore è la potenziale influenza delle ideologie presenti nei testi. Un altro fattore determinante nella selezione del materiale è la volontà di stabilire un paragone fra le rappresentazioni formulate dai due canali d'informazione, motivo per cui è imprescindibile che il materiale selezionato condivida periodo di pubblicazione, argomento trattato e tipologia testuale. L'analisi si concentra su un periodo definito di tempo a fini di coerenza e completezza: tutti gli eventi riportati negli articoli fanno riferimento al mese di settembre 2015.

Uno dei temi fondamentali relativi alla costruzione dell'identità è il ruolo svolto dai mezzi di comunicazione di massa nel forgiarla: essi rappresentano gli attori sociali e ne diffondono le immagini potenzialmente a livello mondiale, influenzando sull'insieme di conoscenze ed opinioni del pubblico, incoraggiandolo in tal modo ad appropriarsene e a farne uso nei processi di interpretazione della realtà (Semino 2008: 85; Johnson & Ensslin 2007: 13). L'informazione dei media, le ideologie e le rappresentazioni mentali formulate possono dunque rinsaldare il senso di differenza dall'"Altro", o invece quello di comune appartenenza ad uno stesso gruppo, rafforzando in tal modo i meccanismi sociali di inclusione od esclusione (La Barbera 2015: 9) e promuovendo immaginari di "intrusione" o di complementarietà. Le idee veicolate possono dunque diventare uno strumento di appropriazione, controllo e mantenimento del potere a vantaggio di particolari gruppi sociali: da un lato il flusso di informazioni trasmesse permette di costruire il proprio prestigio ed un'immagine di sé positiva, mentre dall'altro può servire a minare l'affidabilità e la reputazione degli altri (Semino 2008: 85). L'immagine delle persone migranti delineata dai mezzi di comunicazione è il probabile frutto di gruppi ideologici dominanti, riflette interessi economici, politici e sociali, e come tale mira a fomentare un atteggiamento comune e delle opinioni condivise nei

confronti del fenomeno migratorio che siano favorevoli alla salvaguardia di tali interessi. A loro volta, tali convinzioni hanno necessariamente un risvolto pratico nelle azioni che chi legge decide di intraprendere in merito alla questione migratoria (Stibbe 2015: 1). Altresì, i media hanno il potere di colmare eventuali lacune di chi legge riguardo alla tematica delle migrazioni e il retroterra storico, sociale e culturale delle persone migranti. La rappresentazione dei rifugiati e dei richiedenti asilo può dunque rivelare stereotipi, pregiudizi, miti e cagioni d'ansia dei lettori attraverso un'esposizione erronea o fuorviante dei fatti concernenti il fenomeno migratorio e delle persone in esso coinvolte, o mettere in luce la personalità e le caratteristiche degli individui rappresentati (Banks 2012: 2).

L'interesse per la questione identitaria nasce dal fatto che i nuovi flussi migratori hanno portato allo sviluppo di nuovi tipi identitari estremamente differenziati e svincolati dai limiti nazionali, essendo di per sé transnazionali e in movimento (Blommaert 2010: 172), delle "identità multiculturali" favorite dalle nuove tecnologie informatiche che danno la possibilità a chi si sposta di mantenere frequenti contatti con il paese d'origine e con la comunità di provenienza pur vivendo altrove. La validità dei vecchi schemi interpretativi degli attori sociali viene dunque messa in discussione dalle persone in movimento, la cui identità richiede necessariamente la rottura di modelli identitari rigidi e stabili e l'introduzione di categorie più versatili e varie. Una delle conseguenze di questa nuova sfaccettata identità potenzialmente ubiqua concerne il concetto di integrazione: nuove identità dovrebbero presupporre la nascita di nuove forme di convivenza e di inserimento nel tessuto sociale della comunità ospitante e l'abbandono di posizioni sociali rigide e ben definite (Blommaert 2016: 1-3). Al contrario, all'aumento della diversità e dell'ibridismo da un lato e della de-territorialità dall'altro pare corrispondere una chiusura all'interno dei confini nazionali ed un apparente rafforzamento dell'idea di omogeneità; in tal modo le persone migranti vengono costrette all'interno di categorie riduttive ed inadeguate a rappresentarli nella loro pienezza, che escludono e reprimono invece di stimolare un vero senso di appartenenza alla, e da parte della, società ricevente (Blommaert 2010: 177).

Dopo aver presentato il materiale, la terminologia e la metodologia selezionati per l'analisi, l'articolo espone e discute le principali pratiche linguistiche e discorsive riscontrate nei testi analizzati e le rappresentazioni dei migranti che esse configurano.

### **La costruzione dell'identità**

Traendo spunto dalle parole di La Barbera (2015: 9), con il termine identità si vuol fare riferimento a due processi, ossia quello di auto-percezione di sé e di classificazione sociale. Combinati, essi risultano nel riconoscimento della propria diversità dagli altri membri della comunità cui si appartiene. A sua volta, il senso di appartenenza alla comunità viene stimolato dalla società di arrivo stessa, la quale può attribuire alle persone immigrate lo status di membro desiderato della comunità, o di cittadino indesiderato ed appartenente solo alla sua comunità di provenienza. In altre parole, l'identità si basa sia sul riconoscersi, sia sull'essere riconosciuti come parte della società di destinazione (Krzyżanowski & Wodak 2008: 101;114). Identità, perciò, è tanto frutto delle azioni e delle parole dei rifugiati stessi, quanto risultato della loro rappresentazione e/o della loro interazione con altri attori sociali citati nei testi, molto spesso cittadini europei. In questo articolo si adotta il termine "rifugiato" per

riferirsi a tutte quelle persone che hanno fatto richiesta, o vogliono fare richiesta, di protezione internazionale e a tutte le categorie di rifugiati (economici, politici, ecc.).

L'analisi del modo in cui viene strutturata la "rappresentazione dell'Altro" nelle notizie giornalistiche si pone l'obiettivo di destrutturare eventuali ideologie formulate da élite sociali che contribuiscano potenzialmente a perpetuare ingiustizie sociali (Wodak 2009: 8-9) e di trovare delle possibili rappresentazioni alternative. Il concetto di "rappresentazione dell'Altro" è strettamente correlato alla costruzione del "sé", ovvero permette di delimitare approssimativamente i confini della propria identità attraverso l'individuazione di quelli dell'identità altrui. Tale processo comporta la costituzione di *ingroups* e *outgroups*, ovvero di gruppi di inclusione e gruppi di esclusione che fanno percepire determinati individui o gruppi sociali come "vicini", o come "distanti" (Simpson & Mayr 2010: 23). Questo concetto di "distanza" ha delle implicazioni per quanto riguarda l'atteggiamento di chi legge nei confronti dei protagonisti delle notizie, in quanto può facilitare od ostacolare l'identificazione del pubblico con le persone descritte e di conseguenza può influire sulle sue azioni concrete nella realtà.

I criteri utilizzati per analizzare l'identità dei rifugiati sono tratti dalla ricerca di Bednarek e Caple (2012) e riguardano: il processo di negoziazione di sentimenti fra l'autore del testo e chi legge; il grado di generalizzazione con cui vengono rappresentati gli attori sociali nelle notizie giornalistiche (perciò si dirà che un individuo o gruppo di persone è molto individualizzato quando gli viene conferita prominenza nel testo, mentre è poco individualizzato quando viene rappresentato in maniera approssimativa); il grado di astrattezza o meno con cui un fatto, fenomeno, gruppo di persone, ecc. è riportato; la spettacolarizzazione ed il potenziale drammatico di un evento e la presentazione dei suoi effetti e delle sue conseguenze in termini iperbolici, esagerandone, ad esempio, la gravità, le proporzioni e la serietà. Tali criteri sono fra loro interrelati, per cui ad una rappresentazione molto individualizzata di un attore sociale corrisponderà in tutta probabilità un alto grado di identificazione e coinvolgimento da parte del lettore, mentre una rappresentazione caratterizzata da un basso livello di concretezza può portare alla concettualizzazione di un fatto, entità o attore sociale come distante dalla realtà del lettore e può offuscarne le caratteristiche e la natura.

### **I "rifugiati": il ritratto dell'"Altro"**

L'identità dei migranti risulta generalmente caratterizzata da ambivalenza. Due sono le principali tipologie descrittive adoperate e tendono a concettualizzare i migranti e il fenomeno migratorio evocando immagini rispettivamente astratte o concrete. Ciò è evidente già a partire dalla terminologia utilizzata, per cui ci si riferisce ai rifugiati in termini di "migranti", "richiedenti asilo", "rifugiati", o "persone": l'espressione "richiedenti asilo" li introduce in termini più specifici e connotati del più generale "migranti", che fornisce poche informazioni riguardo il loro status e i diritti che ne dovrebbero derivare.

Spesso le immagini evocate si caratterizzano per la spettacolarizzazione dell'evento o argomento cui fanno riferimento e si connotano in modo negativo sia dal punto di vista degli eventi riportati, sia da quello della terminologia impiegata, che di frequente fa riferimento al campo semantico della guerra o dell'illegalità ("scuffles", BBC 1; "tense stand-off with police", BBC 2; "crisis", BBC 3). Si tende, inoltre, a rappresentare il fenomeno migra-

rio come una crisi o una situazione problematica, descrivendolo dunque in termini negativi. I rifugiati vengono perciò spesso rappresentati come ribelli alle autorità e alle leggi dei Paesi d'accoglienza e in termini di distanza culturale dai costumi europei, evocando potenzialmente paura e preoccupazione nel pubblico e giustificandone l'esclusione dal tessuto sociale (Banks 2012: 2). Un altro aspetto della rappresentazione del fenomeno migratorio ha a che fare con il concetto di sicurezza: sono vari i riferimenti alla sorveglianza e al rafforzamento e/o chiusura dei confini nazionali, al crimine e a generali misure repressive adottate in risposta al crescente senso di insicurezza dei cittadini europei.

Per quanto riguarda la rappresentazione degli attori sociali, vi è una tendenza generale a contrapporre i membri della società ospitante ai rifugiati, presentando così i partecipanti degli avvenimenti in termini manichei di "buoni" e "cattivi" (Banks 2012: 16). Rifugiati e autorità si caratterizzano per diversi gradi di individualizzazione e concretezza che permettono agli attori sociali di acquisire o perdere rilievo nel testo: se delle autorità viene generalmente fornita un'immagine relativamente dettagliata e completa, ai rifugiati corrisponde un processo di dis-identificazione per il quale vengono presentati collettivamente in termini di "immigrati", "migranti" o "persone" e solo raramente come singoli individui (Banks 2012: 2). Fra le principali concettualizzazioni astratte dei rifugiati vi è quella tesa a rimarcare le proporzioni e l'entità dei flussi migratori; a volte, l'espedito retorico della metafora viene utilizzato per esagerarne le dimensioni e dunque il potenziale impatto sulla società di arrivo. La raffigurazione metaforica più evidente nei testi esaminati rappresenta i rifugiati in termini di acqua: spesso il discorso dell'immigrazione fa riferimento al movimento dell'acqua per costruire l'immagine di persone impegnate nel processo di migrazione, o per rappresentare i rifugiati in termini di eventi meteorologici catastrofici ("[a] steady stream of migrants", BBC 2; "flood", CNN 1, CNN 3), proponendo così un'immagine dei rifugiati quali potenziale minaccia all'Europa che arrecherà danni alle società di arrivo e mettendo in atto un processo di disumanizzazione dei soggetti rappresentati (Martin 2015: 314). Non mancano, poi, riferimenti all'onere che i rifugiati rappresenterebbero per l'economia del Paese ospitante e di messa a rischio del retroterra culturale europeo e dei suoi valori fondanti. Il clima generale richiama quello di uno stato d'allerta caratterizzato dall'introduzione di controlli e regolamentazioni più severi e da un'apparente processo di disintegrazione dell'istituzione Europa dovuta alla presenza di rifugiati sul suo territorio. Aspetto caratterizzante è dunque la variabile della negatività nelle notizie, come dimostrato da uno studio sulle pratiche giornalistiche inerenti al tema dei migranti e dei richiedenti asilo condotto da Gemi et al. (2013), il quale rivela come le notizie riguardanti il fenomeno dell'immigrazione tendano ad essere connotate negativamente e a focalizzarsi su eventi e fatti controversi, che vengono considerati più *newsworthy*, ovvero rilevanti, perché "fanno notizia". La rappresentazione dei "migranti" in quanto partecipi o coinvolti in eventi negativi non può che avere delle ripercussioni negative sulla percezione che i lettori hanno di loro: un'immagine negativa dei rifugiati può favorire atteggiamenti di sfiducia ed ostilità nei confronti delle persone in arrivo o già stabilitesi in Europa.

Al polo opposto, i metodi che permettono di delineare un'immagine dei rifugiati relativamente individualizzata si rilevano nelle rappresentazioni di gruppi di rifugiati o di singoli individui affidate alla voce dei rifugiati stessi, per quanto inusuale nelle notizie sui

migranti (Gemi *et al.* 2013: 269-270). È il caso dei reportage di giornalisti corrispondenti, le cui raffigurazioni dei rifugiati tendono ad includere la loro dimensione emotiva e psicologica (Busà 2014: 68-69) (“a group of migrants and refugees”, “the group”, “[s]everal people”, “the crowd”, “[s]everal refugees”, “a father carrying a baby”, “families” and “young men”, BBC 2), concentrandosi dunque su gruppi di persone più esigui e su categorizzazioni più specifiche (padri, famiglie, ragazzi, ecc.). Potenzialmente, esse avranno un maggior impatto emotivo sul pubblico di lettori, favorendo una più agile identificazione con i personaggi descritti.

È da notare che la rappresentazione dei rifugiati non è vincolata al ruolo, alle parole ed alle azioni da loro compiute, bensì può derivare da quelli di altri partecipanti coinvolti nel processo di migrazione o dal ritratto di attori sociali terzi presentati come non attendibili, le cui parole ed azioni, e dunque l'immagine dei rifugiati che propongono, vengono discreditate. Ne è un esempio il discorso istituzionale, che generalmente attribuisce loro un basso grado di concretezza ed individualità (“17.000 arrivals”, “the flow”, “migrants” and “refugees”, BBC 3).

Nonostante gli articoli tendano a focalizzarsi più sulla rappresentazione di un'Europa in crisi, che sul ritratto dei rifugiati, l'immagine complessiva dei migranti che viene proposta è duplice e contrastante. Da un lato essi vengono percepiti come una potenziale minaccia al mondo occidentale: una minaccia identitaria se concepita in termini sociali, ma anche economica, dovuta perlopiù alle spese di accoglienza ed inserimento nella società, e nondimeno politica, connaturata ai processi di fragilità e destabilizzazione delle strutture europee e del potenziale impatto che il fenomeno migratorio potrebbe avere su di esse. L'immagine che se ne propone risulta essere piuttosto astratta, focalizzata su un soggetto tipicamente collettivo ed omogeneizzante, se non addirittura metaforico. Si tratta dunque di un ritratto poco incline a stabilire un legame di comunanza tra migrante e lettore o a favorire da parte di quest'ultimo una disposizione d'animo ed una mentalità aperta nei confronti dei nuovi arrivati. Dall'altro lato, vi è un modulo rappresentativo teso a rafforzare i vincoli di comunanza fra lettore e migranti, incentrato sulle loro caratteristiche, identità, storie e vicissitudini personali, che ne mette in risalto la natura di esseri umani, di individui con una propria personalità.

Queste due modalità rappresentative dei migranti, l'una fonte di una generale preoccupazione, l'altra di comprensione e relativa identificazione col soggetto in questione, coesistono, si intrecciano e a volte combaciano ambiguamente nelle immagini formulate nelle notizie giornalistiche. Il sovrapporsi di formulazioni anche contrastanti delle persone migranti potenzialmente evoca nel lettore una probabile reazione emotiva duplice se non sfaccettata e dai confini indistinti. Ciononostante, indipendentemente dal loro essere ritratti in termini relativamente positivi o negativi, la rappresentazione dei rifugiati pare essere formulata principalmente in termini di un *outgroup*, ovvero di un gruppo di esclusione, in contrasto dunque con l'idea di *ingroup*, gruppo inclusivo. L'effetto che questa rappresentazione dei rifugiati rischia di produrre sul pubblico dei lettori è un generale senso di insicurezza e una sensazione di preoccupazione rivolti alle potenziali future conseguenze della convivenza con l'“Altro”. È importante sottolineare come il fatto che a volte i migranti vengano ritratti in qualità di elemento destabilizzante per le istituzioni europee può implicare o riferirsi

indirettamente alla fragilità dell'Europa stessa e delle sue politiche migratorie inconsistenti, piuttosto che ad un pericolo connesso alla ricezione dei rifugiati.

### Conclusioni

In conclusione, nei canali di informazione considerati pare esservi una tendenza generale a rappresentare le persone migranti in termini di alterità rispetto alla società europea ospitante. Nonostante si faccia spesso riferimento al campo dell'illegalità e della criminalità, del caos, del disordine e di altri aspetti difficili o problematici, la rappresentazione dei rifugiati non è intrinsecamente negativa, bensì diventa tale nel momento in cui il fenomeno dei migranti e dei richiedenti asilo viene percepito come una minaccia all'assetto istituzionale europeo. La questione dell'immigrazione si rivela perlopiù un problema di accoglienza e di preoccupazione riguardo alle future conseguenze della convivenza con l'"Altro". La risposta alla migrazione può dunque essere o l'accettazione, o il rifiuto della (più o meno percepita) diversità: "[t]he stranger may be someone, we welcome into our home, we shelter and we help, but may also be someone we treat with distrust, skepticism and suspicion" (Banks 2012: 11). La duplice ed a volte contraddittoria identità attribuita ai rifugiati rischia di lasciare il lettore interdetto, indeciso se accoglierli o escluderli dalla comunità d'arrivo. Il ruolo cruciale giocato dai media è determinante nel promuovere l'accettazione dei rifugiati, oppure nel sottintendere l'idea che stiano abusando di un sistema progettato appositamente per la loro protezione (Banks 2012: 5).

Alla base delle rappresentazioni di *outgroup* emerge l'esclusione del concetto di intero multiculturalità come capacità di muoversi all'interno di due o più macrosistemi socio-culturali, o come riconoscimento di tali sistemi in termini di un unicum al quale il proprio retroterra culturale fa riferimento. Il problema relativo alla questione migratoria riguarda il fatto che un fenomeno di tale portata mette in discussione l'apparente omogeneità culturale ed etnica della comunità ospitante (La Barbera 2015: 5), idea che mal si adatta ad un mondo caratterizzato dalla fluidità (Blommaert 2010: 155). È necessario trovare nuovi modi di rappresentare la realtà, strumenti linguistici ed identità che permettano di descrivere (McLeod 2010: 309) i cambiamenti sociali in atto, abbandonare concetti vincolanti quali l'integrazione completa e introdurre modelli di riferimento che comprendano la possibilità di nuove e diverse forme di convivenza. L'odierno quadro generale di ibridismo sociale richiede un cambiamento discorsivo di fondo: se la società cambia, deve cambiare il modo di rappresentarla.

Un approccio responsabile alla questione relativa alla ricezione delle persone migranti va dunque ricercato anche nella formulazione di un concetto di identità sfaccettato, mutevole ed estremamente personale, che prenda in considerazione la possibilità di un'integrazione "parziale" (o piuttosto "alternativa") (Blommaert 2016: 3; La Barbera 2015: 3). L'accettazione ed accoglienza dei rifugiati può essere facilitata dalla costruzione di un'immagine dei rifugiati diversa ed alternativa, che veda la "diversità" non in termini di un'intrusione, ma di un arricchimento, smantellando atteggiamenti di sfiducia e timore nei confronti dei rifugiati e strutturando il fenomeno migratorio e dei richiedenti asilo non come un tema di sicurezza, ma come tema di umanità (Banks, 2012: 17). Così facendo si potranno porre le basi per una riconciliazione con e nella diversità.

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**Elisa Fortunato**

**Medicine Matters in Five Comedies of Shakespeare. From the Renaissance Context to a Reading of the Play**

*Luisa Camaiora & Andrea A. Conti. 2016. Medicine Matters in Five Comedies of Shakespeare. From the Renaissance Context to a Reading of the Play. Peter Lang, pp. 246, EUR 63.30, Formats: EPUB, PDF, Paperback, ISBN 9783034323130*



The two-authored volume examines the presence of medicine, in all its facets, in five comedies of Shakespeare (*The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and investigates the role that medicine matters play in the critical analysis of Shakespeare's comedies.

The book is divided in two parts and has ten chapters. In the first part (*Some Features of the Renaissance Context*), Andrea A. Conti presents a fascinating overview of the medical professionals during the Renaissance and of the medical topics mostly debated at the time. These topics, in turn, are the ones that could be considered Shakespeare's background (from the theory of the humours to the ocular pathologies, from syphilis to the "green sickness", e.g. hysteria, melancholia). He also discusses the most significant achievements of Western medicine and the instrumental role played in this context by an enhanced knowledge of human anatomy and innovative operative techniques.

In the second part of the book, Luisa Camaiora combines the medical matters addressed by Conti with a close reading of five Shakespeare's comedies, offering to the reader an illu-

minating and unexpected perspective from which to interpret the plays. The second part (*A Reading of Five Comedies of Shakespeare*) is organised into five chapters, each one devoted to a comedy and to the specific dominant medical topic that the authoress identifies in it. The first chapter is devoted to *The Comedy of Errors*, to the centrality of sight, and to the dangers hidden in a diagnosis based exclusively on one and univocal parameter of interpretation. The authoress shows how an undifferentiated diagnosis, by ignoring the distance between the visual and the actual, could falsify the reality itself. Luisa Camaiora then turns to *Love's Labour's Lost*. Apart from a general concern with language, the play examines the disorders inherent in certain excessive uses of speech and its functions. Camaiora's scrutiny originally contributes to the study of the Shakespearean comedy identifying two driving motives: a minor one, linked to the concept of love as a contagious disease, and a major motif relating to the presence of logorrhoeic symptoms in the characters. The third chapter, building on the previous one, continues investigating love and centres on its problematic effects and on the consequences of passion ("the chameleon syndrome") in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The chapter "Homoeopathic Necessity in *The Taming of Shrew*: Interactive Therapy" brilliantly focuses on the 'efficacy' of an interactive cure which leads to the final outcome: Katherina's recovery coincides with her transformation into the anodyne wife. Camaiora dedicates the last chapter to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Of particular interest here is her analysis of the dermatological pathologies in the play: if a damaged skin can expose men to maladies, a moral distemper can weaken the spiritual temper.

The entire book is characterized by an impressive and well-documented variety of medical matters (first part) always linked with a thorough scrutiny of the medical allusions identified in the five comedies of Shakespeare analysed (second part). In Shakespeare medicine matters because it provides an unexpected perspective from which to interpret the plays and their multifaceted characters. The book as a whole adds meaningful and original insights into Shakespeare's study.

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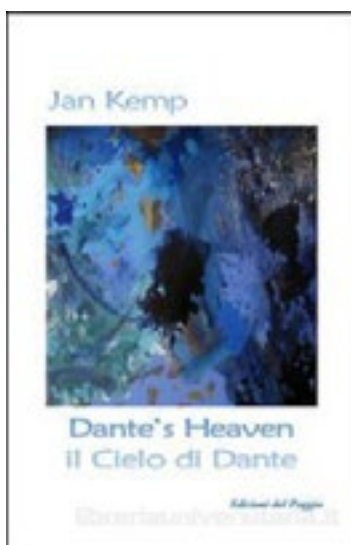
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**Peter Byrne**

**The Scale of Love: Jan Kemp's *'Dante's Heaven***

***Jan Kemp. 2017. Dante's Heaven. Il cielo di Dante. Translated by Aldo Magagnino. Poggio Imperiale (FG): Edizioni del Poggio, pp. 150, € 12,00. ISBN 9788889008881***



But it must once have been there  
 la selva oscura – the dark wood?  
 Yes, the one  
 we all take years  
 to come through – yes, it existed  
 (Kemp 2016: 118).

The New Zealand poet and thorough cosmopolite, Jan Kemp, doesn't disdain being somebody's child. In "On news of a poet's death" (88) she tells us: "I've had a few fathers since first questioning God the given". In *Dante's Heaven*, her collection of 2006, Dante Alighieri has become her parent of choice. This makes crucial Aldo Magagnino's incisive 2016 Italian translation, *Il Cielo di Dante*. Dante and with him Kemp are brought back to Italy. The operation is daunting, not least because the great Florentine has had so many different faces in English language poetry. Which one captured Kemp's imagination?

We can rule out the Dante of John Ruskin, William Morris, or the Pre-Raphaelites. For them he was a key to understanding the Middle-Ages. They stood their own age up against his and drew conclusions about how to organize society and make art. 20th Century Modernist poets looked to another Dante, which isn't Kemp's either. Distracted, as their world fell to pieces, they found solace dreaming with Dante of a complete and ordered universe. As poets, they praised the unsurpassed craftsman, but when T. S. Eliot gave Dante an edge over Shakespeare it was because Dante offered a monumental philosophic-religious system that the Elizabethan age could not provide. From within this system, Eliot could claim that Canto XXXIII of "Paradiso" was the greatest poetry ever written. It portrayed the beatific vision, the gazing upon God Himself.

Now while Jan Kemp may have embraced Dante, her purview goes beyond his Christian God. Her splendid "Beatus" (134) makes that clear. It gives substance to a Maori myth where the vision of all visions is that of a lover seeking to look on the face of her beloved. The short, sharp poem, unclouded by 13th Century mysticism, is full of the bright colour of the palpable and alive with the excitement of the situation. It reveals Kemp's ambition, which is to meld the aboriginal worldview with a classical Western one. Whether or not she succeeds in *Dante's Heaven* or whether success is possible at all, her image of Dante and Virgil rising out of Hell into a Purgatory of antipodean light won't be forgotten:

And Dante, pilgrim, could have climbed up/  
out of the shaft, plum opposite Jerusalem, to stand/  
ankle-deep in the Pacific, on a shoal near the Kermadecs  
("Crux Australis", 12)

There's sky enough to dive into/  
islands in green blue water/  
to swim to.  
("Dante's 'heaven'", 16)

Kemp, like the rest of us, is a child of the Age of Identity. Our political thinkers decry it. They say that striving merely to know who we are keeps us from making the world how it ought to be. Kemp is impelled to specify her national and personal identity. Her remarkable cosmopolitan credentials may even intensify the impulse. It is all the stronger in the outgrowths of European imperialism around the world. Hardly surprising then that Kemp has glimpses of new identities for Dante and Beatrice. He is not always so truculently present: "He's evaporated / into the crowd" ("Someone kissed me", 116). Beatrice can muse, theology forgotten, perturbed like any lover: "A portrait of Dante's younger self" (112). She even has her own strategy in love: "Beatrice denies Dante her greeting" (126). She had a past that was innocent of responsibility for him. Then "she stepped thoughtless / fearless & lightly as a muse" ("Being Beatrice", 128).

Dante and love is a phrase that raises before us a grandiose flight of stairs with diverse 'amore' on each step. The last line of his 'Divine Comedy' touches the metaphysical summit when it says that it's "[God's] love that moves the sun and the other stars" (*Par.* 33. 143-145).

The second to last line is just as lofty but in the mystical heights. Dante says "My will and my desire were turned by love" (*ibid.*). In other words, he can find none to describe his beatific vision except to say that he knew his own desire was in accord with God's love.

The love evoked by the poems of *Dante's Heaven* is of a more familiar sort, grounded, always respectful and sedate: "The banal but lifted. Paradise yes, 'but earthy'" ("Eloquence", 52). It can be pious as when Kemp honours her admired dead. As a necrologist her personal touch is exquisite and always a poet's:

what he still would have written  
I so wanted to know [...]  
and it is here –  
where we must pick up the traces.  
("On news of a poet's death", 82)

Kemp sees her role as a moral imperative, a civil, or at least a civil-artistic responsibility: "We carry the dead / and we must now be / what the lives stood for" ("Silence / speech", 102). We can speculate on how much her career as a teacher and inescapable role as representative abroad of her small country has made the poet Kemp into something of a public figure. The nature of a public figures is to be positive, and Kemp is a stranger to negativity. Evil doesn't appear in her poems. She has come through Dante's 'Inferno' unscathed. That original rogues' gallery, crowded with wrong-doing and its gruesome retribution, doesn't seem to have touched her. She applies the rod only to a rampant male or two and even then, the taps are affectionate: "No wonder she went overseas. But men / here were like that then, except for Hermes" ("Jousting", 130). As for the intimate, we have the beautiful "Love is a babe" (110). It distances the experience by evoking Beatrice but speaks very much for now. Its sense is that the poet's life is a continuous accumulation of love, citing Shakespeare's Sonnet CXV: "Love is a babe; then might I not say so / To give full growth to that which still doth grow?" "Look, look well", Jan Kemp quotes from Dante's 'Inferno' XII, 18, in her "Ming-blue fish" (60). She's exhorting a painter, but it's advice she has made her own in contemplating a world so very far from Florence and the great Florentine's dream. It's her serene world: "Everything suits, when you think of it" ("Down to the ground", 62).

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Danila Cannamela

Objects in Italian Life and Culture: Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality

***Paolo Bartoloni. 2016. Objects in Italian Life and Culture: Fiction, Migration, and Artificiality. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 203 pp., US\$ 99.99. ISBN 978-1-349-94874-1***



<http://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9781349948741>

Bartoloni's *Objects in Italian Life and Culture* retraces landscapes in which individuals and objects are joined by relations of co-belonging, contending that people's relations with objects make places meaningful. The author combines Cultural Studies and psychoanalytical theories with a variety of philosophical perspectives, including Phenomenology and Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). The book comprises six chapters and explores four typologies of relations: the fictional, migrant, multicultural/transnational, and the artificial.

Chapter two, which follows chapter one, the introduction, provides a theoretical overview of the notion of meaningful places. Bartoloni discusses Freud's definition of 'oceanic feeling' – a sense of oneness that ties a person to a place – and Heidegger's image of the house as the privileged locus of the relation between individuals and language. Bartoloni then refers to anthropologist Ferdinando Fava's study on the 'poetic of inhabiting'. This research highlights how private narratives of homing can reveal microcosms of identities, feelings, and interactions that controvert the public image of a place. Bartoloni also discuss-

es how the framework of modernity shifted people's view of material objects. He engages with intellectuals like Simmel, Marx, Debord, and Pasolini to discuss that the devaluation of the sense of things is directly related to the modern desacralization of places. Yet, borrowing from philosopher Tonino Griffero, Bartoloni suggests that the current challenge is to re-evaluate our empathic experience with things and restore a caring atmosphere of reciprocity.

In the third chapter, dedicated to fictional objects, Bartoloni borrows from Object-Oriented Ontology that the meaning of objects resides in their materiality. However, unlike OOO, he affirms that materiality does not withdraw itself from relations. The material significance of objects depends on processes of mediations. In contending this point, he draws from Michel Serres' and Bjorn Schiermer's view that the bonding experience between people and material things turns objects into markers of collective meanings. Bartoloni then analyzes the relational role of fictional objects, examining Italo Svevo's novel *La coscienza di Zeno* and Michelangelo Antonioni's films. In Svevo's book, the coming together of bodies and / or objects is essential to the protagonist's journey toward consciousness. Bartoloni focuses on Zeno's fetishism of the female body, the character's sick body as a form of knowledge-making experience, and the complex 'materiality' of the novel's language. Moving to two films by Antonioni, *L'eclisse* and *Blow up*, Bartoloni contends that the Italian director creates a 'phenomenology of vision' that stems from the mediation of actors and objects. Antonioni turns materiality into a tangible sense of restlessness and incommunicability. These cinematic images, like Svevo's language, are objects that simultaneously ground the characters to the world and suspend them among the countless options of modernity.

Drawing from the online exhibition *Belongings*, in chapter four Bartoloni contextualizes 'migrant objects' in the socio-historical setting of the Italian migration to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. The author examines the interviews with immigrants collected in this exhibition. He refers to the testimonies of southern-Italian women who brought kitchen tools to Australia and explains that these domestic objects served the purpose to recreate a sense of place overseas. These everyday tools can also tell of women's struggle with education: many female immigrants lived marginalized in the domestic space and secluded from the community for their inability to speak English. Often the language barrier became the 'object' that identified Italians as foreign people and made them feel out of place. Immigrants then used objects to create a 'solid' surrogate for their precarious identities.

In the fifth chapter, Bartoloni analyzes multicultural and transcultural objects that represent the development of the new identity of Italians in Australia. The chapter features the case of the Italian Forum, a replica of a typical Italian square, inaugurated in Leichhardt, Sydney's Little Italy, in 1999. The Forum intended to celebrate Italian integration; yet, according to Bartoloni, this space does not creatively elaborate on the range of contrasting experiences and emotions that informs multiculturalism. In attaining a 'musealization' of an idealized 'authentic' Italy, the Forum does not express the struggles that immigrants underwent in the gradual development of Italian-Australian hyphenated identities. Bartoloni argues that an urban design that aims to express transculturalism must engage with a complex process of translation that finds new shared values and symbols in the cultural 'in-betweenness' of migration.



In the last chapter, the author refers to Ludovico Zorzi's *La città e il teatro*, a book that illustrates the connection between urban design and political power, highlighting how the Medici family shaped and staged Florence into a showroom of power. The author then focuses on the theatrical environment of shopping malls and analyzes how new commercial developments are trying to charge non-places with symbolic values that convey a sense of place to their shoppers. Bartoloni examines the case of the Sicilia Outlet Village in Agira (near Catania). The outlet re-creates a traditional Sicilian village by featuring a quasi-cinematic set with native trees, local materials, and the typical Baroque style. The idea that inspired this site was to revitalize a depressed area and conjugate economic growth with cultural valorization. Bartoloni applies translation theories to the Sicilia Outlet Village, contending that in translating the 'authenticity' of a Sicilian village into a concrete place, the outlet has become a successful business model that combines a safe shopping environment with a dramatization of traditional Sicilian culture.

*Objects in Italian Life and Culture* compellingly intertwines theoretical discourses about material life with an interdisciplinary variety of case studies, including literature, cinema, immigration history, and everyday lifestyle.

Through its focus on Italian culture, Bartoloni's work partakes of the current scholarly debate about the nonhuman, proposing intriguing reflections on the translation process that underlies different 'poetics of inhabiting' and on the connection between objects and our ability to give meaningful sense to a place. Although I would have liked to see more about Italian-Australian literature and how it elaborates on the immigrants' need to 'translate' meanings through objects, I appreciate Bartoloni's focus on the experience of immigration and the 'material translation' of values that this process entails.

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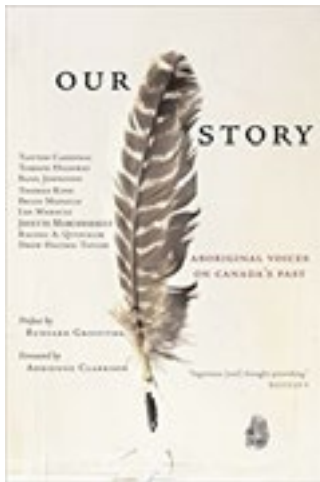
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**Giuseppe Barca**

**The Re-empowerment of Native Canadians through Literature: A Comparison between Lee Maracle's *Goodbye, Snauq* and Tomson Highway's *Hearts and Flowers***

***Tantoo Cardinal, Tomson Highway, Basil Johnston et al. 2005. Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past. Toronto: Anchor Canada, pp. 250, CA\$ 21.00, ISBN 978-0-385-66076-1***



<http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/93029/our-story#9780385660761>

Native Canadian oral stories explore the environmental peculiarities of a specific homeland to provide the inhabitants of a given place with a wide knowledge of the space they belong to in order to forge a spiritual relation to the land, i.e. a sense of place. The transmission of stories establishes continuity between the past and future generations, fostering both the embrace of a holistic vision of life and the acknowledgement of each individual's personal responsibility to the earth. Stories, furthermore, are part of a performance where the listeners are co-creators of the meaning of the words they hear and these words are not regarded as terms of a scientific discourse where each lemma corresponds to a single object. On the contrary, they are keepers of a creative power that transcends the boundaries between the ideal and the phenomenal, the physical and the metaphysical, the logical and the mythical, thereby including each human being in a net of relations and connections with the rest of the world (Panikkar 2007).

By virtue of it, colonization can be read as a twofold process: while the dispossession

of lands provokes a physical removal, the assimilation of oral traditions in mainstream literature and painting brings about a spiritual diaspora and an environmental injustice since, through stories, Aboriginal peoples honour the earth as sacred and manifest a deep sense of care for every creature.

To re-appropriate their own patrimony and to recoup the world as a source of a creative power, Aboriginal peoples frame a body of literature that is not *about* them but written *by* them. This literature is conceived as a means of transformation for Natives from being objects of Western ethno-anthropological studies to becoming the subjects of a pursuit of self-definition. Writing encourages the reconciliation of Indigenous peoples with their traditions and lands, thereby promoting the reinvention of an eco-sustainable space but, as a medium of the colonizers' culture, it also arises obstacles. Overcoming the conflict between *orature* and *literature*, in fact, presumes finding in the process of writing analogies and affinities to the Native *modus sentiendi*, which appears realistic since writing is characterized "by an impulse toward wholeness that is the primary motivating principle of the imagination" (Allen 1987: 564).

Sto:loh novelist Lee Maracle and the Cree playwright Tomson Highway are committed in the construction of an eco-sustainable Aboriginal narrative. Their short stories *Goodbye, Snauq* and *Hearts and Flowers*, contributions to the anthology *Our Story: Aboriginal Voices on Canada's Past* (Random House of Canada, 2004), serve as prime examples. In *Goodbye, Snauq*, Maracle recounts the colonization of the Canadian West Coast and investigates the transformation of Snauq, her birthplace, which once was the supermarket of the nation for its abundance of food while now has become an urbanized area, for the Squamish Band Council sold the land to the Canadian government for 92 million dollars. *Hearts and Flowers* is about the eight-year-old Cree Daniel Daylight, who on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1960, when Canadian Aboriginal peoples got the right to vote, was awarded the first prize at the Kiwanis Music Festival in Manitoba: on that occasion he performed "Sonatina" by Clementi and the duet for four hands "Hearts and Flowers", a piece of music defined by the author as universally transformational.

Both Maracle and Highway alter the European literary canons to suit their own Aboriginal sensibility and, despite adopting different narrative techniques, transfer features of the oral storytelling to the written form to inject a creative force in the English language. *Goodbye, Snauq* is a fine example of literary experimentalism, whereas *Hearts and Flowers* is more canonically structured. Maracle's short story follows the rhythm and progression of the I narrator's stream of consciousness, which, transcending spatial and temporal borders, allows the readers to fall into the story and turns them into active participants in the remembrance of Snauq before its drilling. Readers are so accompanied by the storyteller through the same sensorial experiences of the Salish population by means of rhetorical devices that construct a patchwork of vivid imagistic descriptions. They are deliberately asked to taste the roasted elk, to look at the white camas, to feel the smell of cedar in a longhouse, and thereby, far from being passive observers, they play a crucial role in the imaginary reinvention of the land. The colonization of Snauq is at last a *fait accompli*, but collective remembrance guarantees its survival and, by encouraging the development of an environmental consciousness, may prevent other dispossessions of lands. According to Maracle,

in fact, writing means shaping a dialogic discourse with the environmentalists, including perspectives, and thus taking action, reacting, blocking projects in the north of the country as already done by Matthew Coon Come and other activists. This explains both why the readers, and not the author, stand at the centre of the process of writing and the reason for the lack of a canonical conclusion: it is the readers or the listeners, as co-creators of meaning, who have to draw their own conclusions, since in the Aboriginal sensibility interpretations are not either right or wrong, they are all possible and, as such, valuable.

The sensorial fluidity of Maracle's storytelling is counterpoised by the structural rigour of Highway's. As a musician, with a Bachelor in Music, the Cree author combines classical music forms with Aboriginal themes, motifs and sensibilities in the conviction that music and the musicality of words are the keepers of a universally transformational power. *Hearts and Flowers* is structured as a sonata in four parts, graphically separated in paragraphs. The progression of the events is chronological and embedded in the sonata's subsequent movements: from exposition, to development, to recapitulation and finally to a coda, which, being partially identical to the beginning of the text, frame the story as a cyclical narration that does not leave its meaning to the open interpretations of the readers. The readers, in fact, can't help but acknowledge the transformation of reality accomplished by the music, whose waves have reached "the flesh and bone and blood" (198) of the people inside and outside the Auditorium, right across the reserves, the shores in the north, and the Minstik Lake Residential School. In the end, it makes everyone cry, the white and the Indians, thereby erasing the walls of suspicion. Suspicion, in *Hearts and Flowers*, is a white sentiment impersonated by the teacher Mr Tipper, with whom Daniel Daylight converses during his trips to the city of Prince William. Mr Tipper is convinced of the inhumanity of Aboriginal peoples and the dialogic dialogue the boy sets up with him is specular to the dialogue of Maracle with her Western readers. The authors believe that language, both in the spoken and in the written form, is not a pure means of communication but a new medium of creative power, a source of nourishment for every human being that, in turn, can modify the way their hearts and minds approach the Other and the Earth. This inherent transformative quality of words and music has changed Mr Tipper and, so far, also Maracle's readers, who, by falling into her environmentalist narrative, are expected to truly and authentically transform themselves, to build up cross-cultural negotiations and mutual understanding.

As Thomas King sustains in his "Introduction" to the anthology *All My Relations*, the main difference between Native literature and literature about Natives regards the function ascribed to the signified. In traditional oral performances words are heard and alive, creative forces of connections to Mother Earth, and so the recourse to phonetic symbolism in writing by Aboriginal authors aims at reinvigorating the silence of the written word. In *Goodbye, Snauq*, for instance, the description of the land before colonization is smooth and sibilant, whereas palatal and dental consonants are predominant when recounting the arrival of the Europeans with their "toxic chemicals waste" (207), "thousands of metric tons of sewage" (*Ibidem*) and "dredging and draining of the water" (*Ibidem*). All the same, in Daniel Daylight's speeches, liquid and nasal consonants prevail; hence, music is "water-like, limpid, and calm as silence" (197), while, for Mr Tipper, Indian peoples are not human "at least

not according to the government. They cannot vote" (186). The rendering of *orature* in literature by means of alliteration, consonance, assonance and sibilance both by Maracle and by Highway reveals the authors' attempt to guide the readers to the acquisition of a new emphatic environmental consciousness that never turns into an imposition of truth. We are never told what is right or what is wrong, but just invited to follow the text and the subtext to autonomously shape our own thinking.

To date, it is widely assumed that literature has become a source of empowerment for Native peoples, who, gaining ground in the public as well as in the academic discourse, are fostering transcultural understanding between Aboriginal and not-Aboriginal, especially as far as the urge to take care of the Earth is concerned. Like Maracle and Highway, each author is following their own literary path, but the *fil rouge* between the old and the new generations of writers, females and males, is the reconstruction of a deep sense of belonging to the Earth that regards everyone, the colonizers and the colonized, in light of the assumption that, as Tomson Highway maintains, 'we don't own space, space owns us'.

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**Jaydeep Sarangi**

### **In Conversation with Neerav Patel**

Neerav Patel (b. 1950) is a Gujarati and English language poet, translator and editor from Gujarat, India. He is best known for his significant contribution in Gujarati Dalit literature such as *Burning From Both The Ends* (1980, English poems), *What Did I Do To Be Black and Blue* (1987, English poems) and *Bahishkrut Phulo* (2006, Gujarati). He edited *Swaman*, a journal of *dalit* writings in Gujarati. He pioneered the movement of Gujarati Dalit literature, publishing the first ever Gujarati Dalit literary magazine *Akrosh* in 1978 under the auspices of the Dalit Panther of Gujarat. He also co-edited short-lived Gujarati magazines such as *Kalo Suraj*.

**Jaydeep Sarangi** Please tell us about your childhood?

**Neerav Patel** I was born in 1950 into a *chamar* (tanner) family in a village called Bhupaladi, my parents were completely illiterate and were working as skinner, tanner, leather worker, carcass-collector and agricultural labourer. Literacy in our family started with me. I must say it is due to the lifelong hard work of my parents that I am what I am today. I was never asked to assist them either in their traditional leather work or in agricultural work, they wanted me to just study and get a respectable white-collar job in the city so that I can be spared of the miseries of a *dalit*<sup>1</sup> life. And I did study, I always stood first in my class. My high caste teachers and my high caste classmates all loved me. Although the untouchability was there, I was treated quite friendly keeping the customary distance when required in public. On passing SSC with distinction, it was a high caste *patel*<sup>2</sup> teacher who took me to the principal's office for admission at the prestigious St. Xavier's college in Ahmedabad. To have fun as a child, however, I do remember having gone with my parents and other *dalits* to drag a dead ox pulling its tail! I also remember having accompanied my parents for customary begging of feast food at our *girasdars'* (landlords) houses on festive or holy days. In a hurry to get a job, I applied in a nationalized bank for the post of a cashier, and I was selected! It was all due to my merit, I had scored 75% in SSC in those days. But it was also due to the reservation policy, how can a son of a *chamar* work in a bank otherwise? And it was posted in a far-flung place called Una (now known for the flogging of four *dalit* youths) in Saurashtra, some 400 km from my residence. And that was the end of my formal education. But I studied intermittently attending evening college / as external student and earned

<sup>1</sup> Meaning 'oppressed' in Sanskrit and 'broken/scattered' in Hindi, a term for the members of lower castes of India known as untouchables.

<sup>2</sup> The headman of a village, having general control of village affairs, and forming the medium of communication with government officials.

my BA, MA and PhD in English. I am married with three children (one of them mentally challenged) of different mothers. Yes, it's a story worth listening someday. Life has been a great roller coaster journey and yet goes smoothly.

**JS** What has motivated you to join the Dalit movement? Has there been any personal experience of discrimination on you?

**NP** I think you refer to both: the Dalit movement in general and the movement of Dalit literature in particular. Let me clarify at the outset that the specific movement of Dalit literature is part and parcel of the general Dalit movement. Their ultimate aims and objectives are the same: emancipation of the *dalits* from the oppressive and exploitative caste system, freedom from the unjust and inhuman social order that denies human rights of equality, fraternity, liberty and dignity to the *dalits*. Both are therefore complementary and contributory to each other, only the tools and weapons to fight for securing such social justice are different. No *dalit*, illiterate or educated, villager or city-dweller, poor or rich, weak or powerful, resourceless or influential, can escape overt or covert, rude or shrewd, visible or invisible, violent or non-violent casteism practised by Hindu Indians and Hindu Indian diaspora. How can I, and for that matter anybody born as *dalit*, be an exception? I have suffered my share of humiliations and indignities, discrimination and segregation but have saved myself from physical violence so far! I have however witnessed cruelties meted out to my innocent kith and kin and other known and unknown *dalits*. In this social scenario, what more motivation one requires to join a *dalit* movement? No choice but to join the movement that fights for survival and humanhood. I joined the movement with the tools and weapons I have: I have words that can appeal for change to a just social order, I have words that can attack for change to an egalitarian social system. I have joined the *dalit* movement as a committed *dalit* poet, as a missionary *dalit* writer.

**JS** When and how did you get introduced to the Dalit movement?

**NP** It was when I left my village in 1966 and came to Ahmedabad city for college studies. I lived in a *chawl*<sup>3</sup>, a paying guest in a labour area, a *dalit* ghetto surrounded by Muslim *chawls*. Here, I happened to meet and make friends with many activists, communists and socialists and *Ambedkarites*<sup>4</sup>, one of them was Dr Ramesh Chandra Parmar, President of Gujarat Dalit Panther and a lover of literature! He used to publish a journal called *Panther* in which *dalit* poetry and short stories translated from Marathi appeared almost regularly. That was the biggest inspiration, we thought why not publish an exclusive magazine solely devoted to *dalit* literature? And *Akrosh* was born on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1978, launching so to say the movement of *dalit* literature in Gujarat. I have been with the movement as a completely committed *dalit* writer from those days ...

<sup>3</sup> A large building divided into many separate tenements, offering cheap, basic accommodation to labourers.

<sup>4</sup> Followers of B. R. Ambedkar, politician and social reformer who inspired the Dalit movement and campaigned against social discrimination against *dalits*.

**JS** Are there specific activists in the movement or outside who have inspired you to join the movement?

**NP** Although initially there was apathy and antagonism from mainstream literary establishment, the movement of *dalit* literature in Gujarat has been lucky from its very beginning in getting the support and guidance of some well-meaning non-*dalit* activists, academics, writers and artists. It's a long list to name, but most prominent among them were Achyut Yagnik, Bhanu Adhwaryu, Manishi Jani, Indukumar Jani and Girish Patel. And there were *dalit* activists like Valjibhai Patel and Pravin Rashtrapal in addition to Dr. Ramesh Chandra Parmar. They were the source of great inspiration, they acted as mentors to us budding *dalit* poets and writers.

**JS** What is the role of *dalit* literary activism in the *dalit* freedom movement?

**NP** As I have said earlier, the role of *dalit* literary activism is complementary and contributory to the general movement. I will give just one example: in 1981, a *dalit* youth was burnt alive in a village called Jetalpur in the *Panchayat*<sup>5</sup> office itself. *Dalit* activists and organizations were on the streets protesting and demanding justice on this gruesome murder. *Dalit* poets decided to join the protest by urgently bringing out a special number of *Akrosh* solely devoted to this incident. It had such an impact, that government immediately banned the magazine, confiscated undistributed copies, arrested editor and publisher and contributing poets – I was one among them! *Dalit* literature thus sensitizes both the *Dalits* and non-*dalits*, the victims and the perpetrators with the its special literary appeal and literary attack.

**JS** Do you have any thoughts regarding the present *Dalit* freedom activists?

**NP** This is a time of great awakening, at the same time it is a time of great opportunism. Many *dalit* activists are sincere and passionate. And knowledgeable and committed too. Almost all call themselves *Amebedkarites*, but they can be found attached anywhere, from left to centre to right, to the extent that they can be found in ultra-radical Marxist-Maoist parties to RSS/VHP/BJP<sup>6</sup> as well. At this moment, one Afro-American woman writer and activist comes to my mind, probably Gloria Naylor, who was asked on priority. She said I am troubled by three things simultaneously: my class, my colour and my gender. But I think I am more troubled by my colour and race than my class and gender. I would therefore pre-

<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, every Indian village was ruled by the 'Five Elders', who collectively comprise the *Panchayat*. Further, each community within the village (caste, sub-caste) has its own *Panchayat*, invested with certain judiciary powers. Many Indian villages over the centuries have been relatively unaffected by historical and political changes and continue with the *Panchayat* system even today.

<sup>6</sup> RSS (*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*), a Hindu right-wing nationalist organization with a purported objective to uphold Hindu values and a conservative agenda; VHP (*Vishva Hindu Parishad*), an Indian right-wing Hindu nationalist organisation based on the ideology of *Hindutva*, which adheres to the concept of homogenised majority and cultural hegemony; BJP (*Bharatiya Janata Party*), the centre-right party that is built out as the political wing of the RSS.



fer to be with my black brothers and sisters in the fight against racism. Ambedkar acted on the same priority, and my opinion cannot be different. Let us first work for the abolition of 'caste', for without which there cannot be a real fraternal 'class' of have-nots in our society, the class that is dreaming for higher goal of a classless society.

**JS** Years back you wrote: "Without seeing and knowing/Without reading or thinking/Without understanding/You attacked like stupid". Please explain what you mean through these lines?

**NP** These are the lines from my poem 'Operation Equality'. The devastating earthquake of 2001 in Gujarat serves as its backdrop. As if to act as a leveller, the earthquake ravages one and all, rich and poor as if to begin afresh with equality and fraternity for all human beings. But the caste and creed play the partial role of spoiler in rescue and rehabilitation and relief works. The poet rebukes the Earthquake for his failed mission and in a sense all those Hindu levellers calling themselves philanthropists or revolutionaries who do not forget to play caste card even on these tragic times! The poem is a scathing satire to so-called levellers.

**JS** Please let us know more about the *dalit* literary magazine *Kalo Suraj*? Is there a manifesto?

**NP** Since there was no space available to *dalit* literature in the mainstream literary periodicals, *dalit* writers and activists had no option but to launch their own little magazines from their meagre resources. After *Akrosh* in 1978, *Kalo Suraj* ('The Black Sun') was another important magazine launched by us in the early '80s. They lived for a short time, they couldn't sustain financially, but their contribution in creating literary impact was immense. Their short editorial notes were a kind of their manifesto, therefore, strictly speaking, there is no manifesto of *Kalo Suraj*.

**JS** What are your important books of poems?

**NP** I am a voracious reader, but not a prolific writer. Some of my Gujarati poems have been collected in a book called *Bahishkrut Phoolo*. I also occasionally write in English and my originals and translations are collected in three slim volumes: namely *Burning from Both Ends*, *What Did I do To be so Black* and *Blue and Severed Tongue Speaks Out*. I have edited a book called *Gujarati Dalit Kavita* for Sahitya Akademi (Delhi). I also write short fiction and some autobiographical and journalistic pieces of prose, they are yet to be collected in a book.

**JS** You have translated your poems yourself. How do you do that?

**NP** I am a bi-lingual poet and depending on my mood and demand of the topic, I write in Gujarati and English and translate vice versa. Since I am the original author of the poem, I think I know better what I mean, and try to make it poetic in the other language taking care of the meaning even by taking a little liberty here and there. Let me frankly warn: it's really very difficult to translate *dalit* poetry that usually comes with local references and *desi*<sup>7</sup> *dalit* diction.

<sup>7</sup> India's various regional/local traditions.

**JS** How will you define the term *dalit* in the present context?

**NP** The term is debated for years and even after its worldwide currency, it has still not become acceptable to all in its essential meaning. The literal meaning of the word refers to those who are crushed, those who are beaten and broken to pieces, those whose existence is altered to nothingness by oppression and exploitation, those who have lost their identity as the grain lose its identity by grinding it in a stone mill. This suits only to the ex-untouchables in the Indian context. But for sheer political reasons, both *dalits* and non-*dalits* want to include under this term all the other poor of India.

**JS** Do you think a literary association and forum can reform a society from caste stratification?

**NP** Literary associations and forums can generate awareness and awakening about the evils of caste stratification no doubt, and I think that is their only role. Their product, literature, can act as silent and subtle catalyst, thus contributing in their own way towards bringing reforms.

**JS** Who are important *dalit* activists from your state and how far are they influenced by other *dalit* activists from other states?

**NP** I have had a chance to learn and work with the most dedicated lot of *dalit* activists: Dr. Ramesh Chandra Parmar, Valjibhai Patel, Pravin Rashtrapal, Naran Vora, Martin Macwan, Raju Solanki and many others. For the present, Jignesh Mewani and many young activists have emerged as committed *dalit* activists.

**JS** Can your writings be seen as a vehement literary expression?

**NP** With this question I am reminded of Sartre who wrote in 'What is literature': "If I am given this world with all its injustices, it is not so that I may contemplate them coldly, but that I might animate them with my indignation, that I might disclose them and create them with their nature as injustices, that is an abuse to be suppressed"<sup>8</sup>.

**JS** Are you familiar with *Bangla dalit* literary movement?

**NP** It's an inviting discourse. I don't know very much. But I know some senior *dalit* writers like Mr. Biswas who has translated some of my early poems into Bangla. I know that you and your colleague, Angana Dutta, have been working on translation projects from Bangla to English. Language and distance are big barriers for introduction to each other's writings and meaningful discourse on *dalit* literature in India.

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<sup>8</sup> J. P. Sartre. 1988 [1947]. *What is Literature and Other Essays*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 67.

**JS** How far are you associated with the other *dalit* activists and writers?

**NP** I know almost all the *dalit* activists and *dalit* writers of Gujarat as I have been part of *dalit* movement through literature for all these years.

**JS** Will the *dalit* discourse travel?

**NP** It has spread everywhere nowadays. But again, language and distance are barriers. Let one more generation take over, *dalit* discourse will bloom with English as its lingua franca.

**JS** What is the role of little magazines in the *dalit* movement of Gujarat?

**NP** I have already answered, but again with meagre resources available to the *dalits*, they are the most important vehicles of providing new ideas and information, new literature for *dalit* movements. Thanks to the access to internet now to those *dalits* who can afford, but these little magazines are and were the only source to poor *dalits* for self-education and inspiration.

**JS** Can subaltern populations speak? If so, can they retain their position as subaltern?

**NP** Yes, subalterns can speak. It can speak for themselves as well as through their representatives. And what a nonsensical assumption: 'can they retain their position as subaltern?' You mean just because they are able to speak, just because they speak for themselves, their subaltern-ness disappears by magic? Their subaltern-ness has not happened on a single parameter to their disability to speak for themselves. They have started speaking, and yet they have not ceased to be subaltern.

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