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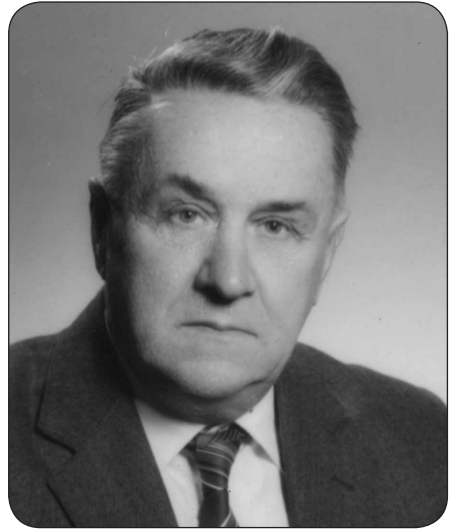
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In Memoriam: Janez Stanonik (1922–2014)



Igor Maver

In its 93rd year, the life and fruitful academic endeavours of Professor Janez Stanonik, long-time head of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, Dean of the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Arts, and a full member of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, came to an end. From the period immediately after World War II – he enrolled in Germanic Studies in 1945 – he researched English and American literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. He devoted much attention to how literature intersects with other arts and folk traditions. He studied the literature of Slovenian emigrants in the United States, as well as the history of cultural ties between Slovenia and both the United Kingdom and the United States. In his linguistic studies he examined the etymological parallels between Slovenian and English, while in the field of German Studies he dealt with early German literature in its interaction with Slovenia and literary Slovenian literature in the Habsburg and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In 1981, Professor Stanonik organized and directed a large and high-profile international symposium in Ljubljana on Louis Adamič, the American writer of Slovenian descent, later editing the comprehensive proceedings. This breakthrough event marked the advent of in-depth academic research into the Slovenian diaspora and emigrant press in the United States, and Slovenian emigrant literature began to be seen as being equal to Slovenian literature in the homeland. Given the strong political prejudices of the time, this was not easy and by no means self-understood.

With his many research contributions on Slovenian emigrants in the United States, Professor Stanonik later cooperated with us, his Slovenian American Studies colleagues, in publishing, for example, in *Enciklopedija Slovenije*, but also in many other forums. At this point one should note the many volumes of *Slovenska izseljenska književnost* – the first exhaustive research of Slovenian emigrant literature around the world – for which he wrote studies from the areas of the older American period and the early Slovenian immigration to the United States.

In 1968 Professor Stanonik founded the scientific journal *Acta Neophilologica*, editing it until 2000. The journal was initially supported by American Slovenians who worked as professors in North America, including Canada, and who contributed papers to *Acta* – a fact of which Professor Stanonik was especially proud. Published in the journal were, among other things, a series of studies on Slovenian emigration, the emigrant press, and literature written by Slovenian and foreign literary historians, many of whom were of Slovenian origin and living abroad. These articles were the first instances of research on Slovenian emigrant literature, especially in the United States, Canada, Australia, and also in colonial Mexico.

Professor Janez Stanonik – Noni to his friends, acquaintances, but also to his students – was a long-time professor of English and American Literature and over the years a mentor to many Slovenian students of English and American Studies. Abroad, he enjoyed a fine reputation as a researcher and an erudite scholar, and everywhere he sought to make valid Slovenian scholarship and research. Noni was, as all of us who knew him are aware, a witty interlocutor who revelled in linguistic acrobatics.

I remember arriving fresh from Slovenia for my research stay at Stanford University and being immediately asked by my American colleagues whether I knew Professor Stanonik. His 1962 English-language book *Moby Dick, The Myth and the Symbol* was an academic *tour de force* on the mythology and symbolism of the white whale. In it, he pointed out new sources for Herman Melville's iconic novel, and the study was seminal also for American literary scholars, and it is still cited today. He proved that the novel is basically a parody of medieval legends about so-called grateful mythological animals and that visible in the work are a number of European, mainly folk, influences and motifs.

If it is true that development rests on the shoulders of past giants, it is certainly true of Professor Stanonik's scholarly work and activities at what was the Faculty of Arts' Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures (later divided into two independent departments). After the destruction of the German library during World War II, Professor Stanonik endeavoured and managed not only to renovate the library but also to supplement and expand the departmental library of the Faculty of Arts. He made significant contributions to the renewal of the study programmes in English and American studies, moving them in the direction of

teaching modern English language and various literatures in English. As one of the most important founders of what was then the Department of English and German Studies at the Faculty of Arts, he was in many ways a visionary spirit. Immensely open to foreign knowledge, he remained keenly aware of the importance that developing Slovenian literary studies, English, American and German Studies, as well as the humanities as a whole, had for Slovenian autonomy and Slovenian identity.

Noni wrote and researched until the end, which kept him mentally agile for many years; indeed, he published his final article at the age of 91. Let me conclude this brief overview of Professor Stanonik's scientific opus by making reference to the Anglo-Saxon heroic epic *Beowulf*. This work, which in many ways is the seminal work of English literature from the early Middle Ages, was particularly close to Noni's heart. His former students remember how he, while interpreting, truly lived with the old Germanic heroes, less with Beowulf than with the demi-human violent monster Grendel and Grendel's mother, who wanted to avenge her son's death. The story's alliterative lines sometimes moved Noni so much that he, an inveterate smoker, would suddenly put a cigarette between his lips so that he could continue his lecture. His unlit cigarette would, to the delight of his student listeners, dance back and forth. Not until after the lecture would Noni light up, in the hall.

Behold, we know not anything;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last – far off – at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

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Is There Drama in Contemporary America? Is There Postmodernism in American Drama? Shepard vs. Mamet – Whose America is (More) Real?

Vesna Bratić

Abstract

Judged by the literary research conducted over the last decades of the previous and the first decade of this century, not only was drama an illegitimate offspring in the American literature but was also treated as a weak premature-born child in the postmodernist thought in general. A stage cohabitation of the postmodern experiment and a realist frame in the contemporary theatre is well illustrated by the two popular contemporary playwrights: Sam Shepard and David Mamet. By their creative opus, not only in the fields of drama and theatre, but also in other literary genres (poetry, essay) as well as in film, through a variety of different characters and situations, these two authors reveal a rich variety of the many possible variations of American social (con)text. The society will be read in their plays as a unique cultural text outside which, as Derrida said, there is nothing. America, its myths and contemporary cultural industry, its class, racial and gender conflicts and the two authors established a mutual set of influences. The playwrights borrow raw materials from the treasury of mass culture (or should it, to be true to the new consumer culture, be more appropriate to say a warehouse) break it down and re-assemble fragments into collages that articulate the contemporary issues in more condensed, more intense and more effective ways. Mamet and Shepard borrow from the contemporary culture only to pay it back with interest: they endow the cultural (con)text with a richer content, impregnated with meaning.

Keywords: Postmodernism, America, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, mass culture, consumerism

1 AMERICAN DRAMA AND POSTMODERNISM

Although American conservative politicians have dealt intensively with American drama, or rather with its playwrights, American literary scholars have long persisted in considering it “an illegitimate child”. At the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century Susan Harris Smith claimed that the “hegemony of genre” was what kept American drama outside the literary canon. Drama is an unwanted child in the American literary family, not accepted by the omnipotent father – the critic(s), with the reasons for this being of a literary-historical nature. Among these, the most pronounced are: the remnants of a Puritan discomfort with theatre, competition with European, mainly British, role-models, and last but not least – the long tyranny of New Criticism, with its strong emphasis on Modernist sensibility (Smith, 1997).

In line with the above mentioned unhappy circumstances which the American literary bastard child, “the illegitimate offspring of an unholy union between misguided American writers and the commercial stage” (Schroeder, 420-427) found itself in, Patricia R. Schroeder, the author of the essay with the rather indicative title “Legitimizing the Bastard Child: Two New Looks at American Drama”, after having voiced her wish to write on American drama, had to give a great deal of thought to what her respected American literature professor said during an informal conversation: “Unless you want to write on Eugene O’Neill, there really isn’t any American drama” (Schroeder 420-427).

According to Schroeder, American drama is also out of favour with more recent critical voices, possibly due to the American theatre’s dependency on production hierarchies dominated by white males. The same pitiless parent who once mercilessly rejected American drama now seems to be the main culprit responsible for its being out of favor with critics all the more inclined to adopt the suppressed objects (Others) from the American margin. In their view, drama is still inextricably interconnected with the *traditional* and (therefore) the *oppressive*. (Schroeder 420-427).

Judged by the literary research conducted over the final decades of the previous and the first decade of this century, not only was drama the illegitimate offspring of American literature, but was also treated as a weak, prematurely-born child within postmodernist thought in general. By the unimpressive number of studies on postmodern drama and the place of modern drama and the theatre in the seminal studies on Postmodernism, it can be concluded that postmodernism and drama are hardly on friendly terms. Christopher Bigsby, an indisputable authority on contemporary theatre, perceives, at best, only a mild interest on the part of the most prominent contemporary scholars in theatre (and consequently among all those who draw on their theories), which leads him to conclude that theatre is still

obviously marginalized within scholarly circles, and at the moment, far removed from the cultural centre (Bigsby, 1982). In his book, the indicatively titled *Postmodern/Drama: Reading the Contemporary Stage*, Steven Watt (2001) notes, with some disappointment, that “drama and theatre play ancillary roles at best in the most influential commentaries on postmodernism” (p. 16). The first three theorists Watt mentions as not considering drama to be of much significance are among the greatest names in the theory of Postmodernism: Lyotard, Baudrillard and Harvey. Watt expands the list of authors and books that “legitimize” postmodern interest in various forms of discourse and diverse intellectual fields, citing the latest Routledge and University of Minnesota releases, featuring titles such as *Postmodern Jurisprudence*, *Postmodernism and Religion*, and even *Postmodern Education*. Postmodernism has a significant role in the altered geography of traditional disciplines, but there are comparatively few books on postmodern drama, and they, according to Watt, offer what at best can be termed as an unreliable articulation of postmodern issues. Cultural critics who study the performing arts are no longer interested in drama, and drama itself does not retain much value within postmodernism. Therefore, when the adjectives postmodern or postmodernist appear with the name of the genre, drama seems to be “emptied of most of the features by which it has traditionally been recognized – dialogue, a discernible narrative, character, agon...” (p.17).

In her book *Theatre of Transformation: Postmodernism in American Drama* (2005) Kerstin Schmidt defends the very opposite view, considering drama to be a truly postmodern genre susceptible to a postmodern analytical framework because it is

Drama and theater [that] are particularly suited to raise questions about the relationship between the text, discourse and performance, about the transformation of fixed words on the page into an articulation on stage, about presence and representation, about the pluralized and fragmented self, about the role of spatiality, and about drama’s own conditions and processes of existence – all of which are major postmodern concerns with inevitable theatrical silences that cannot be stopped or shortened by simply turning the page of the text and are teeming with meaning (p. 8).

The postmodern quality of the contemporary drama is summed up by Smith in a single word - *transformation*. Postmodern drama was born by violating earlier theatrical principles and characteristics, which are reconstituted anew in order to challenge and expand the possibilities and limits of theatrical representation. Drama is also transformed through adopting and “legitimizing” the elements that the modernist aesthetics considered unworthy of creative attention. Therefore, drama, as well as other forms which attempt to articulate the postmodern condition, is evidently under the strong influence of *mass/popular culture*, which becomes a “legitimate area of study and interest” (Blatanis, 2003, p.9).

Answering the most common objection of critics concerning postmodern indifference to social progress and engagement, Smith argues:

that it is precisely postmodernism's indeterminacy and playfulness that promotes the development of a decidedly political agenda in postmodern drama. It is particularly suited to unveiling dominant representational patterns and subverting existing hierarchies and discourses. Its conceptual openness admits those who would be excluded by restrictive and fixed concepts of theory. Consequently, postmodernism has been adopted by playwrights with a decisive political agenda, above all by feminist and/or ethnic writers (Schmidt, 2005, p.8).

In *Modern American Drama*, published two years later J. Anette Saddik (2007) explores the phenomenon of the relationship drama in the U.S. after World War II, by drawing on Aristotle's theory of representation, which she reads as a desire not to give a true picture of society, but as a way to (re)establish and strengthen the existing social hierarchy in the form in which it is imagined by lawgivers and governing structures. Therefore, drama can either reflect (and support?) the existing social order or act subversively to question the established system and the values on which it rests. The American drama of the 1940s and 1950s observes Aristotelian *mimes* – an imitation of situations and characters from real life; the actions are psychologically motivated and characters defined by their psychology. Such a realist mode is perfectly suited to Method acting, which is based on the psychological consistency of characters and the unity of their internal motivation, which in turn explain all of the characters' actions. Truth is represented as being "fixed, stable and knowable" (p. 2).

Abandoning realism in presentation, the new anti-realist drama of the 1950s and 1960s, articulates a protest against this one-sided picture of reality and such a limited understanding of the concepts of identity and truth. A theatrical setting that resists a clear definition of time and place as well as a stage identity that is no longer psychologically consistent, blurring the boundaries between a character/actor and a real person and between real existence on stage and acting, reflect the shattered illusions of (by) post-war America. A growing social insecurity becomes the enemy of Aristotelian mimetic representation (and, thus, support) of the existing order. Europe, silent before the sufferings and atrocities of the Second World War, is no longer able to provide support for any new coherent and meaningful view of life. The last attempt to ensure the integrity and wholeness to the contemporary experience ended with Modernism. Old forms, eroded by the experience of the First World War the first great armed conflict on a world scale were replaced by new, highly aestheticized ones, which were supposed to represent a new experience, a new sensibility, a purified and renewed human nature well aware of its shortcomings, but again, operating in the belief that the world can start afresh. The era in world history, which takes

place after the Second World War, marks the end of such Modernist illusions and offers a plurality of “truths” rather than one; integrity is replaced by fragmentation and authentic identity by performance. Postmodernism, as is claimed by Kerstin Schmidt (compare McHale’s definition or rather definitions in *Postmodern Fiction* (1987)) is rarely unproblematic (p.14). Theorists disagree on terminology and conceptual issues; terms such as *postmodernity*, *postmodernism*, postmodern literature or postmodern theory are perceived and defined differently. However, a postmodern(ist) state of mind finds its expression in Continental European drama in the late 1950s, and in British and American drama during the 1960s. A perception of human alienation, inherited from modernism, is intensified and deepened by a growing awareness not only of the inability to integrate into any given superstructure, but also of the impossibility of achieving integrity in one’s own being.

While Europe was gradually recovering from the physical and spiritual destruction and trauma caused by major conflict, America, both politically and economically, continued to grow more powerful, starting new conflicts across the globe. An average contemporary American had even more reasons to feel postmodern anxiety than his/her European counterpart. Grotesquely exaggerated, postmodern fears were transformed on the contemporary stage into the terrifying scream of a schizophrenically split American “Everyman”. If in Modernism truth was elusive, it was at least still a whole. Postmodernism put everything, truth included, into perspective. Although inclined towards nihilism and instability, this attitude is, according to Saddik, “liberating” for many, because it realizes that the truth is not “fixed” but “politically motivated” and “reality may depend on a person or a group that perceives it” (Saddik, 2007, p. 6).

The beginnings of modern American drama, according to most anthologies, are placed at the end of the 1950s, and are represented by anti-realist experimental pieces with an emphasis on theme and/or conflict at the expense of dramatic action and characterisation. Modern drama is “primarily a drama of postmodernism,” says Saddik, but also remains certain that “traditional realism [...] survived into the 21st century” (p. 8). Postmodern drama and traditional realism coexist in the contemporary theatre, probably because of the shared thematic interests which are a feature of both plays experimenting with form and those which retain traditional forms.

2 SHEPARD, MAMET, AND(POST) MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA

This stage cohabitation of the postmodern experiment and a realist frame in the contemporary theatre is well illustrated by the two popular contemporary playwrights: Sam Shepard and David Mamet. Across their creative opus, not only in

the fields of drama and theatre, but also in other literary genres (poetry, essay) as well as in film, through a variety of different characters and situations, these two authors reveal the rich variety of the many possible variations of the American social (con)text. Society will be read in their plays as a unique cultural text outside of which, as Derrida argued, there is nothing (Derrida, 1988, 136). America, its myths and contemporary cultural industry, its class, racial and gender conflicts and the two authors themselves have established a mutual set of influences. The playwrights borrow raw materials from the treasury of mass culture (or perhaps, in deference to modern day consumer culture, *the warehouse*), break it down and re-assemble fragments into collages that articulate contemporary issues in more condensed, intense and effective ways. Mamet and Shepard borrow from contemporary culture only to pay back with interest: they endow the cultural (con)text with a richer content, impregnated with meaning.

Although the authors of recent studies in American drama usually complain about the chronic ailment of American (and not just American) contemporary theoretical and critical thought, of this literary genre being unduly and unjustifiably neglected in the postmodern context, the use of icons – the visual markers of popular culture – in shaping a dramatic vision of the state of the contemporary American consciousness, and a blasphemous (from the Modernist point of view) marriage between “high” and “low”, elitist and mass culture, could not pass unnoticed. It is possible that the over-exaggerated “Americanness” of what Sam Shepard writes about is, in a way, an obstacle to his plays finding their place with the non-American theatre and readers’ audiences. Having said that, drama scholars outside the US have also noticed and acknowledged the freshness, vitality, energy and the courage with which Shepard, from the very beginning, introduced the visual markers of contemporary popular culture onto the stage. He simply recognizes what Douglas Kellner calls a “cultural colonization” (Kellner, 1995, p. 35) by the media and brings it into his art and onto the stage. There is almost no study, no essay or review, in which Shepard’s name is not paired with popular culture, but, nevertheless, the book that deals exclusively with the icons of popular culture in contemporary American drama, and in which the opus of this author is analyzed as exemplary, was written by a Greek - Konstantinos Blatanis (2003). Referring to the social and cultural theorists who recognized, “a central position for the visible in the cultural space of modern times” (p.10) as early as the middle of the previous century and the close relationship that the visible sign (icon/image/simulacrum) has with the market value of products within consumer culture, the author first introduces us to the multiplicity of meanings within the use of popular images and their importance for modern day existence, and then analyzes in detail how some contemporary writers have elevated them to the level of symbols and used them as formative elements in their plays. Such a study cannot even be imagined without

including Sam Shepard, in whose oeuvre an entire period (the 1970s) is often referred to as “a pop culture phase”.¹ On the other hand, the representative of the “new realism” in American drama, David Mamet, is not mentioned in this study, because he deals with the phenomenon of American consumerism in a different way, almost experimentally monitoring the behavior of an individual in a “control group” made up of desperate “logorrheic” individuals in an existential impasse. When asked whether Shepard and Mamet are postmodern writers, we cannot answer with any certainty. We will start with the easier part of the question. The creative opus of Sam Shepard has all the characteristics of the postmodern at the levels of dramatic structure, themes and characters. He began as an experimenter, a compulsive destroyer of conventions, the fearless “breaker” of the fourth theatrical wall; he turned to a more conventional family (kitchen sink) drama at the zenith of his creativity, and has remained an “archenemy” of linearity and completeness ever since. Ihab Hassan, one of the foremost postmodern theorists, listed very few playwrights on the long list of authors he considers representatively postmodern; only two American playwrights are on that list, one of them being Sam Shepard (in Schmidt, 2007, p. 9).

Furthermore, in the *Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Connor, 2004), which deals with postmodernism in all areas of human activity, and is consequently inevitably limited to rather textbook examples of postmodern art, in the chapter devoted to literature, a typically postmodern(ist) characteristic – the death of character – is explained through the work of Sam Shepard. And finally, Linda Hutcheon (2002) although chooses photography and fiction for her study of the politics (politicality) of Postmodernism, mentions the playwright Sam Shepard as an example of the postmodern representation of mass culture in art(istic) forms (p.10). Shepard is postmodern both because he “kills” character (Connor, 2004) and because he crosses the (formerly distinctly drawn) line between highbrow and lowbrow (Hutcheon, 2002, p. 33).

But, while the name of Sam Shepard sounds almost synonymous with postmodern drama and theatre, even for those least familiar with American theatre, the same cannot be said about David Mamet.² At first glance, his plays are a “homecoming” to realism, (which is) understandable and therefore with more appeal to a wider audience. They seem to be a far cry from the postmodern excursions to meta-reality, from a Shepardesque terror of images, explosion of sounds, the terrorism of the sudden and unexpected, a broken chain of causation, in other words,

1 Blatanis’ reading of a number of contemporary playwrights, including Shepard, as well as our own, has been inspired by Baudrillard’s theory of simulation and the hyperreal

2 Interestingly, in his definition of Mamet’s postmodernism Sauer uses Shepard’s play *Buried Child* to establish a postmodern model in opposition to the modernist model, provided by O’Neill in *Desire under the Elms*.

an escape from entropy. However, as shown by David Kennedy Sauer (2003), Mamet simply uses a common modernist context and, thus, the audience, used to reconstructing meaning in a modernist code, is tricked into believing that such a reconstruction is possible with Mamet's plays. Mamet's plays only appear to be modern; they are in fact "representatively postmodern" because they do not support the hierarchical binarism of the modernist drama (exterior/less important/objective - internal/more important/subjective), but rather deem all issues to be equally (un)important and superficial, while the modernist conflict between the natural and the acquired/social/cultural is part of our artificially conceived ideas of the reality informed by an image of "nature", formed by means of mass communication (p.204). Mamet's plays, in contrast to modernist ones, do not offer any satisfactory closure that gives us the answers we might expect if we followed the signs along the road. Furthermore, Mamet's plays deal with relationships in the corporate-capitalist society, and postmodernism, according to one of its most important theorists, neo-Marxists Frederic Jameson (1991), is "the cultural logic of late capitalism" As is succinctly defined by a postmodern theologian, Kevin Hart (2004), "international capitalism and postmodern culture have been in partnership for decades" even though "clearly not all the world enjoys seeing the happy couple parading around the world as if they owned it" (p.17).

Last but not least in qualifying Mamet's drama as postmodern is the irony with which he examines what Price (2001) calls "discursive hierarchy" (p.45). The dominant ideological position is confronted with the alternative, and it ends with an *aporia* - a rhetorical-logical impasse where the author likes to leave us. The Hegelian-Marxist dialectical principle in this case would be directed towards overcoming the thesis and antithesis through a synthesis, and thus the framework master-narrative of progress would find a way out of hopelessness. However, Mamet's postmodern realism, or rather a realism of an estranging reality, transfers its condition of incompleteness to the level of text, which is therefore not "closed", but opens to a plurality of interpretations that are all equally (in)credible. The postmodernist quality of Shepard and Mamet's drama is confirmed by Steven Watt in his peculiar reading of the contemporary stage with the indicative title *Postmodern/Drama*. Watt's reading of the American cultural (con)text, again inspired by Baudrillard, reveals that many contemporary American texts converge to Baudrillard's view of the culture industry, which "even with more precision" could be established for drama, illustrating this statement with a list of three American playwrights, two of which are the writers we are dealing with in this paper, the third being Kopit: "In its collective vision of the culture industry, American drama can be read as postmodern in the ways Baudrillard (and Edward Bond) describes it" (Watt, 2001, p. 140). However, in accordance with the paradox of the title, it is possible to read contemporary drama in a completely opposite vein. These

same representative samples of American drama are at the same time “decidedly anti-postmodern”, if looked at in the ways that are politically more “resonant” and are reflected in their misogyny and their penchant for clear differentiation between “high” art and mass culture. For example, in an interview at the end of the previous century Mamet is quoted as saying:

The job of mass entertainment is exactly the opposite of the job of art. The job of the artist gets more difficult [...] I like mass entertainment. I’ve written mass entertainment. But it’s the opposite of art because the job of mass entertainment is to cajole, seduce and flatter consumers to let them know that what they thought was right is right, and that their tastes and their immediate gratification are of the utmost concern of the purveyor. The job of the artist, on the other hand, is to say, wait a second, to the contrary, everything that we have thought is wrong. Let’s reexamine it” (Covington).

However liberal we want to be in interpreting the lines above, the point Mamet is trying to make is far from being in favor of the postmodern(ist) blending of highbrow and lowbrow.

The artist, according to Mamet, “renegotiates” our relationship with reality, decomposes and reviews it, suspecting the integrity of the shadows on the walls of these consumer “caves” of ours. In his plays Mamet offers a plethora of different readings of contemporary cultural texts, and thus a variety of images of America. The texts of Mamet’s plays deconstruct those of the contemporary culture, writing (also) of those who stand on the margins of the discourse of the dominant ideology. The cultural text is viewed primarily through the prism of language - the language constructs the reality of Mamet’s characters: if for Derrida there is nothing outside the text, for Mamet there is no reality outside language.

Drawing on Andreas Huyssen’s claims about existence of a certain “uncritical populist trend in a social commentary on the mass culture of the 1960s” which opens the door for a “postwhite”, “postmale”, “posthumanist” world (Watt, 2001, p. 140), Watt noted that to this brave new world one was to come neither through the drama produced by these three playwrights, nor through Altman’s movies. Mamet and Shepard, as well as Kopit and Altman, show a neurotic tendency to heal phallic prerogatives within mass culture through a proliferation of images that promote them (p. 142).

Critics sometimes hold diametrically opposing views on the artistic movements the two authors belong to, and sometimes even Shepard, let alone Mamet, is not admitted to an entirely unproblematic status as a truly postmodern author. There is an overall consensus only about idiosyncrasy of their work. Stephen J. Bottoms (1998) calls Shepard’s aesthetics “confusing” and claims his literary output is divided between at least three aesthetic trends: high or “romantic” modernism, late modernism and what is defined as the playwright’s “careful postmodernism”

(p.212). Shepard has not consciously developed his aesthetics; it was born out of the atmosphere of many American tensions and crises (ontological, existential, and cultural) that had found expression in the avant-garde theater(s) of Greenwich Village. The clash of the three aesthetic currents in New York's avant-garde theater during Shepard's formative period (1963-1971) reflects the entropic state at the national level. In accordance with its own interpretation of Shepard's art which, with typical postmodern qualities, retains some characteristics of late (high) modernism in Shepard's "theater of the present moment", Bottoms makes the following point:

Indeed, if Shepard's is a theatre of the present moment, this is a present which has less to do with the ecstatic celebration of metaphysical immanence (which would rely, paradoxically, on a stable sense of one's location in time) than with Frederic Jameson's definition of postmodernity as a schizophrenic condition in which existence seems to have dissolved into a series of fractured presents without coherent relation to past or future (p.218).

American society itself was irreversibly fragmented into sub-cultural and interest communities, and the myth of the basic integrity and honesty of the nation and its leaders was destroyed by various scandals, conspiracies and assassinations "at home" and war crimes "abroad". On the other hand, for the same author, Mamet is, "(however idiosyncratically) a confessed neoclassicist" (p. 211).

Nevertheless, Mamet's realism is not immune to critical scrutiny. Michael L. Quinn (2004) offers an interesting critical interpretation of this "realism" in the light of the American national ideology and the (im)possibility of taking a "culturally based analysis of their own literature" (p.94). Quinn argues that Mamet's realism is not grounded in a "comparison with an *a priori* reality", that it is "not [...] representational but expressive" (p.93) and that "ideologically effective aspects of (Mamet's) dramatic construction [...] are often simply taken as [...] realistic, rather than as gestures in a standard romantic ritual of American intellectual culture" (p. 94). In the above quotations, Quinn confronts the seemingly easily arguable position that Mamet supports the existing reality. It seems that Mamet's opus, not unlike Shepard's, can be "classified" into different, often mutually incompatible, currents, movements and periods.

Following Quinn's arguments we are tempted to believe that this drama cynic appears to be an American romantic(ist) as well. The link between Mamet and Romanticism is Sakvan Berkovic who "helps" Quinn discover the extremely pro-American character of Mamet's iconoclasm. How is this possible? In the American theatrical history, there is a very strong undercurrent of "community formation through dissent" and "the rejection of American culture in the name of American values is very common" (p.94). American authors believe true American values to be superior to what is offered in their cultural present. It is at the level of this

national romanticism that the „Americanness“ of Sam Shepard rests, and judging by the analysis offered by Quinn, the “Americanness” of David Mamet as well. Quinn sees Mamet as a “dissenting, revolutionary artist with a unique perspective” (p. 94). Mamet’s “romanticism” and “Americanness” are based on the identification of the essential “un-Americanness” of certain elements within the existing cultural matrix.

Invoking Veblen, Mamet assailed the greedy bourgeoisie that crushes the common man in a kind of a “dramatic jeremiad”. It is unusual, but not impossible, to understand Mamet’s work as a continuation of the Puritan literary tradition of “weeping” over a society heading toward utter destruction. Watching Mamet’s work through the prism of Berkovic’s “ritual of apostasy” from a corrupt cultural matrix apart from jeremiads Quinn finds in Mamet’s opus the construction of a “unique individuality”, as well as the need for a different society, that of a Jeffersonian or Rousseauian kind (p. 97). Mamet is, thus, both romantic and realistic, anti-American and pro-American, his moral universe is a hybrid of the Puritan ethics based on a critique of society and the need of a troubled assimilated American Jew to deal with collective anxiety. He creates an illusion of reality through dramatic action that is not a copied reality, but a reality that is created through action. The final instance of Mamet’s realism is turning to the “the healing power of memory [and] the redemptive power of love” (Kane, 1992, p. 127), an attempt to take root in the “old neighborhood”, the old faith and elegiac Yiddish rhythms imposed on colloquial American English, full of invective and the scatological, so typical of this author.

3 SHEPARD VS MAMET. WHOSE AMERICA IS REAL?

Searching for similarities in the oeuvre of the two playwrights, after the first reading we could not help seeing little but the very idiosyncratic in their plays. We found Shepard as a Byronic self-exile, a poet-wanderer, Childe Harold who voluntarily embarked on a pilgrimage into the heart of (his own) darkness and found there personal and archetypal “boogies” and then brought them out into the daylight (as well as under the stage lights), showing us that our hell is under our own kitchen table, that our demons are hiding in the fridge, and that the evil spirits of our undead fathers lies in the (American) desert.

Mamet is, again, a different type of poet, he is bard of the American (vulnerable) machismo, a Hemingwayesque elliptical poet of the “omitted”, the poet of invective who “pours” postmodern fluidity into the sturdy framework of realistic structure.

The opus of both authors offer their own idiosyncratic lenses through which America can be seen, while at the same time they themselves paint the canvas of America with fresh colors. If Shepard’s “paintings” are delicate watercolors and elusive, nostalgic landscapes of the “real” (rural?) West, and Mamet’s rough sketches

of urban dullness, are not their visions complementing one another? Is what is left out by one not clearly visible on the canvas of the other, thus making the collage of America complete? It would be very convenient if everything fitted like in a jigsaw puzzle, if the two poetic “districts” were bordered by beautiful and clearly drawn lines: what is omitted by Shepard is shown by Mamet and vice versa. But, it is not quite so. The culture that shaped them, and was shaped by them, made sure that all the key issues of American (and universal) existence are encompassed by their creative horizons to a greater or lesser degree. The essential questioning on the essence of humanness by examining the cultural determinants through which this essence is constructed, such as gender/sex, nation, race, whether belonging to the established social and cultural norm, or deviating from it, find their way into the oeuvres of both writers. However, our conclusion after reading their plays is that the two greatest (or at least the most important, and ultimately, the most famous) living American playwrights differ as much as is possible, even when all the similarities conditioned by the influence of the same cultural background are taken in consideration. There really should not be any “anxiety of influence” (in Harold Bloom’s phrase) between the two.

Autonomous, with a self-consciousness bordering with arrogance, Mamet and Shepard do not admit to (or do, but only a very few) literary influences,³ boldly declaring that they owe little if anything to either predecessors or contemporaries, that they do not read other authors and do not go to the theater. In other words, they want us to believe that they have no idea who and about what their peers are writing today and refuse to be forced into categories.

Born in the early 1940s (1947 and 1943) in the “Baby boom” era, Mamet and Shepard by their life and work, mark the second half of the century, in which the focus of global events moves towards the Western hemisphere. After two world wars on its soil, Europe was exhausted and worn out, and thanks to its economic and military superiority the U.S. becomes the absolute center of the world in the fields of finance, culture and entertainment. The U.S.A is where how to live the best and most comfortable lives is “prescribed”. America is where one goes in pursuit of your (American) dream, even if one is not American. The entertainment industry shows us through an increasingly powerful, or rather omnipotent media, how to make that dream come true and live it, or how *to pretend* to live it, with the assistance of countless means of simulation.

3 One of the identified “impacts” on Shepard is W. Whitman, who, in turn, denied any influence on his work although there would hardly be a Whitman (at least so thought Harold Blum) without an Emerson before him. On the other hand, Mamet’s literary model, collaborator and friend, Harold Pinter (who directed the London production of Mamet’s *Oleanna*) initially claimed he had not read Beckett before writing his own first play, only to deny it later. Pinter befriended Beckett and is a kind of “spiritual connection” between Beckett, Mamet and Shepard, because Shepard admits only Beckett’s influence on his drama.

Judging by what it represents for a majority of Americans, Mamet and Shepard each live an “American dream”, but they, nevertheless, talk about those less successful - the “losers”, the collateral damage suffered on the road to this dream. Their characters, one and all, are tragically maladjusted individuals who, in one way or another, in various spheres from family to business, from the kitchen to the office,⁴ with every new step move dangerously further away from American ideals. Although in all the critical texts on American drama, the two authors are placed in neighboring chapters and although they basically deal with the same questions (im)posed by the spirit of the time/culture within which they create, although their texts are simultaneously parts of and commentaries on the same cultural text, Shepard and Mamet underwent specific formative processes. Personal and cultural specificities led to the development of different interests and sensibilities, so their dramatic characters are, though faced with the same problems, illuminated from different angles and, of course, by quite different artistic means.

We may, however, say that, on the one hand, the son of an army bomber pilot from World War II, who unsuccessfully tries to calm his inner turmoil by avocado farming in rural Duarte, the proud third owner of the same name in his paternal line, and, on the other, a descendant of Polish Ashkenazi Jews, who escaped the pogroms narrowly by fleeing to the “brave new world” insisting on assimilation⁵ under the guise of cultural diversity, provide together a clearer image of what is America(an) than either of them could individually. We are of the opinion that the objective “image” of America over the last 50-odd years can more easily be seen through the plays both of them than through the work of one of them only, even if the pictures that we see are, as Baudrillard claims, just another simulation.

We must say that the joint canvas of Mamet and Shepard is largely deprived of any vision of cultural or gender otherness. If you would like to find out what America looks like in the eyes of a white male, heterosexual and mostly aggressive, drowning their disappointment and sorrows in a bottle, and settling arguments by torrents of expletives and salvos of insults, squatting on a large baggage of complexes inherited from childhood (among which Oedipal is not the most horrible) who, when words fail, resorts to the base way of reckoning of those who do not believe in dialogue – violence, then Shepard and Mamet’s drama offers an abundance of options.

4 Shepard’s characters are mostly in the kitchen, living room or a motel room; namely – in a private environment, while Mamet’s “avoid” being at home, and are always at a place where some sort of “business” is being done.

5 Mamet himself said that as a young man he had a feeling of being sent the following message by his environment: “Everything will be OK if you’re gonna be like me” (Biggsby, 2004, p. 223)

Mamet and Shepard reach out for masks and role playing in both life and in their plays. Their attitude towards their own artistic “personae” is postmodern - they will re-construct the “image” over and over again and will continue to do so for as long as they see it as an appropriate survival mechanism in the postmodern universe. Therefore, it is indisputable that Mamet and Shepard have an urge to (re)create their own personalities, which both deemed to be inappropriate from the very beginning. While Shepard dismisses his three generations old name and tradition of the farmers of the West Coast in favour of the experimental New York theater, embarking on a quest for a distinct identity, Mamet struggles with the ancestral “sin” of the negation of Jewish identity and his forefathers’ assimilation into “all-Americanness” and returns to the fold of the “old faith”, where he regains the identity that the previous two generations of his family had betrayed. The first point of arrival in the quest for both is, interestingly, theater. They decidedly refuse to shape their own personality by taking a path trodden by the feet of their parents. In their case, this personal struggle against patriarchal power structures (whose roots are situated in the archetypal rebellion of son(s) against a tyrannical father) was complemented by a typically American Emersonian belief in the possibility of “rebirth” and “self-reliance”. Like the ancient Indians, they seepostmodern jungle. Tireless in the creation of their own masks (their Jungian persona) as well as in the work which is not limited to writing plays, the field where they are undoubtedly at their best, although perhaps not the best known to a wider audience.

In a large number of recent reviews/essays on American drama, there emerges a need for a (re)definition of American drama of the twentieth century. With much less uncertainty is it possible to write about the postmodern American drama today than it was at the time of its beginnings in the 1970s. It is also much easier to write about post-modern authors, such as Shepard and Mamet, because the continuity of their topics, interests and ways of theatrical presentation, has been established over the past forty years of their creative output.⁶

Shepard and Mamet appear almost simultaneously in the American theater and it seems logical to expect that the two of them are analyzed simultaneously in a paper on American drama. But only in the past few years have authors dared to draw clearer parallels between them, possibly because their opus is broader and more comprehensive and their status in American literature is sufficiently cemented that the English language has been enriched by various neologisms; there are two new adjectives – Shepardesque and Mametesque and a compound, Mamet-speak. Being in neighboring chapters in earlier scholarly books on American

6 To be precise, Shepard begins in 1964 with the one-act pieces *Cowboys* and *Rock Garden*, and Mamet in 1970 with *Lakeboat* (revised 1980). Whereas the first of Shepard’s plays immediately drew public attention to the new, strange talent of a young Californian, the Chicagoan had to wait for a couple of years (*Sexual Perversion in Chicago*, 1974).

drama, placed and replaced in chapters for primarily chronological reasons, the works of Shepard and Mamet seemed like circles that touch, but never intersect. The points of contact are mainly based on common interest in the identity quest(ioning)s of white American males. Mamet and Shepard (with the addition of David Rabe) were first moved from the margins to the cultural/drama center, then entered “mainstream” drama, that is, the *canon* together and caught the attention of feminist criticism, which characterized their drama as machoistic and misogynist, as blind to gender otherness.

What was subtly begun by Miller – the testing of American identity against the parameters of (liberal) individualism, power, and the sustainability of the “American Dream” after the Second World War – Mamet and Shepard continued through the simultaneous articulation and calling into question of the American myth, a process which is a textbook example of postmodern techniques. They “challenge the hegemony of Anglo-patriarchal mythology” through publicly “exposing the power structures surrounding identity and social performance in America” (Saddik, 2007, p. 138).

The nodal points of their works are: the American Dream, liberal individualism, a review of the Anglo-patriarchal power structures that underpin American society and “cultural narratives (rules, values and images) by which [America] live[s] [...] from [...] the end of World War II to [...] the present day” (p. 138).

Starting from the Shepard-Mametesque axiom that speech-language is in fact action, in a broader context, their play can be considered a strong action performed by the macho “center” that “induces” a reaction from the “margin”. Shepard and Mamet’s plays, to use a deconstructionist metaphor, are “haunted” by the ghosts of what is omitted from the text, and the more this occurs, the more these ghosts are suppressed in their texts. Analyzing their body of work, we may stop before the sensitive issue of whether or not they know how to deal with the marginalized, but if we look at them as a strong provocation from the center itself which erodes its structures from within, they become (willingly or not) the “allies” of the marginal.

Mamet and Shepard share the same cultural “moment” in an identical cultural space - they simply write in/on the same cultural text and participate, in Foucauldian terms, in the same discursive processes. However, even when they clearly state that Shepard and Mamet are the most important American playwrights of the final decades of the 20th century (they reached their zenith in the 1970s and 1980s), scholars must emphasize their difference. Writing about the decline of Williams’s creative powers, Christopher Bigsby notices that “dramatic attention, meanwhile, had switched elsewhere” (Bigsby, 2004b, p. 294) mentioning Shepard and Mamet as sovereign rulers who conquered and shared the contemporary theater scene, but by using very different “weapons”. Mamet’s are “hyper-realism, the demotic prose, the forceful metaphors” and Shepard’s “lyrical, oblique myths” (Bigsby 2004b, p. 294).

Their in many ways different plays and different artistic personalities, inevitably open up the same postmodern issues: the questions of the fictional nature of personality and the possibility of authentic identity, the commoditization of myth, the role of performativity, which becomes an ontological necessity in the (re)creation of postmodern identity, and of the relationship between identity and postmodern capitalism. Performativity is a *sine qua non* (post)modern identity as “the boundaries between acting and being are continuously blurred” (Saddik, 2007, p. 139). The reality in which a postmodern man lives, Baudrillard’s hyperreality, is “also measured as such in terms of its performativity” (Lane, 2000, p. 86). The categories of good and evil and the concept of morality are not applicable to this reality; what is important is its functionality – “how well does it work or operate?” (Lane, 2000, p. 86)

The postmodern era, in correlation with late capitalism, is the archenemy of authenticity, centralization, completeness, wholeness. If you can buy everything (the issue is not availability, but only the cost), if you can produce, multiply, and make it (more) desirable through advertising, if it is possible to find a replica of almost everything, then the center, roundness and depth insisted upon by modernism are replaced by decentralization, openness and surface (sometimes superficiality), identity/individuality/uniqueness in existence and action understood as masking/acting and performance. In such a society, the “old ways” of dealing with life and work are doomed to end with the “death of a salesman”, Hoss (*The Tooth of Crime*) can only be authentic in his final act of self-destruction because his individuality only served as a model for another mask for Crow, a postmodern thief, and Aaronow (*Glengarry Glen Ross*) and Teach (*American Buffalo*) can but bemoan the collapse of male (and interpersonal) solidarity between the small gears of American business whose mechanism they are not able to understand.

Mamet and Shepard’s image of America shows that such (postmodern) condition often causes a profound sense of frustration and utter despair, after all the attempts to readjust have been exhausted. Mamet’s dramatic world is full of such characters, or rather, as

Sanja Nikčević (1994) refers to them, - losers whether they sell (Roma, Levene Moss in *Glengarry Glen Ross*) or buy the illusion of the American Dream (Lingk in *Glengarry Glen Ross*). A society in which Mamet and Shepard create is postindustrial, the alienation from nature is at its peak and hedonism and money are both the means and the end.

Modern America is another name for the paradox which is another feature of the postmodern condition. It was created based on an apparent paradox – a puritanical religious fervor, in essence Christian, that turned into the Puritan “work ethic”, discipline and materialism. An extreme sect of a religion based on love, altruism and sacrifice gave birth to pragmatism and individual liberalism, and a society based

on irreconcilable opposites – the Puritans reconciled the irreconcilable: the service of both “God and Mammon” at the same time. This, of course, leads to a complete absence of empathy for all that stands between the “individual/ nation” and “progress”. Between “us” and the “Frontier”. Finally, pragmatism abandoned both God and science, it did not need anything transcendental, there ceased to be any need for philosophy and metaphysics, their eyes were directed straight ahead and “narrowed [...] to what one could deal with”, and then theories were constructed to justify this narrowness (Nastić, 1998, p. 76). The construction of “justifications” for the American way of life *has become* the American way of life itself. The need for the constant affirmation of the correctness of the “American way” grows in proportion to disappointments and defeats. Power and performance, as opposed to truth and action, image as opposed to essence, and masking as opposed to being, are what postmodern America is. Fragmentation versus integrity. A pluralism of lifestyles whose valorization of everything only devalues everything (Nastić 1998, p. 76).

This is, also, the image of America we see in both Shepard and Mamet’s works – America is far from the promised Paradise;⁷ it is no Hell either, and to be a Purgatory, there must be a true desire for transformation. It seems to be an infinite postmodern Dantean Limbo.

The young Shepard and Mamet perceive and transmit such an image of America, while the mature Shepard “looks back in anger” (*States of Shock, God of Hell, Kicking a Dead Horse*) and the mature Mamet attempts to strike a balance between assimilation and irony, provocation and acceptance. Ultimately, Shepard and Mamet are living examples of the American paradox – both made a profit (in different aspects of life) from the very act of criticizing American values. This confirms the postmodern American creed – each lifestyle in America welcome, as long as it is American.

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7 In his philosophical travelogue Baudrillard plays with the idea of “paradise”. The American paradise is the only one possible. “Paradise is just paradise. Mournful, monotonous, and superficial though it may be, it is paradise. There is no other” says the philosopher. “If you are prepared to accept the consequences of your dreams – not just the political and sentimental ones, but the theoretical and cultural ones as well – then you must still regard America today with the same naive enthusiasm as the generations that discovered the New World.” Baudrillard argues that “Europe can no longer be understood by starting out from Europe itself.” and that American modernity key to understanding the “end of history” (107).

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Ali obstaja sodobna ameriška drama? Ali je postmodernizem v ameriški dramatik? Shepard vs. Mamet – čigava Amerika je (bolj) resnična?

Mamet in Shepard si kot dramatika izposojata iz sodobne kulture, da ji s tem poplačata z obrestmi vred: njuna dela dajejo kulturnemu (kon)tekstu bogatejšo vsebino, kar je tudi vsebina pričujočega članka.

Ključne besede: postmodernizem, Amerika, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, mass culture, potrošništvo

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THE ANALYSIS OF SANDRA CISNEROS' *HOUSE ON MANGO STREET* BASED ON SOCIAL CRITICISM OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S *BORDERLANDS: LA FRONTERA*

Špela Grum

Abstract

The article deals with the main female characters that appear in Sandra Cisneros' collection of vignettes, *House on Mango Street* (1991). It sheds light on their lives and motives for their actions, through social criticism of Gloria Anzaldúa and the main points she establishes in her semi-autobiographical collection of essays *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1999). The topics Anzaldúa addresses give an insight into the Chicano identity, and the struggle of Chicano women in particular. Through her vantage point, I discuss gender roles, the immigrants' search for identity and their quest for a more dignified life, by trying to reconcile the antagonizing forces of the different parts of their identity.

Key words: Chicano, Mestiza, immigrants, gender roles, borderlands

Gloria Anzaldúa (1942–2004), the author, cultural theorist and feminist philosopher, born in Raymondville, south Texas (American National Biography Online), was, as she described in *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1999), “the first in six generations to leave the Valley, the only one in family to leave home” (Anzaldúa 1999: 38). Being Chicana herself, the daughter of Mexican immigrants, she aptly describes the position and role of Mexican women in her culture, the “cultural tyranny” (Anzaldúa 1999: 38) they experience, as well as the social position of the Mestizo population in general. She sheds light on the centuries-long struggle of living in “the borderlands”, experiencing the ostracism of white Americans and having family members from Mexico risk their lives to come to a promised land, only to be treated as “cucarachos”. In her essay *The Homeland, Aztlan/ El otro Mexico*, there is a passage where she explains the situation they find themselves in:

Those who make it past the checking points of the Border Patrol find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano *barrios* in the Southwest and in big northern cities. Living in a no-man’s borderland, caught between being treated as criminals and being able to eat, between resistance and deportation, the illegal refugees are some of the poorest and the most exploited of any people in the U.S. (Anzaldúa 1999: 34)

Further on in her essay, she expresses an even bigger concern, which permeates her entire collection of essays, and is especially important for the topic of this article, and it is the concern for the Mexican woman. She writes:

The Mexican woman is especially at risk. Often the *coyote* (smuggler) doesn’t feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her or sells her into prostitution. She cannot call on county state health or economic resources because she doesn’t know English and she fears deportation. American employers are quick to take advantage of her helplessness. She can’t go home. She’s sold her house, her furniture, borrowed from friends in order to pay the *coyote* who charges her four to five thousand dollars to smuggle her to Chicago. She may work as a live-in maid for white, Chicano or Latino households for as little as 15\$ a week. [...] *La mojada, la mujer indocumentada*, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe homeground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain. (Anzaldúa 1999: 34, 35)

To understand the subject matter behind *House on Mango Street* (1991), one must consider the terms *Chicana* and *Mestiza*. As the term *Chicana* generally refers “(in North America) to a woman or girl of Mexican origin or decent”

(Oxford Dictionaries) the term *Mestiza* is used “(in Latin America) [for] a person of mixed race, especially one having Spanish and American Indian parentage” (*ibid*). The latter term is especially dealt with in Anzaldúa’s seventh essay, *La consciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*. In this essay she mentions Jose Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher, who “envisaged *una raza mestiza, una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color, la primera raza sinesis del globo*” (Anzaldúa 1999: 99). “Opposite to the theory of pure Aryan, and to the policy of racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity” (*ibid*). In her essay, Anzaldúa speaks of an “[...] ‘alien’ consciousness [that] is presently in the making – a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*: It is a consciousness of the Borderlands (*ibid*). It is a consciousness that is a product of “[...] racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization” (*ibid*). But as much as this definition sounds promising, and describes a new consciousness which is richer and full of potential, it often reveals a life filled with struggle and search for identity. Anzaldúa eloquently describes this in the following passage:

Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. [...] Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. (Anzaldúa, 1999 : 100)

This is the struggle Chicanas face every day of their lives, when they try to reconcile the different aspects of their identity and strive to lead a better life in a country that is often unwelcoming to everything they represent as Chicanas and as immigrants. In her essays, Anzaldúa masterfully conveys her theory of the borderlands and Jorge Capetillo-Ponce, in his article *Exploring Gloria Anzaldúa’s Methodology in Borderlands/ La Frontera – The New Mestiza* (2006), observes that Gloria Anzaldúa had taken

her analysis of the emergence of a New Mestiza consciousness into unexpected and unexplored territories. [...] Not only does she shift continually from analysis to meditation, and refuse to recognize disciplinary barriers, but she speaks poetically even when dealing with cultural, political and social issues. (Capetillo-Ponce 2006: 87)

Similarly, Sandra Cisneros portrays her characters through the eyes and narration of Esperanza, the main character of *The House on Mango Street* (1991). Their stories are soaked with tragedy, but yet they are not presented in a somber

and gloomy way. Esperanza's accounts are, similar to Anzaldúa's, very poetic and implicit in meaning, thus having a more powerful impact on reader's ability to relate. She speaks almost matter-of-factly about the lives of Sally, Marin, Alicia and others, and demonstrates that such is the reality for them, and lamenting their fate or giving in to desperation is not the luxury they have. Of course, they do, to some extent, correspond to her age, as certain aspects are presented from a girl's point-of-view. However, she is a girl who had seen more than an average young person, and who has had life teach her lessons many adults never receive in their lifetime. She learns by example, and observes which path not to choose in life. Nevertheless, she is somewhat trapped in her seemingly pre-determined role, struggling to take control of the course of her life. She falls prey to the manipulations of a man and is robbed of the ultimate virtue in her culture, her virginity.

Sandra Cisneros, the acclaimed author of several books that deal with the Chicano and the immigrant topics, was born in Chicago in 1954. She studied at Loyola University of Chicago and the University of Iowa. Among her most well-known books are *Bad Boys* (1980), *My Wicked Wicked Ways* (1987, 1992), *Loose Woman* (1994), *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991), *The House on Mango Street* (1991) and *Caramelo* (2002). The novel of particular importance to this article, "*The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1984, won the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1985 and is required reading in middle schools, high schools, and universities across" (sandracisneros.com) the U.S. It is a novel, more accurately, a collection of vignettes, narrated by a girl named Esperanza. She is the main character from whose perspective we experience all the stories about different people in her neighbourhood. She is an excellent observer of gender roles that her Mexican culture imposes on her and her peers. She observes and describes how different people, especially women, deal with their role in the community, as well as in society in general.

She begins her story with herself, and how her name bears an already pre-determined sadness, as if she were aware of the "Mestiza consciousness" Anzaldúa speaks of, and how her destiny, as a woman, and as a Mexican immigrant, is meant to be a struggle. She expresses the awareness of the weight of her heritage, since it was her great-grandmother's name. She explains:

She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse - which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female - but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong. [...] I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. (Cisneros 1991: 11)

She understands her great-grandmother's wish, much to the resemblance of her own, to have a future of her own design and not give too much importance on marriage. However, a rebellious woman was something that was not to be tolerated, and matters had to be settled then, similarly as they are settled now. She writes:

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the ways so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza, I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window. (Cisneros 1991: 11)

Here, she states her point-of-view about her own future, and makes it clear that she would never accept this heritage passed on by so many women before her, who had to passively watch their lives pass them by, and perform the tasks that were expected of them, on account of being Chicano women. Esperanza's mother, in between repeating to herself "I could've been somebody, you know" and telling her how "shame is a bad thing" because "it keeps you down" (Cisneros 1991: 91), encourages her to try to be the master of her own destiny and amount to something in her life. Esperanza expresses her conviction in the following passage:

[...] I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain. [...] I have begun my quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate. (Cisneros 1991: 89)

Anzaldúa possesses this same mentality, and in the description of her experience as a young girl, hers greatly resembles Esperanza's:

At a very early age I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair. I had a stubborn will. It tried constantly to mobilize my soul under my own regime, to live life on my own terms, no matter how unsuitable to others they were. *Terca*. Even as a child I would not obey. I was "lazy". Instead of ironing my younger brother's shirts or cleaning the cupboards, I would pass my hours studying, reading, painting, writing. Every bit of self-faith I'd painstakingly gathered took a beating daily. Nothing in my culture approved of me. (Anzaldúa 1999: 38)

All the female characters Esperanza describes in *House on Mango Street* (1991) are predominantly isolated and kept quiet by the men in their lives. The young girls dream of a better life which solely depends on men, who are the only catalysts of change, and the ones who can, by means of proposing matrimony, change their lives. The only character that does not invest her hopes in a man is Alicia.

She is yet another girl who faces her father's deeply set and rigid beliefs about gender roles and the position of women. He believes there should be no distraction in Alicia's life, no silly or unnecessary thoughts (she is afraid of mice) that would keep her from her duties as a woman in charge of a household. Alicia, being so unfortunate as to have lost her mother, is the one who needs to run the household. Her father believes that "a woman's place [in the evening] is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears early just in time to rise and catch the hind legs behind the sink, beneath the four-clawed tub, under the swollen floorboards nobody fixes" (Cisneros 1991: 31) Alicia wishes she hadn't inherited "her mama's rolling pin and sleepiness" (Cisneros 1991: 31) and she is a smart girl who managed to enter university, so she would not have to waste her life in a factory or as a housewife. Esperanza comments, that Alicia "[i]s afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers" (Cisneros 1991: 32). With the latter she wishes to express how crippling and fear-invoking her father's beliefs and expectations are for Alicia. Her entire life could take a different course, should he make it his business to prevent her from following her dreams.

Anzaldúa believes that "[c]ulture (read males) professes to protect women", but "[a]ctually it keeps women in rigidly defined roles" (Anzaldúa 1999: 39). She goes even further in depicting the true sentiment of these women:

The world is not a safe place to live in. We shiver in separate cells in enclosed cities, shoulders hunched, barely keeping the panic below the surface of the skin, daily drinking shock along with our morning coffee, fearing the torches being set to our buildings, the attacks in the streets. Shutting down. Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey. Alienated from her mother culture, "alien" in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits. (Anzaldúa 1999: 42)

Esperanza's friend Sally, represents Chicano women, who wish to live a better life, but are convinced, that they will achieve it only by putting all their hopes in a man, and renouncing all power over their own destiny. Sally's father, who desperately holds on to tradition and tries to enforce it in raising his daughter, resorts to physical violence to try to keep her at her best behaviour and remain pure until marriage. This was the ultimate virtue in a woman's life, to remain a virgin, and by doing so, be a good woman.

Anzaldúa, in her second essay *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan* speaks of this "cultural tyranny" and states that:

[...] culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws, women transmit them. [...] Men were enforcing this traditional behaviour, without truly understanding it, and women followed and obeyed in order to avoid physical punishment, shame, or simply to avoid the social tag of a “*mujer mala*”. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not obeying them, for being *bociconas* (big mouths), for being *callajeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbours), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. (Anzaldúa 1999: 38)

In her opinion, women in the Chicano culture are quickly categorized:

If a woman rebels she is a *mujer mala*. If a woman doesn't renounce in favour of the male she is selfish. If a woman remains a *virgen* until she marries, she is a good woman. For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother. Today some of us have a fourth choice: entering the world by way of education and career and becoming self-autonomous persons. A very few of us. As a working class people our chief activity is to put food in our mouths, a roof over our heads and clothes on our backs. [...] Educated or not, the onus is still on woman to be a wife/mother – only the nun can escape motherhood. Women are made to feel total failures if they don't marry and have children. (Anzaldúa 1999: 39)

The cultural “paradigm” that women should not rebel, maintains them in a permanently inferior position, frightened to overstep their limits that have been established for women “of their kind”. Anzaldúa demonstrates this by saying:

In my culture, selfishness is condemned, especially in women; humility and selflessness [...] is considered a virtue. In the past, acting humble with members outside the family ensured that you would make no one *envidioso* (envious); therefore he or she would not use witchcraft against you. If you get above yourself, you're an *envidiosa*. If you don't behave like everyone else, *la gente* will say that you think you are better than others, *que te crees grande*. With ambition (condemned by the Mexican culture and valued in the Anglo) comes envy. *Respeto* carries with it a set of rules so that social categories and hierarchies will be kept in order: respect is reserved for *la abuela, papá, el patron*, those with power in the community. Women are at the bottom of the ladder one rung above the deviants. (Anzaldúa 1999: 40)

Similarly as Sally, Marin is another female character Esperanza speaks about, who is also portrayed as a sad figure, which is desperately aiming for a better life,

one sold Avon product at a time, and working as a baby-sitter for her cousins. Although, she has a boyfriend in Puerto Rico, she dreams of an American man who would offer her better opportunities in life. Her mentality is that of many young girls from Mexican families with rigid traditional views that represent the only stability in a life full of struggle, belittlement and uncertainty in a foreign country. Marin, who lights a cigarette outside the house every night and listens to the radio in the cold, shares her wisdom with Esperanza, that gives her insight into the motives of the women she knows, by saying that “it doesn’t matter if it’s cold out or if the radio doesn’t work or if we’ve got nothing to say to each other. What matters [...] is for the boys to see us and for us to see them” (Cisneros 1991: 27). And Esperanza knows all too well that “Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere”, “[i]s waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life” (Cisneros 1991: 27).

Esperanza also speaks about the stereotypes she is faced with, when other people arrive to her neighbourhood. She explains:

Those who don’t know any better come into our neighbourhood scared. They think we are dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. (Cisneros 1991: 28)

She realises that some people in her neighbourhood look unusual and sinister on a surface level, but people in her community don’t feel threatened because they know them, and accept them as one of them. But Esperanza is acutely aware of the duality of their standards considering their own visit to a different community. She admits:

All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighbourhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled uptight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes. (Cisneros 1991: 28)

This is how stereotypes and fears are perpetuated. Every immigrant community feels vulnerable in a foreign country and finds acceptance only within the confines of their own neighbourhoods. They find refuge in the most rigid of cultural beliefs and traditions, in ways of life that are oppressive, but at the same time incredibly appeasing and close to home. However, it is interesting how diligently they reference stereotypes themselves, when considering others from their own community. They use them in a very bitter, resigned fashion. An example of such an event is when Marin meets a man who is later killed in a road accident and she turns out to be the last one to have seen him alive. She is helpful to the police, but deep down she reprimands herself. She tells herself

that he was of no importance to her. "Just another *brazier* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. [...] The ones who always look ashamed." (Cisneros 1991: 69) Esperanza explains to the reader:

His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo – he went north... we never heard from him again. (Cisneros 1991: 66)

Anzaldúa addresses this issue when she writes about how the Mexicans "have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks" (Anzaldúa 1999: 33).

Faceless, nameless, invisible, taunted with "Hey *cucaracho*" (cockroach). Trembling with fear, yet filled with courage, a courage born of desperation. Barefoot and uneducated, Mexicans with hands like boot soles gather at night by the river where two worlds merge creating what Reagan calls a frontline, a war zone. The convergence has created a shock culture, a closed country. (Anzaldúa 1999: 33)

They are often called *mojados* or wetbacks, because they

float on inflatable rafts across *el rio Grande*, or wade or swim across naked, clutching their clothes over their heads. Holding onto the grass, they pull themselves along the banks with a prayer [...] on their lips. (Anzaldúa 1999: 33)

If they are fortunate, they end up in *barrios*, across the border from, what Chicanos call, "North America's rubbish dump" (Anzaldúa 1999: 33). They join communities ravaged with poverty, but held together by shared struggle in a hope for a better life. For Esperanza, a better life is represented by the house she will once own. It will be completely different from the house on Mango Street which, for her, represents shame and the inability to do better – a house not worthy of pride, but she will do better in her life. She feels she represents all the people who are disenfranchised and underprivileged, especially Mexican women. She writes:

Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed. Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after. (Cisneros 1991: 108)

This is her way of saying that she will claim her freedom and independence for those women she knew couldn't, and her house will represent to her a territory where she would belong, even if it was built in a country she never felt truly accepted.

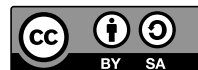
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Analiza dela *House on Mango Street* Sandre Cisneros z vidika družbene kritike Glorie Anzaldúa v *Borderlands: La Frontera*

Prispevek obravnava glavne ženske like v zbirki vinjet Sandre Cisneros *House on Mango Street* (1991) ter analizira njihova dejanja in motive zanje skozi optiko kritiškega dela Glorie Anzaldúa *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1999).

Ključne besede: Chicano, Mestiza, migranti, vloge spolov, meja

Narrating the Marginalized Oriental Female: Silencing the Colonized Subaltern

Saddik Gohar

Abstract

A scrutinized reading of the early fiction of Naguib Mahfouz, particularly his masterpiece *Midaq Alley*, reveals that the author's outward tendency to offer what seems to be a neutral presentation of Egyptian-Arab women is thwarted by a hegemonic master narrative originated in local patriarchal traditions. It either marginalizes the female subaltern downsizing her role in the fictional canvas or conflates her with a status of gender inferiority by assigning her a role which conforms to her image in the patriarchal taxonomy of Oriental women. In other words, the authorial attempt to create an objective narrative of the male/female controversy in *Midaq Alley* is totally undermined by a plethora of male voices dominating the fictional text and deploying patriarchal discourses about the depravity of the female race and the invalidity of women's struggle for independence. In this context, the paper argues that due to a hegemonic narrative mechanism, Mahfouz's representation of the female protagonist conforms to domestic patriarchal visions of femininity while on the surface it masks itself as a progressive image of womanhood.

Key words: colonization, patriarchy, hegemony, subaltern discourse

1 INTRODUCTION

In one of the early pioneering studies on Naguib Mahfouz¹, Sasson Somekh points out that women in *Midaq Alley*² “are not a complementary element; often they are in the very center of action. Hamida is possibly more prominent than any of the other people presented in the novel” (79). In reality, the reader did not see many events in the novel to verify this assumption. In his delineation of Hamida, the protagonist, the author incorporates a narrative strategy that unconsciously betrays the masculine psyche of a supposedly well-intentioned male Arab writer who attempts to write on behalf of the oppressed and the marginalized female community in his country. Hamida’s narrative voice was submerged in a text predominated by a plethora of male voices reflecting the attitude of the imperial narrator. In other words, Mahfouz develops a narrative strategy through which the female is either pushed to the periphery or assigned a status of inferiority or silence.

Moreover, the dehumanizing process which targets the marginalized Oriental female in addition to the absence of a moderate male voice to represent a counter attitude toward the central anti-feminist perspective reinforces the biased discourse of Mahfouz’s master narrative controlled by a patriarchal imperial voice. Due to the hegemonic structure of Mahfouz’s master narrative, the male / female issue is unfortunately viewed from the viewpoint of the hegemonic patriarchal side. The narrative structure of the novel conspicuously uncovers a camouflaged patriarchal ideology infiltrating the text as a subterranean current. It is noteworthy to illustrate that the narrative strategy of *Midaq Alley*³ is shaped by the author’s biased perspective on the male / female equation, which turns the novel into what Jean-François Lyotard calls “grand narrative” (23).

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- 1 Naguib Mahfouz is (1911-2006), the famous Egyptian writer, is the most celebrated novelist in the Arab world in the twentieth century. He published 34 novels, 350 short stories, five plays and dozens of film scripts. His novels have been transformed into Egyptian and foreign movies. He is the only Arab writer who obtained the Nobel Prize in literature in 1988. Most of his works were translated into more than ten languages and his novels have been taught in universities and colleges worldwide.
 - 2 According to Mona Amyuni, the Arabic name “Midaq” literally signifies a place which indifferently grinds down its dwellers devastating them. The characters are part of the lower strata of the Cairo society. Beneath the surface lurk conflicting evil forces tearing the lives of the alley’s inhabitants apart. See Mona Takieddine Amyuni. “Images of Arab Women in *Midaq Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz and *Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Saleh”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17(1985): 25-36.
 - 3 The events take place in an alley located in a poverty stricken district of Cairo. Its people take the opportunity offered by the WWII to salvage their life from degraded economic conditions. “The conception of the alley as a crucible is carried out with much consistency saving the story from fragmentation.” (Somekh 1973: 92). For further details, see Sasson Somekh. *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Naguib Mahfouz’s Novels*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.

In the novel, the voices of the male and female characters are blended into a monologic and imperial voice crystalizing the author's attitude toward the female protagonist. In short, the incidents of the novel are orchestrated by a narrative structure that manipulates the voices of all characters in order to amplify the patriarchal ideology of the author overwhelming the reader with perverted images about Hamida and the female race. The novelist aims to reconstruct reality and obscure the hegemonic policies of patriarchy employing a narrative dynamic through which all the characters turn into mouthpieces expressing his own perspective. By using a narrator who views the female protagonist as a whore by nature, the author attempts to mystify the brutal process of patriarchal subjugation by making it seem to be the inevitable result of female degradation and moral corruption. The hostile treatment of the fallen woman figure, Hamida, in *Midaq Alley*, subverts critical allegations about what is called "Mahfouz's pro-feminist tendencies". For example, Miriam Cooke points out that prostitutes are "the most interesting and creative women characters" (111) in Mahfouz's fiction. This perspective is not supported by Simone de Beauvoir who argues that "prostitutes as literary figures used as projections of male fantasies" (157).

Combined with the technique of one-sided dialogue utilized in the novel, Mahfouz's narrative strategy aims to distort reality subverting women's images. Instead of defending the female subaltern against the tyrannical practices of a patriarchal culture, the narrator condemned Hamida and punished Abbas, the humble male who failed to subjugate her. By delineating the marginalized female as despicable in her character and totally blameworthy for the suffering of Abbas, the author negotiates the possibility of her removal from the alley. Throughout the text, the author attempts to degrade the female subaltern categorizing her as a whore to justify her subsequent punishment. Furthermore, the destruction of the humanity of the female other is achieved in different ways in the novel either by downsizing her voice or by assigning her roles which confirm to her stereotyped image in local culture or by conflating her with a degraded status reflecting her position in domestic patriarchal taxonomy.

In *Midaq Alley* the process of marginalizing, subjugating and silencing carries within itself specific gender and class implications. Within the intersection of gender, power and class, silencing is intrinsically related to the precarious situation of the woman as a non-hegemonic object who is either denied the possibility of self-articulation or whose voice is purposefully ignored. In the novel the voice of Hamida is subdued and colonized by a phallogocentric narrator. Besides, the incidents of the novel are monopolized by a narrative mechanism and a hegemonic discourse which confine the marginalized female Oriental to the social ghetto of the harem. Instead of deploying a plethora of voices as reflections of male and female attitudes toward male/female issues, the omnipresent author introduces a

biased hegemonic voice replacing the discourse of the feminine with that of the masculine in order to make the latter desirable and render the patriarchal narrative consumable.

There is no doubt that Mahfouz's fiction is explicitly dictated by an imperial narrative and the tale is narrated by a male voice whereas Hamida is introduced as personification of evil and sin. As a sexual monster, she is humiliated by being transformed into a whore. When Hamida, the female subaltern, is allowed to speak, her utterances conform to her stereotyped image in local patriarchal iconographies. In addition to the narrow space given to the female protagonist in the textual canvas, the ultimate fictional discourse reveals the existence of gender demarcations separating between male and female. As a reproduction of discourses advocated by patriarchal powers in a conservative society, Mahfouz's narrative reinforces local stereotypes about women rampant in the Egyptian and Arab societies.

2 SUFFOCATING THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

Though Hamida is the protagonist of the novel, she was not given a substantial space in the narrative canvas. Even in episodes in which she was given focus, the readers see her through the spectacles of the male imperial narrator embodying the voice of the author or via the eyes of the male characters in the novel. The novel consists of thirty five parts mostly devoted to events and motifs integral to the superstitious, corrupt and rapacious community of the alley. Priority is given to narratives engaging male characters such as the wisdom of Mr. Radwan Alhussainy, a landlord in the alley, the drug addiction and homosexuality of Mr. Kirsha, the coffee shop owner, the moral corruption of Mr. Zeta, the cripple-maker, the personal life of Salim Alwan, the rich businessman, the suspicious, illegal activities of Dr. Booshy, grave-digger, the close relationship between Uncle Kamil, the shop owner and Mr. Abbas Alhilu, the barber, the routine work of Mr. Sonkor, the coffee boy, the work of Mr. Hussain Kirsha in the British camp and the connection between the Jewish broker and Salim Alwan, The miserable life of Sheikh Darwish, a government employee who lost his job in the Ministry of Endowment as well as the unfortunate destiny of the local folklore ballads singer abandoned by his audience after the introduction of the radio are also given some narrative space.

Moreover, rumors surrounding old women in the alley such as Umm Hamida, the match-maker and Mrs. Saniya Affi, the rich widow who aspires to marry a young man are spotlighted in the narrative. The recurrent quarrels between Husniya, the female baker and her husband, Jaada besides the ferocious

conflict between Mrs. Kirsha and her husband over the issues of homosexuality and drug additions are intermittently emphasized in the mainstream narrative. Minor motifs are also given increasing attention such as the recurrent news about the Second World War, the cooperation between the Egyptian government and the British forces besides episodes dedicated to political corruption and election campaigns. The narrative also includes details regarding the daily activities of the poor female workers from nearby urban quarters who made use of the work opportunities provided by WWII and got jobs in a Cairo factory. Other references are frequently made to the Jewish ghetto girls who are envied for their fashionable appearance and the freedom they enjoyed.

The first part introduces the readers to the male characters in the novel particularly, Radwan Alhussainy, one of the landlords in the alley whereas the second part is dominated by the presence of old sterile women such as Umm Hamida, the lady who adopts the protagonist since her childhood after the untimely death of her mother and Saniya Afify, the wealthy widow and owner of a house in the alley. Hamida, the protagonist appears for the first time in a brief episode in part three and she is seen through the eyes of the imperial male narrator who personifies the voice of the author: "Hamida was in her twenties. Her skin was bronze-colored. Her most remarkable features were her black, beautiful eyes" (Mahfouz, 21)⁴ and sexy body. According to the narrative, the ambitions of the rebellious girl has transcended the boundaries of the alley: "Oh what shame, Hamida. What are you doing living in this alley? She felt jealous of the girls who work in the factories, those Jewish girls who go to work. They all go about in nice clothes" (24). Hamida wants to emulate the factory girls but she is aware of her limitations. She does not have a certificate or school education to follow on their heels. She felt jealous of the Jewish girls from the neighborhood, but she hates the factory girls descending from slums and poor districts in Cairo who succeeded in getting jobs and became economically independent.

Hamida resented them for their prosperity and freedom: "They imitated the Jewish girls by paying attention to their appearance and in keeping slim. Some even used unaccustomed language and did not hesitate to walk arm-in-arm and stroll about streets of illicit love" (35). Moreover, in part five, Hamida encountered Abbas, the young barber who expressed his love for her: "She saw the sparks of love in his eyes just as she suspected it was there when he stared at her window. She knew his financial state was not impressive but his personality was submissive and humble. This should have pleased her dominating nature" (37). Because of her attitude to dominate, Hamida violates the roles implemented by the surrounding

4 All subsequent citations from the novel will be taken from Naguib Mahfouz, *Midaq Alley*, Trans. Trevor Le Gassick. Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1977.

patriarchal society, thus she must be punished. Abbas also must be punished because he surrendered to Hamida, a woman who turns him into a puppet in her hand. This act is a violation of the domestic masculine conventions integral to Arab manhood. In addition to her feminine skills “in attracting men”, she yearns for power and “love for money” (34). According to the narrator, Hamida is haunted by “a desire to fight and conquer men”, therefore she is ostracized and outraged by the male community.

In part ten, Hamida met Abbas briefly for the second time and he proposed to her. He told her that he decided to work for the British army in order to make a fortune and make her happy. He plans to visit their house and publically proposes to her: “I will meet your mother. The arrangement must be made before I leave” (76).

Furthermore, in part thirteen, the engagement rituals were consummated and Hamida had the first emotional /semi- physical contact with Abbas on the dark stairs in her house at the night prior to his departure: “He took her arm and drew himself gently towards her. His mouth searched desperately for hers, touching first her nose and then making its way down to her lips which were already parted in welcome. He was transported on a wave of ecstasy from which he did not recover until she gently drew herself from his arms and went upstairs” (94). Hamida enjoys her first romantic experience with Abbas undermining authorial allegations about her tough and unfeminine nature: “Hamida had never before had such an emotional experience. For this one brief period in her life, she brimmed with emotion and affection, feeling that her life was forever bound to him” (93).

In part eight, Hamida is captured through the eyes of Salim Alwan who wants to remarry because his first wife was not able anymore to gratify his sexual instinct. Once he caught a glimpse of Hamida, he told himself: “Yes, she was indeed poor and lowly, but unfortunately desire could not be denied, could it? She was poor and humble, but what about her bronze-colored face, the look in her eyes and her lovely slender body?” (59). Afterwards, Hamida appears briefly expressing her desire to accept Salim Alwan’s marriage proposal after he talked with her foster mother. In this context, she is presented through the eyes of the narrator as a diabolical cunning girl. After the proposal of the Alwan, the company owner, she repudiates her commitment to Abbas without any qualms. She forgot the emotional experience she had with him on the staircase on the eve of his departure when she thought she was forever bound to him. When Alwan asked her hand in marriage, Hamida discarded her first fiancé with no regrets because he had really been banished from her heart long time after his departure. She also rejected the advice of Mr. Alhussainy who told her mother to turn down the marriage proposal because “The barber is young and Mr. Radwan is old; the barber is of the same class as Hamida and Mr. Radwan is not” (124). Hamida’s ambitions to break the social taboos and transgress the class structure in the alley are not permitted in

Mahfouz's world and therefore her marriage from Radwan should not be consummated. Eventually, Radwan fell ill due to a sudden heart attack which terminated his sexual potency forever. The news of Radwan's sickness struck Hamida "like a thunderbolt" (126).

In part twenty, Hamida met with the pimp, Ebrahim Farag for the first time. As a supporter of one of the corrupt politicians, Farag infiltrated into the alley during general elections campaigns. Hamida believed he fell in love with her like others and was intoxicated by his warm words: "This is not your quarter, nor are these people relatives of yours. You are completely different. You do not belong here at all. How can you live among these people? Who are they compared to you? You are a princess in a shabby cloak" (143). Before she fell into the snares of Farag who will unmask his real identity as a pimp "a tiger waiting for an opportunity to leap", she was momentarily engaged in a love affair with him because he mastered the role of the passionate lover. Besides, in part twenty two, the third person narrator views Hamida very briefly. Her image is projected through the eyes of Salim Alwan who survived the heart attack but remained impotent. He recalls his desire for her when Umm Hamida visited him after he returned to the alley: "Was it not strange how he had forgotten Hamida as though she had never existed? It was as though she had been a small drop of the healthy blood that flowed in his veins and when his health had gone she had vanished with it" (153).

In part twenty-three, Hamida fell in the trap of the pimp and decided to elope with him and leave the alley. Farag recruits whores to entertain the British soldiers in Cairo during the time of WWII. Consequently, he takes Hamida to a building in downtown Cairo where he teaches his female victims how to become professional prostitutes after training them to master Oriental and Western dancing in addition to the English language. When she discovered the reality of Farag she did not quit. She told him "you are trying to corrupt me. What an evil, wicked seducer you are? You are not a man, you are a pimp" (168). He told her that he is a pimp and "the headmaster of a school" (178). Though aware of Farag's evil intentions, Hamida accepted prostitution willingly and became an accomplished whore in a short time. Farag is fully aware that Hamida will not leave him simply because "she is a whore by instinct" (170).

In part twenty five and as a result of her disappearance, Hamida becomes the talk of the alley. Hussain Kirsha told his mother: "She has run away. Someone has seduced her, taken position of her senses and run off with her" (185). Moreover, the protagonist's name is changed into Titi to fit her new role as a prostitute serving British soldiers who found it more difficult to pronounce her original name "Hamida". In Farag's prostitution house, she met with the English language teacher and the effeminate dancing teacher Susu who is a kind of lady boy. In part twenty-six and for the first time in her life, Hamida had a full sexual

relation surrendering her body to Farag. While in bed and just before penetrating her virginity, Farag refrained from completing the sex act and behaved as a pimp. He withdrew and said: "Gently, gently, American officers will gladly pay fifty pounds for virgins" (192). In response "she sat upright on the bed, then sprang to the floor with amazing speed like an enraged tigress. Now all her vicious instincts were roused as she slapped his face with such a force that the blow cracked through the room." In retaliation, "he struck her right cheek as hard as he could. Then he slapped her left cheek just as violently. She clung to him, her head raised towards his face, her mouth was trembling with passion" (193).

In part twenty eight, Abbas returned home to discover the scandal of Hamida's escape from the alley. In his search for her, he encountered the factory girls who told him that they "saw her several times with a well-dressed man in suit" (204). Throughout part thirty, Abbas was searching for Hamida in the taverns of Cairo and in Vita's Bar in the Jewish Quarter in the city. In part thirty-one, Hamida is disappointed after Farag informs her that he is not a marrying man. He told her in a sarcastic tone "Tell me my darling, are people still getting married?" (223). At this point, she was not able to go back to the alley or Abbas. She reached a point of no return as she was fully transformed into a professional prostitute: "She had now learned Oriental and Western dancing and she also showed a quicker ear for learning the sexual principles of the English Language" (219). When she encountered Abbas in part thirty-two, she cunningly moved him against Farag in order to get rid of both males⁵ according to critical allegations. During the meeting Abbas was enraged and in his fury he swore to kill the pimp who destroyed their life.

Subsequently, he orchestrated a plan in collaboration with his friend Hussain Kirsha to punish the seducer. Instead of avenging himself on the pimp, Abbas attacked Hamida with a broken bottle paving the way for his murder at the hands of the British soldiers. In part thirty-four, Abbas glimpsed Hamida entertaining British soldiers in a tavern. In the frenzy of his anger, he forgot the pimp and rushed towards her striking her with a bottle smashing her face: „He saw Hamida sitting amidst a crowd of soldiers. One stood behind her pouring wine into a glass in her hand, leaning towards her slightly as she turned her head towards him. Her legs were stretched on the lap of another soldier sitting opposite her and there were others in uniform crowding around her, drinking boisterously“ (241).

In the presence of Hussain and other passers-by, Hamida was severely injured but survived the quarrel. The narrator describes the scene as follows: "blood poured in a stream from her nose, mouth and chin mixing with the creams and powers on

5 For more details on this perspective, see Marius Deeb. "Maguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*: A Socio-Cultural Analysis" in *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, Edited by Trevor Le Gassick. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1991, pp. 27-36.

her face and running down on to her neck and dress” (241). Noticeably, the drunk British troops killed Abbas in retaliation after Hamida’s screams drove them crazy. Many angry and powerful soldiers fell on Abbas from all sides like wild animals crushing him to death. At the end of the novel part thirty-five the alley was informed by Hussain of the details pertaining to the death of Abbas and the injury of Hamida. Eventually, the alley restores its old way of life as if nothing happen: “The alley returns to its usual state of indifference and forgetfulness” (244).

3. CONSTRUCTING A PATRIARCHAL PATTERN

In addition to patriarchal hegemony, the narrative undeniably betrays trajectories of power structure crucial to the sexual relations and the image of women in *Midaq Alley*. The theme of British colonization infiltrates into the text with details regarding the WWII era, where downtown Cairo was the sanctuary of prostitution houses and taverns originally erected to entertain the foreign soldiers situated in military camps encompassing the capital city. Hamida was trained as a prostitute to serve in these brothels, however she was mainly victimized by what Kate Millett refers to as “interior colonization” (cited in Amyuni, 25). Moreover, Hussain, representing the Egyptian masses, was an eye-witness to the murder of Abbas, the innocent young man and the sexual violation of Hamida (Egypt). In this context, Hamida may figuratively epitomize Egypt who is viewed as a prostitute exploited by a corrupt political regime who gave her to the colonizers.

In a related context, Mona Mikhail sees Hamida as a fallen virtuous woman and a victim (76) whereas Marius Deeb argues that the protagonist is an ambitious social climber and a cunning woman who “wants to be liberated from Farag both emotionally and economically and hopes that after a violent encounter between Abbas and Farag, both will end up in prison or perhaps perish and thus she will regain her freedom and continue to pursue her career” (33). Regardless of the preceding critical arguments, the narrative unveils a battered image of the female protagonist. Throughout the narrative, Hamida is demonized by the narrator who weaves an entangling web of myths around her immersing her into a state of irredeemable immorality. The novel is overshadowed by gendered power structures and patriarchal discourses and sexist depictions of the female other. In like manner, the protagonist is stigmatized by being presented as a prostitute who denounced the traditional roles of a wife and mother. She has a negative impact on her male lovers. Abbas is emasculated, demeaned and became effeminate due to Hamida’s spells over him. Hamida is penalized because she ferociously fights against domestication and refused to envision the world from a patriarchal angle. Indisputably, the fictionalized Oriental protagonist in

Mahfouz's novel is viewed as being naturally subservient to a superior and morally mature power.

In *Midaq Alley*, patriarchal subjugation of women is triggered by its alleged adherence to idealized traditions of wifehood and motherhood. The incidents in the novel, which are reproduction of domestic patriarchal narratives, aim to disempower and Orientalize the femininity potential. Since Orientalizing is a basic strategy of marginalization, the female protagonist is transformed into a cultural object, Orientalized and marginalized to conform to her image in patriarchal categorization of women. Historically, the destruction of female images is a recurrent, almost a ritualistic practice in fictional discourses by male Arab writers, therefore the female subaltern, in Mahfouz's novel, is either denied a voice or appears in the single image of a decadent whore. Simone de Beauvoir observes that prostitutes "as literary figures are used as projections of male fantasies" (157). On this basis, the poor female other in *Midaq Alley* is fictionally exploited cope up with the anti-feminist discourses integral to contemporary Arab culture.

Surprisingly, Cooke refers to what she calls "a narrative voice" allegedly given by Mahfouz to his female characters, thus she identifies him as a feminist novelist (108). However, *Midaq Alley* is abounded by a narrative praxis which uncovers the author's commitment to a patriarchal ideology manifesting itself in the tenor and texture of the text. The act of narration accommodates thematic concerns and other related issues – deeply entrenched in the author's gender and religious/cultural orientation – which intrude on the text subordinating the narrative to the prejudice and subjectivity of the male novelist or what Monika Fludernik calls "the repurposing of narrative techniques"⁶ integral to some texts (784). The omnipresent author employs a highly subjective male perspective expressed through a hegemonic authorial narrative strategy and a language (verbal violence) condemnatory of women.

The narrative of *Midaq Alley* is overwhelmingly masculine and the voice of Hamida is smothered in the text. Even in the few episodes dominated by her presence, the readers see her throughout the male perspective of the third person narrator. The image of Hamida as a strong woman with sharp tongue conforms to a deeply rooted stereotypical notion of feminine cunningness inherent in Arab cultural mythology and religious traditions. According to the narrator, Hamida overtly epitomizes non-maternal womanhood. She hates children and does not want to be a mother in addition to her disposition to deceive others. In Mahfouz's narrative, Hamida is delineated physically to unearth nothing except her beauty,

6 For more details on narratology and narrative theory, see Monika Fludernik. 1998. *Encyclopedia of the Novel* (V.2), edited by Paul Schellinger, Christopher Hudson, and Marijke Rijsberman. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998, pp. 784-801.

seduction and sensuality. In reality, Hamida represents the downtrodden and the pariahs of the Cairo lower class. Her inner turmoil and psychological problems resulting from her poverty and inferior status are completely invisible in the text.

Portraying Hamdia's conflict with society from a masculine viewpoint and taking over the typology intrinsic to Arab culture of degraded women confronting conservative traditions, the narrative discourse of Mahfouz's novel categorizes the female as inferior and demonic. Unfortunately, the invisibility of a respectable female voice in the novel provides an impetus to the distorted male discourse of the text assigning the female a role which conforms to her degraded image in local culture. Moreover, the frequent appearance of the female victim in the speeches of hegemonic male narrators problematizes the narrative interfaces of the novel. Instead of viewing the female from a balanced perspective, Mahfouz's master narrative, overshadowed by an anti-feminist discursive strategy, becomes a reproduction of domestic patriarchal stereotypes about women inferiority strengthening the boundaries of racial and gender differences between men and women. Further, the dispersion of a militant patriarchal version of womanhood in the text transforms *Midaq Alley* into a masculine narrative neglecting the rights of the oppressed females.

For example, the hopeless condition of Hamida as a down-trodden orphan afflicted with abject poverty is completely ignored in the novel. Instead, she is introduced, throughout the narrative, as a sexual object to be penetrated. She was given three difficult options: poverty affiliated with marriage from Abbas, the barber or subjugation associated with selling her body in a business marriage from Salim Alwan or prostitution. As a tragic character she has to choose between the home or the brothel. Here lies the narrator's complicity with the values of a patriarchal society and the stereotypical fears about the catastrophic consequences of female sexuality are consequently emphasized. Moreover, Hamida's sexuality jeopardizes the alley's male moral values, therefore she is forced to project her sexuality outside the alley in prostitution houses. Hamida is also oppressed because she turned down the advice of Mr. AlHussany, a symbol of patriarchy in the alley, regarding her marriage from Salim Alwan. In short, she is banished from the alley because she dares to rebel against patriarchy, male supremacy, the pressures of poverty, traditional marriage and social classification.

In *Midaq Alley*, the author utilizes several narrative subtleties which aim to silence the voice of Hamida and re-inscribe negative stereotypes about her and the female community in the alley. Such stereotypes contribute to a discursive strategy which aims to locate or fix the female other in a position of inferiority. Through presentations of reveling descriptions – appropriated by the male narrator – of Hamida where scenes of lust and elaborate accounts of sexual desire prevail, the author attempts to reconstruct an imaginary voluptuous female who

fits the morbid attitudes of a patriarchal society toward women. This stereotyping process requires the aesthetic function of stimulating and tantalizing the reader's fantasy with passages about female sexual corruption. After being exhibited to the readers, the female stereotype has to conform to local customs: she should be a replica of Satan, an incarnation of evil. In *Midaq Alley*, Hamida is demonized by the male narrator who portrays her as a fallen woman from the beginning of the novel. Even Abbas the only person who sympathizes with Hamida was unjustly punished for lack of masculinity because he sympathized with her considering her a victim of Farag, the pimp rather than a promiscuous sinner. Ironically, the pimp survives and continues his career bringing more females to the prostitution trade serving the foreign soldiers.

In Mahfouz's fiction, the relationship between men and women is one of power and domination where the imperial male voice makes use of imaginative speculations to produce erroneous stereotypes of the female subaltern. The author assigned the central roles, in his novel, to male characters while the Oriental female is either subjugated or marginalized. Unequivocally, most of the narrative of *Midaq Alley* is controlled by masculine voices which, from the perspective of a neutral reader, are not justified in their dehumanization of the female other. In the same vein, the monolithic narrative strategy latent in Mahfouz's fiction is not justified in marginalizing the Oriental female as second class citizen or essentializing her as an inheritor of a degraded sexual impulse threatening the moral codes of a conservative society.

There is no doubt that the events of the novel bear testimony to the marginalized position of Hamida. She is explicitly persecuted because she strives for her emancipation. She is subordinated by phallogentric culture depriving her of education and a respectable career. Hamida is obviously a victim of a racist patriarchal ideology which aims to humiliate and suppress the female subaltern in order to tyrannize her. Mahfouz failed to view Hamida as the voiceless victim of ever-deepening oppression and poverty entrenched in layers of male supremacist tradition. He was also reluctant to condemn an obnoxious culture that suffocated women obliterating their humanity. Ironically Hamida's voice is released in marginal episodes whereas the voice of the male narrator occupies central ground in the narrative. This act on the part of the author/narrator reflects the commodification and the demeaning stereotyping of the female protagonist.

By narrowing the feminist viewpoint, in *Midaq Alley*, Mahfouz attempts to marginalize the female subaltern restricting the space in which she can be re-written back into social history. In a novel shaped by authorial pro-patriarchal inclinations, the female protagonist is introduced in a way that fulfills patriarchal authorial agendas. She appears without form until she is reconstructed by the masculine narrator. In *Midaq Alley*, there is no space from where the subaltern subject can

speak because her voice is muted by the male author. Deploying a narrative dynamic through which Hamida is allowed only to utter statements which reveal a tendency toward debauchery and desire for wealth, the author aims to acquit the male community from any accusation of hegemony and brutality.

From the beginning of the novel, Hamida is described by the narrator as an aggressive girl who dreams of subjugating men: "She could take on an appearance of strength and determination which was most unfeminine" (21). The narrator criticizes her obsession with dominating and impressing others and her insistence on challenging and defying her society and its moral values. Further, the narrator emphasized that most of the inhabitants are not spared the sting of her tongue. The narrator also told the readers three times that her voice is not pleasant (unfeminine). Even her beautiful eyes framed with kohl reflect her ferocity and determination. In a nutshell, the narrator sets up the norms of femininity as "weakness, passivity and vacillation" (Cooke, 116) adding that "she hated children and that this unnatural trait made her wild and totally lacking in the virtues of femininity" (40). It is well-known that in Arab culture, the "specific trait of nurturing children is apparently an exclusive attribute of the female gender" (Oersen, 54).

By making the whole tale narrated by a pro-patriarchal narrator, the voice of Hamida is either submerged or muted. Further, the distressed Hamida is reduced to an object, a horrible simulacrum of a human being. Due to Mahfouz's narrative strategy which eradicates the identity of Hamida enclosing her into a degraded classification, the pro-feminist counter-narrative is underestimated. As a strategy of presentation rooted in masculine discourse and patriarchal degeneration, Mahfouz's narrative apparatus places the male narrator at the center of the text marginalizing the female voice of Hamida because she debunks the myths of a conservative society. As a lustful monster, Hamida should be humiliated by being transformed into a prostitute selling her body to the British soldiers who represent the colonial forces occupying the land of Egypt.

It is relevant to argue that the male/female controversy in the novel is undermined by a narrative strategy that prioritizes the male patriarch and deprives the feminized Oriental from entering the text except as a non-person or a vicious whore. The marginalized status of the female protagonist and the use of a narrative strategy that advocates the moral perspective of the male narrator leads to the construction of a subterranean anti-feminist motif underpinning the text. Social and sexual issues in addition to the intersection between poverty and prostitution are also depicted from the viewpoint of the dominating male while the vulnerable and destitute female is totally muted and denied a reasonable voice to express her attitude toward a society dehumanizing her for decades.

Using an imperial patriarchal voice to introduce the story of Hamida to local audience and incorporating a narrative strategy which mutes the marginalized

female so that her voice cannot be heard, the novel produces a prevailing view about women that is totally accepted and endorsed by the local community. In *Midaq Alley*, the female perspective toward different issues is introduced either by the faint voices of marginalized characters or filtered throughout the eyes of a dominating anti-feminist narrator. Like Orientalists who speak to the West on behalf of backward societies, the central narrator in the novel presents the female subaltern to the Arab reader in a way that conforms to local standards, as vicious and decadent. The process of preventing the female from entering the text except as a decadent inferior Oriental aims to perpetuate racist patriarchal stereotypes and enhance gender division. On the surface, the novel seems to be an attempt to offer a critique of the patriarchal master narrative widely accepted in the Arab world about women, nevertheless, the author fails to provide an alternative to such hegemonic discourse due to a strategy of narration which silenced the marginalized female or periodically removed her out of the text. Categorically, the author places male characters at the center of the text preventing the victimized subaltern from introducing her counter-narrative in an appropriate manner.

4 CONCLUSION

In *Representing the Colonized*, Edward Said refers to the concept of silencing which has been affiliated to women's positions in patriarchal societies in addition to other marginalized groups and minorities: "The colonized has since WWII expanded considerably to include women, subjugated and oppressed classes, national minorities and even marginalized or incorporated academic sub-specialties" (207). As Said puts it "to be one of the colonized is potentially to be a great many different but inferior things, in many different places, at many different times".⁷ What colonized cultures and marginalized groups have in common is their placement in relationship to a dominant culture that impinges upon them and seeks to define and silence them. In hegemonic cultures, there is no possibility for an alternative thinking because one of the most powerful distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized is the emphatic difference between a speaker with agency and the figure of what Gayatri Spivak calls "the silent or the silenced subaltern".⁸

In the early fiction of Mahfouz, such as *The Cairo Trilogy*, women are mostly portrayed as silenced subalterns who are not allowed to speak all the time. In other words, the female subaltern sometimes speaks but not from a subject position recognized by a patriarchal and sexist culture. In the hegemonic society of Cairo

7 See Edward Said. *Representing the Colonized : Anthropology's Interlocutors*. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 207.

8 Cited in Said. *Representing the Colonized*, 1989, p. 271.

reflected in *Midaq Alley*, the woman is depicted as a subjugated object colonized and appropriated by patriarchal discourse that considers her speech as irrelevant. In the novel, male/female analogy is explored from a purely male-oriented perspective similar to other prejudiced treatments of related topics deeply seated in Arabic literature. As the paper argues, Mahfouz's attempt to introduce a neutralized image of Eastern women reflecting what critics call "his balanced view"⁹ toward feminine issues is eclipsed by a biased narrative strategy providing credibility to the patriarchal vision introduced by the male narrator. On the surface, the narrative of *Midaq Alley* gives a false impression that the author aims to introduce the image of the female from an objective viewpoint different from anti-feminist treatments advocated by other Arab writers. Nevertheless, a thorough reading of the text provides evidence that writing can never be a neutral activity.

The narrative of *Midaq Alley* is controlled by an omnipresent and omniscient author relying on narration as a substitute for reliable facts operating from a common assumption that both the novelist and the reader shared a stable set of standard convictions which regulated the pattern of their expectations. The events of the novel are in the grip of an infallible and authoritative narrator. This kind of narration is based on a belief in "the infallibility of mimesis" which was seen as a solid representation of life with its verisimilitude as the ultimate proof of its plausibility and relevance to the reader's experience (Hafez, 102).¹⁰ In the forties when *Midaq Alley* was written, the main criteria of adequate narrative was plausibility and the ability of the text to consolidate the reader's own experience of reality. The narrative with its trustworthy reproduction of the typology of the alley, the old area in Islamic Cairo, and its social, cultural historical trajectories as valid examples of such approach. This narrative¹¹ method involves reproduction of reality in a way that would convince the reader that what he reads has already happened.

The narrative structure possessed by the omniscient novelist is unmistakably contingent upon monophony and a unitary vision. All characters are viewed from the same viewpoint and this unified perspective provides the narrative's cohesion.

9 See Miriam Cooke. "Men Constructed : In the Mirror of Prostitution", In *Naguib Mahfouz : From Regional Fame to Global recognition*, Edited by Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 106-125.

10 Sabry Hafez illustrates that during the 1940's, the Arab novelist adopted western cultural models of narration exhibiting his control over his narrative world advocating the methods of the natural science as a model for the rationalization of other disciplines. For more information on "the infallibility of mimesis" see Sabry Hafez. "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response". *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 57 (1994): 93-112.

11 For more information on narrative constructions, see Kenneth Burke. *Counter Statement*. Berkeley: university of California Press, 1968, pp. 120-123.

This vision manufactures a simple connected plot whose coherence is essential to syllogistic progression in a causal and chronological manner. The concept of time is that of a logical unfolding of events. This reliance on the causal logic transforms the novel into a closed text as defined by Umberto Eco (3).¹² In *Midaq Alley*, Hamida's freedom was defined and constrained by the norms imposed by the omniscient novelist whose omnipresence and imperial control over the narrative are reflections of patriarchal policies and the centrality of authority. The narrative of *Midaq Alley* focuses on Hamida's rebellion and her career as a whore. It was not concerned with the psychological aspects of Hamida who like most of the women in the same alley was oppressed by men. Like other women, she was "more or less inferior to men on almost all levels, whether economic, social or political".¹³ The women community in the alley is marginalized, subjugated and brutally crushed. According to Ebrahim El-Sheikh, women "were toiling hard to feed their hungry families, while others were denied all chance of a decent life or even the slightest glimpse of hope to improve their lot" (88).

Manifestly, Hamida's fate is determined by forces outside and inside the alley represented by the British soldiers, the pimp and a repressive patriarchal culture. Like Western colonizers exploiting Hamida's body, the local males are not distinguished from the predatory colonial forces occupying the country. In fact, Hamida surrendered to the colonizers because she was initially defeated by the domestic patriarchal power structure she challenged. The defeat of Hamida symbolizes a record of multiple set-backs experienced by Egypt, a country ruled by a puppet government and occupied by invading colonizers. In her search for a mechanism of liberation that stands in marked contrast to the backward masculine traditions of the alley, Hamida confronted a more brutal force that will colonize her body after colonizing the land of her home-country. Unlike other women in the alley who do nothing to change the status quo, Hamida only takes action by willingly becoming a prostitute: "Hamida stoops to prostitution by force of overwhelming circumstances and external factors." (Somekh, 84). She has to break out of a world „that expects her to be other than she wants to be. She will break that particular circle only if she can escape the constrictions of her space" (Cooke, 116). Hamida tries to challenge a merciless society using the only weapon she possesses, her body and herein lies her tragedy.

She is defined by the hegemonic discourse of the text as irredeemably other because she questions the patriarchal system articulating her discontent with

12 For further details, see Umberto Eco. *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. London : Hutchinson, 1979, pp. 3-43.

13 See Ibrahim El-Sheikh. "Egyptian Women as Portrayed in the Social Novels of Naguib Mahfouz". In *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, Ed Trevor Le Gassick. Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1991, p. 88.

the life style in the alley. Hamida poses as a dangerous woman who destabilizes the fixed moral codes of the alley, thereupon she should be intimidated and displaced. Her demands for more freedom fell on deaf ears and she is physically silenced by those who have the power to give her speech vitality. In *Midaq Alley*, the hegemony of the dominant male culture perpetuated its power through a totalizing discourse which isolates the female protagonist to the historical ghetto of the harem. Instead of confronting the totalizing / silencing discourse of the male mainstream culture, Mahfouz succumbs to domestic patriarchal politics. The text is infiltrated by a masculine authoritative discourse annihilating and negating the identity of the female protagonist who is deemed of rebellion against local moral values.

The minor role given to Hamdia, the protagonist and the limited narrative landscape given to moderate characters such as Uncle Kamil and Sheikh Darwish prioritizes the militant masculine perspective latent in the narrative. By obscuring the female mindset and marginalizing moderate viewpoints toward women, the narrative strategy utilized in *Midaq Alley* produces a prevailing view of the female subaltern that ignores the victim and advocates the opinion of the hegemonic male community. As a descendant of the Oriental women in the harem, Hamida fails to reformulate an independent personality. Personifying the voices of silenced women, Hamida starts a personal search for a voice, a new identity outside the alley but her desperate attempts collapsed because the patriarchal world offered her three options: to live in poverty with Abbas, the barber or be enslaved by local patriarchy represented by Salim Alwan or become a harlot prostituting her body and entertaining the colonizer.

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Pripovedi o marginalizirani orientalski podobi ženske: utišanje koloniziranega podrejenega

Natančno branje zgodnje proze Naguiba Mahfouza, še posebej njegova mojstrovina *Midaq Alley*, odkrije avtorjevo zunanjo tendenco ponuditi karseda nevtralno presentacijo egiptovsko-arabskih žensk. Ta je močno omejena s hegemonsko glavno pripovedjo, ki temelji na lokalnih patriarhalnih tradicijah.

Ključne besede: kolonizacija, patriarhalnost, hegemonija, diskurz podrejenega

The Role of Science Fiction within the Fluidity of Slipstream Literature

Janez Steble

Abstract

The paper explores the complex and contradictory role of science fiction in slipstream, the type of postmodern non-realistic literature situated between the fantastic genres and the mainstream literary fiction. Because of its unstable status of occupying an interstitial position between multiple literary conventions, the article first deals with an expansive terminology affiliated with slipstream and elucidates upon using a unified term for it. Avant-pop, transrealism, and interstitial fiction all help us in understanding the vast postmodern horizon of slipstream. Furthermore, the slipstream's philosophy of cognitive dissonance in comparison to science fiction's is analysed to see the similarities and differences between them. The section is mainly concerned on expanding Darko Suvin's concept of cognition and viewing it as partially compatible with slipstream's estrangement techniques. The final part is focused on the exemplary slipstream novel *Vurt* by Jeff Noon, a perfect example of science fiction providing material, including latest post-Newtonian paradigms of science, for slipstream to mould it in its own fashion.

Key words: slipstream, science fiction, Avant-pop, transrealism, interstitial fiction, cognitive dissonance, chaos theory

1 INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (qtd. in Brigg, 3) already foresaw the need for literature¹ to expand its subject matter to that of science and technology. He claims the latter phenomena will be “familiarized to men” and become “the household of man”, and that the »poet« will be present to not only perceive the transfigured world, but be an active participant in its transfiguration. In the 20th century, especially the post-WWII period, this commingling of the world of science and literature has become commonplace, not just because of the specific genre of science fiction, but mainly because mainstream, and even canonical, authors have seen the need to “embrace the precepts and influence of science and engender a vision of man that takes account of our science-laden times in both style and subject matter” (Brigg 2002, 5). However, when it comes to the stories of the late 20th century and now of the new millennium another Romantic poet can shed some light upon the particular trend of the latest fiction, namely John Keats and his concept of negative capability: “... that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (qtd. in Wolfe 2002, 185). Joining Wordsworth’s speculation on the never-ending horizon of science and Keats’s epistemology of uncertainties is not at all impossible and ludicrous. The two views can easily complement each other and the best form of literature to attest to that is slipstream, the elusive and slippery mode of writing which is essentially the continuation of postmodernist fiction via unprecedented degree of genre miscegenation. The immediate inherent problem of dealing with slipstream fiction is its interstitial and liminal position between different, and even contradictory, themes and genres it employs – it is not out of the ordinary to read a slipstream story fusing both the realist and fantasy narrative frameworks without coming apart at the seams.

The proliferation of science, technology and information has rendered our postmodern world in epistemological and ontological crises. Even though authors have no choice but to follow the speculation of Wordsworth, they also find the domesticity of realism and the rigorousness of science fiction inadequate when trying to hold the mirror up to everyday life.² Genre miscegenation implies the fusion of the following narratives: science fiction, fantasy, horror, detective story, magical realism and realistic modes (writers operating within genre territories

1 Specifically, he was referring to poetry, yet the general tone of his address implies the universal meaning of the preface. See Peter Brigg’s *The Span of Mainstream and Science Fiction: A Critical Study of a New Literary Genre*.

2 Brian McHale claims for postmodernist fiction that it imitates “the pluralistic and anarchistic ontological landscape of advanced industrial cultures” (2003, 38). The same holds true for slipstream narratives which emphasize this problem of imitation by employing tropes from every available genre.

would call the latter mainstream). My aim in the article is to delineate the complex role played by the genre of science fiction in this interstitial and fragmented mode of writing called slipstream. Due to the exhausting nature of dealing with various genres in such a multifarious type of literature, I will have to limit myself to one. The point of this delineation is to show that science fiction within such literature can resume its dialectical relationship between cognition and estrangement, albeit sometimes estrangement alone taking the dominant role in this relationship. It can be argued that slipstream is not only the continuation of post-modernist fiction, but specifically the continuation of science fiction due to the simple fact that both fictional modes steadfastly interrogate the mutable worlds of human experience. In the end, Keats's negative capability essentially sets the tone for how science fiction acts in the non-realistic mode of slipstream.

2 PROFUSION OF TERMS

2.1 Settling for the Name

The definitions, terms, and descriptions following the discourse of slipstream are anything but exact and systematic. Ever since Bruce Sterling came up with the name³ in 1989 the discussions surrounding slipstream have been increasingly proliferating and contradictory. Slipstream is not even a common name given to the ever-increasing ascendancy of interstitial literature of the 21st century. Gary K. Wolfe and Amelia Beamer have simply found it necessary to call this literature 21st century stories,⁴ a makeshift name for works which are otherwise dispersed into a "panoply of new terms": slipstream, interstitial. Transrealism, New Weird, nonrealist fiction, New Wave Fabulist, postmodern fantasy, Postgenre fiction, cross-genre, span fiction, Artists without Borders, New Humanist, Fantastika, liminal fantasy (Wolfe 2011, 164). In this section I will add a few more to this terminological menagerie. Using the specific term "slipstream" among such a treasure trove of signifiers is thus problematic in itself and warrants an explanation. With so many recently published anthologies of slipstream/postmodern fiction, especially under the editorship of James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel, one, whether a reader or a critic, is bombarded with almost as many concepts as there are stories. The decision of using one term over another can lead to the exclusion of one anthology over another. Due to the specific nature of this article, I have the privilege of using one term, namely "slipstream", among many, which is the term

3 The essay originally appeared in *SF Eye* 5 (July 1989): 77-80.

4 Some of the authors commonly referred to as writers of slipstream were prolific in the late 80s and 90s of the 20th century. This means that slipstream is so elusive we cannot even pinpoint it to one decade.

most commonly tied with some of the science fiction narratives in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.⁵ My aim is not to provide a new definition, to explain and to describe all of the terms associated with naming these 21st century stories or to even attempt to concretize the fluid nature of such fiction, but mainly to expose and critically evaluate the philosophical standpoints of this profusion and confusion of terms and definitions.

For my purposes Peter Brigg's use of span fiction actually comes close to how I deal with the role of science fiction in slipstream. Span fiction, as the name implies, connects the realms of mainstream and science fiction, it connects "two land masses" (Brigg 2002, 14). Authors, officially subsumed under another fluid, yet commonly known term postmodernist fiction, are his main examples: "Pynchon's span fiction is about people in a world surrounded by the physical presence of science (technology) and holding a worldview frequently expressed in the language or metaphors of science" (72). This is useful for grasping the underlying philosophy of a plethora of authors ranging from the period of New Wave science fiction to the interstitial fiction of the 21st century, and therein lies the problem. Span fiction becomes too widespread all too quickly, throwing authors from Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, J. G. Ballard to Thomas Pynchon, Doris Lessing, Don DeLillo in one conceptual basket. These umbrella terms, encompassing too many authors and too many periods, are all too frequent in such discourses. If one takes into account the prolific and experimental period of the New Wave science fiction, there is no need to come up with a new term in the first place – science fiction can be span fiction by default. However, there are two reasons why I will not resort to using span fiction as the unifying name for the prose I am analysing here, namely the concept of genre and the frequency of usage. A genre implies a common set of reading, writing and marketing/publishing conventions. As a philosophical category, the genre of span fiction can be of some use, especially if we find common traits in given authors, but genre in literary criticism should also encompass marketing/publishing strategies, and readers' conventions, and even fandom. Science fiction as a genre exists in literary form and style with its own unique history and development, it exists as a collection of books on a shelf in a store, it exists as a set of reading/interpretation practices, and it exists as a marketing category spanning multiple media. Span fiction is a coinage by Peter Brigg and it essentially exists solely as a philosophical category, and thus a new issue emerges – the frequency of usage is too rare to have any meaningful echo beyond his critical study. It cannot be called a real genre per se and one rarely encounters the term in slipstream studies. Brigg's study and even terminology is very useful

5 Since New Weird is directly connected with horror and New Wave Fabulism with fantasy I can to some degree forego the narratives associated with these "genres".

and illuminating, but because he tries to literally come up with a new genre, it becomes too ambitious.

Unfortunately, “slipstream” is just as problematic in this regard as “span fiction”. In fact, Brigg emphasizes Sterling’s original article, namely how the name “slipstream” is temporary and subject to scrutiny and eventual change by future critics, and how John Clute in his *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993) deems it unsatisfactory.⁶ However, James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel in the introduction to their slipstream anthology *Feeling Very Strange* update the term by emphasizing the denial of its status as a *bona fide* genre and underlining the effect this type of literature produces, thus avoiding the contentions inherent in genre creation/naming,⁷ and in this article I am mainly resorting to their non-rigorous and descriptive usage of slipstream as “the literature of cognitive dissonance⁸ and of strangeness *triumphant*” (xi). In other words, slipstream is not a genre,⁹ but a literary effect. Even back in 1989 Bruce Sterling did not dare call slipstream a full-blown genre – it is pertinent to quote him verbatim on the subject:

This genre is not category SF; it is not even “genre” SF. Instead, it is a contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensus reality. It is fantastic, surreal sometimes, speculative on occasion, but not rigorously so. It does not aim to provoke a “sense of wonder” or to systematically extrapolate in the manner of classic science fiction.

Instead, this is a kind of writing which simply makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the late twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility. We could call this kind of fiction Novels of a Postmodern Sensibility ... for the sake of convenience and argument, we will call these books “slipstream”. (qtd. in Kelly, J. P. and Kessel, J. 2006, viii)

In this revealing passage we find descriptions rather than any forms of definition. Indeed, the whole of Sterling’s article is littered with complex terminology from literary criticism and postmodernist discourse, yet at the same time he

6 “The image is either nautical or aeronautical: a ship or an airplane (either of which stands for genre SF) can create a slipstream which may be strong enough to give non-paying passengers (Paul THEROUX, say) a ride. As a description of commercial piggybacking, the term seems apt; however, when used to designate the whole range of non-genre SF here called FABULATION, the term – which implies a relationship of dependency – can seem derogatory” (qtd. in Brigg 2002, 12).

7 “Science Fiction has not been well served by its seventy-year-long war of definition, and moreover, what right do we have to raise the walls of a new genre around writers who have no commitment to or even knowledge of what we think of as slipstream?” (Kelly, J. P. and Kessel, J. 2006, x-xi)

8 More on this concept in the next section.

9 The editors at one point do actually suggest that slipstream “might well be the beginnings of genre” (xi).

rightly avoids any rigorousness that we may find in Darko Suvin,¹⁰ for example. From the very inception of the term, we thus have a healthy and non-restrictive manoeuvrable discourse in which we can analyse the fluid and cross-generic literature of modern times.

But what of the name slipstream itself? Kelly and Kessel quickly make us aware of Sterling's implications.¹¹ Many of the authors Sterling provides as outstanding examples of slipstream are not part of any genre at all, and the article was largely directed to the audience of genre literature. If there is slipstream, then there is mainstream, and the connection between the two is intrinsic. If we take a look at the dictionary definitions of slipstream, the primary meanings relate to aerodynamics, hence the whole conception is analogy-based. In the succinct definition "a stream of air behind any moving object" replacing "stream" with a slipstream story and "any moving object" with the literary development of either genre fiction or mainstream gives us a sufficient conception of slipstream. These stories are behind or moving in the margins of either the flow of genre(s) or the mainstream world of literature. They are fluid in nature because they partake in multiple genre conventions and are part of the wake, the trail or the margins of conventional literature. Their ambivalent ontological status perfectly reflects the world(s) they are imitating, marking an even greater departure from the outlook of modernism – "The modernist mindset is alienation. You're looking at Henry Ford's machine system, and you can't deal with it, and you want to retreat to some interior creative space. But in a postmodern stance you are so infiltrated by the various shattering aspects of the postmodern condition that your own core identity fragments. You become a kind of multi-tasking personality ..." (Sterling 2011, 9). In slipstream this multi-tasking is specifically achieved by "the careful modulation of postmodern, genre, and traditional literary elements, all undermining each other, all augmenting one another, but without quite resolving into the authority of any single mode" (qtd. in Wolfe 2011, 19). What is most important here is the emphasis on the unresolved nature of slipstream – we are dealing with a multi-tasking literature, but without any "task" or mode being finished in the process. Fluidity, interstitiality, fragmentation, modulation – all of these descriptive markers are subsumed in the central term "slipstream" I am using in this article. It is by no means a perfect term, but merely adequate, and its best feature is the ongoing discourse it has been brewing since Sterling's conception of it. Like science fiction, it has become a discursive field.

In the special issue on slipstream in vol. 38 of *Science Fiction Studies* there is an abundance of explanations and heated debates either confirming and improving

10 Suvin's border policing will play a major role in the next section.

11 "From the outset, Sterling defined slipstream as largely a mutant form of the mainstream" (viii).

Sterling's controversial term or simply trying to negate it altogether, but there is no doubt that there is a consensus among most of the writers, readers, and critics in using "slipstream" as the common signifier for the fragmented and multi-generic fiction the world of literature has been facing since the dawn of postmodernism.¹² Authors in this special issue of the journal repeatedly emphasize how this "genre", when compared to science fiction, faces a special conundrum: "Trying to get slipstream writers together is like herding cats. I don't think they have a temperament with which they can unite" (Sterling 2011, 6). There are as many conflicting interests between the authors of this fiction as there are novels associated with these interests. Some may plunge into the occult of Lovecraftian horror,¹³ others into the fractal narratives expressing the nonlinear dynamics of chaos theory.¹⁴ Furthermore, without social phenomena, such as science fiction fandom, fanzines, and criticism, it is difficult finding a common group of people writing these stories or narrative methods. No bookstore has a special label "slipstream" with which a reader is guided through certain bookshelf mazes; in fact, it is quite common to find various slipstream novels overlapping different, and even conflicting, genres.¹⁵ There are, of course, no resolutions found in these studies, and that is precisely the point – the discursive field is open, growing in size each time a new work of fiction tries to pursue the fluid ontological waters of slipstream.

The most illuminating concept pertaining to slipstream activity as a whole that I have come across in these studies is found in Justin St. Clair's article on Pynchon's *Against the Day*, namely *bricolage*. This is another observation that stems directly from Sterling's thoughts, and it is again relevant to quote him verbatim:

Slipstream is also marked by a cavalier attitude toward "material" which is the polar opposite of the hard-SF writer's "respect for scientific fact". Frequently, historical figures are used in slipstream fiction in ways which outrageously violate the historical record. History, journalism, official statements, advertising copy ... all of these are grist for the slipstream mill, and are disrespectfully treated not as "real-life facts" but as "stuff", raw material for collage work. Slipstream tends, not to "create" new worlds, but to *quote* them, chop them up out of the context, and turn them against themselves (emphasis in original). (qtd. in St. Clair 2011, 46)

12 The aforementioned Kelly and Kessel based their selection of slipstream stories on authors "active today, primarily in the period since Sterling's essay" (xiv).

13 The New Weird of China Miéville, if we take a famous example in this growing trend of horror.

14 Jeff Noon's *Vurt* is a perfect testament to that.

15 Pawel Frelik ascribes this overlapping status to slipstream in general: "In Miéville's *The City and the City* Beszel and Ul Qoma largely occupy the same physical space. How this is exactly possible is never explained, which makes the novel an emblematic Slipstream text – such ontological conundrums are central to many S-stories" (Frelik 2009).

Bricolage as creation/construction of something from divergent sources that are given in the detritus of the world directly connects slipstream with the post-modern modes of thought, found in Derrida and Deleuze/Guattari, to name a few. The former attributed this fiddling/tinkering activity to discourse in general,¹⁶ and the latter two described it as the characteristic mode of production of the schizophrenic producer (Deleuze, G. and Guattari F. 2004, 7-8). As was stated previously when referring to the postmodern stance of slipstream, this “schizophrenic producer” is precisely the multi-tasking man tinkering with either the pop-cultural items strewn across the urban landscapes or the post-generic texts and samples scattered throughout the media. The bricoleurs of slipstream are not usually associated with communities of fandom and agendas, found in science fiction. The source material for their works comes from the never-ending chain of signifiers, the signified being lost in the sea of genres spanning at least two centuries of literature. Bricolage is thus another item to add to the ever-growing list of slipstream descriptive markers. With so many concepts and ideas attributed to and subsumed in the term slipstream it is more than enough to warrant using it as a common name when traversing this nonrealistic “genre” of postmodern sensibility.

2.2 Other Helpful Terms

Before venturing into the methods and philosophy of slipstream as a literary effect, it is prudent to outline some additional terms we inevitably encounter when critically approaching this kind of fiction. The common thread behind this terminological morass is the intrinsic connection between slipstream and science fiction. Settling for the name, as has been mentioned, is just one part of the problem, the other being finding linking concepts and notions that help us understand slipstream as the continuation of science fiction and science fiction as playing a central or marginal role in slipstream narratives, depending on the authors’ intention, the critique, or readers’ reception. Pinpointing the degree of science fiction qualities, such as the style and tropes, featuring in mainstream postmodernist works in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, is an arduous task in itself; however, since the appearance of Sterling’s article the situation has only exacerbated – the proliferation of fiction eluding the critical edifice established in the late decades of the 20th century is reaching an overload to the degree that the notion of genre itself is being supplanted¹⁷. My goal here is not to augment the critical frustration

16 See “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”. Available online: <http://hydra.humanities.uci.edu/derrida/sign-play.html>

17 See Gary K. Wolfe’s *Evaporating Genres – Essays on Fantastic Literature*.

when faced with this liquid realm of post-generic fiction, but to, on the contrary, expose the vigour, or at least flexibility, that slipstream can bestow upon science fiction.¹⁸

Robert Scholes' tongue-twisting "structural fabulation", coined in 1975, is an attempt to implement structuralism into certain science fictional narratives displaying greater artistry towards humanistic concerns than their pulp-oriented counterparts. Specifically, works of Daniel Keyes, Olaf Stapledon, Frank Herbert, John Brunner, and Ursula K. Le Guin are at the forefront here. He further develops the notion of cognitive estrangement and, continuing Viktor Shklovsky's line of thought on estrangement/defamiliarization, emphasizes how science fiction uses a different approach in achieving *ostranenie* – the focus in science fiction is more on the conceptual side rather than verbal. His purpose was to essentially dispel certain misconceptions surrounding the then conservative criticism and to expose science fiction works of great quality, such as Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*, and Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, to the wider audience. By constructing a new name for science fiction he tried to uplift the critical status of the genre as a whole.

In works of structural fabulation the tradition of speculative fiction is modified by an awareness of the nature of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures, and the insights of the past century of science are accepted as fictional points of departure. Yet structural fabulation is neither scientific in its methods nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science. Its favorite themes involve the impact of developments or revelations derived from the human or the physical sciences upon the people who must live with those revelations or developments. (Scholes 1975, 42)

What is most revealing here is how this elaboration connects to the afore-mentioned Brigg's span fiction when dealing with authors, e.g. Thomas Pynchon and Doris Lessing, who are much less directly affiliated with the science fiction genre than, say, Daniel Keyes. The line of reasoning again echoes Wordsworth's proclamation of science as the subject matter of future art. Scholes felt the need to expose the mature perspective on human existence amidst the flexible landscapes of science and technology that certain science fiction works display, and further critics, such as Brigg, felt the same way when it comes to post-WWII mainstream literature in general. Science fiction's constant exploration of the relationship between the human landscapes and human experiences thus eventually leads the genre not just towards the employment of "soft sciences" and humanities, but also

18 "... the entire history of slipstream with its discontents could perhaps be viewed not as an emergence and formative pains of a new literary entity but a symptom of sf's vibrancy and creativity" (Frelik 2009).

towards cross-generic and interstitial trends witnessed in slipstream. Structural fabulation with its emphasis on radical discontinuity with the empirically given world is, in effect, an insightful precursory remark on slipstream literature.

Just as the theories of structural fabulation and span fiction herald the effacement of the dividing line between human everyday perception and scientific reality, Avant-pop of the ,90s in the 20th century tried to accomplish the same annulment between the ubiquitous horizon of pop culture and sophisticated art. In other words, Avant-pop is a tendency toward “deconstructing the difference between high art and junk culture” (Tatsumi 2006, 30). Similar to slipstream, Avant-pop is one among a plethora of post-postmodernist literary endeavours to try to make sense of the onslaught of contradictory perceptions we are faced with in the late-capitalist world. Since it is a fusion of two extremes, namely “the avant-garde’s impulse to push the aesthetic envelope, embodied in disorienting time/reality shifts, and the addiction to pop culture exemplified by an exploration of various aspects of pop Americana from McDonald’s to soap opera, including the ransacking of sf themes”¹⁹ (Rossi 2002, 20), it is not surprising to see many writers who belong to science fiction, Avant-pop, and slipstream at the same time. The pastiche approach to sci-fi genre hybridizing and thematic appropriation makes the separation between slipstream and Avant-pop all the more difficult. Jonathan Lethem and Jeff Noon, for example, are simply authors belonging to both “camps”. As it is with all slipstream fiction, everything depends on the modulation and reception.²⁰ Avant-pop assists us in understanding slipstream due to its insistence on accepting the pop cultural detritus, littered with science and technology, as the new human clay with which we can actively construct ourselves, reality, and perceptions.²¹

Transrealism is another literary endeavour facing perceptions, another form of literature that sets its face against consensus reality, as Sterling would say. It “... conveys an enlivening approach to *realistic* fiction that enhances the vividness of its characters and events by imbuing them with elements drawn from fantastical imagination” (Broderick 2009, 52). The originator of the term Rudy Rucker wrote the manifesto²² in a similar fashion as Mark Amerika with his own proclamation of avant-gardism:

19 This specifically refers to Jonathan Lethem’s exemplary Avant-pop novel *Amnesia*, which bears universal merit.

20 If we take the example of Jeff Noon’s *Vurt*, the Avant-pop reception of it would focus more on the mass media elements and informational distribution featured in the hectic plot.

21 “The emerging wave of Avant-Pop artists now arriving on the scene find themselves caught in this struggle to rapidly transform our sick, commodity-infested workaday culture into a more sensual, trippy, exotic and networked Avant-Pop experience” (Amerika 1993).

22 Available online: <http://www.rudyrucker.com/pdf/transrealistmanifesto.pdf>

Transrealism is not so much a type of SF as it is a type of avant-garde literature. I feel that Transrealism is the only valid approach to literature at this point in history. The Transrealist writes about immediate perceptions in a fantastic way. Any literature which is not about actual reality is weak and enervated. But the genre of straight realism is all burnt out. Who needs more straight novels? The tools of fantasy and SF offer a means to thicken and intensify realistic fiction. By using fantastic devices it is actually possible to manipulate subtext. The familiar tools of SF – time travel, antigravity, alternate worlds, telepathy, etc. – are in fact symbolic of archetypal modes of perception. (Rucker 1999)

Immediate perception and the immediate surrounding world are again in the foreground, *mimesis* being the main method with which an author grasps the world and thus resuming the ontological preoccupations of postmodernist fiction *in toto*. The character of a transrealist novel is usually the author, narrating the world as he/she faces it with the help of science fiction tools. The main format of transrealist fiction are thus semi-autobiographies: Rudy Rucker's *White Light* (1980) and Jonathan Lethem's *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003), for example. Transrealist method is essentially transgressive realism – the consensus reality is the subject matter, yet one has to transgress the conventions of mainstream/realist fiction by shunning its framework, to transcend it. It does not come as a surprise that Philip K. Dick²³ is the precursor to this trend – the novel *VALIS* (1978), featuring Dick/Horselover Fat as a character split between two personalities and in which he constantly interjects the plot with metafictional sly remarks, can be considered as the prototypical transrealist fiction. It is also worth mentioning here that his mainstream/realist novels never truly worked and became as successful as his science fiction ones because he always found tame empirical reality insufficient to describe what he felt and perceived. In fact, Dick's necessary venture into science fiction, and how science fiction functions in transrealism, can explain an important role science fiction plays in splistream – it is there to better explain the subjective and objective world(s).

Last, but not least, interstitiality is an important concept regarding the special position slipstream occupies in the multi-genre space. As with Avant-pop and transrealism, interstitial fiction is a recent trend with its own “manifesto”²⁴ and two anthologies.²⁵ There are two main focuses here that need to be addressed. “Interstitial works maintain a consciousness of the boundaries they have crossed or disengaged with; they present a clear awareness of the kinds of subtexts which might

23 One of the most influential authors of postmodern literature of every possible subset.

24 An introduction to the Interstitial Arts Foundation can be found online: http://www.interstitialarts.org/what/intro_toIA.html

25 *Interfictions* (2007) and *Interfictions 2* (2009).

be their closest classifiable counterparts” (Fenkl, H. I. 2007, iv). This fiction is not actually liminal, it is not trying to become something else, but rather literally stays in the interstices and thus maintains a unique epistemological and ontological position. It is its own non-category. The in-between position is referred to as the DMZ (de-militarized zone):

Interstitial works are self-negating. That is, if they become successful to the degree that they engender imitations or tributes to themselves, or if they spark a movement which results in like-minded works, then they are no longer truly interstitial, having spawned their own genre, subgenre, or even form. The DMZ they initially inhabit becomes its own nation, so to speak. (v)

Both anthologies accentuate the strength of this fiction due to its precarious position – vitality and innovation stemming from marginality. Secondly, the genre indeterminacy provides a special relationship to reception: “What the Interstitial does, actually, is transform the reader’s experience of reading. Formerly invisible historical trajectories become visible to the reader (vi)”. Again we come full circle – interstitial fiction as the enlivenment of experience, the crystallization of perception.²⁶ As the short stories in the anthologies attest, interstitial fiction holds no hesitation to turn to science fiction, fantasy, horror, magical realism, and many other genres/categories to defamiliarize readers’ given reality to the nth degree.

3 COGNITIVE ESTRANGEMENT AND COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

As much as the definitions and explanations concerning science fiction try to move away or beyond Suvin’s staple definition, it is nevertheless necessary to return to it, especially for the purpose of extracting the genre’s core from the slipstream flow. The main controversial feature of his approach is first, and foremost, in the exclusive nature of the prescription: “Suvin’s despotic denial of the sf label to a wide range of texts exemplifies the politics of purity inherent in border policing” (Frelik 2011, 23). The author denounces Suvin’s labeling of Ray Bradbury as a “science-fantasy” writer, because he not only excludes him from science fiction in general, but reduces everything that is not exactly science fiction to impurity. The denouncement is, of course, perfectly justified, and it is ironic that here we are using Suvin to help us understand slipstream, because Frelik’s point is that

26 If there is a difference between transrealism and interstitial fiction, it would again have to be in the direction of the narrative focus. Interstitial fiction tries to break the rules a reader deems unbreakable, ergo much more focus is put on establishing genre conventions only to break them apart when the reader least expects it.

writers like Bradbury testify that “from the moment of its naming sf has always had its slipstream – a steady line of texts that failed to contain themselves within the envisioned borders of the genre” (23-24). If we actually delve into the concept of cognitive estrangement, things are not as bleak and exclusive as they seem. The point is to consider it as a guide through the various estrangement techniques slipstream likes to employ, not as a prescription one should follow to the letter. The role of science fiction as cognitive estrangement need not be fully oppositional to the role of slipstream as cognitive dissonance, especially considering the flexibility of cognition.

To briefly reiterate Suvin’s definition: “*SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment*” (Suvin 1979, 7-8). Estrangement is mainly derived from Bertolt Brecht’s distancing/estrangement effect used in theatre to provoke the audience into critical thinking concerning their immediate perception of the play. Breaking the fourth wall definitely counts as one of the main methods in achieving the estranging effect, in postmodern literature the device is called metafiction. Kessel and Kelly in their introduction to their famous slipstream anthology posit metafictional games as one of the techniques to estrange us.²⁷ In a reductive and simplified sense, estrangement differentiates science fiction and other fantastic genres from the realistic/mainstream mode. Suvin, of course, wishes to specify the estrangement by emphasizing Brecht’s thoughts on Galileo and his detached observation of the swinging chandelier: “... He was amazed by that pendulum motion as if he had not expected it and could not understand its occurring, and this enabled him to come at the rules by which it was governed” (qtd. in Suvin, 6). The type of estrangement described here is cognitive and creative, or, if we use Scholes’ wording – the focus on “rules” makes the estrangement conceptual rather than verbal.

Cognition and the presence of a novum²⁸, is, then, the *specifica differentia* of science fiction by which Suvin tries to exclude fantasy, myth, folk-tale, science-fantasy, and other “non-cognitive” genres. However, the concept of cognition is much wider than science²⁹ or the employment of technological gadgetry: “Significant modern SF, with deeper and more lasting sources of enjoyment, also presupposes more complex wider cognitions: it discusses primarily the political, psychological, and anthropological *use and effect of knowledge, of philosophy of science, and the*

27 They refer to the short story “The Rose in Twelve Petals” by Theodora Goss.

28 “*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional ‘novum’ (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*” (63).

29 Suvin warns us that the Anglo-Saxon meaning of “science” is too restrictive in the first place (13).

becoming of failure of new realities as result of it" (15). New Wave science fiction, if we take the science fiction trend which does not involve "hard sciences", with its attention to psychology, politics, sexuality, and religious issues definitely fits the prescribed cognitive role. Mathematical sciences and humanities are all subsumed under "cognition". Following cognition is the presence of some sort of a novum – a device, gadget, novelty, idea, character, space, society, etc. – estrangement and cognition thus revolve around this novum and build the narrative logical to it. The novum is in science fiction usually foregrounded and is the novelty that directly estranges the readers like a focused lens. If we take the extreme case from the New Wave science fiction anthology *Dangerous Visions* (1967), "If All Men Were Brothers, Would You Let One Marry Your Sister?" by Theodore Sturgeon, the novum is the society based on the idea – driving the Freudian thought on the repression of incestuous desires to its unintended conclusion – that free practice of incest makes the society happier and healthier. The novum, specifically based upon Freudian psychoanalysis, makes us not only become estranged, but lets us critically question the status quo of "normal" society. If we take into account the multitude of modern slipstream stories we can find a plethora of nova estranging the readers in various ways; however, as soon as we explore the nature of these nova, we find ourselves at odds with Suvin's persistence on validation by cognitive logic and philosophy of science, i.e. the supposed *specifica differentia* of science fiction. Sturgeon's New Wave science fiction story is one thing, but Ted Chiang's slipstream story "Hell is the Absence of God" (2001) with the novum being the literal existence of Heaven and Hell in the modern world, is quite another. The latter story is excluded from science fiction on the grounds of cognition, at least as it is formulated by Suvin, in the same way as Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicle* (1950). However, both contain a novum and the estrangement effect. Do we require a new category here or the expansion of the existing one?

The category of cognition enters a whole new dimension when subjected to slipstream interrogations. To reiterate, slipstream is the literature of cognitive dissonance – holding two or more contradictory views simultaneously, cognition here can take the form of a belief, perception or idea. In Suvin's terminology cognition in science fiction leads to the resolution of contradictions, in slipstream one form of cognition leads to a wave of conflicting ones with no resolution in sight. In fact, slipstream prides itself on being schizophrenic: "We contend that slipstream is an expression of the zeitgeist: it embraces cognitive dissonance rather than trying to reduce it" (Kelly and Kessel, xii). Questions, such as "how long can you stand to both love and hate an abusive father?", "if you believed destroying weapons of mass destruction justified the invasion of Iraq, how do you feel about the war now?", or even "if God created everything, then who created God?" all fall under the domain of slipstream. They all contain within themselves a certain

form of cognition, whether it is of purely pathological or intellectual nature. If these questions are posed as a slipstream narrative, then they also surely contain a novum which is the basis for the plot, and, of course, there can be no doubt the novum will tend to estrange. These specific questions are incompatible with the cognition Suvin prescribes to the definition of science fiction; however, Kessel and Kelly also pose another question taken directly from the scientific circles: "Is an electron a wave or a particle?" Slipstream answers "yes" on both accounts.

The dual/contradictory nature of sub-atomic particles has been well documented in quantum mechanics. Coupled with the onset of chaos theory³⁰ and fractal mathematics the Newtonian/Cartesian reality that we take for granted all of a sudden falls apart and contradiction becomes part and parcel of the very fabric of our universe. Sub-atomic particles become as unstable as our postmodern identity, one flap of a butterfly's wings leads to a hurricane at the other end of the world, one tiny change in our daily routine causes a nervous breakdown – the world of science and the world of man joined once again in all of their glorious contradictions. Should not chaos theory and quantum mechanics fall under "cognitive logic"? It is, after all, a recognized branch of theoretical and applied sciences, and, as quantum mechanics is the continuation of Newtonian mechanics, so can slipstream be the continuation of science fiction. As has been stated, both cognitive estrangement and cognitive dissonance, when applied to fictional narratives, are based upon the trio of novum, estrangement, and cognition. If Suvin's approach to defining science fiction's cognitive logic is extended towards the latest trends of science,³¹ then even one of the most rigorous approaches to science fiction theory can include the fluidity of slipstream fiction. However, as interstitial fiction demonstrates, as soon as we find ourselves in a comfortable spot of cognitive validation, i.e. as soon as the narrative assumes the mantle of science fiction genre, we are quickly transported into another realm with its own rules or even a complete lack of rules. One moment we are in the zone of Fordist mechanical reproduction, next we step into the world of Heisenbergian indeterminacy, and finally enter the land of unicorns and faeries, etc. The science fiction framework may be able to help us understand the rules of two of those worlds, not all, and we simply have to accept the fact that in this type of fiction lack of total understanding is its virtue and *raison d'être*. The role of science fiction within slipstream becomes a contradiction in and of itself – its strongest feature becomes its greatest weakness.

30 This will be briefly touched upon in the next section discussing Noon's narrative of *Vurt*.

31 It is worth mentioning here Steven Hall's debut novel *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), a slipstream narrative taking its cue from the latest developments in database research, including the all-pervasive internet. See more on this subject: N. Katherine Hayles' Material Entanglements: Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* as Slipstream Novel in *Science Fiction Studies* 38, no. 1 (March 2011): 115-133.

4 THE STRANGE CASE OF VURT

Finding slipstream novels and short stories, which represent the continuation of science fiction and at least to some degree employ the dialectic of cognitive estrangement, among a plethora of diverse authors, interests, and genre markers becomes all the more difficult when certain critics, publishers or editors come up with new names, anthologies, and publishing labels on a yearly basis.³² The example we will shortly touch upon here is but a stepping stone and is by no means exhaustive. The field of slipstream is so diverse and open the process of selection and exclusion, even when it comes to a specific genre, is always subject to change. After all, we never step into the same slipstream twice. Slipstream is a prolific territory for writers of varied interests and talents to tackle genres they are not even part of or simply do not find them satisfactory. In effect, readers are facing a similar problem: “Science fiction has been undergoing a kind of crisis of confidence. Some have worried that our stories are too often pitched at that narrowest of science fiction audiences, those who have spent lifetimes reading the stuff. The world building had gotten so complex that readers who are new to the genre get confused, then frustrated and many give up. There has been a call for a more accessible science fiction, which still maintains the virtues of the genre” (Kelly, J. P. 2009, 278). Therefore, science fiction via slipstream rears its head again to resume its ongoing mission of estranging us and boldly opening up new vistas for readers and writers alike.

Jeff Noon’s debut novel *Vurt* (1993) is a helter-skelter narrative of fractal dimensions³³ set in an alternate version of Manchester with futuristic characteristics we can find in typical science fiction novels, such as cyborgs, telepaths, mutants and virtual realities. We follow Scribbler and his motley crew of Stash Riders in search for his sister through the drug-induced cyberpunk-like environments of Vurt – the unified name for a hallucinogenic/dream-like reality existing side by side with the “real” world. As a slipstream novel it contains a fuzzy set of epistemological and, most importantly, ontological ideas. It is in many aspects a science fiction novel, yet tends to quickly slip into inexplicable territories. Everything revolves around Vurt, yet we do not really receive a sufficient sci-fi explanation into its origins³⁴ nor is that the focus of the novel. The more the plot advances, the

32 As if categories, such as New Weird, New Wave Fabulism, or Magic Realism are not obscure enough, Kelly and Kessel provide us with a new anthology of Post-Cyberpunk short stories.

33 For more on the metaphorical usage of fractal geometry in *Vurt* see Andrew Wenaus’ Fractal Narrative, Paraspace, and Strange Loops: The Paradox of Escape in Jeff Noon’s *Vurt* in *Science Fiction Studies* 38, no. 1 (March 2011): 155-174.

34 At the very beginning of the second novel set in the same universe *Pollen* (1995) we are given a partial explanation as to how humanity gained access to the realm called Vurt; however “... the actual origins of the Vurt and the method by which human beings travelled there (via ‘dream feathers’ which were placed into the mouth) will always be shrouded in mystery” (Noon 2001, 3).

more the differences between the real world and Vurt become fluid. In fact, one of the overarching themes of *Vurt* and its sequel *Pollen* seems to revolve around the concept of fluidity. The borders are breaking down between worlds and beings: “But the world is getting very fluid these days. Very fluid. Dangerously so. There are doors opening between the species” (Noon J. 2001, 106). There are at least five known “species” in this fuzzy Mancunian setting, ranging from literally undead to pure human, and with them scales of worth.³⁵ Concerning the species and the fluidity between them, there is an exposition³⁶ about five modes of being (essentially, a taxonomy of species) – first level is that of purity/solidity, the final that of fluidity of unimaginable scale. Sex and cybernetic grafting are they key to opening up new modes and breaking the biological/ontological borders between them – the existence of robodogmen or dogmanvurts is nothing out of the ordinary in this post-species³⁷ world. The fluidity between different states of being/existence in *Vurt* goes beyond what science fiction would consider conventional, there is not only sex between dogs and men, but between men and entities originating in dreams and myths.³⁸

The second theme I would like to touch upon revolves around the concept of chaos – “... attempting to understand the postmodern space, such as that exemplified by *Vurt*, through ordered and sequentially predictable Cartesian grids will be hermeneutically vain” (Wenaus, 163). To fathom the role of space in slipstream, and let us consider *Vurt* as an exemplary representative, one needs to not only move beyond the outer space mentality of the Golden Age science fiction, but also beyond cyberpunk – Vurt is not cyberspace³⁹ and the zigzagging movement between worlds is not of electronic nature. This does not mean that we need to entirely forego cognitive estrangement and fully embrace cognitive dissonance. The aesthetic guidance for Jeff Noon was none other than chaos theory and quantum mechanics:

35 Science fiction generally likes to portray alternate societies with sociological underpinnings. In *Vurt*'s case, we have a perfect example of slipstream social bricolage in which zombies, humanoid dogs, cyborgs, humans, and Vurt/dream-state entities function in an orderly/disorderly society, copulate, and even have offspring. And, as it is in the real world, there are conflicts between them with pure humans having the most privileges.

36 Expository mini-chapters are narrated by the peculiar Game Cat, a being who can inexplicably traverse between Vurt and the real world. Among his sly remarks we can find metafictional gems: “Chances are you, the reader, are a Second level being of some kind” (Noon 1994, 268).

37 Both *Vurt* and *Pollen* are brimming with hyper-miscegenation of species and cyborgs, yet there seems to be no room for a post-generic mindset.

38 This hyper-breeding between species is revealed in the second novel to have been caused by the concoction Fecundity 10. It can be argued that this is a science-fictional plot device *par excellence*, yet it is in this case basically a magic potion, somehow enabling copulation between corpses and living beings, between Vurt creatures and men.

39 Yet it is a consensual hallucination.

What's happening in the twentieth century is that scientists have taken over the realms of the imagination ... And you see that again and again with chaos theory, complexity theory, relativity ... The universe became strange and was proven to be strange ... It's almost ... as though poetry had entered the universe ... and I think the artists and writers have been lagging behind. (qtd. in Wenaus 2011, 156)

Science fictional "sense of wonder" is thus rekindled in the latest science. Newtonian mechanics tell us the universe is structured, orderly, and predictable, chaos theory/nonlinear dynamics and the sub-atomic world, on the other hand, reverse the mindset. The ubiquitous fluidity of species and space open the narrative world of *Vurt* to chaotic transfigurations. Most importantly, the species and modes of being are given a new order out of disorder – new taxonomies on all levels of society emerge. Chaos theory provides a new/transvaluated meaning of order: "Literary theorists value chaos primarily because they are preoccupied with exposing the ideological underpinnings of traditional ideas of order. They like chaos because they see it as opposed to order. Chaos theorists, by contrast, value chaos as the engine that drives a system toward a more complex kind of order (Hayles 1990, 23)"; "The more chaotic a system is, the more information it produces. This perception is at the heart of transvaluation of chaos, for it enables chaos to be conceived as an inexhaustible ocean of information rather than as a void signifying absence" (8). In *Vurt* Noon aesthetically combines the disorder of Mancunian reality and the order inherent in postmodern space(s). Unlike the New Wave science fiction with its proclivity towards apocalypses and entropic disorders,⁴⁰ the novel's stylistic usage of latest science shows us the new levels of complexity arising out of the detritus of postmodern trash. There is no need to entirely abandon the staple of cognitive estrangement in strange cases like *Vurt*. Behind the fractal narrative and chaotic plotline lies the aesthetic guidance of the latest philosophy of science rising out of the rigidity of the Euclidean universe, previous categories become a hindrance to the new perceptions and being in the postmodern world we consciously and unconsciously inhabit.

5 CONCLUSION

Science fiction in slipstream gains an unprecedented degree of complexity. Owing to genre miscegenation and latest paradigms of science, the dialectic between cognition and estrangement becomes a postmodern playground, in which the effect of "feeling strange" gains dominance over the rational resolutions, usually displayed in science fiction narratives. Cognitive dissonance becomes the guiding

40 See Colin Greenland's *The Entropy Exhibition: Michael Moorcock and the British "New Wave" in Science Fiction*.

principle, contradictory views, beliefs, and perceptions are maintained in stories which may, at first, seem to possess the literary tropes of science fiction to resolve them, yet rapidly descend into territories science fiction has no maps for. The estrangement of the readers is specifically upheld by employing techniques, ranging from allegory, metafiction, pastiche to appropriation of multiple genre tropes from the fruitful domain of the fantastic literature. In slipstream the science fiction twists of quantum mechanics, nonlinear dynamics, and fractal geometry become a metaphor for the uncertainty and chaos of everyday life; rather than attempting to directly resolve the existential anguish, slipstream is there to assist us in portraying the strangeness and contradictoriness of the world, warts and all. The role of science fiction in all of this is, therefore, to provide new materials for the effectiveness of cognitive dissonance.

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Vloga znanstvene fantastike v fluidnosti slipstream književnosti

Članek raziskuje kompleksno in kontradiktorno vlogo znanstvene fantastike v slipstreamu, tipu postmoderne nerealistične književnosti, pozicionirane med fantastičnimi žanri in mainstream književno prozo.

Ključne besede: slipstream, znanstvena fantastika, avant-pop, transrealizem, intersticijska proza, kognitivna disonanca, teorija kaosa

Zur Rolle der Emotionen in Brechts Dramentheorie

Špela Virant

Abstract

Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts begann ein Prozess der 'Abkühlung' in den Künsten. Die dargestellten Gefühle und die gefühlvolle Darstellungsweise wurden aus der Literatur verdrängt oder sehr nüchtern betrachtet. Es kommt zu einer Rationalisierung, Ökonomisierung und Ideologisierung der gesellschaftlichen Emotionsdiskurse, was auch die Dramentheorie beeinflusst, für die die Erregung und Reinigung der Gefühle seit der *Poetik* von Aristoteles von zentraler Bedeutung ist. Brecht bekämpfte das aristotelische Theater aus ideologischen und politischen Gründen. Je mehr er gegen Aristoteles argumentierte, desto stärker näherte er sich einer modernen Lesart der *Poetik* an. Interessant ist aber, dass sich auch das sogenannte postdramatische Theater, das sich von Aristoteles und Brecht ausdrücklich distanziert, immer noch als kalt bezeichnet.

Key words: Bertolt Brecht, Aristoteles, Poetik, Dramentheorie, Theatertheorie

In der Dramentheorie spielen, seit Aristoteles in seiner *Poetik* die Katharsis als das Ziel der Tragödie definierte, Gefühle eine zentrale Rolle. Dabei geht es nicht um die dargestellten Gefühle und auch nicht um die gefühlvolle Darstellungsweise, noch weniger um die Gefühle des Autors, denen Ausdruck verliehen werden kann, sondern um die Gefühle der Leser und Zuschauer, die geweckt werden sollen. Zwar wurde die Katharsis im Laufe der Jahrtausende unterschiedlich interpretiert, doch die Meinungen divergieren vor allem bezüglich der Art der Gefühle, die erweckt werden sollten, und bezüglich des Objekts der Reinigung, also bezüglich der Frage, was wovon gereinigt werden soll: der Zuschauer von den Gefühlen oder seine Gefühle selbst. Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts begann jedoch ein Prozess der „Abkühlung“ in den Künsten. Die Gefühle, die noch in der Zeit der Romantik eine bedeutende Rolle spielten, wurden aus der Literatur langsam verdrängt, sowohl was die dargestellten Gefühle wie auch was die Darstellungsweise anging, und zwar zu Gunsten einer nüchternen Betrachtung der Lebenswelt. Die realistische Schreibweise und später der Naturalismus betonten, gestützt von den Theorien der Positivisten, die sozial-historischen, ökonomischen und biologischen Aspekte der Lebenswelten, die sie distanziert und mit einer fast wissenschaftlichen Akribie zu beschreiben suchten. Diese Abkehr von den Emotionen, die traditionell zu den Hauptthemen der Literatur gehörten, wurde als ein äußeres Zeichen von künstlerischer Modernität betrachtet, die der Modernisierung und Technisierung der Welt entsprechen sollte. Sie ging Hand in Hand mit Verschiebungen in den dominierenden Emotionsdiskursen der Zeit, die einerseits die Emotionen zum Untersuchungsobjekt von Naturwissenschaften machten, andererseits das Vokabular, das von den Geisteswissenschaften verwendet wurde, um Emotionen zu theoretisieren, einer weithin akzeptierten Vorstellung von Rationalität anpassten. Indem die Emotionen zum Gegenstand der Medizin unter anderen Wissenschaften wurden, wurde auch das Interesse wie auch die Vorstellung von Gefühlswelten verschoben, und zwar von Gefühlen als Manifestationen geistigen Lebens zu Emotionen als Folgeerscheinungen körperlicher Prozesse. Konkret heißt das zum Beispiel die Verschiebung des Interesses von der Liebe als Gefühl hin zur Sexualität, zu ihren Ursprüngen und Ausprägungen.

Diese Verschiebung ist auch im geisteswissenschaftlichen Diskurs zu beobachten, sie findet aber auch in der Literatur selbst statt, die immer offener Sexualität thematisiert, die Gefühle jedoch ausblendet, soweit sie sich nicht mit sich selbst und ihrer eigenen Form beschäftigt. Die Verschiebung im Bereich der Geisteswissenschaften markiert am deutlichsten Sigmund Freuds Psychoanalyse, die eine Brücke zwischen der medizinischen und der geisteswissenschaftlichen Erforschung von Sexualität schlägt. Freud, dessen Theorien bis heute nicht wissenschaftlich einzuordnen sind, führte gleichzeitig mit dem Untersuchungsobjekt Sexualität auch eine Sprache dafür ein, die sich an dem Vokabular der

Wirtschaftswissenschaften orientiert. Neben der Medizin, von der er sich in seinen Theorien entfernte, galt die Ökonomie als Garant von Rationalität, gesundem Menschenverstand und distanzierter Emotionslosigkeit. Die Einführung des wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Vokabulars bürgte dafür, dass die Sexualität im Rahmen dieser Theorien nüchtern und rational, also quasi wissenschaftlich untersucht wird. So spricht Freud über „Libidoökonomie“ (Freud 1991, 118), Jacques Lacans Theorie kreist um den Begriff des Mankos (*manque*), Jean-François Lyotard greift auf Freuds Terminologie zurück und schreibt über „Libidinöse Ökonomie“ und Theoretikerinnen, die von Foucault und Deleuze ausgehend gegen Lacan argumentieren, fordern eine Theorie des Begehrens, die nicht mehr auf dem Konzept des Mankos und der Negativität, sondern auf Fülle und Reichtum beruhen würde, also eine Ökonomie des Überflusses, nicht des Mankos, wie Rosi Braidotti es formulierte (vgl. Braidotti 2000, 15).

Doch wenn auch Freud das Vokabular der Wirtschaft in die Diskussion der Sexualität einführte, hat die Verwendung von ökonomischen Denk- und Erklärungsmustern in Bezug auf Emotionen durchaus Tradition in der Geschichte des westlichen Denkens. Schon Platon erklärt im *Symposion* die Liebe mit einem Denkmodell, das auf dem wirtschaftlichen Begriff der Nachfrage basiert: Die Liebe erklärt er als Begehren von etwas, das man nicht hat. Schon bei Platon ist Eros, ähnlich wie bei Lacan, von einem inhärenten Mangel gezeichnet, das sein Begehren nach dem Schönen und Guten hervorbringt (vgl. Platon 199c-201d). Doch nicht nur im Rahmen der idealistischen Denktradition werden ökonomische Erklärungsmodelle für Emotionen bedient, auch die materialistisch orientierten Denker gebrauchen solche Modelle. So erklärt Karl Marx in seinen *Frühen Schriften* die Liebe als eine Art Tauschgeschäft, ein Geben und Nehmen (vgl. Marx 1971, 301). Dieser vereinfachende, nüchterne Blick, den Marx auf die Liebe wirft, entzaubert die Liebe und macht sie zu einer Randerscheinung, die keiner weiteren Diskussion bedarf. Damit weist er seinen Anhängern, wie auch Bertolt Brecht, den Weg zu einer nüchternen, unsentimentalen Behandlung von Gefühlen, die nun nicht nur ein Ausdruck der Modernität ist, sondern auch ein politisches Vorzeichen bekommt. So wird der Emotionsdiskurs auch ideologisiert. Doch die Vermischung von Elementen verschiedener Denktraditionen sowie die Rationalisierung, Ökonomisierung und Ideologisierung der Emotionsdiskurse, werden Brecht Schwierigkeiten bereiten in seinem Versuch, gegen Aristoteles zu argumentieren.

Brecht bekämpfte das aristotelische Theater aus ideologischen und politischen Gründen. So fasste es schon Hans Mayer zusammen: „Brecht gedachte seine Dramenkunst und Bühnenkunst sehr deutlich gegen die Prinzipien der aristotelischen Poetik zu stellen, das ist bekannt. Er selbst wurde nicht müde, es immer wieder zu unterstreichen.“ (Mayer 1986, 33f) Den entscheidenden Unterschied

zwischen Brecht und Aristoteles sieht Mayer in ihrer Konzeption der Funktion von Dramatik: „Die Funktion des Dramas begrenzt sich bei Aristoteles wie bei Lessing auf die Dauer des Theaterabends, die Geschlossenheit des Bühnenraums. Die Funktion der Brecht dramatik strebt über den Theaterabend und Zuschauerraum hinaus, will den Menschen belehren, auf Widersprüche des gesellschaftlichen Seins hinweisen, Erkenntnisprozesse auslösen, klares und einsichtsvolles Handeln im Leben provozieren.“ (Mayer 1986, 37)

Diese Argumentation von Mayer trifft in Bezug auf Brecht sicherlich zu, problematischer erscheint sie jedoch in Bezug auf Aristoteles, denn auch für ihn ist die Tragödie mit ihrem Bestreben, eine reinigende Wirkung auf die Zuschauer auszuüben, auf ein Ziel ausgerichtet, das außerhalb des Textes und des Theaters liegt. Dementsprechend ist es nicht verwunderlich, dass für Brecht der Angelpunkt seiner Kritik an der *Poetik* von Aristoteles gerade die Katharsis war. Im Gegensatz zu Mayers verkürzter Darstellung ist der Unterschied zwischen diesen zwei Vorstellungen der Dramenfunktion nicht so groß; deshalb bemühte sich Brecht in verschiedenen theoretischen Texten, diesen Unterschied zu präzisieren. Was das Brechtsche Motiv für den Kampf gegen Aristoteles angeht, beschreibt es Mayer recht überzeugend: „Brecht meinte von jeher die *geschichtliche Gestalt des Aristoteles*. Er lehnte nicht bloß die *Poetik* des Aristoteles ab [...] sondern vor allem seine Politik. Das konservative, auf Maß, Mitte, Ausgleich gerichtete System des Philosophielehrers Alexanders des Großen war ihm tief verdächtig.“ (Mayer 1986, 38)

Brecht hatte also politische und ideologische Gründe, die Bedeutung der Gefühle in der Dramentheorie und im Theater zu verringern und er hatte eben solche Gründe, sich von Aristoteles zu distanzieren. Hinzu kam, als drittes Kampffeld, Brechts Widerstand gegen die Praxis des bürgerlichen Theaters, die unter Berufung auf die Lessing'sche *Poetik*-Übersetzung auf die Erregung von Mitleid und Furcht ausgerichtet war. Diese drei Anliegen kommen zusammen, wenn Brecht gegen Aristoteles argumentiert, doch dabei argumentiert er, so die These, die im Folgenden weiter ausgeführt werden soll, vor allem gegen ein figurenzentriertes psychologisches Theater des späten Bürgertums.

Zur Katharsis kommt der Zuschauer, so Brecht, „auf Grund eines eigentümlichen psychischen Aktes, der Einfühlung des Zuschauers in die handelnden Personen“ (Brecht 1993, 171). Die Katharsis, wie Brecht sie versteht, schließt kritische Rationalität aus: „Eine völlig freie, kritische, auf rein irdische Lösungen von Schwierigkeiten bedachte Haltung des Zuschauers ist keine Basis für eine Katharsis.“ (Brecht 1993, 172) Diese kritische Haltung aber ist wichtig im Klassenkampf in der Zeit des Hochkapitalismus. Brecht lässt in dem kurzen Text *Kritik der „Poetik“ des Aristoteles* (Brecht 1993, 171f) die Möglichkeit offen, dass der Verzicht auf Einfühlung nur zeitweilig sei, eben an den Hochkapitalismus

gebunden, den es zu überwinden gilt. Doch nicht nur der Klassenkampf erforderte die Zurückstellung der Gefühle zu Gunsten einer kritischen und praktischen Vernunft. In der Zeit von 1933 bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs, also in der Zeit der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft, organisierten die Nationalsozialisten die so genannten Thing-Spiele, die darauf ausgerichtet waren, die Massen emotional zu mobilisieren, sie zu begeistern und zu manipulieren. Eine kühle, distanzierte Haltung des Publikums war so auch notwendig, um Brechts marxistisches Theater von den nationalsozialistischen Spektakeln zu differenzieren, so erhielt es neben dem ideologischen auch ein politisches Vorzeichen.

Das Abkühlen der Kunst, das für Brecht so wichtig war, begann, aus den bereits erwähnten Gründen, schon im 19. Jahrhundert. In der Literatur ist es besonders in der Prosa, vor allem im Roman, zu beobachten, wahrscheinlich wegen seiner relativen Flexibilität und der vermittelnden Instanz des Erzählers, die zwischen den dargestellten Figuren und dem Leser Distanz erschaffen kann. Doch für die Dramatik ist dieser Prozess schwieriger. Zwar lässt sich schon sowohl in dem Dargestellten als auch in den Darstellungsmitteln ein Zurücknehmen von Emotionalität auch im Drama beobachten, doch es bleibt nach wie vor wichtig, bei den Zuschauern eine emotionale Reaktion hervorzurufen, wenn auch durch *Understatement*. Die emotionale Reaktion des Publikums im Theater aufzugeben, ist aus zwei Gründen ein schwieriges Unterfangen. Das erste Problem betrifft die Theorie. Am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts gibt es keine Dramentheorie, die auf das Erregen der Gefühle des Publikums verzichtete. Eine neue Theorie müsste formuliert werden, die gegen die von Aristoteles bestimmte Tradition das Ziel der Dramatik neu definieren würde. Das zweite Problem dabei ist praktisch und lässt sich leicht beschreiben, jedoch schwer lösen: Werden die Emotionen des Publikums nicht angesprochen, so gehen das Interesse und die Aufmerksamkeit verloren. Geht das Publikum verloren, so gibt es kein Theater.

Brecht versuchte beide Probleme zu lösen. In der Theorie konzentrierte er sich auf die Dramenrezeption und entwickelte das Konzept des epischen Theaters, wo das Gefühl, das er dem aristotelischen Theater zuschrieb, zurücktrat zu Gunsten der Ratio. Dies wird aus der Tabelle ersichtlich, die er in dem Text *Das moderne Theater ist das epische Theater: Anmerkungen zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* veröffentlichte (Brecht 1957). Um das zu erreichen, wandte er im Drama einige der Textstrategien an, die sich bereits in der Epik zur Abkühlung der Emotionen bewehrt hatten. Der erste wesentliche Aspekt war die epische Struktur, die er einführte, der zweite die epische Spielweise, bei der der Schauspieler zeigt, wie er sich die Figur „denkt“ (Brecht 1957, 154). Der Schauspieler distanziert sich von der Rolle. Er spielt und gleichzeitig zeigt er, dass er spielt. Er funktioniert als vermittelnde Instanz, ähnlich dem Erzähler in der Prosa. Andere Mittel der Verfremdung, die Brecht verwendete, waren die Songs, die den

Zusammenhang der Geschichte unterbrechen. Die Verwendung von Musik, die zwar die Identifikation des Zuschauers erschweren soll, hilft jedoch auch, seine Aufmerksamkeit zu fesseln. So weit, so gut.

Brecht aber war ein Theaterregisseur und wusste, dass das Theater nicht nur die Ratio ansprechen und auf seine didaktische Funktion reduziert werden darf. Schon in den *Anmerkungen zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* fügt er eine Fußnote hinzu, in der er betont, dass die im Schema aufgelisteten Gegenüberstellungen nicht als „absolute Gegensätze“ zu verstehen sind, sondern dass „innerhalb eines Mitteilungsvorgangs das gefühlsmäßig Suggestive oder das rein rationell Überredende bevorzugt werden“ kann (Brecht 1957, 19). Später versuchte er in anderen Texten zum Theater immer wieder den Eindruck zu korrigieren, der durch die graphische Gegenüberstellung in dem erwähnten Schema erweckt wurde und die Austreibung der Emotion aus seinem Theater implizierte. In dem Text *Vergnügungstheater oder Lehrtheater?* behauptet er sogar, dass, wer Vernunft und Gefühl als Gegensätze sieht, weder große Gefühle noch wirkliche Vernunft kenne. Sowohl Vernunft als auch Gefühl seien im Zeitalter des Kapitalismus „entartet“. „Die aufsteigende neue Klasse hingegen und jene, die mit ihr zusammen kämpfen, haben es mit Vernunft und Gefühl in großem produktivem Widerspruch zu tun.“ (Brecht 1957, 73)

Gleichzeitig mit dieser versuchten Rehabilitation von Gefühlen begann Brecht aber auch, in seinem theoretischen Gebilde die Sinnlichkeit und die Lust zu betonen. Diese ist jedoch nicht Selbstzweck, sondern dient dem Lernen. Es geht also um „lustvolles Lernen, fröhliches und kämpferisches Lernen“, um „amüsantes Lernen“ (Brecht 1957, 66). Das Theater muss Spaß machen und wenn es moralische Lehren vermitteln will, muss es sie vergnüglich machen, „und zwar den Sinnen vergnüglich“ (Brecht 1957, 131). Wo es um Lust, Spaß oder Freude in Verbindung mit dem Lernen geht, findet Brecht auch die aristotelische Poetik akzeptabel: „Solange der Aristoteles (im vierten Kapitel der Poetik) ganz allgemein über die Freude an der nachahmenden Darstellung spricht und als Grund dafür das Lernen nennt, gehen wir mit ihm.“ (Brecht 1993, 172) Genauer betrachtet, geht Aristoteles a priori davon aus, dass Lernen Freude macht. Es muss gar nicht auf besondere Weise vermittelt werden, denn es ist an sich schon ein Vergnügen: „Das Lernen bereitet nicht nur den Philosophen größtes Vergnügen, sondern in ähnlicher Weise auch den übrigen Menschen (diese haben freilich nur wenig Anteil daran)“ (Aristoteles 1448b). Ein vergnügliches Lernen wäre demnach eigentlich schon eine Tautologie.

In seinem Essay *Kleines Organon für das Theater* betont Brecht auch die zentrale Bedeutung der „Fabel“, die er als „Herzstück der theatralischen Veranstaltung“ bezeichnet und als „Gesamtkomposition aller gestischen Vorgänge“ definiert. Sie zeigt das, „was *zwischen* den Menschen vorgeht“, woraus der Zuschauer alles

ablesen kann, „was diskutierbar, kritisierbar, änderbar sein kann“ und dem Publikum Vergnügen bereitet (Brecht 1957, 165). Während er für sein Theater also die vorrangige Bedeutung der Fabel hervorhebt, sieht er in der *Poetik* von Aristoteles vor allem die Bedeutung der Figuren hervorgehoben, wie er in anderen Texten ausführt. Die Katharsis, das Ziel der Tragödie, werde, so Brechts Interpretation der *Poetik*, durch die „Einfühlung des Zuschauers in die handelnden Personen“ (Brecht 1993, 171) erreicht. So heißt es in dem Aufsatz Über die Verwendung von Musik für ein episches Theater auch: „In der aristotelischen Dramatik wird der Held durch die Handlungen in Lagen versetzt, in denen er sein innerstes Wesen offenbart. Alle gezeigten Ereignisse verfolgen den Zweck, den Helden in seelische Konflikte zu treiben.“ (Brecht 1957, 243) Emotionen und Vergnügen schöpft der Zuschauer in der Theorie des epischen Theaters von Brecht aus der Fabel, der „Gesamtkomposition aller gestischen Vorgänge“, während sie bei Aristoteles, wie Brecht dessen *Poetik* interpretiert, durch die Einfühlung mit den Figuren erreicht werden sollten. Diese Auslegung der *Poetik* erscheint, wenn man den Text genau betrachtet und dabei auch die neueste Forschung berücksichtigt, etwas eigenwillig.

Aristoteles bezeichnet die „Zusammensetzung der Geschehnisse“, die „Nachahmung von Handlung“ als Mythos. Dies ist der „wichtigste Teil“ der Tragödie, die ohne Handlung nicht zustande käme, „wohl aber ohne Charaktere“. (1450a) Ein weiteres der sechs Elemente, aus denen die Tragödie besteht, ist die Erkenntnisfähigkeit (1450a). Schon hier wird deutlich, dass auch für Aristoteles das Theatererlebnis nicht nur auf Gefühlen und sinnlichen Wahrnehmungen basiert. Doch der Mythos, die Handlung, bleibt für ihn das wichtigste Element der Tragödie und somit ist er für ihn auch der wichtigste Auslöser von Emotionen: „Nun kann das Schauderhafte und Jammervolle durch die Inszenierung, es kann aber auch durch die Zusammenfügung der Geschehnisse selbst bedingt sein, was das Bessere ist und den besseren Dichter zeigt. Denn die Handlung muß so zusammengefügt sein, daß jemand, der nur hört und nicht auch sieht, wie die Geschehnisse sich vollziehen, bei den Vorfällen Schaudern und Jammer empfindet.“ (1453b) Von Einfühlung in die Charaktere ist hier nicht die Rede. Wohl aber präzisiert Aristoteles, wie die Geschehnisse zusammengesetzt werden sollten und noch genauer führt er drei Beispiele auf, wie sie nicht zusammengesetzt werden sollten, damit sie eine emotionale Reaktion beim Publikum hervorrufen, die über das Empfinden von Abscheu hinausginge. Was nicht gezeigt werden sollte ist der Fall eines makellosen Mannes, der Aufstieg eines Schuftes und der Fall eines ganz schlechten Mannes. Das erste schockiert nur, das zweite ist unakzeptabel, das dritte selbstverständlich (vgl. 1452b-1453a). Für die Katharsis ist das Hervorrufen von Emotionen nur der erste Schritt, der zweite ist die Reinigung. Für diese aber ist offensichtlich wichtig, dass die Zuschauer verstehen, wie und warum

etwas passiert, also dass sie die kausalen Zusammenhänge und die ethische Dimension der dramatischen Handlung verstehen. Auch die neuesten Forschungen weisen darauf hin, dass sich für Aristoteles das Erregen von Emotionen und eine kritische, rationale Haltung nicht ausschließen.

So bezeichnet Adelheid Stephan die Katharsis bei Aristoteles als „rezeptionsästhetisches emotives und erkenntnistheoretisches Prinzip der Tragödie“ (Stephan 2012, 173). Doch genauer geht auf die Problematik der Emotionserregung bei Aristoteles Christof Rapp ein. Er macht darauf aufmerksam, dass Aristoteles in seiner *Rhetorik* zwischen kunstfremder und kunstgemäßer Emotionserregung unterscheidet. Von der kunstfremden sage Aristoteles, „sie *verhindere* ein wirkliches Urteil, während er von der kunstgemäßen Erregung von Emotionen sagt, sie *modifiziere* das Urteil der betroffenen Zuhörer“. (Rapp 2007, 158). Weiter stellt er die These auf: „Möglicherweise meint er daher, daß seine Methode der Emotionserregung über die Modifikation der Urteile zur Überzeugungsbildung beiträgt, während die konventionelle Bemühung, den Hörer durch Emotionen von der Sache abzulenken, eher dahin geht, eine Überzeugungsbildung zu verhindern“ (Rapp 2007, 158). Vor allem wichtig ist jedoch seine Feststellung, für Aristoteles gehöre „die Emotionserregung, wie er sie selbst konzipiert, zum Bereich des Gedankens oder der Gedankenführung (*diánoia*) und stellt daher eine inhaltsbezogene Weise der Überzeugung dar.“ (Rapp 2007, 158) So sei, so Rapp, auch die Emotionserregung durch die Handlungszusammenhänge in der Tragödie dem Bereich des Gedankens zuzurechnen, der zur Urteilsbildung führt (vgl. Rapp 2007, 162). Wichtig dabei aber ist doch, der Redner muss „durch das, was er sagt, den Zuhörer glauben machen, daß etwas der Fall ist“ (Rapp 2007, 159). Es geht also auch um die Art und Weise, wie etwas dargestellt wird, damit es glaubwürdig ist.

Ich will nicht ausschließen, daß in der Tragödie auch Rhythmus, Melodik, Aufführung, Inszenierung eine emotionsrelevante Wirkung entfalten; erstens jedoch wertet Aristoteles diese gegenüber der Handlung in der Tragödientheorie genauso ab, wie er in der Rhetorik den mündlichen Vortrag und die sprachliche Form gegenüber der *diánoia* abwertet; und zweitens erscheint die Handlung beim Erzielen der tragödienspezifischen Wirkung autonom. (Rapp 2007, 162)

Für Aristoteles ist also die Handlung oder der Mythos das wichtigste im Drama, wie für Brecht die Fabel. Die Ratio, die Brecht der aristotelischen Emotion gegenüberstellt, ist auch bei Aristoteles ein bedeutender Teil der Tragödie und die kunstgemäß erregten Gefühle schließen eine kritische Urteilsbildung nicht aus. Es scheint, dass sich Brecht immer mehr an die aristotelische Poetik annäherte, je

mehr er sich von ihr loszulösen versuchte. Noch offensichtlicher als in der Theorie passierte dies in seinem literarischen Schaffen, was von der Literaturwissenschaft bereits beobachtet und behandelt wurde. Gerade in der Zeit zwischen 1937 und 1939, als er an seiner *Kritik der „Poetik“* arbeitete, entstanden auch zwei Theaterstücke, die als „aristotelisch“ gelten, und zwar *Die Gewehre der Frau Carrar* und *Leben des Galilei*. Hans Mayer, der Brecht verteidigt, räumt ein, dass es in diesen Stücken zwar keine Katharsis gäbe, aber „eine spezifische Schwierigkeit dialektischer Theaterarbeit“ (Mayer 1986, 42) dabei sichtbar werde. Die Verteidigung stützt er vor allem durch die Hervorhebung von Brechts Verständnis der Notwendigkeit einer „vielfältigen, formenreichen, stets aber dialektischen Bühnenpraxis.“ (Mayer 1986, 42)

Obwohl sich Brecht weder in seiner Theorie noch in seiner literarischen Praxis von Aristoteles vollkommen lösen konnte, suchte er nach einer Möglichkeit, sich von ihm zu distanzieren. Die Formulierungen in dem kurzen Text zur Kritik an der *Poetik* klingen schon fast krampfhaft verzweifelt, denn auch die Einfühlung, die er Aristoteles und den Theaterbesuchern der griechischen Antike zuschreiben möchte, kann er nicht nachweisen:

Einfühlung beim Aristoteles. Nicht daß wir beim Aristoteles als Art der Entgegennahme des Kunstwerks durch den Zuschauer die Einfühlung finden, die heute als Einfühlung in das Individuum des Hochkapitalismus vorkommt. Dennoch haben wir bei den Griechen, was immer wir uns unter der Katharsis, die unter uns so fremden Umständen vor sich ging, vorstellen mögen, als deren Basis irgendeine Art von Einfühlung zu vermuten. (Brecht 1993, 172)

In dem Abschnitt, indem Brecht „irgendeine Art“ von Einfühlung bei den Griechen vermuten will, obwohl er der Antike kein neuzeitliches Individuum oder Subjektkonzept unterstellen kann, wird deutlich, dass er vor allem an der „Einfühlung in das Individuum des Hochkapitalismus“ Anstoß nimmt. Es wird deutlich, dass er die neuzeitliche, bürgerliche Interpretation der aristotelischen Poetik bekämpft, die ihr eigenes Interesse an Individualität, an intrasubjektiven Vorgängen und moderner Psychologie auf die antike Poetik projizierte. Er versucht in anderen Texten die Aufmerksamkeit des Theaters wieder auf die intersubjektiven Vorgänge zu lenken, auf das zwischenmenschliche Geschehen, also auf das, was Peter Szondi in seiner Mitte der 1950er Jahre veröffentlichten Theorie des Theaters als „die Dichtungsform des je gegenwärtigen zwischenmenschlichen Geschehens“ definiert (Szondi 1963, 74). Brecht hat so ungewollt jene Dimension der *Poetik* herausgearbeitet, die im deutschsprachigen bürgerlichen Theaterdiskurs ab Mitte des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts übersehen oder eigenwillig interpretiert worden sind. In dieser Zeit dominierte das Interesse

an dem „psychologischen Aspekt des Katharsisproblems“ und „die emotive Deutung der Katharsis“ (Luserke 1991, XIII), die zwar schon seit Jakobus Pontanus angelegt war, aber mit Jacob Bernays Studien große Resonanz erfuhr. So werden in dieser Zeit vor Brecht in Aufsätzen zur Katharsis vermehrt Begriffe verwendet wie das „psychologische Faktum“ (Weil 1991, 78), „Entladung der Affekte“ (Volkelt 1991, 157) oder es werden Vergleiche zu Breuers und Freuds Behandlung der Hysterie angestellt (vgl. Berger 1991, 139).

Brechts Betonung der Ratio und der Abkühlung von Gefühlen war also gegen die Emotionen erhitzenden nationalsozialistischen Spektakel gerichtet, die zwar mit dem aristotelischen Theater nichts gemeinsam haben (sie bezogen sich eher auf ein pervertiertes Verständnis germanischer Mythologie) und in seinem Sinne eher einem kunstfremden Erregen von Emotionen zur Verhinderung der Urteilsbildung entsprechen. Sie kommen ohne Brechts Ratio und ohne aristotelische *diánoia* aus. Brechts Kritik an der Einfühlung hingegen richtet sich gegen das psychologisierende, plüschgepolsterte, warme bürgerliche Theater, das sich auf intrasubjektive Vorgänge konzentrierte und das Zwischenmenschliche, Soziale und Politische ignorierte, wodurch es in Brechts Sicht konservativ erschien, da es der privilegierten Klasse vorbehalten blieb, die sich mit sich selbst beschäftigte, um sich nicht mit realen gesellschaftlichen Problemen auseinandersetzen zu müssen. Die Brecht-Forschung hat diese Ansätze zwar thematisiert, doch hat sie sie einerseits zu wenig differenziert, wie es Karl-Heinz Ludwig hervorhebt, der meint, dass Brecht die Einfühlung zur Theatralik des Faschismus zähle (vgl. Ludwig 1975, 156), andererseits aber vor allem in die philosophische Tradition einzuordnen versucht, wie Franz Norbert Mennemeier und Michael Thiele. Mennemeier bemerkt, dass Brecht eine in Psychologie versandende unpolitisch-illusionistische Kunst kritisiert, wodurch er sich wieder Platons Kunstkritik annähert (Mennemeier 1979, 145f). Thiele hingegen sieht darin keine Rückkehr zu Platon, sondern eher eine Kritik an einer auf Einfühlung beruhenden Kunstauffassung, die Brecht zwar als „aristotelisch“ bezeichnet, die sich aber eher an Hegels Konzeption der romantischen Kunstform orientiert (Thiele 1991, 148).

So formierte sich Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts vor dem Hintergrund historischer Ereignisse eine auf die Kunst bezogene Temperaturskala, in der *Wärme* der konservativen, bürgerlichen Kunst und *Kälte* der modernen, progressiven, meistens politisch linksorientierten Kunst zugeschrieben wurde, während populistische (potentiell rechtsorientierte) Spektakel als *heiß* galten. Diese Temperaturzuschreibungen samt den politischen Vorzeichen sind so suggestiv, dass sie bis in die Gegenwart nachwirken. So ordnet auch Hans-Thies Lehmann in seiner Theorie des postdramatischen Theaters den negativ konnotierten Begriff Wärme einem veralteten, an psychologischer Darstellung menschlicher Schicksale orientierten Theater zu, während Kälte das moderne beziehungsweise postmoderne Theater auszeichnet.

Der Kälte, die im Formalismus des postdramatischen Theaters verortet wird, wird hier nicht explizit ein politisches Vorzeichen zugeschrieben, doch durch dessen Modernität kommt auch ihr eine kunstimmanent positive Wertung zuteil:

Durch die Beteiligung lebender Menschen wie auch durch die jahrhundertalte Fixierung auf bewegende Menschenschicksale eignete dem Theater eine gewisse 'Wärme'. Dem haben zwar klassische Avantgarden, das epische und dokumentarische Theater schon weitgehend den Garaus gemacht. Dennoch ist der Formalismus des postdramatischen Theaters ein qualitativ neuer Schritt und löst noch immer Ratlosigkeit aus. Er kann für den, der auf die Darstellung menschlicher im Sinne von psychologischer Erfahrungswelten wartet, eine schwer erträgliche *Kälte* manifestieren. (Lehmann 1999, 161f)

Was die Ablehnung der psychologischen Darstellung von Figuren angeht, ist das postdramatische Theater von Lehmann nicht besonders innovativ, da diese bereits von Brecht abgelehnt, von Aristoteles hingegen nie gefordert wurde. Diese Ablehnung richtet sich noch immer gegen ein bürgerliches Theater, das auf einer dem 19. Jahrhundert geschuldeten eigenwilligen Interpretation der *Poetik* von Aristoteles, insbesondere des Begriffs der Katharsis, beruht. Die Differenz, die das postdramatische Theater einführt, liegt vielmehr in seinem Umgang mit der Handlung. Im Vergleich mit dem postdramatischen Theater ist Brechts Theater dramatisch gerade in seiner Betonung der Handlung. Auch Birgit Haas bezeichnet es als dramatisch, während sie in der Postmoderne eine Radikalisierung von Brechts Theaterästhetik sieht, die dadurch zerstört wird. Für sie ist jedoch das wichtigste Kennzeichen des dramatischen Theaters „das Streben nach einem ganzheitlichen Kunstwerk, welches die Erfahrungen eines dialektischen Bezugs von Kunst und Realität einbezieht“ (Haas 2007, 47).

Abschließend kann festgestellt werden, erstens, dass sich Brecht, je mehr er ausdrücklich gegen Aristoteles argumentiert, umso stärker einer genauen Lesart seiner *Poetik* annähert, und zweitens, dass sich das sogenannte postdramatische Theater, das sich ausdrücklich von Aristoteles und Brecht distanziert, sich als *kalt* bezeichnet, obwohl sich die *Kälte* als Charakteristikum eines modernen, progressiven, anti-bürgerlichen und anti-faschistischen Theaters gerade durch Brechts Annäherung an Aristoteles unter besonderen politischen und ideologischen Verhältnissen Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts entwickelte. Doch es ist nicht das Ziel des vorliegenden Artikels, die Besonderheiten des sogenannten postdramatischen Theaters zu bestimmen, sondern nur auf bestimmte Widersprüche in der Dramentheorie des 20. Jahrhunderts hinzuweisen, die durch eine überkommene implizite Wertung bestimmter dramaturgischer Techniken, in der jedes Erregen emotioneller Reaktionen des Publikums ein kunstimmanent und politisch abwertendes Vorzeichen bekommt, die Möglichkeiten für die Entwicklung neuer Schreibweisen begrenzt.

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O vlogi čustev v Brechtovi teoriji drame

Članek na kratko oriše proces postopnega čustvenega »ohlajanja« literature, ki se je začel že sredi 19. stoletja in povzročil poseben problem v teoriji drame, ki je vse od Aristotelove Poetike temeljila na vzbujanju in očiščenju čustev. Brecht je v svoji teoriji epskega gledališča, kjer argumentira proti Aristotelu, poudaril vlogo razuma, ki naj bi nadomestil čustvovanje. Natančna analiza Brechtovih besedil in sodobne raziskave Aristotelove Poetike pa pokažejo, da se je Brecht upiral predvsem proti interpretacijam Poetike, ki so nastale v 19. stoletju in spremljale razvoj meščanske psihologizacije gledališča. S svojimi argumenti proti tako razumljeni Poetiki pa se je pravzaprav močno približal sodobnim branjem Aristotelove Poetike.

Ključne besede: Bertolt Brecht, Aristoteles, Poetika, teorija drame, teorija gledališča

About the Role of Emotions in Brecht's Theory of Drama

The article briefly describes the process of gradual »cooling down« of literature, which began already in the middle of the 19th century and caused a special problem in the theory of drama that has been since Aristotle's Poetics based on the evocation and purgation of emotions.

Key words: Bertolt Brecht, Aristotle, Poetics, theory of drama, theory of theatre

La rencontre avec « un médecin philosophe »: une lecture du chapitre XIII du *Hussard sur le toit* de Jean Giono

Daniela Ćurko

Résumé

L'article étudie l'intertextualité de F. Nietzsche dans le chapitre XIII du roman *Le hussard sur le toit* de Jean Giono. Nous démontrons que le vieux médecin rencontré par Angelo à la fin de sa traversée d'une Provence ravagée par le choléra, est non seulement un maître à penser, mais qu'il est ce « philosophe médecin de la culture » dont rêve Nietzsche. Par son diagnostic sur le mal qui est le choléra, le vieux praticien est effectivement redevable à la critique que Nietzsche fait de la civilisation occidentale et notamment du christianisme. Plusieurs preuves viennent étayer cette hypothèse, tout d'abord la représentation de notre civilisation comme décadente, accablée par la tristesse, et qui n'a rien à « offrir en échange » à la pulsion de mort ; la référence à la vie urbaine et à la grande ville comme lieu emblématique de la décadence ; enfin, la représentation du choléra comme « une vengeance de la chair qui raisonne » et qui se révolte contre le statut dévalorisant octroyé au corps, aux pulsions et à la pensée inconsciente dans notre civilisation.

Mots-clés : Giono, Nietzsche, civilisation, décadence, philosophe médecin de la culture

1 INTRODUCTION

L'incipit du roman *Le hussard sur le toit* s'ouvre avec son héros, Angelo, déjà en route pour son voyage dans le sud de la Provence vers Gap afin d'accompagner, en preux chevalier, la jeune Pauline de Théus à son château de Gap ; ce récit narre la traversée d'Angelo qui voyage seul, puis en compagnie de Pauline, à travers une Provence ravagée par le choléra. Et si Angelo est appelé l'« homme de grand chemin », c'est non seulement, comme le lui avait expliqué le marquis de Théus, « en l'honneur de l'amour du large et des vastes entreprises »,¹ mais aussi parce qu'Angelo parcourt effectivement, tout au long du roman, les routes à l'aventure,² et qu'il est donc, au sens métatextuel, le héros par excellence d'un roman d'aventures. Dans la clausule du roman, la fin de son périple et son arrivée à destination ne sont, pour Angelo, que le début d'un autre - vers l'Italie natale de ce *carbonaro*. Ce roman est avant tout celui d'un long voyage, interrompu par un long séjour à Manosque auquel le héros est contraint, puis par de courts arrêts dus à la clausuration forcée, à l'emprisonnement provisoire du héros - à la quarantaine de la grange près des Omergues et à celle de Vaumeilh - ou bien à la fatigue, au besoin de sommeil, à la nécessité de s'abriter d'un orage...

Roman d'aventures donc, roman métaphysique et roman manichéen de la lutte du Bien contre le Mal, l'histoire d'Angelo est celle d'un voyageur et d'un voyage qui débute comme un voyage réel dans un espace-temps réel, puisque Angelo, parti du Sud de la Provence vers son Piémont natal, prend la direction du Nord et doit d'abord monter la montagne de Lure, une montagne des Préalpes de Haute-Provence. Pourtant, ce voyage réel se mue, dès les premières pages du roman, en voyage intérieur, véritable descente aux Enfers qui conduit le jeune homme pur et naïf à travers la vision du Mal et la rencontre de ses méfaits sous la forme du choléra, vers son engagement dans cette bataille, puisque le héros apprend à agir contre le Mal. Il l'apprend grâce à ses initiateurs - personnages rencontrés sur son chemin et qui initient le jeune homme inexpérimenté au combat contre le choléra. Ainsi, « le petit français », jeune médecin rencontré presque au début de sa route, à sa sortie des Omergues, premier village où Angelo voit la mort partout, lui a donné l'exemple de

1 Jean Giono, *Angelo* in Œuvres romanesques complètes. Paris : Gallimard, 1977, t. IV, p. 120. Le marquis de Théus, époux de Pauline de Théus, héroïne du *Hussard sur le toit*, emploie cette expression dans un autre roman du cycle du Hussard, *Angelo*.

2 L'expression « l'homme de grand chemin » est donc polysémique. D'abord, elle en rappelle celle du « bandit, voleur de grand chemin », avec les connotations de la hardiesse, de l'impudence, de l'insolence ; tout comme elle rappelle une expression très semblable, où le mot « chemin » est mis au pluriel : « être sur les grands chemins », qui signifie « aller à l'aventure, sans aucune idée de l'itinéraire et des événements qui peuvent survenir » (TFL), où, comme le précise le même dictionnaire, « l'accent est mis sur la notion de voyage aventureux » (Ibid.)

l'abnégation, en lui apprenant à « chercher le dernier »,³ donc à essayer, au prix de sa propre vie, de soigner et, pour se faire, de trouver, parmi les morts, celui qui est encore vivant et que l'on pourrait encore sauver. La vieille nonne du couvent abandonné de Manosque, quant à elle, l'investit d'une véritable mission en lui intimant l'ordre et le devoir de sauver les âmes des victimes du choléra, et à consoler leurs familles désemparées face à l'épidémie. Pourtant, ce n'est que vers la fin de son voyage qu'Angelo apprend à *penser* en psychologue, sociologue et finalement en philosophe, le Mal suprême qui est le choléra. Cette compréhension est rendue possible grâce au dernier initiateur d'Angelo, celui que Pauline et lui rencontrent par hasard, dans un village montagnard en ruines, alors qu'ils cherchent l'abri d'un vrai déluge, et qui semble être le dernier habitant d'un monde en ruine - un vieux médecin philosophe.

C'est ce vieil ermite qui propose à Angelo de suppléer la réflexion à l'action pour cerner et approcher ce mal qu'est le choléra - réflexion, il faut bien le dire, par endroits volontairement obscure et énigmatique, puisque Giono, dont le vieux médecin nous semble être un étrange porte-parole, dote celui-ci de son propre goût pour la lecture et la solitude, ainsi que pour la pipe ; l'auteur se plaît donc à égarer Angelo, et son lecteur, par un discours souvent décousu, à l'image du salon du vieux praticien⁴ où règne un désordre et un chaos inouïs :

Les flammes qui jaillissaient avec assez de force d'énormes bûches permettaient de voir l'énorme entassement de meubles très riches mais fort mal entretenus et tous surchargés de gros bouquins et de tas de papiers sur lesquels s'essayaient à l'équilibre des pichets, des brocs, des bols, des cuvettes, des bouteilles, des casseroles, des louches, des pipes de toutes les grosseurs, de toutes les formes et mêmes des tiroirs pleins d'ustensiles de cuisine.⁵

Et Angelo de se dépêtrer de ce bric-à-brac de pensées et de références sur le choléra, dont la chambre du vieux médecin est à la fois la métonymie et la métaphore.

Le vieux médecin est donc le dernier initiateur du novice Angelo, et représente une étape essentielle de son chemin initiatique, de sa compréhension de l'Homme, de la vie et surtout de la mort et du mal qu'est le choléra. Ce qui nous intéresse ici, c'est la pensée qui sous-tend son discours en apparence extravagant et incohérent, un discours surprenant, à la limite de l'incompréhensible. Qu'est-ce qu'Angelo, et le lecteur par-delà le personnage, apprennent sur le choléra de la bouche du vieux praticien ?

3 Jean Giono, *Le Hussard sur le toit* in Œuvres romanesques complètes. Paris : Gallimard, 1977, p. IV, p. 280.

4 Cette chambre, encombrée de livres et de vieux papiers, ressemble d'ailleurs bien plus au bureau-bibliothèque d'un écrivain qu'au salon d'un praticien en retraite.

5 Jean Giono, *Le Hussard sur le toit*, op. cit., p. 604.

2 UN MÉDECIN PHILOSOPHE

L'endroit où Angelo et Pauline rencontrent le personnage est déjà signifiant : en cherchant un abri pendant l'orage, ils arrivent dans un vieux village en ruine qui leur semble désert, et qui l'est en effet, à l'exception de ce vieux médecin, son dernier habitant. L'abandon, la déréliction et le délabrement du vieux village symbolisent l'état triste de décadence où se trouverait notre civilisation :

Il [Angelo] était entré dans un débris de cave, ou de grange voûtée. Dehors, le déluge noyait les ruines d'un vieux village. [...]

Malgré l'épaisseur de la pluie et les nuages qui couraient à travers ce lieu élevé le village apparaissait complètement en ruine ; il ne restait que des chicots de murs. L'homme à la redingote leur fit traverser une sorte de place encombrée de buissons et d'herbes [...].⁶

Le vieux médecin prévient Angelo dès le début en lui disant : « Je suis bien loin de vouloir vous faire un *laïus* : il ne s'agit pas du tout d'anatomie » (Ibid., p. 611). Car ce qu'il va proférer, malgré tout, c'est un *laïus*, mais d'une nature telle que cette étrange dissertation changera non seulement la vision que le héros a du choléra, mais surtout celle qu'il a du monde et de la société, puisque la maladie du corps est vue et représentée par le vieux médecin comme métaphore de l'état pathologique de la civilisation occidentale.

Le médecin, au lieu de parler, comme l'attendait Angelo, des traitements et des remèdes à administrer aux malades du choléra, donne en effet son diagnostic de l'état décadent de la civilisation de l'Europe contemporaine⁷ – et cette idée prédominante de la décadence, et de la tristesse de l'Homme des sociétés civilisées, de même que le reste du contenu de son discours que nous analyserons plus bas, en font ce « médecin philosophe »⁸ de la culture, tant souhaité par Nietzsche.⁹ Car ce médecin constate que le choléra, mise à part une épidémie réelle, est surtout une des manifestations du malaise de notre civilisation. Dans un roman d'avant la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, *Que ma joie demeure* (paru en 1936), Giono avait d'ailleurs traité du même malaise, en le nommant

6 Ibid., p. 602-603.

7 Giono situe l'action de son roman en 1830-1832, lors de la grande épidémie de choléra en Provence.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*. Paris : Flammarion, 2007, p. 29.

9 Anne-Marie Boigontier a été la première à démontrer, dans sa thèse sur l'intertextualité nietzschéenne et l'éthique des personnages gioniens des *Chroniques romanesques*, que Giono a bien lu Nietzsche. Voir Anne-Marie Boigontier, *Giono : par-delà le bien et le mal*. Analyse de l'éthique, du bouleversement des valeurs dans les Chroniques. Thèse en microfiches : Caen, 1977.

la « lèpre »¹⁰ de l'ennui, et accablant de cette lèpre la communauté isolée du plateau de Grémone. Car la société occidentale ne peut pas offrir de perspective à l'Homme et ne lui donne plus de joie ; l'ennui est, d'après Giono, la véritable maladie de notre civilisation, qui fait des Hommes des « lépreux »¹¹ - ou des cholériques. Le choléra n'est, somme toute, qu'un symptôme ou une manifestation des plus spectaculaires de l'état décadent de notre civilisation, et Giono, à la suite de Nietzsche, évalue notre civilisation en termes de santé et de maladie, d'où la métaphore du philosophe médecin de la culture empruntée par Giono à la seconde préface du *Gai savoir* :

J'attends toujours qu'un médecin philosophe au sens exceptionnel du mot – un homme qui aura à étudier le problème de la santé d'ensemble d'un peuple, d'une époque, d'une race, de l'humanité – ait un jour le courage de porter mon soupçon à son degré ultime et d'oser cette proposition : dans toute activité philosophique, il ne s'agissait absolument pas jusqu'à présent de « vérité », mais de quelque chose d'autre, disons de santé, d'avenir, de croissance, de puissance, de vie ...¹²

3 DIAGNOSTIQUER LE MALAISE DANS LA CIVILISATION

Évidemment, le choléra, c'est aussi une des manifestations du Mal absolu qu'est la Shoah, puisque le vieux médecin fait une allusion au brassard jaune dont le port a été imposé aux Juifs par les Nazis et les gouvernements collaborationnistes,¹³ mais, mise à part une manifestation concrète du Mal à une époque historique donnée, le choléra est représenté par le vieux médecin comme un malaise intrinsèque et immanent à notre civilisation d'où la joie est exclue, selon un Giono lecteur de Nietzsche. Il faut dire que dans la pensée de Nietzsche, le terme même de « civilisation » a un sens particulier puisqu'il se réfère uniquement à notre civilisation contemporaine. Le terme a toujours un sens négatif pour Nietzsche, parce que, d'après lui, notre civilisation détruit ce qui est le meilleur en l'Homme en étouffant ses instincts au lieu de les sélectionner et de les discipliner (par l'élevage). En faisant cela elle fait aussi des ravages sur son esprit et tout penchant de celui-ci vers la grandeur. La civilisation est par définition ennemie de l'Homme supérieur, celui qui tend vers le Surhumain. En résumé : « La Civilisation, par exemple le christianisme, est une forme décadente de culture, qui ne met en œuvre qu'une

10 Jean Giono, *Que ma joie demeure* in Œuvres romanesque complètes. Paris : Gallimard, t. II, p. 461.

11 Ibid., p. 469.

12 F. Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, op. cit., p. 28.

13 « Actuellement, j'appelle choléra un brassard jaune et si je le fais porter à mille personnes, les milles crèvent en quinze jours. » (*Le Hussard sur le toit*, op. cit., 605)

*Zähmung*¹⁴ [dressage] visant à brimer la volonté de puissance, à rendre malade et à affaiblir le type d'homme que Nietzsche caractérise comme supérieur, accompli, ou encore abouti, et à privilégier l'apparition d'un type décadent. »¹⁵

Et si le vieux médecin exhorte Angelo d'être grec,¹⁶ c'est que la civilisation de l'ancienne Grèce est vue par Nietzsche comme l'antipode et l'antithèse de notre civilisation actuelle, comme la seule époque de la civilisation occidentale, avec la Renaissance italienne, où cette dernière ait atteint l'idéal de *Kultur*, d'une culture supérieure. Et cette « surabondance de santé, ce *trop-plein* de l'existence »¹⁷ qui caractérise et distingue la société et la culture grecques dans la vision nietzschéenne, oppose la Grèce ancienne, époque de santé, à notre civilisation malade, exsangue, morose. Car l'Homme est dépourvu de joie dans notre civilisation, et Giono reprend ici sa métaphore des oiseaux de la joie qui s'envolent en laissant l'Homme seul, image à laquelle il a eu recours dans *Que ma joie demeure*¹⁸ :

Il [le vieux médecin] voulait, disait-il, donner une description, même approximative, si je ne peux pas plus, hélas, de la façon dont enfin la conscience humaine se sentait alors dépouillée de toutes ses joies. Le souvenir même en est effacé. Il compara ces joies à des oiseaux. [...]

De toutes cette oisellerie et qui s'enfuit, non pas vers l'horizon mais vers le zénith, le ciel est plein, il en déborde. Il y en a tant qu'il en est embarrassé, que ses hauteurs s'engorgent, qu'il en souffre.¹⁹

Car dans cette vision, la civilisation occidentale moderne n'a rien à offrir à l'Homme, rien qui puisse satisfaire ses besoins d'épanouissement. Et le vieux médecin de dire avec ironie, en réponse à Angelo qui a remarqué que les villes manquent de chlore pour combattre le choléra :

Les villes ne manquent pas de chlorure, dit l'homme en allumant sa pipe. Elles manquent de tout ; en tout cas de tout ce qu'il faut pour résister à une mouche, surtout quand cette mouche n'existe pas, comme c'est le cas.²⁰

14 Le terme signifie « dressage » et désigne le mode de traitement des pulsions dans notre civilisation, qui vise à les brimer et à les éradiquer. Ce terme s'oppose donc à celui de *l'élevage* qui caractérise une *Kultur* [culture], terme désignant pour Nietzsche une culture supérieure.

15 Patrick Wotling, *Nietzsche et le problème de la civilisation*. Paris : PUF, 1995, p. 295.

16 « Soyez grec, mon jeune ami ! » (*Le Hussard sur le toit*, op. cit., 608).

17 Friedrich Nietzsche, *La naissance de la tragédie* ou Hellénisme et pessimisme. Paris : Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 34.

18 Dans ce roman dédié tout entier à la problématique de l'ennui dans la civilisation moderne et à l'entreprise avortée, échouée de la joie, Giono montre la vieille fermière Marthe qui se désole du départ des oiseaux qui ont quitté son champ en hiver.

19 Jean Giono, *Le Hussard sur le toit*, op. cit., p. 616.

20 Ibid., p. 605.

L'Homme, pour qui la vie n'a plus de valeur car il n'y a plus de joie, est en proie à l'instinct de mort, et Éros s'efface devant Thanatos. D'où le choléra, mal symbolique de l'Homme moderne. Chassez le naturel – le corps et sa pensée inconsciente, ses pulsions – il revient non seulement au galop mais il revient en cavalier de l'Apocalypse qui sème la mort :

Voici les premières lueurs du jour qui va peu à peu éclairer *l'autre côté des choses*.
Le cholérique ne peut plus en détacher les regards.²¹

Le cholérique n'est pas un patient : *c'est un impatient*. Il vient de comprendre trop de choses essentielles. Il se hâte d'en connaître plus.²²

Le meilleur, le seul remède ne serait pas d'administrer un médicament, une potion au malade, mais de lui redonner l'envie et le goût de vivre, d'imposer Éros au Thanatos, bref, « en un mot être plus fort, ou plus beau, ou plus séduisant que la mort. ».²³ Ce savoir permettra plus tard à Angelo de sauver Pauline, quand la jeune femme tombera malade du choléra, et qu'il se mettra à frictionner son ventre par des gestes qui évoquent l'acte sexuel.

4 LA CONDAMNATION DE LA VIE URBAINE

Le vieux médecin se réfère à Paris comme un lieu d'où provient son état mélancolique :

Il [le vieux médecin] avait exercé à Lyon, Grenoble et même Paris. C'était l'origine de sa mélancolie, dit-il avec ses lèvres dorées du plus délicat des sourires. (Ibid., p. 607)

Cette remarque du vieux médecin n'est pas anodine – il s'agit d'une condamnation sous-jacente et indirecte de la vie urbaine. Rappelons que Nietzsche et l'antimodernité qui s'inspire de sa pensée condamnent ensemble la vie urbaine et celle des grandes villes en particulier. L'image de la ville en général, et de la grande ville en particulier, pour Giono lecteur de Nietzsche, est corollaire du sens négatif du terme « civilisation » :

Quand la grande ville se transporte à la campagne, ce n'est pas de l'engrais qu'elle apporte aux champs, c'est de la pourriture et de l'horreur.²⁴

La ville et la Grand-ville sont, pour le philosophe allemand, les lieux de la maladie emblématique de la civilisation moderne qu'est la dépression, conçue comme

21 Ibid., p. 618, nous mettons en italique.

22 Ibid., p. 618-619.

23 Ibid., p. 620.

24 Friedrich Nietzsche, *La Volonté de puissance*. Paris : Gallimard, 1995, t. II, p. 40.

la conséquence de la destruction, par la civilisation moderne, de tout ce qu'il y a de meilleur en l'Homme. C'est pourquoi il dénonce la dépression comme étant le mal qui accable les habitants des villes dans la société industrialisée, elle est, selon lui, inhérente à la vie urbaine :

Crache sur cette ville des âmes déprimées et des poitrines étroites, des yeux perçants, des doigts poisseux [...].²⁵

Dans *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, la ville péjorativement nommée « la Vache bariolée »,²⁶ représente toute ville de la civilisation moderne. Si toute ville de la civilisation moderne est le lieu de décadence, ou de la stagnation dans le meilleur des cas, une grande ville l'est encore plus que les autres villes, et Zarathoustra la fustige dans le chapitre « De passer son chemin ». ²⁷ Lieu emblématique de la civilisation moderne, la ville - et notamment la grande ville - porte toutes les tares dont le philosophe accuse la civilisation. Elle est en premier lieu la demeure de celui que Nietzsche voit comme le paradigme de l'Homme moderne - le Dernier Homme, l'Homme chez qui l'instinct, en soi naturel et sain, est bridé, brimé, asservi, dévié ou détruit ; l'Homme borné, médiocre, servile et hypocrite, incapable de quoi que ce soit de grand, l'Homme à l'esprit grégaire²⁸ qui se complait dans le conformisme et l'autosatisfaction, l'antithèse du héros que tout Homme supérieur cache en lui. Le double de Zarathoustra, incarné par son fou, dépeint la Grand-ville en insistant sur l'image des abattoirs et sur celle du sang putride,²⁹ métaphores que Giono reprend d'ailleurs dans sa description de la Villevieille du Chant du monde³⁰ et de celle de la ville anonyme du Moulin de Pologne.³¹

25 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*. Paris : Flammarion, 1996, p. 1996, p. 228.

26 «Vache bariolée » (en allemand *bunte Kuh*) est une expression populaire ironique servant à désigner de petites agglomérations urbaines disparates dont la population serait dénuée de ce sens civique et politique qui fait la « Cité » ou la « Nation ». Pour reprendre la dérision du texte de Nietzsche, il faudrait traduire de façon irrévérencieuse par : « Trifouillis-les-Oies ». » (Note de Paul Mathias, in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, op. cit., 397).

27 Voir F. Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, op. cit., p. 226-230.

28 Le fou de Zarathoustra décrit l'esprit grégaire du Dernier Homme de la manière suivante : « Pas de berger et un seul troupeau ! » (Ibid., p. 53)

29 « Ici pourrissent tous les grands sentiments ; ici l'on n'autorise que le cliquetis de menus sentiments entièrement décharnés. [...]

Ne sens-tu pas l'odeur des abattoirs et des gargotes de l'esprit ? Cette ville n'exhale-t-elle pas un fumet d'esprit massacré ? [...]

Ici le sang coule putride, tiède et spumeux dans toutes les veines ; crache sur la Grand-ville, sur cette grande sentine où fermentent toutes les lies. » (Ibid., p. 227, nous mettons en italique).

30 Voir Jean Giono, *Le Chant du monde* in Œuvres romanesques complètes. Paris : Gallimard, 1972, t. II, p. 275-276, 283.

31 Voir Jean Giono, *Le Moulin de Pologne* in Œuvres romanesques complètes. Paris : Gallimard, 1980, t. V, p. 694.

5 DEVENIR LION

L'image du lion brodé, réitérée deux fois, est le moyen par lequel le vieux médecin semble parler du cœur, au sens de « courage ». Elle n'a vraiment de sens qu'interprétée dans le contexte de la pensée nietzschéenne :

Non, mademoiselle, je n'ai pas parlé de cœur : ouvrage de dame. C'est un lion que nous portons brodé sur la chemise. [...]

Vous caressez subrepticement le lion brodé sur votre chemise.³²

Or, dans le contexte de l'interprétation insolite qu'entreprend le médecin du phénomène du choléra – il la représente, nous l'avons vu, comme une manifestation, certes effrayante, du mal inhérent dans notre civilisation occidentale – il semble que le vieux médecin appelle indirectement à la révolte, ou au moins à un besoin de remise en question de notre civilisation et de la société occidentales, et à un besoin de réévaluation de toutes les valeurs (le terme de *réévaluation* est d'ailleurs un des termes clés de la pensée de Nietzsche). Car l'image du lion symbolise chez Nietzsche précisément la révolte contre les anciennes valeurs qui entravent l'Homme³³ et dont il faut s'affranchir afin de réaliser une *culture*, une culture supérieure, saine par définition.

6 LE CHOLÉRA, VENGEANCE DE LA CHAIR QUI RAISONNE

Le choléra, ainsi que le médecin l'explique à Angelo, est une sorte de revanche du corps trop longtemps opprimé par la raison. Notre civilisation accorde à celle-ci la primauté et un statut ontologique supérieur. Le choléra devient ainsi une étrange critique de la raison pure :

Entrez, entrons dans ces cinq à six pieds cubes de chair qui va devenir cholérique, de chair en proie au prodrome de ce *cancer de la raison pure*, de chair fatiguée des détours que lui fait prendre sa matière grise, qui raisonne soudain à l'aide de ses mystères et met les bouchées doubles.³⁴

32 Le Hussard sur le toit, op. cit., p. 614.

33 Rappelons qu'à la différence du chameau, symbole de l'homme qui, plein de respect et de déférence pour les valeurs millénaires, n'en est que le continuateur docile et obéissant, le lion est celui qui s'en libère, afin de pouvoir par la suite devenir créateur de nouvelles valeurs, cette créativité étant symbolisée par l'image de l'enfant, la troisième et dernière métamorphose. Voir Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, op. cit., 63-65.

34 Ibid., p. 616.

En effet, dans la pensée de Nietzsche, la valorisation du corps et sa pensée inconsciente ont pour corolaire la dévalorisation de la conscience.³⁵ Le corps, pour Nietzsche, est d'abord pensé comme structure pulsionnelle et sa fonction est primordiale dans le processus d'interprétation. Selon le philosophe, le corps est considéré comme le siège du Soi,³⁶ de la pensée inconsciente à laquelle Nietzsche accorde plus de valeur qu'à la conscience. Nietzsche considère en effet celle-ci comme « la dernière et la plus tardive évolution de l'organique et par conséquent aussi ce qu'il y a en lui de plus inachevé et du moins solide. »³⁷

7 LES LOUANGES DU CORPS ET DE LA TERRE

Si le choléra est, comme l'explique le vieux médecin, le mal de la « chair qui raisonne »,³⁸ parce que la civilisation a trop longtemps opprimé le corps et méprisé la pensée inconsciente, on ne peut la vaincre qu'en libérant ce corps et en le mettant en valeur par l'élevage des pulsions qui ne sont point brimées. Et le vieux médecin de souligner la beauté du corps d'Angelo. À plusieurs reprises il exhorte le jeune homme à abandonner sa pudeur, afin de célébrer et de libérer ce corps dont une des raisons d'être est précisément d'aimer :

Au diable la pudeur, lui dit l'homme, restez là près du feu. Vous êtes bien fait, qu'est-ce que vous risquez ? Croyez-vous que Mademoiselle a été créée et mise au monde *per studiare la matematica* ? [...] (Ibid., p. 608)

D'ailleurs, la passion d'Angelo et de Pauline, sentiment qui ne s'exprime guère à cause de l'interdit de l'adultère, n'échappe point à l'œil perspicace du vieux praticien qui semble inciter les deux jeunes à vivre leur passion sans culpabilité en leur représentant celle-ci comme une évidence. Le médecin philosophe de Giono,

35 Nietzsche inverse la hiérarchie des valeurs installée depuis longtemps dans notre civilisation en mettant le corps en haut et la raison en bas, puisque le corps n'est pas que le corps - il s'inscrit dans la perspective interprétative : « La conscience est la dernière et la plus tardive évolution de l'organique et par conséquent aussi ce qu'il y a en lui de plus inachevé et du moins solide. » (Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, op. cit., p. 69). Comme le remarque Karl Jaspers, le corps est dans sa pensée le sujet des fonctions inconscientes :

« Nietzsche appelle la forme et la vie de l'homme : son corps. Celui-ci n'est pas le corps purement anatomique, non point le cadavre, mais le tout des vivantes fonctions inconscientes, dans lesquelles nous sommes englobés. » (Karl Jaspers, Nietzsche. Introduction à sa philosophie. Paris : Gallimard, 1950, p. 317).

36 « Par-delà tes pensées et tes sentiments, mon frère, il y a un maître puissant, un sage inconnu, qui s'appelle le Soi. Il habite ton corps, il est ton corps. Il y a plus de raison dans ton corps que dans l'essence même de ta sagesse. » (Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, op. cit., 72).

37 Nietzsche, *Le Gai savoir*, op. cit., p. 69.

38 *Le Hussard sur le toit*, op. cit., p. 616.

réalisation romanesque de l'idéal du médecin philosophe de Nietzsche, n'omet pas de représenter le désir et l'attachement qui unissent Angelo et sa compagne de voyage, comme quelque chose à la fois de bon, d'acceptable et même de très naturel, comme s'il chantait, lui aussi, « les louanges du corps et de la terre ».³⁹

8 CONCLUSION

Nous avons vu que le vieux médecin philosophe était donc le premier et le seul des personnages rencontrés par Angelo lors de sa traversée d'un pays dévasté par le choléra qui ait permis à Angelo de *penser* le mal que représente cette épidémie. Or, nous avons souligné que le vieux médecin le faisait – et Giono ici avait déployé tout son sens de l'humour – dans un discours qui n'en était pas un, tant il était décousu, chaotique, à la limite du compréhensible. Dans ce coq-à-l'âne du vieux solitaire, plein d'allusions énigmatiques, ni Angelo ni le lecteur ne trouveront pas d'explication scientifique de l'épidémie, ce dont le vieux médecin avait d'ailleurs explicitement prévenu Angelo. Ils trouveront, par contre, dans ce qui semble être une divagation du vieil original une sorte de résumé, certes délibérément très confus et lacunaire, de la critique que fait Nietzsche de la civilisation occidentale et notamment du christianisme. Le choléra est, pour le vieux praticien, symptôme d'un malaise très profond, d'une crise de civilisation où le terme de civilisation a le même sens – uniquement négatif, qu'il a chez Nietzsche pour qui la Civilisation est opposée à la culture. Alors que cette dernière représente l'idéal d'une haute culture, telle qu'a été la civilisation de la Grèce antique ou de la Renaissance, la Civilisation (qui est donc notre civilisation occidentale) opprime les instincts, les *dresse* au lieu de les élever – au lieu d'apprendre aux hommes à les dominer, tout comme elle dénigre et déprécie le corps. D'où, d'après Nietzsche, la dépression qui n'est donc qu'une manifestation du désir de mort et du nihilisme passif, « sentiment creusant de rien »⁴⁰ omniprésent dans notre civilisation.

Pour Nietzsche, le corps n'est pas uniquement une entité physique, mais il est avant tout une structure très complexe de pulsions et le siège de la pensée inconsciente qu'il s'agit d'explorer et de revaloriser. Et le désir est une de ses pulsions, et d'une grande importance pour tout être humain. D'où l'accent que met le vieux praticien de Giono sur le désir physique, son incitation à la prise de conscience

39 « Loyal entre tous, ce Moi parle du corps et veut le corps, même quand il rêve et divague ou papillonne, les ailes brisées.

Ce Moi apprend à s'exprimer avec une loyauté croissante ; et mieux il l'apprend, plus il trouve de mots pour dire les louanges du corps et de la terre. » (Nietzsche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra*, op. cit., p. 70)

40 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes in Oeuvres philosophiques complètes*, Paris : Gallimard, 1968-1997, t. XI, p. 228.

d'Angelo du désir inavoué et inavouable qu'il ressent pour Pauline, femme à ses yeux interdite car épouse digne, chaste et fidèle du vieux marquis de Théus.

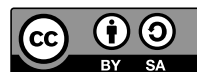
Par la représentation, certes lapidaire, de la grande ville – notamment de Lyon – comme le lieu emblématique d'une civilisation décadente Giono est également redevable à Nietzsche.

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Srečanje z »zdravnikom filozofom«: branje 13. poglavja knjige *Hussard sur le toit* Jeana Gionoja

Prispevek analizira intertekstualnost F. Nietzscheja v 13. poglavju romana *Le hussard sur le toit*. Stari zdravnik, ki ga sreča Angelo, ni le mislec, ampak predstavlja tudi »filozofskega zdravnika kulture« o katerem sanja Nietzsche.

Ključne besede: Giono, Nietzsche, civilizacija, dekadenca, filozofski zdravnik kulture

The Meeting with the Physician Philosopher. Reading Chapter 13 of the Novel *Le hussard sur le toit* by Jean Giono

The article analyzes the intertextuality of F. Nietzsche in Chapter 13 of the novel *Le hussard sur le toit*. The old physician Angelo meets is not only a thinker, but also represents a philosophical doctor of culture about whom Nietzsche dreams.

Keywords: Giono, Nietzsche, civilisation, decadence, a philosophical physician of culture

LE MYTHE D'ŒDIPE-ROI EN FACE DU »MOLINISME« DE GRANDES TRAGÉDIES CORNÉLIENNES

Boštjan Marko Turk

Synopsis

Cet article vise à relever le dynamisme interne du drame cornélien. Le substrat sur lequel s'accomplit la comparaison est l'histoire du roi Œdipe, telle qu'elle a été inaugurée par Sophocle. Dans ce contexte, l'article explore le rôle du hasard ou l'hamartie présenté par Aristote. Il est à noter que la coïncidence prend un ascendant considérable dans la genèse de grandes tragédies (*Le Cid*, *Horace*, *Cinna*, *La Mort de Pompée*, *Polyeucte*, *Suréna*) bien que fonctionnellement elle n'apparaisse pas en toutes lettres, puisque il y a, à tout instant, un vecteur dans la disposition des événements théâtraux qui remet l'action sous l'emprise rationnelle des protagonistes. L'écrit présent explore davantage le caractère complémentaire de la notion de vraisemblance que celles du hasard et de l'hamartie. L'article consacre finalement une attention particulière à Œdipe de Corneille lui-même, révélant un paradoxe intéressant. La grande majorité de la pièce pourrait être interprétée comme la négation des forces qui, en dehors de tout contrôle, agiraient contre l'homme faisant de lui un pantin impuissant en face du destin, ce qui serait en accord avec les idées molinistes en vogue à l'époque. Pourtant les derniers vers de la tragédie éponyme raffermissent ostensiblement la prédisposition de la fatalité et semblent identifier – *ex post* – la pièce entière à l'enjeu qui tient en son pouvoir l'*Œdipe-Roi* de Sophocle. On pourrait donc fonder une présupposition que le hasard ou l'hamartie pourraient avoir plus d'emprise sur la structure profonde de l'œuvre cornélienne qu'il n'apparaît au premier abord.

Mots-clefs: Œdipe, théâtre cornélien, hamartie, vraisemblance, protoprologue, amour, mort, honneur.

L'Œuvre dramatique de Pierre Corneille représente un exemple monumental de la tragédie classique même s'il n'est pas facile, en instance finale, de l'identifier par rapport aux exigences du genre. Les *dramatis personae* de Corneille, ainsi que la structuration des normes qui ne souffrent aucune réserve, enlèvent à cet univers théâtral le caractère intégralement tragique, surtout si on ne considère pas les filles de Melpomène sous l'angle de l'exclusivité de la catégorie comme définie par la tradition.

La tragédie relève de l'ontologie de l'existence, par rapport à la transcendance et par rapport aux liens sociaux. Il n'existe pas de représentation artistique où l'homme puisse mieux se définir. A sa source la tragédie fournit une définition de l'ensemble du *faire* de l'espèce humaine, soit dans sa forme réflexive soit préreflexive. Celui-ci aboutit nécessairement à ce que les courants postérieurs, tels les existentialistes présentent comme absurde. Ces éléments sont intégrés dans la naissance même du genre, dans le mythe de la famille royale de Thèbes. C'est en s'appuyant sur cette même pensée que Sophocle créa l'*Œdipe-Roi*. Laïos, ivre et englouti dans un songe entend Apollon qui lui déconseille de mettre au monde sa progéniture. Il sera plus tard tué par son fils: la mort en duel serait survenue comme conséquence d'une querelle insignifiante visant le parcours libre de l'escorte royale sur un chemin étroit de montagne.¹ Il y a sept portes qui mènent à Thèbes, mais ce n'est que devant une seule que se trouve le Sphinx: à sa future (potentielle) victime il aurait pu poser une question quelconque: il choisit pourtant celle qui est liée à la nature de l'homme. Après avoir tué le roi et écarté le monstre, Œdipe pénètre dans la ville et se voit offrir l'accès au lit de Jocaste: sa faute, ayant un double sens par rapport à la conquête², commence à monter en spirale d'un crescendo incoercible. Plus ses réussites brillent d'éclat, plus Œdipe est aveugle aux événements en dehors de l'espace tragique, conçu par les forces surnaturelles, dont il est la création et la victime. Lorsque éclate la peste et qu'il entend la prophétie de Tirésias il se lance à la poursuite de l'énigme. Plus en enquêteur qu'en prince ou en philosophe il suit derrière pour atteindre la cause secrète des maux, comme dans une chronique scandaleuse.³ Quand sa recherche porte les fruits inattendus, il s'aveugle, stupéfié de tout ce qui est survenu. Pourtant, il ne fait pas d'effort pour remédier à l'état général de la détresse dont il est l'instigateur. Même en face du crime le plus horrible qu'il soit, il n'a à cœur ni de s'excuser ni de se repentir.⁴

1 Il s'agit de l'embarras qui est entièrement le fruit de la coïncidence, du hasard.

2 En termes grecs: hamartein.

3 A comparer: *«Ainsi Œdipe-Roi est le progrès habilement ménagé d'une enquête policière. Au début il y a maldonne: ni Œdipe ni Thèbes ne sont en face du vrai malheur: c'est la peste.»* Victor-Henri Debidour: *«Avant-propos»*. *Œdipe Roi*. Paris: Le Livre de poche – Classiques, 2007: 2.

4 A comparer: *« Dès que la vérité est révélée, ni Œdipe ni personne n'en discute les conséquences. Œdipe s'aveugle et s'exile. Il ne plaide pas, il n'accuse pas les dieux. Nous sommes dans un étrange univers de responsabilité absolue, sans qu'il y ait des responsables au sens moderne du terme.»* Victor-Henri Debidour: *«Avant-propos»*. *Œdipe Roi*: 3.

Le théâtre de Pierre Corneille semble à première vue dénier les postulats exposés ci-dessus. De cette façon, l'ascendant du hasard, de l'imprévu et du fatal, ne jouerait qu'un rôle contingent dans la structure sous-jacente des pièces: en l'écartant de la norme posée par Sophocle, ne risque-t-on de l'écartier du lien, qui depuis la création du genre dramatique, unit l'hamartie à ce qu'il y aurait de plus précieux (humain), c'est à dire la noblesse de l'innocence telle qu'elle survient dans l'espace tragique que les Dieux renferment jusqu'à l'engloutissement final du héros. Pourtant les tragédies de Pierre Corneille jouissent d'une énorme réputation et continuent à être représentées de génération en génération, faisant partie intégrante de l'héritage culturel: *Le Cid*, *Cinna ou la Clémence d'Auguste*, *La mort de Pompée*, *Horace*⁵ ont en commun que »ses héros se reconnaissent à leur indomptable énergie. On apprend d'eux jusqu'où peuvent aller les forces humaines et il n'est pas de leçon plus salutaire«.⁶ La Bruyère soutient une opinion pareille: »Quand une lecture vous élève l'esprit et qu'elle vous inspire des sentiments nobles et courageux, ne cherchez pas une autre règle pour juger de l'ouvrage: il est bon et fait de main d'ouvrier«.⁷ Les assertions analogues sont davantage à récupérer dans l'œuvre d'Augustin Sainte-Beuve, incitateur de la théorie de l'intentionnalité, orientée vers le but suprême de la morale, qui est le bien. Dans ses *Portraits littéraires* il accorde à Corneille une place prestigieuse, rangeant les protagonistes de ses drames parfois au dessus de William Shakespeare:

Les personnages de Corneille sont grands, généreux, vaillants, tout en dehors, hauts de tête et nobles de cœur. Nourris la plupart dans une discipline austère, ils ont sans cesse à la bouche des maximes auxquelles ils rangent leur vie; et comme ils ne s'en écartent jamais, on n'a pas de peine à les saisir; un coup d'œil suffit: ce qui est presque le contraire des personnages de Shakespeare et des caractères humains en cette vie. La moralité de ses héros est sans tache: comme pères, comme amants, comme amis ou ennemis, on les admire et on les honore; aux endroits pathétiques, ils ont des accents sublimes qui enlèvent et font pleurer.⁸

Sophocle et Pierre Corneille devraient donc être plus proches qu'il ne paraît. En fait, Corneille acquiert la célébrité universelle en 1637 par la présentation en public du *Cid*. Le sujet de la pièce est l'histoire du bonheur de deux fiancés dont l'idylle est interrompue par la querelle de leurs pères. Elle s'aggrave jusqu'à ce que l'un d'entre eux ne finisse ses jours sous l'épée de l'autre, dans un duel. Le

5 Tous les textes de Pierre Corneille dans le présent article sont cités d'après l'édition intégrale: Pierre Corneille: *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Seuil, 1963.

6 Abry, Emile, Audic, Charles: *Histoire de la Littérature française*. Paris: Henri Didier, 1946: 180.

7 La Bruyère: Jean de: *Les Caractères*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1999: 168.

8 Sainte-Beuve: *Portraits littéraires*. Paris: Gallimard, 1956: 692.

nœud dramatique se complique encore mais évite la catastrophe et termine dans la résolution (invraisemblable) du conflit. De là, le titre secondaire, placé sous le principal: tragi-comédie. Pourtant: c'est l'exposition de la pièce qui mérite l'attention. Son noyau est l'harmonie entre Rodrigue et Chimène dans leur étreinte amoureuse, aveugle et repliée sur elle-même. Pour le Roi Œdipe le côté sombre du clair de Lune n'existe jusqu'à ce que les malheurs ne se révèlent totalement. De même, les amoureux du *Cid* considèrent tout comme contingent par rapport au caractère total et sans limite de leur attachement, accommodement convenable réservé uniquement au bonheur. »*Mes enfants, jeune lignée de l'antique Cadmos*»⁹ apostrophe dans un des premiers vers du prologue l'idylle évanescence le roi de Thèbes. On appréhende mieux le poids du vers si on prend en considération le fait complémentaire que ce drame présente l'exemple net de la construction analytique: tout se développera par conséquent de l'exposition, dominée par le sens omniprésent du premier bonheur, *eidullie*,¹⁰ vocable grec qui désigne un moment bref, ici l'espace idyllique de l'exposition, le lieu de l'illusion de celui qui devrait être Polybe, le fils imaginaire du roi corinthien, mais en fait ne l'est pas. La même prise de conscience est à retrouver dans *Le Cid* notamment, si on le considère sous l'angle de sa réception. La pomme de discorde soulevée par l'Académie française¹¹ se résumait en reproche sur la vraisemblance. On a constaté que la conduite de la princesse paraissait bien improbable: la conscience du fait que le fiancé a tué son futur beau-père, la fait agir de la sorte qu'elle veuille compenser la mort par un nouveau trépas. Après avoir mieux considéré la situation, elle s'affole encore une fois. Elle demande un nouveau dédommagement qu'elle voit – *in ultima analysis* – en amour. On assiste donc à un prototype de l'action théâtrale¹² où le prologue de la tragédie place le spectateur en face du caractère irrévocable du sort. Chimène est sur la même ligne concernant le rapport avec son fiancé que ne l'est Œdipe avec *teknos*, les enfants de *Cadmos*, périphrase de Sophocle, afin de désigner les habitants de Thèbes.

Le protoprologue dans Œdipe-Roi et dans *Le Cid* se rapprochent encore en un point. Aristote évoque dans *Morale à Nicomaque*¹³ le terme *hamartia*, c'est-à-dire l'artifice servant à tromper l'héros à son insu jusqu'à ce qu'il ne s'y laisse complètement piéger. Or le signifiant du verbe *hamartein*¹⁴ couvre une large gamme de

9 *Sophocles: Œdipe roi*: 7.

10 En grec: »la forme courte«: ici l'allusion au bonheur passager surgissant au centre de l'exposition.

11 L'image très détaillée de la »querelle du Cid« est fourni par: Civardi, Jean-Marc: *La Querelle du Cid*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004.

12 Le terme convenant mieux à ce propos serait » le protoprologue«.

13 Aristote: *Morale à Nicomaque*. Paris: Hachette, 1882.

14 En grec: »lancer mal«, »rater malgré toute probabilité«.

phénomènes, allant de ce qu'on pourrait caractériser comme la faute inconsciente à travers le hasard, jusqu'à une action réfléchie et voulue. La sémantique du verbe en question replace le nœud de l'action théâtrale dans la proximité des prémisses ontologiques du théâtre grec, ce que les écoles modernes rangeront sous la dénomination de l'absurde existentiel.

Ce qui légitime le sens des existences d'*Œdipe-Roi* et du couple Chimène – Rodrigue fait partie de l'épreuve, qui en principe, ne devrait rien avoir avec l'essence de la vie même. Il appartient à l'ordre de la chronique scandaleuse, fondée en rumeurs répandues. *Œdipe-Roi* a oui-dire de Tirésias qu'il circule un commérage dont le contenu serait qu'il n'est pas fils de Polybe de Corinthe, mais... Don Gomez reçoit une claque au visage de la part de Don Diegue et réagit comme il le fait en mettant en suspens le nœud causal de l'intrigue d'un côté tout en poursuivant de l'autre côté les conséquences occasionnées par le raisonnement faux, jusqu'à la fin.¹⁵

Tenant d'adopter cet angle d'approche on pourrait constater que l'intégralité de l'existence humaine chez les deux dramaturges serait manifestement remise en question. En ce qui concerne le cycle de la politique romaine la tragédie *Horace* en offre une preuve supplémentaire. Notamment : en observant de près le proto-prologue¹⁶, on s'aperçoit qu'il ne diffère pas ostensiblement de ce qui a été retracé jusqu'à présent. Cette fois-ci le tirage au sort, qui devrait choisir d'une façon aléatoire et capricieuse, met en péril les deux familles, plus précisément les deux couples. Le protoprologue présente Horace, le frère de Sabine, et Camille dont le frère aime l'unique sœur d'Horace. Horace est romain, Curiace Albain : Camille doit se marier avec Albe : à condition qu'il y ait la réciprocité dans toutes les familles. Il est à rajouter que c'est d'après Tite-Live que Corneille créa la tragédie. Or, l'auteur d'*Ab urbe condita libri*¹⁷ peignait les personnages en les juxtaposant à la norme de la grandeur, fondée en sacrifice pour le bien commun, sans se soucier des détails particulier que fournissent les exigences psychologiques d'un individu concret. Il y a donc des puissances, à vrai dire supra humaines, provenant d'un type d'héros-modèle, commun à Tite-Live ainsi qu'à Corneille, qui vont conférer à cette tragédie une rigueur et forces exceptionnelles. Dans les scènes qu'englobent l'exposition et le protoprologue, il y a un sentiment général de la félicité reposant sur la stabilité du *cursus* de la vie que rien ne paraît ébranler. L'empathie semblerait être équivoque à celle que transmet la ligne: »*Hier encore, l'antique héritage de*

15 De point de vue de la vraisemblance, il n'est pas facile d'imaginer qu'un débat concernant la chose tellement abstraite qu'est l'éducation des dauphins puisse avoir des conséquences si irrévocables (concrètes).

16 Pour les implications du terme »protoprologue« dans la tragédie de Pierre Corneille – et d'ailleurs – voir Boštjan Marko Turk: »L'ascendant du doute dans le protoprologue de grandes tragédies cornéliennes«. *Acta neophilologica*. Ljubljana: Filozofska fakulteta, 2014, 47: 109-120.

17 Tite-Live: *Histoire romaine*. Paris: Flammarion, 1995-1997.

félicité était pour eux légitime félicité.¹⁸ Il s'agit d'un discours rapporté dans lequel un des servants résume l'état passé en face de la calamité actuelle. C'est alors qu'il introduit l'arrivée sur la scène du roi désormais aveugle et déshonoré. On pourrait tracer le parallèle à l'*oarystis* du protoprologue dans *Horace*: la princesse d'Albe ne pouvait nullement pressentir qu'un obstacle quelconque puisse naître sur son chemin, apparemment tout tracé, vers le bonheur définitif, résultant dans le fait, de devenir complètement romaine. C'est pour cette raison que Julie, conseillère de Camille lui tient ce propos:

C'en est peut être assez pour une âme commune,
 Qui du moindre péril se fait une infortune,
 Mais de cette faiblesse un grand cœur est honteux
 Il ose espérer tout dans un succès douteux.
 Les deux camps sont rangés au pied de nos murailles,
 Mais Rome ignore encore comment on perd les batailles.
 Loin de trembler pour elle, il faut l'applaudir,
 Puisqu'elle va combattre, elle va s'agrandir.
 Bannissez, bannissez une frayeur si vaine,
 Et concevez des vœux dignes d'une Romaine.¹⁹

Le caractère tragique du protoprologue pourrait être encore mieux saisi si on prend en considération l'assertion d'Horace, c'est en fait la réexplication de la condition tragique occasionnée par Œdipe-Roi lui-même. Le mythe de la famille royale de Thèbes implique que c'était la malédiction originale qui a fait retourner Antigone au foyer natal, son retour générant le proto-modèle du conflit fraternel dans l'évolution du genre dramatique, i.e. le combat entre Polynice et Étéocle. En poursuivant la spirale du conflit vers le fond, on constate que la lutte fratricide n'aurait été possible sans que son instigateur, Créon, n'ait été maudit par le roi aveugle. Ce geste – à son tour – n'existerait pas si la famille de Laïos n'avait été maudite par Apollon.

Ce fut Apollon, amis, Apollon
 Qui lança les maux que voici, les maux,
 Sur moi que voici, sur moi, ces horreurs!²⁰

Dans l'exposition de la tragédie les quatre protagonistes (Horace, Curiace, Sabine et Camille) jouissent d'un bonheur stable mais sur lequel l'ombre de la future catastrophe, résultant d'un tri absurde, commence à grandir. Le sort en est jeté. Contre toute attente, il a désigné les trois frères Horace pour Rome et les trois

18 Sophocle: *Œdipe-Roi*: 87.

19 Pierre Corneille: »Horace«. *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Seuil, 1963:250.

20 Sophocle: *Œdipe-Roi*: 89.

frères Curiace pour Albe. A l'opposé du *Cid*, les conséquences n'éclatent qu'en quatrième acte, ce qui le rapproche de *l'Œdipe-Roi* qui retarde le dénouement par plusieurs coups d'arrêt jusqu'aux passages de la conclusion.²¹ Lorsqu'Horace – au cours d'un épisode invraisemblable – achève ses adversaires, Rome emporte la victoire, ce qui rend le prestige de la famille des Horace encore plus brillant. Pourtant, l'arrangement interne des nœuds causaux qui organisent le mécanisme théâtral composant l'ossature interne de la tragédie conduit à la conclusion que la catastrophe ne pourrait être que le fruit du hasard fondé sur le démontage de *l'oaristys* inaugurale et que le drame entier se joue sur l'hamartie, le sort arbitraire et absurde aux prises avec l'homme.

Même la tragédie la plus «romaine» dans le cycle évoqué par le présent écrit, i.e., *Le Cinna ou la Clémence d'Auguste* ne peut être complètement saisie qu'à la lumière de ce qui vient d'être évoqué. D'abord, il est nécessaire de partir du titre lui-même. A première vue il s'agit du syntagme construit de façon coordinatrice et dont le contenu se compose de deux prénoms. En réfléchissant mieux au binôme, on s'aperçoit que le premier de ses membres n'est pas autonome et qu'il s'agit en fait d'une hypotaxe : « Cinna » servirait du complément du nom mettant en relief une des caractéristiques du détenteur du pouvoir suprême, celle qui l'identifie le mieux à l'entité divine du christianisme, i.e., sa miséricorde. Cela implique la redéfinition du genre dramatique : la question qui pourrait se poser est : est-ce encore la tragédie ou un nouveau genre dont l'intention est de peindre la passion dévastatrice et montrer comment y remédier par la générosité, par le pardon et finalement par la charité. L'œuvre la plus romaine et la plus rationnelle de ce point de vue s'identifierait difficilement aux exigences du genre. Pourtant cela ne veut pas dire qu'au fond il n'y ait pas de mécanisme pareil à celui qu'on a rencontré à propos d'autres tragédies.

Les voies de Cinna et d'Auguste – à l'exception du titre – bifurquent. L'unique objectif du premier est d'avoir libre accès à Emilie, dans le sens plein du terme. Il n'accepterait jamais de la partager avec qui que ce soit. Si pour mener à bien son projet il faut écarter le personnage le plus puissant de la planète, qu'importe. La position de Cinna n'est peut-être pas complexe, celle de son amante l'est, au contraire. Emilie a été ravie et prise en otage. Auguste a tué son père et fait sa fille prisonnière. Au cours des années il l'a prise en amitié. Lorsque l'exposition ouvre le drame, les sentiments de l'empereur envers elle ne sont que positifs : remplis de tendresse et d'affection. Les émotions pourtant ne sont pas partagées. Emilie hait l'empire romain et son empereur en premier lieu. Le mariage avec Cinna ne passerait que par la dépouille d'Auguste. Il devient – suivant cette logique – à son insu le héros principal du drame.

21 Ce n'est qu'au début de l'acte 5 que Valère communique aux protagonistes le résultat du combat.

Dans le protoprologue Auguste contemple la sérénité de *pax romana* et de sa personne. Il propage encore l'atmosphère de la plénitude et du bien-être comme il veut renoncer au trône. La décision, qui est par rapport à la dyarchie romaine quelque chose de très particulier et de surprenant sinon de vraisemblable, implique que lui-même va monter dans la gloire que conférerait à un individu une attitude tellement noble. Mais il se prépare un assassinat. C'est alors que le prestige d'Auguste monte davantage tandis que ceux qui sont prêts à attenter à une telle noblesse, décroissent en estime. Mais puisque Maxime, camarade de l'héros éponyme du drame est profondément amoureux de celle que voient les yeux de Cinna, le complot perd son dynamisme et se dissipe. Le coup de grâce lui est donné par Euphorbe qui dénonce tout à l'empereur. Les conjurés alors attendent le pire. Ils admettent tout pour se purger leur conscience. Mais Auguste leur accorde le pardon en réaffirmant son envergure:

Je suis maître de moi comme de l'univers;
Je le suis: je veux l'être. O siècles, o mémoire,
Conservez à jamais ma dernière victoire!
Je triomphe aujourd'hui du plus juste courroux
De qui le souvenir puisse aller jusqu'à vous.²²

Après avoir proféré la formule d'une telle ampleur l'action dramatique retourne à l'état de concorde et d'harmonie de l'exposition. La paix est restaurée, l'ordre métaphysique est rétabli puisqu'il y a dans la réaction d'Auguste non seulement la présence d'un génie politique mais d'un maître-penseur chrétien.

Or la spirale de la violence aurait pu prendre une autre direction. C'est l'hamartie ou le tri arbitraire du sort qui transforme le drame en tragi-comédie, tout en laissant ouvert un chemin qui aurait pu conduire à la catastrophe. Ce qui pose de nouveau la question de la vraisemblance. Auguste, las d'être le maître de l'univers, demande conseil à Maxime et Cinna, qu'il adore : doit-il renoncer à l'Empire ? Cinna, redoutant de ne pouvoir satisfaire la vengeance d'Émilie, approuve sa décision. Maxime tâche de le détourner. Le moment, lorsqu'Auguste indique qu'il est prêt à quitter le trône, se recoupe entièrement avec celui où on entrevoit le point où se croisent les chemins de Cinna et de Maxime, Emilie. Cela paraît peu probable, étant donné que Corneille ne pouvait asseoir cette prise de position de l'empereur sur une source historique fiable. En plus: il y a dans la pièce deux personnages principaux féminins: Emilie et son pendant, l'impératrice Livie. Sans la première le nœud dramatique résultant en intrigue ne serait pas possible; sans la deuxième Auguste ne pouvait jamais consommer l'acte qui confère le sens au drame entier et qui le transpose en légende et exemple pour des siècles à venir:

22 Pierre Corneille: »Cinna ou la clémence d'Auguste«. *Œuvres complètes*: 287.

Après cette action vous n'avez rien à craindre:
 On portera le joug désormais sans se plaindre,
 Et les plus indomptés, renversant leurs projets,
 Mettront toute leur gloire à mourir vos sujets,
 Aucun lâche dessin, aucune ingrate envie
 N'attaquera le cours d'une si belle vie,
 Jamais plus d'assassins ni de conspirateurs,
 Vous avez trouvé l'art d'être maître du cœur.²³

Ainsi parle l'impératrice Livie. Ses paroles pourtant contredisent les sources historiques.²⁴ Celles-ci la soupçonnent d'avoir elle-même empoisonné son mari une fois devenu vieux. Si ce genre de contradiction est à comprendre – en ce qui concerne le comportement d'un individu – par le désir aveugle de détenir le pouvoir le plus longtemps possible, il est impardonnable en ce qui concerne la structuration hiérarchique des valeurs sur laquelle repose la tragédie. L'arbitre en question de morale d'un Auguste ne peut pas être la même personne que celle qui l'a intoxiqué afin de réaffermir le pouvoir. C'est de l'in vraisemblable. Une chose s'est passée bien que – d'après toute probabilité – elle n'aurait pas pu se passer. Il s'agit d'une hamartie, de l'intervention du sort qui réintègre l'action dramatique à l'archétype du protoprologue.

Il y a encore l'œuvre *La mort de Pompée*, une sorte d'âme ardente dans un corps émacié si l'on s'exprime par métaphore. Le héros principal n'apparaît même pas sur scène, car sa mort est intégrée dans le temps que le drame ne présente pas. Il s'agit d'une copie de motif issu de *Cinna ou la Clémence d'Auguste*, seulement que le haut sujet (César) exige cette fois une subordination et il venge – paradoxalement – la mort de son rival, Pompée. Les sources historiques selon lesquelles Corneille travaillait, nous apprennent que durant la guerre civile du premier siècle avant J-C, Jules César conquiert sans difficulté l'Italie et vainquit son rival Pompée à Pharsale. Celui-ci se retira ensuite en Egypte, où il fut tué. César vient alors après lui pour calmer Cléopâtre, avec laquelle il aura un fils – Césarion. Le personnage central, en plus du mari absent, est Cornélia, qui à la fin de la tragédie, déroule ainsi la trame principale des événements :

Moi, je jure des Dieux la puissance suprême,
 Et pour dire encore plus, je jure par vous-même,
 Car vous pouvez bien plus sur ce cœur affligé,
 Que le respect des Dieux qui l'ont mal protégé,
 Je jure donc par vous, ô pitoyable reste,

23 *Ibidem.*

24 Comparer: Tacite: *Œuvres complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1990.

Ma divinité seule après ce coup funeste,
Par vous, qui seul ici pouvez me soulager,
De n'éteindre jamais l'ardeur de le venger.²⁵

»*La puissance suprême des Dieux*« signifie que César effectue ainsi seul un autre pas en comparaison avec son majestueux prédécesseur (Auguste) du premier siècle avant J-C : Pour rediriger dans sa totalité l'action dramatique à son point de départ, le protoprologue, non seulement il pardonne à son rival pour le trône et dont les fils l'on préparé à déclarer à la bataille de Mundi : »*le but de mon combat était toujours la victoire, à une seule exception, celle de Mundi où il me fallut lutter pour sauver la vie elle-même*« - mais allant plus loin, il décide de venger son ombre, sa poussière et ses cendres (»*je jure donc par vous, ô pitoyable reste!*« dit Cornelia attristée), d'un Pompée absent de toute œuvre, bien qu'en réalité présent, d'une façon métonymique extrêmement discutable, (*pars pro toto*) seulement par les restes de son corps.

L'action de César, après diverses péripéties, revient ainsi difficilement à elle-même, dans le protoprologue : on comprend cette pensée de façon qu'elle ne soit jamais sortie d'elle-même et que la tragédie est plus statique que ce que pourrait nous révéler une lecture superficielle. César est une sorte de copie renforcée de son prédécesseur issu de l'âge d'or (*aurea aetas*).

L'impulsion de correction essentielle dans le domaine du destin, comme l'incarne Œdipe roi, est contenue aussi dans d'autres œuvres. Ainsi *Polyeucte*, une tragédie religieuse, comme l'auteur lui a donné son sous-titre. Il s'agit d'un noble arménien du même nom, qui du temps du tyran Dèce, se convertit à la foi chrétienne.²⁶ Il fait cela sans tenir compte de la menace directe de mort, telle qu'il a eu l'occasion de la voir avec son propre parrain, Néarque. La décision de Polyeucte entrera également en conflit avec sa relation avec Pauline dont le vers anthologique l'apostrophe le mieux : »*Je Vous aime, beaucoup moins que mon Dieu, mais bien plus que moi-même*«. ²⁷ La suite du drame, dans laquelle il mènera sa décision à son terme, indique à quel point il est sincère, même au prix de sa propre vie. C'est pourquoi il déclare déjà au commencement :

Vous me connaissez mal: la même ardeur me brûle
Et le désir s'accroît lorsque l'effet se recule.
Ces pleurs, que je regarde avec un œil d'époux,
Me laissent dans le cœur aussi chrétien que vous.
Mais pour en recevoir le sacré caractère,
Qui lave nos forfaits dans une eau salutaire,

25 Pierre Corneille: »La Mort de Pompée«. *Œuvres complètes*: 331.

26 En 259 AD sous le règne de Valérien.

27 Pierre Corneille: »Polyeucte«. *Œuvres complètes*: 307.

Et qui purgeant notre âme et dessillant nos yeux,
 Nous rend le premier droit que nous avons aux cieux,
 Bien que je le préfère aux grandeurs d'un empire,
 Comme le bien suprême et le seul où j'aspire.²⁸

Au premier abord, ceci pourrait nous faire croire un instant qu'il s'agit d'une tragédie *sui generis*, dont le but est la glorification religieuse ou l'extase de la pureté vers laquelle le poète vieillissant tendrait de plus en plus.²⁹ Le lien causal avec la mort fonctionne comme une prise efficace dans la transformation chrétienne : en voyant la perte de Néarque, le noble arménien se plonge dans la religion : La suivant, Pauline se décide pour elle aussi : son exemple entraîne tous les personnages, y compris Félix et Sévère, son ancien amant. Que cela soit réaliste avec le déroulement naturel des choses ou non, pose à nouveau la question de la vraisemblance à l'intérieur de laquelle s'ouvre nécessairement le dilemme du hasard : cela pourrait aussi être différent, s'il en est déjà ainsi. Mais *Polyeucte* a trop de caractéristiques romaines (cornéliennes) pour que l'engouement religieux puisse être la formule de son dernier contenu. C'est que le drame est un récit sur un héros qui est, comme le dit la citation au-dessus, décidé à réaliser la propriété primaire de sa volonté, qui s'exprime dans cet exemple concret comme un désir de sainteté. Cela pourrait (comme c'est le cas) être autre chose. Le notable pourrait incarner les postulats de miséricorde (Auguste), de sentiment d'appartenance nationale (Horace), de sublimation des règles de chevalerie (Rodrigue) ou un idéal de justice absolue (Cornélia et César). Il pourrait également vivre pleinement la dernière pensée de la philosophie stoïque dans laquelle le suicide est aussi naturel que la vie elle-même.

C'est justement dans ce dernier que l'on atteint le point où Corneille s'éloigne le plus du syndrome du drame de Sophocle (Le dévoilement de la culpabilité ontologique et de l'absurdité de la vie) : il s'approche de la définition stoïque de l'existence de l'Homme, et surtout de la partie qui enseigne que parfois la vie d'un homme est trop parfaite et pure pour que l'individu puisse la vivre dans un environnement plus proche de la sphère diabolique que divine, comme le révèlent les paraboles. C'est justement pour cela que *Suréna, général des Parthes* est aussi la confirmation de la prémisse de départ de la présente composition *per negationem*. Il s'agit de la dernière œuvre d'un poète vieillissant qui cette fois-ci n'a – comme le dit l'histoire littéraire – même pas fait d'effort pour assurer à son œuvre ce que l'on appellerait aujourd'hui la publicité. Comme s'il s'enroulait aussi dans l'indifférence qui enveloppe Suréna de plus en plus froid, surtout avec le dernier vers qui est également le dernier alexandrin que le dramaturge a laissé derrière lui :

28 Pierre Corneille: »Polyeucte«. Œuvres complètes: 293.

29 Comparer: Raymond Triboulet: »Corneille et l'aspiration au martyre«. *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 1985, 85: 771.

Suspendez ces douleurs qui pressent de mourir,
Grands Dieux! Et dans les maux où vous m'avez plongée,
Ne souffrez point ma mort que je ne sois vengée.³⁰

Ainsi s'exclame Palmis, la sœur du combattant, à la fin d'une longue péripétie qui opposa le héros à l'empire romain (et par conséquent à son propre sentiment). Les Parthes étaient un peuple qui menaçaient le plus le royaume de la louve sur le Tibre, c'est pourquoi le final de la dramatique de Corneille est d'autant plus lourd de signification d'un point de vue du „cycle romain“ : il s'agit d'une copie antithétique miroir où Parthe, l'ennemi numéro un, en dit plus sur les Romains qu'eux-mêmes n'en sont capables. Mais il semble comme si enfin Suréna ne voulait rien avoir à faire avec les membres de l'autorité d'aucune sorte, en un mot, avec l'histoire qui est celle-ci dans les grandes lignes : Eurydice, la fille du roi arménien, doit se marier, à cause d'un accord militaire, avec Pacorus, fils d'Orode, le roi de Parthe. Mais elle aime Suréna, le commandant Parthe et vainqueur des romains. Il l'aime en retour. Cependant, Orode a peur que la gloire de la victoire de son commandant lui fasse de l'ombre. Pour s'assurer sa loyauté, il désire le marier avec Mandane, sa fille. Suréna refuse : lorsque sa liaison avec Eurydice est découverte, il est perdu. Tous les efforts investis par sa sœur de sang, Palmis, pour le détourner de la perdition sont en vain. Suréna est décidé; comme Polyeucte, il avance vers son destin.³¹

Nous réalisons qu'à la fin, Suréna a oublié son propre passé au sein du monde, il a oublié les Romains, Eurydice et a laissé cela au royaume des ombres. Il marche vers une mort stoïque telle une apparition, comme si la vie n'existait pas, comme si toute la péripétie des événements historiques qui l'ont forgé ne s'était jamais produite : ou si elle s'est produite, il en est maintenant soustrait. Suréna arrive enfin à lui-même sans jamais emprunter ce chemin. C'est pour cela que la pensée du commentaire dans l'édition de la *Pléiade* vise l'actualité constante de la dernière particule de matière du géant, pour autant que dans ce dernier l'on comprenne non seulement la grandeur de l'écrit mais l'éternité des attaches tragiques entre le monde et l'Homme.

Le dernier vers que Corneille ait écrit pour le théâtre mérite qu'on s'y arrête. Il est fort beau. Les idées de mort et de vengeance qu'il renferme lui donnent une couleur pathétique et violente. Il termine la pièce autrement que de cette façon dilatoire dont usa si souvent le poète depuis le Cid (laisse faire le temps, ta vaillance et ton roi) et qui laissait croire qu'après les catastrophes tragiques, les héros ne pouvaient plus agir mais avaient besoin de reprendre haleine. Ici le drame est effectivement achevé.³²

30 Pierre Corneille: »Suréna«. Œuvres complètes: 818.

31 Comparer: Boštjan Marko Turk: »Dramatika Pierra Corneilla v implikacijah 20. stoletja«. *Nitasti jezik*. Ljubljana: Nova revija, 2009: 286.

32 Corneille, Pierre. *Théâtre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1965 : 486.

C'est Suréna - s'étant ainsi positionné - qui indique le chemin à l'incarnation de la volonté suprême de restaurer l'ordre de la façon que l'homme puisse être à l'abri du sort. C'est-à-dire remettre tout au point initial du protoprologue. Une telle ambition entraîne la nécessité de transsubstantier le mythe. Mais le changement de la substance se passe sous les auspices d'une ambigüité foncière. C'est Corneille lui-même qui intervient à l'origine du récit et le transforme d'après ce que lui inspirent les disputes académiques du 17^e siècle.

Le chrétien Corneille entend d'autre part, en pleine querelle du jansénisme, protester contre cette fatalité effrayante, et il insère un long développement sur le libre arbitre. Il va donc transformer Œdipe de victime en coupable. Le thème de l'inceste est soigneusement rejeté au second plan. Il exténue toute l'horreur de la tragédie grecque, qui atteignait si bien le but qu'elle se fixait: terreur et pitié. Ainsi Corneille refuse un impossible parallèle avec ses modèles, Sophocle et Sénèque.³³

Ce qui est d'un côté vrai. Mais cela n'implique pas l'herméneutique intégrale de la pièce, puisque celle-ci se termine par les dodécasyllabes suivants:

Thésée: Cessons de nous gêner d'une crainte inutile.
A force des malheurs le ciel fait assez voir
Que le sang de Laïus a rempli son devoir:
Son ombre est satisfaite: et ce malheureux crime
Ne laisse plus douter du choix de sa victime.
Dircé: Un autre ordre demain peut nous être donné.
Allons voir cependant ce Prince infortuné,
Pleurer auprès de lui notre destin funeste
Et remettons aux Dieux à disposer du reste.³⁴

La critique s'est bien aperçue de cette dichotomie. Elle l'a commentée de la sorte:

Corneille en cette fin simple, pitoyable et majestueuse, semble ne pas voir qu'Œdipe, redevenu soudain généreux dans le malheur ne soutient plus le caractère tyrannique qu'il lui a prêté jusque-là. Mais il ne pouvait se dispenser de rester fidèle en ce point à son célèbre modèle. Il en résulte surtout une gêne sur l'interprétation générale de la pièce: le poids d'une injuste fatalité pèse de nouveau sur l'auteur de crimes involontaires.³⁵

33 André Stegman: »Présentation d'Œdipe«. *Œuvres complètes*: 565.

34 Pierre Corneille: »Œdipe«. *Œuvres complètes*: 590.

35 André Stegman: »Notes«. *Œuvres complètes*: 590.

Il en doit être ainsi puisque Corneille reformule – *ex post* – l'identité de sa pièce en identifiant son essence au texte originel, celui de Sophocle. Les vers: »*Et remettons aux Dieux à disposer du reste*«³⁶ et

Ce fut Apollon, amis, Apollon
Qui lança les maux que voici, les maux,
Sur moi que voici, sur moi, ces horreurs!³⁷

sont identifiés par le même signifié. Celui-ci diffère essentiellement des parties introductives et finales des tragédies qui sont le sujet de l'analyse présente. Le molinisme est l'intervention de la volonté rationnelle dans le domaine où le sujet entre en contact analogique avec l'entité transcendantale. La prédestination, une fois conciliable avec le libre arbitre, permet à l'être humain de maîtriser le sort en écartant l'hamartie fournie par la force supranaturelle. Ainsi: »*Ce n'est donc nullement un hasard si Corneille introduit dans la tragédie la fameuse tirade de Thésée sur la liberté de l'homme (III, V, 1149 – 1170), aux accents si nettement molinistes, ainsi qu'on a souvent noté*«.³⁸ Or la fin de l'Œdipe s'y oppose intégralement : il n'est qu'à prendre en considération le discours où Dircé, la protagoniste la plus moliniste, parle de la prédestination en termes respectueux se servant non de la troisième personne du singulier, mais de la première personne du pluriel, généralisant ainsi le message de deux dramaturges sur l'humanité entière.

Il paraît que la fin d'Œdipe laisse entrevoir le rôle qu'assume l'hamartie remettant en question le rationalisme comme le principe exclusif de l'œuvre cornélienne.

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36 Voir *supra*.

37 Sophocle: *Œdipe-Roi*: 89.

38 Serge Dobrovsky: *Corneille et la dialectique de l'héros*. Paris: Gallimard, 1963: 339.

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Mit kralja Ojdipa v razmerju do "molinizma" velikih Corneillevih tragedij

Pričujoči članek si prizadeva osvetliti notranjo dinamiko v dramatici Pierra Corneilla. Pri tem za komparativno podlago jemlje zgodbo o kralju Ojdipu, kot jo je prvi predstavil Sofokles. V tej zvezi raziskuje vlogo naključja ali hamartije, kot jo je definiral Aristotel. Ugotavlja, da ima naključje v genezi velikih tragedij pomembno vlogo, četudi ta ni tako eksplisitna kot pri Sofoklesu.

Ključne besede: Kralj Ojdip, gledališče Pierra Corneilla, hamartija, verjetno, protoprog, ljubezen, smrt, čast.

The Myth of King Oedipus versus the "Molinism" of Corneille's Great Tragedies

The article tries to shed light on the internal dynamics in the plays by Pierre Corneille. As a comparative basis it uses the story about king Oedipus as it was first presented by Sophocles. In this connection it researches the role of coincidence or hamartia, as defined by Aristotle and comes to the conclusion that coincidence has an important role in the genesis of the great tragedies, although it is not so explicit as with Sophocles.

Keywords: King Oedipus, Pierre Corneille's theatre, hamartia, the probable, protoprogue, love, death, honour

L'ERNESTO, OVVERO IL PRIGIONE DI UMBERTO SABA

Dario Prola

*Ho fatto un sogno, e all'alba lo ritrovo.
Parlavano gli uccelli, o in un uccello
m'ero, io uomo, mutato. Dicevano:
NOI DI BECCO GENTILE AMLAMO I FRUTTI
SAPORITI DEGLI ORTI. E SIAMO TUTTI
NATI DA UN UOVO.*

*Proprio il sogno d'un bimbo e d'un uccello.
(Fratellanza da: Quasi un racconto, 1951)*

Abstract

Privileged meeting point between Slavic, Latin and Germanic cultures, Trieste has always been a breeding ground of literal experiments, a place where the old meets the new, tradition modernity. Its natural creativity and receptivity is to be found in its flowing, open identity, in the absence of that weight that national institutions ascribe to monoethnic and national culture. *Ernest*, the uncompleted novel of Umberto Saba, an Italian poet native of Trieste, was written in 1953 just before dying and published in 1975. Its open and indefinite form still fascinates critics and readers. It is the late confession of Saba's conquer of his sexual and artistic identity, with the city of Trieste between nineteenth and twentieth century as background. In this *Künstlerroman* Nietzsche and Freud's lesson has been elevated by Saba's lyric strength and by a prose, which expressive style comes from the combination of literal Italian and the Triestine dialect. This article offers the analyses of the text through the definition of the concepts of undefinedness, intimacy and lightness in Umberto Saba's poetic.

Keywords: undefinedness, intimacy, lightness, Trieste, *Künstlerroman*

1 INDEFINITEZZA

È cosa nota a studiosi e appassionati d'arte e di letteratura, che un eccessivo formalismo, il perfezionismo smodato, l'ossessivo affinamento stilistico possano produrre in luogo della bellezza agognata, il suo esatto opposto. E questa considerazione vale non solo per i mezzi stilistici ed espressivi, ma anche per il disegno ideologico che cela un'opera d'ingegno: per questa ragione la *Gerusalemme conquistata*, mondata dal Tasso da quelle che lui considerava scabrosità, è unanimemente considerata dai critici inferiore alla *Gerusalemme liberata*. Ora, non sappiamo cosa sarebbe stato dell'*Ernesto* se Umberto Saba fosse riuscito a finirlo: forse avrebbe rinunciato ai ruvidi dialoghi in triestino in favore dell'italiano letterario (Saba riteneva *Ernesto* impubblicabile proprio per il linguaggio), o magari avrebbe censurato gli episodi più scabrosi. In ogni caso quest'opera per tanti versi liberatoria e catartica, scritta da Saba sul letto d'ospedale in uno slancio creativo e crepuscolare, si trasformò per il suo autore in un peso proprio per la sua incompiutezza.¹ Il poeta triestino, in una lettera alla figlia Linuccia del 17 agosto 1955, arriva addirittura a pregarla di bruciare quel "romanzetto incompiuto" (per fortuna a quei tempi nelle mani disobbedienti di Carlo Levi).² Saba-prosatore – che aveva lavorato per tutta la vita sulla forma breve (da *Scorciatoie a raccontini*, sino ai *Ricordi-Racconti*) – sa che quello che ha scritto è un testo in-definito, ma non tanto riguardo al genere (romanzo o racconto?), quanto nel non essere fissato nei limiti (rassicuranti) di una forma. Saba, fin dall'inizio alla ricerca di una giustificazione, attribuisce la colpa di questa situazione ora alla sua condizione di malato (in senso fisico e morale), ora alla mancanza della "crudeltà" necessaria,³ infine ai suoi limiti di prosatore; nella lettera a Nora Baldi del 28 agosto parla di "gravi errori" nella costruzione narrativa, di episodi "fuori della trama"; errori dovuti non tanto a un eccessivo compiacersi dei ricordi, quando alla mancanza di un disegno preciso, di una solita struttura complessiva. Il libro – come indica lo scrittore Pierantonio Quarantotti Gambini⁴ – avrebbe potuto fermarsi alla fine del terzo episodio, dopo la salita di Ernesto da una prostituta, ed effettivamente sarebbe stato un racconto più compiuto.

1 Saba inizia la stesura nel maggio 1953, durante la sua degenza alla clinica romana Villa Electra. Tenta di finirlo invano tra luglio ed agosto, a Trieste. Il libro uscirà solo nel 1975, vent'anni dopo.

2 "Senti, Linuccia, io sto così male come forse nessuno può immaginare. In queste condizioni mi scerebbe assai lasciare in giro cose incompiute, che dovrebbero essere tutte riviste, terminate ecc... e che così come stanno non hanno senso. Né io avrei mai più la forza, né l'animo di terminare quel romanzetto incompiuto che ho lasciato da lui con l'obbligo preciso di bruciarlo appena ne avesse avuto da me l'ordine. Ti prego di passargli l'ordine, senza fare ostruzione: e poi subito telegrafare "eseguito", p. 145. I testi delle lettere sono tratti da: *Tredici lettere di Umberto Saba in cui si parla di "Ernesto" con una nota di Sergio Miniussi*, in Umberto Saba, *Ernesto*, Torino, Einaudi, 1975.

3 Lettera a Nello Stock del 1 settembre 1953, p. 155.

4 Lettera del 25 agosto 1953, pag. 154.

L'*Ernesto* può essere considerato come il cartone preparatorio di un romanzo abortito, è vero, ma ciò non rende onore a un'opera che ha affascinato critici e lettori forse proprio per la sua incompiutezza e la sua indefinitezza. Antonella Santoro⁵ attribuisce all'*Ernesto* una forma ibrida dove si intrecciano i modi del *Bildungsroman* a quelli del *Künstlerroman*, un sottogenere del romanzo di formazione dove si mettono in scena le vicende, i conflitti (interiori e sociali) di un giovane artista sulla strada della maturità. Come fa notare Giovanna Rosa si tratta di un'opera totalmente novecentesca "perché la formazione del protagonista non sta più nel raggiungimento di uno stato sociale determinato o in una svolta concreta nella vita dell'individuo ma in un percorso di maturazione interiore che mira alla presa di coscienza di sé".⁶ *Ernesto*, infatti, non è solo la storia dell'educazione erotico-sentimentale di un giovane praticante di commercio con un "bracciante avventizio" e con una prostituta, quanto la storia della rivelazione di Saba a Saba.

Ma il racconto della crescita, della fine dell'adolescenza, è condotto dal poeta sulla scorta di Freud e quindi non è sbagliato parlare per l'*Ernesto* anche di racconto psicanalitico. La scoperta del sesso si accompagna alla rivelazione del sé e la stessa struttura dell'opera, la sua partizione in sequenze giustapposte, in episodi che sono autentici momenti di passaggio, momenti iniziatici sulla strada della maturazione sessuale (il rapporto con l'uomo, il taglio della prima barba, la salita dalla prostituta, la confessione alla madre ecc.), favorisce una lettura in questo senso. I fatti mantengono una linearità cronologica, ma la loro funzione è del tutto svincolata alle esigenze di fabula ed intreccio: seguono piuttosto le regole del tempo psichico e soggiacciono alle leggi della memoria. La loro importanza è direttamente proporzionale al peso che hanno avuto nella maturazione del protagonista:

Un'intera epoca poi lo divideva da quando aveva iniziata quella strana amicizia con un bracciante avventizio, che – di questo almeno era sicuro – l'aveva (a modo suo) amato; [...] e non era passato che un mese; [...] troppe cose gli erano accadute in quegli ultimi mesi; più credeva che in tutto il resto della sua vita.⁷

Saba è tentato dal racconto in terza persona: interviene nella narrazione con incisi e frasi incidentali, commenta in tono affettuoso e paternalistico quello che accade ad Ernesto, le sue vicende di crescita, le sue ingenuità e riflessioni. Si tratta, a ben vedere, di un tipo di narrazione mista (terza persona più commenti diretti

5 Si veda il saggio *Ernesto di Umberto Saba: tra autobiografia e formazione* in "Sinestesie", *Letteratura e arti*, n. 2, 2012.

6 Giovanna Rosa, *Tre adolescenti nell'Italia del dopoguerra: Agostino, Arturo, Ernesto*, in: *Il romanzo di formazione nell'Ottocento*, a cura di Maria Carla Papini, Daniele Fioretti, Teresa Spignoli, Pisa, edizioni ETS, p. 107.

7 *Ernesto*, pp. 572-594. Le citazioni dall'*Ernesto* provengono da: Umberto Saba, *Tutte le prose*, a cura di Arrigo Stara, Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2002.

dell'io narrante) che rimanda ai moduli del racconto filosofico di matrice illuminista e che s'impone nel romanzo ottocentesco.⁸ Ma si tratta di un Saba psicanalista piuttosto che filosofo, come si evince anche dalle allusioni dirette al modello psichico di Freud: "C'erano, naturalmente, altre cause, e più profonde, ma il ragazzo le ignorava"⁹, spesso espresse con il tono sentenzioso e aforistico che richiama le *Scorciatoie*: "Un rimorso è la visione errata di un avvenimento lontano: si ricorda l'atto, e si dimenticano i sentimenti dai quali quell'atto è sorto".¹⁰ Lo stesso io narrante sembrerebbe suggerire una chiave di lettura deterministica dell'omosessualità di Ernesto, condotta sulla scorta delle teorie di Freud. Ernesto, messo alle strette dalla madre, che sperando di farlo riassumere dal signor Wilder sta per mandare a monte il piano da lui ordito per liberarsi dell'uomo, decide di confessarle la sua relazione. La signora Celestina però non può capire perché:

non vedeva che il lato materiale del fatto, che le sembrava, più che altro incomprendibile. Le sfuggiva del tutto il suo significato – la sua determinante – psicologica. Se no, avrebbe dovuto anche capire che il suo matrimonio sbagliato, la totale assenza di un padre, la sua severità eccessiva ci avevano la loro parte...¹¹

2 INTIMITÀ

Ernesto, proprio come il Candido di Voltaire, è accompagnato dal narratore onnisciente nel processo di crescita e di scoperta del mondo; ma Saba, rispetto a Voltaire, mantiene con il suo personaggio un rapporto intimo, affettivo. Emotivamente coinvolto nelle sue vicende – ora si rivela divertito, ora preoccupato o amareggiato – stempera questi sentimenti in un'ironia che nasce sostanzialmente dalla distanza dai fatti narrati. Saba è quindi un narratore tutt'altro che imparziale: parteggiando per Ernesto come un padre per un figlio, è pronto a giudicare e processare tutti coloro che hanno avuto un ruolo nella sua vicenda di crescita.¹² E a ben guardare quasi tutti i personaggi che circondano Ernesto sono declinazioni dell'archetipo

8 Saba, che in un primo momento voleva chiamare il libro *I promessi sposi*, gioca apertamente con il modello manzoniano. Lo si evince dai frequenti richiami alla storicità dei fatti narrati: "L'inverosimile lettore di questo racconto è pregato di ricordarsi che siamo nel 1898 a Trieste", *Ernesto*, p. 515.

9 *Ernesto*, p. 564.

10 *Ernesto*, p. 566.

11 *Ernesto*, p. 609.

12 Come nel caso del signor Winder, smentito e sbugiardato quando accusa Ernesto di essere un giovane "stordito e pretenzioso". "Non era vero, Ernesto non era affatto pretenzioso; e rendeva – malgrado il nativo disordine – più di quanto avrebbe reso, dopo anni di applicazione, Stefano", *Ernesto*, p. 589.

madre-padre. Al quartetto madre – balia – zia (che si occupa del mantenimento della famiglia) – prostituta (Tanda o Natascia, prima di esercitare), fa da contrappunto il quartetto barbiere (Bernardo) – zio Giovanni (sostituto del padre e tutore del ragazzo) – uomo/amante – padrone (Signor Wilder). Questi personaggi hanno un ruolo ben definito nell'accompagnare Ernesto nella crescita, ed esiste tra di loro una trama di echi e richiami nel corso della narrazione. Quando, per esempio, il barbiere taglia ad Ernesto la prima barba questi s'immagina l'uomo in atteggiamento contrito; "Ha parlato come un padre [...] e non come un superiore"¹³ dice la madre in difesa del signor Wilder, disposto a riassumere Ernesto dopo il suo autolicensing; Ernesto chiama Bernardo "mio padre", alludendo a una vecchia calunnia e facendo infuriare sua madre; quando Ernesto si reca a casa della prostituta, è sorpreso poiché vi ritrova lo stesso odore di biancheria nuova della casa della balia (che fu per Ernesto come una vera e propria seconda madre).¹⁴ E si veda, come ulteriore richiamo alla maternità, l'immagine della Madonna con il lumino acceso, accanto al letto matrimoniale della donna, quasi a sottolineare la ritualità di quello che sta per accadere. Dopo aver "consumato" Ernesto esce nella città e si disseta ad una fontanella che si trova "tra una caserma ed una chiesa" (due luoghi "chiave", vere e proprie pietre miliari nella vita tutto sommato povera di grandi avvenimenti del poeta). Mentre si china per dissetarsi, quando gli pare di essere schernito dalle donne, è preso da una strana nostalgia per il suo principale.

Da una lettera alla moglie Lina sappiamo che Saba, qualora ne avesse avuto le forze, avrebbe introdotto nell'opera un ulteriore personaggio femminile che doveva andare a comporre un triangolo amoroso con Ilio ed Ernesto:

Ernesto ama quella ragazza; ma un poco come il Petrarca amava Madonna Laura: sente che non sarebbe mai stata sua moglie (infatti sposa Ilio); e che sue moglie sarebbe stata un'altra alla quale vorrei vagamente, verso la fine, accennare...¹⁵

Anche Trieste, la "più bella gemma" dell'Austria, è correlativo femminile, rappresenta per Saba la poesia, l'arte, la culla (la relazione donna-città attraversa tutto il *Canzoniere*, in particolare le poesie di *Trieste e una donna*). Mentre l'uomo si strugge per Ernesto sul carro, il ragazzo, contemplando estasiato, conclude che nessuna città "può essere bella come questa".¹⁶ Termina così, poco prima dell'incontro fatale con Ilio, la serie di umiliazioni subite da Ernesto da parte da un

13 *Ernesto*, p. 605.

14 Ed anche per lo stesso autore. Saba, che di cognome faceva Poli, nel scegliersi lo pseudonimo artistico volle probabilmente omaggiare la balia slovena (Peppa Sabaz) cui era molto legato.

15 Lettera a Linuccia del 25 luglio 1953, p. 148.

16 *Ernesto*, p. 581.

mondo maschile violento e brutale: il barbiere gli fa la barba a tradimento, lo zio Giovanni lo schiaffeggia, il padrone lo schernisce per il suo mancato talento al violino, il cugino corruttore gli spiega brutalmente come nascono i bambini e lo induce a masturbari, l'uomo vorrebbe percuoterlo con un ramoscello. La madre di Ernesto, la signora Celestina, come la chiama il narratore, quando vuole rimproverare il figlio lo paragona all'ex marito "sei un cattivo figlio e un cattivo soggetto; hai deciso, come tuo padre, di farmi morire a forza di dispiaceri".¹⁷ A ben guardare, a parte Ilio, l'unica figura maschile positiva è il violinista boemo Franz Ondříček, al quale Ernesto vorrebbe idealmente assomigliare. Nel suo orgoglioso irredentismo – sceglie di suonare non al Casino Schiller ma in un circolo irredentista italiano – rivive la figura del padre di Saba, Ugo Edoardo Poli, bandito dall'Impero d'Austria proprio in quanto irredentista e sovversivo.

Saba, che voleva in un primo tempo intitolare il suo libro *Intimità*, si serve di queste figure di uomini e di donne per illustrare le vicende di un'educazione sentimentale già sottintesa nel *Canzoniere*. Si potrebbe quindi considerare l'*Ernesto* una riscoperta, poiché il nucleo tematico dell'adolescenza del poeta si prefigura ed emerge progressivamente già nelle poesie.¹⁸ Detto altrimenti in quest'opera Saba rivela il retroterra psicologico della sua lirica. "È stato come se si fosse aperta in me una diga, e tutto affluisce in me spontaneamente"¹⁹ scrive il poeta in una lettera alla moglie il 30 maggio 1953. E poi constata come questa sua confessione intima, questa sua liberazione, crei un coinvolgimento tale da spingere chi l'ascolta alle lacrime. Nella lettera a Bruno Pincherle del 30 giugno 1953 il poeta dichiara "La gente, Bruno mio, ha un bisogno, un bisogno urgente, di "mettersi in libertà", di essere insomma liberata dalle sue inibizioni. Questo sarebbe il mestiere della mia vecchiaia".²⁰

3 LEGGEREZZA

La dimensione della verticalità è determinata nella poetica del Saba. Nel *Canzoniere* la salita verso la città rappresenta il raggiungimento della dimensione mitica dell'infanzia, equivale al sollevarsi sulla pesantezza del mondo per raggiungere il

17 *Ernesto*, p. 605

18 E questo vale non solo o non solo per le tante figure di fanciulli, Berto per primo, che vi sono richiamati. Nella poesia *Uomo* è già rappresentato il disagio dell'adolescente oppresso dal lavoro e desideroso di evadere (si veda l'autolicensingamento di Ernesto); *Intorno a una fontana* e *La fonte* sono veri e propri "cartoni preparatori" dell'episodio della bevuta di Ernesto alla fontanella pubblica. Liriche come *Glauco*, *Il giovanetto*, il sesto sonetto di *Autobiografia*, prefigurano l'esperienza omosessuale e l'innamoramento per Ilio.

19 Lettera a Lina del 30 maggio 1953.

20 Lettera a Bruno Pincherle del 30 giugno 1953, p. 145.

regno dell'immaginazione e della contemplazione. La discesa, di contro è un movimento verso il futuro, verso la fine.²¹ Così incontriamo Ernesto ed Ilio, alla fine del romanzo, una sera, mentre scendono la "dilettevole erta" di Scorcola per andare a prendere un bagno al mare. I due amici scendono verso la maturità, verso la concretezza del mondo, allontanandosi dall'universo dell'infanzia.

Il libro è disseminato di immagini di leggerezza. La madre, per esempio, nei suoi rari moti d'espansività chiama Ernesto con il nome del suo merlo (Pimpo). La relazione "infante", "volatile", così frequente nella scrittura di Saba, è riconducibile a quella poetica del fanciullino che il poeta aveva fatto sua e di cui sono restatesi numerose testimonianze scritte in tutte le fasi della sua attività poetica.²²

In un suo famoso saggio Gaston Bachelard ha sottolineato come la *rêverie* infantile denoti una certa familiarità con nidi ed uccelli.²³ La relazione tra sogno, *rêverie* poetica e la stanzetta dell'infanzia si esplicita nella famosa lettera che Saba fa scrivere ad Ernesto il 22 settembre 1899 (la data è ovviamente fittizia, si tratta del 22 settembre 1953) all'amico professore Tullio Mogno. La relazione tra spazio, volo, infanzia si palesa nell'infantile poesiola che Ernesto riporta ("La farfallotta ha dispiegato il vol, con insperato, ma potente ardore"), e – sempre nella medesima lettera – nel racconto del sogno:

La notte, verso l'alba, avevo sognato di volare: volavo nella mia stanzetta (quella della poesia) fino quasi a toccare il soffitto; e trovavo la cosa così meravigliosamente facile, che non capivo perché tutti gli uomini non volassero; e dicevo ad

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- 21 Una prima analisi condotta sulle attestazioni lessicali del *Canzoniere* confermerebbe l'assetto spaziale e gnoseologico della poetica e dell'immaginario sabiano. Le parole più frequenti sono *casa* (93), *cielo* (77), *terra* (60), *mare* (63), *città-Trieste* (64). A proposito della dimensione dell'altezza il gruppo *Uccelli/Uccello/Uccelletto* presenta 51 attestazioni, cui vanno aggiunte quelle della parola *merlo* (13). *Nido* compare invece 21 volte. Al polo semantico affettivo e familiare appartengono: fanciullo-fanciul-giovinetto (200), madre (76), Lina-moglie (57). La parola *padre* figura solo 24 volte, tante quante la parola *figlio*. La coppia *Linuccia-figlia* appare 17 volte. Sul piano della trascendenza *Dio* compare 35 volte, una volta in più della parola *uomo*, mentre *anima* appare 78 volte. Il sentimento più frequente è il *dolore* (272), ben più presente della *gioia* (39) o della *letizia* (9), mentre *amore/amor* appare 189 volte. Da segnalare il binomio *vita* (189) - *morte* (48) tutto a vantaggio della prima (che è quindi *vita nel dolore*). Del corpo umano più frequenti sono *occhi* (103), *bocca* (27), *mani* (28).
- 22 Si pensi alla scorciatoia n.118, dove ritroviamo a Villa Borghese il Pimpo "alato amico dell'infanzia", o le poesie "Favoletta alla mia bambina", "Fratellanza" (citata all'inizio di questo saggio) o gli stessi titoli di alcune sue raccolte poetiche (*Cose leggere e vaganti*, *Uccelli*). Ma una lettura attenta del *Canzoniere* estenderebbe notevolmente il campionario degli esempi.
- 23 "Per dirla in breve, in letteratura [...] l'immagine del nido è una puerilità. [...] Scoprire un nido ci rinvia alla nostra infanzia. [...] Se sollevo cautamente un ramo, ecco che scorgo un uccello che sta covando le uova; è un uccello che non vola via, freme soltanto un po' ed io tremo di farlo tremare, ho paura che l'uccello alla cova sappia che sono un uomo, l'essere che ha perduto la fiducia negli uccelli. [...] Il nido, come ogni immagine di riposo, di tranquillità, si associa immediatamente all'immagine della casa semplice. [...] Il nido [...] è precario e tuttavia mette in moto in noi una *rêverie della sicurezza*. „Bachelard G., *La poetica dello spazio*, Bari, Dedalo, 1999, pp. 115-128

Ilio (è il nome del mio amico) che si provasse anche lui a volare. Infatti, poco dopo, egli si sollevava dal suo letto, che si trovava, nel sogno, nella mia stessa stanza; e subito volavamo tutti e due, uno vicino all'altro.²⁴

Ernesto appartiene alla dimensione dell'aria, del volo. L'uomo in un attimo di passione lo chiama "angiolo"²⁵ e anche Ilio, con i capelli biondi che coprono le spalle, bellissimo e come perso dietro una "visione nota a lui solo", appare ad Ernesto come se sorrisse "agli angeli". Saba stesso definisce Ernesto "un po' come un angelo: tenero, pietoso, assetato dei beni della vita" o come un "meraviglioso fanciullo", "fanciullo dio", quasi come una sorta di deità pagana.

Nella cultura e nell'immaginario occidentale l'angelo non è solo mediatore per eccellenza, protettore e custode: simboleggia l'armonia, l'unione del femminile e del maschile, ed ha a che fare con la musica (passione che Ernesto condivide con il ben più portato Ilio).²⁶ È indefinito e perfetto, proprio come Ernesto, o come Ilio appare ai suoi occhi. Ernesto cerca il fanciullo nella sala del concerto ma "la dolce e tormentosa visione" si è come *volatilizzata*.²⁷ Ilio, che non ha le sue insicurezze né si tormenta come lui, rappresenta per Ernesto il modello ideale (il suo nome per esteso è Emilio, forse in omaggio al famoso fanciullo di Rousseau); egli l'invidia dell'invidia amorosa (che non è mossa dal desiderio di togliere per il piacere di togliere, come precisa l'io narrante); Ernesto è investito dal desiderio "altrettanto appassionato quanto disperato, di assomigliare al proprio oggetto".²⁸ Pensa che i suoi genitori lo tengano vestito così, in calzoncini corti, per conservarlo eterno fanciullo, per tenerlo il più vicino possibile "come una rosa al naso".²⁹ E anche se Ernesto si sbaglia di molto nel suo giudizio,³⁰ in Ilio vive il mito dell'infanzia geniale, la nostalgia del volo, della leggerezza.

24 *Ernesto*, p. 161.

25 "E lei perché el me ga ciamà angiolo? [...] I angeli no fa de ste robe, - disse, quasi severo, Ernesto. - No i ga gnanca corpo." *Ernesto*, p. 530.

26 Nel *Dizionario dei simboli* di Juan Eduardo Cirlot alla voce *Angelo* leggiamo "Simbolo dell'invisibile, delle forze che ascendono e discendono tra l'origine e la manifestazione. [...] In alchimia l'angelo simbolizza la sublimazione, l'ascensione di un principio volatile (spirituale). Come nelle figure del *Viatorium spagyricum*". Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Diccionario de símbolos*, Ediciones Ciruela S.A., Madrid, 1997, p. 82.

27 *Ernesto*, p. 620.

28 "Voleva essere certo di vedere ancora una volta, all'uscita, il meraviglioso fanciullo, che, non potendo *essere*, si sarebbe contentato di *avere*", Ernesto pp. 618-621.

29 Come leggiamo alla voce *Rosa* in Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *op. cit.*, p. 392. "La singola rosa è, essenzialmente, un simbolo di finalità, di successo assoluto e di perfezione. Per questo può identificarsi con tutto ciò che identifica questo significato, come centro mistico, cuore, giardino di Eros, paradiso di Dante, donna amata".

30 "Basta guardarlo per capire che mai si è abbandonato a fare quelle cose, né con le donne, né con gli uomini." (Se fosse stato uno dei suoi amici, Ernesto avrebbe saputo che, trovandosi inosservato in campagna, le aveva fatte - come gli antichi pastori - perfino con una capretta e, per di più, se nera vantato). *Ernesto*, p. 128.

Il nesso tra infanzia, leggerezza, eros, si estende alla lettura: Ernesto, che grazie a Ilio passa da soggetto amato a soggetto amante, ha già conosciuto il “fanciullo meraviglioso”, il “fanciullo dio”, in una estate passata, trascorsa a leggere *Le mille e una notte* disteso sul letto nella sua stanzetta sotto il cielo; allora la meraviglia che provava per gli usi e costumi del suo merlo Pimpo si confondeva a quella provata da lui per la lettura “in una sola indimenticabile beatitudine”.³¹

Quello strano, quel meraviglioso fanciullo era – comunque si chiamasse allora a Trieste – il figlio del pasticciere di Bagdad (o di Bassora), quello che aggirava, sì, l'offerta di uno, anche due sorbetti; ma, rifiutando le carezze dell'offerente, gli intimava, allontanandolo col gesto: “Restate tranquillo al vostro posto. Accontentatevi di guardarmi e di servirmi.”³²

La scrittura di Saba nasce sotto l'egida di Nietzsche e Freud, i due pilastri ideologici su cui poggia tutta la sua produzione.³³ Se Freud ha offerto a Saba gli strumenti dello scavo psicologico per portare alla luce la ricchezza dell'inconscio e del passato, Nietzsche rappresenta una tensione verso la leggerezza, la chiarezza e in ultima istanza la verità.³⁴ Detto altrimenti esiste una dialettica tra “introversione” ed “estroversione”, cui corrisponde il movimento di innalzamento e abbassamento: le coordinate spaziali, come si accennava, dominanti nella poetica del Saba, un poeta che potremmo definire “ascensionale” (anche se l'altezza, in quanto tale, è spesso dimensione dominante in poesia).³⁵ Quindi rinveniamo nella scrittura del Saba una fondamentale ambivalenza: da una parte la pesantezza del vivere e della condizione esistenziale (che si esplicita in una precisa derivazione lessicale e stilistica di matrice petrarchesca e leopardiana) e dall'altra il desiderio e la tendenza alla leggerezza, alla spensieratezza, alla noncurante levità (riconducibile al modello nietzschiano). Questa ambivalenza che attraversa tutto il *Canzoniere* è decisamente risolta a favore della levità nell'*Ernesto*. Il fanciullo di Saba è a tutti gli effetti una di quelle cose “che per la loro leggerezza, vagano, come liete apparenze, sopra e attraverso le pesantezze della vita”.³⁶

31 *Ernesto*, pp. 581-582.

32 *Ernesto*, p. 621.

33 Nella *Scorciatoia 61* Saba definisce Nietzsche “precursore” di Freud in quanto indagatore dell'animo umano e psicologo.

34 Si veda la poesia intitolata *Nietzsche* dalla raccolta *Uccelli* (1948): “Intorno a una grandezza solitaria/non volano gli uccelli, né quei vaghi/gli fanno, accanto, il nido. Altro non odi/ che il silenzio, non vedi altro che l'aria”, U. Saba, *Il canzoniere*, Torino, Einaudi, 2004, p. 549.

35 Per un approfondimento si vedano: Cfr. M. David, *La psicoanalisi nella cultura italiana*, cit., p. 423; e M. Paino, *La tentazione della leggerezza. Studio di Umberto Saba*, Olschki, Firenze 2009, p. 229.

36 Umberto Saba, *Storia e cronistoria*, p. 179 in: *Tutte le prose*, a cura di Arrigo Stara, Milano, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 2002.

CONCLUSIONI

“Il nostro stile è peso” diceva Scipio Slataper, riferendosi alla mancanza nella letteratura dei triestini di quella spigliatezza serena che è nel sangue della letteratura italiana. Analogamente Stuparich parlava di eredità malferma, “da puntellare momento per momento. Comminare voleva dire urtare...”.³⁷ Se quello che sostengono i due triestini è valido per scrittori come Italo Svevo, la scrittura di Saba si colloca sul polo opposto: per il poeta triestino la ricerca della verità si coniuga con l'imperativo categorico della chiarezza espressiva, che in termini letterari si traduce in leggerezza stilistica. Anche nell'*Ernesto* Saba ha dato saggio di equilibrio, trasparenza, sobrietà e leggerezza. Questo perché era essenzialmente poeta della linea petrarchesca, ovvero uno di quei poeti che – ritornando instancabilmente sui propri passi – tentano attraverso il perfezionamento stilistico di esprimere la propria verità poetica con parole precise, potenti, definitive. Uno dei quei poeti che, per così dire, non amano mutarsi d'abito, ma lavorando in levare, scartando e sostituendo perseguono l'unicità del proprio stile.³⁸ Da un punto di vista linguistico la loro vicenda letteraria non è quindi caratterizzabile come un itinerario, un andare da un luogo all'altro modificando il proprio mezzo, ma un movimento circolare intorno agli stessi temi ripetuti e approfonditi con un vocabolario tanto scarno quanto selezionato e levigato. Un movimenti circolare che ricorda quello del setacciatore, inginocchiato sul fiume, specchio sulla pozza che nasconde il senso più profondo del suo essere, quel senso che lui solo può cogliere.

Quella compiutezza che Saba vagheggiava sul piano formale, e che per l'*Ernesto* si rivelò una chimera, è stata in pieno raggiunta sul piano del linguaggio, realizzando quella che Italo Calvino indicava come una delle tre modalità attraverso cui si esplicita la leggerezza nell'opera letteraria.³⁹ Mentre nelle sue poesie Saba trasmette alle parole il peso della sua condizione esistenziale, in questo libro Saba affida ad esse la leggerezza e la perfezione di Ernesto. Laddove l'italiano è troppo “pesante”, troppo letterario per restituire la sua levità di fanciullo meraviglioso, Saba non esista – nelle parti dialogate – a ricorrere al dialetto, l'idioma dell'intimità, dei rapporti familiari, del mondo primitivo (proprio così Saba definisce Ernesto, un primitivo, ma non nel senso deteriore del termine, ma nel senso di

37 Citato da Mario Lavagetto, *L'altro Saba*, p. XIII *Umberto Saba. Tutte le prose*.

38 Il racconto di questa ricerca della propria verità e del proprio stile è affidato alla “Storia e cronistoria del Canzoniere”, il commento critico che Saba scrisse in terza persona servendosi dello pseudonimo di Giuseppe Carimandrei.

39 Italo Calvino, *Lezioni americane. Sei proposte per il prossimo millennio*, Garzanti, Milano, 1988, pp. 17-18. Oltre alla leggerezza sul piano del linguaggio Italo Calvino indicava anche le immagini figurative di leggerezza che assumono valore emblematico e la descrizione del processo psicologico e fisico di elevazione metaforizzato nel tema dell'ascesa. Mentre immagini simboliche di leggerezza sono presenti nell'*Ernesto*, tale processo di elevazione è piuttosto riscontrabile nelle liriche del Saba.

primus).⁴⁰ Anche la madre, donna che disprezza il dialetto (“appannaggio esclusivo degli intimi strati della popolazione”) e che controlla oltremodo le sue emozioni lesinando carezze al figlio, trova solo nella parlata triestina le parole per esternare la sua dolcezza e consolare il figlio. Quelle parole che le sarebbe stato impossibile pronunciare in italiano, la lingua dell’ordine costituito, della società e del lavoro.⁴¹ Grazie al dialetto, così, Saba riesce a dire direttamente, ad arrivare al cuore delle cose, proprio come gli riesce in alcune indimenticabili poesie. Perché poesia è arrivare a dire direttamente, senza il bisogno dell’approvazione dei critici, senza la protezione dei padri, senza tendere la mano verso chi è venuto prima (e pochissimi in Italia sono stati capaci di farlo).

Con quella frase netta e precisa, il ragazzo rivelava, senza saperlo, quello che, molti anni più tardi, dopo molte esperienze e molto dolore, sarebbe stato il suo “stile”: quel giungere al cuore delle cose, al centro arroventato della vita, superando resistenze e inibizioni, senza perifrasi e giri inutili di parole; si trattasse di cose considerate basse e volgari (magari proibite) o di altre considerate “sublimi”, e situandole tutte – come fa la Natura – sullo stesso piano.⁴²

“Rimanere a lungo in compagnia di noi stessi, genera il bisogno d’uscirne”⁴³ scrive Saba in *Storia e cronistoria del Canzoniere* (1948) a proposito della raccolta poetica intitolata *I prigionieri* (1924). La leggerezza dell’*Ernesto* non sarebbe possibile senza “il peso” del materiale grezzo, del sovrabbondante, senza lo scarto materico da cui si libera la figura di questo fanciullo indimenticabile. Da qui il riferimento al noto ciclo di sculture di Michelangelo nel titolo di questo saggio. Anche Michelangelo arrivò per caso ai *Prigionieri*, ma egli – a differenza di Saba – intuì che senza la gravità della materia, senza lo sforzo liberatorio, non sarebbe stata possibile alcuna levità. Saba invece, soggetto al demone della forma, stilista instancabile, non poteva che concepire *L’Ernesto* come una sconfitta, come un aborto letterario.

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40 Lettera a Bruno Pincherle del 30 giugno 1953: “Ernesto non aveva inibizioni [...] (Non era un decadente, era un primitivo)”.

41 “No pensarghe più, fio mio” disse, passando all’improvviso, e senza accorgersene, al dialetto [...] “quel che te sé nato sé assai brutto, ma no gà, se nessun viena saverlo, tanta importanza. No ti sé, grazie a Dio, una putela”. *Ernesto*, p. 611.

42 *Ernesto*, p. 525.

43 *Storia e cronistoria del Canzoniere*, p. 211.

Ernest ali ječa Umberta Sabe

Ernest je nedokončan roman Umberta Sabe, italijanskega pesnika iz Trsta, ki je bil napisan leta 1953 tik pred smrtjo in izdan leta 1975. Njegova odprta in nedefinirana forma še vedno fascinira tako kritike kot tudi bralce.

Ključne besede: Nedefiniranost, intimnost, lahkotnost, Trst, *Künstlerroman*

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