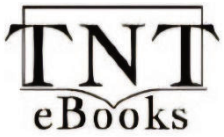
FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Essays in Honour of Nóra Séllei



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FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Essays in Honour of Nóra Séllei

Edited by

GYÖRGY KALMÁR & ANNA KÉRCHY

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Köszöntő

Formált tudományt.
Nevelt és nevel fiatal kutatókat.
Oktat itthon, oktat nemzetközi fórumokon.
Alakította és alakítja a szakszerűség erősítése érdekében a Kar tudományos szabálykereteit.

Felmutat nekünk közéleti, nagyon nehéz helyzetekben helyes magatartásmódokat.
A legelesettebbek gondjait karolja fel. Folyamatos lelkesedéssel, erővel, kitartó akarattal.

Elhivatott alkotó.
Elhivatott közéleti ember.
A legnemesebb értelemben.

Köszönet, hogy folyamatosan tanulhatok tőle:
Kiállást ügyekért.
Kiállást a tudományért.

Keményfi Róbert
DE BTK dékán

Message from the Dean

She has shaped scholarship.
She has trained – and continues to train – young researchers.
She teaches at home and in international academic forums.
She has helped to shape, and continues to shape, the Faculty's scholarly regulatory framework in the service of strengthening academic standards.

She offers us models of principled conduct in public life, even in the most difficult circumstances.
She advocates for the concerns of the most vulnerable.
She does so with unfailing enthusiasm, strength, and perseverance.

A committed scholar.
A committed public intellectual.
In the noblest sense of the term.

I am grateful for the opportunity to continue learning from her:
What it means to stand up for causes.
What it means to stand up for scholarship.

Róbert Keményfi
Dean, Faculty of Humanities
University of Debrecen

György Kalmár

Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Nóra Séllei's Feminist Interventions

It is an honour and a pleasure to introduce this volume, dedicated to the career of Professor Nóra Séllei upon her well-earned retirement. It is an honour because of the distinguished career that we look back on, and it is a pleasure, as in the past thirty years she has not only been an inspiring mentor and a reliable colleague, but also a true friend to me. Her contributions to Hungarian academia have been nothing short of transformative, expanding the scope and methodology of literary scholarship in Hungary through feminist and gender-critical perspectives, enabling access to international theory, shaping curricula, and, as a charismatic and empowering teacher, nurturing generations of students. Her oeuvre is extensive, inspiring in its size as much as in its academic and historical importance: at the time of writing it consists of more than 160 items, among them 12 books, 47 journal articles, and 44 book chapters. It would be impossible to properly introduce this immense body of work in its complexity, depth, and breadth here. Nevertheless, I do wish to highlight some of the most important achievements of her work, her role in the history of the Hungarian academia and Hungarian feminism, from her early scholarly interventions to her role as an institutional pioneer, established scholar, and public intellectual, offering a portrait of a complex thinker whose legacy will no doubt remain foundational for Hungarian feminist literary studies.

Séllei Nóra's career began with her English-language book *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Personal and Professional Bond* (1996), developed from her PhD thesis, an English-language study that examined the creative and personal connections between two central figures of modernism. By analysing their exchanges and the ways they influenced one another's artistic trajectories, she brought fresh insight to the comparative study of these writers, a feat which brought her international recognition. This was also one of the earliest contributions from a Hungarian scholar to global Woolf and Mansfield criticism, written at a time well before online libraries, digital archives, search engines, and AI-enhanced research tools made such work much quicker and easier. This was a time when Eastern European scholars had to travel abroad on a regular basis, so as to get close to precious library collections. Funding was scarce, and many of us economised on food and clothes so as to save money for books. We hunted for key books in the second-hand bookshops of Hull, Birmingham, Oxford and London, and we usually travelled everywhere with our cherished, hand-written reader's journals full of notes and citations. When at home, we relied on interlibrary loans that often took weeks to arrive, stood for long hours by copy machines, and kept hundreds of photocopied and hand-highlighted texts in our homes. These conditions of the pre-digital infrastructure of academic research (which may be easy to romanticise in retrospect, though they were often demanding and exhausting) further highlight the importance of Séllei's achievement in these early

years of her career. Her research at the University of Hull and the British Library provided the perfect academic background for building bridges between Hungarian and Anglophone academia, a project she was to continue in various ways throughout her distinguished career.

In the late 90s and early 2000s, this kind of cultural and intellectual mediation often took the form of Hungarian publications, books and articles in which academics who had access to libraries in Western Europe or America started transferring knowledge and employing the critical methods practiced there in their Hungarian publications. This may also explain why Séllei's next two books played such an important role, not only in terms of the academic study of literature, but also for the canonisation of women's literature and the introduction of feminist analytical frameworks in Hungary. In her next monograph, *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd: 19. századi angol írónők* ('She Becomes a Girl and Starts to Write: 19th-Century English Women Writers', 1999), Séllei turned to the longer nineteenth century. This is a wide-ranging, 455-page study of nineteenth-century English women writers that maps the emergence of female authorship within the constraints and opportunities of the period's literary marketplace. The book examines how gendered expectations, publishing conditions, and critical reception shaped women's choices of genre and voice, and it traces the strategies by which they negotiated authority, visibility, and professionalism. By reconstructing this cultural ecology, Séllei not only expands the Hungarian canon of reference for Victorian and post-Victorian studies, but also lays the historical groundwork for her later inquiries into women's self-representation and modernist experimentation. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this volume for the visibility of gender-sensitive criticism in this country, which single-handedly transformed the Hungarian reception of canonical women writers including Jane Austen, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters. If it has continued to be inspirational for generations of Hungarian scholars, running to a second edition, an extraordinary thing in our profession, this is so because of its unique achievement: in *Lánnyá válik*, Séllei devised a mode of reading that succeeds in being 'political' as well as theoretical – in the kinds of questions it poses – without giving up the drive for close reading, displaying a rare sensitivity for textual detail and literary nuance, combining the insights of cultural critique and feminist theory with the best Anglo-Saxon traditions of close reading.

In her next major work, *Tükröm, tükröm …: Írónők önéletrajzai a 20. század elejéről* ('Mirror, Mirror… Autobiographies of Women Writers from the Early 20th Century,' 2001), Séllei returned to the first half of the 20th century, focusing on autobiographical writing by modernist women writers. This study revealed how female authors employed life-writing as a means of negotiating identity and authorship in a cultural environment that still limited their voices. Through her analysis of key texts by Virginia Wolf, Gertrude Stein, Jan Rhys, and Mary McCarthy, Séllei highlighted autobiography as a space of experimentation and self-assertion, while also showing the constraints imposed by social expectations. It was in this monograph that Séllei first embarked on the extensive analysis of a Hungarian text: her chapter on modernist writer Margit Kaffka's autobiography, which

remains a seminal interpretation of this work, was the first in what was to be a series of analytical essays on Hungarian women writers including Alaine Polcz.

Together, these early monographs established key themes that would remain central to her scholarship: the exploration of women's voices, the importance of historical and cultural contexts, the use of feminist theory as a critical perspective, and a continuing focus on the textual qualities of the works she analyses, whether literary or cinematic (she was to produce a number of insightful analyses of films, including Neo-Victorian adaptations like *The French Lieutenant's Woman* and *Morpho Eugenia*, as well as Hungarian movies like Ágnes Kocsis's *Friss levegő* (*Fresh Air*). Though in these volumes Séllei did not position herself explicitly as a feminist literary historian, she systematically focused on women writers and introduced feminist critical methods. The essential characteristics of her academic writing were also already present in these early books: professional preparedness and rigor, a complex and nuanced style of argumentation, keen sensitivity to textual and cultural problems, persistent questioning of entrenched hierarchies and biased cultural assumptions, sustained attention to the ethical and political implications of speaking/reading/writing from the position of the cultural other, and an occasional touch of irony when unveiling the short-sightedness of existing dogmas.

It is not by accident that these two books in Hungarian received so many scholarly references and became key texts for university classes on British literature or women's writings in Hungary: they transferred knowledge, offered original results, and popularised approaches little known and rarely practiced in the Hungarian academia. Understanding the importance of this kind of cultural and academic mediation is crucial for seeing the relevance of Séllei's Hungarian works in the 90s and early 2000s. For much of the twentieth century, Eastern European academia operated under limited contact with international networks. Critical movements that shaped Western universities, such as structuralism, poststructuralism, feminist theory, or cultural studies, often reached Hungary only belatedly, if at all. This reinforced the sense of intellectual belatedness that had been haunting Hungarian intellectual life since early modernity: conversations unfolding in the great intellectual centres of "the West" seemed distant, and Hungarian scholars lacked the resources and institutional support to engage with them directly. As a result, most academics in the humanities were out of sync with some of the global intellectual trends, especially Anglophone ones. This, of course, stems from the traditionally German (and, to a certain extent) French orientation of Hungarian intellectual and academic life, but, in the 1980s and 90s, several other factors contributed to the aversion towards more politicised critical tendencies. Thus, gender studies and feminist criticism, just like other theoretical and critical trends informed by the cultural turn, took much longer to reach Hungary than, say, hermeneutics or structuralism, and even when they did, they often encountered hostility. Yet, after the fall of communism, when universities redesigned curricula, and scholarly associations encouraged international exchanges, there was a strong demand for translations and contextualisations of recent theoretical developments. In this environment, cultural mediators played a decisive role. It is in this sense that Nóra Séllei's work

was crucial: instead of simply introducing these ideas, she adapted them to the Hungarian context, offering usable alternatives to existing approaches both in terms of theoretical frameworks and interpretative strategies.

Scholars such as Nóra Séllei were essential in this period: they acted as conduits, introducing new discourses, translating key works, and contextualizing them for local audiences. Such mediation was not simply about knowledge transfer; it was about opening a space where Hungarian academia could join global conversations and re-situate itself within a shared intellectual landscape after a long period of cultural seclusion. Through her books, articles, edited volumes, and translations, Séllei introduced feminist literary criticism and gender theory into Hungarian scholarship. Equally importantly, she embedded these frameworks within Hungary's own intellectual traditions, ensuring that her students and colleagues could not only absorb international theory, but also contribute to it. In this way, she helped bring Hungarian literary studies into closer alignment with the intellectual currents of the wider world.

As Séllei also notes in her 2007 book *Mért félünk a farkastól,* introducing feminist criticism into Hungarian academia in this regard was made especially complex and challenging by the fact that, by the time feminist criticism began to gain a foothold in Hungary in the 1990s, Western feminist thought had already entered a new, more plural and fragmented phase. While Hungarian scholars and students were only just becoming acquainted with the foundational texts of second-wave feminism (works that focused on the recovery of women writers, the critique of patriarchy, and the politics of representation), feminism in the West had already shifted toward third-wave, poststructuralist and postfeminist orientations. These newer approaches emphasised diversity, intersectionality, poststructuralist critiques of identity, and advocated a politics of difference, often questioning the very categories that earlier feminism had used to mobilise women as a collective subject. This temporal disjunction posed significant challenges: Learning and teaching about the "classical" phases of feminist theory, Hungarian scholars were confronted with the more complex, self-critical, and globally diverse landscape of third-wave feminism(s). This created a twofold task of reception: to integrate the canon of second-wave feminist texts in order to build a common foundation, and simultaneously to engage with the ongoing debates of third-wave feminism(s) so as not to remain permanently behind. Mediators like Nóra Séllei often had to employ complex strategies in order to sustain this difficult balance, presenting feminism's earlier achievements and critical perspectives in classrooms, interviews, advisory boards and translation projects, while also introducing its newer trajectories.

It is in this historical context that one can fully appreciate the importance of Nóra Séllei's commitment to editorial and translational projects that functioned as bridges between Hungary and the broader international academic world. Her edited volume *A feminizmus találkozásai a (poszt)modernnel* ('Encounters between Feminism and (Post)modernism,' 2006) was groundbreaking in that it introduced Hungarian readers to key essays by figures

such as Toril Moi, Susan Bordo, or Elizabeth Grosz. These translations were more than simple transfers of text: they were carefully framed, annotated, and contextualised, allowing readers unfamiliar with the cultural debates of the West to grasp their relevance in a Hungarian setting. In doing so, Séllei provided a critical toolkit for non-English-speaking students and scholars eager to join international discussions but lacking direct access to them. The Hungarian translation and publication of these texts – as well as the bibliography of feminist and gender-sensitive criticism in Hungary which concludes the volume – was instrumental in reinvigorating feminist criticism in Hungary by pushing it beyond the earlier focus on canon revision and representation toward complex theoretical questions about subjectivity, embodiment, discourse, and power. This anthology helped ensure that feminism did not become static, uninspiring or "passé," but remained responsive to broader intellectual movements in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and cultural theory.

The task of overcoming prejudices against feminist criticism and demonstrating its productiveness is even clearer in Séllei's book of the following year, *Mért félünk a farkastól? Feminista irodalomszemlélet itt és most* ('Why Are We Afraid of the Wolf? Feminist Criticism Here and Now,' 2007). Against the backdrop of Hungarian academia's resurgent conservativism, persistent provinciality, and wilful ignorance of certain international trends, this was a timely and much-needed intervention, offering a comprehensive introduction to the main theoretical questions, social issues and critical trends present in Anglophone feminist criticism while also addressing the situation (or plight) of feminist criticism in Hungary. As Séllei observed in *Mért félünk a farkastól*, "the fossilised division of sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which still reflects a nineteenth-century outlook, is not even capable of 'noticing' these new disciplines, let alone engaging in fruitful dialogue with them" (34). The Hungarian case studies in the later chapters of the book, including the memorable analysis of the reception of British and Hungarian chick lit, effectively indicated some ways in which more awareness of gender-conscious attitudes could be beneficial both culturally and intellectually. This volume is also an important point in Séllei's oeuvre in the sense that it is perhaps in this book that she first positioned herself consciously and openly as a public intellectual and social critic at odds with the patriarchal cultural context of Hungarian society and academia. Mid-career academics at that time, as today, often found themselves kept back by an old guard and old boys' network whose members occupied prominent positions at universities, editorial boards, or the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and acted as self-appointed gatekeepers, while unwilling or unable to engage with many of the intellectual tendencies that inform contemporary international academic inquiry.

Introducing gender-sensitive critical approaches into Hungary's academic and cultural environment was an uphill struggle, and it usually took courageous and resilient people like Nóra Séllei to make a difference. Though the collapse of state socialism opened the doors for new intellectual currents, the local cultural milieu was marked by ambivalence. While there was enthusiasm for Western theory in some circles, particularly among young

and mid-career scholars, there was also widespread suspicion toward feminism and theory in general, which were often caricatured as a foreign ideological import or a passing intellectual fashion. Literature departments had long been dominated by philological traditions and historical-literary paradigms that valued textual positivism over theory-driven analysis, and these established frameworks proved resistant to approaches that foregrounded gender, subjectivity, and power.

This institutional context of the Hungarian academia after 1989 posed serious challenges to the acceptance of feminist and gender-based approaches. Universities and research centres were often dominated by tightly knit, tribe-like intellectual circles, in which advancement depended less on the quality of academic output than on personal loyalty to gatekeeping patriarchs and alignment with entrenched hierarchies. These circles frequently resisted perspectives that questioned traditional authority structures, particularly those that challenged patriarchal assumptions about authorship, culture, and scholarship itself. Within this environment, feminist scholarship could easily be dismissed as peripheral, foreign-inspired, ideological, or disruptive to institutional stability. The patriarchal underpinnings of cultural institutions also meant that women scholars had to negotiate not only intellectual scepticism but also systemic bias in career progression and recognition. Figures like Nóra Séllei confronted these barriers with persistence, creating spaces (through conferences, publications, and teaching) where feminist criticism could gain legitimacy despite institutional inertia. Her ability to build networks and foster collaboration offered a crucial alternative to the insular structures that otherwise governed Hungarian cultural and academic life.

This cultural and institutional context is crucial if one is to appreciate all that Séllei and others accomplished in the two decades after the 1989 regime change. Her next published volume, *A nő mint szubjektum, a női szubjektum* ('Woman as Subject, the Subject as Woman,' 2007) was an edited volume based on the lectures given by various feminist scholars at a conference of the same title, organised by Nóra Séllei, in the spring of 2006. The conference and the edited volume were logical follow-ups to the previous book: in this volume, she brought together Hungarian scholars in dialogue with international frameworks, creating an intellectual space in which local research could enter into conversation with global feminist theory, facilitating a two-way exchange rather than a one-sided reception. One of her notable projects was the editing of the book series Artemisz Könyvek ('Artemis Books') from 1999 through the early years of the new millennium, bringing key texts like Madonna Kolbenschlag's *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye*, Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* or Elisabeth Badinter's *The Myth of Motherhood*, let alone Séllei's own translation of Woolf's autobiographical writings (and it is here that one should mention her inspired translation of Woolf's book-length essay Three Guineas, published in Hungarian in 2006). Through these projects, Séllei demonstrated that conference-organisation, translation and editing are not merely auxiliary scholarly activities but essential forms of cultural mediation. An important part of her bridge-building was her work on the Hungarian reception of major British or Anglophone women writers like Austen, Mansfield and

Woolf. By curating, contextualizing, and transmitting critical ideas, she was among those trailblazers who enabled the Hungarian academia to catch up with (and ultimately contribute to) the major theoretical currents of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Today's young and mid-career Hungarian academics, for whom it is natural to attend international conferences and publish their work in established international journals, enjoy the results of the efforts of scholars like Séllei, who not only popularised feminist critical approaches, but also promoted international academic standards in Hungary. She established professional contacts with leading Hungarian academics working in gender studies, sociologists and social scientists as well as critics. She generously promoted similar initiatives and unselfishly helped young scholars, often reviewing their works in various venues, while she also reviewed contemporary Hungarian women writers like Krisztina Tóth, Zsófia Bán, Kriszta Bódis, Agáta Gordon, and Noémi Kiss.

One of the most significant achievements of Nóra Séllei's career was her successful defense of her DSc thesis at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA) – this is the highest academic rank recognised in Hungary. Her dissertation, *Kulturális (ön)reflexivitás Virginia Woolf harmincas évekbeli regényeiben* examined Virginia Woolf's writings of the 1930s. In this study, which was later also published as a monograph (*A másik Woolf: Kulturális (ön)reflexivitás Virginia Woolf harmincas évekbeli szövegeiben* ['The Other Woolf: Cultural (Self-)Reflexivity in the 1930s texts of Virginia Woolf', 2012), she repositioned works that had often been overlooked, and demonstrated the intellectual depth and the engagement with cultural self-awareness of texts that used to be relegated to the margins of the kind of mainstream Woolf-scholarship that celebrated Woolf mainly as a modernist author. In the conservative and patriarchal environment of Hungarian academic life, this accomplishment carried weight far beyond the personal milestone it represented. While the MTA was regarded as the pinnacle of scholarly authority in the country, it had few women in it, its committees were often dominated by conservative voices sceptical of theoretical innovation and dismissive of feminist approaches, and most of its members never really engaged with the 'new' approaches represented by scholars like Nóra Séllei. No wonder that the conspicuous scarcity of women in the MTA, at least in literary studies, was coupled with an equally telling scarcity of scholars with international visibility. For a woman scholar to hand in a dissertation explicitly informed by feminist literary criticism was thus a courageous act subverting existing discursive and power positions in the academia. The dissertation was also a conscious intervention in existing Woolf criticism, calling attention to the importance of Woolf's later writings, shifting focus points, and offering alternative modes of reading to the ones previously published by some of the powerful men sitting in the committee. The doctorate thus brought not only recognition of Séllei's intellectual excellence but also a symbolic victory for feminist scholarship in Hungary. As Séllei has noted in her article on women professors, for a woman in Hungary to become the doctor of the MTA and being appointed as a full professor at her university amounted to breaking through the glass ceiling ("Professzornők" 271). Successes like hers also showed that gender-sensitive approaches, rather than marginal curiosities, are serious contributions to academic knowledge. In this sense, Séllei's

achievements helped open the door for future generations of scholars, many of them women, who would go on to pursue research in feminist and cultural studies with greater confidence that their work, too, could achieve institutional legitimacy.[1]

Though Nóra Séllei's Hungarian language publications have played a particularly important role in the Hungarian reception of feminist perspectives and women's literature, she continued to publish articles, books, edited volumes and book chapters in English throughout her career. Her English-language publications chart a remarkable intellectual trajectory, beginning in the 1990s with detailed analyses of canonical women modernists and extending into the 2000s and 2010s with wide-ranging reflections on feminist theory, women's autobiography, and cultural mediation – while not abandoning the textual analysis of canonical figures, from Mary Wollstonecraft, Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and Sarah Perkins Gilman through Woolf's short fiction, Sylvia Plath, Rosamond Lehmann and Doris Lessing to contemporary writers like A. S. Byatt, Helen Fielding, Janice Galloway and Victoria Mackenzie. Her early articles, published in journals such as the *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* and *British and American Studies*, focused on figures like Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, George Eliot, and Jean Rhys, interrogating questions of gendered authorship, narrative form, and the politics of memory. From the 2000s onward, her scholarship increasingly engaged with feminist literary theory and cultural criticism, situating Hungarian debates within transnational contexts. She wrote on the reception of feminist theory in Hungary, on the complexities of women's autobiography in the 20th century, and on the challenges of teaching gender studies in a conservative academic environment. Her English-language articles and book chapters from this period often carried a double purpose: to communicate Hungarian perspectives to the international scholarly community and to bring global feminist discourses into dialogue with local traditions. In later work, she examined the intersections of women's writing, trauma, and identity formation, and reflected on the role of feminist criticism in reshaping canons and curricula. Taken together, her English-language oeuvre exemplifies her role as a cultural mediator, bridging disciplinary, linguistic, and national divides, and ensuring that Hungarian feminist scholarship became part of international conversations.

Nóra Séllei's work in the 21st century reveals the understanding that bringing about change in the complex systems of Hungarian academic and cultural life was only achievable through the cumulative effect of a variety of related activities. This is why her work extends far beyond her scholarly publications. She published translations of key theoretical texts, translated literary texts by Virginia Woolf and Jean Rhys, established the Gender Studies Centre at Debrecen University, wrote pieces for the general public for educational purposes, introduced new university courses, organised conferences, built

[1] For more details about the state of feminism and gender studies in contemporary Hungary, see the interview with Ágnes Pető reprinted in the present volume.

international networks, wrote book reviews about new publications significant for women's studies, and gave interviews.

At the University of Debrecen, Séllei has been a pioneer in curriculum development, designing some of the earliest courses in Hungary dedicated to feminist and gender studies. Her teaching covered a wide range of topics, from women's writing and subjectivity to gender and film, and her carefully developed course materials provided students with resources that were otherwise unavailable. As head of the Gender Studies Centre and as twice-elected president of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English, she worked to create institutional frameworks that could support feminist research and teaching on a long-term basis. As a board member of ESSE, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the University of Debrecen, as well as a guarantor at the University of Ružomberok in Slovakia, she introduced new standards, formal procedures, and norms of transparency and gender equality, thereby raising the overall level of professionalism.

Nóra Séllei's interviews, public lectures and educational texts written for general readership also played an important role in bringing feminist perspectives into Hungarian cultural discourse. She often stressed that feminism is not simply a political movement but a theoretical framework and a methodological toolkit through which literature and culture can be reread in more nuanced and inclusive ways. In these conversations, she highlighted the slow and sometimes resistant reception of feminist works in Hungary, reflecting on how reviews and cultural responses to anthologies of women's writing revealed both growing interest and lingering prejudice. She also underlined the importance of conducting feminist dialogue in Hungarian rather than relying solely on English-language discourse, insisting that only by rooting feminist theory in the local idiom could it become culturally resonant. At the same time, she challenged nationalist and patriarchal assumptions embedded in Hungarian cultural narratives, pointing out how concepts of national identity are too often imagined in masculine terms. Through her role as co-editor of a feminist book series, she further advocated for moving from the narrower framework of "Women's Studies" toward a broader "Gender Studies," which would also address masculinity and gender structures as a whole. Perhaps such wider cultural interventions have gained even more significance since the 2010s: in the wake of Hungary's illiberal turn – when "gender" became a vilified term in state media, some gender studies programmes were banned, and LGBTQ rights were systematically curtailed – the work of people like Nóra Séllei assumed a distinctly political and cultural urgency.[2] In this context, her persistent engagement with feminist issues, and her use of gender-sensitive critical perspectives represent a form of intellectual dissent, safeguarding the freedom of critical inquiry and the pursuit of equality in an increasingly hostile and authotaritarian environment. Thus, taken together, these interviews, public lectures, and educational texts carry significant cultural weight: they not only explain feminist ideas to a wider audience but also model how feminist theory can reshape both academic practice and public debates in

[2] See Svégel Fanni's interview with Pető Andrea in the present volume.

post-communist Hungary (see Virginás Andrea's interview with her, originally published in *Korunk,* reprinted in the present volume).

This volume celebrates Nóra Séllei's achievements and pays tribute to the profound ways in which she has shaped Hungary's intellectual life. At the same time, it represents a modest contribution to the ongoing feminist intervention in academic and cultural discourse. True to her vision, I have sought to honour her life's work by assembling a collection with a distinctly feminist academic focus, inviting colleagues whose writings engage with and extend the intervention of feminism and gender studies in Eastern Europe. I imagine that Nóra, if consulted, would have opted for such a volume, one more centred on thematic coherence than on personal recollection, one that actively carries forward the legacy of feminist thought. The essays gathered here reflect the breadth of feminism's influence in contemporary scholarship, spanning literature, theory, and cultural critique. Together, they affirm that feminism's legacy will endure, continuing to inspire new forms of academic engagement and broader cultural transformation.

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Virginás Andrea

Feminizmusok / tudományos beszédmódok / civil szerveződések
Interjú Séllei Nórával

(Kerettörténet) A feminista szemléletmód egyaránt sajátja lehet elméleti és gyakorlati koncepcióknak, de mint minden fiatal, expanzióban tetten ért gondolatrendszernek még visszakereshetőek az eredői, adott téridő-metszetben közvetlenül csatlakoztatható személyekhez, intézményekhez, megmozdulásokhoz. Egy ilyesfajta kísérlet szövegszerű dokumentuma olvasható a továbbiakban. Séllei Nóra (könyvei: *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf – A Personal and Professional Bond*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt, 1996, illetve *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd. 19. századi angol írónők*. Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, Debrecen, 1999) a magyarországi feminista ihletésű irodalomkritika/irodalomértelmezés képviselője, aki a Debreceni Egyetem tanáraként és a Csokonai Kiadó Artemisz Könyvek című, feminizmusra és „gender"-tanulmányokra alapozó sorozatának szerkesztőjeként mondhatni egyik csomópontja a Budapesttől keletre elterülő régió feminizmusainak. A szívessége folytán létrejött, a kérdező elvárásainál sokkal komplexebbre sikeredett email-interjú szó szerint virtuális nyomvonala az előbbiekben felvázolt, nyilván örökre illuzórikus eredetkeresésnek.

– A *Lánnyá válik, s írni kezd*… a második könyved. A címe alapján az első is hasonló témakörben mozog. Hogyan érkeztél el oda/ide, az első könyved miről szólt, módosultak-e koncepcióid a második megírásáig? A magyar irodalomértelmezésben mindenképpen ritkaságnak számítanak az olyan típusú érdekfeszítő, találékony és nyelvi leleményességről árulkodó olvasatok, amilyeneket a *Lánnyá válik*ban olvashatunk. Milyen tradícióhoz csatlakoztatnád te ezeket? Mivel foglalkozol a továbbiakban?

– A dolog elég egyszerűen kezdődött: 1990-ben kerültem az egyetemre tanítani, 1992 tavaszán kaptam egy néhány hónapos ösztöndíjat az angliai Hull egyetemére, ahol nagyon erős a feminista szemléletű oktatás, ennek megfelelően a könyvtár is. Bennem akkoriban kristályosodott ki, hogy miből írom a doktorimat, és Hullban rendkívül jól hasznosítható szemléletet alakíthattam ki a Katherine Mansfieldet és Virginia Woolfot bizonyos szempontok szerint összehasonlító dolgozatomhoz – ez jelent meg aztán könyv alakban is (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996). Sosem gondolkoztam azon, vajon módosult-e a koncepcióm a két könyv között. Mindkettő más, hisz az első esetben részben a két írónő személyes kapcsolatát vizsgálom, részben összehasonlító elemzéseket végzek, míg a *Lánnyá válik*ban hat 19. századi angol írónő egy-egy regényének szövegközeli értelmezésével próbálkozom, elsősorban a regény különböző válfajainak műfajelméleti tükrében. Nehezen tudnám azt is megfogalmazni, milyen irányzathoz csatlakozom ezzel, mert úgymond felhasználok mindent, ami az utamba akad, és az adott szöveg olvasásához hasznosnak bizonyul, azaz, ha segít a szövegnek esetleg eddig kevésbé ismert rétegeit feltárni. De persze kétségtelen, hogy nagy hatással voltak rám olyan kritikusok, mint Elaine Showalter,

Sandra M. Gilbert és Susan Gubar, Toril Moi az elméletiek közül pedig Nancy Chodorow és Judith Butler.

Jelen pillanatban századelős írónők önéletrajzi írásaival foglalkozom, tehát most is egy műfaj és egy korszak köré szervezem a vizsgált szövegeket, és részben visszatérek Woolfhoz. Ha minden igaz, aránylag belátható időn belül ennek a kutatásnak is kézbe vehető eredménye lesz – hogy milyen, arra egyelőre én is kíváncsi vagyok.

– Hogyan, milyen alapokból, milyen kiadói és kiadási politikával indult el az Artemisz? Milyen közegbe érkezik? Mit adtatok ki eddig, miért és mit terveztek a továbbiakban?

– Az Artemisz Könyveket, a debreceni Csokonai Kiadó sorozatát egy általunk, a sorozatszerkesztők által – szerkesztőtársam, Nagy Beáta a budapesti Közgazdaságtudományi Egyetem szociológusa – érzett hiány hozta létre, azaz teret akartunk adni a magyar nyelvű feminista beszédmódnak, és ebben a Csokonai Kiadó vezetése tökéletes partnernek bizonyult. Ha röviden akarnék fogalmazni, illetve önmagamat idézni a sorozat minden kötetében megjelenő sorozatelőszóból, akkor azt mondanám, hogy „az Artemisz Könyvek sorozat a maga eszközeivel szeretne hozzájárulni ahhoz, hogy a magyar nyelvű közgondolkodásban is elterjedjen és minél általánosabbá váljon a társadalmi nemi szerepek kritikai vizsgálata".

Eddig fordításokat jelentettünk meg: tavaly karácsony előtt egyszerre a sorozat első négy kötetét (Naomi Wolf: *A szépségmítosz*; Madonna Kolbenschlag: *Búcsúcsók Csipkerózsikának*; Elisabeth Badinter: *A szerető anya*; Virginia Woolf: *Egy jó házból való angol úrilány. Önéletrajzi írások*). A továbbiakban nyitni szeretnénk a szintén a sorozatelőszóban megfogalmazott irányokba, azaz olyan tudományos, esszéisztikus vagy szépirodalmi műveknek, monográfiáknak vagy tanulmányköteteknek, magyar nyelven írott könyveknek vagy fordításoknak akarunk helyet adni, amelyekben egyértelműen jelen van a nemi szerepek társadalmi meghatározottságának s ezáltal megváltoztathatóságának tudata, s amelyek megkérdőjelezik e kulturális beidegződéseket, és esetleg alternatívát kínálnak velük szemben. Ennek szellemében terveink között szerepel egy magyar nőmozgalom-történeti könyv kiadása, Alina Reyes fiatal kortárs francia írónő egy regényének és esszéinek, valamint Angela Carter egy regényének megjelentetése, tovább szeretnénk folytatni Woolf eddig magyarul nem létező műveinek fordítását, feminista témájú, magyar vonatkozású cikkgyűjteményeket tervezünk – de mindez igen nagy részben, mint a magyar könyvkiadás egészében is, a megszerezhető támogatások kérdése lesz.

A sorozatnak mindenesetre jó a fogadtatása mind a kritikusok, mind az olvasók körében, nem érkezett tehát légüres térbe. Persze itt azt is meg kell említenem, hogy nem áll egyedül, hisz egyrészt bizonyos kiadók egy-egy ilyen szemléletű könyvet eddig is megjelentettek, másrészt sorozatként sem áll egyedül az Artemisz Könyvek, hisz létezik a Balassi Kiadó Feminizmus és Történelem sorozata (most jelent meg Rosalind Miles: *Az idő leányai* című könyve), illetve a Kijárat Kiadó Léda Könyvek sorozatában szintén most került az olvasók kezébe Bagota Ágota: *Melegágy* című könyve is. És talán mindez hozzá fog járulni

ahhoz, hogy a feminista/gender szempontú beszédmód egyre inkább része legyen életünknek és gondolkodásunknak.

– Hogyan írnád körül, definiálnád a feminista/„gender" típusú megközelítést, miben hoz ez újat a társadalomról, kultúráról, irodalomról való teoretikus/kritikai gondolkodásban?

– Valószínűleg jelen pillanatban ez az egyik legnehezebb kérdés, hiszen feminizmus mint homogén egész már régen nem létezik, s ha általában akarnám megfogalmazni, mit jelent a feminista/„gender" típusú megközelítés, csak annyit mondhatnék, hogy ez a szemléletmód elsősorban a társadalmi nem – a „gender" – fogalmát, létrejöttét, konstrukcióját vizsgálja kritikai szemszögből. Az én értelmezésemben tehát nem mosandó össze a biológiai nem és a szexualitás vizsgálatával – még ha vannak is kapcsolódási pontok. Ami a kritikai szemléletmódot illeti: hangsúlyozni kell, hogy a történelmi korokban patriarchális társadalomszerkezet dominált, melyben élesen elkülönült társadalmi szerepeket játszottak a nők és a férfiak, és a feminista/„gender" szemléletek felfogása szerint ezek a szerepek hierarchikus, alá-fölérendeltségi viszonyban álltak-állnak egymással. A kritikai vizsgálat tehát arra terjed ki (és ezért feminista eredetű a társadalmi nemfogalmak kritikai vizsgálata, a „gender studies"), hogy miképpen kódolódnak kultúránk legszélesebb és legszűkebb értelemben vett szövegeibe és diskurzusaiba akár látható, akár láthatatlan módon ezek a szerepek. Emögött pedig ott bujkál az a nem titkolt előfeltevés, hogy a „természetesnek" elfogadott társadalmi szerepek egyáltalán nem biztos, hogy természetesek, azaz nem biztos, hogy a biológiai nemek és a társadalmi nemi szerepek között olyan egyértelmű megfelelések vannak, mint ahogy azt egy hagyományosabb gondolati rendszer tételezi. S mivel a társadalmi nemi szerepek áthatják egész gondolkodásunkat, kultúránkat, intézményrendszerünket, természetes, hogy beszélhetünk feminista/„gender" szemléletű szociológiáról, jogtudományról, történet- és irodalomtudományról, de még természettudományokról is – a sort végtelenségig lehetne folytatni.

Ami közelebbi területemet, az irodalmat illeti, a fentiekből következik, hogy egyrészt az irodalomszemléletre is hatnak az egyéb tudományterületeken elért eredmények, hiszen az irodalom felfogható a társadalmi diskurzusrendszer egyik elemének, amely nehezen választható el a többi diskurzustól. Másrészt pedig a feminista irodalomtudományt nem szabad kivonni a kortárs elméleti viták közegéből, hiszen a nyugati – elsősorban angolszász és francia – kultúrákban a feminimus/gender studies jelenlegi állapota egy több mint három évtizedes és igen intenzív elméleti vitákkal átszőtt folyamat eredménye. Igazából feminizmusokról beszélhetünk tehát, s ezeknek a hátterében megtalálhatók mindazok a szellemi áramlatok, amelyek hatással voltak általában a társadalomról, kultúráról, irodalomról való elméleti gondolkodásra az elmúlt három évtizedben, azaz a feminizmus egyes változatai összekapcsolódhatnak – hogy csak példákat említsek – a pszichoanalízistől az új marxizmuson, az új historizmuson, a posztkoloniális és diskurzuselméleteken keresztül a dekonstrukcióig mindennel. És mindezeken túl persze a feminizmusnak van egy egyáltalán nem elhanyagolható gyakorlati oldala is – ehhez tartoznak például a krízis-

helyzetbe került nőket segítő civil szerveződések, melyek szintén új társadalmi jelenségként foghatók fel.

– A Toril Moi által azonosított nézőpontok (Toril Moi: „Feminista irodalomkritika." In: Ann Jefferson–David Robey (szerk.): *Bevezetés a modern irodalomelméletbe*. Osiris Kiadó. Bp., 1999. 233–253.) – feminizmus mint politikai álláspont, illetve meglévő kritikai módszerek átpolitizálása, tipikusan női élmények áramoltatása, harmadikként pedig a femininitás mint marginalizált beszédpozíció kutatása (egyetértesz-e ezekkel? Ha nem, miért nem?) – közül melyek (illetve milyen egyéb irányok) örvendenek nagyobb népszerűségnek? Mit tartasz te fontosnak?

– Mint az elején említettem, a feminizmus, de ezen belül a feminista irodalomelmélet és -kritika sem egységes, hiszen a kritikusok beszédpozíciója igen eltérő lehet. Nyilvánvaló, hogy az egésznek a hátterében ott munkál egy tágan értelmezett és szinte semmiből sem kiiktatható politikum, mely talán az egyik feminista szlogennel illusztrálható legjobban: „the personal is political", azaz minden, ami személyes, egyúttal politikum is. A feminizmus politikumát sokkal tágabban kell értelmezni, mint ahogy általában mi értelmezzük ezt a szót – főleg azokkal a szocializmus alatt kialakult reflexekkel, melyek a politikum ellenében a magánszféra (és mellesleg az esztétikai szféra) különállását és autonómiáját próbálták megőrizni. Nem lehet tehát eltekinteni a politikumtól feminista szemlélet esetében, azonban ennek a mikéntje, mint a fenti osztályozás is sejteti, változott a közvetlenül politikai és kifejezetten marxista ihletésű – pl. az elnyomás fogalmával operáló – feminista olvasatok óta (ez leginkább a hetvenes évek elején volt jellemző). Ezek egy része sajnos nem sokkal lép túl azon, amit – a vulgármarxizmus analógiájára – vulgárfeminista jelzővel lehetne illetni.

Sokkal érdekesebbnek és irodalomtudományi szempontból értékesebbnek tűnnek számomra azok a megközelítések, melyek úgy adnak szövegközeli olvasatokat, hogy a feminista kritikai pozíció a maga hasznára fordítja a fent említett kortárs irodalomelméleti irányzatokat is. Egyrészt a patriarchális kultúra kanonizált szövegeinek újraolvasásáról van szó, ez a feminista irodalomtudomány egyik fő iránya. A feminista irodalomkritika legnagyobb része mégis írónők műveit elemzi; ennek többek között az is az oka, hogy általános meggyőződés szerint a meglévő kánonok létrejöttében elsősorban olyan kritikai mércék játszottak szerepet, melyek eleve kizárták a nők által írott szövegek igen nagy részét. Az „elveszett" (az irodalomtörténetből kiesett) írások és életművek újraértékelése tehát fontos – ha úgy tetszik, irodalompolitikai – feladat. Ezen túl kétségtelenül létezik egy olyan irányvonal, elméleti és kritikai megközelítés is, mely alapvetően a lacani pszichoanalízisből kiindulva a nőiesség textualitását vizsgálja: ez a „francia" feminizmus jellemzője – de a francián nem feltétlenül mindegyik francia feministát kell érteni, s nem is csak a franciákat, hanem a főként Cixous és Irigaray által képviselt pozíciót. Szerintük létezik egy jellegzetesen női beszédmód, mely a nyelvben/kultúrában elfoglalt marginalizáltságból ered, mely a női testből fakad, s ennek a kultúra margójáról szóló beszédmódnak szubverzív hatása van.

És hogy még tovább lépjek, és Julia Kristeva kategorizálásához forduljak (Julia Kristeva: „A nők ideje." Ford. Farkas Anikó, Kis Attila Atilla, Kovács Sándor s.k., Odorics Ferenc (szerk.) *Testes könyv* II Ictus és JATE Irodalomelméleti Csoport, Szeged 1997. 327–356; más fordításban: „A nők kora". Ford. Huller Ervin. Csabai Márta, Erős Ferenc (szerk.): *Freud titokzatos tárgya: Pszichoanalízis és női szexualitás. Válogatott tanulmányok*. Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1997. 237–255.): ő harmadik módként és lehetőségként a poszt-strukturalista szubjektumelméletekhez kapcsolódó „gender"-szempontú megközelítéseket említi, melyekben teljesen megszűnik az esszencializmus, azaz a társadalmi nemfogalmak és a biológiai nemek egyrészt különválnak, másrészt pedig ezek a fogalmak olyan jelölővé válnak, melyekről kiderül, hogy jelentésük és jelöltjük korántsem olyan fix és adott, mint ahogy azt feltételeztük.

Mindez igen érdekes olvasatokra ad lehetőséget – és nem is igen tudnám megmondani, hogy a felsorolt megközelítések közül melyik a népszerűbb, vagy hogy én mit tartok fontosabbnak. Viszont úgy gondolom, olyan szemléletmódot tükröznek az ilyen szövegértelmezések, amelynek esetleg nemcsak az úgynevezett tudományos életben van hozadéka, hanem legközvetlenebb életünkben is, hiszen mindezek a kérdések egy más szinten mindennapi életünket is behálózzák.

– Hogyan látod Te a kérdés és a régió/magyar nyelvterület kapcsolatát? Hogyan vázolnád fel nagy vonalakban a feminizmus gondolatrendszerének magyarországi térhódítását? Meglátásom szerint a politikai feminizmus nem örvend nagy támogatottságnak a világnak eme keleti felén. A hagyományosabb társadalmi szervezettség lenne ennek az oka?

– Valószínűleg senkit nem lepek meg azzal a válasszal, hogy a feminizmus Magyarországon és sejtéseim, valamint személyes tapasztalataim szerint a határon túli magyar közösségekben, de akár az egész régióban sincs igazán kedvező helyzetben. Irodalmár lévén nem hiszem, hogy ennek okait igazán fel tudnám tárni, de érzésem szerint több dolognak is tulajdonítható.

Fontosnak tartom, hogy a feminizmus gyökerei olyan politikai-ideológiai rendszerekhez kapcsolódnak, melyek jelen pillanatban nem igazán preferáltak a világnak ebben a felében: egyrészt a liberalizmus eszmerendszeréhez, hiszen az első összefüggő politikai és programszerűen (proto)feminista esszét Mary Wollstonecraft (a Frankensteint író Mary Shelley anyja) éppen a francia forradalom emberi jogokat követelő gondolatainak hatására írta. Az angolszász világban – de Magyarországon is – a 19. században egyértelműen összekapcsolódtak a feministának nevezhető és a liberális gondolatok a női egyenjogúságért való küzdelemben (ami nemcsak a választójogra, hanem teljes jogi egyenlőségre, iskoláztatási esélyekre, munkavállalásra is kiterjedt), s nemcsak gyakorlati szinten, hanem olyan elméletírók műveiben is, mint például John Stuart Mill.

A feminizmus másik gyökere a múlt századi szocialista–marxista gondolatokra megy vissza, s ez sem könnyű örökség, hiszen ebben a régióban szinte minden ország megélte a nők kényszerű, felülről jövő „egyenjogúsítását", amely a legtöbb esetben a nők sokszoros

megterheltségéhez – hogy ne mondjam, kizsákmányolásához – vezetett. A munkahelyi műszakot követte az otthoni második műszak – mindez anélkül, hogy az otthoni nemi szerepek szinte a legcsekélyebb mértékben változtak volna, arról nem beszélve, hogy a volt szocialista országok jelentős részében egy idő után a férfiak nagy része kényszerűen másodállásokat vállalt. Így tehát nem lehet csodálni, hogy Magyarországon például a rendszerváltás utáni, konzervatív ideológiáktól sem mentes légkörben sok nő szinte felsóhajtott, amikor visszamehetett abba a hármas körbe, amelyet németül olyan jól hangzóan fogalmaztak meg a „női szféra" lényegeként: Kinder, Küche, Kirche, azaz gyerekek, konyha, templom.

Valószínűleg nem kedvez a feminizmus itteni térnyerésének az sem, hogy annak idején a hatvanas, hetvenes években a televízió és a sajtó olyan meggyőzőnek ható képeket közvetített a „nőiességükből kivetkőzött", tiltakozó megmozdulásokon, mondjuk a Fehér Ház felé vonuló polgárjogi harcosok, feministák tömegeiről – én magam is emlékszem ilyenekre kislánykoromból. A liberális és szocialista gyökereken túl tehát (pedig egyes politikusok számára nincs is a liberálbolsinál jobb szitokszó) véleményem szerint mélyen él a köztudatban a maszkulin és agresszív feminista képe is. Valószínűleg mindennek hatására alakult ki az, hogy néha a nők között talán még nagyobb az ellenérzés a feminizmussal szemben, mint a férfiak körében, és nagyon sokan, akik kifejezetten feministának tekinthető elveket hangoztatnak, sietnek kijelenteni, hogy ők nem feministák.

Nem könnyű tehát az örökség, viszont mindazok a társadalmi változások, melyek körülvesznek bennünket, amelyek életünk kereteivé válnak, csak megerősítik annak a szükségességét, hogy sokkal nagyobb figyelmet kellene fordítanunk a társadalmi nemi szerepek vizsgálatára, mert például, mint a jogászok nem győzik hangsúlyozni, egész jogrendszerünk – nem beszélve a joggyakorlatról és a mindennapi életben nagyon nagy mértékben jelen lévő szexizmusról – tele van teljesen nyilvánvaló és látens nemi diszkriminációval.

Mindezzel részben talán arra is válaszoltam, hogy az, amit magyarországi feminizmusnak lehet nevezni (még ha térhódításról nem mernék is beszélni), elsősorban a rendszerváltás után kezdte el hallatni a hangját, hiszen részben civil szerveződésekre kell gondolni, amikor erről beszélünk, részben pedig olyan elméleti és tudományos beszédmódra, amely nem volt nagyon preferált. Nem mintha most az lenne, de azért talán több olyan kutatóhely alakult ki, talán lezajlott egy generációváltás is az egyetemeken, vagy ha nem, akkor is egyre többen tisztában vannak azzal, hogy nem „pc", azaz politikailag nem korrekt szidni a feministákat, legalábbis nem külföldi konferenciákon, és talán az sem árt, ha a tanszékeken van mutatóban egy-egy feminista, annál is inkább, mert a hallgatók igen nagy százaléka nő, akiket nemcsak intellektuálisan, hanem érzelmileg is be lehet vonni – és ezáltal jobban motiválni – a gender studies szemléletű kurzusokba.

– Hogyan néz ki a helyzet a magyarországi felsőoktatási intézményekben? Vannak-e szakosodásra lehetőségek, hol, hogyan, van-e akadálya az ilyen jellegű órakínálatnak, hogyan fogadják a hallgatók? Jó lenne, ha be tudnál számolni személyes oktatási tapasztalatidról.

– Sajnos nem tudok erre átfogó és általános választ adni – két hónap múlva okosabb leszek, mert novemberben lesz épp egy ilyen témájú konferencia Budapesten *Nők az oktatásban* címmel. Én is nagyon kíváncsi vagyok, milyen irányba mozdult el az elmúlt években ez az ügy Magyarországon. Személyes ismeretségeim és a magyarországi e-mailes „gender studies" levelező lista alapján nyilvánvalónak tűnik, hogy nagyon nagy változások vannak ebből a szempontból, hiszen a felsőoktatásba belépő újabb generációkból sokakban megfogalmazódott annak az igénye, hogy saját szakterületükön feminista szempontú kutatásokat végezzenek, hogy ilyen típusú órákat tartsanak, s talán az egy évtizeddel előttihez képest kisebb akadályba ütköznek, ha terveiket meg akarják valósítani. Részben dilemmának számít, hogy vajon milyen módon célszerű lépni: interdiszciplináris „gender studies" központokat és szakokat létrehozni, vagy pedig arra törekedni, hogy minél több hagyományos szakterületek szerint felosztott tanszéken, kutatóhelyen váljon elfogadottá a feminista szemléletmód. Pontosabban nem is biztos, hogy ezt vagy-vagy kérdésként kell feltenni, hisz mindkettőnek megvan a maga létjogosultsága, csak éppen a hazai viszonyok között vetődhet fel a kérdés, hogy mi tűnik célravezetőbb megoldásnak.

Tudomásom szerint – és tényleg hangsúlyozom, hogy talán csak információhiányról van szó – „gender studies" mint szak elsődiplomás szinten még nincs Magyarországon: a Közép-Európa Egyetemen van ilyen tanszék, egyéves MA(magiszteri)-képzésben lehet részt venni. Ugyanakkor számos helyen vannak kollégák, akik szociológia, történelem, irodalom, jogtudományi stb. tanszékeken feminista szemlélettel oktatnak – hogy csak a nagyobb egyetemeket soroljam: Budapesten, Pécsen, Szegeden, Debrecenben, pontosabban ezen egyetemek bizonyos tanszékein.

Ami engem illet, én ebből a szempontból – a Debreceni Egyetem Angol-Amerikai Intézetének keretein belül – mindkét változattal próbálkozom, hisz egyrészt van egy bevezetés jellegű órám, amelyet interdiszciplinárisnak lehet mondani (a következő félévben indul távoktatási formában is olyanok számára, akiknek már van egy angol szakos főiskolai diplomájuk, s az egyetemi kiegészítő képzést végzik). Erre az alapozó tárgyra épülnek irodalomóráim, melyekben a feminizmus jól megfér a bizonyos korszakokat átfogó irodalmi szemináriumokkal (19. és 20. századi angol írónők), a műfajközpontú vizsgálódásokkal (a művészregénnyel vagy az önéletrajzzal), illetve bizonyos témák köré is rendeződhetnek a kurzusok (pl. a nők és az őrültség az irodalomban).

Az órák fogadtatására igazán nem panaszkodhatom sem az Intézet vezetése, sem a hallgatók részéről, hisz az Intézettől a lehető legtöbbet kaptam: szabad kezet az oktatásban és a kutatásban s a könyvbeszerzésekhez szükséges és az Intézet lehetőségeihez mért anyagi támogatást. A hallgatók pedig kifejezetten érdeklődnek ezek iránt a kurzusok iránt, mindig betelnek a szemináriumok, számtalan szakdolgozat készült már „gender" szempontból, s most már az ilyen szemléletű PhD-sok is végeznek. Van tehát érdeklődés, van utánpótlás.

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Attila Kiss

The Anatomy of Subversive Women in Early Modern English Tragedies

Women in early modern English tragedies are key participants in the networks of systematically foregrounded ambiguities. A liminal space in these plays stretches out between appearance and reality, life and death, containment and subversion, tragic and comic, symbolical and empirical, medieval and premodern, suggesting that the human condition often resists categorisation into these clear-cut binaries. The resulting ambivalence is representative of the all-pervasive uncertainty of the period. Revenge tragedy, the most popular and persistent genre of the English Renaissance, repeatedly posits female characters into situations where it is almost impossible to decide whether they have gained agency or, on the contrary, they have been even more firmly bound to the markers of their socially determined gendered subjectivity. Curiously, the agency they appear to assume often displays a specifically anatomical character: they indirectly influence the course of events through their severed, dissected, anatomized body parts. We find an early example of this already in the prototypical Renaissance revenge drama, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, where Bel-Imperia sets the chain of revenge in motion with a letter written in her own blood. By the time of the peak of the Stuart period, this thematisation of feminine agency and anatomy takes on extreme proportions. At a climactic point in Ford's '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*, a revenge tragedy that was one of the standard references for arguments about the decadence of English Renaissance drama after Shakespeare, the revenger Antonio enters the scene as an anatomist coming from an unfinished dissection, "with a heart upon his dagger." The heart is a real heart, but it is just a heart at this point. In response to the horrid sight, Vasques cries out: "What strange riddle is this?" The ambiguity of the question is representative of the complex epistemological crisis which framed the early modern age. Vasques aims his question, of course, at what might be the shocking result of some brutal butchery, but, at the same time, he is also interrogating an image that could be, and had always been, interpreted in the light of a multiplicity of iconographical, moral, religious traditions. One aspect of the riddle is the uncertainty of who the heart belonged to, but, on the other hand, the riddle immediately and conveniently offers itself to a number of solutions where the only difficulty is that of an exploding polysemy: it can be decoded as an emblem from the memento mori or the religio cordis tradition, it can be the symbol of affection and pleasure, but it can just as well stand for filial and spiritual bond, love and devotion, and we are still far from the end of the list. The hugely impactful stage effect of the scene, itself probably arranged as an emblematic stage tableau vivant, is ignited in the moment of the demetaphorisation of the heart: Antonio announces that the object is the heart of his beloved wife Annabella, he ploughed up "her fruitful womb" and, together with her heart, he also plucked out their unborn son. At this moment, the bleeding heart could still be interpreted as a symbolical representation of the triumph of love and the victory of Annabella in the

aftermath of a star-crossed love affair, except that, in the blink of an eye, the heart, which is loaded with an arsenal of meanings for an audience with a panmetaphoric semiotic disposition, is transformed from a polysemous emblem to crude materiality, a chunk of flesh, just a piece of offal, as Michel Neill would put it (Neill 36). What interpretive matrix, which critical orientation or theoretical paradigm could unravel the complexity of this scene which focalises the heart of a woman as a triumphant emblem in a blood-soaked revenge scenario? What are the chances of a feminist methodology in the understanding of early modern revenge tragedies?

The demetaphorisation of iconographic elements is a persistently recurring representational technique on the early modern emblematic stage, it problematises the contrariety or ambiguity of the age which is the result of two simultaneously present, competing epistemologies, and it connects two of the most popular contemporary arenas of public spectacle: the anatomical theatre and the public theatre. As Duke Pesta argues:

> In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the tensions between competing epistemologies, between the long-standing metaphysical tradition of the memento mori and the emerging empirical and scientific discoveries of the anatomy theatres were reflected not only in the architecture and iconography of the anatomy theatres, but also in the graveyard theatres of anatomy in plays like *Hoffman* and *Hamlet*. (37)

In order for us to really make sense of this anatomical investment in the early modern English revenge tragedies that, for a long time, were stuck on the margins of the canon, Renaissance scholarship had to cover an itinerary launched by the new historicist interest in material practices, leading up to the current forms of transdisciplinary research into the political, medical, religious and economic background of English Renaissance drama. All these interpretive orientations share a methodology which explores the dramatic canon in the light of the representational logic and the everyday material practices of the contemporary theatre. At the same time, they also see these practices embedded in the cultural semantics of the age, where the theatrical institution was functioning in the larger context of technological innovations and experiments, as well as the rites, procedures, and social customs that were being rewritten by the contemporary epistemological and thanatological crisis. Adrian Streete argues that this early modern theatre functioned as a laboratory where new ideas about identity and subjectivity could be experimented with. "As the space where discourses of nascent secularity jostle with those still powerful sacred narratives and ideas, the theatre is a veritable crucible where dominant and emergent forms of subjectivity are tested" (26, 29). Research has been ongoing into the technology that expanded the boundaries of cognition, the Protestant theology that reformulated the fundamentals of semiotics, the gender antagonisms that emerged during the formation of the early modern subjectivity, and the power antagonisms of the Anglican Church which balanced between conflicting religious currents. Feminist and gender

criticism made significant contributions to this line of interdisciplinary research, although initially this critical perspective was not devoid of limitations and blind spots.

When Lisa Jardine published her highly influential and critical monograph on the feminist readings of English Renaissance drama, she argued that it was inevitable for this critical orientation to tackle, before any other author or historical period, "that most patriarchal body of texts, the works of William Shakespeare" (1). Her intention was to expand the scope of feminist Shakespeare criticism beyond the then dominant two lines of research: the critique of the "out-and-out sexist attitudes" of Shakespeare, and the idealisation and idolisation of his all-encompassing vision of the human experience. This was more than three decades ago, and since then, inspired (or provoked) by several new directionalities like the corporeal, the pictorial, the affective, and the intersectional turn, and emerging new paradigms like the new historicism, cultural materialism, critical race theory, ecofeminism and animal studies, Renaissance scholarship has certainly proliferated into diverse directions which all bear relevance for feminist practice. A sketchy list, very far from being comprehensive, will include the study of the material conditions of everyday life in the light of commercial, political, religious antagonisms (Greenblatt), the intersection of new forms of subjectivity and interiority with moral and political ideas (Maus), cultural representations of competing world models (Sawday, Engines), early medical and anatomical understandings of the human body (Sawday, The Body; Marshall; Nunn), the intersectionality of gender, race, and class (Novy; Hall; Parker; MacDonald), the circulation of desire and the formation of sexual practices (Traub), women's silence as a form of subversion or resistance (Luckyj), femininity and abjection (Zimmermann), and the relation of women to the environment, animals, and the household (Laroche and Munroe). If there is one lesson scholars of early modern English drama can draw from this development, it is that any study of the representation of gender or the constitution of female subjectivities in Renaissance texts must resist generalisations. Women characters are representations of the intersection of a multitude of cultural discourses in early modern England, and their assertion of female agency often testifies to an understanding of singular individuality which resists the conventional and ideologically determined cultural categorisation and containment. In what follows, I will scrutinise female characters who are represented as liminal, ambiguous, in-between agents in English Renaissance revenge tragedies.

If we survey the most well-known plays from the Stuart period of English literature, we encounter several dramas which literary history has repeatedly cited for epitomising the extreme tendencies that became the trademark of the 'decadence' of Jacobean and Caroline tragedy. The critical discourse about the decline and the later decadence of English Renaissance drama after Shakespeare was initiated already by Dryden, and, during the formation and solidification of the Shakespearean canon and the cult of the bard, was repeatedly reasserted by critics throughout the centuries (from Dryden and Thomas Rymer in 1668 and 1667–78 respectively, through Rupert Brooke in 1916 to William Archer in 1923). Fredson Bowers's monograph on the history of English revenge

tragedies allows for significant development in the plays of dramatists following Shakespeare, but he also posits authoritatively that the decades before the closing of the theatres in 1642 witness the gradual disintegration and final decadence of the genre (Bowers 218). Renaissance scholarship had to wait until the postsemiotically informed theories of the poststructuralist orientations to make sense of the seemingly bizarre and excessive representations in these plays. New interpretive trends after the postsemiotic and corporeal turn of the 1980s revealed that, when viewed in the context of contemporary intellectual, religious, scientific, and philosophical developments, these extremities appear to arise from the collision between the inherited emblematic representational traditions, coming down to the time of the Renaissance from the Middle Ages, and the new, early modern modes of interrogating a universe that started to display hitherto unknown or uncharted characteristics. These dramatic excesses become fully intelligible when interpreted as responses to the uncertainties surrounding the formation of early modern subjectivity and the period's epistemological crisis. Seen in its contemporary socio-political context, one of the most radical extremities of Stuart tragedy is the representation of subversive women in ambiguous, liminal positions. Female characters assert their individual identities, gender agency and sexual autonomy in ways that unsettle the logic of the patriarchal establishment and undermine cultural and political essentials that had been thought to be unquestionable and metaphysically motivated. The independence of the female subject is a threatening possibility which is suggested but always necessarily contained and suppressed, voiced but finally muted. Nevertheless, the foregrounding of this latent uncontrollable element in the social fabric in itself turns these plays into critical commentaries on the status quo, and the female body becomes the site upon which competing ideologies of control and freedom are inscribed.

As has been mentioned, one peculiar aspect of the ambiguity of the female body is that, in many of the revenge plays, women characters appear to gain agency through their body parts, although these corporeal constituents are subjected to extreme forms of violence. In what follows, I examine a representative selection of such instances to show how the persistent anatomical interest of early modern English revenge tragedy simultaneously shatters and elevates the body of independent, nonconformist, or subversive women. My first example comes from Shakespeare's earliest and long-debated tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* (1594), a play which provoked tens of authors to prove that it could not have been written by "the bard." Yet, after the corporeal turn and the new postmodern anatomical interest, this early tragedy has been in the focus of much critical and theatrical attention.[1]

As Michael Hattaway notes, in *Titus Andronicus* "Shakespeare was seeing what happens when a thing, a human hand, for example, is thrust repeatedly before the audience's consciousness. The word occurs forty-six times in the play, and as if that were not enough,

[1] The analyses that follow below are expanded versions of Kiss, "Kísérletek," and interpretive chapters in Kiss, *Kettős anatómia*.

a hand, Titus' severed hand, is carried off by the handless Lavinia who holds it between her teeth" (188). Let me briefly examine here this complex and climactic scene (3.1) where the hand is foregrounded within the systematically organised imagery of the play, because, even if it is the hand of the patriarch that replaces the tongue of the woman, the scene will grant Lavinia extraordinary agency. The composition of the stage at the end of the scene produces a tableau with Titus' daughter in the centre.

> And, Lavinia, thou shalt be employed in this;
> Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth.
> (Titus, 3.1.280–81)[2]

Lavinia's "involvement" is presented to us by a puzzling stage image, for the interpretation of which we need the codes of the emblematic stage. The daughter takes the severed hand of the father, the centre of the patriarchal order, into her empty, tongueless mouth. In the upside-down universe of the drama, the symbol of power and patriarchal command, the paternal hand thus fills a specific gap: it takes the place of a woman's discourse, of feminine language. Recent performance-centred interpretations see the scene as a concentrated tableau vivant of confusion (Fawcett), a magnified emblem of chaos (Green), or Lavinia's second rape (Smith). The grotesque scene poses a great challenge to modern directors and actors and is often staged in a modified setting. As Erika T. Lin points out, even editors of modern editions sometimes try to tone down the gruesome, abject spectacle by omitting any reference to Lavinia's teeth or mouth, even though both the First Folio and all quarto editions make it clear that the mutilated Lavinia takes out her father's hand between her teeth (137). It is true that Lavinia would be able to take her father's hand away even if it was squeezed between the stumps of her mutilated hands, but Shakespeare chooses a much more powerful and radical solution. I intend to show that the apparently grotesque or extremely morbid scene is in fact the culmination of the emblematic meaning structure of the entire play.

The emblematic scene, with the mutilated Lavinia and the severed hand of her father inserted in her mouth, can be translated as a representation of how absence meets absence – Lavinia lacks her tongue, Titus lacks his hand, the two absences meet to produce a new discourse. When we apply a corporeally informed semiotic approach, we realise that it is not enough to establish an interpretation of the scene which argues that Lavinia is given a new language, since this reading would only focus on the patriarchal emblem of power, the hand asserting its position for a second time in the avalanche of violence. Shakespeare forms the semiotics of absence with a more complicated logic, and on this basis the scene can also gain a feminist interpretation. Lavinia becomes the source of the new language that is becoming necessary in the cosmic chaos of the play, her body serving as a map for Titus to navigate ("Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs", 3.2.12), to find his "cave of revenge" (2.1.270), his motivational energies, and to succeed in his war plan. To

[2] References to the play are from William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972).

do this, he must change, he must learn a new alphabet, he must give up his previously proud paternal, military, political framework of thought, otherwise he cannot outdo Tamora's skills. So, the scene is not about paternal rape, it's more about Lavinia, the woman, starting to talk. The paternal power, through the emblem of military communication, speaks through a symbolic prosthesis, but it speaks a new language. A language that can compete with the invading Tamora, one that feeds on the body and that brings to the surface hidden, suppressed, ignored layers of writing, speaking, notation.

The difficulty of the scene is well demonstrated by the fact that, since the beginning of the "postmodern renaissance" of the tragedy, almost none of the productions ventured to explicitly show Lavinia with her father's hand in her mouth, since they did not make an attempt to deal with the complexity of this scene, a complexity which results from its textual, thematic embeddedness. The image of the hand as a central symbol had already been introduced earlier in the tragedy with Titus' "victorious hands" (I.1.163), followed by Lavinia's hands severed by Tamora's sons, and then Titus' hand cut off by Aaron, just to mention the most important instances of the human hand being in the centre of attention on the stage. The extreme mutilations performed on the human hand have always posed an almost unsurpassable challenge to directors who either used the strategy of stylisation to cope with the brutality of the scenes, or they mixed abjection with parody to foreground the grotesque heterogeneity of the tragedy. One of the most spectacular examples of stylisation was the performance at the 1988 Colorado Shakespeare Festival, directed by Joel G. Fink, in which Chiron and Demetrius pulled extremely long, blood-red silk ribbons from the sleeves of Lavinia's gown and spread them around her in such a way that Lavinia ended up looking like "a giant wounded butterfly, with wings of 'blood' covering the stage" (Fink 462). A good example of the mixture of the "reality effect" and its simultaneous parody was William Freimuth's 1986 staging with the Source Theater Company in Washington D.C., in which at the beginning of the performance a cleaning lady distributed plastic bags and baby feeding bibs to the audience sitting close to the stage, while the deafening noise of sawing heard from the background was intended to convey that the limbs of Alarbus were being cut off for the sacrificial fire.

I cannot here dwell at greater length on how various adaptation techniques can facilitate our imaginative reconstruction of what may have taken place on Shakespeare's stage. The important point to note is that the hand which replaces the tongue in Lavinia's mouth gives her new agency. If we follow the methodology of performance-oriented semiotic approaches and carefully imagine every detail of the scene on stage with a Lavinia who has gained agency rather than being even more repressed, the visual tableau will reveal that Lavinia at this point becomes eerily similar to a signpost. She has not only become a map, she has not just provided her father with a new alphabet, she is now also pointing out the direction in which Titus should proceed to bring his revenge plan to realisation. The signpost or fingerpost, a pointing device for the indication of directions, became widespread by the seventeenth century in England, when roads between settlements were

maintained by local parishes, and legislation introduced the requirement for markers to be erected at road junctions.

No solid evidence exists to prove the presence of fingerposts in Shakespeare's England, but even if we cannot link Lavinia's appearance to the shape and function of early modern signposts, we can certainly establish that connection between her and the sign in which the fingerpost has its historical origin: the manicule. The "pointing hand" was originally used as an eye-catching sign at the margins of codices and served to draw the reader's attention to particularly important passages. After the spread of printing, English printers called it a pointing fist: it is called the indicationum or index in the history of typography.[3]

Today, every computer user encounters this symbol countless times a day since it is the Windows icon for the Internet link: ☛ / 👆 / ☞. The stage tableau "Lavinia as manicule" must have carried a complex meaning on the emblematic stage, embedded as a climactic moment in the progress of the systematic imagery of hands in the play. Not only could it point out that we have reached a particularly important moment in the drama, but it also transformed Lavinia herself into a kind of signpost: a fingerpost which indicated the way for the protagonists out of the network of revenges in the tragedy. In this way, the mutilated daughter, the subordinated woman is positioned in a strangely ambiguous situation: in spite of having been brutally reduced to the zero point of existence and signification, Lavinia still emerges as the one who gives direction to the events and indirectly holds control of the action.

I will now move on to another representative example of the line of revenge tragedies where the seemingly passive and suppressed female character becomes curiously active and influential again. Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606), written shortly after the turn of the century, represents the culmination and synthesis of this tradition. In many ways, it bears the imprint of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the other great revenge tragedy of the period. Middleton's play overflows with shocking scenes of violence, but it is far more than mere horror drama. He compresses into this single work all the essential features of the revenge tragedy, with the exception of the Senecan ghost – an obligatory feature in first-generation revenge plays that authors gradually abandoned during the Jacobean period. Middleton also experiments with parody and burlesque, adopting a cynical tone to push the genre's limits. Vindice, the protagonist, appears at the beginning of the play as a Prologue figure, adopting the persona of the Vice from medieval morality plays

[3] "The printer's symbol ☞. This type ornament has a long history, the printed outline of a hand being used as a paragraph mark by, among other early printers, Huss at Lyons in 1484 in the edition of Paulus Florentinus's 'Breviarum totius juris canonici' he printed with Johannes Schabeler. As with other typographic conventions this was taken from scribal practice, carefully drawn hands pointing to a new paragraph being found in early 12th century (Spanish) manuscripts. It is also known as a fist, hand, or index." (Glaister141) For the history of the manicule, see also Sherman 25–52.

and employing the Renaissance convention of direct audience address. In a distinctly metatheatrical moment, he introduces the characters of the drama – his drama, the tragedy he is about to "stage" himself. The setting is a thoroughly corrupt Italian court – then a common surrogate in early modern English drama for indirect criticism of domestic political and diplomatic conditions, which censorship otherwise forbade. The lascivious Duke, who poisoned Vindice's betrothed Gloriana nine years earlier after failing to seduce her, parades before us like a puppet. The entire court follows. Midway through the Prologue, we receive a shocking revelation: the skull Vindice holds in his hand is not merely the expected memento mori prop, the didactic emblem traditionally used to moralise death, but the actual skull of his murdered beloved, Gloriana. Vindice has returned to court to exact revenge. In becoming the perfect earthly embodiment of the allegorical figure of Revenge he earlier invoked, Vindice devises ever more elaborate plots. One of these involves dressing Gloriana's skull as a young bride, smearing poison on its mouth, and having the skull "enact" the revenge. In one pivotal scene, Vindice – in the role of a bawd – leads the lustful Duke to what he believes will be a secret sexual encounter. In complete darkness, the Duke embraces the disguised skull and, kissing it passionately, poisons himself. Thus, it is not Vindice, but Gloriana – through her skull which now takes on strange but gruesomely efficient agency – that takes vengeance.

Extreme scenes like the opening of *The Revenger's Tragedy* can be read as attempts to escape the web of the inherited medieval symbolic tradition: until the midpoint of Vindice's Prologue, the skull functions as the conventional, almost boring memento mori emblem. Then, in a single shocking gesture, Middleton strips it of symbolic abstraction and presents it as raw material reality – Gloriana's actual skull. A similar effect of demetaphorisation occurs in Hamlet, when the prince comes to the shocking realisation that the skull he is contemplating in his hand is not just any skull but the remains of Yorick, the beloved jester of his childhood. A central concern in Stuart drama, then, is whether it is possible to break free from the weight of inherited traditions. This question also carries political and subversive potential. In a time when official church doctrine no longer allowed engagement with spirits, Purgatory, or the Eucharistic miracle of transubstantiation, the theatre became – at least in England – the refuge for such social anxieties and spiritual themes. From *The Spanish Tragedy* through Hamlet and *The Revenger's Tragedy* to *The Duchess of Malfi*, revenge tragedy provided a particularly potent form through which to stage these concerns. As Margaret Owens argues, "what is being mourned in revenge tragedy is mourning itself" (212): the genre is a dramatisation of the earlier Catholic rites of collective and individual grief that the Reformation discontinued, and it involves audiences into acts of cultural memory that helped process the increasingly suppressed and traumatised themes of death and loss in Reformation England. The heightened attention to the body and its internal structures was partly the result of a growing anatomical interest during the period – yet another response to the omnipresent epistemological uncertainty. Public dissections and anatomical theatres became widespread in Europe and soon reached England, where physicians and barber-surgeons competed for the corpses of executed criminals. Playwrights exploited the similarities between the public theatre

and the anatomical theatre (Nunn 2, 4), often staging scenes that reflected an intense desire to dissect reality, to penetrate beneath appearances in search of truth.

This quest for the truth of the human body and subjectivity characterises the next play I am to examine, John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612–13), another famous and infamous Jacobean tragedy, which still draws from the tradition of the revenge tragedy while simultaneously diverging from it. Though most of its principal characters belong to a ducal family, the play marks a significant shift toward what is known as domestic tragedy – a genre that moves away from the grand historical, courtly, or political settings, instead offering insight into the internal microcosm of familial relationships. Moreover, it broadens its focus beyond the aristocracy to include ordinary people and the fates of those from lower social strata. Another crucial achievement of Webster's tragedies lies in the exceptional autonomy and psychological depth he grants to his female protagonists – far surpassing both his predecessors and most of his contemporaries. Like Vittoria in Webster's *The White Devil* (1611–12), the Duchess of Malfi appears as a sovereign individual, endowed with her own agency and will, thus anticipating the increasing independence afforded to female characters in Caroline drama.

However, *The Duchess of Malfi* also confronts us with a paradox from the outset, embedded in the protagonist's very name. The young widow, striving to escape the strictures of a patriarchal society and feudal traditions, seeks to assert her own will and take control of her destiny. She falls in love and freely chooses to remarry Antonio, her steward – a man of lower social standing. They have children together, and despite mounting threats, she resolutely defends her choices. Yet we never learn her actual name; she is referred to only as the Duchess of Malfi throughout the play. This paradox, gradually deepening, encapsulates the drama's central philosophical dilemma and reveals the Duchess's true tragedy: no matter how fiercely she strives for autonomy, she cannot fully disentangle herself from the social constraints symbolised by her title.

Regardless of her efforts to free herself from her two brothers – the power-obsessed Cardinal and the incestuous, increasingly deranged Ferdinand – her actions threaten the male-dominated political status quo and so must be suppressed. The dramatic paradox culminates in the realisation, at the moment of her death, that the title "Duchess of Malfi" ultimately holds no intrinsic meaning. It guarantees neither personal identity nor fulfilment, serving only as a metaphysical label derived from collective social consensus. Before she is strangled by the executioners hired by her brothers, she is visited by the arch-villain of the play, Bosola – disguised as an old man – who announces with grim irony that he has come to carve her tomb. The Duchess, bewildered, confronts him with questions in an attempt to assert her identity. But in this moment, the name has already lost its significance, a fact Bosola articulates in language drawn from the vanitas tradition:

> DUCHESS Who am I?
> BOSOLA Thou art a box of worm-seed, at best but a salvatory of green mummy. What's this flesh? A little cruded milk, fantastical puff-paste. Our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in. [...]
> DUCHESS Am not I thy Duchess?
> BOSOLA Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on thy forehead (clad in gray hairs) twenty years sooner than on a merry milk-maid's. [...]
> DUCHESS I am Duchess of Malfi still.
> BOSOLA That makes thy sleep so broken. Glories, like glowworms afar off shine bright, But look'd to near, have neither heat nor light. (4.2.125–47)

Webster's tragedy aligns with other great early modern dramas that interrogate the philosophical, political, and artistic dimensions of emerging subjectivity: who is a person when stripped of socially imposed roles, titles, and traditions? How much truth is there in the assertion, made on the threshold of death, "I am Duchess of Malfi still"? The term "duchess" proves to be a social signifier whose validity persists only so long as the structures of power support it. Once the individual exits this metaphysical field, she is reduced to a vulnerable, bare human being – a mere mixture of flesh and blood. Yet, this scene also draws attention to another possibility: perhaps it is not in ceremony, authority, rank or title where we should seek the innermost core of our identity, but self-determination and integrity, virtues that only the Duchess excels in. Facing death with extraordinary calmness and self-assurance, the Duchess of Malfi is transformed by Webster into an emblem of sovereignty, which, at the same time, is a curiously subversive element in the social fabric, threating to undermine the feudal and patriarchal rule in a truly new, original way of inner, female, individual aspiration.

In the final scene, after realising the irremediable corruption of the court and world and killing both the Cardinal and Ferdinand, Bosola himself receives a fatal wound and bids the world farewell:

> BOSOLA O, I am gone! –We are only like dead walls, or vaulted graves,
> That ruin'd, yields no echo. (5.5.96–98)

His words cast the entire tragedy in a veil of bitter irony. Not long before, he had offered to carve the Duchess's tomb; now he identifies both himself and humanity with cold, silent grave-markers – an image central to the visual and symbolic world of the play. This association supports the critical view that *The Duchess of Malfi* in fact has two protagonists. One is the Duchess, who, implicitly aware of her impending doom, gradually transforms herself into her own tomb, echoing the ars moriendi tradition and facing her death with stoic pride and unique dignity – even as the noose tightens around her neck. The other is Bosola, a coarse, often brutal man forged in violence, yet ultimately capable of moral awakening. Too late, he realises the corruption of the ruling class, both secular and

ecclesiastical. Thus, the play carries a strong anti-authoritarian and socially critical undertone. However, for a long time, critics struggled to make sense of its bizarre and extreme stage tableaux. In one scene, Ferdinand punishes his sister's defiance by leading her into a pitch-black room, placing a severed, icy hand in hers, and then revealing what seems to be the mutilated corpses of Antonio and their children. Though the audience later learns these are wax figures, the shock of the scene casts a long shadow over the remainder of the drama.

Criticism long viewed such tableaux and extended death scenes – like the Duchess's drawn-out demise at Bosola's hands – as excessive. Yet protracted deaths were a staple of early modern tragedy. Not only do Shakespeare's Hamlet, Othello, and Desdemona die slowly and with many lines, but numerous other characters in the period do as well. The liminal moment between life and death was a central theme of the era, particularly as the Reformation transformed conceptions of dying. In *The White Devil*, the poisoned Duke Brachiano suffers an agonising, extended death; in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Duke meets a gruesome end; and in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, the Duke of Venice, Piero, has his tongue torn out, prompting the revenger Pandulpho to cry: "Let him die, die, and still be dying!" (5.5.76).

Scenes that might strike modern audiences as grotesque or melodramatic can only be understood within the broader thanatological context of the period – a cultural crisis surrounding death, dying, and mourning. Webster's wax figures, for instance, can be interpreted as resembling effigies on tombs, linking the scene with the Duchess's death and Bosola's final words. These elements form part of a coherent visual and thematic network centred on commemoration, a motif that pervades the entire tragedy and reflects the English Renaissance's evolving death culture in the wake of the Reformation – a phenomenon Michel Neill has termed the "early modern crisis of death" (Neill 15, 102).

Of course, it was not only attitudes toward death, the status of tombs, and patterns of social memory that were transformed during the Renaissance – society, politics, and science were all in motion. Early steps toward empirical, experimental science still coexisted with the spiritually charged analogical worldview of the past: sympathetic magic, alchemy, folk beliefs, and superstition. Scientific experimentation in these transitional dramas can thus be read both as harbingers of modern science and as remnants of a vanishing cosmology, and they must not be dismissed as mere superstition or "pseudo-science."

What might appear to today's readers as pseudoscientific manipulation likely represented, for early modern audiences, the repository of a mysterious and novel form of knowledge – the promise of this new epistemology is embodied in the book discovered by Beatrice in her husband Alsemero's chamber in *The Changeling* (1622), a tragedy co-authored by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley.

> BEATRICE Bless me! A right physician's closet 'tis,
> Set round with vials, every one her mark too.

> Sure he does practice physic for his own use,
> Which may be safely call'd your great man's wisdom.
> What manuscript lies here? The Book of Experiment, Call'd Secrets in Nature.
> (4.1.20–25)

This drama is not strictly speaking a revenge tragedy, but it perfectly fits in the line of tragedies that problematise the potential subversive agency of women. The heroine of the play I am going to address next is the daughter of the governor of Alicante. Beatrice is characterised as capricious, impassioned, and impulsively reckless. Though she is courted by the nobleman Alonso de Piraquo, her affections lie with Alsemero. Determined to remove her unwanted suitor, she overcomes her intense aversion to her disfigured servant, Deflores – whose face is marred by boils – and solicits him to commit murder on her behalf. Deflores, hopelessly infatuated with his mistress – or, more accurately, consumed by desire for her – accepts the commission without hesitation, asserting that he will name his price in due time. Beatrice, heedless of the implications, agrees to the arrangement.

Following Alonso's murder, Deflores presents Beatrice with the victim's severed finger and the ring as proof of the deed. In exchange, he demands Beatrice herself – the object of his obsessive desire – as compensation. Although she pleads for reprieve, Beatrice finds herself entrapped: Deflores blackmails her with threats of exposure should she refuse. He claims his "reward," and Beatrice is reduced to his concubine. From this point onward, the narrative traces their mutual descent into deception as they attempt to evade discovery. Beatrice weds Alsemero, but on their wedding night, she must resort to subterfuge, persuading her still-virginal maid to consummate the marriage in her stead, unbeknownst to her husband.

Beatrice, though physically beautiful, is contrasted with the grotesque Deflores; the primary characters of the main plot appear rational, whereas those in the subplot – set in a madhouse – are ostensibly insane. However, this dichotomy is ultimately destabilised. The narrative gradually reveals that Beatrice's internal moral corruption rivals, if not exceeds, Deflores's external deformity. Furthermore, the supposedly "sane" world of Alicante's court is shown to harbour greater madness and moral dissolution than the asylum. Rather than functioning as a distorted mirror, the madhouse serves as an accurate reflection of the psychological and ethical disarray that dominates the ruling elite. As Duffy (194) notes, the play's governing aesthetic operates through the "optics of madness."

The play thus engages in a sustained epistemological inquiry, interrogating the deceptiveness of surfaces and the inherent difficulty of apprehending the underlying truth. In this respect, *The Changeling* shares thematic affinities with other early modern tragedies. Yet it is distinguished by its intense preoccupation with the senses – particularly the sense of sight – and the unreliability of visual perception. From its opening lines, the play

foregrounds questions of sensorial mediation, returning repeatedly to the instability of vision and the interpretive challenges posed by appearances. Deception, role-playing, and strategic misrepresentation pervade the characters' interactions, embedding *The Changeling* firmly within the metatheatrical tradition of early modern drama.

The afflictions of the mind exhibited within the madhouse are ultimately eclipsed by the more insidious maladies of the soul: the degradation of conscience, the collapse of moral integrity, and the figurative disease that metastasises within individuals and manifests as a contagion in the social body. These pathologies culminate in potent images of infection, poison, and contamination. "Oh, come not near me, sir; I shall defile you" (5.3.181), Beatrice exclaims to her father upon her exposure. In the play's final scene, Deflores murders Beatrice and then takes his own life, declaring: "...now we are left in hell" (5.3.196). Further intensifying the apocalyptic imagery, Beatrice's father offers a summative reflection that encapsulates the play's moral universe: "We are all there; it circumscribes [us] here" (5.3.197). The text deliberately resists closure, leaving open multiple interpretive possibilities. Its refusal to articulate a definitive moral judgment likely rendered it provocatively transgressive for contemporary audiences. Does Beatrice act out of autonomous will, or is she the inescapable victim of structural and circumstantial determinism? Does she come to accept the monstrous yet loyal Deflores, or is her every physical encounter with him an act of revulsion? As a review of the 2017 production under the title *Maskarák* (Masquerade) at the Budaörsi Latinovits Theatre aptly summarises: "We cannot determine whether we are witnessing a pitiable, desperate victim destroyed by shame, or a deeply corrupted villain who discovers her true self in transgression" (Szemerédi).

Upon closer scrutiny, this question of the innermost, true self of the covetous and self-assured woman and her capacity to drive the members of the court closer to clear-sighted self-knowledge and self-examination becomes a complex problematic in the "madhouse optics" of the play. As has been mentioned, the entire drama is loaded with images of the senses and acts of sensation, but these image clusters converge around one peculiar thing, as if everything was spiralling down to the mysterious kernel of the play's cosmos, on several levels. Acts of seeing, touching, smelling, hearing are all aimed at finding out the secret of the castle of Alicante, the great Citadel. However, the secret of this great circular construction is nothing else but another "circular structure," Beatrice's much-desired secret: her genitals. A great number of wordplays in the quick reposts exchanged by Beatrice and Deflores are indirectly not only about sexual desire, passion or lust, but also intercourse itself. In early modern English bawdy, the word "hell" could also connote the female sexual organ, and in the light of this, the concluding sentences cast an ironical, almost cynical light upon the tragedy. When Deflores finally posits that they are now in "hell," and Beatrice's father intensifies this with yet another image of circularity, the contemporary audience must have received the meaning of the intended pun and realised that the all-devouring place that has consumed their world is not the underworld but Beatrice's uncontrollable sexuality, the innermost circle in the circular fortification of

Alicante. The imagery of the devouring female genital, much like the persistent vagina dentata imagery in Titus Andronicus, finally endows Beatrice with a threatening power which is tragic and ironic at the same time, since, in this reading of the events, she has become victorious over the entire company of men trying to protect, possess or harass her. However, her victory has commenced at the cost of her life and with the ultimate disintegration of her attempted sovereignty.

Insatiable and uncontrollable passion is also the central theme of the drama I am going to examine last. It is not due to reckless whim or thoughtless folly that Annabella – much like Beatrice in *The Changeling* – finds herself ensnared in an emotional and social trap. She is the female protagonist of one of the most provocative and controversial tragedies of the Caroline era: John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Most probably written in the latter half of the 1620s and first published in quarto format in 1633, the play again centres on the theme of desire, but this time desire is brought to the extreme: it is incestuous desire between siblings. Owing to its explicit portrayal of incest and its graphic staging of passion descending into violent sexual coercion, the play remained largely ignored by the literary canon in the centuries following its composition. It was omitted from the 1831 collected edition of Ford's plays, and editors often sought to mitigate the shock of the title by altering it. Only in the second half of the twentieth century did critics begin to re-evaluate the play as a powerful exploration of individual passion in conflict with social and religious injunctions, situated within the ideological contradictions of its time. As port.hu declared in promotion of the 2010 Magyar Színház production in Budapest, "The performance is as if Tarantino had rewritten *Romeo and Juliet*." The intersection of revenge tragedy and contemporary film has been the subject of much recent criticism (Matuska), but in this staging this intersection was anatomical and dissective. One critic described the central set piece–a large plexiglass table in the intimate space of the studio theatre–as a hybrid between an autopsy table and a Renaissance banqueting hall (Kovács).

The drama unfolds in the household of Florio, a Parman citizen, where Giovanni, newly returned from university in Bologna, falls in love with his sister, Annabella. Though Father Bonaventura attempts to dissuade him, Giovanni defies both religious doctrine and social mores, confessing his love to Annabella. With the assistance of her governess, Putana, the two young lovers arrange secret meetings and carry on their illicit relationship. Eventually, however, Annabella becomes betrothed to the nobleman Soranzo. When her pregnancy is revealed, the enraged Soranzo confines her to her room, and the narrative shifts into the mode of a revenge tragedy. Determined to uncover the identity of the man who has dishonoured him, Soranzo enlists the help of his loyal servant, Vasques, who extracts the truth from Putana and has her blinded for her complicity.

Annabella, now aware of the mortal danger facing her brother-lover, writes a warning to Giovanni in her own blood – a dramaturgical solution we already saw in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. But he, blinded by passion, disregards her message and attends Soranzo's birthday banquet. Recognising that fate has conspired against them and that they can never be

together in life, Giovanni sneaks into Annabella's room, stabs her during a kiss, and then dashes into the banqueting hall with her blood-dripping heart skewered on his dagger. Before the horrified guests, he declares his love for the now-deceased Annabella and brandishes her heart as a grotesque token. He then murders Soranzo before being slain himself by Vasques's hired thugs.

For a long time, literary historians regarded this blood-drenched final scene – with its image of a frenzied man parading the severed, steaming heart of his beloved – as a transgression of aesthetic and moral boundaries, an extreme outburst of Stuart drama's increasingly 'decadent' obsession with passion and violence. Yet upon closer examination of the play's imagery and recurring motifs, it becomes evident that *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* is structured by the same ambiguity and undecidability that characterise early modern revenge tragedy in general. Ford makes a bold theatrical attempt to render this ambivalence in its most dramatic form.

The final tableau may be interpreted as a moral allegory grounded in the Renaissance emblematic tradition – an image-laden declaration of moral themes such as the "grammar of the heart," sacrificial love, repentance, and spiritual renewal (Lara 171). It can also be decoded as an ironical celebration of love's victory – although it is the male avenger who stages the ostentation of the female lover's heart, similarly to how Vindice holds up Gloriana's skull in his prologue, we can still decipher the heart as an emblem of Annabella's triumph over the hostile and corrupt environment. But it also admits of more cynical or ironic readings (and stagings), in which the scene is stripped of transcendence: what remains is a lump of flesh, a butchered organ impaled on a dagger of vengeance, devoid of higher meaning (Neill 36). Passion, in this reading, is not to be located in the bodily humours of classical theory, nor would Annabella, in opening Giovanni's chest with the dagger he offers her (1.2.216), find the secret of love. The body, despite the era's burgeoning fascination with public dissections and the anatomical theatre, ultimately proves mute on such questions. Anatomy fails; insight must instead be sought in the mind, the soul, or reason itself – which, in the emerging Cartesian world model, is increasingly conceptualised as separate from the body.

Following the anatomical experiments of early modern drama, and the passionate, corporeal extremes of Stuart theatre – not so much decadent as radically invested in the mutual dissection of body and mind, matter and affect, the corporeal and the mental – the upcoming periods of the Restoration and eighteenth-century classicism largely abandoned this "theatre of dissection." In its place, they developed new dramatic models that sought to represent the political and spiritual conditions of bourgeois society and their influence on the modern, Cartesian subject.

In sum, the subversive women of Stuart tragedy embody the unresolved contradictions of their transitory historical moment: they are at once emblems of patriarchal violence and agents of destabilisation who resist containment even in death. Their fragmented

bodies and transgressive desires reflect the epistemological crisis of an age that witnesses the clash of medieval symbolism and emerging modern rationality, ritual meaning and empirical materiality. Revenge tragedy stages female characters in emblematic tableaux that defy interpretive closure, transforming the stage into a site of cultural negotiation where the limits of subjectivity, gender, and knowledge itself were put to the test. Even if these subversive female characters must ultimately be silenced, mutilated, or annihilated, their persistent capacity to redirect meaning and unsettle authority ensures that they remain an irreducibly disruptive presence. Stuart drama thus not only exposes the fault lines of its own patriarchal culture but also grants its women agency and a paradoxical sovereignty – one forged in ambiguity and enacted through the dissected, anatomised body.

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Bényei Tamás

'Such leaves! What leaves!': Traces of Daphne in *Aurora Leigh*

> *"Apollo has stolen Daphne's laurel branch to make his own crown, has locked up her version of the story inside his, has pretended she is captive and silent inside the tree, has claimed that women do not make poets and storytellers, that poets and storytellers make women." (Michèle Roberts, The Book of Mrs Noah xxx)*

In Book V, halfway through *Aurora Leigh*, the narrator speculates at length about the possibilities of poetry, going through various genres, which is more than appropriate in a verse-novel, a text that, by definition, experiments with genre.[1] Among other genres, like the ballad, dismissed as too fast, and the sonnet, which is too static or "momentary," Aurora also enlarges upon descriptive landscape poems, more precisely, her own ventures into this field, discussing in a general sense how poetry is supposed to approach nature.

> A tree's mere firewood, unless humanised–
> Which well the Greeks knew when they stirred its bark
> With close-pressed bosoms of subsiding nymphs
> And made the forest-rivers garrulous
> With babble of gods. For us, we are called to mark
> A still more intimate humanity
> In this inferior nature, or ourselves
> Must fall like dead leaves trodden underfoot
> By veritable artists. (V.95–103)

Apparently dismissing the Greek strategy of animating nature as somehow inadequate, Aurora claims that earth (that is, nature) remained "stiff and dry, / A mere dumb corpse, till Christ the Lord came down" (V.105–6). It is, thus, the Christian view of nature that enables us to discover ("mark") "a still more intimate humanity" in "inferior nature", for, as Aurora goes on to argue in a chiasmic construction, if we – artists, that is – fail to do so, we will be no more than "dead leaves", that is, like the "firewood" insufficiently animated by the Greeks. It is as a result of the coming of Christ that earth "lives, remembers, palpitates / In every limb, aspires in every breath…" (V.110–11). There is, Aurora argues,

[1] The contemporary reception of the Victorian verse-novel was largely determined by the different attitudes to its generic mixture. The volatile state of this hybrid genre is indicated by the fact that even its name was unfixed: Barrett Browning herself referred to *Aurora Leigh* as a "poetical novel" *(novel-poem)* and as a "verse-novel" (Edmond 35; Markovits 36). These "generic anomalies" (Mermin 184) were often dismissed as unsuccessful epics, novels or lyrical poems, even though most of these texts reflected on their own generic hybridity, in fact, gaining much of their energy from such reflections (cf. Markovits 16; Bacskai-Atkari).

no need for the gods and other mythical beings as vehicles of a connection between nature and humanity that, as revealed by Christ, is both deeper and more intimate. We

> want no half-gods, Panomphaean Joves,
> Fauns, Naiads, Tritons, Oreads and the rest,
> To take possession of a senseless world
> To unnatural vampire-uses. See the earth,
> The body of our body, the green earth,
> Indubitably human like this flesh
> And these articulated veins through which
> Our heart drives blood. (V.113–20)

The Greek method of animating nature is, thus, rejected not simply as inadequate but also as fundamentally wrong, harmful, a "vampire-use," a parasitical draining of life, that is, the very opposite of animation, of giving life. This claim also has a meta-rhetorical stake, exposing the ancient (pre-Christian) strategy of personification and animation as inherently parasitical. Instead, Aurora outlines a Swedenborgian system of correspondences between the natural/physical and the invisible world, and claims that it is to this that poets must give voice.[2] She suggests that her own efforts in pastoral poetry were all failures (presumably because they were unable to express or render this sense of living interconnectedness), yet, when talking about her own artistic failure, she once again resorts to a Greek metaphor or motif in her account of how her poems fell short of what she had hoped:

> He has shot them down,
> My Phoebus Apollo, soul within my soul,
> Who judges, by the attempted, what's attained,
> And with the silver arrow from his height
> Has struck down all my works before my face
> While I said nothing. (V.413–8)

The above quotes also indicate some of the higher stakes of the role of mythology, especially the parallel presence of the Christian and the pagan (Greek and Roman) strands in Barrett Browning's verse-novel. The first, very modest claim of this essay is that, even though Daphne's name is not even mentioned in Aurora Leigh, the mythical narrative in which she appears is present through allusions to the Daphne myth and its two

[2] In fact, the Greek view of nature, with its theophanic, metamorphic logic, in which everything is alive, could and would be in line with Aurora's poetics, and, despite this dismissal, the text is pervaded by Greek (mythological) images and allusions – including allusions to the stories of Danae and Io – that don't seem to be less 'authentic' or indeed less pertinent than the equally numerous Biblical ones. According to Marjorie Stone, the allusions of *Aurora Leigh* "draw on classical as well as Biblical texts, combining them in a textual palimpsest" (154).

protagonists (the tree that is also a nymph and mighty Apollo) as well as other motifs,[3] and that its traces, investigated in my reading of an important scene in Book II, are integral not only to a submerged, disavowed Greek plot in the text but also its (proto)feminist strand, a symptom of Barrett Browning's troubled awareness of "her revolutionary and problematic status as a woman writer" (Machann 58). With aspirations well beyond those of "poetesses" such as Joanna Baillie, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, Barrett Browning was both frustrated and liberated by her role as "the first woman poet in English literature" (Mermin 1). Some feminist critics stress how the conservative nature of Barrett Browning's ideas of gender and creativity, informed partly by her strong religious views, put the lid on any protofeminist aspirations, claiming that, in the conclusion, Aurora's artistic creativity is ultimately subsumed in the traditionally feminine stance of self-sacrifice (DuPlessis 87). This view is summed up by Deirdre David: "the appropriation of Aurora's art and sexuality by male power is executed with such certainty that whatever defiance of androcentric authority we may discern in the poem is overwhelmed by the orgasmic reconciliations of male and female, politics and art, material and spiritual" (152). In this reading, any feminist claims we might have discerned in the poem are obliterated by the ending of the verse-novel (David 142), by what Gilbert and Gubar call "the self-abnegating servitude with which Aurora Leigh concludes" (580).

Others, however, see the verse-poem and its conclusion in potentially more empowering terms. Herbert Tucker, for instance, argues that, although at first she cannot conceive of a woman speaker in the role of poet-genius, Barrett Browning "gradually assigns that role to a female speaker and poet-genius in a number of ways which overlap incrementally, until in *Aurora Leigh* the role is unconditionally given to a woman" (93; cf. Helen Cooper (185–7; cf. Mermin 217). Reading Barrett Browning's verse-novel in terms of the difference and particular difficulties of the female poet's awareness of and attempt to deal with the influence of the past (predecessors), Helen Cooper suggests that, according to Aurora Leigh, "as long as poetry is imagined as a predominantly male endeavor, a female poet enacts her liberation by transforming herself from being the object of male narrative to being the subject of her own story" (145). Cooper emphasizes the relevance of the generic aspect to this issue: "In the blank verse of Milton's epic, Barrett Browning writes of a heroine who refuses to be merely a helpmate. In spite of being taught by her aunt and lectured by her cousin Romney in the Miltonic ways of womanhood, Aurora insists on claiming for herself the Adamic privilege of naming the world" (146). Crucial to this argument is the gendering of genres: for Cooper, the verse-novel is a successful synthesis, in which Aurora's voice is formed by "the male epic tradition and the female novel" (147).

The traces of the Daphne narrative might also be seen in these terms: the metamorphosis of Daphne is revised by Barrett Browning in terms of the transformation of Aurora as

[3] Daphne was not a particularly popular mythological figure in Victorian literature, except for George Meredith's early long poem „Daphne" (1851); to a certain extent, the amorous pursuit in his *The Egoist* (1879) might be seen as a rewriting of the Daphne story.

described by Cooper, from an object of the male gaze to a subject. Thus, Aurora's empowerment is enacted not simply through revisions and reversals of the chivalric quest and rescue story, as Dorothy Mermin claims (187), but also through the rewriting of the Daphne story. The presence of the myth also affects the generic properties of *Aurora Leigh*. While Greek and Roman mythological allusions and analogies would seem to reinforce the epic ('masculine') qualities of Barrett Browning's text, which was conceived and received partly in terms of the epic tradition, I suggest that the presence of the Daphne narrative is both more 'hidden' and more 'novelistic' – in fact, it might be seen in terms of what Rod Edmond refers to as Barrett Browning's rethinking of this very masculine genre as a feminine text (134). This claim, of course, is not altogether surprising given that the text which contains the most widely circulated ancient version of the Daphne narrative, Ovid's 'epic' Metamorphoses, can itself be seen as a novelisation of the epic avant la lettre. There are, however, other generic implications of this set of motifs, as I shall argue in the conclusion of my essay.[4]

The traces of Daphne make up a strand in *Aurora Leigh* that is present in the form of small motifs. Although the centrepiece of my talk is the scene in Book II (II.74–497), it has to be noted that the concentrated presence of this set of motifs in this episode is not entirely unexpected, since Book I contains several traces of the latent Daphne plot or subtext. Aurora is four when her Italian mother dies and, at the age of thirteen, she loses her English father. In the lines that describe the sudden death of the father, Aurora compares herself to a tree:

> I was just thirteen,
> Still growing like the plants from unseen roots
> In tongue-tied Springs–and suddenly awoke
> To full life and life's needs and agonies
> with an intense, strong, struggling heart beside
> A stone-dead father. (I.205–10)

The orphan is taken to England, to the house of her father's sister. From the start, England is described as a place of lovelessness and lifelessness, a spiritually deadening environment where Aurora is withering away, although she does begin to regenerate slowly, mainly through her ability to connect to the "sweet, familial nature" of England (I.641), intimated through vegetal symbols, including what might be seen as the text's only reference to Daphne/Laura: "the overflow / Of arbutus and laurel" (I.588).

[4] The traces of Daphne might also be seen as integral to *Aurora Leigh*'s meditations on love, making up a trajectory through the persistent vegetal metaphors: we seem to be moving from the burning bush (maternal love) to the Rose of Sharon at the end, with many stops on the way (metaphors of trees and flowers abound throughout). A full discussion of this theme is beyond the scope of the present essay. I simply note that the text's Christian and Christological trajectory is, if not subverted, at least complemented and troubled by the scattered traces of the (revised) Daphne story as well as other Greek mythological motifs (e.g. Amor and Psyche).

It is also in this section that the tree motif makes a more marked appearance. Her aunt orders Aurora to turn her chair away from the window while she is in her room: "With back against the window, to exclude / The sight of the great lime-tree on the lawn, / Which seemed to have come on purpose from the woods / To bring the house a message" (I.486–9). While the tree, animated and invested with a will of its own, seems to have some affinity with the girl, its role is not unequivocal – its "message," for instance, is never revealed. Many critics have noted that these passages reflect upon Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," where the lime tree is a spiritual companion for the speaker. Here, however, it is not a source of comfort: "I had enough there, of the lime, be sure, / My morning-dream was often hummed away / By the bees in it" (I.579–81). According to both Herbert Tucker and David Sigler, the lime tree is an anti-Coleridgean allusion, indicating that Barrett Browning "has now given up the belief in the male poet as genius. She creates her poet-genius-speaker as a woman, living and working in a fertile feminine environment literally (and literarily) overshadowed by male genius" (Tucker 93); Sigler argues that, rather than an homage to Coleridge, this detail might be seen as part of how Barrett Browning is wresting back this space for the women's side.

If read in these terms, the lime tree anticipates the tree motifs[5] in one of the best known episodes of *Aurora Leigh*, the famous proposal scene in Book II, which is the focus of the present essay. While the content of the episode is also important, I shall be focusing here on its mise-en-scène, which tells its own little narrative: this set piece, which takes up the first half or so of Book II, can also be read as a revisiting of the Daphne narrative, which is reappropriated in two ways. The most obvious strategy of reappropriation is that the story is retold by the Daphne figure, Aurora, but what makes Barrett Browning's engagement with the Daphne story unique is that, rather than conceiving it as a rape narrative,[6] Barrett Browning uses the mythological episode to revisit the themes of poetry, art, and marriage. It can be seen as a female response to a prevalent and patriarchal understanding of the Ovidian narrative, one that relies on the conclusion of the Ovidian text. Here, Apollo, who seems to be far from being disheartened by Daphne's rejection, redefines the metamorphosis as the story of his own triumph rather than the failure of his amorous pursuit:

> 'My bride', he said, 'since you can never be,
> At least, sweet laurel, you shall be my tree.
> My lyre, my locks, my quiver you shall wreathe;
> You shall attend the conquering lords of Rome

[5] The tree motif recurs throughout *Aurora Leigh* in different guises and contexts, including a self-reflexive one when Aurora is speculating about questions of poetic form, suggesting that, instead of rigid conventions, we should trust the spirit to make the form and invoking the tree as a metaphor of organic form: "What matter for the number of the leaves, / Supposing the tree lives and grows?" (V. 231–2)

[6] One could argue that the rape narrative in *Aurora Leigh* is displaced into the story of working-class girl Marion Erle.

When joy shouts triumph and the Capitol
Welcomes the long procession […]'
Thus spoke the god; the laurel in assent
Inclined her new-made branches and bent down,
Or seemed to bend, her head, her leafy crown. (I.556–64)

That is, in Ovid, the narrative and its conclusion are reinterpreted by Apollo as reinforcing and monumentalising his authority, particularly over poetic creation and glory: Daphne, as laurel, will forever be the symbol of his might – and of patriarchal authority in several spheres, including that of poetry.

The episode in Aurora Leigh, which features several motifs of the Ovidian narrative, gets off to an extremely upbeat start; at daybreak on a glorious summer day, which is also her twentieth birthday, Aurora goes out, plunging into the outside world somewhat in the manner of a youthful Clarissa Dalloway, identifying herself with nature, especially vegetation:

The June was in me, with its multitudes
Of nightingales all singing in the dark
And rosebuds reddening where the calyx split (II.10–12)
…
In which fantastic mood I bounded forth
At early morning–would not wait so long
As even to snatch my bonnet by the strings,
But, brushing a green trail across the lawn
With my gown in the dew, took will and way
Among the acacias of the shrubberies,
To fly my fancies in the open air (II.18–24)

The passage contains clear echoes of the Ovidian text, where Daphne is consistently metaphorised through her fastness and her untied, free-flowing hair: "A careless ribbon held her straying hair […] / He sees the loose disorder of her hair / And thinks what if it were neat and elegant […] she / Flies swifter than the lightfoot wind" (Ovid I.480; 498–504).[7]

Aurora, however, is very different from Daphne: rather than admiring the freshness and liveliness of the early summer day, she is dreaming about poetic glory, and, in a playfully defiant mood, contrives the idea of crowning herself:

[7] This identification starts already in Book I, when Aurora's unruly hair is forced into a more orderly structure by her strict aunt: "I broke the copious curls upon my head / In braids, because she liked smooth-ordered hair" (I.376–86). At the end of Book V, when Aurora mistakenly believes that Rodney loves Lady Waldemar, she, as it were, erases her Daphneesque attribute, her loose hair: "My loose long hair began to burn and creep, / Alive to the very ends, about my knees: / I swept it backward as the wind sweeps flame, / With the passion of my hands / ….made a knot as hard as life / Of those loose, soft, impracticable curls." [V.1126–34] (see also V.1037–41)

what, therefore, if I crown myself today
In sport, not pride, to learn the feel of it,
Before my brows be numbed as Dante's own
To all the tender pricking of such leaves?" (II.33–36)

She sets about trying to find the right kind of leaves to make a crown for herself.

'Such leaves! What leaves!'
I pulled the branches down
To choose from,
Not the bay! I choose no bay
(The fates deny us if we are overbold)
Nor myrtle – which means chiefly love; and love
Is something awful which one dares not touch
So early o'mornings. (II.37–40)

This is an ambiguous reappropriation of the myth (and of the poetic tradition) not only from Ovid, but also, and perhaps more importantly, from the Petrarchan tradition. Aurora has cast herself both as Daphne and Apollo, just like Petrarch's speaking persona, who, in the Canzoniere, and often within individual poems, comes to occupy all the possible roles in the story (Sturm-Madox 52), and yet, in the final moment, Aurora chooses the ivy rather than the bay:

Ah – there's my choice – that ivy on the wall,
That headlong ivy! Not a leaf will grow
But thinking of a wreath. Large leaves, smooth leaves,
Serrated like my vines, and half as green.
I like such ivy, bold to leap a height
'Twas strong to climb; as good to grow on graves
As twist about a thyrsus; pretty too
(And that's not ill), when twisted round a comb. (II.46–53)

Deciding not to choose the bay (laurel) seems like an act of feminine modesty, refraining from usurping the traditional symbol of poetic glory, while it can also be read as Aurora's refusal to identify herself with Daphne. As Angela Leighton suggests (130), it can also be seen in terms of Aurora's obsessive mourning for her dead parents ("good to grow on graves"), while, on the other hand, this choice might also be seen as a refusal of the entire Apollo/Daphne scenario: by choosing the ivy, Aurora disdains the culturally accepted (patriarchal) symbol of poetic greatness.

Ivy, a parasitical plant,[8] apart from its funereal associations, is often represented emblematically as the female principle, climbing around the noble (male) oak tree, but it is also a plant associated with Dionysus, and its choice can be seen as a defiant gesture on the part

[8] Ivy, actually, is not quite parasitical, at least not in the sense in which mistletoe is parasitical: ivy does not drain the sap of the host plant.

of Aurora: she opts for the anti-Apollonian plant.[9] The Dionysian allusion is reinforced by the reference to the thyrsus, a staff or spear made of giant fennel, covered with ivy vines and leaves, topped with a pine cone (or a bunch of vine-leaves, grapes and berries). Carried along during Dionysian festivals, it represented prosperity, fertility, pleasure, enjoyment.[10]

Whatever her motives for choosing ivy, she does make for herself a wreath, and puts it on, that is, crowns herself as a female poet, just like Corinne, one of the archetypal figures of the female poetess as monumentalised by Georges Sand as well as a number of early 19th-century female poets, only to be surprised by the unexpected appearance of her second cousin Romney Leigh. Stunned and somewhat abashed by Romney, she is frozen in what seems to have suddenly become an awkward rather than dignified pose:

> I stood there fixed –
> My arms up, like the caryatid, sole
> Of some abolished temple, helplessly
> Persistent in gesture which derides
> A former purpose. Yet my blush was flame,
> As if from flax, not stone. (II.60–5)

Her pose evokes not only the caryatids – petrified objects of the male gaze (Cooper 157) –, but also the best known early pictorial representation of the Daphne story, Antonio del Pollaiuolo's painting (ca. 1470–80), with Daphne's arms reaching upwards, transforming into symmetrical branches. In line with the Daphne story, although reversing its logic by having the coronation precede the metamorphosis, the scene dramatizes one of the key dichotomies of Ovid's version, the general transformation from dynamism, light-footed movement to "fixed" immobility and heaviness. One could even argue that these lines also appropriate further Petrarchan motifs from "Canzone XXIII," often referred to as "the canzone of metamorphoses" (Barkan 210), like the change of condition or substance, the wavering between fluidity and stony hardness, immobility, something that is both vegetal and mineral-stony. It is important that, in their reunion in Book VII, although Romney comes like the prince to Sleeping Beauty "to bestow the kiss of sexual awakening," he is blind as well as helpless, and it is Aurora who "captures Romney with a transfixing gaze" (Mermin 189), seeing him as a work of art, "pale and patient" like a statue (VIII.1100), while he will never objectify her with his gaze (Mermin 190).

If Aurora is here a Daphne figure, then Romney, the possessor of the male gaze, becomes something of an Apollo, an association playfully anticipated by the passage in Book I in which he is first introduced:

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[9] It has to be said, though, that the Apollo–Dionysus dichotomy did not become prevalent before the turn of the century.

[10] As Sigler suggests, there might be a bit of Coleridge, too, in Aurora's choice of ivy: the speaker of "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" expresses his pleasure in how "a deep radiance lay / Full on the ancient ivy."

> Always Romney Leigh
> Was looking for the worms, I for the gods.
> A godlike nature his; the gods look down,
> Incurious of themselves; and certainly
> 'Tis well I should remember, how, those days,
> I was a worm too, and he looked on me (I.551–6)

Although he is introduced as godlike, and the text maintains the playful association between him and Greek gods, it has to be said that Romney's credentials as an Apollo are questionable to say the least. Now, when he startles Aurora, he has brought along a book of poems, belonging to her, that he has found by a beech tree overhanging the stream – the very stream "of which you said / the Oread in it has a Naiad's heart / and pines for waters" (II.82–4). Romney rejects Aurora' poetry well before she rejects his proposal, refusing to read it, claiming that "the thing had witchcraft in't, / Whereof the reading calls up dangerous spirits" – and that / I rather bring it to the witch" (II.78–80). Romney's words not only reinforce the kinship between Aurora and 'nymph-hood,' but also create a link between her nymph identity and her unruly 'witch-hood': the kinship is part of the way Romney dismisses both Aurora's creativity and her closeness to nature.

From this point, the scene might be read as a post-metamorphic reenactment of the Daphne-Apollo intercourse, with Romney inevitably playing the double role of Apollo: he is Daphne/Aurora's suitor (or aspirational rapist, as in Ovid) as well as the representative of patriarchal cultural authority that considers poetry a masculine prerogative. His proposal amounts to little more than trying to persuade Aurora to give up her poetic aspirations, to forget forever the stone and the bronze wreath that would prove too heavy for her (II.95). Romney's proposal, thus, is a thinly disguised devaluation of women:

> Mere women, personal and passionate,
> You give us doating mothers, and perfect wives,
> Sublime Madonnas, and enduring saints!
> We get no Christ from you, - and verily
> We shall not get a poet, in my mind. (II.221–5)

It is, in fact, not his ardent wooing that morphs into a definition of Aurora in her proper Miltonic and Victorian womanhood, but the other way around: it is his curtailing of Aurora's proper activities that becomes, at least formally, a proposal.

On the other hand, although the choreography of the Daphne/Apollo scene is fully recognisable, it is not only Romney who does not seem to be able to fill Apollo's divine boots: neither protagonist fits the archetypal role. Romney is an extremely inadequate Apollo primarily because, unlike Apollo, he does not lust for Aurora-Daphne, who has already had her run in physical terms before the wooing and thus her escapade is entirely verbal. Aurora is an anti-Daphne in that Daphne denies her own sexuality (detesting her own beauty because she feels it is alien to her inner core [cf. Ovid II.549]), whereas birthday girl Aurora is jubilant, exalting in her young womanhood which is only now beginning. Also, unlike the

silent and fugitive Daphne, Aurora does talk to her wooer; in fact, she expresses her dissatisfaction with the insufficient ardour of Romney's wooing in no uncertain terms: "What you love, / Is not a woman, Romney, but a cause: / You want a helpmate, not a mistress, sir." (II.400–1) She feels that the lukewarm quasi-proposal of Romney-Apollo is denying or erasing her awakening sexuality[11]. In turn, sensing that he is failing as a 'lover-Apollo', Romney eventually indulges in a kind of mock-wooing which, he claims, he has deliberately avoided so far, believing Aurora more dignified and above such flattery:

> 'Lady, thou art wondrous fair,
> And, where the Graces walk before, the Muse
> Will follow at the lightning of their eyes,
> And where the Muse walks, lovers need to creep:
> Turn round and love me, or I die of love.' (II.428–32)

It is probably not by chance that this clichéd exercise in wooing, the last line of which could be a quote from Ovid's Daphne narrative, abounds in classical references (as part of tired Petrarchan clichés), perhaps connecting their alleged artificiality to that of this hackneyed amorous discourse.[12]

The relevance of the Daphne motif is erased by Romney on another level, too: in dismissing Aurora's poetic efforts, Romney is also trying to replace the Greek frame of reference with a Christian one, associating the former with what he sees as the vacuity of feminine poetry. First, he does this directly, claiming that the passing of Greek and Roman religion has also made mythological imagery obsolete and inauthentic:

> 'The time is done for facile settings up
> Of minnow gods, nymphs here and tritons there,
> The polytheists have gone out in God.
> That unity of Bests' (II.150–4)

Then he goes on to reiterate the argument in an indirect manner, comparing Aurora herself to Eve rather than to a nymph, while – paradoxically – appropriating her Roman mythological name for his own purposes: "'You, you are young / Eve with nature's daybreak on her face'" (II. 158–9). The – Petrarchan – motif of the daybreak mobilises the meaning and the mythological origins of Aurora's name, very much in line with Petrarch's similar strategies and ruses: in several of his Laura poems, Petrarch's speaker avails himself of the paronomasia between Laura and Aurora (Sturm-Maddox 19–20). At this point, therefore, Aurora's insistence on her nymph identity (a virginal young woman) and

[11] One could argue that Romney's trajectory follows, or inverts, the order of Jane Eyre's wooers: starting out as a kind of St. John Rivers, needing a helpmeet rather than a wife, he ends up like blind and reformed Mr Rochester.

[12] In Book VIII, when this scene is revisited at length in a conversation between Aurora and Romney ten years later in Tuscany, Romney self-disparagingly describes himself as an anti-Apollo: "I built up follies like a wall / To intercept the sunshine and your face" (VIII. 381–2).

her outright refusal of Romney's identification also have a gendered slant: the pagan allusions serve to emphasise her femininity, her sexuality and her poetic creativity at the same time.

She insists that the work and the love that Romney offers are not fulfilling for her, since she has her own work cut out for her, no less important than Romney's: "I too have my vocation – work to do […] Most serious work, most necessary work / As any of the economists" (II.455–60). Aurora thus rejects Romney's proposal not least because it is not even a proper proposal (II.572–5), and vindicates her autonomy as a person, as a woman and as an artist.[13]

In her account of the scene, Aurora once again broaches motifs from the Daphne narrative, for instance, that of a natural, loose-limbed fastness that is struck dumb by the sun: "We all begin / By singing with the birds, and running fast / With June days," until "the sun / Strike down upon us like a friend's sword caught / By an enemy to slay us" (II.754–8). Looking back on this scene from the age of 27, just before she leaves England for Italy, she has no regrets about her refusal, knowing that, even if there was love on both sides, her love for Romney would have been inevitably monetised as payment for his generosity, and she knew she had to fend for herself, without benefactors and helpers. The scene in Book II concludes with a repetition of the symbolic gesture before Romney's arrival and proposal, Aurora taking up the besmirched wreath of ivy and crowning herself:

> Then I stooped
> And lifted the soiled garland from the earth,
> And set it on my head as bitterly
> As when the Spanish monarch crowned the bones
> Of his dead love. So be it. I preserve
> That crown still – in the drawer there! 'twas the first.
> The rest are like it – those Olympian crowns,
> We run for, till we lose sight of the sun
> In the dust of the racing chariots! (II.808–16)

If the sun is still, at least up to a point, Apollo, this final verdict makes a distinction between solar Apollo as a primal force of (poetic and other) energy and Apollo as the overseer of institutionalised poetic glory. But there is more to this act of self-crowning and

[13] There is yet another trace of the Daphne story here. After the proposal, and after she has been rebuked by her aunt, Aurora cries out to her dead father, just like Daphne, who begs her father to save and transform her (Ovid I.547–9). Only too aware that that there is no father to appeal to, Aurora is standing alone in the garden, "and looked up / The Deaf blue sky that brings the rose out / On such July mornings" (II.748–50). After her morning exaltation, she experiences the aftermath of the proposal scene as one of existential alienation and utter solitude. As Angela Leighton writes, "Aurora's real choice is not so much one of motherland or fatherland, as it is the choice to survive in a world which, because of the father's absence, is all a desert" (124). For Mermin, the plot, at least from halfway through, is organised by the daughter's quest for a mother (190).

the image of the crown in general. In Book IV, Aurora speculates about love, defining it in a reciprocal context, imagining this new conception of love as a circle, "[a] perfect round of love" that "includes . . . being loved" (IV.179–80), an idea that gives rise immediately to the idea of a crown: "The cataracts of her soul had poured themselves / And risen self-crowned in rainbow: would she ask / Who crowned her? it sufficed that she was crowned." (IV.184–86) As Herbert Tucker suggests, "the crowning celebrated in *Aurora Leigh* is not earned by virtue; it is the kind one gets for oneself […] In Barrett Browning's text of experience the poet has become an autonomous, mature woman, a poet – equal to 'the poet,' who recognizes that in order to be crowned, she must crown herself." (102–3)[14]

Later that day, Romney sends Aurora a letter in which he properly proposes to her, using vegetal metaphors once again, thus perpetuating the presence of the Daphne myth.[15] In her reply – a refusal –, Aurora accepts the new vegetal metaphor, but turns it against Romney.

> But certain flowers grow near as deep as trees,
> And, cousin, you'll not move my root, not you,
> With all your confluent storms. Then let me grow
> Within my wayside hedge, and pass your way!
> This flower has never as much to say to you
> As the antique tomb which said to travellers, 'Pause',
> 'Siste, viator' (II.844–54)

The vegetal metaphor persists into the scene at the end of Book II, when Aurora tears up the document that would make her a wealthy heiress: the pieces of paper "fluttered from my hands, / As forest-leaves, stripped suddenly and rapt / By a whirlwind on Valdarno, drop again, / Drop slow, and strew the melancholy ground / before the amazed hills" (II.1165–8). The leaves of written sheaves are transformed into "forest leaves"; the image of the fluttering pieces of paper, however, evokes not only the vegetal associations of Aurora but also her most Daphne-like attribute, her unruly hair – an attribute she retains until the end.

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[14] Crowning as a motif persists throughout the verse-novel, right up to the closing image that presents Aurora as a woman crowned with the sun (Stone 182): golden-haired Aurora stands with the moon beneath her feet in her final passionate embrace with Romney (IX.842), as both "[g]aze on, with inscient vision toward the sun" (IX.913). The crown motif connects the theme of (female) poetry and the idea of (the female) Christ. Marjorie Stone argues that Aurora becomes a female prophet-poet, a representative of Victorian sage discourse (137–8), while, for Corinne Davies, Aurora becomes an active, creative female Christ figure, a "female Christ-poet" (55).

[15] Towards the end of the wooing scene, when revising both his general approach and at least some of his metaphors, Romney insists on vegetal metaphors when he implores her once again: 'Place your fecund heart / In mine, and let us blossom for the world' (II.375–6). This overtly vegetal metaphor, however, is a very mixed one, both endowing Aurora with fecundity and withdrawing it from her with the same gesture. About the heart metaphors of *Aurora Leigh* in the context of the Victorian (gendered) culture of the heart, cf. Blair 119–22, 129–44.

If we consider the proposal scene in terms of the Ovidian narrative, the transformation that is urged by Romney would be the metamorphosis of Aurora into an angelic Victorian woman, shedding her witch-like attributes lamented and rejected by him in Book II. It might be argued that the traces of Daphne (together with some other pagan motifs) represent these non-integrable, demonic qualities, unacceptable for young Romney, but accepted by him after he comes to appreciate her. In terms of genre, the presence of Daphne remains something of a problem: *Aurora Leigh* is clearly a Bildungsroman, its entire rhetoric predicated on and permeated by this logic. The story of Daphne, however, is one of arrested development – thus, not one that can be embraced by an aspiring female poet. This is perhaps what accounts for the absence of Daphne in Book VIII, in the long conversation between Aurora and Romney that is a quiet and harmonious repetition of the proposal scene. The Daphne allusions in the proposal scene of Book II are about the female reappropriation of poetic creativity, and their absence here, rather than a disavowal, might suggest that, after her volume has become a soul-changing experience for Romney, this reappropriation has been accomplished by Aurora-Laurel.

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Janka Kascakova

Katherine Mansfield's Review of Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day*[1]

Some parts of this review have been examined many times; they are routinely used to illustrate the complex relationship between Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf. Furthermore, combined with an equally famous accompanying letter from Mansfield to John Middleton Murry,[2] they serve as a sort of Mansfield-manifesto of post-war literature. She, rather disappointed by Woolf's regression to traditional writing, allegedly vented her frustration in a way that many, including Woolf herself, considered too harsh. Subtly exploiting the novel's recurring naval metaphor associated both with the protagonist Katharine Hilbery and her mother, she likens it to a ship which is "sailing into port serene and resolute on a deliberate wind" (Kimber and Smith 532). Mansfield finds "her aloofness, her air of quiet perfection, her lack of any sign that she has made a perilous voyage – the absence of any scars" (Kimber and Smith 532) unnatural for the post-war period, and, although she acknowledges the technical perfection, calling it "fresh, new, and exquisite, a novel in the tradition of the English novel," she immediately makes clear that this is not a compliment: "In the midst of our admiration it makes us feel old and chill" (Kimber and Smith 534).

The letter to Murry further clarifies her reasons for dismissing the novel. She calls it "a lie in the soul," and famously associates its failure, and the failure of many other post-war novels, with lack of memory, since they, according to her, pretended "[t]he war has never been" (Mansfield et al. 82). Although she does not suggest that the topic should be the only one possible, admitting her own inability to talk about the events of war directly, she is firmly persuaded that the new era requires a search for new forms of expression since the old ones are no longer usable, and concludes her reasoning with this claim: "What has been stands, but Jane Austen could not write *Northanger Abbey* [now] – or if she did, I'd have none of her" (Mansfield et al. 82; emphasis in original).

While somewhat provocative and extravagant, the analogy between Woolf and Austen in the letter is indirect, made in the form of a juxtaposition and left tantalisingly without any further comment; it is, however, given a fair deal of attention in the review. Yet, although the comparison itself never fails to find its way into any discussion about the review, the novel it critiques, or the relationship between Mansfield and Woolf, it has not yet been properly analysed, and the significance of the Austen connection as well as the fairly long section of Mansfield's review which is dedicated to examining it are summarily overlooked.

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[1] "A Ship Comes into the Harbour," *Athenaeum*, 21 November 1919 (Kimber and Smith 532–4).
[2] To J. M. Murry, 10 November 1919 (Mansfield et al. 82).

The following analysis of this heretofore rather neglected aspect of the review takes into account two other texts, to some degree connected to it: notably Frank Swinnerton's extensive, two-part article published in the Athenaeum in September 1919,[3] shortly before Mansfield was given Woolf's novel to review; and, less importantly and somewhat speculatively, an unsigned review of *Night and Day* entitled "A Tragic Comedienne," published in Nation, a text which Woolf attributed to Robert Lynd, but Kimber and Smith include among Mansfield's critical texts.[4] It is of particular interest not only for its similarities to the signed Athenaeum review, but also because it, too, makes the connection between Woolf and Austen, albeit much more briefly.

The section of the review that deals extensively with Austen begins with Mansfield's claim that it "is impossible to refrain from comparing '*Night and Day'* with the novels of Miss Austen". According to her, there are moments when "one is almost tempted to cry it Miss Austen up-to-date" (Kimber and Smith 532). Interestingly, she does not continue by mentioning at least a single particular one of those moments, even though there would be many to choose from. *Night and Day*, after all, bears more than a passing resemblance to Austen's novels, a point made many times since by various other critics as well (de Gay 48–53; Gilbert and Gubar 19; Marcus 97–122). In a nutshell, there is Woolf's humour, dry wit, the charming absurdity of some of her characters, the overall plot structure, and some incidents in the story reminiscent of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) in particular, Woolf's and Austen's similar emotional sobriety and detachment, and finally, there is Woolf's unmistakable nod to Jane Austen's legendary practice of hiding her writing with blotting paper whenever somebody entered the room: Katharine Hilbery is described as slipping "her paper between the leaves of a great Greek dictionary which she had purloined from her father's room for this purpose" every time she hears steps on the staircase (Woolf 42). What is more, the narrator's revelation that Katharine does not understand Greek appears to be the germ of Woolf's most famous works touching upon the issues women artists face in a patriarchal society: "On not knowing Greek" (1923) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), which, incidentally, also include Jane Austen as an important element of their argument.

Mansfield, however, mentions neither the humour nor the resemblances in plot or structure, but focuses solely on Woolf's writing style. In this respect, Swinnerton's largely appreciative discussion of Austen, although probably not entirely responsible for her idea of comparing Woolf and Austen, seems to help elucidate the direction of Mansfield's thoughts.

Mansfield sees *Night and Day* as

> extremely cultivated, distinguished and brilliant, but above all – deliberate. There is not a chapter where one is unconscious of the writer, of her

[3] Swinnerton, "Jane Austen I," and "Jane Austen II,"; hereafter abbreviated as JA I and JA II.
[4] Anon. "A Tragic Comedienne," *Nation* (15 May 1920) (Kimber and Smith 599–602).

> personality, her point of view, and her control of the situation. We feel that nothing has been imposed on her: she has chosen her world, selected her principal characters with the nicest care, and having traced a circle round them so that they exist and are free within its confines, she has proceeded, with rare appreciativeness, to register her observations. (Kimber and Smith 532–3)

"A Tragic Comedienne," which is equally focused on the writing style and choices of the author, makes a very similar point when it claims that "we rejoice more in the accessibility of Mrs Woolf's mind than in her story" (Kimber and Smith 602).

This emphasis on the presence of the author echoes Swinnerton's main argument in the first article where he divides Austen's novels into two groups, not solely based on their order of composition, and the significant time gap that separates them, but also on the gradually decreasing presence of Austen's self-portraiture in them, what he calls "the need for personal exemplification which young novelists feel" (JA I, 839). He claims that, while in the first three she is present in different characters, in her other three novels she is no longer portraying herself, and this makes them in consequence "much more mature, less lively and effervescently satirical, and very much more analytic" (JA I, 839–40).

At this point, it could be argued that Mansfield's observations are inconsistent as Northanger Abbey, which she mentioned in the letter, is, according to Swinnerton, the least affected in the first group of novels by this authorial presence. It is, however, necessary to remember that Mansfield did not use the comparison with this particular novel in her review, and that, according to Swinnerton, it is *Pride and Prejudice*, which *Night and Day* resembles the most, is the most personal. Furthermore, as discussed later, the reasons for including *Northanger Abbey* in the letter are based on a different part of Swinnerton's argument.

Returning to the quote above, there are other interesting issues concerning Woolf's alleged similarity with Austen and what Mansfield thought about their respective styles. The reference to Woolf carefully choosing her world and tracing circles around her characters indicates that Mansfield is alluding to Austen's reputation for restricting herself to a limited and closed world of her own knowledge. This is upheld further in the review where she implies that Austen and Woolf do not correspond only in this aspect, but also in their restrained and sober approach to writing:

> As in the case of Miss Austen's novels, we fall under a little spell; it is as though, realizing our safety, we surrender ourselves to the author, confident that whatever she has to show us, and however strange it may appear, we shall not be frightened or shocked. Her creatures are, one might say, privileged; we can rely upon her fine mind to deliver them from danger, to temper the blow (if a blow must fall), and to see their way clear for them at the very last. (Kimber and Smith, 533)

In linking this aspect of Woolf and Austen, but also in the way she verbalised it, mimicking the slow, deliberate style of Woolf's text, Mansfield revealed not only her famed shrewd talent for observation, but, equally and more importantly, the instinctive understanding of the way the novel was written, even though she had no inkling of the reasons. It seems difficult to imagine that Mansfield's displeasure over the book would be so great, had she known that Woolf wrote it as therapy after a mental breakdown. Mansfield was never to know about this fact, just as Woolf, for a long time, did not entirely grasp the seriousness of Mansfield's condition, and, as a result, they, further wounded by gossip within their respective circles of friends, grew apart.

Mansfield's intuition, however, was unerring, and she astutely saw what the novel was doing: clinging to structure, borders, causality, and common sense in its resistance to disorder, chaos, uncertainty and the illogical nature of both the war and mental illness. In linking Night and Day with Austen's novels, she also touched upon their respective therapeutic potential; Austen's works were, after all, "prescribed" as reading for seriously shell-shocked soldiers, because it was believed that, for those "whose minds were shattered by dynastic history, the famously limited dimensions of Austen's fictional world could feel rehabilitative; her parlours could feel manageable; her very triviality could feel redemptive" (Johnson, "Divine Miss Jane" 154).

So far in the review, Mansfield shows where she thinks Woolf and Austen are alike. There is one slightly enigmatic statement apparently in favour of Woolf over Austen before Mansfield goes on to elaborate on what she sees as Woolf's deficiencies face to face with her more famous literary predecessor. The statement reads as follows: "It is the measure of Mrs. Woolf's power that her 'happy ending' could never be understood as a triumph of the heart over the mind" (Kimber and Smith 533; emphasis added). This seems to indicate that, for Mansfield, Austen, despite her neoclassical sobriety and emphasis on the healthy balance of reason and emotions, did not manage this in all her novels, and that, in at least one of her endings, the heart won over the mind.

This perceived small shortcoming, however, does not appear as serious as the ones she sees Woolf displaying when compared to Austen:

> But whereas Miss Austen's spell is as strong upon us as ever when the novel is finished and laid by, Mrs. Woolf's loses something of its potency. What is it that carries us away? With Miss Austen, it is first her feeling for life, and then her feeling for writing; but with Mrs. Woolf these feelings are continually giving way the one to the other, so that the urgency of either is impaired. While we read we scarcely are aware which is uppermost; it is only afterwards, and especially, when recalling the minor characters, that we begin to doubt. (Kimber and Smith 533)

The repeated references to Austen's "spell" match almost perfectly the late 19th-century attitudes or rather, as Claudia Johnson has it, "platitudes […] which make up a large part

of Victorian commentary on Austen" and in some form survive even to this day (Cults and Cultures 69–70). Mansfield seems to suggest that, for her, as indeed for many others, after analysing all the rational reasons why Austen was a great author, there remained an element of the unknown, some sort of unexplainable magic that made Austen so successful, even over equally technically accomplished writers. Alternatively, however, Mansfield did not necessarily have to subscribe to this belief herself, she might have been just reinforcing the whole point of her review: her conviction about the obsolescence of Woolf's method, by reverting to the matching kind of anachronistic criticism and terminology. In both cases, she would be paying Woolf a small compliment, as, according to her, she possessed the same quality as Austen, albeit not yet fully realised.

Mansfield surmises that a large part of Austen's appeal lies in the fact that her striving for technical perfection never overshadows her ability to tell a story, that her writing is seamless, appears effortless and natural, while Woolf does not entirely accomplish this: her sentences are brilliant, but the text does not always flow naturally, and the formal aspects of writing get in the way of storytelling. What is more, the novel's universe is far from being as well-functioning as Austen's:

> We have the queer sensation that once the author's pen is removed from [the minor characters] they have neither speech nor motion, and are not to be revived again until she adds another stroke or two or writes another sentence underneath. Were they shadowy or vague this would be less apparent, but they are held within the circle of steady light in which the author bathes her world, and in their case the light seems to shine at them, but not through them. (Kimber and Smith 533)

Here again, Mansfield's assessment corresponds with Swinnerton's ideas, more particularly his analysis of Emma (1815), which, according to him, is "by far the most brilliant, the finest exhibition of its author's restrained wit, and the novel containing the most varied portraits" (JA II, 907). He sees it as a display of "group community" and, à propos of the minor characters, he shrewdly observes:

> They interest us, certainly, and divert us; but the stuff of the book, its texture, and the feeling it gives us of absolute first-hand reality, is due to something besides the finished exemplification of character. It is remarkable how closely all these diverse persons are bound together, how they affect one another, and how the intricate relationships, recoils, and attractions, are all made a part of the web that holds our attention, of the picture that deepens with each page in our consciousness and our memory. (JA II, 907)

Swinnerton describes the novel as a well-oiled, well-working machine in which all the parts are interdependent, working and moving even if the reader's attention is not on them. On the contrary, according to Mansfield, *Night and Day* fails to achieve this level of technical excellence, as the minor characters do not fit naturally into the narrative and feel forced. Making further use of Swinnerton's remarks, not all Woolf's characters are

connected by "the fine threads" (JA II, 907) that would create the sense of community and reality, and, unlike Austen, her knowledge of character is not sufficient enough to enable her to "present it as idiosyncrasy" without caricature (JA II, 907).

The other part of this critique of minor characters is no less intriguing. The naval metaphor framing the whole review is not the only device Mansfield borrows from Woolf only to turn it against her. The image of the "circle of steady light" is as much an allusion to the attention Woolf gives her characters as it is a reference to the constant emphasis on lights in the novel itself and, yet again, to her attempts at "tempering the blow," that is, at deliberately restricting the darkness of her fictional world. Interestingly, this is another element that links this review with the unsigned one which goes as far as suggesting that Woolf "could more fitly have called her book 'Nighlight & Day,' for the intensity and the fears of night have been shut out" (Kimber and Smith 600).

The claim that the minor characters are neither shadowy nor vague is yet another comeback from Mansfield, this time challenging Mary Datchet's observation that her colleagues Mr. Clacton and Mrs. Seal are "in the guise of shadow people, flitting in and out of the ranks of the living – eccentrics, undeveloped human beings, from whose substance some essential part had been cut away" (Woolf 276). Mansfield is as good as saying that Woolf is contradicting herself and, although asserting they are like that, does not succeed in presenting them accordingly.

Finally, in declaring that the light "shine[s] at them, but not through them," Mansfield further accentuates that she believes them to be caricatures rather than real people. While she herself started off writing characters like these, especially in her juvenilia, the stories of In a German Pension (1911), she very soon replaced the flat figures designed to stand in the spotlight only to be mocked by rounded individuals that, even in the worst cases, reflect the complexity of humanity and elicit respect or at least compassion. She holds that characters, even the minor ones, should not serve only as a means of entertainment, but be the bridge to some higher knowledge, the lens through which the light shines and illuminates the truth about human behaviour and personality.

At this point, the part of the review directly comparing Woolf and Austen ends, to be followed by the retelling of the story and the damning conclusion implicitly delegating the novel to the depths of history and out-dated literary production. The last paragraph of the review registers Mansfield's surprise at the very existence of this kind of novel in this time and age, and returns to the image of the novel as a ship: "We had thought that this world was vanished for ever, that it was impossible to find on the great ocean of literature a ship that was unaware of what has been happening" (Kimber and Smith 534). At first sight, the sentence might appear rather confusing to a reader familiar with Mansfield's work and the early 20th-century literary scene. Firstly, the reference to the vanished world immediately conjures up Mansfield's most acclaimed works, the so-called New Zealand stories returning to her Antipodean and decidedly Victorian childhood, which are exactly that, the records of a time and world vanished. Mansfield, however, does not

speak about the temporal or spatial setting of Woolf's novel, but its form. The epitome of the story about the vanished world, and one of Mansfield's masterpieces, *Prelude* (1918), typeset by Woolf herself and published by the Hogarth Press in 1917, is her proof that one can in fact return to the past but present it in a thoroughly innovative manner, very different from that of pre-war aesthetics. All evidence suggests that Woolf indeed heeded Mansfield's rebuke and it was *Prelude* she took as an inspiration for her further work as one of her subsequent novels, To the Lighthouse, is on many levels similar to Mansfield's modernist reimagining of her early years (Smith 91–110).

Secondly, the quotation appears to belie its core assertion; having reviewed many books happily stuck in pre-war patterns, Mansfield knew very well that the "great ocean of literature" was in fact teeming with traditional production and she had surely no illusions about it stopping anytime soon. Unless, by the great ocean, she did not mean the vast expanse of the publication industry that included all sorts and standards of writing, but an ocean of great literature, in which case she was paying Woolf another backhanded compliment, telling her she considered her great at the same time as announcing she did not expect her to betray her potential by putting forward a novel like that.

Mansfield's review thus suggests that there were two disappointments for her in reading *Night and Day*: the first was the betrayal of the new approach that she must have felt as acute after such a promising beginning; the second that, even if she took and read it as a traditional novel, Austen-like, it did not attain the standard set by Austen's fiction. Consequently, for Mansfield, *Night and Day* was a double failure: first as a modern novel, second as a traditional one.

Most of the above, however, does not really elucidate the letter's remark about *Northanger Abbey*. Although there seems to be a general agreement that *Night and Day* is the least attractive of all Woolf's novels (Goodman 69), for the same reason Mansfield dismissed it, that is, for its traditional character, putting the much longer, technically more elaborate, and for all its humour and whimsical irony, a much more serious book alongside Northanger Abbey seems to be wide of the mark. As indicated earlier, there are more resemblances here to *Pride and Prejudice* than any other Austen's novel, and *Night and Day*'s slow, detailed, deliberate and plodding progression is rather like that of *Mansfield Park* (1814), which de Gay considers a major influence on it (48–53).

Mansfield, however, did not say anything about *Night and Day* being like *Northanger Abbey*. She just put them side by side mostly to create a dramatic effect and to emphasise, as strongly as possible, her displeasure and the conviction that *Night and Day* is a relic of the past that a writer of Woolf's calibre should be ashamed to bring out, just as Austen would be, knowing that an unrevised work of her early years made it to publication. The difference between the two, though, is that while Austen had no say in what happened to her text after her death, for all that Mansfield knew, Woolf went on this path willingly, something that she, unaware of her colleague's struggle, could not understand.

Mansfield, in her letter communication with Murry, relies on her conviction that he would connect her remarks with Swinnerton's article elaborating upon the perceived deficiencies of what he emphatically claimed to be "the least perfect in construction as in matter," "the least profound" and "the weakest as it is the slightest of all" Austen's novels (JA I, 839). She knew that her statement would never be dramatic enough if she used any other of Austen's works, as to her, Murry, and at that time possibly most readers, Northanger Abbey was tolerated only as a "literary toddler" (Carson 37), a juvenile whim of an author who proved in her other works that she could really write.

There are, however, some other interesting assertions in Swinnerton's discussion that might have made Mansfield think about the parallel between Woolf and this particular novel. Towards the end of the first part, he maintains that *Northanger Abbey*, coming as it does at the moment that separates the two periods of Austen's writing career, "marks a turning-point in her method" (JA I, 839–40). But while Austen turned to writing technically better and more elaborate works, Mansfield was possibly afraid that Woolf was, after a very promising beginning, turning back towards the safer, less experimental prose. Mansfield had read and liked Woolf's *The Voyage Out* and some of her short stories; one of which, the thoroughly experimental "Kew Gardens" (1919), she reviewed positively for the Athenaeum in 1919.[5] Mansfield felt Woolf, wielding great potential, was at the crossroads, but was afraid that, with *Night and Day*, she was turning away from the right direction.

There is one more remark in Swinnerton's article that could have possibly tempted Mansfield to put the two works in question side by side, and that is when he states that the weaknesses of *Northanger Abbey* are due to "its partly satiric conception" (JA I, 840), a claim that resonates also in "A Tragic Comedienne," which perceives the main problem of *Night and Day* to be its two incongruous and constantly warring sides, the tragic and the comic. If it is, indeed, Mansfield who wrote the review, she regards the novel as "a witty comedy wrongly cast," where, yet again, Austen enters the picture when Katharine Hilbery is characterised as moving "through the sheltered places of the book with an air of tragedy," just like Balzac would "among Jane Austens" (Kimber and Smith 599).

The following statement towards the end of the unsigned review could thus easily describe the authors of *Night and Day* and *Northanger Abbey* respectively, viewed through Swinnerton's and arguably also Mansfield's eyes:

> She has, we think, in writing pure comedy deliberately sacrificed part of her genius. She has entered into the artist's struggle with her material with one hand tied behind her. Luckily, in writing this handicap matters less than in some other occupations. Mrs Woolf's talent is so splendid in its richness

[5] "A Short Story," 13 June 1919 (Kimber and Smith 473–5).

> and fine in its quality that half of it will go as far as the talents of ten less gifted writers. (Kimber and Smith 602)

These reservations about satire and comedy echo the Athenaeum review's similar concerns about the dangers of presenting characters for the sole purpose of mockery, of letting the light "shine at them, but not through them," having no deeper purpose than their entertainment value.

In the Athenaeum review, however, Mansfield chose to take a different path, and, instead of focusing on an imperfect and rather controversial analogy with Northanger Abbey, she decided to make a broader examination of the overall similarities of Austen's and Woolf's styles and the ramifications her choice of method meant for the latter. This approach was less radical, comparably more constructively critical and had much less potential of being insulting; for, in spite of all her uncompromising directness, Mansfield did have a point and was not trying to be mean. That was not what Woolf thought, though, at least not at first. What is more, for her, the overall negativity of the review was further aggravated by two circumstances: the writer she was compared to and the person of the reviewer. Mansfield was not somebody Woolf could easily dismiss as inconsequential; she cared about her opinion and valued her art more than she was ever able to express while Mansfield was alive. With Austen, Woolf had a similarly ambivalent relationship; she embraced her as much as she wanted to reject her, and, as Mark A. Wollaeger argues, in order to distance herself from her Edwardian contemporaries, she felt the need to first "disentangle herself from Jane Austen" (34). It is no wonder that, of all the remarks Mansfield made, it was the analogy with Austen that Woolf clearly resented the most, which is noticeable in her two recorded reactions. First, she interpreted Mansfield's assessment as being described as "[a] decorous elderly dullard […]; Jane Austen up-to-date" (Woolf et al. 314); she returned to the topic later, somewhat sullenly maintaining that she would "rather write in [her] own way of Four Passionate Snails than be, as K.M. maintains, Jane Austen over again" (Woolf et al. 316). It is an indication of her distress for being thus criticised by a younger colleague whom she secretly admired that she did not realise that it was not that much "Jane Austen over again," but rather "Jane Austen manqué" that Mansfield had in mind. Mansfield's frustrated exclamation to Murry: "What has been stands," implies, after all, that Austen did well for her era, and that there is no fault with her method but with Woolf's misguided aspiration to apply it out of context and not mastering it so well at that.

It has been stated repeatedly that Mansfield's interactions with Woolf, their talks, letters and Hogarth Press's publication of Prelude had a profound impact on Woolf, and possibly nudged her in the direction of her distinctly experimental style (Kaplan 11; Smith 5; Alpers 251–2). Woolf admitted that, with the loss of Mansfield, something would be forever missing from her life and that she would think about her till the end of hers. This turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the references to Mansfield keep reappearing in Woolf's letters and diaries, the last one recorded only a few weeks before her death. It

seems, however, that there is another, so far unacknowledged, consequence of their relationship connected to the review discussed here. It could be argued that Mansfield's bold analogy further fuelled Woolf's desire to distance herself from Austen and contributed to her later, almost obsessive and constant reappraisal of Austen in the years following Mansfield's death. It is as if every time she mentioned or discussed Austen, she not only re-evaluated what made her a great author, what her flaws were, and what Woolf's position was with respect to both, but it was another way of answering to and remembering her one-time rival, Mansfield. Austen and Mansfield became Woolf's personal great ghosts, two women she could not help communicating with in her personal writings as well as her fiction.

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György Kalmár

Subversive Bodily and Textual Practices in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*[1]

Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* seems to evade those well-established methods of criticism that apparently work well in the case of Woolf's other novels. Nothing indicates this better than the fact that many critics neglect this novel in their works covering Woolf's oeuvre (amongst them such noted Woolf scholars as Mitchell A. Leaska in his *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, or John Batchelor in his *Virginia Woolf: The Major Novels*). Many of those who finally undertake analysing it – David Dowling, Howard Harper, or Makiko Minow-Pinkey for example – basically fail to step out of the analytical framework of modernism, which often prevents them from taking notice of such characteristics of the novel as its strong narrative drive, the importance of metafiction, its parody of different styles and discourses, not to mention the particular interrelations of love, desire and disseminative writing.

My starting point in the following analysis of *Orlando* comes from Julia Kristeva and Nóra Séllei, who point out that theories of textuality and narrative tend to be inextricably intertwined with theories of subjectivity (Kristeva 124; Séllei, "A nő mint szubjektum" 10). These theories, I would argue, usually manifest themselves as practices of writing and being, that is, as specific ways of organising intertwined systems of textuality and subjectivity. Therefore, my aim is to relate the novel's narrative-rhetorical characteristics to theories and practices of subjectivity. I will try to demonstrate that *Orlando* is an odd one out in Woolf's oeuvre, a text that not only works differently, but one that is inspired, fuelled and shaped by another experience of subjectivity. *Orlando* is a novel in which the 'typical' questions that criticism approaches Woolf's texts with (like narrative technique, time, gender, subjectivity, art, history and politics) are inscribed in a different, yet no less exciting or subversive way. Similarly to Séllei, who contends that Woolf's later writings require an analytical framework slightly different from the one established on basis of the 'great' novels of the 1920s (Séllei, *A másik Woolf*), I will argue that *Orlando* follows a different paradigm and therefore demands a different analytical approach. I will argue that this 'other Woolf' that criticism often avoided without any explanation, and Woof herself also repudiated later, is at least as radical and productive from both a theoretical and a political point of view as the more characteristically modernist one.

I wish to argue that, when read with feminist and/or post-structuralist theories of desire and the body, *Orlando* shows its subversive and disseminative potentials. This

[1] The present article is an abbreviated, slightly rewritten version of "Parler-Entre-Elles: Possibilities of a Less Phallocentric Symbolic Economy in Virginia Woolf's Orlando." *The AnaChronist*, 16 (Winter 2011): 57–79. ISSN 1219–2589. DOI: https://doi.org/10.53720/MSKG9805 Reprinted here with the kind permission of *The AnaChronist*.

disseminative activity is closely connected to certain narrative characteristics, its deconstructive rhetoric, and the role the body and eroticism play in the production of meaning and subjectivity. *Orlando* is a pleasurable read in which the body becomes a central site, source, inspiration, and medium of meaning. I will indicate how *Orlando* creates a textual and libidinal economy that is different from the typical patterns of both modernism and phallogocentric systems of meaning in general (Booker 182). Relying on some feminist interpretations of Lacan, I will argue (contra Lacan) that *Orlando* proves that the field of meaning is not necessarily exclusively that of castration and lack, but may also be something considerably different, more joyful, something similar to what Derrida in *Writing and Difference* characterised as "the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of the world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin..." (Derrida 292).

The pleasure of the text

In order to understand the playful joys of *Orlando*, and the ways pleasure may turn into an organising (or, at times, disorganising) principle, it might be helpful to refer to the distinction that Roland Barthes makes between texts of bliss and texts of pleasure:

> Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Barthes 14)

I would argue that, while most of Woolf's writings are texts of bliss (and, what is more, they are exactly the kind of texts of modernism that gave birth to these categories, that made critics distinguish between worthy and enjoyable texts), *Orlando* may be seen either be a text of pleasure or (in a more radical reading) one as one deconstructive of Barthes's dichotomy. At first glance, *Orlando* is an example of texts of pleasure. But if one takes a closer look and examines its rhetoric and figurativity, one may realise that in *Orlando* the 'logic' of texts of pleasure is taken to its ultimate point, creating a playful and subversive symbolic system driven by pleasure, love and desire. *Orlando* offers a textual and libidinal economy different from the 'proper' norms of phallogocentism. It not only tolerates, but also notoriously accumulates logical contradictions, creating a discourse in which difference works in other ways than in (what Derrida and Irigaray call the) economies of the proper. The text constantly confuses basic dichotomies of the (patriarchal) symbolic and disregards such axioms of it as the unity of the self, the unity and univocal nature of sexual identity, and the ability of the narrator to exercise mastery over the text. In other words, while the novel may appear to please and entertain us without really challenging the existing order (like texts of pleasure), it actually takes the reader away from the properly castrated (that is, from what is castrated by the order of the *proper*).

Orlando is not only fuelled by pleasure, but also by libidinal energies and desire (the desires of narrative, the body and the unconscious), and also that of a different kind of subjectivity. This is the basic set of notions which should open new spaces for the novel's meanings. According to Barthes, in the pleasure of the text, the (patriarchal) Law becomes a more flexible playfield, and the body (together with the drives connected to it) can join discourse. The reader is simply *lost* in the pleasurable text, one loses oneself in it. This seems to make sense from a psychoanalytical perspective in which it is only intensive joy or pain that can loosen the grip of the symbolic: in *Orlando*, the mixing of the reader and the text (which is the crucial act of the birth of this kind of aesthetic experience) happens through intensive pleasure. Thus, the pleasure of the text is also an erotic pleasure as it stems from the pleasure of union, the union of the text, the reader and his/her (repressed) other. As Peter Brooks remarks, satisfaction is a "surrender to otherness" (Brooks 9), where the reading self surrenders to the otherness of the text and (at least partly) to the formless inner otherness that is normally covered by the coherent (castrated) subject. This surrender to the other, this loss of the self is the satisfaction caused by and felt in the pleasure of the text.

It may very well be the case that *Orlando* reveals something that many post-structuralist theoreticians forget. I would argue that *Orlando* and Barthes know something about the flexibility and openness of both meaning and subjectivity that Lacan does not seem to: that we like to play, and that when we are absorbed in joyful play we feel and *are* different. The game we play refigures the symbolic for a time together with the subject. It is an ironic characteristic of psychoanalytical theory that while it presents a de-centered, split subject, it also conceptualises the symbolic order, the field of meaning in which that subjectivity takes shape as (almost completely) unified and (potentially) trans-historical. Texts like *Orlando* may point out that the field of meaning and the subject may be much more flexible, open and shifting than mainstream accounts of psychoanalytic theory usually describe it.

Let us see how the game this text plays rewrites certain elements and mechanisms of phallogocentric systems of meaning. Perhaps it is best to start with the most obvious one, the problem of gender identity. What may strike the reader first is that Orlando does not seem to have the coherent, unchanging, 'proper' identity that 'normal' people (or characters) have. "When you meet someone, the first distinction you make is 'male or female?' and you are accustomed to make this distinction with unhesitating certainty" – says Freud in his (in)famous lecture on femininity (Freud 146). Yet, Orlando's gender identity – or, more exactly, the naturalness of 'his' gender identity – is questioned by the very first sentence of the novel: "He – for there could be no doubt about his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it – was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (Woolf 11). As Booker correctly notes, "this declaration of Orlando's gender is highly ironic: there is in fact a great deal of doubt about his sex, and the entire fabric of the text is permeated with images of ambiguous gender" (Brooker 182). In other words, by affirming something – Orlando's gender

identity – that should be obvious and natural, the text brings it into question and destabilises its very naturalness. The gender identity of Orlando and the duality of his identity and appearance become an open question from the very first sentence of the novel, an obscure place in the signifying process in which desire can be born. The text does not say that it could not be known whether Orlando was a boy or a girl, but creates a world in which these concepts need explanations, words, descriptions, focussing an erotically charged attention on the body. In this way, *Orlando* does not simply subvert the patriarchal symbolic order (of "unhesitating certainty") thematically, but also teaches the reader to think in terms of a language which is different from the Oedipal order.

The strong narrative drive, one of the most important characteristics of texts of pleasure, is also typical of *Orlando*, which never frustrates its reader, but always remains enjoyable, understandable and seductive, constantly feeding and teasing the reader's epistemophilia and scopophilia. Through these pleasures, the reader becomes erotically invested in a text that French feminist writers would call a piece of *écriture féminine*, a text that diverges from the patriarchal symbolic in both the imaginary and symbolic registers. In Moi's description,

> It is a writing which finds its source and character in the half-repressed libidinal drives of the girl child for the mother. . . . Not only is such a writing essentially different from male writing, it is also a de-cerebralised writing, which takes its energies from the sexual pleasures of the body. The phrase that recurs as a near synonym of *écriture féminine* is the phrase 'writing the body'. . . . To 'write the body' is to seek to recover the inhabited, repressed, forgotten, lost desire for the mother and the mother's body, which the Symbolic Order of language has superseded. (6)

In my opinion, the most radical potential of the concept of *écriture féminine*, just like Derrida's concept of writing, is that these are theories of difference *within* the field of meaning: these concepts are capable of rewriting Lacan's binary system in which meaning, symbolic economies and subjectivity are always necessarily connected to being subjected to Oedipalisation, castration, lack, and the phallus, while everything outside this (unhappy, phallocentric) system are also placed outside meaning and subjectivity in general (and associated with fantasy or psychoses). I argue that *Orlando* calls attention to the theoretical necessity that one replaces this inside/outside model with one that is able to account for a variety of different economies of meaning and different subjectivities.

Desire and the text

What can be known about the birth of *Orlando* (from the con-*text*, texts written by Woolf, contemporaries, critics, and biographers) seems to suit well the ideas of pleasurable loss in a different order of meaning outlined above. What is more, the way the text and its con-text relate to each other in the case of *Orlando* may deconstruct our ('proper') ideas about the (theoretically) distinct categories of author, implied author and narrator.

Woolf started writing *Orlando* in the winter of 1927, when Vita (Victoria Sackville-West), who is usually referred to as her greatest love, went travelling with her husband. That is the reason why Nigel Nicolson could call the novel "the longest and most charming love letter in literature" (Knopp 111). So on one hand the text is a love letter, a piece of writing between two women in love, *parler-entre-elles,* as Irigaray would call it, a text written in the specific feminine language of the couple (Whitford 199); but, on the other hand, it is also a substitute for the lacking object of desire. One could say that Woolf wrote *Orlando* (for herself) because of the lack of Vita, as a surrogate.[2] In this case, the novel is a metaphor or textual displacement of the object of desire: the body of the text is analogous to the body of the loved one. Naming, telling, narrating something in this sense also means possessing it: telling (the story of) the object of desire means having that object (Brooks 19–20). Obviously, this may be one of the sources of the pervasive pleasures of the novel, pleasures that spread easily from the narrator to the reader.

The crucial point to see here is that these are not 'just' metaphors of love, just like these pleasures are not bookish or dry at all. The object's being made up of figures of speech does not differ much from 'ordinary' situations of love: according to post-structuralist theoreticians of love and desire like Lacan or Catherine Belsey, these feelings are very much based on seeing the object through certain kinds of figures of speech (Belsey 34). In the Lacanian sense, there is no language without desire (to tell, to know, to be recognised by the other), just as there is no desire without language. As Lacan's analysis of courtly love aptly demonstrates in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, distance and figurativity only increase desire, as they delay its fulfilment, so much so that courtly love may be called a "poetic exercise" (148).

In other words, *Orlando* shows, displays, focuses on Orlando's body, but this appearance of presence through words and figures of speech talks about the absence of the original object, which is the precondition of desire in the first place. This paradoxical situation amounts to saying that an object of desire is always present and absent, always bodily and figurative, whether encountered in a book or in bed.

This way the novel also stages the acts of desire, 'knowing,' and the constant refiguring of subjectivity by desire, and desire by language. As the sight of the naked body is often less erotic than the gap between two pieces of clothes (to use Barthes's example), the game of concealing and revealing also becomes more exciting and pleasurable than showing the object in its 'nakedness' would be. It also has to be noted that according to psychoanalysis the ultimate object of desire can never be shown: it is unnameable and terrifying at the same time. The original object shown in itself is a Medusa head, which can be watched only in the mirror of one's shield, as Perseus did. This prohibition, and the necessity that the text be something that shields, mirrors, and refigures at the same time, defines the basic semantic and rhetorical strategies of the novel. Another reason why

[2] For a detailed analysis of the connection between self-therapy, writing and autobiography in Woolf, see: Nóra Séllei "Az önéletírás (lehetetlensége)".

nudity is less exciting than the game that constantly conceals and reveals its *objet petit a*, as Lacan calls it, is that nudity may cut short fantasy and figurative meaning, the things that can transform the object into (the illusion of) the original object of desire.

The diary entries and letters of Woolf may also indicate how closely connected *Orlando* is to love and pleasure: "I am so engulfed in *Orlando* I can think of nothing else. . . . I make it up in bed at night, as I walk the streets, everywhere. I want to see you in the lamplight, in your emeralds. In fact I have never more wanted to see you than I do now" (Knopp 112). It seems that the textualisation of desire liberates both the narrative and desire. Sexual and textual desires transform into each other. The strength of narration, the vigorous style of the work, the love of words and the unmistakable joy of the (implied) writer in her work all seem to come from this eroticism. This liberation and textualisation of her desires was as sudden a turn for (the implied) Woolf as strong the previous repression was: "[*Orlando* was] extraordinary unwilled by me but potent in its own right ... as if it shoved everything aside to come into existence" (Knopp 115). All these words are very telling: *Orlando* was not intended by Woolf, and one can emphasise either the word "unwilled" here, as Woolf *did not intend it*, or the words "by me," as *it was not Woolf* who intended the birth of the work (but an internal *other*).

The way Woolf comments on her work is not any less telling. She often calls it a joke, a farce, a writer's holiday or an escapade (Minow-Pinkey 118). These expressions and the fact that she later disavowed her work emphasise the novel's difference from the rest of the oeuvre. Calling *Orlando* a joke is telling not only because it means that the novel is different, but also because such an underestimation of the work can also be read as a defensive technique to distance the text's pleasures from the subject who feels threatened by them. At the same time this underestimation sets the text free from the critical eye of the Law: the jester's cap may serve as defence, and may open spaces for a different (and more pleasurable) economy of writing.

Metonymic speech and the body

From the perspective of the above theoretical considerations, *Orlando* appears like a highly eroticised text where (in the constitutive distance from the phallus) the imaginary, the unconscious, and the drives of the body take unusually active parts in producing joyful, disseminative writing. It may be fruitful to recall at this point that Barthes's favourite metaphor in the description of the pleasure of the text is also the eroticised body:

> Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes?* ... it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. (Barthes 9–10)

One may perceive a very similar economy of pleasure, seeing, and knowledge in *Orlando*: the play of showing and concealing the object of desire and/or knowledge is a recurrent strategy (for example in the descriptions of Orlando or the Russian princess), but this strategy also seems to regulate the relationship of the Law and the subject of pleasure, or the economy of knowledge and uncertainty. That is the reason why omission becomes one of the most important rhetorical vehicles of the novel: the reader often does not get fully satisfying descriptions, explanations, or motivations of characters of the kind (that realism made us grow accustomed to). Consequently, *Orlando* creates the impression that there is nothing like ultimate truth, psychological coherence, or a deep essential logic behind events. The same may be said about the erotic parts: it is not only in the more intimate scenes that the narrator cuts away, but she also avoids the overtly erotic parts in the (frequent) descriptions of Orlando's body.

One of the most conspicuous poetic vehicles of the text is in close connection with this. In the subtly eroticised text of *Orlando*, the object of desire is something highly rhetorical and figurative. We never see private parts or the ultimate truth in its 'nakedness': things are always covered, displaced, substituted by deceptive figurations. The text, in a radically anti-essentialist manner, keeps talking about Orlando's *body* instead of him/her. However, Orlando's body is not shown naked either; the most often used metonymy (or synecdoche) of his/her body is that of the legs, which appear many times and often play important roles in the story. Sometimes, however, the text does not stop even here, but talks about desire through another metonymy – Orlando's clothes. This is another sense in which the novel establishes the discourse of the body: the signs of the novel are written on the bodies of the characters. In other words, the text (dis-)places the object of desire (and knowledge together with it) in a series of substitutions, displacements, metaphors and metonymies.

The scene when Orlando meets Queen Elizabeth may be a fine example. In the discourse of the body in general, and here as well, the spectacle is of prime importance, as the desired body is put on stage in the field of vision. The importance of the sight of the body and the logic of metonymy are spectacularly connected here:

> Such was his [Orlando's] shyness that he saw no more of her [the Queen] than her ringed hand in water; but it was enough. It was a memorable hand; a thin hand with long fingers always curling as if round orb or sceptre; a nervous, crabbed, sickly hand; a commanding hand, too; a hand that had only to raise itself for a head to fall; a hand, he guessed, attached to an old body that smelt like a cupboard in which furs are kept in camphor; which body was yet caparisoned in all sorts of brocades and gems; and held itself very upright though perhaps in pain from sciatica; and never flinched though strung together by a thousand fears; and the Queen's eyes were light yellow. (Woolf 16–17).

The passage illustrates perfectly how the body speaks in the novel. Basically, it uses metonymies, and, with the help of synecdoches, it shows the whole in the part. If one is to believe Freud and Barthes, behind this characteristic of the discourse of the body one finds the prohibition of showing the whole and the naked: revealing the ultimate object of desire is not only a blasphemy, a taboo, but more importantly an essentialist gesture of someone (like Nietzsche's "dogmatic philosopher" in *Beyond Good and Evil*) who does not know anything about woman or knowing. Such a clumsy (essentialist, dogmatic, metaphysical) gesture could no doubt extinguish desire. It is also interesting in the above passage that even death is signified by a synecdoche from the field of the body, when, instead of an execution, it mentions the fall of a head.

One might ask why the representation of the Queen is saturated by this high extent of rhetoricity and figuration, why the signifying chain is extended to such a length by the metonymies of the body. The Queen is not the object of desire for Orlando, or for the narrator. I think it is exactly this characteristic of the text that should call our attention to the importance of the Queen's character. The Queen as a symbol may signify the great mother (of life), the starting-point of all life and things, power, wisdom, and the *phallus*. She is the one who donates lands to Orlando, to her favourite, in a sense she is the one who sets the story off. She is the ancestress and the donor of Orlando's story, and, as there is not much about Orlando's mother in the novel, she also fulfils that function. In other words, it is the main character of the imaginary that the reader meets here, the (pre-oedipal, 'phallic') mother. The attention paid to her hand may also suggest that the figure of the Queen may also represent the Writer: she is the origin of the story, she loves Orlando, and decides in questions of life and death by a move of her fingers. This is the reason why the Queen cannot be glimpsed, why she cannot be touched and why all the vehicles of rhetoric are there: her immediate presence would stop words and signification, her sight would freeze the narrative.

The discourse of the body has another feature that may be relevant in this context. According to French feminist thinkers, the body (and its drives) can be a place of resistance to the symbolic order. It may resist the 'proper' places and meanings prescribed for it, it differs from them, always threatens with transgression, and keeps producing a surplus of (semiotic) meaning that cannot be integrated into the symbolic. As Brooks argues, the body "often presents us with a fall from language, a return to an infantile pre-symbolic space in which primal drives reassert their force. Yet the earliest infantile experiences . . . may be foundational of all symbolism" (7).

This is where the body as the place of subverting the symbolic meets the body as the foundation of symbolism. In the child's world, the main analogy for the understanding of experience is the body. That is the reason why the language of returning to the pre-oedipal world of the girl child can also be described as the language of the body. Therefore, this textual strategy may be regarded as a return not only to the early stages of the psyche but also to one of the early stages of language. Language was partly built of the

body, when it was built on it to hide it. And, as the mother is ever present behind language, as source, inspiration and something to conceal, so is the body:

> the body furnishes the building blocks of symbolisation, and eventually of language itself, which then takes us away from the body, but always in a tension that reminds us that mind and language need to recover the body as an otherness that is somehow primary to their very definition. . . . . the body as at once a cultural construct and its other, something outside of language that language struggles to mark and to be embodied in. (Brooks xii–xiii)

As the Woolf passage quoted above may indicate, the basic trope of the discourse of the body is metonymy. Of the two basic psychical mechanisms of the unconscious in Freudian psychoanalysis – condensation and displacement –, it can be connected to the latter, which Lacan explicitly connects to the way desire works (*Écrits* 176). The main idea of displacement – like that of a metonymy – is to transfer a thing's meaning to another in close connection with it, and to conceal the first thing by this. It is also important that there is no hierarchical relation between the two things; the old and the new signifiers (unlike in the case of a metaphor or condensation) are both on the same level. "Little Hans" in Freud's famous case-study uses a metonymy when he transfers his hatred and fear of his father – that he feels in the street when walking with him – to the horses he sees there almost in the same way as Woolf does when talking about Orlando's stockings instead of talking about his/her body. In the first case, as in Woolf's "A Sketch of the Past," it is rather trauma and anxiety that drive the signifying chain forward (Séllei, "Az önéletírás" 82), while, in the second, it is desire.

If a text is metonymic, one of the first things that may call one's attention to this fact is the lack of hierarchical relationships. The individual episodes cannot be connected to anything common floating somewhere above them as an omniscient perspective, it is not inner affinity that connects them, but rather their succession in time, or the presence of the main character('s body). These texts do not have any parts standing above or structuring the others, like the last two lines of the Shakespearean sonnet or the final outcome of the *Bildungsroman*. Of course, this brings about the freedom and playfulness of meanings, since the individual episodes may live their own lives without being limited by anything external to them. In the metonymic text, meaning is less centred, more fluid, constantly on the move. *Orlando* does not take even its own figures of speech seriously; it often forgets them and starts creating new ones which do not necessarily converge with the previous ones. The situation is very similar in the case of the protagonist. Metonymic texts are anti-essentialist; they deny all forms and notions of essence behind the surface that could limit the free play of meanings coming from the body, and as such they also subvert the idea of any coherent self. In one of the *par excellence* metonymic genres with a clear influence on the novel, the picaresque, one cannot find characters with psychological 'depth.' Voltaire's *Candide* or Sade's *Justine* are not really rounded characters: they seem to lack depth or a complexity of inner layers. Orlando is their true companion in

this respect. These characters seem to lack what is so central in European thinking, the Cartesian core of the personality that would keep them together, make them self-identical, and would keep them from changing in space and time, under different circumstances. These typical, metonymically structured anti-heroes may represent the repressed *other* side of our traditional (metaphysical, phallogocentric) view of the self.

The influence of history and external circumstances on Orlando's personality is often mentioned and demonstrated in the novel. Orlando changes together with the world, his/her nature, temperament and behaviour are determined by these 'external' conditions, for example by his/her clothes. The novel talks about Orlando's variety of selves over many pages. The only problem (Orlando's only problem) is that (s)he cannot find a central (Cartesian) self that would unite or organise the others:

> So Orlando, at the turn by the barn, called 'Orlando?' with a note of interrogation in her voice and waited. Orlando did not come.
>
> 'All right then,' Orlando said, with the good humour people practice on these occasions; and tried another. For she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many thousand. Choosing then only those selves we have found room for, Orlando may now have called on the boy who cut the nigger's head down; the boy who strung it up again; the boy who sat on the hill; the boy who saw the poet; the boy who handled the Queen the bowl of rose water...
>
> Perhaps; but what appeared certain (for now we are in the region of 'perhaps' and 'appears') was that the one that she needed most kept aloof, for she was, to hear her talk, changing her selves as quickly as she drove – there was a new one at every corner – as happens when, for some unaccountable reason, the conscious self, which is the uppermost, and has the power to desire, wishes to be nothing but one self. This is what some people call the true self, and it is, they say, compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all. Orlando was certainly seeking this self… (Woolf 213–4).

Thus, Orlando's identity is an open one, formed by accidental circumstances, and there is no "Captain-self" that would control the others. One gets to know most about Orlando from the style and the metonymies of the text: from the image of the castle that (s)he lives in, that of the oak tree that (s)he likes lying under, and the poem *The Oak Tree* that (s)he has written and always keeps by her/himself. In this respect, s/he resembles the novel too: in its metonymic slidings and displacements, the basic constituents of 'proper' symbolic systems (such as the binary oppositions of essence and appearance, male and female, or internal and external) are dislocated. In *Orlando*, the "*one* of form, of

the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning" that Irigaray lists in *This Sex* as the characteristics of patriarchal phallomorphism (Irigaray 26) are all missing. The difference between appearance and essence collapses, and the subject is always only what we can see at the moment, in that particular situation. The subject is neither a master of being nor that of the world: (s)he is inseparable from it, has no existence without it.

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"Closely united, immensely divided." Reading Virginia Woolf's *Flush* and Sigrid Nunez's *Mitz* as humanimal biofiction

Reading Flush as humanimal biofiction

Virginia Woolf's short novel *Flush: A Biography* (1933) is a strangely doubled fictional biography: it recalls episodes from the life of the Victorian literary foremother, Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861) from the perspective of her dog, a cocker spaniel called Flush. A sketch of a human past, a private story with public relevance in homage to the famous artist predecessor is intertwined with speculations about an animal past even less frequently commemorated than the "herstory" of a woman's life in an androcentric and anthropocentric (his)storytelling tradition. Hence, the story performs a double resistance to the silencing of the marginalised.

Published only two years after Woolf's majestic experimental novel *The Waves* (1931), *Flush* was originally intended as a joke, a lark, a jeu d'esprit (Briggs 300), a tongue-in-cheek parody of celebrated biographies like Lytton Strachey's *Queen Victoria* (1921), dedicated to Woolf. In a letter to Ottoline Morrell in February 1933, Woolf associates the birth of the text with a spontaneous outburst of joy, a comic relief, a sweet temptation to light-heartedness: "I was so tired after the Waves, that I lay in the garden and read the Browning love letters, and the figure of their dog made me laugh so I couldn't resist making him a Life." (Letters vol. 5, 161–2, qtd. in Novak 107). The endeavor borders on the nonsensical in light of Woolf's claim formulated in her essay "The New Biography:" "Let it be fact, one feels, or let it be fiction; the imagination will not serve under two masters simultaneously." (234) However, *Flush*, mockingly subtitled "A Biography" does precisely the opposite, and performs the paradoxical by aiming to mingle fact and fiction in the semi-imaginary account of poet-owner's and pet-dog's parallel experiences.

While Woolf acknowledged Barrett Browning's "complicity in the making of modern poetry" (104) – she called *Aurora Leigh* "a masterpiece stuck in an embryonic state" (Péter 62) –, she was perhaps even more captivated by the myth surrounding the fragile yet fierce figure of the invalid author, unjustly commemorated by posterity more because of her life than her art, as "an extravagant freak of early Victorian taste" – as Woolf put it in an early review of Lubbock's monograph on Barrett Browning's letters (Snaith 614). True to the modernists' interest in details hidden beneath the grand narrative surface story, and driven by a ludic demythologising agenda, she portrayed Barrett Browning, "England's foremost poetess, the brilliant, the doomed, the adored Elizabeth" (*Flush* 18) through the eyes of the therapy pet who accompanied her from the claustrophobic confinement of Wimpole Street, London's most dignified and impersonal household, to the

romantic escapade with the poet spouse, to the sensorially stimulating and intellectually liberating touristic-artistic exploration of the lush Italian cities.

Nóra Séllei (2012) describes *Flush* as a "deceptively charming" little text that at once takes itself seriously and parodically, reflecting not only on the genre of biography but also on a dense network of Victorian disciplinary discourses: the Austenian novel of manners, the logically structured scientific essay of natural history, spatial semiotics, and the rhetoric of colonisation – each reiterated and subverted on its turn. Beneath its seemingly light-hearted surface, *Flush* engages with the socio-political contexts of both mid-nineteenth-century London and the early 1930s, when the text was composed, interrogating internalised cultural norms of class, gender, race, (dis)ability, and the hegemonic power of the British Empire from the lowly vantage point of a dog, a marginal witness to human history. The irruption of animal alterity – surfacing in narrative gaps, twists, and hybridisations – serves as a key instrument of textual politics.

Flush is a playful stylistic exercise in animal stream of consciousness that offers a peek into the private life of the poetess through reimagining the intimate human-animal bond based on Barrett Browning's letters and poems. This curious companionship, described as a "sharing of shadows," an "aloneness together," a "mutual mirroring," is endowed with the potential of an interspecies solidarity that Donna Haraway's ecofeminist philosophy today would call a "sympoietic becoming with and through one another" (58). The celebration of relationality works both at an inter- and intraspecies level: in her tender description of the companion animal, Woolf echoes Barrett Browning's own lyrical wording. The passages are exciting from a zoopoetic perspective – concerning the intersection of poetic thinking and transverbal animal consciousness, our tendencies to treat animals as humans and humans as animals, as well as the challenges of the artistic discursive representations of such difficult connections.

But they also posit the book as an exercise in the genre's subversive "metabiographical" exploration (Herman 547, Nünning 195). Flush uses nonhuman subjectivity to explore the limits of language. Its primordial dilemma is the knowability and the speakability of self and other, the insufficiency of any solid narrative to frame the turbulence of a life, those ephemeral moments of being Woolf was so interested in. Moreover, the mock-sentimental, intimate tone of Barrett Browning and Flush's double fictional biography is an elaborate case of self-masking that hides and reveals Woolf's own confession about her feelings for dogs, in particular, her beloved cocker spaniel Pinka. Woolf's playful identification with the canine perspective pays an affectionate homage to the animal world, a radical otherness both frightening and fascinating, assimilated or marginalised to the brink of human society in an illusorily tamed or violently bestialised form. Even if Woolf is ironically aware of her authorial ownership over (dog and human) lives, yet hers is a dialogic attempt to self-reflectively engage with the literary foremother – an avid letter writer like herself excelling in the dialogic form –, past and present animal companions, and the biographical genre itself.

Received ambiguously by critics and marginalised for some time by canonisation, Flush has been rediscovered by feminist scholars who drew a parallel between the unleashed dog's wild life-energies and the woman-artist's fight to reject the yokes of paternal tyranny and patriarchal custom, to denounce systemic oppression involved in sexist, classist, colonialist, fascist, or speciesist marginalisation – an ethical agenda shared by Woolf and Barrett Browning. Politicised readings (eg. Squier, Flint, Snaith, Séllei, "Kutyaszimat") explored how the generic hybrid of human/canine biofiction provides a critical commentary on the ideological othering and the subversive counter-narrative potentialities, the somato-sensory explorations involved in becoming-woman and becoming-animal.

It is an exciting question to explore how the personal yet politically charged experimentation with the biographical mode in Woolf's case relates to the hybrid genre of "biofiction" defined by David Lodge as a narrative that "takes a real person and their real history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel's techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography" (2007, 8). In the following, I wish to interpret Flush as a humanimal biofiction (a double portmanteau of "human-animal fictional biography") focusing on novelistic techniques of representing non-human subjectivities. In my understanding, humanimal biofiction fictionalises actual historical figures and factual events with a focus on interspecies connections, mutually formative bonds between humans and animals, like pets and owners, exploring animal perspectives as alternatives for self-centred anthropocentric viewpoints. Meanwhile, on a meta-level it also addresses limitations concerning the insatiable hunger for truth implied in Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact and the inevitability of defacement problematised by Paul de Man, as well as the difficulties of detachment from the human/ist gaze. As Louisa Treger puts it, according to the illusory premise and the legerdemain logic of the genre, biofiction "presents a lie through which truth can emerge" (Treger qtd. in Layne 9). Some of these truths, in Flush's case, concern the status of animals in the human lifeworld.

The dog as engine of (life)narrative and agent of liberation/(de)mythologisation

Even if *Flush* is a playful hybrid of novel and biography (or, more precisely, an anti-novel and mock-biography suffused with fable, in which anthropomorphic animals reflect on frailties of human lives), readers are inclined to assume that our speculative familiarisation with (or even fantasising about) Barrett Browning as a dog-owner will shed a new light on her art and life. Yet, surprisingly, Woolf's narrative reveals little about Barrett Browning's artistic efforts or creative genius; the writerly self is witnessed only in the context of her letter-writing, which the canine gaze ironically admires only because of the physical feat of her manual dexterity. Nevertheless, Woolf's humanimal biofiction exerts a subtle but palpable impact on Barrett Browning's critical reception and the reconstruction of her authorial persona by posterity. By mockingly filling biographical lacunae, *Flush* retrospectively rationalises unjustifiable, seemingly inexplicable life choices by foregrounding animal agency.

Flush comes to be celebrated as an agent of liberation and a pivotal figure in his owner's personality development, courtesy of an anecdote appropriated by multiple biographers and recycled in Woolf's text. According to the anecdote, when Elizabeth, despite parental prohibition, rescued Flush from criminals – it was common practice to abduct gentlefolks' pets who were only returned to their noble owners in exchange for a ransom (Howell 35) –, she realised that she was stronger than she believed herself to be, and that there was life for her beyond her sickbed, so the elopement with future husband, Robert Browning, soon followed. Obeying a novelistic dramaturgy, Woolf fictionalises the episode. Barrett Browning's letters and diaries attest to three separate dog-nappings, which became condensed into a single incident in the novel, and although it remains uncertain whether Elizabeth or her brother executed Flush's rescue from the animal traffickers, Woolf attributes the courageous act to the poetess herself. By a romanesque logic, a cause-and-effect relation is imposed on potentially unrelated events: the dog's rescue precipitates the elopement with Robert, underscoring the significance of animal intervention within the course of human lives. Interspecies entanglement thus emerges as an identity-theme, in Norman Holland's sense, celebrated by Woolf's biofiction.

In her notes on *Flush*, Woolf highlights "the question of dogs' relation to the spirit of the age, whether it is possible to call one dog Elizabethan, another Augustan, another Victorian, together," mockingly adding that "the influence upon dogs of the poetry and philosophy of their masters, deserves a fuller discussion" (*Flush* 162). In this manner, she enacts a simultaneous demythologisation and remythologisation, carving out a space for the untold stories of animals and their human companions and entwining literary, historical, and biographical narrative.

The dog as eyewitness

In *Flush*, the depiction of the dog's life functions primarily as a pretext to get a glimpse of the secretive life of the famous woman writer from a curious yet ostensibly authentic perspective. Intimate details of the private sphere – the sick bed, Oedipal anxieties, inhibited passions – are disclosed, but there is no moral censure attached to this voyeurism. We lack the doubts related to paparazzi's questionable peeping, since the animal acts as an unbiased eyewitness. The non-human animal perspective thereby becomes a guarantor of credibility, mediated through a pseudo-realistic mockumentarism that substitutes for the Lejeuneian autobiographical pact, the conventional promise of truth-telling as the prerequisite of any life- or self-writing's mimetic genre.

As Nóra Séllei observes, the dog's acute sensory perceptions minutely detect and defamiliarise the social customs, taboos, and discourse systems foundational to Victorian culture: Flush's microscopic observations of knee-high objects decorating a bourgeois household simultaneously map a refined lady's taste and material traces of colonial ideology. With an ironic reiteration of socialist feminist critique, Woolf juxtaposes the prestige of the pedigreed purebred dogs with that of human aristocratic ancestral lineage, while celebrating a pack of Mediterranean stray dogs as emblematic embodiments of a utopian

ethos of democracy, free love, and unrestrained mobility. The dog's distanced vantage point underwrites Woolf's attempt to reconstruct an authentic image of the artist and her milieu – so much so that, because of this authenticity, Lackey reads *Flush* as a historical novel ("Usages" 13). However, it also remains a partial perspective, constrained by the limitations of its location and by its self-conscious acknowledgment of the difficulty inherent in human conceptualisations of a non-human gaze. What Lackey designates as biofiction's "truth proposal" (Biofiction passim) manifests here as a fidelity not to literal fact, but to the 'spirit' of Barrett Browning.

The dog as a mirror

In Barrett Browning's poetry – most notably in "Flush or Faunus" and "To Flush, My Dog" –, Flush emerges as a Faun-like figure, a sprite of Nature, whose vitality animates the poetess's world with his life energies: "a lowly creature with the most sublime love, a loving friend and gentle fellow creature." The dog, a gift from an old friend, Mary Russell Mitford, was intended to console Elizabeth, who was overwhelmed by grief following the death of her two brothers. The mischievous spaniel soon evolved from a comfort object to a therapeutic companion animal and, ultimately, a soulmate. Barrett Browning interprets canine fidelity through affective anthropomorphisation, framing Flush's devotion in terms of sacrificial heterosexual romance: she believes the dog renounces his own needs and desires to remain by her sickbed because of his unselfish devotion, thereby mimicking her emotional states to articulate rudimentary forms of empathy. The companion animal grants a pleasure derived from narcissistic self-recognition, a satisfying similarity that Barrett Browning describes through the metaphor of mutual mirroring.

Yet Woolf also invites us to consider the insurmountable differences, the irreducible asymmetries inherent in the hierarchically organised relation of master and pet. Elizabeth's voluntary confinement is medically mandated, whereas Flush's limited mobility is externally imposed on him by his owner. The passage describing the first encounter between Elizabeth and Flush emphasises their interlocking gazes, dramatising the separation involved in the proximity:

> There was a likeness between them. As they gazed at each other each felt: Here am I– and then each felt: But how different! Hers was the pale worn face of an invalid, cut off from air, light, freedom. His was the warm ruddy face of a young animal; instinct with health and energy. Broken asunder, yet made in the same mould, could it be that each completed what was dormant in the other? She might have been–all that; and he–But no. Between them lay the widest gulf that can separate one being from another. She spoke. He was dumb. She was woman; he was dog. Thus, closely united, thus immensely divided, they gazed at each other. (*Flush* 27)

The scene resonates with Jacques Derrida's philosophical reflections in *L'animal donc que je suis* ("The Animal that therefore I am more to follow"), particularly the famous

anecdote in which he notices his cat staring at his naked body, prompting him to meditatively reflect on his own reactions to animal otherness, and to realise humans' inability to fully conceptualise the animal perspective. Like Derrida, Woolf invites the reader to see the animal seeing us.

To further illuminate the ambiguous dynamics of interspecies bonds, ocular intimacy is counterpointed by insurmountable differences, most notably the question of language: Elizabeth excels in the mastery of words, whereas Flush is incapable of verbalisation. This melancholic acknowledgment of a "togetherness of worlds-apart" imbues the narrative with a metanarrative quality, problematising the speakability of the self, the knowability of the other, and the cultural myth of interspecies friendship's redemptive quality.

The dog as muse

Flush toys with the possibility of reconstructing a canine stream of consciousness, attempting to capture the essence of dogly being with the inherently limited apparatus of human language. As Vanessa Berry observes, the book is not so much about how much Woolf loves dogs, but how much she wants to be a dog herself. The book abounds in lengthy descriptions about the inadequacy of human language to convey the intricate olfactory and sensory experiences of a dog roaming freely through the streets, emphasising the fundamental gap between species-specific modes of perception.

> […] there are no more than two words and perhaps one-half for what we smell. The human nose is practically non-existent. The greatest poets in the world have smelt nothing but roses on the one hand, and dung on the other. The infinite gradations that lie between are unrecorded. Yet it was in the world of smell that Flush mostly lived. Love was chiefly smell; form and colour were smell; music and architecture, law, politics and science were smell. To him religion itself was smell.… But Flush wandered off into the streets of Florence to enjoy the rapture of smell. He threaded his path through main streets and back streets, through squares and alleys, by smell. He nosed his way from smell to smell; the rough, the smooth, the dark, the golden. …He slept in this hot patch of sun–how sun made the stone reek! he sought that tunnel of shade–how acid shade made the stone smell! He devoured whole bunches of ripe grapes largely because of their purple smell; …He followed the swooning sweetness of incense into the violet intricacies of dark cathedrals; and, sniffing, tried to lap the gold on the window-stained tomb…Not a single one of his myriad sensations ever submitted itself to the deformity of words. (125)

This verbosity about unspeakability invites us to read the text as a fictional metabiography, a genre defined by Ansgar Nünning (2005) as one that transgresses the boundaries between fact and fiction, blurs generic distinctions, employs self-reflexivity, and ultimately reveals more about the biographer than the elusive subject (195–6). Woolf's stylistic experiment in "becoming a dog" deploys the same imaginative literary techniques

characteristic of her experimental fiction: stream of consciousness, free indirect discourse, and narrative subjectivity. Applying Woolf's own critical categories, as articulated in her "The Art of Biography" (1939), *Flush* aligns more closely with the novel, insofar as it is committed to the aesthetic imperative of projecting "the truth of [its] own vision" (124) rather than the epistemic obligation to accurately represent established, verifiable facts, as conventional biographies do.

On the one hand, attributing the complex cognitive agency of mindwandering to a dog challenges our ingrained automatic anthropocentrism: anticipating posthumanist philosophy, canine psycho-narration vindicates agency through subjectivation for non-human beings. As exemplified by the olfactorily rich and sensorially intricate experiences of the canine flâneur described above, Woolf treats the dog's animal perceptions as more immediate, more authentic, and closer to reality than those of humans. Dogs can experience things in themselves, apprehend pure phenomena stripped of cultural connotations, unmediated by symbolic frameworks. Flush, infested with fleas, and subsequently shaved bare naked, stripped of the purebred elegant beauty of its fur coat, undergoes an existential catharsis of "being nobody and becoming nothing," dissolving into the totality of the world's things, experiencing absolute independence, and thereby enacting the modernist aspiration of a "world seen without a self." (Macadré 27)

The dog as an autobiographical animal

On the other hand, *Flush* performs a double exercise in empathy: adopting a canine perspective enables Woolf to reach back to her literary foremother, Barrett Browning. Canine biofiction celebrates relational identity by foregrounding entanglement in interspecies bonds and within the woman-writerly tradition. Neither fiction nor documentary biography can fully express who one is: the self can be grasped only through its connection with the other – whether a pet or a fellow female artist –, fading, dissolving into the collective fantasy of community. Yet behind the conjoint biofiction of Elizabeth and Flush lies the shadow story of another writer and another dog: an autofictional stratum inspired by Woolf's relationship with her dog, a black cocker spaniel called Pinka, a gift from Vita Sackville-West, who functioned as an affectively charged transitional object of queer desire, and who, in Woolf's words, "represents the private side of life, the play side" (Woolf 5). Pinka embodies those "unwitnessed inscrutable moments of being which are foundational of the value of every life," moments that constitute the very subject of biofiction (Boldrini et al 8). As Woolf confesses in a letter to Vita Sackville-West, the human–animal bond is both an impossible and an irresistible form of love:

> Your puppy has destroyed, by eating holes, my skirt, tore it to shreds. He ate Leonard's proofs. He did all the damage that could be done to the carpet. But he is an angel of light […]. Leonard says seriously that Pinka makes him believe in the existence of God… and this after he peed on the floor eight times in a single day. (Woolf qtd. in Adams 227)

Woolf thus uses the life of her subject to articulate her vision of the world (Lackey, "Introduction" 10), offering a nuanced meditation on the human–animal bond, but also on empathy, freedom, and the ethics of writing – the responsibility to engage imaginatively with the world.

A dog… and a marmoset of Bloomsbury

The afterlife of Flush is compelling not only in terms of literary-critical reevaluations but also through contemporary fictional reimaginings of its central concerns. Sigrid Nunez's *Mitz: The Marmoset of Bloomsbury* (1998) plays with the infinite regress of mise en abyme by staging a metafictional layering: Woolf, who imagines Barrett Browning through her dog, is herself reimagined by Nunez through her own pets. In this way, Nunez's novel doubles Woolf's mock-biographical experiment, creating a chain of interspecies portraits.

Although Woolf's spaniels, Pinka and Sally, figure prominently in Nunez's novel – which also references Flush as both a modernist exercise in imaginary life-writing and a literary homage to dog-loving –, Nunez's humanimal biofiction primarily seeks to rescue from oblivion a very different companion animal; the eponymous marmoset, a pet monkey, Mitz, adopted by the Woolfs from the Rothschild family. Much like Woolf's reconstruction of Barrett Browning's life through Flush, Nunez draws on real historical documents – letters, diaries, and anecdotal records – to reimagine the writer Woolf's domestic life and the cultural and affective dynamics of the wider Bloomsbury circle, refracted through their entanglement with, and occasionally narrated from the perspective of this largely forgotten pet.

As if to mock speciesist hierarchisation that arbitrarily discriminates between beings based on species membership, dog is contrasted with monkey: one considered to be man's most loyal, best friend, the other a biblical emblem of foolishness, vanity, and distorted imitation, one is domesticated, tamed, subservient, the other a rebellious wild creature, one familiar, the other radical otherness incarnate. Yet Woolf attests the same curiosity about both, even if eyeing the two reveals different affective relationalities.

> She liked to stare into Pinka's eyes too, but you cannot lock gazes with a dog the way you can lock gazes with a cat or, as she now discovered, with a marmoset. […] When Virginia stared hard and unblinking into Mitz's eyes, Mitz stared hard and unblinking back. […] Pinka's eyes were the very image of trust–never so much as when she tipped them up at you. But Virginia had never seen such an expression in Mitz's eyes; always a glint of suspicion, a cast of doubt. (45)

The animal gaze functions as a mirror for Wolf, as Flush's did for Barrett Browning. Yet while locking eyes with a dog provides a narcissistic self-contemplation in the eyes of a sacrificial lover, the unblinking marmoset stare remains an incomprehensible enigma, allowing a melancholic masochistic self-identification with the other. Nunez's Woolf jokes about how much she and Mitz have in common: "two nervous, delicate, wary females,

one as relentlessly curious as the other," both in love with Leonard, both unbelonging. Mitz, a sickly, fragile creature, mirrors both Virginia's vulnerable psyche and the precarity of life amidst turbulent times.

The rare animal alien to the British context – a symbol of artistic decadent taste, like the Rossettis' wombat or Byron's bear, and an exotic merchandise of colonial conquest – offers a grotesque defamiliarisation of actual historical events. Tragedy turns farcical when Mitz "saves the Woolfs from Hitler" (as they put it with ironic exaggeration) when the cuteness of the monkey distracts the attention of Nazi officers during the couple's visit to Germany. The tiny creature offers emotional consolation in times troubled by the impending war and Virginia's worsening mental illness.

Much like Flush, Mitz explores animal consciousness with a novelistic sensibility. In some passages, Nunez directly echoes Woolf: when describing the pet's atavistic memories of the sensual experience of its untamed past wilderness, the locking of the human-animal gaze, or the beast's wondering about humans' limited perceptions. However, Mitz, as a late 20th-century novella, is even more prominently enriched by a meta-modernist self-reflectivity that comments on how the animal thought-processes are conceptualised by the human thought-processes of Woolf, who seeks to verbalise her experience in her creative writing:

> Virginia looked long upon Mitz very often. She wondered about Mitz as she had wondered about the cats and dogs she had known all her life. What was it like to be an animal? How did the world look through a dog's eyes? What did cats think of us? Without such wonder it is doubtful Virginia ever would have written Flush. Now it was Mitz's walnut of a head she wished to crack. Did marmosets dream? Did they remember? Did they regret? What did marmosets want? (44–5)

This psychologising interest curiously echoes Freud's famous unanswerable question: "What does a woman want?" According to Nunez, Woolf's speculations about animal minds' enigmatic otherness are assumed to be the very engine of her fiction: were it not for her fascination with dogs, she would not have written Flush; her curiosity and compassion for companion species' dreams and desires lurk in subtle ways beneath all her self-contemplative writings. As Wendy B. Faris suggests, animals in the art and lives of the Bloomsbury circle served three main functions: they embodied repressed emotions, helped to articulate unresolved social issues, and represented those "reverent feelings" of relatedness with the cosmos that helped construct "the delicate web of communal feeling and mysterious connections that comprise Woolf's 'luminous envelope' of life itself" (107–8).

Mitz also illuminates the complex temporal structuring of lives: while interfacing Bergsonian inner and outer time, it measures the passing of time in terms of Virginia's book publications, the manic and depressive episodes of her illness, global historical events

(the progress of the Second World War), and the brief animal lives reminding humans, like memento mori, of the finite nature of our existence. Both *Flush* and *Mitz* end their narrative abruptly with the pet protagonist's death, remarking bitterly how the world goes on, disinterested, implying that all stories are just fragments of a bigger picture. Yet Nunez also considers posterity, reflecting on authorial afterlives. She ponders what Woolf would think about her current critical receptions, hence implicitly welcomes today's readers into the text. These beastly biographies reveal how the past "is re-enacted, reused, repurposed and reimagined by the present" (Bronstein 1), how "textual beasts are written into history [while they remain] ready to pounce on readers of the future" (Ryan 27)

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Angela Carter's Parody of Romance and Gothic Conventions in the Bristol Trilogy

Introduction

Angela Carter's early writing presents passive characters who struggle to accommodate themselves to numerous versions of stereotypical feminine ideals, only to discover that they cannot satisfy the demands of others. In this respect, Carter uses the genres of the romance and the Gothic romance to re-write and parody the predetermined roles and stereotypical assertions which these traditional genres contain.[1]

Angela Carter does not tell romances: she slices them open, seasons them with irony, and serves them raw. In *Shadow Dance* (1966) and *Love* (1971), she steps inside the familiar machinery of romance and Gothic romance, only to rewrite the genres with irony, grotesque imagery, and acts of destruction. Her heroines do not walk hand-in-hand into a sunset; they stalk away through the ruins, set fire to the house, or stage their own annihilation. These early novels dismantle the ideological architecture of the love plot, its faith in male redemption, its fetishisation of female submission, its promise of renewal through marriage or rescue, and replace it with entropic narratives where obsession, violence, and decay are the true constants. Reading the volumes that comprise The Bristol Trilogy, that is, *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions* (1968) and *Love*, together, reveals Carter's sustained political act: she uses the conventions of the genres that have scripted women's lives for centuries not to uphold their myths, but to show the wreckage they leave behind.

Angela Carter's early novels inhabit and disrupt the structures of popular narrative forms, particularly romance and its Gothic variant. In *The Secular Scripture*, Northrop Frye identifies the archetypal romance as a cyclical form, descending "through the threatening complications and up again through the escape from them" (131). Within this trajectory, the descent into danger is only a temporary stage; the plot moves inexorably towards reconciliation, stability, and renewal, often embodied in the union of hero and heroine. This structural arc, which for centuries has defined the romance, not only shapes the reader's expectations but also reflects deeply ingrained cultural narratives about gender. Women in romance, as Tania Modleski has observed in *Loving with a Vengeance*, achieve fulfilment "only by undergoing a complex process of self-subversion" (37), learning to

[1] In 2014, together with Nóra Séllei, I was a convenor of a panel on Food in Literature Written by Women. Professor Séllei presented on the theme of food in Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*. Our joint panel sparked my interest in the topic of food in literature. This article of mine, to celebrate Nóra's birthday, returns to Carter's early texts, to her perception of conventional femininity and happy endings.

renounce independence and submit to the needs of the hero. Marriage, domesticity, and motherhood are the inevitable and desirable rewards.

Carter's fiction rewrites this framework from within. In *Shadow Dance*, *Several Perceptions*, and *Love*, she constructs narratives that initially seem to draw on the love plot and the Gothic romance but then warp their trajectories, replacing the consolatory ending with destruction, disillusionment, or deliberate ambiguity. Her settings are not the lush landscapes of pastoral romance or the exoticised castles of Gothic fiction but decaying urban environments where desire is tangled with violence, obsession, and ironic detachment. The ruins in these novels are more than atmosphere: they are metaphors for the collapse of the ideological structures that romance has traditionally sustained–patriarchal authority, female passivity, and the conflation of sexual union with personal fulfilment.

Although Angela Carter does not write romances and Gothic romances in the conventional sense, her early novels clearly engage with and subvert elements of the genre. In Shadow Dance, Carter draws on the conventions of traditional popular romances, yet refuses to produce a text designed "to read as an escape" (Radway 52). Rather than offering the romance as a "reversal of the oppression and emotional abandonment suffered by women in real life" (Radway 55), Carter uses the form to expose those very realities. She rewrites the genre's happy endings, adopts at times a masculine narrative perspective, and incorporates violence–both metaphorical and actual–to dismantle the fantasy of romantic rescue. *Shadow Dance* negotiates and inverts the genre's prescribed unequal power relations between women and men: instead of culminating in the heroine's marriage to a saviour figure, Carter's narrative reveals how such endings reinforce female subordination.

Passive Dolls and Practical Girls in Shadow Dance

In *Shadow Dance*, the lovers "moaned and writhed in the rhododendron bushes among the fag ends and dogshit" (SD 13), a scene that grotesquely parodies the conventional image of passion in an idyllic setting.[2] The description refuses the idealising gaze, situating romantic encounter amid waste and decay. As Aidan Day has argued, the novel's ruined landscapes are "symbolic of old, outdated cultural values" (15), including the assumption that heterosexual love can redeem suffering and restore order. Carter's world is not cyclical but entropic: relationships do not emerge from danger purified; they

[2] Peach labels the novel as "Euro-American Gothic" (27), in "'Mutability Is Having a Field Day': The Sixties Aura of Angela Carter's Bristol Trilogy," Marc O'Day says that the novel, together with *Several Perceptions* and *Love*, "invite[s] readings in terms of quite traditional literary realism" (24), while Aidan Day sees the novel as an "allegory of the nature of sexual identity in a manner comparable to Carter's other fiction" (22). The obvious ambiguity of the genre allows for a more open characterization, and that is why it is possible to read this novel, as I do, as an anti-romance.

collapse further into obsession, cruelty, or apathy. The novel, in its ironic treatment of the romance genre, breaks all the typical taboos.[3]

The narrative centres on Morris and Honeybuzzard and three women, Ghislaine, Edna, and Emily. The novel begins with Ghislaine, who has been sexually involved with both men, returning from hospital after being stabbed by Honeybuzzard. Violence, in Carter's vision, is not the barrier to romance but its underlying logic, the latent threat that traditional narratives domesticate or disguise.

Edna, Morris's wife, is perhaps the closest the novel comes to a conventional romance heroine. She is described as "a Victorian girl" (SD 45), engaged in knitting, jam-making, and dreaming of "his children" (SD 22). Her understanding of marriage is explicitly one that conceives it in terms of "submission and procreation" (SD 45), and Carter's irony here is devastating: Edna's wedding-day glow is likened to the radiance of altar chrysanthemums, a simile that mocks the solemnity of vows while revealing the passivity expected of a bride. In Modleski's terms, Edna exemplifies the heroine who achieves happiness through self-erasure, sacrificing desire and agency to fit the mould of devoted wifehood.[4] Yet, Carter refuses her the romance's reward. Edna's obedience yields neither security nor transformation; she remains static, a figure of muted endurance: "Husbands were a force of nature or an act of God; like an earthquake or the dreaded consumption, to be borne with, to be meekly acquiesced to, to be impregnated by as frequently as Nature would allow." (SD 45)

Emily offers a contrast, beginning as a doll-like figure with "a dolly patch of bright pink in the centre of each round cheek" (SD 54), but revealing herself to be a "practical girl" (SD 104) who recognises Honeybuzzard's predatory nature.[5] Discovering Ghislaine's

[3] Janice Radway points out the significance of taboos in the romance genre, which include rape, violence, and 'bed-hopping' of the female protagonist: there are "things that 'should never appear in a romance [...] promiscuous sex, a sad ending, rape, physical torture and weak heroes have no place in the romance" (73).

[4] The novel is narrated from the third person point of view, but, mostly, it presents the male perspective ("male focus," Peach 29). However, the male perspective is only one of many and it is "challenged and undermined by the wider interaction of voices within the text which also encourages the reader to regard it sceptically" (Peach 29). Linden Peach's observation enables the possibility to concentrate on other voices (e.g. Edna's) to parody the male focus. Thus, Edna can be seen as a cliché heroine of a romance and the male characters as comic versions of the Gothic villains – Honeybuzzard enjoys wearing false noses and false vampire teeth.

[5] In "Convulsive Beauty and Compulsive Desire: The Surrealist Pattern in *Shadow Dance*," Anna Watz Fruchart suggests that Ghislaine is "a doll-like child woman" (23). She compares Ghislaine to surrealist automata and concludes that "[t]he dolls, patched up like Ghislaine, confuse and conflate categories such as sexiness and innocence, childhood and adulthood, beauty and its destruction, eroticism, mutilation and death in a manner characteristic of surrealism" (24). I add that this is exactly how Carter crosses the conventions of the genre. By presenting the character in contradictory terms, she liberates her from the passive/active, male/female dichotomies which are typical for traditional romances.

murder, she compares him to Bluebeard, invoking the folkloric archetype of the dangerous husband who hides dead wives behind a locked door. Emily's response is active and destructive: she tears off the corset advertisements and Victorian knick-knacks in Honeybuzzard's room, smashing a bust of Queen Victoria (SD 164). These objects, relics of an oppressive past, are physically destroyed in a gesture that combines personal rage with symbolic iconoclasm. In leaving Honeybuzzard while pregnant, she asserts that her child "had nothing to do with him" (SD 179), rejecting the central romance equation between sexual union, motherhood, and male ownership.

If Emily figures a resistant reimagining of the romance heroine, Ghislaine embodies the most extreme form of its passivity. In the closing scenes, she returns to Honeybuzzard declaring, "I can't live without you, you are my master, do what you like with me" (SD 166). The scene is chillingly familiar from the declarations of surrender in conventional love stories, but Carter strips it of romantic gloss. Ghislaine is killed by Honeybuzzard. This collapse of the "happy ending" exposes the violence implicit in fantasies of complete submission, while also revealing the danger that Frye's cyclical model conceals.

Carter aligns bodily states with narrative disruption. Emily's pregnancy sickness, initially unrecognised, functions as a visceral metaphor for the breakdown of the romance plot; her body refuses to "digest" the trajectory laid out for her. Her final act, burning down Honeybuzzard's house, destroys not only his property but also the symbolic architecture of the romance's conclusion. The "decaying old house" of Frye's tradition is here reduced to ash.

Blind and Blank Dolls: Inscribing Resistance in Several Perceptions

In *Several Perceptions*, Carter similarly inscribes resistance into the body: she uses physical symptoms to signal a refusal, which may be partial, conflicted, or unconscious, of prescribed narrative and social roles. The simultaneous "acceptance and refusal of sexuality" (Mitchell 289) and motherhood result in the symptoms of Anne Blossom's hysteria. In this novel, Anne Blossom, herself an orphan, decides to give away her newborn baby boy, because, as a single mother, she would not be able to earn enough to support herself and her child. This seems to be a reasonable solution to her economic as well as her social status. However, her hysterical limping exposes the unresolved contradictions of her situation: she relinquishes the baby yet remains caught in the bodily aftershocks of maternal and sexual deprivation.

In her hatred towards Mrs Boulder,[6] a prostitute, she expresses her anger with herself as well as with her own mother, who had given her away in a similar fashion. Mrs Boulder,

[6] Mrs Boulder is the mother of Joseph's friend, Viv. In "Nothing Sacred," Sarah Gamble offers a particularly interesting reading of the figure of the *femme fatale* through Mrs Boulder. She is presented as an active woman, even though she is "worn out by the constant battle to resist the aging process" (57). Gamble suggests that Mrs Boulder is a survivor and, viewed through Joseph's eyes, "she embodies a kind of masochistic heroism" (57). I only add that Mrs Boulder is one of the first

the "white queen," was able to keep her son, Viv, and is able to get her man, "a black king" (SP 131). Anne's body signals her frustrated desire for the baby. She unconsciously punishes herself for this act by developing somatic symptoms: limping and pain in her leg. Her hysterical paralysis is cured by Kay, who tells her in a firm voice that she does not really limp.[7] "She turned and ran towards him. She was laughing exultantly. Then she ran right back to the fireplace and spun round and back to Kay, racing her mirror image. 'I'm all right again,' she said. 'It wasn't a punishment for what I did'" (SP 144). Kay helps Anne to overcome her hysterical paralysis from the outside, parodying psychotherapy.

In *Several Perceptions*, women characters (Miss Blossom, Mrs Boulder) are portrayed as dolls, although the connotations are slightly different. Miss Blossom's face "was perfectly expressionless" (SP 43), "her eyes were blind and blank" (SP 43) and she "was the quietest of women" (SP 43) who "looked like a Dutch doll" (SP 44). Miss Blossom, in her old-fashioned clothes, is portrayed as a victim: "It was an anonymous face in the crowd, face of a girl with a paper carrier bag of groceries waiting at a rainy bus stop or the blurred newspaper face of a girl raped and murdered by a perfect stranger while walking by herself in a wood; it was a plain brick in the wall of the world" (SP 37). Miss Blossom can be seen as a victim of patriarchy, because it is impossible for her to be economically independent as a single mother, and she is thus forced to give her baby away.

On the other hand, Mrs Boulder "was fat, white and painted like a holy statue" (SP 48), she "did not speak often although her voice was beautifully dark and cool" (SP 48) and despite the fact that she worked as a prostitute, "she was, as always, immaculate" (SP 48). The image of a silent 'holy statue', I suggest, is the strategic masquerade Mrs Boulder uses to earn her money. By presenting Mrs Boulder as a single mother who cares for her illegitimate son with all her love, Carter destroys the conventional image of a prostitute.

Several Perceptions ignores traditional happy endings, however, they seem to bring positive promises: they challenge the objectification and paralysis of women in traditional romantic plots. Anne Blossom frees herself from the repressed guilt and learns to walk straight again.

Painted Dolls: Gothic Traps in Love

If *Shadow Dance* and *Several Perceptions* parody and reject the restorative arc of romance, Love extends this critique into the Gothic, a genre traditionally associated with danger,

among Carter's prostitutes. They are not seen as pitiable fallen women, but, with Carter's legendary pinch of optimistic grotesque, as women striving to survive the stereotypical representations of the *femme fatale*. Carter presents this type of prostitute most memorably in *Nights at the Circus*.

[7] For a psychoanalytical analysis of 'the sense of lack' in *Several Perceptions*, see Linden Peach's *Angela Carter* (48–50) and Aidan Day's *Angela Carter*: *The Rational Glass* (36–40). The psychological link between sexual and oral appetite in *Several Perceptions* is explored by Sarah Sceats (52–3).

confinement, and eventual escape.[8] As Elaine Showalter notes, the Gothic has often articulated "women's dark protests, fantasies, and fear" (127). Its heroines face tyrannical men, mysterious houses, and ambiguous threats, but in the classic form, these dangers are resolved: the villain is unmasked, the heroine rescued, and moral order restored. Carter retains the danger, but resists resolution. Her Gothic worlds remain morally ambiguous, their endings unresolved or destructive.

David Punter remarks that Carter "ironically suggests that the Gothic vision is in fact an accurate account of life, of the ways we project our fantasies onto the world and then stand back in horror when we see them come to life" (398). For Carter, the Gothic's excess and theatricality are not escapist ornamentation but a means of confronting the fantasies and fears embedded in everyday relationships.[9] In Love, she stages a love triangle between Lee, his half-brother Buzz, and Lee's wife Annabel. From the outset, Annabel is "confronted by ambiguities" (L 1), signalling her unstable sense of self. She inhabits an imaginary world "populated with fearful shapes" (L 3) and projects her fantasies onto Lee, seeing him in grotesque, contradictory images: as "a herbivorous lion" and "a unicorn devouring raw meat" (L 34). The idealising gaze common in romance heroines is here distorted through predatory and violent imagery, collapsing the boundary between desire and destruction.[10]

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[8] The term Gothic has been used in a broader context than that of classical Gothic fiction, and some of the new varieties of the genre are quite different from its original practice. In *The Literature of the Terror*, David Punter observes that "one central meaning, however, it has retained: Gothic writing is not realist writing. And as non-realistic and broadly expressionist forms of fiction multiply in England and America, so has the term 'Gothic' become more prevalent" (373).

[9] In "'The Desecration of the Temple'; Or, 'Sexuality as Terrorism'? Angela Carter's (Post-)feminist Gothic Heroines," Rebecca Munford explores Carter's fiction within the framework of postfeminism. Like Munford, I try to show that Carter's protagonists ought not to be understood within the framework of "victim feminism" (63). Further, I concentrate on the chronological development of the characters' positions from protofeminism to postfeminism. In *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience*, Helene Meyers emphasizes "the use of [the] contemporary female Gothics for the development and critique of feminist thought on female victimization" (19).

[10] Aidan Day in *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* observes that *Love* explores "a traditional pattern of understanding the nature of gender identity and the relations between the sexes, which is characterized in terms of unreason" (55). Linden Peach in *Angela Carter* suggests reading Carter's Bristol Trilogy (the term suggested by Marc O'Day in "Mutability is Having a Field Day") in similar terms, an idea also supported in Lorna Sage's "Introduction" to her edited volume *Flesh and the Mirror*: she reads it as "a combination of Gothic and psychological fantasy" (27). However, nearly all of Carter's novels are indebted to the Gothic. According to Linden Peach, the pervasive Gothic tone of her early writing "subverts the close relationship between word and referent which characterizes realism" (28). The Gothic mode gives Carter's writing openness and ambiguity. In "Reconfiguring the Gothic Body in Postmodern Times: Angela Carter's Exposure of Flesh-Inscribed Stereotypes," Mariaconcetta Constantini discusses the frequency of Gothic plots in Carter's writing, evident already in Bristol Trilogy: "[…] *Shadow Dance* or *Love* are still characterized by a project of 'domestification' of danger typical of female Gothic romances (from eighteenth-century to contemporary ones) […]" (16). She observes that "in traditional Gothic, the various

Annabel and Lee's relationship incorporates ritualised violence. After she loses a chess game, she strikes him; he responds by tying her wrists, forcing her to kneel, and beating her until she collapses. The scene is narrated with Carter's characteristic detachment: the narrator refuses to moralise while making the choreography of harm disturbingly intimate. The dynamic exemplifies her inversion of the romance: passion becomes performance, intimacy is inseparable from cruelty, and mutual objectification replaces mutual devotion.

Annabel's acts of possession are equally distorted. She tattoos her name on Lee's chest, an inscription that, as Sarah Gamble argues, is "not the symbol of romance it seems, but a visible sign of his tie to Annabel, which is compounded not of love, but of mutual pain, manipulation and delusion" (*Angela Carter* 87). The tattoo literalises ownership but does not prevent Lee's infidelities. Instead, it turns his body into another object in Annabel's 'collection,' reducing the beloved to a possession rather than elevating him into a romantic ideal.

Her suicide attempts are staged with an eye for spectacle, blurring the line between performance and reality. Before spying on Lee and his lover, she borrows Buzz's ring to pretend she is invisible; after witnessing them together, she retreats to the bathroom to kill herself, irritated that she must "make do with an undignified razor blade" rather than a more theatrically appropriate knife (L 44–5). Even her final act, killing herself after Lee spends the night with another woman, is presented as a tableau: "now she was a painted doll, bluish at the extremities" (L 109). The romanticised image of the tragic heroine is here undercut by its artificiality, its doll-like stillness an emblem of lifelessness rather than beauty.[11]

Buzz, while ostensibly Lee's foil, is equally implicated in Annabel's objectification. During sex, he imagines her as she appeared after a suicide attempt, "on a tiled floor with her blood welling out through the silk pores of her embroidered shawl," and finds the image erotically stimulating. The eroticisation of her inert body reinforces Carter's critique of

manifestations of the uncanny (physical violence and pain, sadistic practices, female victimization, forbidden sexual fantasies, and unrestrained terrors) are rendered with a language of excess that encourages a dual reading: on one side, it promotes a reactionary ethic by stressing the frightening effects of uncontrolled desires; on the other, it gives evidence of the artificiality of culture and identity, which are obtained through the rigidification of a polarized system" (15). I add that Carter plays upon these notions in their parodies of the Gothic genre. For a detailed study of Carter's postmodern Gothic, see Botting's "Aftergothic," where he suggests that "Carter powerfully, and often critically, demonstrates the reversal of values and identifications that occurs via the Gothic genre" (186).

[11] It is not only Annabel who is unable to become an autonomous subject: the brothers also feel "incomplete without her presence; without any conscious volition of her own, by a species of osmosis, perhaps, since she was so insubstantial, somehow she had entered the circle of their self-containment" (*L* 29).

the link between desire and possession. This collapse of Annabel's subjectivity into a fetishised image previews her dehumanisation within the narrative.

Annabel is repeatedly described in monstrous terms, as possibly "not fully human" (L 33). Aidan Day observes that she "ends up as literally nothing" because she cannot form "a coherent, autonomous being" (62).[12] Carter's Afterword underlines this, noting that "even the women's movement would have been no help to her" (L 111). Annabel's tragedy is not only that she is destroyed by male desire but also that she cannot imagine herself outside the fantasies that consume her. Unlike Emily, who destroys the symbols of her oppression and leaves, Annabel destroys only herself.

Conclusion

Across these early novels, Carter dismantles both the romance's promise of renewal and the Gothic's moral resolution. Her heroines may resist, self-destruct, or take revenge, but they never arrive at the harmonious closure Frye identifies. By inhabiting these genres closely enough to evoke their pleasures, she is able to distort them from within, exposing the patriarchal ideologies they encode. The ruins, dilapidated houses, and broken objects that litter her narratives are not mere decoration; they are structural metaphors for the collapse of narratives that have bound women's lives to submission, sacrifice, and the eroticisation of harm.

Carter's refusal to offer alternative "happy endings" is not a failure of hope but a political choice. As Linden Peach notes, her work "refuses to collude with the reader's desire for closure" because such closure often requires the reinstatement of the very structures she seeks to dismantle (66). By leaving her narratives fractured and her endings unresolved, or, in the case of *Shadow Dance*, resolved only through death and fire, Carter challenges readers to imagine other scripts for desire and agency.

In *Shadow Dance*, the cycle of romance collapses into murder and arson; in Several Perceptions, Carter subverts the conventions of the traditional happy ending. While the conclusions offer a sense of hope, they actively resist the objectification and passivity imposed on women in conventional romantic narratives. Anne Blossom overcomes her internalized guilt and regains the ability to walk with confidence. In Love, the Gothic entrapment ends not with rescue but with the heroine's annihilation. These are not aberrations but deliberate revisions of the genres' fundamental promises. Carter stages the descent into "threatening complications" (Frye 131), but refuses the ascent back into safety, substituting endings that confront the reader with the cost of believing in such ascents at all.

[12] David Punter also comments on Annabel's and other characters' inefficient attempts to survive: "the characters do not struggle for self-realisation, or indeed for survival" (399).

In doing so, she enacts a sustained political act: that of dismantling the myths that bind female experience to the consolations of romance and revealing the dangers of stories that promise escape only to return women to the arms of domination. Her heroines may not always survive, but their fates expose the violence embedded in the very idea of the 'happy ending,' leaving the reader to contemplate what other endings might be possible once the old houses have burned to the ground.

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A közepe. Jennifer Egan újabb prózájáról

Kétség sem lehet afelől, hogy Jennifer Egan a 2010-es évek egyik legfontosabb kortárs amerikai prózaírója. Erről nem csupán szövegeinek fogadtatása, de díjai és az írói szervezetekben betöltött pozíciói is tanúskodnak. A magyarul *Az elszúrt idő nyomában* (*A Visit from the Goon Squad*, 2010) címmel megjelent szövege karrierjének derekán Nemzeti Könyvdíjat ért (nem mellesleg Franzen *Szabadságát* [*Freedom,* 2010] maga mögé utasítva);[1] a 2017-es *Manhattan Beach*et egyértelműen pozitívan fogadta a kritika; a magyarul egyelőre nem elérhető, *Az elszúrt idő nyomában* szórványos történeteit folytató *A mézeskalács ház* (*The Candy House*, 2022) pedig nem csupán elismerést váltott ki, de vele kapcsolatban felröppent az amerikai irodalmi siker legkétesebb elismerését jelző hír is: az előzménnyel együtt tv-sorozatot készítenek belőle. A siker szinte tankönyvi példája mellett azonban fontos megemlíteni, hogy elérésében szerepet játszott Egan szövegeinek kísérleti jellege, melyet a posztmodern formai játékosságából jórészt kiábrándult amerikai irodalmi élet az utóbbi időben csak igen ritkán – és akkor sem ellentmondásoktól mentesen – tüntet ki figyelmével és elismerésével. Egan fentebb említett három szövege ugyanis annak a folyamatos műfaji és stiláris irányváltásnak a jegyében született, mely általában is jellemzi a szerző pályáját, mindamellett persze, hogy az életmű egyes alapmotívumai – így az emberi kapcsolatok kudarcainak színrevitele, a külföldön tett utazások személyiségre gyakorolt hatásainak feltárása, a technikai és technológiai környezet átalakulásának és ezekkel összefüggésben a tapasztalat autenticitásának kérdései – állandó és visszatérő témái elbeszéléseinek. Az alábbiakban Egan utolsó három szövegének elemzése révén ennek a sikernek az okait kutatom: azt, hogy ahogyan írásom címe is jelzi, miképp őrzi Egan prózája kísérleti jellege ellenére is központi helyét a kortárs amerikai próza rendszerén belül a 2010-es évek eleje óta. Kiegészítés kíván ez lenni a poszt-posztmodern próza leírására kísérletet tévő könyvemhez (*Mi jön a posztmodernre?*), s nem csupán azért, mert kritikusaim egyike (Balajthy) némileg jogosan hívta fel a figyelmet a női szerzők hiányára, hanem mert Egan szövegeinek vizsgálata egy további, könyvemben alulértékelt, s éppen csak említésre méltatott fejleményre irányítja rá a kritikai figyelmet a poszt-posztmodern próza alakzatai kapcsán. Ez a fejlemény pedig – legalábbis a felszínen – a műfaji kódokhoz fűződő új típusú viszonyban keresendő, olyannyira, hogy bizonyos szerzők Egan kapcsán is „műfaji fordulatról" (Kelly) beszélnek. Ennek a fordulatnak a közelebbi meghatározása lesz ennek az írásnak a célja is.

[1] Egan, *Az elszúrt idő nyomában*. Illetve: Franzen, *Javítások*. Ennek hírét meglehetősen ellentmondásosan tálalta a korabeli szaksajtó, mely nem Egan sikerét, hanem Franzen bukását emelte ki. Ez a siker annyira meglepte a kritikát, hogy a szakirodalom tulajdonképpen innen datálja Egan kései sikereit. Nem véletlen, hogy Alexander Moran is ezzel kezdi Eganről szóló monográfiájának első fejezetét (*Understanding* 1–2).

Érvelésem során az irodalmi mező jellemzésére tett három kísérletet hívok segítségül. A Robert Rebein által használt „topikalitás", a Mark McGurl által leírt „autopoézis" rendszerének meghatározó elemei, illetve Michael Dango kritikai értékelése a fogyasztás különböző mintázatait mozgósító „reparatív" stratégiákról abban lesznek segítségemre, hogy bemutassam, hogyan háromszögelhetők Egan prózájának a siker szempontjából fontos megkülönböztető jegyei, melyek egyúttal a „műfaji fordulat" szempontjából is meghatározónak tekinthetők.

A közepébe

Mit is jelent tehát pontosan, hogy Egan prózája a kortárs amerikai próza mezőjének „közepén" található? Már csak az évente megjelenő címek számából adódóan lehetetlen teljes áttekintést adni magáról a mezőről, melynek a körülhatárolása, az azt kitevő anyag sűrűségének a meghatározása is elemi mennyiségi problémákba ütközik. A történeti korpuszok esetében adódó, nagyobb szövegegyüttesek esetében alkalmazott digitális bölcsészeti eszközök, így a távoli olvasás (Moretti) lehetősége sem adott, hiszen az adatbázis létrehozásához szükséges elérhetőséget a szerzői jog és az üzleti érdek kortárs összefonódásai lehetetlenítik el. Másképp kell hát megközelítenünk a kérdést, hogyan is néz ki a korpusz domborzati térképe, a szövegek pozícióját, egymáshoz való viszonyát, beszédmódját, illetve az azok lehetséges értelmezéseit meghatározó nyelvi konstrukciókat tekintetbe véve. Robert Rebein 2001-ben megjelent kötete ugyan még a kilencvenes évek amerikai prózájának izolált jelenségeit egymásra épülő tanulmányokban tárgyaló történeti összefoglaló kíván lenni, mégis hasonló kérdések mozgatják. Ráadásul vállalkozása a kortárs folyamatok megragadására meglehetősen népszerűnek bizonyult: a könyv változatlan formában jelent meg újra 2009-ben, ami, ha nem is egyedülálló a kortárs irodalmi tendenciákról szóló szövegek esetében, mégis jelzi vállalkozása sikerét. Rebein érvelése alapos, és így nem nélkülözi az irodalomtörténeti önreflexiót: a szerző tisztában van a korszakfogalmak exkluzivitásával, ahogyan azok – miként a posztmodern állapot és a posztmodern mint esztétikai minőség fogalmi érintkezése, helyenként keveredése is jelzi – képesek nem csupán bizonyos szövegszerű sajátosságok kiemelésére, különböző szerzők, művészeti és irodalmi törekvések hasonlóságainak megragadására, de egyben háttérbe szorítják és elrejtik a hatókörükön kívül eső alkotókat, műveket és folyamatokat (6–9). Rebein ráadásul dinamizálja is történeti áttekintését, amikor megkülönbözteti az evolúciós és revolúciós irodalomtörténeti narratívákat, vagyis azt, hogy az átalakulás történetét egyszer többé-kevésbé radikális szakításként, máskor két, egymáshoz sok szálon kapcsolódó esztétikai gyakorlat átmeneteként írjuk le (1, 11, 16). Arra a kérdésre, hogy mi jön a posztmodern irodalom (vagy még inkább a posztmodern irodalma) után, Rebein a látszat ellenére evolúciós választ ad. Ebből az irodalomtörténeti felfogásból adódnak főbb megállapításai is, melyek a következőképpen foglalhatók össze. Újra felbukkannak a fősodorban a realizmus különböző formái (9, 17–22), s még a tipikusan posztmodern hatásokra (például az intertextuális utalásokra) építő szövegek esetében is háttérbe szorul a posztmodern szövegek hangvételét, megszólalásmódját, helyenként szerkezetét is alapvetően meghatározó irónia (Rebein 172). Az előbbi tendencia érzékelése megbízhatónak

bizonyul: az ezredforduló után sorozatosan jelennek meg a posztmodern prózapoétikákat is magukba olvasztó nagyrealista regényre hajazó szövegek Jonathan Franzen újabb műveiben (az Egan regénye által maga mögé utasított *Szabadság*tól datálhatóan), illetve Garth Risk Hallberg *Ég a város* (*City on Fire*, 2015) vagy Nathan Hill *Nix* (2018) című regényeinek jóvoltából. A realizmus fősodorban való jelenlétét és a posztmodern kitérővel a hozzá való visszatérést jelzi Franzen esszéje is a „nehezen olvasható" regényekről (Franzen, „Mr. Difficult"). Az „iróniátlanításra" is találni példát, a Rebein által emlegetett Jane Smiley esetében, de idesorolhatók a Colson Whitehead nyomán „poszt-faji" korszakban alkotó kisebbségi szerzők egyes munkái, akár annak ellenére is, hogy ők maguk helyenként elutasítják is a korszak megnevezését.[2] A Magyarországon is ismert szerzők közül itt elsősorban természetesen Colson Whitehead „realista" irányultságú szövegeire, elsősorban *A föld alatti vasút* (*The Underground Railroad*, 2017) és *A Nickel-fiúk* (*The Nickel Boys*, 2019) című regényekre), illetve Jesmyn Wardnak a mágikus realizmus felől a realizmus irányába elmozduló munkáira kell gondolnunk (mint amilyen a *Hallgasd a holtak énekét!* (*Sing, Unburied, Sing!,* 2021) vagy *A csontok megmaradnak* (*Salvage the Bones*, 2011); Ward az, aki megkérdőjelezi – némileg félreértve – a „poszt-faji" kitételt). A posztmodernnel és a minimalizmussal szemben meglehetős averzióval viseltető Rebein számára a minimalizmus végzetét a kulturális divatok fősodrába való bekerülés, a „white trash", a fehér alsó-középosztállyal kapcsolatba hozható esztétika divatos, középosztálybeli kisajátítása jelenti (mint ahogyan az megjelent a 2000-es évek legnagyobb irodalmi botrányában, JT. Leroy esetében, de ahogy az már a *Harcosok klubja* [*The Fight Club*, 1997] esetében is megfigyelhető volt).[3] A posztmodern sorsa ellenben az eljelentéktelenedés, mely leginkább abban nyilvánul meg, hogy még az olyan evidensen posztmodern szerzők műveiben is inkább az etnikai jelleg kerül előtérbe, mint Don DeLillo. Ez lenne Rebein *Underworld*-olvasatának legfőbb tézise: az olasz-amerikai munkásosztály történetébe való beágyazottság fontosabb a hidegháborús nagyregényben, mint a nagyívű forma ironikus mivolta, itt a hidegháború történetének egy hazafutásba történő belevetítése (173–8). Ezekből a megállapításokból következik Rebein legfontosabb észrevétele is a kortárs szövegek „topikalitásáról". Ez az elképzelés egyfajta felhatalmazást jelent: valahonnan (egy adott régióból és régióról), illetve valakiként (az identitáspolitikai térképen behatárolt pozícióból) írni, másfelől viszont a kortárs próza időbeliségére, aktualitására, tudatosan kortárs mivoltára, s ekként időbeli behatároltságára (és tegyük hozzá: korlátoltságára) vonatkozik (Rebein 165).

Rebein irodalomtörténeti narratívájának ugyanazok a gyengeségei, mint amik az erősségei. Egyrészt láthatóvá teszi a kulturális fősodorban háttérbe szorult, és a kortárs amerikai próza jelenében fontossá váló jelenségeket, így a fősodron kívül teljesen soha oda nem hagyott realizmus előretörését, a beágyazottságot a lokálisan meghatározott kortárs

[2] A „poszt-faji" terminus értelmezéséről lásd: Saldívar. Saldívar esszéje előre is jelzi a „poszt-faji" próza mozgását, mely egyes szerzők esetében ellentétes irányú az amerikai kortárs próza fősodrának általam jelezni kívánt mozgásával. Jól szemlélteti ezt Colson Whitehead munkássága, aki a műfaji szövegek irodalmi igényű átgondolása felől érkezik a kortársi realizmusok fősodrába.

[3] Ezekről lásd: Sári B., *„Joe csikorgó fogsora vagyok"* 136–8, 72–88.

földrajzi, kulturális és politikai diskurzusokban, ám ezzel egyben el is tünteti a posztmodern és a minimalista próza történetéből adódó formai kérdéseket, melyek ott kísértenek a kortárs realizmus szövegeiben, és sajátos fénytörésbe állítják ezen szövegek „topikalitását" is. Ebben a kontextusban Egannak a tízes évektől kezdődően publikált szövegei a „posztmodern" játékosságnak és a regényforma minimalista novelláskötetekre jellemző szerkesztési elvének a visszatérését jelzi, ami már önmagában is egyfajta irodalomtörténeti ingamozgásként írható le. Ez a megállapítás elsősorban *Az elszúrt idő nyomában* és a nosztalgia csábításának szirénénekét megszólaltató *A mézeskalács ház* című szövegekre vonatkozhat, ám – mint azt bizonyítani igyekszem majd – bizonyos megkötésekkel a látszólag konzervatívabb elbeszélői megszólalásmódot működtető *Manhattan Beach* című, „historicista" regényre[4] is alkalmazható. Egan regényének topikalitását meghatározni ebben a keretben nem egyszerű feladat, hiszen a posztmodern poétika és a töredékes minimalista szerkesztésmód játékba hozásával éppen a topikalitás alapelemeit bizonytalanítja el: a regionalitást, az identitást és az időbeliséget. Legfontosabb szereplői elhagyják az Egyesült Államok területét, identitásnarratívájuk meghatározó eseményei is általában külföldön zajlanak, a regények szerkesztésmódja pedig ha nem is bontja fel olyan látványosan a történetvilág tér-idő szerkezetét, mint a kilencvenes évek meghatározó nagyprózai alkotása, a *Végtelen tréfa* (*The Infinite Jest,* 1996),[5] mégis szerkezeténél fogva relativizálja az intradiegetikus időpillanatok kapcsolatait, s egyben felteszi azoknak a történeti, „extradiegetikus" időhöz fűződő viszonyának a kérdését is.

Ennek az Egan szövegei esetében elbeszélői nézőpontok bonyolult hálózatát eredményező írásmódnak az a következménye, hogy annak meghatározása, hogy maga a szöveg honnan, kinek a nevében, kiért beszél – vagyis milyen identitáspolitikai pozíciót is rendelhetnénk a szerzőhöz –, nyilvánvaló nehézségekbe ütközik még akkor is, ha maguk a szövegek felvetik ennek a pozíciónak a kérdését. Az egyik legszemléletesebb példája ennek a problémának nem is a posztmodern elbeszéléstechnikákat és minimalista történetszerkesztést alkalmazó két kötetből, Az elszúrt idő nyomában és A mézeskalács ház című művekből származik, hanem a szerző élettörténetének időbeli határain kívüli világot megidéző *Manhattan Beach* női és etnikai tapasztalatokat megidéző epizódjaiból.

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[4] A terminust George Hutchinson regényről írott kritikája nyomán használom, aki arra hívja fel a figyelmet, hogy a fiktív történeti elemet szerepeltető regény (a II. világháború alatt nem működtek nők nehézbúvárként) számos műfaji, intertextuális utalással építi fel cselekményét, s a szereplők olvasmányai is jelentős szerepet játszanak történetük alakulásában. Ennek talán legfontosabb példája az apa alakja, aki a regény mottóját kölcsönző *Moby Dick* cselekményét idézve járja meg a tengert és építi újra saját férfiszerepét, családjához (egyáltalán: a család elképzeléséhez) és lányához fűződő kapcsolatát. Lásd: Hutchinson.

[5] A *Végtelen tréfa* szereplőinek egymást keresztül-kasul szelő, a nyelvi formájuk révén egymáshoz mégis kapcsolódó történetei ugyanis a nemzetállami kereteket áthágó, Kanadát, USA-t és Mexikót magába foglaló szuperállam („The Great Concavity", a magyarban „Nagy Konkavitás"; mégis inkább „Nagy Homorúság") keretei között zajlanak, ahol az idő múlását sem egy közös történeti eseménytől eredeztetett évszám jelzi, hanem az évet „szponzoráló" fogyasztási termék nevének változása.

Egyfelől Anne Kerrigan első szexuális tapasztalatainak leírására, másrészt pedig későbbi szeretőjének, az apja eltűnéséért felelős gengszternek, Dexter Stylesnak a halálára kell itt utaljak. Kortárs mércével mérve mindkét epizód a második világháborúról szóló történeti narratívák határmezsgyéjén helyezkedik el. Igaz ugyan, hogy a megváltozott gazdasági és politikai helyzetnek megfelelően a nők társadalmi szerepeivel kapcsolatos elvárások átalakultak: belépésük a munkaerőpiacra, a korábban elképzelhetetlen állások betöltése és munkák végzése mellett nagyobb szexuális szabadságot és szabadosságot élvezhettek, melynek természetesen mindjárt meg is teremtődött a politikai-ideológiai ellensúlya, és a háború végeztével és a hidegháború beköszöntével jól érzékelhető társadalmi nyomás nehezedett rájuk, hogy visszatérjenek hagyományos szerepeikhez (vö. May). Hasonló kettős mozgás zajlott le történetileg az etnikai integráció és asszimiláció tekintetében is: míg egyes európai nemzetiségek elvesztették „jelölt" mivoltukat, addig a háborús ellenfelek esetében az etnikai markerek fokozottan hozzájárultak a kirekesztés gyakorlatához (vö. Ueda). Egan ebben az átmeneti pillanatban helyezi el Anna első szexuális kalandját Leonnal, és a második generációs olasz bevándorló Dexternek a halálakor átélt epifániáját saját amerikaivá válásának belátásáról. Mindkét esetben fontos a tapasztalat határpillanata: Anna első szexuális élményét, annak a tapasztalatlanságból a tapasztalatba tartó mivoltából fakadó erőszakát a szöveg a beleegyezés leírásával oldja:

> Ahogy a fiú mozgatni kezdte a kezét, Anna kíváncsisága, hogy mi is ez, kételyek nélküli tudásba fordult át – és akaratba. A fiú váratlanul megremegett, mintha elektromos vezetékhez ért volna. Aztán az oldalára fordult abban a hitben, hogy itt a vége. De tévedett, mert bármi volt is, ami kettőjük közt dolgozni kezdett, már Annát is magával ragadta. Megfogta a fiú kezét, a szoknyája redői közé szorította, és addig mozgatta a meleg ujjakat, amíg el nem árasztották a nyers gyönyör hullámai. (*Manhattan Beach* 169–70)

Erre az epizódra és a két tizenéves szexuális beteljesülésére még a lány szexuális érése előtt kerül sor, ami az eseményt kívül helyezi a nem kívánt terhesség kérdésére összpontosító, korabeli hatalmi retorikán. Ahogyan az ezen a ponton némileg suta magyar fordításban olvashatjuk: „Anna azonban szerencsésnek bizonyult: ő volt az egyetlen a barátai között, akinek még nem kellett havonta elszenvednie az átkot" (*Manhattan Beach* 172).[6] Egan elbeszélése mintegy a szexualitás diskurzusának határán helyezi el az Anna történetében végig ott munkáló akaratot, és a lány cselekvőképességének a gyökerei is ennek a tudásnak az akarásában keresendők, s ezek segítik hozzá sikeres nehézbúvár karrierjéhez, valamint biztosítják számára az apja utáni nyomozáshoz az eltökéltséget.

Dexter Styles felismerése a halálát megelőző pillanatokban Annáéval éppen ellentétes irányú. Bár a szöveg a halál pillanatát megélő Dexter mozgását a jövőre irányulóként írja le, a felismerés mégis a múltba, a már megtörtént és korábban meg nem értett események felé mutat: „A múlt éjszakai felfedezése most váratlanul újra visszatért hozzá teljes

[6] A fordító élhetett volna a magyarul is használatos „havibaj" kifejezéssel, hogy visszaadja az eredetit: „she was the only one of her friends not to have the curse yet" (*Manhattan Beach* [2017], 121).

tisztaságában: az öböl sötét vizében emelkedve úgy érezte, belemosódik környezetébe, eltűnnek a körvonalai, és erős áramlat indul el belőle a ragyogóan meghitt jövő felé. Amit olyan keményen megpróbált megtenni, már megtette! Amerikai volt!" (*Manhattan Beach* 469–70) A szöveg ismét csak párhuzamot von az öböl vizében végrehajtott merülés és a múlt feltárása, valamint a halál és a jelölt etnikai identitás elvesztése között. Dexter Styles halála pillanatában érti meg, hogy immár (fehér, középosztálybeli, heteroszexuális) amerikai (férfi), s az ekként felfogott interszekcionális identitást a regény további kapcsolatokon keresztül is tematizálja. Ezek közül is talán a legfontosabb Anna halottnak hitt apjának, Eddie Kerrigannek a fekete bócmannal közös tapasztalata, mely kölcsönös utálattal és rivalizálással indul, hogy aztán a tengeren közösen átélt szenvedések nyomán a kölcsönös tiszteleten alapuló barátsággá alakuljon. „Sűrű levelezésben maradtak, és kizárólag a »testvér« megszólítást használták. Eddie pedig furcsa örömmel fedezte föl, hogy az ő mondatai milyen dadogó kisiskolás stílusban szólnak a fedélzetmester extravagáns szövegei mellett." (*Manhattan Beach* 558–9) Az etnikai és faji előítéletek ebben a történetben is fontos szerepet játszanak: Eddie csak nagy nehezen érti meg a bócman sértettségének okát, aki műveltsége, szaktudása és munkabírása ellenére kénytelen az elnyomás legkülönfélébb formáit elszenvedni. A kapcsolat dinamikáját kiválóan jelzi, hogy kisebbségi érzése ellenére Eddie később nem csupán elfogadja barátja intellektuális fölényét, de a „brother" kifejezés kölcsönös használata – mely egyként utalhat az afro-amerikai szubkultúrában bevett megszólításra, biblikus hagyományokra és a francia forradalom eszméire – azt is jelzi, hogy kapcsolatuknak sikerült átlépnie az etnikai szubkultúrák határait.

Ez a hasonlóságokat, a társadalmi pozíciók, faji, nemi, etnikai különbözőségek ellenére létrejövő közös tapasztalatot előnyben részesítő diskurzus általában is jellemzi Egan prózájának „topikalitását". Kortárs amerikai szerzőként szinte egyedülálló módon, miközben elismeri ezeknek a kategóriáknak az érvényességét, az egyéni történetek és csoportos identitások megélésében játszott fontos szerepüket, Egan saját szerzői pozícióját egy egzisztenciálisan ezeknél alapvetőbbnek tételezett talapzatra építi.

A közepén

A második háromszögelési pontként felhasznált Mark McGurl-monográfia Rebein könyvének második kiadásával egyidőben jelent meg, ám időben nem a posztmodernen túlra, hanem a második világháború utáni időszakba kalandozik vissza: oda, amit ő a kreatív írás intézményesülése nyomán csak „programkorszaknak" nevez. Könyvének alapvető tézise, hogy a második világháborút követő időszak irodalomtörténetileg legjelentősebb fejleménye a kreatív írás önálló képzéssé, majd saját, részben önfogyasztó rendszerré válása, valamint túltermelési válságot okozó elburjánzása volt. (*The Program Era* ix)[7] McGurl fejezetei részletesen is tárgyalják ennek a folyamatnak az egyes állomásait, melynek történeti előzményeit korábban D. G. Myers dokumentálta *The Elephants Teach* című

[7] McGurl ezek után már csak a kiadói intézményrendszert lényegében kiiktató fejleményt, a saját közlések forgalmazók által különböző szolgáltatásokkal megtámogató szövegek elszaporodását látja, melyet az Amazon korszakaként ír le (vö. McGurl, „Everything and Les.

könyvében: a különböző modernista esztétikai alapelvek követendő maximaként épülnek be a második iowai modellként ismertté váló „műhelyszeminárium" gyakorlatába, s miközben a programok fokozatosan önállósodnak és függetlenednek az egyetemen belül a háború utáni felsőoktatási expanzió következtében egyre több hallgatónak otthont adva, egyre inkább kötődnek a folyóiratok, a könyvkiadás és a kritikai fórumok hálózatához. Így nem csupán a kreatív írás program válik a kultúra termelésének helyszínévé az egyetemen belül, hanem súlypontja kívül kerül az egyre inkább a tudományosságra és a kutatásra hangsúlyt helyező egyetemi tanszékeken, így a bölcsészettudományon (amerikai megfelelője a *liberal arts* inkább, semmint a *humanities*) is. Az intézményesülésnek azonban nem csupán intézményes és rendszerszintű következményei vannak, mint a kulturális termelés megváltozott feltételrendszere, hanem – ezekkel szoros összefüggésben – jól látható kulturális-esztétikai vonatkozásai is figyelemreméltóak. McGurl könyvének szemléletes ábrái (*The Program Era* 23, 68, 81, 103, 110) jól foglalják össze azt a három modernista esztétika alapvetést, melyek jelenléte az irodalom rendszerén belül jelentős változásokat hoz magával, s tulajdonképpen megteremti a programkorszak prózavonulatait. Ezek rendszere az az „autopoétikus" igazodási mátrix, melyben minden egyes szöveg leírható a kitüntetett esztétikai igazodási pontokhoz, a „technomodernizmushoz", az „elitkulturális pluralizmushoz" és az „alsó-középosztálybeli modernizmushoz" való távolsága révén. Ezek a megnevezések nem csupán a háború utáni amerikai próza kanonikus formációinak, a posztmodern fikciónak, az etnikai kánon szövegeinek és a minimalista prózának a megnevezésére szolgálnak, de egyben azok törekvéseit is jelzik: a(z írás)technológiai kérdésekkel való foglalkozást, az elitkultúrában történő elismertetés (és az ide sorolható esztétikák kisajátításának) igényét, az irodalmi tevékenység munkaként történő elismertetésére és a munka világának ábrázolására való igyekezetet. Ezeket az esztétikai gyakorlatokat és az irodalmi mezőben való pozicionálásuk tudatos folyamatát McGurl részben Ulrich Beck és Anthony Giddens munkáira támaszkodva reflexív modernitásként írja le (*The Program Era* 12–3, 365–71): a szerző és a szöveg folyamatosan végzett önformáló tevékenységeként.

McGurl narratívája azonban már csak terjedelmi okokból is – egyébként tudatosan – figyelmen kívül hagyja a kreatív írói programok belső felosztását: azt, hogy elválik egymástól a fikciós és nem-fikciós próza, illetve a költészet oktatása (ha egy pillanatra a műfaji próza okozta bonyodalmaktól eltekintünk; a dráma és a filmes forgatókönyvírás pedig saját intézményrendszert tudhat magáénak). Ezért is jegyzi meg, hogy a költészetről vagy a nem-fikciós prózáról szóló vizsgálódás egészen más történetet eredményezett volna (The Program Era 28). Így az általa vázolt rendszer nem feltétlenül képes minden, munkája megjelenése után bekövetkezett fejleményről számot adni,[8] ám bizonyos megfontolásokkal segítségemre lehet Egan prózai törekvéseinek értelmezésében. McGurl

[8] McGurl központi fogalma, az autopoétika összecseng a legutóbbi idők prózai fejleményeiként számon tartott autofikciós törekvésekkel, melyeknek az Egyesült Államokban a legismertebb és legjelentősebb képviselője éppen egy költő, Ben Lerner, kinek autofikciós trilógiája a költészet, a nyelv materialitásának, a fikciós életrajz és a politika diszkurzív változásainak történetét viszi színre. A trilógia utolsó darabja (*Az iskola Topekában*, 2020 [2019]) magyarul is elérhető.

kategóriái ugyanis azzal a hozadékkal is rendelkeznek, hogy képesek rávilágítani a megszilárdult kanonikus prózai alakzatok formai sajátosságai és politikai beágyazódásuk közötti kapcsolatra: hogy az amerikai minimalizmus „alsó-középosztálybeli" mivolta egyben olyan kulturális fogyasztási szokásokat jelöl, mely ellentmond saját esztétikai törekvéseinek, és egyben olyan „osztálytudatot" feltételez, melyből épp a „tudat", a közösséghez való tartozás érzése hiányzik; hogy a posztmodern próza „technicitása" nem csupán etnikai markerként, vagyis egyfajta „etnicitásként" funkcionál a fősodor javarészt fehér, középosztálybeli, férfi szerzői számára, de egyben a technológiai fejlődéssel szemben megnyilvánuló kritikai irányultságot is jelez; hogy az etnikai jellegűnek mondott tapasztalatot identitásképzőnek tételező etnikai kánonok szövegeiben is tetten érhető a modernista esztétikák iránti igény. Ezek a meglátások Egan esetében éppen azért szolgálhatnak belátásokkal, mert formailag ugyan mindhárom irányzathoz szervesen kapcsolódik, ám egyik politikai célkitűzéseit sem osztja maradéktalanul.

A *Manhattan Beach* kapcsán már láthattuk, hogy Egan mennyire ragaszkodik az interszekcionálisan behatárolt, közösnek tételezett tapasztalattal szemben annak egyediségéhez, szereplőinek egzisztenciális érintettségéhez saját történetükben, és a tapasztalat közösségi, egyáltalán: közösen megélt mivoltához is meglehetősen ellentmondásos és kritikus a viszonya. Ez a formailag kísérletezőbb regényeiben még inkább tetten érhető. *A mézeskalács ház* egyenesen az emlékezet technikai rögzíthetőségének a csapdájára figyelmeztet, ahogyan az „elbeszélhetőségétől" megfosztott vizuális tudatfolyam óhatatlanul a nosztalgia tárgyává és egyben megoszthatóvá válik a regénybéli Mandala-kockában történő rögzítése által. De a motívum már *Az eltűnt idő nyomában* című előzményben is megjelenik, ami – ahogyan arra Moran Michael Szalay írása nyomán figyelmeztet – a kultúra közösséget teremtő lehetőségeinek nehézségét állítja a középpontba. (Moran, *Understanding* 92; Szalay) Ennek a csúcspontja a regényben a Scotty Hausmann-koncert a Világkereskedelmi Központ helyén, melyet egy közösségi médiában terjedő, összehangolt „suttogókampány", egy tudta nélkül irányított, felhasználókból álló „vakválogatott" hoz tető alá:

> És lehetséges, hogy a tömeg a történelem bizonyos pillanataiban maga lesz az indok, amiért összegyűlt, mint '67-ben a Washington-emlékműnél a vietnami háború elleni tüntetésen vagy a Monterey Pop fesztiválon vagy Woodstockban. De lehetséges az is, hogy a térfigyelő kamerák és az évtizedes háborúk nemzedéke egyszeriben egy magányos, reszketeg fazonban ismert rá saját, bizonytalan szorongásaira. […] Bárki, aki aznap ott volt, határozottan azt állította, hogy a koncert akkor kezdődött el igazán, amikor Scotty felállt. Ekkor kezdte el játszani azokat a dalokat, amiket éveken át csak magának írt, amikhez hasonlót sem hallott még soha senki – A szemek a fejemben, Egyesek és nullák, Ki figyel jobban –, a paranoia és az elszigeteltség balladáit, amik egy olyan ember legbelső világáról szóltak, akiről ránézésre tudni lehetett, hogy nem volt soha semmilyen profilja, adatlapja, honlapja, de telefonja vagy minitabletje sem, akiről nem tároltak sehol statisztikákat és adatokat, aki végig a legszélén volt, elfeledve és dühösen – ami mostanra a tisztaság valamiféle szinonimája lett. Az érintetlenségé. Persze ma már nehéz

> eldönteni, ki is volt ott valójában azon a legelső Scotty Hausmann-koncerten – többen állítják magukról, mint ahányan akár csak a környéken elfértek volna. Most meg, hogy Scotty a legendák közé emelkedett, mindenki szeretett volna belőle egy kicsit. És talán jól is tették. Egy legenda végtére is mindenkié, nem igaz? (*Az elszúrt idő nyomában* 438–9)

A leírásban ott rejlik a tapasztalat autenticitásának paradoxona: hogy a kulturális eseményként gondosan megtervezett előadás középpontjában a technológiailag megteremtett magány megfogalmazása áll, melyet egy attól érintetlen művész ad elő, s maga az előadás az eseményen túlmutatóan őrződik meg a kollektív emlékezetben és rögzül a technológia által meghatározott virtuális térben. A tapasztalat autencititását már mindig is megelőzi az annak konstrukcióját célzó kulturális törekvés és technológiai manipuláció, ahogyan megőrzéséért is javarészt ezek felelősek. Az ironikus elbeszélői szólam ezt kommentálja, de emellett fontos azt is megemlíteni, hogy a koncertet követően annak szervezői, Alex és Benny Salazar nosztalgikus sétára indulnak Manhattanben, hogy felkeressék korábbi szerelmüket, Sashát, kinek korábbi lakásából – várakozásaikkal ellentétben – egy új lány lép elő. A múlt nem ismételhető maradéktalanul, az elszúrt időt nem lehet bepótolni. Ahogyan jeleztem korábban: ennek a nosztalgikus, az ismétlés tökéletességére és a belőle következő azonosság megteremtésére irányuló vágynak a beteljesíthetetlenségét viszi színre majd a regény folytatása, *A mézeskalács ház* is.

A fentiekből Egan pozíciójára vonatkozóan azt a formai tudatosságot érdemes kiemelni, mely a McGurl által leírt autopoetikus rendszer mindhárom kitüntetett vonatkozási pontjától azonos – kritikai – távolságra helyezi el őt. Egyrészt maga a regény a popzenei műfajok történetében a hanghordozó szerkezetében rögzült művészi formát, a konceptalbumot használja fel a regény cselekményének vázaként, s ezzel nem csupán a punk történeti idejét és időtlen indulatát idézi meg, (Moling; Hering) de a zenei utalásokat felhasználja a történeti időben létrejött tapasztalatok generációk közötti átadására. Ez az attitűd hasonlatos a minimalizmusnak a kortárs popkultúrához való viszonyához, amennyiben annak termékei ugyanúgy formaképző elemként és tapasztalati mezőt meghatározó kulturális közegként jelennek meg a minimalista szövegekben, melyeknek jól beazonosítható törekvése a tömegkulturális beágyazódáshoz való ellentmondásos viszony feloldása, nagyjából a hetvenes évek végéig a „szégyen megszépítése", (McGurl, *The Program Era* 294) azt követően pedig a tömegkulturális formák ironikus valorizálása révén. Egan amellett, hogy beépíti a minimalizmus formai elemeit, a minimalizmusnak mindkét tendenciáját – elsősorban azok ideológiai tartalma miatt – fenntartásokkal kezeli, hiszen számára nem a társadalmi osztályokhoz való tartozás, hanem a tapasztalat etnikai és nemi szerepekkel kapcsolatos vonatkozásai az elsődlegesek. A posztmodern irónia játékba hozása éppen ez utóbbiak relativizálása irányában működik, az így meghatározott tapasztalatnak a közössé válásával, közösségépítő mivoltával kapcsolatban fogalmaz meg kételyeket. Ebben az olvasatban Egan kései prózája annak a már Rebein által is detektált folyamatnak az ellenirányú mozgását járja be, hogy a minimalista és a posztmodern törekvések háttérbe szorulnak a 2010-es évek amerikai fikciós prózájában, s helyére a különböző kortársi

realizmusok és az etnikai tapasztalatot megszólaltató kísérletek lépnek, valamint előtérbe kerülnek a különböző műfaji próbálkozások – részben a korábbi évtized új őszinteségének megnyilvánulásaival szemben. Egan minimalista nagyformái, posztmodernre emlékeztető játékossága, kísérletező hajlama és ironikus kommetárjai azt jelzik, hogy a McGurl által leírt autopoetikus rendszerben érzékelhető hangsúlyeltolódások ellenére Egan a rendszer súlyozatlan, mértani középpontját jelenti, amennyiben a változó trendek ellenére igyekszik egyenlő távolságot tartani mind a „technomodernista", mind az „alsó-középosztálybeli", mind pedig a „elitkulturális pluralista" esztétikáktól.

A közepéből

Van Egan prózájának egy eddig még nem érintett sajátossága, mely Michael Dango nemrégiben megjelent monográfiájának érvelése mentén válik értelmezhetővé. Dango könyvének alaptézise már a könyv címéből is megfejthető: a *Crisis Style: The Aesthetics of Repair* [*A krízis stílusa: A reparativitás esztétikája*] című művében számára a műalkotások „stílusa" egyrészt nem az intézményes struktúrákból adódik, mint McGurl érvelésében, hanem a műalkotás szerzője által érzékelt válsághelyzetre adott válasz. Ekként a stílus nem a műalkotás formai eleme, hanem olyan cselekedet, melynek intenciója magában a stílus gyakorlásának aktusában rejlik, nem pedig időben előtte vagy térben mögötte: vagyis az őt megelőző pszichológiai folyamatokban vagy a szerző elméjében. (Dango 13–4) Mondhatnánk: a stílus maga a műalkotásban megtestesült intenció. A stílusnak a válság kontextusában történő értelmezését pedig az teszi lehetővé, hogy a krízis érzékelése és a rá adott válaszok a kortárs műalkotások esetében jól megfigyelhető, művészeti ágakon átívelő mintázatokba rendeződnek (ezért dolgozik Dango úgynevezett „promiszkuózus archívumokkal", melyek áthágják a kultúra intézményes határait). Dango szerint magának a krízisnek is „műfajai" vannak, melyek az ellenőrzés és az el- vagy felismerés [recognition] elképzelésével vannak kapcsolatban, melyek lényegében egybeesnek a neoliberalizmus kritikájának két csapásirányával. Dango előbbit marxista, utóbbit foucault-i gondolatmenetekre vezeti vissza, amikor amellett érvel, hogy egyfelől az intézményi struktúrák kiüresítéséről és formalizálásáról van szó, másfelől viszont magának az egyénnek a rendszerben elfoglalt helyének, egyáltalán: az egyénről alkotott elképzeléseknek az átalakításáról. Mi több, mindkét szinten a neoliberalizmus gazdasági logikája érvényesül: a jóléti intézmények elsődleges feladata nem társadalmi funkciójuk betöltése, hanem a működés gazdasági hatékonyságának való megfelelés és a társadalom mindenekelőtt gazdasági szempontokat érvényesítő irányításának megszervezése, az egyén pedig megszerzett képességeit, társadalomban elfoglalt helyzetét és személyes tapasztalatát tekintve is a gazdasági racionalitás mentén, a jövőbe való befektetésként értelmeződik. (Dango 110) A társadalmi berendezkedés modellje a nagyvállalat, a szubjektivitásé ennek megfelelően a befektetési bankár. A művészi reakciók is kétfélék lehetnek a Sedgewick „reparativitásról" szóló művészetfilozófiai elképzeléseit hasznosító Dango szerint: kényszeresek és mániákusak, hiszen céljuk nem lehet a válság megoldása, csupán elkendőzhetik azt, élhetővé téve ezzel az egyén számára saját, jól körül határolt világát (34) Ha tetszik, a művészet kézenfekvő élethazugság. Az intézményi struktúra működése felett elvesztett ellenőrzés

és az egyéni elismerés válságára adott kényszeres és mániákus reakciók a fentiek folyományaként négy, a fogyasztás különböző mintázataira épülő stratégiát hoznak létre, melyek segítségével a műalkotások – benne a kortárs irodalom – stílusait és műfajait jellemezhetnénk. Dango szerint ezek lennének a „detox" [„méregtelenítés"], a „binge" [„mértéktelen belefeledkezés"], a „filter" [„szűrés"] és a „ghost" [„eltüntetés"] (sorrendben: az intézményi ellenőrzés elvesztésére, illetve az egyéni elismerés megváltozott feltételrendszerére adott kényszeres és mániákus reakciók).[9]

Bár Dango nem csupán az irodalomról, hanem általában vett művészeti és kulturális gyakorlatokról beszél (mint amilyen a példái között szereplő molekuláris konyhaművészet vagy az Occupy Wall Street mozgalma), gondolatmenete kiválóan hasznosítható Egan szövegeinek eddig még nem említett sajátosságának, a műfajiságnak az értelmezésekor. Már *Az elszúrt idő nyomában* zárlatában is feltűnhetett: a közösségi élménynek, tulajdonképpen az élmény közösségének a kétes megítélésű lehetőségét – a legtöbb Egan-szöveghez hasonlóan – a szerző a meghiúsult románc és a hozzá kapcsolódó érzelmek kontextusába ágyazza. A történetek ismétlésére irányuló kísérlet (Alex és Bennie sétája Sasha egykori lakásához) a beteljesülés szempontjából kudarcnak bizonyul, de maga a kísérlet hozzájárul az érzelmi viszonyulás lehetséges átalakulásához, a meghiúsult románcos történet érzelmi áthangolásához.

Ez az alapképlet, apróbb módosításokkal a legutóbbi két Egan-regény esetében is kimutatható. A *Manhattan Beach* hagyományosabb történetszerkesztésű és elbeszélésmódozatú szövege a történelmi regény eszköztárának felhasználását, a nagy történeti elbeszélés mellett feledésbe merülő történeti tapasztalatok és egykori irodalmi ábrázolásuk rekonstrukciós kísérletét egy meghiúsult románc segítségével keretezi: Anne Kerrigan első szexuális partnere után elnevezett gyerekének születése, illetve elveszettnek hitt apjának visszatérése egy átkonfigurált családmodellt állít a románcos történetek megszokott hagyományos modelljének a helyébe: az apa helyébe a nagyapa lép. Ugyanez a helyzet *A mézeskalács ház* címet viselő, 2022-ben megjelent regénnyel, mely éppen a Dango által kifogásoltak ellenében terjeszti ki a szereplők történeteinek lehetőségét. Dango ugyanis azt rója fel *Az eltűnt idő nyomában* című szövegnek, hogy az egyes fejezeteket nézőponti elbeszélőként vagy fokalizátorként jegyző szereplők a „filter" módszerével jelenlétüket egyetlen aspektusra korlátozzák, énjüket és érzéseiket kompartmentalizálják, ám a regény még ettől a módszertől is megfosztja azokat a karaktereket, akik nem juthatnak szóhoz, elsősorban szexualitásuk (Rob) és faji hovatartozásuk (Bix) miatt. (Dango 134–43) *A mézeskalács ház* éppen Bixnek tudattartalmak megosztására kifejlesztett találmánya körül forog, ám történeteinek disztópikus világában nem a technológiai bonyodalmakon, hanem – azzal éppen ellentétben – a történetmesélés szerepén és „reparatív" lehetőségein van a hangsúly. Egan itt is a végletekig kiaknázza a kísérleti megszólalásmódban rejlő lehetőségeket, ami leginkább az előző regényben a koncert létrejöttét marketingesként segítő Lulu történetében a leginkább szembetűnő. Egyrészt az egész regény olvasható az ő, apja

[9] Dango részletes, táblázatba foglalt és példákkal illusztrált taxonómiáját (40).

megtalálására tett kísérleteként (a hasonlóság Lulu, Sasha és Anne történetei között több, mint felűnő), másrészt a határozott, a neoliberális politika egyéni vonatkozásaival korábban teljes mértékig azonosuló lány a jövőben a nemzeti ügy szolgálatába állítja képességeit, és beépített ügynökként hajt végre egy majdnem fatális kimenetelű akciót, csak hogy létét apja számára bizonyítsa.

Ennek az akciónak a leírása a regény megjelenése előtt majd' egy évtizeddel, önálló történetként látott napvilágot a New Yorker magazin Twitter-bejegyzéseiként. Az elbeszélés megjelenésének módja egyrészt tagadja az irodalom által hordozott közös olvasói tapasztalatnak még csak a lehetőségét is (az olvasók saját csatornájuk részeként, más és más bejegyzések közé ékelődve olvashatták Egan novelláját), másrészt a hazafias érzelem és az önfeláldozás történetét technológiai keretbe ágyazva az én érzéstelenítése kerül a középpontba. Egan – mint azt talán az alábbi részlet is mutatja – szinte tökélyre fejleszti a műfajként is értelmezhető megszólalásmód (itt: a Twitter-elbeszélés) és az érzelmi hatás fokozásának és finomhangolásának művészetét.

> A part messzinek tűnhet, a víztől körülölelve, egyedül, egy erőszakos, könyörtelen férfi társaságában.
>
> Ilyenkor akár együttérzés is kialakulhat benned az élénk színű bikinijeikben a távolban alig kivehető szépségek iránt.
>
> Ilyenkor örülhetsz neki, hogy munkádat nem fizetség fejében végzed.
>
> Önkéntes szolgálatod a hazaszeretet leginkább kitüntetett formája.
>
> Emlékeztesd magad, hogy munkádat nem fizetség fejben végzed, amikor kijön a vízből és nehézkesen elindul feléd.
>
> Emlékeztesd magad, hogy munkádat nem fizetség fejében végzed, amikor egy sziklatömb mögé kormányoz és az ölébe ültet.
>
> A Disszociációs Technika olyan, mint az ejtőernyő – a kellő időben kell meghúzni a zsinórt.
>
> Ha hamar húzod meg, akadályt gördítesz működőképességed útjába a fontos pillanatban; ha túl későn, túlságosan belemerülsz az akcióba, hogy kiszabadulj.
>
> Kísértést érzel, hogy meghúzd a zsinórt, mikor súlyos karjával, melynek ereje, ha futólag is, de férjedre emlékeztet, átölel.
>
> Kísértést érzel, hogy meghúzd, amikor alulról megérzed, hogy tested ellenében ritmusosan mozogni kezd.
>
> Kísértést érzel, hogy meghúzd, amikor szaga körülölel; fémes, mintha nyirkos kezed aprópénzt markolna.

> A felszólítás, hogy „Lazíts!”, azt jelzi, hogy feszélyezettséged tapintható.
>
> A „Senki sem láthat bennünket” azt jelzi, hogy feszélyezettségedről azt hiszi, a leleplezéstől való félelem az oka.
>
> A „Lazíts! Lazíts!” ütemes, torokhangon való ismételgetése azt jelzi, hogy feszélyezettséged egyáltalán nem kellemetlen számára. (*The Candy House* 200; saját fordításom)

Azzal ellentétben, amit Dango állít, mármint hogy a „filter” stílusának alkalmazása Egan esetében a szerepek leegyszerűsítésének és uralásának a biztosítéka, afféle narratív bagatellizálás, a zavaró érzelmi hatások kiszűrésének és a műfaji határok fenntartásának az eszköze lenne, ez a szövegrészlet – különösen Anna prebubertáskori szexuális kalandjának leírásával összevetve – éppen arról tanúskodik, hogy a kevesebb ebben az esetben sem feltétlenül kevesebb. A regények elbeszélői makrostruktúráinak, illetve az érzelmi elfojtások nyelvi vonatkozásainak előtérbe emelésével ugyanis az Egan által előszeretettel alkalmazott műfaj, a meghiúsult románc olyan érzelmi komplexitást képes megjeleníteni, mely alapjaiban mond ellent a „filter” mint személyiségredukció dangói értelmezésének. Az a tény pedig, hogy Egan szövegeit az esztétikai „középpontban” igyekszik tartani, nem csupán a technomodernizmus, az elitkulturális pluralizmus és az alsó-középosztálybeli modernizmus, de a műfaji próza viszonylatában is, arról tanúskodik, hogy képes mindezekhez kritikusan is viszonyulni. Egan alkalmazza a posztmodernnel társított ironikus megszólalásmódot és nyelvi reflexiót, és képes a technológiai környezet változásaira és kihívásaira reflektálni. Eközben nemcsak a történelmi és személyes tapasztalatok megfogalmazására tesz kísérletet az etnikai irodalmakra jellemző igénynek megfelelve, de képes ennek a tapasztalatnak az esetlegességére és kulturálisan konstruált mivoltára is felhívni a figyelmet. Teszi mindezt úgy, hogy az ábrázoláshoz minimalista elbeszéléstechnikákat és formát hív helyenként segítségül a műfaji keretek maximális kiaknázása és érzelmi töltetük áthangolása során. Mi több, utóbbi szövegei kiválóan illeszkednek abba a folyamatba, melyet a kritika a kortárs amerikai fikciós próza „műfajosodásaként” igyekszik megragadni, (Moran, „No Future”; Kelly) s mely nem csupán a műfaji kódoknak a szépprózai alkotásokba történő beemeléséről és kreatív alkalmazásáról szóló tendencia a 2010-es években, de a műfajokkal társítható érzelmi struktúrák áthangolására való törekvés is egyben. Az érzelmi struktúrák pedig, már ha hihetünk Raymond Williamsnek, magát a kultúrát jelentik.

A tanulmány korábbi megjelenési helye: *Alföld. Irodalmi, Művészeti és Kritikai Folyóirat* 74 (2023): 80–93.

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Kinga Földváry

Colonial Women in Control – W. Somerset Maugham's Female Characters on the Page and the Screen

When looking for powerful female characters who appear to be in control of their own fates, we rarely turn to literary works written by white middle-class men who were subjects and in many ways beneficiaries of the British colonial empire, and yet, such preconceptions on our part may result in the same kind of neglect towards thought-provoking, even revolutionary writings as the forms of silencing that females, colonial subjects, and other historically disadvantaged groups experience to this day. At the same time, it is hard to change the reputation of authors who have become associated with a period and a style of writing whose controversial aspects we are now fully aware of, owing to the work of feminist and postcolonial scholars. Some writers appear to have gone out of fashion not necessarily for what or how they wrote, but simply because the socio-historical context in which they lived and worked is no longer entirely laudable, and if their careers flourished under such eras and regimes, they may easily end up being condemned to silence for crimes they are innocent of.

Such a controversial literary figure is William Somerset Maugham (1874–1965), who was an extremely popular writer throughout his long and prolific career, from the end of the nineteenth century to the early 1960s. In fact, his commercial success, which greatly surpassed his contemporaries, may have been precisely the reason why he was never quite accepted, and certainly not appreciated by "the English-language literary establishment and intelligentsia in a century in which the writers most highly regarded by the academy were modernist psychological and ontological experimentalists such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, D. H. Lawrence, and Samuel Beckett, who struggled to attract a large readership and found it difficult or impossible to make a living by the pen" (Adams 43). Whatever the reason for the snubbing of him and his work, the result is obvious: Maugham, whose plays used to be popular repertory pieces for decades, and whose novels and short stories were found on the shelves of all and sundry, has by now all but disappeared from not only academic but popular discussion as well.

This neglect is evident from the almost complete absence of recent critical appreciation of, or even interest in, his work. A search for his name brings up no more than four entries in MTMT, the Hungarian Scientific Bibliography, one of which is a translation (Maczelka), another a historical account of the Jewish ghetto in Subotica, or Szabadka in Hungarian, with only a passing reference to Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (Dévavári), and there is one unpublished conference paper discussing the novel *Theatre* in the context of theatre studies. The single monograph that gives a broad overview of his career for the general reader, rather than the literary scholar (Budai), is also nearly forty years old. It is true that Maugham's name is still used as a common reference point by scholars with

a broader-than-average erudition, and therefore the new Hungarian-language English literary history also includes a short analysis of his autobiographical novel (Bényei, "Az Edward-kori regény" 390, 392–4), and several brief references to his work (Bényei, "A századforduló" 314, 316, 320; Bényei "Az első világháború irodalma" 430–32), but for in-depth literary analyses one either has to dig extremely deep, or to time-travel to earlier periods when the author's name was still common currency in literary parlance and scholars dedicated their attention to his work and thought.

What is particularly painful in this neglect is that Maugham's realist and possibly middlebrow (cf. Bényei, "A middlebrow irodalom" 192), but highly readable and often thought-provoking work features a number of extremely – and unexpectedly – interesting female characters. Many of these women are found in colonial settings clearly informed by Maugham's own travels around the world, his acute observations of fellow humans, and his own feelings of social marginalisation, rooted partly in his unconventional upbringing, the early loss of his parents and the consequent absence of a loving family environment in his life, and his latent homosexuality (or bisexuality). The ambiguity regarding his sexual orientation came partly from his own attempts to avoid suspicion of what was still considered a criminal offence throughout his life, and partly from his desire to conform to social convention, even against his own feelings. As his nephew relates in his account of the family, the repression of Maugham's sexual inclinations (which he referred to as his greatest mistake) was directly responsible for the unhappiness of his private life: "I tried to persuade myself that I was three quarters normal and that only a quarter of me was queer–whereas really it was the other way round" (Robin Maugham 212). Whether it was his own fears of exposure, or his natural talent that he also used in his time as a spy in revolutionary Russia (see Jeffreys-Jones) that made him such a sharp-eyed observer, he was certainly able to transform his raw material to captivate the reader with the almost poetic descriptions of exotic landscapes (something he rarely did in his work set in England), and particularly his tales of people set in circumstances that will reveal what they are truly made of.

It is no wonder that so many of his stories have been adapted into other media, from the stage through the cinema and television to radio, and inspired the greatest stars to play his complex characters, battling moral dilemmas, fighting their own desires and failings as well as social convention, prejudice and the power of circumstances. *The Painted Veil*'s Kitty Fane was played by Greta Garbo in 1934 and Naomi Watts in 2006; Leslie Crosbie in *The Letter* brought yet another great triumph to Bette Davis in 1940; Mildred Rogers in *Of Human Bondage* was embodied by Kim Novak in 1964; and *Theatre*'s Julia Lambert was brought to life by Annette Bening in *Being Julia*, directed by István Szabó in 2004. In fact, some scholars go as far as claiming that "considering that his books have been made into forty films and hundreds of radio and television plays, it would be fair to say that no other serious writer's work has been so often presented in other media" (Calder 262). Though this statement may probably be refuted by looking at the unceasing popularity of William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and a few other "serious writers"

on the screen, Robert L. Calder is clearly right when he explains the abundance of adaptations with reference to Maugham's skill as a dramatist and the fact that "[h]is dialogue – whether witty, colloquial, or earthy – often needs little alteration by the screenwriter; and his realist's external point of view, with its diagnostic concentration on physical characteristics, provides memorable roles for many performers" (263).

The woman I wish to single out from the long list of these memorable characters inspiring spectacular performances is the protagonist of "Rain", one of Maugham's most famous short stories, the first one he ever published about his travels to the South Sea Islands. The significance of this character within the narrative is also signalled by the fact that when the story was first published in the American literary magazine *The Smart Se*t in 1921, it was still titled "Miss Thompson". The character of Sadie Thompson was also immortalised in at least five different screen adaptations, not to mention the countless theatre and radio reworkings, and out of these adaptations, the three Hollywood feature films had Gloria Swanson (*Sadie Thompson*, dir. Raoul Walsh, 1928), Joan Crawford (*Rain,* dir. Lewis Milestone, 1932), and Rita Hayworth (*Miss Sadie Thompson*, dir. Curtis Bernhardt, 1953) in the lead. This list of Hollywood stars should be sufficient to prove that the central character allows an actress to shine – no wonder that all three films were nominated for various awards, and both Gloria Swanson and Joan Crawford received Photoplay Awards for their performances in the role of Sadie Thompson, a prostitute on her way to a new life.

In the briefest possible summary, the short story's plot has been described as follows: "a missionary persecutes a prostitute until suddenly a taste for forbidden fruit which no one suspected him of entertaining gets the better of him" (Ross 225). Even though such a description makes the story sound like an unrealistic cautionary tale, or even a psychological exploration of the power of repressed desire (after all, Freud's *Totem and Taboo* was published in 1913, and even though Freud is not mentioned in Maugham's notebooks, there are plenty of passages contemplating pleasure and pain, religion and desire, hedonism and social conformity to imply that the writer was just as interested in these notions as the majority of his contemporaries), the narrative is known to have been inspired by real life. In *The Summing Up*, the author talks about the inception of "Rain" during his travels in the South Seas, although he admits to "have always liked to let things simmer in [his] mind for a long time before setting them down on paper," therefore it was only about four years after making his notes that he wrote "the first of the stories [he] had conceived in the South Seas" (129). Even more interestingly, among the 1916 notes in *A Writer's Notebook*, we can find the following remark: "On these three notes I constructed a story called 'Rain'" (106) – but when leafing through the volume more carefully, we can observe not three, but a whole host of further passages that are used sometimes verbatim in the published story. The notes include brief sketches of several passengers, among them a missionary and a prostitute called Miss Thompson, but also an account of the clearing of Iwelei, the red-light district in Honolulu that the author witnessed (*A Writer's Notebook* 97–9), which plays such a prominent role in "Rain", too.

At the same time, the story has mostly been interpreted, and was probably meant to be interpreted, as an exploration of human behaviour, a conflict between types placed in specific situations. Graham Greene famously wrote, acknowledging the long-lasting power of the story: "Mr. Somerset Maugham, I suppose, has done more than anyone to stamp the idea of the repressed prudish man of God on the popular imagination" (*Journey* 205). Don Adams, on the other hand, encourages reading Maugham's work "figuratively as ethical parables that exhort readers to fulfil their unique individual natures and that condemn social moral intolerance that prohibits the free expression of our natural and best selves" ("What then is Right Action?" 105).

What should we then see in these characters? Are they types, or even two-dimensional stereotypes? Or are they carefully observed sketches from life, immortalising the author's random travelling companions? I believe they are neither – though they are certainly rooted in reality, and their stories can be read as parables, their literary representation, Maugham's rich and often poetic writing style turns them into flesh-and-blood, thought-provoking complex characters who cannot simply stand for virtues or vices precisely because of their multi-layered composition. The setting, and the constant references to the rain that also gives the story its title are equally meaningful – the rain represents the metaphorical prison that the travellers are cast into, and it is the source of tension that drives the characters to breaking point.

The narrator of the story is Maugham's favourite kind, introduced in *The Moon and Sixpence*: "the semi-autobiographical narrator who serves as the ethically exemplary Everyman figure, and whose task it is to observe closely and honestly, refusing judgement and censure, while interacting with the reader directly, transparently, entertainingly, and with scrupulous consideration" (Adams "Somerset Maugham's" 57). In "Rain", the third-person narration is limited to the point of view of Dr Macphail, a Scottish doctor and wounded veteran, who is travelling with his wife to the Pacific island of Samoa to rest and heal from his war injuries. His medical background and his position of focaliser make him reminiscent of the author, particularly in the way he sees the follies and shortcomings of his fellow travellers, but he rarely passes judgement on anyone. True, he does have a few arguments with Davidson, the American missionary hell-bent on eliminating sin from the world of the natives, and on saving Miss Thompson by making her pay for her past, but in general, as the name Macphail suggests, he has no real power or desire to change the course of events.

The story, as expected, has a small number of named characters, among them Dr Macphail and his wife, a weak and colourless woman eager to conform and visibly afraid of upsetting others or stepping out of line; the Davidsons, both missionaries returning to Apia after a year, and Miss Sadie Thompson, a woman who is accused of being a prostitute on the run from Iwelei, Honolulu's infamous red light district, and on her way to Apia, in search of a new occupation. The text does not mention any real evidence for her past other than the fact that she came abroad in Honolulu, and of course her loud

and coarse behaviour, playing her gramophone even on a Sunday, and entertaining male visitors in her room with drink and raucous conversation. Yet even if these signs are more than enough to suggest a woman who has no place in polite society, it is telling that the accusation comes indirectly, from Davidson's speculation, rather than through an eye-witness account of her actions. It is also true that the author was probably trying to steer clear of censorship by avoiding explicit references to sexuality or promiscuity – at the same time, the narrative leaves sufficient ambiguity to allow a benevolent interpretation. It is not only the modern reader who can fail to notice Miss Thompson's loose morals, but Dr Macphail and his wife also try to treat her as just another fellow passenger stranded in the boarding house in a muddy little harbour while they all wait for their destination to be clear of the measles.

While Mr Davidson begins his assault on Sadie Thompson's morals of his own accord, it is interesting to note the way she is described by the narrator. "She was twenty-seven perhaps, plump, and in a coarse fashion pretty. She wore a white dress and a large white hat. Her fat calves in white cotton stockings bulged over the tops of long white boots in glacé kid" (Maugham, *Collected* 15). At this point it is hard to see what the problem may be with her appearance, as white has traditionally been associated with innocence and purity, therefore in itself it should not raise the alarm of any fellow traveller. What is more, we do not get to see what colour the Macphails are dressed in, and on the tropics it would not be uncommon to wear light colours and materials – although the Davidsons are wearing black, but that is clearly a consequence of their vocation, rather than any other fashion trend. The only issue with Miss Thompson's clothing therefore may be its impracticality, and as the narrator notes once again the next day, it is not whiteness in itself, but its unsuitability for the location that makes her stand out: "She was dressed as on the day before, in a white frock, and her shiny white boots with their high heels, her fat legs bulging over the tops of them, were strange things on that exotic scene." It is the timid Mrs Macphail whose remark draws our attention to what is wrong: "'I don't think she's very suitably dressed, I must say,' said Mrs Macphail. 'She looks extremely common to me.'" (Maugham, *Collected* 21).

Whiteness, and the shiny glacé kid boots, especially high-heeled ones, are therefore not indecent in themselves, or suggestive of anything sinful, but when they stand out, drawing attention to themselves, they imply an attitude that is against public decency in an unmarried woman who should never draw attention to herself in society, something that Miss Thompson is evidently unwilling to do. When the Macphails pass Miss Thompson in the street on the next day, another detail is emphasised as tasteless: "She had all her finery on. Her great white hat with its vulgar, showy flowers was an affront" (Maugham, *Collected* 25). What is remarkable here is that the author, who takes such great pains to describe landscapes and natural sights in detail, is surprisingly slow in sharing the details of this woman's appearance, even though this is what is responsible for the conflict. But as her character is slowly but surely taking shape in front of our eyes, we will realise that she represents everything that the puritanical spirit of American new Protestant churches

condemns: excess of all kinds. She is excessive in the size of her hat, the showy decorations, the festive dress, and her body itself which cannot be contained by the boots.

This latter sign that invites criticism in Miss Thompson's appearance is, moreover, no fault of her own, and while it is not yet an example of body-shaming, but it shows a traditional association with weakness and vice. Her plumpness, and the way her calves bulge over the tops of her shoes may metonymically signal her resistance to restrictions, whether social conventions or legal, moral, religious codes of conduct. While body size and beauty ideals are culturally coded, in this context the prostitute's body is associated with unbounded bodily pleasure – and it is in clear contrast to the Davidsons, a woman of small stature and dressed in black, and particularly the "singular" appearance of the man, who will take on the role of antagonist in the short story:

> He was very tall and thin, with long limbs loosely jointed; hollow cheeks, and curiously high cheek-bones; he had so cadaverous an air that it surprised you to notice how full and sensual were his lips. […] His dark eyes, set deep in their sockets, were large and tragic; and his hands with their big, long fingers, were finely shaped; they gave him a look of great strength. But the most striking thing about him was the feeling he gave you of suppressed fire. It was impressive and vaguely troubling. He was not a man with whom any intimacy was possible. (Maugham, *Collected* 13)

As this description suggests, neither is Mr Davidson presented as a positive character, and from the moment of his first introduction, the narrator implies that his highly controlled external appearance hides secrets, and even passions that are about to break free. In this sense, he once again appears as the direct opposite of the prostitute, who pretends to have passion even when she feels none – whatever the case, these two characters are the ones who display passion and are willing to fight for their own attitude towards it. At the same time, the text already foreshadows the ending: the "hollow cheeks", and particularly the "cadaverous" air associate the man with death, and the "tragic" eyes create an equally ominous atmosphere that add to the suspense slowly building up to soon reach breaking point.

But to return to the question of appearances, when looking at the socio-historical context of the lives of colonial women in the Far East, it is clear that being unmarried in itself was against the norm, and thus seen as provocative and potentially even dangerous to the Western norms of monogamy. As the white colonial population tended to comprise a higher proportion of men than women, prostitution and concubinage were more or less accepted phenomena, similarly to intermarriages, though the social position assigned to the women involved in any of these relationships was at the bottom of the hierarchy, and even "decent" occupations did not much help. As Stoler explains,

> Single professional women were held in contempt as were European prostitutes, with surprisingly similar objections. The important point is that numerous categories of women fell outside the social space to which European

> colonial women were assigned; namely, as custodians of family welfare and respectability, and as dedicated and willing subordinates to, and supporters of, colonial men. The rigor with which these norms were applied becomes more comprehensible when we see how a European family life and bourgeois respectability became increasingly tied to notions of racial survival, imperial patriotism and the political strategies of the colonial state. (643)

Within this system, an unattached woman is therefore in an equally inferior position, whether she is a cashier, a singer, or a prostitute – but what I find remarkable is that Maugham portrays Sadie Thompson with a strong emphasis on her resistance to conformity. I would therefore disagree with Anna Gaździńska's overall assessment that "Maugham's female characters are thus denied the fundamental independence enjoyed by his male protagonists" (72). Her view may indeed apply to many of the novels' protagonists, but Miss Thompson defies this categorisation, as well as many others. Although she appears to be broken by the missionary's powerful onslaught of forceful conversion, Maugham's heroine begins and ends the narrative as independent, with a mind of her own, and willing to make her way in life in whatever way she pleases.

Ironically, but perhaps predictably, in every one of the Hollywood film adaptations, several of these moments of ambiguity are eliminated for the sake of a more appropriate, socially more acceptable representation of the heroine. For one thing, none of the Hollywood stars playing Sadie Thompson sacrifice their own beautiful slim ankles and attractive bodies to make the character's appearance more controversial, or less appealing. This, of course, makes it easier to relieve the guilt of the men who fall under her spell – who could not? after all, the whole world admired Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford and Rita Hayworth – and also distance us from the uglier side of reality, which is not absent from Maugham's description of the red-light district. More importantly, in each of the films, the protagonist ends up losing her independence, sacrificing it for the sake of morality, but the films also more or less explicitly deny her being an actual prostitute. All three films can thus easily offer her redemption in the form of a respectable existence, conforming to what G. B. Shaw's Alfred Doolittle would call "middle-class morality" (Shaw 121). Sadie Thompson is relieved of the obligation to return to San Francisco and go to prison when the missionary commits suicide, therefore she happily gets on a boat, accompanied by the bright-eyed American Sergeant Tim O'Hara (an addition from the 1922 stage adaptation by John B. Colton and Clemence Randolph), who offers her a home, a future, marriage and a family. It is also significant that in each of the three film adaptations, she gets to leave the boarding house, the suffocating hypocrisy of social conventions, but she does so in a way that can once again be seen as a renewed imprisonment within patriarchal society. As Sarah Projansky describes the conclusion of the 1928 film version called *Sadie Thompson*, it can be seen as "extremely ambivalent about its critique of gendered oppression" (56). On the one hand, the film conforms to the Hays code's stipulations by making Mr Alfred Davidson a reformer, rather than a missionary, "one of the Hays Office dicta being that the clergy should not be represented in a pejorative fashion" (Calder 264), yet the narrative "links a religious interest in reforming

prostitution and in colonizing the "south seas" to a patriarchal oppression of women" (Projansky 56). The film also makes its eponymous protagonist more acceptable to its middle-class viewers by implying that Sadie's lifestyle is not one of choice, and she is innocent of the crime that would result in a prison sentence awaiting her in San Francisco.

As Projansky sums up her findings, she notes that "the majority of the films addressing rape and feminism, while they may offer a woman's *experience* of rape, even a feminist *perspective* on rape, […] do not engage a particularly feminist *response* to rape" (58, original emphasis). This is certainly confirmed by the two later adaptations of Maugham's story – both end with a triumphant woman, leaving the island before the "respectable" travellers do, but what is more remarkable is how the short story can be read as offering a more open, and possibly more feminist response to the confrontation between the representative of patriarchal colonial society and an independent female who refuses to conform to the implicit and explicit social conventions of the era.

This may be my tentative conclusion at the end of this brief and rather superficial examination of a nearly forgotten short story and its protagonist. Although it is less surprising that the Hollywood studio system produced white-washed and moralised versions of such ambiguous and open-ended narratives, it is worth remembering that the literary text, and its literary author, who was born in Victorian England, and travelled all over the British Empire, saw the world in a considerably more complex light. That is why he ended the story without a departure – every character is still stuck in their own rut, the missionary is dead, his wife is shaken out of her emotionless convictions, and Sadie Thompson is back

> in all her finery, in her white dress, with the high shiny boots over which her fat legs bulged in their cotton stockings; her hair was elaborately arranged; and she wore that enormous hat covered with gaudy flowers. Her face was painted, her eyebrows were boldly black, and her lips were scarlet. She held herself erect. She was the flaunting queen that they had known at first. (Maugham, *Collected* 44)

What is more, she has the final word in the whole story: "You men! You filthy, dirty pigs! You're all the same, all of you. Pigs! Pigs!" (45) But this is not an empty outburst, as it has the structural position that will make a lasting impression on the reader, just like it has an impact on her fictional listener: "Dr Macphail gasped. He understood." (45) Let us therefore remember Miss Sadie Thompson not as a virginal victim, nor as a middle-class maiden angling for a decent match, but as a bold, flesh-and-blood woman, who can open the eyes of society, making them face their own vices, even if it costs them everything, like the hypocritical Mr Davidson – and let us follow Maugham's narrator in trying to look behind the scenes and understand.

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Imola Bülgözdi

"Lenticular Logic" in a Hollywood Chick Flick: the Representation of the South in Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes* and Its Film Adaptation

Fannie Flagg's 1987 novel spent thirty-six weeks on *The New York Times* bestseller list, and was described as "a real novel and a good one" in their book review section (Butler), providing a solid audience base for the 1991 adaptation by director Jon Avnet. The film also received critical praise, including two Oscar nominations, one for Best Supporting Actress (Jessica Tandy as Ninny Threadgoode) and the other for the screenplay by Carol Sobieski and Flagg herself, which was also nominated as best adapted screenplay by the Writers Guild of America and won the highly regarded Scripters Award ("Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café"). While it is not difficult to see why certain segments of the female readership would find intriguing a book focusing on the midlife crisis of a neglected Alabama housewife and her relationship with her new, elderly friend who opens her eyes through stories of two non-conformist Southern women from her youth, the making of the adaptation was fraught with difficulty from the very start, as remembered by Avnet: "Tomatoes was an impossible film to get made, because on the surface, its appeal is largely female. There were no male stars per se" (qtd. in McCreadie 82). Flagg, discouraged after initial turn-downs, was stunned by the success of the movie, as it lacked the 25-year-old sex symbol, gunshots and violence Hollywood associated with a hit movie, in her view, at the time (81). It was, however, not a coincidence that a four-woman company, Electric Shadow Productions fell in love with the script and proved to be instrumental in raising funds for a screenplay that lived up to their standards of providing "well-rounded, interesting characters and universal themes," and, most importantly, one that centred on women's empowerment, as they would not even "consider anything that exploits women" (Comer 27).

The South, given its traditionally conservative views on women's roles, might seem a surprising setting for a novel with both main storylines featuring strong women characters, but since Scarlett O'Hara's debut, audiences have been accustomed to see white Southern women challenge the restrictive role models the nostalgic Plantation myth imposed on them. Though the mythical figure of the Southern lady, invented by white upper-class Southern men and grown to symbolize what they considered best in Southern culture (Baym), may appear to be a relic of the past in the twenty-first century, her figure problematizes issues of race and gender, lynchpins of Southern regional identity, both black and white. The common denominator between the chick flick and the South, therefore, is a preoccupation with women's roles, and the fact that *Steel Magnolias* (1989) was one of the first films dubbed as a chick flick, followed by other prominent movies set in the South, such as *Thelma and Louise* (1991) or the *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002), has turned attention in Southern film studies to this relatively new genre.

The starting point for this comparative analysis was Tara McPherson's observation in *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* that a "lenticular logic" characterizes the way the South is imagined and represented. The term she coined originates from once-popular lenticular (aka. 3D) images, in which two pictures are overlaid in such a way that from different angles the viewer can see two different images, but at no point can the two be seen at the same time. The specific lenticular image that inspired her featured, on the one hand, a Southern belle and a white-columned plantation house, and a grinning, portly mammy on the other (26), literally incorporating the two most prominent and antithetical Southern female stock characters. McPherson defines lenticular logic as "a schema by which histories or images that are actually copresent get presented (structurally, ideologically) so that only one of the images can be seen at a time. Such an arrangement represses connection, allowing whiteness to float free from blackness, denying the long historical imbrications of racial markers and racial meaning in the South" (7). This arrangement, in fact, is more complex than the relationship between dominant and subordinate narratives or silencing, since "lenticular logic is capable of representing both black and white; but one approaches the limits of this logic when one attempts to understand how the images are joined or related" (26).

The novel, as it shall be demonstrated, clearly surpasses the limitations posed by lenticular logic, even though Ruth and Idgie's storyline is set in the segregated Jim Crow South. However, the tendency to focus on only one or the other side of the coin is also typical of films about the South, which has been lamented as recently as 2011 in the volume *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary*. While the cinematic South often figures as an "exotic" region to the rest of the United States, it has also served "as a repository for the nation's unresolved problems and contradictions" (5), argue Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee. Given the long history of racial conflict in the region, films in the 1960s and 70s mostly thematised racial discrimination and events revolving around the Civil Rights movement, ensuring that Second Wave Feminism did not figure in connection with representations of the South (Barker 92). Therefore, the tradition of the idealized white Southern lady remained largely intact until chick flicks at the end of the 1980s started to deploy the South as "a traditional and often comic backdrop against which to examine the unresolved conflicts generated by the feminist movement, while avoiding issues of race by focusing mainly on the lives of white southern women" (Barker and McKee 11).

Barker's analysis of the link between the chick flick and the setting concludes that the South, with its celebration of traditional femininity, provides the ideal place to explore female empowerment while avoiding the politicized aspect of second wave feminism, thus rendering it the perfect postfeminist film genre. Her definition of the chick flick as "a film that emphasizes female empowerment through female bonding" (93) also very well describes Flagg's novel, though the book has little in common with the main concerns of chick lit, as epitomized by *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), hailed as the originator of

the chick lit phenomenon[1] (Ferriss and Young 4). Thus, chick flick as a genre seems to encompass a wider age-range and does not have romance as its central focus, like chick lit, which has come under fire for shifting "the focus of analysis more fully to the moment, to romance, sex, and money, and less to friendship, identity, or empowerment" due to Fielding's text being pronounced as the genre's main exemplar (Farr 203). The generic conventions of the chick flick, however, are bound to inform the adaptation process, even when the author of the novel serves on the project as a screenwriter. Since both Southern cinema and literature have been affected by the exclusionary nature of lenticular logic, this paper focuses on the cinematic transposition of three major aspects of Flagg's novel that transcend this restrictive point of view: the deconstruction of the Plantation myth, the insight the omniscient narrator provides into the lives of both African American characters and communities, and the question of race relations, summed up by one of the black characters as follows: "Miss Idgie and Miss Ruth … they treat you white …" (Flagg 373), which was a lot to say in a Southern small town in the 1930s.

As mentioned earlier, the restrictive roles women could fulfil according to the Plantation myth has been under fire by strong female characters in both film and literature, but they have a long-lasting legacy: in "The Southern-Fried Chick Flick: Postfeminism Goes to the Movies" Barker posits the generational divide between feminists and postfeminists as the main conflict in chick flicks, through the confrontation of mothers and their adult daughters. The daughters "have to choose which elements of southern womanhood/motherhood to keep and which to reject," while the mothers have to face how their decisions as mothers and wives have affected their daughters (96). Neither the book, nor the film comply with this trait of the chick flick, as the women's liberation movement only features as something that has passed middle-aged Evelyn by and it did not even make an appearance in the traditional small-town existence of elderly Ninny. In the film, Evelyn is confined to the stultifying suburban existence of housewives: her unhappiness seems to be rooted only in her inability to lose weight and a feeling of uselessness after her child-rearing days are over, a malaise that is only exacerbated by an unappreciative husband. The novel, however, details various reasons why Evelyn feels trapped, and one of them is the obligatory emulation of the idealized, pure image of the Southern lady: she realizes at the age of forty-eight that "all that struggle to stay pure, the fear of being touched, the fear of driving a boy mad with passion by any gesture, and the ultimate fear – getting pregnant – all that wasted energy was for nothing" (Flagg 42). Flagg overtly criticizes the real-life consequences of this legacy manifesting themselves as late as the 1980s:

[1] Nóra Séllei presents the Hungarian variant on the formula via a comparative analysis of Fielding's novel and the major bestseller inspired by the character of Bridget Jones, titled *Állítsátok meg Terézanyut!* (*Stop Mammatheresa!*) by Zsuzsa Rácz (2002), focussing on the social, political, and economic context of post-communist cultural production and reception in "Bridget Jones and Hungarian Chicklit."

> She had stayed a virgin so she wouldn't be called a tramp or a slut; had married so she wouldn't be called an old maid; faked orgasms so she wouldn't be called frigid; had children so she wouldn't be called barren; had not been a feminist because she didn't want to be called queer and a man hater; never nagged or raised her voice so she wouldn't be called a bitch… (Flagg 236–7)

Unsurprisingly, the film skips any reference to this, as well as to Evelyn's well-articulated and undeniably feminist conclusion: "all that mattered in this world was the fact that you had balls" which opened the door to everything and led her to regret being "ball-less forever" (276–7).

Oddly enough, the character who acts upon this realization is one of the protagonists of the 1920s and 30s storyline: the reader's expectations are subverted, as there are far more rebellious characters in Ninny's youth who, at the same time, deconstruct the nostalgic image of the past. Going by Ninny's memories, the Threadgoode household functioned as an idyllic Southern home and family, complete with stock characters: the spoilt belle, the naïve and kind mother, the benevolent and charitable father, and various devoted black characters working for the family. The youngest daughter, Idgie is a tomboy, and, surprisingly, the traditional small-town community puts no pressure on her to conform to gender expectations and she actually grows into a person who functions as a man in the community, as if she has acquired some balls – a possibility Evelyn only fantasizes about. Idgie dresses like a man, talks, shoots, drinks like a man, and even falls in love with a woman, Ruth, the perfect Southern lady, who happens to love her back and abandons her abusive husband to set up house together. What is more, no one is surprised in the community when Ruth's baby, born after her separation from her husband, is named Buddy Threadgoode, and Idgie receives money from her father, just like a son would, to start a business to be able to provide for Ruth and her son, which leads to the founding of the Whistle Stop Café. In the novel, this far-from-ordinary family arrangement coexists with traditional but happy marriages, such as that of the Threadgoode parents and Ninny's own, along with failed marriages, like Ruth's, providing a more multifaceted representation of the South than what the Plantation myth allows for.

Despite the tolerant community Flagg portrays in her novel, the film chooses to include some pressure on Idgie to conform, on the one hand, via a marriage proposal by her best mate, the sheriff, Grady Kilgore, and on the other hand, through a new scene when Ruth attempts to teach Idgie to cook. The domestication of Idgie, however, turns into a homoerotic food fight between the two, which the rejected suitor disapproves of, but his complaints and commands to stop are simply ignored by the two women. Ten years later, a more mature Idgie definitely shows Ruth's influence: she is wearing more ladylike clothes, while Ruth also discards the long skirt and petticoats that tripped her up in her youth in favour of pants, a rather daring choice in a small town in the 1930s. The matching outfits function well as a visual signal of their closeness, but present a tamer and more gender-conforming Idgie than expected, going by the novel, which points out that

she remains a tomboy to the last: in her old age, only Idgie's voice betrays that she is not a man.

In "Cinemyths: Contemporary Films as Gender Myth," Ted Tollefson draws attention to a series of films that "traces the amorous relations of Lilith and Eve, the wild woman and the domesticated woman," several of which are set in the rural South (113). Although he praises the friendship, passion, and compassion that are present in these relationships and act as liberating and transforming agents, he laments that "all these films lack the courage to deal openly with sexual love between women" (114). Interestingly, Roger Fischer maintains that "Avnet's film imposes a sense of structural discipline on Flagg's novel and mutes adroitly its lesbian overlay and cloying sentimentality" (185), which statement is suspicious on two counts: on the one hand, the novel is even more reticent about Idgie and Ruth's sexuality, probably due to the elderly woman's first-person narration, and having placed the focus on their charismatic personalities. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is the film that becomes more sentimental due to the generic conventions that require a depoliticized atmosphere, thus reducing Evelyn's awakening feminist consciousness to an occasion for comedy.

Despite the fact that the monolithic image of white Southern femininity is challenged in the film in the storyline set during the Depression, Evelyn's mental state is presented as far less concerning. The fat woman, traditionally a comic character on the stage and in cinema, is troubled by a bad case of menopause and there is no hint at Evelyn's crippling fear of doctors or the severity of her depression that is overtly described in the novel: "the quiet hysteria and awful despair had started when she finally began to realize that nothing was ever going to change, that nobody would be coming to take her away. She began to feel as if she were at the bottom of a well, screaming, no one to hear." Her sense of failure makes her suicidal, as "it wasn't death she was afraid of. It was this life of hers that was beginning to remind her of that grey intensive care waiting room" (Flagg 63) where she had to agree to take her mother off life support.

Her meeting with Ninny turns her life around and Evelyn, who has been on a decade of unsuccessful diets, receives the final push to slim down to lead a healthier life from a community of women at a "fat farm," gaining back her self-esteem. This fact is also omitted from the film, which thus avoids having to present the fact that the Southern norms of domestic femininity did not work out for Evelyn and her support group and fulfilling relationships come from outside of the family. Fischer, contradictorily, praises "the prevalence of feminist ideology and strong, sympathetic female characters" (185), and criticizes the portrayal of "southern women as nurturing goddesses, blacks as objects, and most white men as reptilian slime or contemptuous cretins" at the same time (187). By labelling *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Thelma and Louise* "shrill man-bashing," as well as missing male characters "of the heroic stature of Clark Gable's Rhett Butler or Gregory Peck's Atticus Finch" (188), Fisher clearly demonstrates that he has completely missed the basics: chick flicks simply do not revolve around a male protagonist.

Fisher is, nevertheless, right about the treatment of black characters, whose integration into the Threadgoode family is toned down in the film. Firstly, the life stories of several African American characters that intersect Flagg's narrative independently of the Ruth-Idgie plotline are not included, leading to the stereotypical on-screen presence of the devoted servant. It is through these characters, for instance, that Slagtown, "Birmingham's own Harlem of the South" comes to life, only a block away from segregated white Birmingham, whose residents are "completely unaware that this exotic sepia spot even existed" (Flagg 118–9).

Secondly, agency is denied to black characters in the film in literally life-or-death matters which affect the white protagonists. For instance, when Ruth's no-good husband comes to steal their baby boy, he is killed accidentally with a skillet by Sipsey, a wizened old granny, and the body is disposed of by her son, Big George, without the knowledge of white characters, whereas in the film they ask Idgie for help, and it is her idea to barbecue Frank's remains. The same mechanism is present when Ruth is dying of cancer: her black friend, Onzell, moves into her room and nurses her non-stop, saving tiny amounts of morphine in the process, and giving her a lethal dose when the pain becomes unbearable. In the film, it is Ruth who makes the decision, and Sipsey complies, while Ruth's last moments are turned into a tear-jerking scene with Idgie instead of a quiet and peaceful passing in the company of her black friend, who sings spirituals to her.

Finally, Idgie and Ruth's supportive attitude towards the whole of the black community is downgraded into a scene of youthful bravado, when Idgie convinces Ruth to throw a federal shipment of food off the train for the inhabitants of Troutville, the tiny black town adjacent to Whistle Stop. The novel, however, includes the doings of a mysterious character called Railroad Bill, wanted by the railroad company for regularly looting shipments of food and coal on the trains passing Troutville at the height of Depression. As it is revealed to the reader, Idgie is the one risking life and limb for the black members of her community with Ruth's support, while in the film, Idgie's loyalty stretches only as far as her childhood caretaker and friend, Big George, when the black man is accused of killing Ruth's husband.

Compared to this level of trust and intimacy, Evelyn's experience in a desegregated South is confined to the stereotypical view of African Americans, which aligns with McPherson's lenticular logic. Evelyn considers the black section of Birmingham exotic, and the only black person she knew was her parents' maid, but her point of view is balanced by Ninny's, who has been "around colored people all my life," and is not in the least patronizing. She does not generalize, stating she "cain't speak for all of them" (Flagg 284), and is genuinely shocked to hear Evelyn wish she were black, because Ninny is fully aware that African Americans have always been treated as second-class citizens. Evelyn romanticizes and infantilizes them: "they just seem to fit in with each other … have more of a good time, or something. […] they always look like they're having so much fun" (302), and claims she would like to be "free and open like they are" (303). Flagg's novel

successfully counters these stereotypes via realistic African American characters who are part of the narrative in their own right, but turns expectations upside down by challenging lenticular logic in the Depression era storyline instead of Evelyn's, set in the 1980s.

Evelyn herself is finally able to transcend lenticular logic in the novel when she manages to overcome the Southern rape complex and attends a sermon in a black church in Birmingham, after nearly having a panic attack, this being "the first time in her life she had ever been surrounded by only blacks" (Flagg 309). Though not a religious person, she comes away with a spiritual experience that gives her the strength to put down "the heavy burden and resentment" and feels "free; just like these people […], who had come through all that suffering and had not let hate and fear kill their spirit of love" (313). Another lesson she learns is that all her life she was incapable of seeing past the surface when it came to African Americans:

> As she left the church, she turned at the door and looked back one last time. Maybe she had come today hoping she could find out what it was like to be black. Now she realized she could never know, any more than her friends here could know what it felt like to be white. She knew she would never come back. This was their place. But for the first time in her life, she had felt joy. Real joy. (Flagg 313)

The film, sadly, downgrades the turning point when Evelyn understands that white and black womanhood and manhood are inextricably linked into a 'local color' scene: she takes Ninny to a black church to listen to the choir a bit reluctantly, presumably at the elderly woman's request. They are made feel welcome, but the film does not explore race relations in the 1980s at all, promoting a nostalgic view of decent white folk who stood up for their black friends against the KKK in the Jim Crow South.

This attitude informs the ending of the film, too: in the novel, Ninny passes away while Evelyn is at the fat farm in Florida, finding her place in the world, but the film does not allow her to die, nor does it let Evelyn leave her home for months on end. Flagg closes her novel with the image of an independent, successful Evelyn, who makes her own money, lives a much more fulfilling life with her husband, and is planning to work with a mental health group at the request of the university hospital, having successfully beaten depression. The film not only keeps Ninny alive, but has her move into Evelyn's home, despite her husband's protests, as the old house in Whistle Stop was declared too dangerous to live in, practically turning the old woman into a surrogate mother. This turn of events gives Evelyn the opportunity to assert herself in her own household, but definitely curtails her autonomy: she declares she is ready to devote her time to the care of her elderly friend, which has been women's task from time immemorial. Instead of standing on her own two feet in the present, she takes home a piece of the past: Ninny and her stories of female bonding.

In conclusion, the adaptation of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café* definitely bears the sign of the generic traits of the chick flick, as the lives of black characters are neglected in favour of the white female protagonists, and African Americans are represented in the traditional menial roles, lacking agency and failing to provide the viewer any insight into the workings of the black community. By treating Evelyn's dissatisfaction with her life and serious depression as an occasion for comedy, the myth of Southern femininity and domesticity is portrayed as less problematic. It is also essential to mention that there is no overt feminist agenda in her storyline, which keeps clear of "the villainous, feminist career woman of the 1980s films," the antithesis of the figure of the white southern lady, brought to life by backlash against second wave feminism (Barker 93). Thus, Evelyn embraces an older, but more inclusive form of female bonding, which seems less dangerous partly because its narrative is safely set a lifetime earlier, and partly because Ruth and Idgie's unconventional existence is depoliticized and, therefore, means no threat to the current status quo. All in all, in keeping with the postfeminist ideas that condition chick flick as a genre, Avnet's *Fried Green Tomatoes* does portray the positive power of female bonding among white Southern women, but, regrettably, fails to explore those aspects of the novel that supersede the lenticular logic, thus continuing to normalize some elements of the conventional Southern status quo and presenting power and race relations in the 1980s timeline as unproblematic.

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Zsolt Győri

Realism and Biopolitical Care in *Help* (2021)

One of the most innovative aspects of British television plays from the early 1960s was the liberation of drama from the confines of studios by taking the shooting outdoors and on location despite the less convenient conditions. This meant a detachment from the burdensome mechanics of capturing electronic images in favour of the lightweight 16 mm camera, but innovation did not stop there. James MacTaggart, who worked as the leading producer for BBC's *The Wednesday Play* drama series and was described by Tony Garnett as "extremely innovative, open-minded and … allowing" (quoted in Wake n.pag.), was strongly convinced that "the time has come to write in terms of the pictures" (Bilbow 10), and, hence, urged directors to experiment with non-linear storytelling, rapid shot changes, and close-ups without dialogue to ensure narrative fluidity and the emotional immersion of viewers.

The institutional and creative support of BBC and MacTaggart launched the filmmaking careers of Garnett and young director Ken Loach, who shared the belief that films addressing matters of social concern and endorsing public debate should be dissociated from claustrophobic studios, suffocating both for their spatial limitations and for the distant, theatrical, and sanitised atmosphere naturalism catered for. As film historian Macmurraugh-Kavanagh insightfully opined,

> dealing with the issues of abortion or homelessness in the necessarily alienated environment of the studio looked and, more importantly, felt entirely different to dealing with them in the streets where these issues were daily concerns… In the studio, suspended from society, such issues seemed contained; but out in society, suspended from the studio, they became crises." (249)

As the passage claims, truth received in an *ex vivo* environment was worlds apart from the in vivo truths of cinematic innovators who resembled reporters on the social front line where they encountered unmanageable situations of human despair and social emergency. Whereas in the first scenario, the dramatic framework of truth seemed unengaging, remote and dull, in the second, social crisis situations became relevant and captivating.

The in vivo aesthetic of Garnett and Loach was inspired by television reportage and documentary cinema: both established "genres of the streets." According to Stephen Lacey, amongst the producers of *The Wednesday Play*, Garnett understood most clearly that "the best available languages through which to develop television drama are to be found on television itself, especially news, current affairs and documentary (connoted by 16 mm technology)" (31). Key elements of this documentary language included voice-over narration, sound recorded on location, semi-heard verbal exchanges, improvised dialogues, lack of musical accompaniment, natural lighting, the use of handheld camera

and its shaky images, tightly framed shots, undisciplined *mise-en-scène* and compositions lacking aesthetic perfection, the use of two-shots in the place of shot–reverse shot editing, sudden cuts and longer takes. Throughout the years spent at BBC, Garnett and Loach would employ these techniques as key ingredients of their unique non-fictional style of television docudrama.

John Caughie uses the term "documentary look" to describe the *in vivo* style television plays. He writes:

> [the] documentary look is not the perfect vision of an actual world, but operates, as does the dramatic [look], within a specific rhetoric which is not innocent, offering an objective, true social space, but which works within rules and strategies to produce a social space which is also a narrative, fictional space. (27)

Caughie differentiates the distinct poetic system of documentary look with a set of aesthetic devices at its disposal from the dramatic look, a "highly elaborated narrative rhetoric" one, that "centres the narrative: it establishes, within a world of events, scenes, characters, and little narratives, the line and the connections which are to be privileged. It orders the world into a readable hierarchy" (26). According to this assertion, fiction films control viewer participation in the presented visual material strictly by allowing points of identification, marking plot turns and using psychological realism to both signal motivations of characters and help predict or evaluate their behaviour. In addition, the dramatic look renders legible characters' interactions with their social milieu and vice versa, a process through which the social space stands as the general context of the individualised action. Within this paradigm, the individual and his/her story are still in focus. As opposed to the realism of fiction cinema, docudramas organise the world around, as Caughie claims, "a social space which is more than simply a background, but which, in a sense, constitutes what the documentary drama wishes to be about, the 'document' which is to be dramatised" (26). The cinematic language to ensure narrative control over the viewer is certainly not absent in docudramas; however, it brings about a world that can only be read as a palimpsest, a visual fabric where fact and fiction are not clearly differentiated and, as such, serve as a constant source of controversy.

Caughie's distinction between the documentary look and the dramatic look declines to pit factuality against fictionality, calling attention, instead, to the different degrees of the realist aesthetic at work in telecinematic media. While docudrama lies closer to current affairs reportage, it may, to varying degrees, use a rich repertoire of dramatic techniques, such as scripted dialogues, professional actors, narrative twists, suspense, and shooting in studio. By the same token, social realist cinema, despite its stronger reliance on psychological realism, epic dramatic design, and a tendency to affectively engage viewers, frequently uses on-location shooting, hand-held-camera, and semi-professional actors. Furthermore, it has a dramatic-narrative structure different from either stylistic academicism or the classical Hollywood narration of genre cinema.

Drawing upon Caughie's categories, I propose a classification emphasising the co-presence of factuality and fictionality as poetic attributes while also taking into consideration if these are primary and secondary attributes. As for primary attributes, I differentiate between the documentary analysis of reality (as in docudramas) and the dramatic-narrative analysis of reality (as in social realist films) where "analysis of reality" refers to representational/visual design, or Caughie called "look." Secondary attributes define the degree of factuality and fictionality in the overall poetic discourse, or, put differently, the degree to which primary poetic choices are limited and counterbalanced. Hence the four types are the following: (1–2) the documentary analysis of reality with weak or strong dramatic-narrative control and (3–4) the dramatic-narrative analysis of reality with weak or strong documentary control. A film undertaking (1) the documentary analysis of reality with weak dramatic-narrative control is a vocal, situation-based and snapshot-like representation of a social crisis with great attention to sociographic detail but without appeal to artistic refinement. (2) The documentary analysis of reality with strong dramatic-narrative control reveals more of the characters' affective reactions, characters are more individualised and easier to engage with, and each scene revolves around a verbal dialogue as focaliser. (3) Films offering the dramatic-narrative analysis of reality with strong documentary control are more refined in their narrative choices, storylines are well developed but episodic, rely on psychological realism but verbal exchanges have an authentic feel and the acting style is naturalistic. (4) The dramatic-narrative analysis of reality with weak documentary control enforces strong artistic integrity in the presentation of the social space, regularly uses cinematic clichés, storylines are action-driven, music is widely used for dramatic effect, symbolism and an allegoric mode of address are strong so as to guide audience attention to critical observations. Both the strong narrative-dramatic control of the documentary analysis and the strong documentary control of the narrative-dramatic analysis give filmmakers tools to control how spectators interact with the story-world – identify key character traits, establish causal links between events, recognise thematic motifs and other patterns in the narrative and compare these with personal experience. Whether control is orientation, guidance or supervision determines the degree of interpretational liberty allowed for viewers and equally limits the emancipatory power of films. Agitation as a synonym of making consumable may prove effective in channelling insights about the established order but can equally be criticised for demoting cinema as advertisement for ideology critique. Considering all aspects, realism with strong control mechanisms weakens the spectatorial agency of analysing reality and empowers the filmmaker as the source of critical thinking.

As I have argued in a previous exploration of the work of Garnett and Loach focusing on female social vulnerability, entrapment and the failure of the social and medical professionals to provide them help,[1] television favours Type 1 and 2 representations, whereas social realist cinema prefers the well-defined characters, conflicts, and clearer dramatic arc of Type 3 and 4 representations. I have also found that individual films never fully fit

[1] Analysed films included the following titles by Garnett and Loach: *Up the Junction* (1965), *Cathy Come Home* (1966), *Poor Cow* (1967), *In Two Minds* (1967), and *Family Life* (1971).

into s single stylistic model, in fact, there is much interaction and overlap between models. Such mixed structures are most frequent in Type 2 and 3 representations, in films with strong narrative or documentary control which also happen to be the film addressing current social problems without being sensationalist or superficial.

Six decades after the launch of *The Wednesday Play*, social realist drama has lost nothing of its edge as the worldwide critical acclaim and significant viewership success of the recently premiered Netflix series *Adolescence* (2024) prove. Hailed for its performances, script, and cinematography, Philip Barantini's direction tackles the influence of the so-called manosphere on male teenagers hooked on social media. The film' single-take presentation of events brings together the sense of immediacy and immersion of the documentary look with the tense dialogues, finely crafted narrative pace and ingenious story-telling of the dramatic look. Given the fiercely competitive current media ecosystem, the immense international success of this film validates the efforts of generations of filmmakers and producers who either at the BBC or, since 1982, at Channel 4 have shown great faith in unorthodox, edgy, and uncomfortable films – both television series and feature film – capturing the social and political climate of their corresponding period. Over the last forty years, marked by television films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, 1985), *Shallow Grave* (Danny Boyle, 1995), *Secrets and Lies* (Mike Leigh, 1996), *East is East* (Damien O'Donnell, 1999), *This is England* (Shane Meadows, 2006), *Tyrannosaur* (Paddy Considine, 2011), *The Selfish Giant* (Clio Barnard, 2013), and *Greed* (Michael Winterbottom, 2019) and also popular television drama series in the likes of Jamie Brittain's *Skins* (2007–13), Paul Abbott's *Shameless* (2004–13), Ricky Gervais' *Derek* (2012–14), Meadows' *This is England* (2010–15) and Barantini's own *The Responder* (2022) and *Boiling Point* (2023) have not only strengthened the standing of realism in British screen culture but have built up a vast corpus which enables us to study the correspondence between film style and social commentary. In what follows, I engage with a recent and lesser known television film *Help* (2021), directed by Marc Munden, a film that hopefully proves the legitimacy of my previous research on the realist aesthetic. What also connects this film to my previous research corpus is the topic of female care, but while the early films of Garnett and Loach portrayed exclusively women as those seeking help and care professional were predominantly males, the sides are reversed here: the female protagonist is the provider of care and the patients we see her nurse are men.[2] This shift theoretically indicates greater gender equality and increased social agency for women, yet the film's critical take on institutionalised care is equally invested, as I will show, in matters of biopolitics.

Released amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, *Help* is set in Bright Sky Homes, a Liverpool care facility for elderly people where Sarah, a freshly recruited care worker with no prior experience, faces a helpless battle with the fast-spreading disease. In her late twenties, Sarah is not so directly exposed to the health risks, unlike the elderly occupants of the

[2] In an interview, Munden called the film "a wonderful opportunity to try … to give something to the care sector and always envisaged it as a love letter to the care sector" (Bowman).

facility many of whom suffer from multiple illnesses, including dementia. In my reading, the theme of forgetting runs through the whole film as a multi-faceted hermeneutic cue not restricted to the memory impairment of occupants of the home. It helps viewers grasp the conflict of institutional and individual care, and, indirectly, puts on the map previous strands of British cinema, the already mentioned work of Ken Loach and Tony Garnett, films widely regarded as agitational and political for their willing engagement with the politics of care.

Help fully exploits cinema's capacity to portray abstract societal crisis in character-driven dramatic situations. If there is a single scene to illustrate this point from the film, most viewers would call out the 25-minute long uninterrupted shot filmed by a handheld camera from the middle of the film (42:21–1:06:06). In this segment of cinematographic and acting bravura, Sarah gains first-hand experience about the systemic nature of inequality during a night shift she is required to do solo as her colleagues are either down with the virus or off duty. In the middle of the night, one of the residents, Kenny, starts to display severe respiratory symptoms of the disease. Sarah's telephone calls for help are in vain: the local surgery and the NHS 111 emergency number play pre-recorded messages, and ambulance control openly admits that it would take "some" time to send a car over. She tries a technique called proning, turning the patient on his front, to ease pressure on his windpipe, but she lacks the physical strength to carry out the procedure. In her final desperation, Sarah wakes Tony, a resident in his early forties suffering from early onset Alzheimer, and convinces him to save Kenny's life, which they do.

Munden's stylistic choice and the single-take approach puts the scene firmly on the terrain of realism. Key techniques associated with the documentary look such as the handheld, dynamic camera, the domination of eye-level shots, on-location sound and the lack of a musical score are all present in the scene, yet, exactly because of the exceptional effort shooting long takes requires – advanced planning, coordination and team-work on the part of the filming crew and the absolute concentration of performers – I have serious doubts whether one can regard it as Type 1 documentary realism. Instead, this is a realism that combines the raw stylistic qualities of the documentary look with the more refined dramatic look that, nevertheless, is capable of creating the effect of realism, the feeling of being there. Hence, I regard it a Type 2 representation.

The scene in question draws the spectator into the drama of intensive care gradually. The dominant shot type of the first two minutes is the medium long shot framing the character from a few meters away, looking into Kenny's room through the open door (Image 1). At this stage the camera does not yet cross the threshold and takes up the position of the objective observer of the events from afar. As Sarah rushes off to the staff room to request help by phone, the cameraman follows the nurse from behind and slightly below the eye-level (Image 2). As she makes her first round of unsuccessful calls, the camera slowly approaches her moving through the doorway and framing her in a medium shot (Image 3). Hurrying back to Kenny's room, the apparatus moves in front of her, framing the upper

part of her torso and head in a loose close up (Image 4). As Sarah enters, the cameraman stays close behind her, passing the threshold between the public space of the corridor and the private space of the bedroom (Image 5) that also happens to be the symbolic border between the observatory and the participatory mode of visual representation. From this point on, shallow-focus close-ups dominate the scene, both taking audiences closer to Sarah's face and separating her from the physical environment which appears blurry, opaque, out of focus (Image 6). In addition, rack focus (focus pull) will be frequently used, a technique of adjusting the focus from one character to another, smoothly guiding viewers' attention.[3] The preference of head shots and the interest dedicated to the face not only accentuates emotional weariness but allows emotional identification with the character. If the shallow focus camera making both Sarah's mental panic and isolation from the rest of the word apparent, the use of lighting for dramatic purposes performs a similar effect, especially in parts of the scene when she moves between locations: the ceiling of the corridors connecting parts of the building is fitted with motion sensor lamps, this way she seems to be constantly stepping into and out of darkness.[4] Her spatial isolation and disconnection from the outside world is further emphasised by the labyrinthine and claustrophobic long corridors without any windows.

Images 1–6.

[3] Scenes using focus pull require extreme talent and care to guarantee the maximum sharpness of images, a quality that cannot be fixed in post-production. What makes this technique even more difficult in the present case is that distance between the camera and the characters changes from one part of the set to the next, as such the focal planes also need to be readjusted with a rolling camera. This requires precise planning of every move both the camera and the characters makes.

[4] Borbála László has likened this scene to a purgatory-like situation (László 101). With the constant alteration of darkness and light, the corridor may well be a symbolic space of limbo stretching between the state of being cursed and finding redemption. Constructing such spatial settings with symbolic or overtly religious overtones is not unusual in films about medical care, see for example György Kalmár's analysis of *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* and *Eden* (Kalmár).

The use of the handheld camera, the distance of framing, tack focus and lighting allows for the psychologically realistic portrayal of the emotionally devastated protagonist. The beginning of the second part of the scene (at around 10 minutes into the long take) is a close-up of Sarah's face shot with a low-key lighting setup (Image 6). The double traumatic realisation that she neither possesses the physical strength to turn the overweight Kenny onto his stomach, nor can she hope for outside help forces the nurse to request help from Tony whom she wakes up at the middle of the night. The introduction of a new character allows viewers to submerge in the drama at another level, through the verbal and physical interaction of the characters. Sarah is very much aware that she is using the man's help in a high health-risk situation, thus there is a sense of urgency to her every move and sentence. Although Tony enjoys more visual presence in this part of the scene, his agency is rather limited, not least because Sarah only expects him to carry out her verbal instructions without delay. When Tony goes into the bathroom to wash his hands and put on protective gear, the camera takes up a position outside the doorway: the over-the-shoulder shot suggest that spectators occupy the optical perspective of Sarah who also stops in front of the door and gives orders from there (Image 7). Moments later both the nurse and the camera enter the room framing in a semi-subjective shot her nervously putting gloves and a face mask on Tony (Image 8). Immersion into the character's affective state is guaranteed by the well-prepared and executed visual choices, as a result of which spectators both see with and act with the character. Towards the end of the scene, after Kenny is successfully turned onto his belly, in the same bathroom Tony is removing the protective gear following step-by-step verbal instructions from Sarah. Although the camera shows only the man's face, it is again the nurse who bears agency as Tony automatically repeats what is being shown and told to him (Image 9). The shot from the doorframe appears for the last time while Tony starts the shower, his faded silhouette is seen in the background and the profile shot of Sarah's face in focus in the foreground of the composition (Image 10). They have the following exchange:

> – Thank you for tonight.
> – Well, I didn't do anything.
> – No, you're me hero. (01:01:54–01:02:04)

At this point, there is a focus pull, bringing the background into clear view and blurring the foreground (Image 11), with Tony saying these words: "Some days I feel OK, you know? Some days I feel like I'm aware, and what I should be. And then some days I don't know where the fuck I am! But if I helped, you know, that's nice" (01:02:12–01:02:33). After another focus pull we see Sarah's facial reaction, capturing it at a moment of affective saturation. She walks away before losing composure and starts to sob inarticulately. The tension that has been building up throughout the scene pours out of the character. Yet, there is more here than Sarah breaking down: her face almost literally breaks apart (Image 12). It is distorted by pain and anger, the untameable tension between the impossibility of physical contact and the impossibility to not fell the deep urge for physical contact: to hug Tiny, to connect with another human. As László asserts, the "character's

bodily change is triggered by mental and psychological process, in the course of which Sarah abandons the official notion of care and embraces the personal impulse of offering help" (101).

Immersion into this intensive affective state where every decision may prove to be a choice between life and death is achieved through the combination of the documentary and the dramatic look, from initial observation to eventual participation, from moving with the character to feeling with her. The documentary look, the image moving around in space framing a single character herself moving back and forth between Kenny's room and the office gradually transform into the dramatic look where movement occurs only within a static frame (focus pull demonstrated by Image 10 and 11), where the physical isolation and lack of tactility between humans are visually dramatised by the repeated change of focal planes in an image lacking compositional unity between background and foreground.

Images 7–12.

By definition, the single-take scene is a self-contained narrative segment lacking temporal manipulation. Viewers fully share the spatio-temporal reality of the character: they not only see and hear but *see and hear with* her. The reality viewers are drawn into in this case is a nightmare reality, overwhelming, gloomy and extremely consuming. The sound design of the scene – with heavy breathing, the mechanical sound of the hand sanitiser and disposable glove dispenser and the clacking of light tubes – further accentuates the effect of being present in a nightmare, a tormenting place where even time seems to be at a

standstill. On two occasions, approximately 10 minutes apart (at 53:13 and 1:01:47 of the screening time), Tony asks Sarah what time it is: on both instances the girl replies that it is 3:30 in the morning. No progression seems possible as if they were in a time loop. The pre-recorded voice messages playing endlessly in the background creates this very feeling of being in a never-ending nightmare.

The emotionally immersive 25-minute long scene ends with a cut to the following morning with Sarah still wearing the apron she made from garbage bags as protection. As the new shift of caregivers arrive, she declines to accept their explanation of the events of the previous night suggesting that emergency services simply forgot about them. Sarah declares: "No, they haven't forgot" (01:07:18). I regard her enigmatic comment which she fails to elaborate on as a means to reject easy answers. The film declines closure in the face of an all-consuming affective experience, in fact, it emphasises the impossibility to come to terms with such emotional distress that clearly impacts Sarah's professional identity as a whole.

The rest of the story proposes to unpack this enigma and rationalise how the terrific events changed her ideas about giving care. *Viewers no longer have to see, hear and feel with but rather think with Sarah* as she grows intellectually and comes to directly challenge certain aspects of her works as a caregiver. Help portrays this process with reference to the ethical dimension of care, most importantly the indifference with which institutionalised forms of caregiving treat autonomy and agency and also their tendency to prioritise medical needs over human needs. The latter aspect is already addressed by the final moments of the lengthy scene analysed above, when Sarah sits beside Kenny's bed and simply holds his hand, performing the most basic form of human sociality that, nevertheless, is probably as comforting as any medication or therapy. In order to rationalise this preconscious gesture, to turn it into the knowledge of a self-aware carer, Sarah would have to question the institutional practices of care that claim to understand the needs of the beneficiaries of help, albeit what they actually know is how to locate the care-seeker within global processes of impersonal medical regimes and forms of biopolitical control. In a heated argument with Steve, she emphasises the distinction between patients and residents ("They're not patients, they are residents." 01:15:05–01:15:08), a difference often lost in the biomedical discourse that regards elderly and sick as synonyms. In my understanding, Sarah's insistence on such a distinction is part of both the process of rationalising her previous instinctual–embodied acts of kindness and making sense of having been abandonment by NHS services. At the end of the path Sarah takes, bitter truths await her about systemic inequalities within the institutional forms of providing help.

The film challenges the capitalist medical-biopolitical regime that establishes priorities between patients and allocates better resources, like intensive care, for patients with greater chances of recovery. Inequality also exists between care providers, as the narrative richly illustrates. The staff of the Liverpudlian facility lacks not only PPE masks and other essential protective equipment at the outbreak of the epidemic but also official

guidelines and advice on health protocols. Steve, the manager of the facility, first acquires dust masks from builder friends after paramedics strongly recommend wearing them, and, later, he orders proper mask (likely from his own salary) from China. The allocation of protective gear dwells on the capitalist logic of supply and demand and the biopolitical version of resource management that strives to save lives (be those of patients' or care-givers') in the most cost-effective manner.

Another important stage in the development of Sarah's identity as carer is that of making the unprofessional decision to run away with Steve before medication (strong sedatives) turns him into a vegetable and deprive him of human dignity. Firmly believing that there are other than biomedical means to deal with his condition, Sarah decides to smuggle the man out of the care home and drive him to a remote and abandoned trailer park by the sea where they self-quarantine for 2 weeks. Unfortunately, they are discovered by the police; Tony is sent back to the institution, while Sarah is arrested. In the police car she begs the police officer not to return the man to Bright Sky Homes and, later, delivers a rather didactic monologue:

> – I need your help. Listen to me. He's done 12 days. He's nearly safe... No. No, I quarantined him, I did... No. Just radio in and tell them not to take him back there. Take him somewhere else, please. Please! Are you listening to me? Are you listening to me?
>
> – Please... It's not my department, love.
>
> – No. No. No, it never is, is it? No, never... Never is. Never is. It's always someone else. It's the way this country works now. You know, keep our eyes down to the rest of it. You know, cos if we see people queueing up for food banks and if we see people lying on the streets, if we see disabled people being left to die, we'll feel sorry. We can't cope. We can't cope with Tory. Not us. Not any more. Underlying health conditions. What's in them? When did our lives stop being worth the same? (01:34:14–01:35:26)

With clear political overtones, this verbal outburst, like those in the works of Loach and Garnett discussed above, are intended for the viewers, formulating the awareness-raising messages of the film in the simplistic manner we would expect from Type 4 representations. The main difference, nonetheless, is Sarah looking into the camera during her monologue. By breaking the fourth wall and the codes of realism, the film employs alienating effects and emphasises its own constructed nature. What purpose, we may ask, does this alienating effect serve, apart from offering a mouthpiece for the director's social agenda? What are the benefits of suspending Sarah's presence within the diegetic universe and having an out-of-character Jodie Comer send a loud wake-up call towards the extradiegetic world? Not much. Unless, of course, the employment of uncinematic effects is still pro-cinematic, part of a calculated strategy to create distance from the character. In my understanding, the film plays at presenting Sarah's emotional address as her way of finding closure through verbalising the lessons learnt from the traumatic night shift. Does

this strategy discredit the protagonist's plight? By no means! It only urges viewers not to accept Sarah's truth as the only truth and to consider her intellectual journey through a critical lens. Some might find Sarah less of a responsible carer than an idealist revolutionary, someone falling into the trap of overidentifying with the people she provides care for. Others might regard her to be a sound progressive who is right to claim that ethical care exists only outside the system, even if this 'outside' may actually be created within the system in the form of new practices and alternative forms of care.

Help, I contend, builds a richer context for understanding Sarah's motivations to free Tony than the explanations suggested by her verbal tirade quoted above where she mentions the general lack of solidarity and empathy, blindness to inequality, and the soaring number of self-interested, egotist people: the general erosion of values related to care. By contrast, the film identifies capitalist market rationality (the management of gain and loss) at the heart of the concept of institutionalised, professional care. Munden makes a connection between, on the one hand, Sarah's decision to rebuff professional standards in order to save Tony from an aggressive form of pharmacological treatment and, on the other hand, her very personal experience of having been neglected by healthcare services. There is nothing exceptional about this connection as long as we regard it as a means of revealing the personality of a character by showing what experiences lead to what action. This is characterisation, the prevailing technique used by psychological realism in literature and the dramatic arts. But there is more to it in this case: the decision to spare a life from systemic biomedical entrapment on the traumatic impulse of systemic negligence renders legible not the personality of the character but the nature of biopolitical care. Defined by Thomas Lemke, biopolitics "does not produce an extension of politics but rather transforms its core, in that it reformulates concepts of political sovereignty and subjugates them to new forms of political knowledge" (Lemke 33). Along these lines, the film depicts biopolitical care as the fundamental transformation of care both through the elimination of the autonomous anatomical body, as in the case of Tony, and the subjugation of the agency of people to a medical knowledge that declares them useless and expandable, as in the case of Kenny. At the end of the day, it is not the abstract system but its local agent, the care provider, who exercises the power of elimination and subjugation: in fact, the professional integrity of carers is achieved through commitment to these powers. Overall, Sarah undergoes a professional crisis not because she has ever contemplated refusing to take care of a Tony (even when his condition deprived him of human features), or declined to help some elderly residents because others required more attention, but because *it is the very act of taking care that deprives Tony of his freedom and denies residents the right to receive equal help.*

Of the countless questions the film raises through the actions of Sarah, I regard those about biopolitical care to be the most relevant today, even if these often lack definitive answers. The heritage of television drama is obvious in Munden's refusal to impose an instructive reading on viewers. Stylistic and narrative patterns place *Help* on the side of realist social commentary, combining Type 2 and 3 representations that do not didac-

tically explain the meaning of the story but rather structure the process of deciphering meaning. Realism reveals itself as manifold: the visual and narrative design of the gut-wrenching uninterrupted sequence at the middle of the film merges the documentary analysis of a medical emergency situation and the dramatic analysis of human vulnerability into an emotionally overpowering yet engaging experience. *Help* not only verifies findings of previous research that characterise cinematic realism as a style operating through the release and control/refinement of raw impulses but raises the stake and manages this operation in a single take. Well into the 2020s, the teachings of 1960s screen culture still prevail with the new generation of filmmakers required to prove their talents both as agile social critics and stylistic innovators.

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László Borbála

A Story of Telltale Eyes: Filmic Gaze and Spectatorial Agency in Ferzan Ozpetek's *Facing Windows*

This essay was originally published in the 2019 issue of The Anachronist, though its earliest form was developed first as a presentation and later as a seminar essay for Gender and Film, led by Nóra. The in-class discussions, shared film analyses, and Nóra's generous feedback on both the presentation and the essay have significantly shaped the way I think about the filmic gaze, the relationship between film and viewer, and the cinematic interpellation of gender. For these formative insights, inspiring conversations, and so much more, I remain forever grateful.

Between Absorption and Address: Rethinking the Cinematic Gaze

Since the 1970s, much has been said about how viewers are sutured into the fictional world of cinema. Most prominently, Kaja Silverman's cinematic suture theory has helped reveal the strategies through which films address the spectator, producing a specific kind of spectatorial agency (47). Drawing on Emile Benveniste's notion of suture as the joining of the split subject within discourse, Silverman applies this idea to film-audience dynamics to show how spectators, through formal devices like the shot/reverse shot formation, are provided with a stable point of identification that masks the rupture in subjectivity. As a result, the viewer gains a fictional sense of mastery and becomes immersed in the diegesis (201). In this aspect, Silverman also builds on Jean-Pierre Oudart's claim that "[e]very filmic field is echoed by an absent field, the place of a character who is put there by the viewer's imaginary, and which we shall call the Absent One" (36). In other words, the camera as well as other devices like editing, cutting, exclusion and negation are defined as the absent "speaking subject" which conceal themselves to create "cinematic coherence and plenitude" (Silverman 205) while in fact they "speak," direct, and control the gaze of the viewing subject. As Susan Hayward explains, conventional film-audience dynamics not only facilitate but also control the viewing subject as "the spectator is identified with the gaze" created by the filmic discourse (157).

Many films engage with these dynamics critically. Often labelled as postmodern and self-reflective, these films require a spectator who likes to question the pleasures provided by the classical filmic gaze, having a keen eye for artifice and an appreciation for the devices that offer moments of disenchantment instead of absorption into fiction. The suture at work in such films is unique only to the degree that it grants access into the diegetic world of a self-investigating and sceptical viewing subject: the diegesis is designed to accommodate such agency and grant her the pleasure of the doubt. Beyond these familiar approaches, there also exist films that, rather than aiming for full absorption or overt self-

reflexivity, treat their viewers as participants in momentary acts of intersubjective communication. This article explores such moments: not when films aim to fully deconstruct classical film-viewer dynamics, but when they look back at us tentatively. In this reading, the filmic gaze refers not to the creation of the filmic/discursive self through suture but to the mode of address, the whole fabric of the film, which is construed as a looking subject.

This perspective diverges from the assumptions of early psychoanalytic film theorists – such as Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey – who, drawing on Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, emphasised the spectator's illusion of control over the image (McGowan, *The Real Gaze* 2).[1] Todd McGowan critiques this tradition for reducing the gaze to the function of the Imaginary – manifested in the mirror phase –, and that of the Symbolic – perpetuating ideology –, while neglecting cinema's potential of bringing us into contact with the Real (*The Real Gaze* 4). In Lacan's own terms, the Gaze introduces "depth of field, with all its ambiguity and variability, which is in no way mastered by me" (96). It is the point from which the object (the film) is imagined to be staring back at the subject (the spectator) (Lacan 84), and for this reason, the cinematic experience is "the site of a traumatic encounter with the Real, with the utter failure of the spectator's seemingly safe distance and assumed mastery" (McGowan, "Looking for the Gaze" 29). This reconceptualisation shifts the focus to the film's own acts of looking.

In this paper, I propose that the notion of the cinematic gaze as mode of address is best explored through characters' glances, body language, and positioning, as well as optical devices representing human eyes (i.e. cameras, telescopes, binoculars), since these elements activate moments of de-suturing, coupled with the experience of our non-diegetic selves being confronted. My argument is that the majority of films do not look at but through the spectator, who is immersed into the diegetic universe, treated as a passive observer. This does not entirely mirror the psychoanalytic notion of the voyeur, since the scene's spectacle is not constructed by the viewer but by the film; the cinematic apparatus remains the more active agent of the gaze. I contend that when films look at viewers – rather than through them – they momentarily grant spectators a more active role, creating a form of cinematic eye contact.

[1] As Metz puts it, "the spectator is absent from the screen *as perceived*," but also "present there and even 'all present' *as perceiver*" (54). Metz contends that the spectator's agency is created by the illusion that the subject looks at the object (the film), while he is not looked at in return, which prescribes that the viewer believes to be controlling the cinematic image. Baudry explicitly links this kind of spectatorial experience to that of the mirror stage. He states that "the arrangement of the different elements – projector, darkened hall, screen – in addition to reproducing in a striking way the *mis-en-scéne* of Plato's cave . . . reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the 'mirror stage' discovered by Lacan" (539). Furthermore, Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" perpetuates the notion that the filmic gaze is associated with male spectatorship and the ideological machinations of patriarchal society.

Tom Gunning's concept of the "cinema of attractions" helps illustrate this point. He distinguishes early-modern, pre-1906 cinema, which addressed audiences directly, from later narrative cinema, which suppresses direct address to maintain psychological realism and viewer absorption.[2] Gunning notes how narrative cinema casts viewers as passive, immobile observers by discouraging acknowledgment of the camera. However, he also suggests that elements of the "cinema of attractions" persist in later films, "provid[ing] an underground current floating beneath narrative logic and diegetic realism" ("An Aesthetic of Astonishment" 826), thus revealing the potential for alternative film-viewer dynamics even within narrative frameworks. This is important because, as I argue, it is not only postmodernist, highly self-reflexive films that can engage viewers in the meaning-making process, and, by the same token, it is not only classical narrative cinema that can confine viewers to the role of passive observers. It is crucial to see that films can address, or in my interpretation look at or through spectators irrespective of paradigmatic categorisations.

Gunning's genealogy also takes into account the fact that the gaze of the whole cinematic text is largely determined by the actors' stance vis-a-vis the camera. Indeed, the filmic gaze is often expressed through the characters' extra-diegetic glances. Breaking through the fourth wall, however, is not the sole condition of looking at the audience, and Gunning's theory fails to recognise this: it only mentions two modes of address, suggesting that films treat us either as passive voyeurs or as active looking subjects. Thus, the question is: what about the movies that seem to establish a coherent diegesis only to begin ogling us? Or what about those in which direct address is integrated into the diegetic universe? Such films fit neither the category of "narrative cinema" nor that of the "cinema of attractions."

Using a similar binary categorisation, Timothy Corrigan distinguishes between "gaze" and "glance cinema" (62). He contends that with the increasing significance of televisual media in the 1980s, audiences watched movies "according to a glance aesthetic rather than a gaze aesthetic" (62), by which he means that films were "watched across distractions rather than the collective gaze" of spectators, and as such, they disrupted mechanisms of "primary identification" through which cinema sutures viewers into the filmic text (16).[3] Thus,

[2] While the "cinema of attractions" addressed the audience directly so as to confront, astonish, emotionally and critically engage spectators, – which effects were mostly achieved through the actors' "mischievous contact with the camera" (Brown 4) –, the "cinema of narrative integration" absorbs viewers into fiction, treating them as "static, passive observers" (Staiger 13). According to Gunning, the distinction between the opposing types of cinematic address evolved as follows: "The performers in the cinema of attractions greeted the camera's gaze with gusto, employing glances, winks and nods. With the establishment of a coherent diegesis, any acknowledgment of the camera became taboo, condemned by critics as destructive of the psychological effect essential for an involved spectator" (*Origins of American Narrative Film* 261).

[3] Corrigan's distinction between "gaze" and "glance aesthetic" can be traced back to John Ellis's *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (1982), wherein these terms were used to distinguish between watching movies (gazing) and watching television (glancing).

for Corrigan, "glance cinema" still engages viewers in meaning-making, but through fragmented, performative modes rather than continuous narrative identification. In this sense, both theorists maintain a binary framework: films either fully absorb the viewer or directly address her. What remains under-theorised is the filmic gaze that oscillates: films that neither wholly suppress nor fully embrace intersubjective engagement. These ambiguous, hybrid forms of address are particularly evident in contemporary auteur films which neither dismantle classical spectatorship nor reinforce it uncritically.

In contrast to these hybrid forms, Hollywood films tend to construct a diegetic world that immerses viewers and does not reciprocate their gaze. This dynamic evokes the situation of the bearded man in Descartes's engraving from his Optics: locked in a dark room, the only view he can get of the external world is through the eye of a human being inserted in the wall. As Miran Bozovic explains, Descartes wanted to emphasise that we "can never step out but are forever entrapped in a room in which we deal with our retinal images only and never with things themselves" (162). This parable can also be seen as an illustration of the gaze of Hollywood films which tend to act upon the limitations instead of the possibilities of human visual perception: we are bound to look at the film, but it does not look at us in return, since it is constructed as the external world which one sees only from the dark room of his or her own perspective.[4] In other words, classical narrative cinema re-enacts the "impossibility of stepping out from the world of imitations, copies and simulacra" (Bozovic 162) so that we are not offered more than an absolute point of view, "a point of interiority which can never be externalised … a point at which we can be nothing but voyeurs" (164). To put it simply, mainstream cinema restricts the spectator's agency to the role of the voyeur who believes to be the subject of the gaze, hence her feeling of being sutured into the diegesis.

By contrast, some independent or auteur films suggest a split in this seamless viewing experience. They allow brief moments in which the suture loosens and the viewer senses, as it were, being seen by the film. As suggested earlier, these moments do not necessarily come through direct address but may emerge through characters' glances, ambiguous compositions, or shifts in perspective. Such films therefore also challenge the dominant opposition between passive absorption and critical distance by weaving both into their fabric. The two films I analyse in this paper – Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and Ferzan Özpetek's *Facing Windows* (2003) – offer contrasting yet complementary examples of how films can construct the spectator's agency. *Rear Window* serves as a paradigmatic case of classical Hollywood cinema that, despite its self-reflexive elements, ultimately restricts viewer agency by suturing the spectator into the protagonist's gaze. In contrast, *Facing Windows*, while also employing classical narrative strategies, creates fleeting but meaningful moments of intersubjective contact through its ambiguous mode of address, multifocal perspective, and the faciliation of intimate character-viewer interactions.

[4] This does not mean that watching Hollywood films is an unbearable experience: we readily suspend our disbelief in exchange for the pleasures of viewing (Rowe 88).

Classical Film-Audience Dynamics: A Film That Looks Through Spectators

As a representative example of Hollywood cinema, *Rear Window* demonstrates that the use of meta-cinematic devices does not necessarily entail intersubjective communication with viewers. In my reading, *Rear Window* – as a looking agent – does not bring about an active spectatorial agency, because the camera consistently identifies viewers with the protagonist's point of view, thereby absorbing them into fiction, and treating them as passive observers. The film's mode of address is solidified, and as such, it does not aim to initiate a type of communication resembling actual acts of looking. Instead, *Rear Window* makes references to the voyeuristic mode of watching films to reveal how restricted the dynamics between film and audience are. As such, this example shall serve perfectly to explain how spectators are sutured into the fictional world of cinema, and at the same time, to illustrate Descartes's dark room parable about the limitations of human visual experience.

If *Rear Window* is indeed a "metaphor for cinema" in which Jeffries stands for the audience (Mulvey 23), the whole filmic text can be read as a rendering of the spectator's inability to escape the viewpoint provided by the looking subject. The viewer's limited agency is underpinned by Jeffries's constrained physical position – being tied to a wheelchair – as a result of which his perspective is as severely restricted by his binoculars and his camera as that of the viewers by cinematic technicalities (movements, positions of the camera, and editing). Memorable references to this shared position are the scenes in which Jeffries zooms in on the opposite flats: the dark framing of the camera is a direct reference to the filming device that controls our gaze. As Silverman argues, *Rear Window* "foregrounds the voyeuristic dimensions of the cinematic experience, making constant references to the speaking subject" (206). Another example in this regard is the episode when Thorwald suddenly looks back at Jeffries and later comes to attack him in his apartment. The alarming sound of Thorwald's footsteps, his menacing stare, the ominous glare of his cigarette in the darkness, his silhouette coming closer and closer remind viewers that, similarly to Jeffries, we only wish but are unable to control the spectacle. In our relation to the cinematic image, we are as immobile and helpless as Jeffries.

In Mladen Dolar's interpretation, "Rear Window is the Hitchcockian presentation of the Panopticon, his illustrative application of Bentham and Foucault" (144), since the flats opposite Jeffries's rear window evoke the cells under the pervasive scrutiny of the Supervisor's gaze. Yet, while in Bentham's and Foucault's Panopticon, it is the prisoners who live in constant fear of the gaze they cannot see, in Rear Window, it is Jeffries who lives in permanent fear in his watchtower, troubled by the fact that he cannot make his gaze ubiquitous (and as an evidence of his powerlessness, he is asleep at the time of the murder). As Dolar concludes, "the inhabitants are not the prisoners of the gaze of the Other, with its invisible omnipresence; it is rather the Supervisor who is the prisoner, the prisoner of his own gaze – a gaze that does not see" (144). By connecting the experience of Jeffries with that of the viewers, the meta-cinematic devices in Rear Window thus expose

the conventional framework of watching films, wherein spectators wish to pervade the cinematic image with their gaze yet can only behold it from the position of peepers, as if through binoculars and a rear window.

By the same token, Hitchcock's film can be interpreted as a re-enactment of the limitations of human visual perception as such, where the window represents eyes. In terms of this metaphor, the window shades rolling up in the first scene are the eyelids opening to the external world. As Bozovic claims, "[t]hat the window we are looking through functions virtually as an eye is evident from the fact that the room itself functions as a camera obscura – what unfolds in the room on this side of the window is precisely the inverted image of what unfolds beyond the window of the flat on the opposite side of the courtyard – the Thorwalds' flat" (162). Jeff on this side is immobilised in a manner similar to Thorwald's wife on the opposite side, and the actions of these two characters are subordinated to those of their mobile partners, Lisa and Lars, respectively. This insight informs Bozovic's comparison of Jeff's room with the dark room in Descartes's parable: both spaces represent "the world of imitations, copies, and simulacra" in which we are all entrapped (163). In agreement with former criticism, I therefore believe that Rear Window, with its allusions to the limitations of the spectator's agency and of human visual perception, looks through rather than at viewers, or in other words, it aims not to modify suture, but, as Zizek describes Hitchcock's works, "to pursue the transferential fiction to the end" (10).

The Telltale Eyes of Facing Windows: A Film that Looks Back

Ferzan Ozpetek's *Facing Windows*, an example of contemporary auteur cinema, employs a more ambiguous visual strategy. In my reading, it destabilises the conventional dynamics between spectacle and spectator, because, while following the conventions of narrative cinema, it introduces moments that question the stability of its mode of address. This is achieved by three distinct but interrelated means: 1) by refusing the objectifying influence of voyeurism within the diegesis; 2) by providing a multiplicity of perspectives to be identified with; 3) and by creating thorough ambiguity concerning the distinction between fiction and reality, which culminates in a crucial hallucinatory scene. It must be noted, however, that not even in this emotionally elevated, illusory moment does the main character look directly outwards, and, in this sense, *Facing Windows* too is an example of classical narrative cinema. Yet, I argue that the filmic gaze addresses the audience mainly through the main character Giovanna's telltale eyes, as she is able to establish a confidential relationship with the viewers through the camera.

Indeed, the story is told through and by Giovanna's eyes, from which it follows that Facing Windows displays specific features of what Gunning identifies as the "cinema of attractions". The main character's positioning (more precisely, doubling) and the undefinable direction of her gaze make the spectator self-conscious, the movie ambiguously metafictional, and the gaze of the whole filmic text oscillatory, meaning that it occasion-

ally and implicitly blurs the boundary between the act of watching and actual looking. By inciting spectators to detach themselves from the point of view of the voyeur, that is, the perspective they had originally adopted, *Facing Windows* requires self-reflection from the viewers, offering a more active spectatorial agency than classical narrative cinema. This also implies that identification here is rather conceived "as a series of shifting positions [which] assumes that cinematic identification is as fragile and unstable as identity itself" (Mayne 27). In short, the movie's oscillating gaze results in an inconsistent spectatorial agency.

In *Facing Windows*, the viewers see mainly through the eyes of Giovanna, a young mother of two children, a discontented wife. Her disgruntlement is related to her unfulfilled desire to become a pastry chef; to support her family, she works as an accountant in a poultry factory. Her yearning is, as it were, sublimated into the habit of peeping: she secretly gazes at the window of the opposite apartment and its handsome resident, Lorenzo. The two eventually meet, and they together end up looking after an old man who is walking the streets of Rome unconsciously, suffering from partial memory loss. While helping Davide unfold his story and regain his identity, Lorenzo and Giovanna's romantic interest in each other also develops toward its climax.

Although it is about desire, *Facing Windows* refuses the objectifying, passivising influence of voyeurism. Early in the film, Giovanna's daughter says: "I told you I don't feel like watching TV," and she would prefer to help the adults arrange groceries. At this point, it seems that Martina inherited the wilfulness of her mother, who is similarly obsessed with order, annoyed by any disruption or intrusion into her vision.[5] Giovanna's stubborn insistence that only her view is correct could also explain why she starts prying on Lorenzo's life, but her looks are infused with shame: her eyes are cast down after catching something private and she always closes the window after peeping. Her behaviour thus betrays that she does not derive pleasure from voyeurism, and that, by watching somebody else's life, she only wants to elude the disappointments and frustrations of her own. This assumption is also supported by the fact that once she faces her disappointed self, she renounces peeping. In this sense, Martina foreshadows her mother's superiority which results from her self-reflexivity rather than from seeing more accurately than others, and in a similar manner, Giovanna focalises the spectator's self-reflexive agency when facing herself in the window in the hallucinatory scene.

As implied above, the role of gender is crucial in *Facing Windows*, as the film privileges a distinctly female gaze that challenges the traditionally masculine structuring of looking in cinema. Unlike the dominant cinematic paradigm theorised by Mulvey, in which the gaze is aligned with male desire and control, Facing Windows centres both its narrative and its self-reflexive visual strategy on Giovanna's perspective: a woman who does not objectify what she sees but contemplates, reflects, and ultimately transforms through acts

[5] In a scene when Giovanna wants to report an illegal worker at the factory, her friend mockingly calls her an SS officer just to take the edge out of her behaviour.

of looking. In other words, her gaze is not directed outward to possess or dominate, but inward to confront her own dissatisfaction and repressed desires. By focusing on her sensory and emotional perception rather than on scopophilic pleasure, the film articulates a gaze that is emphatetic, self-scrutinising as well as relational – qualities often associated with feminist reconceptualisations of spectatorship. This alternative form of vision allows *Facing Windows* to explore the potential of the female gaze not only to resist objectification but also to foster introspection and intersubjective connection, positioning Giovanna – and through her, the viewer – as a subject who sees, feels, and transforms.

At the same time, *Facing Windows* presents a polyphonic visual field that resists confinement to a single point of view: we are presented with a multiplicity of perspectives not all of which are infused with the delusions of voyeuristic desire. The first scene that disperses the main character's dominant viewpoint is the one in which we learn that Giovanna and Lorenzo engage in mutual voyeurism: Giovanna's friend Eminé reveals to her that "He spied on you just like you spied on him." In this light, Lorenzo's perspective is added to that of Giovanna, even if only as its duplication. When, however, Davide appears, his own oblique and confused perspective is also added to the others'. Therefore, gaze here is not a privilege and, at the same time, limitation, of a male hero, let alone one single character, but belongs to multiple characters and their perspectives. There are a few scenes that I shall further highlight in this regard.

In what I term the "scene of the traveling gaze," Lorenzo's perspective gains narrative significance as his attention focuses on the lost Davide sitting on a fountain behind Giovanna. This implies that he is not only interested in the love affair but also dedicated to the common cause of helping the Holocaust survivor find his bearings in the present. At the same time, he passes the gaze on to Giovanna, so it can be suggested that the viewer identifies with the two characters' shared perspective, which, in addition, points beyond their desire towards each other, creating a supplement embodied in the concern for Davide.

The film also stages several instances of a phenomenon which I refer to as "the spinning gaze." In these scenes, all main points of view are included and equalised in a full circle tracking shot (with montage), with the camera revolving around the characters and the perspective changing according to who holds the gaze. A crucial scene in this regard is when Giovanna, Lorenzo and Davide are waiting for their drinks in a street bar, taking a break after the former two have been following the old man's ramblings through Rome. Since a fourth male character appears on the scene, who we assume to be Davide's long-gone lover, it is here that we get the first hints of his homosexuality and of his traumatic past inflecting and confusing his present vision. These are important details from two aspects. Firstly, as Davide has introduced himself from the beginning as Simone – the name of the object of his desire –, his subplot mirrors the relationship of Giovanna and Lorenzo where the roles of the loved one and that of the lover are exchanged as well. Secondly, the presence of the past is also important here, as, by intruding into the present, it blurs temporality. Since the character sees his dead loved ones as clearly as the living

around him, scenes such as this imply that according to the film's conception of memory, one never entirely loses others but retains little smithereens of them in oneself. Aided by sensory memory, the fragments of lost people make one see, hear and smell them as if they were still here. The concept of memory as a form of intersubjectivity can also be aligned with the gaze of the film per se, insofar as the latter also alludes to viewers as participants in a form of intersubjective communication.[6]

The role of memory is also crucial in the third scene which demonstrates the multiplicity of perspectives. This is the "scene of the dancing gaze," a music-triggered memory sequence showing Davide looking back at his past lover while dancing with Giovanna in the present. Apart from projecting on each other past and present, the scene is also significant because the act of dancing with a pretty woman, with obvious erotic overtones, gains a new, homoerotic perspective. In this way, it is not only the desirer who changes position in *Facing Windows*: the object of the desire is also rendered multifarious. Scenes like those of "the traveling gaze," "the spinning gaze," and "the dancing gaze," therefore tend to blur the dichotomy between the object and the holder of the gaze in more than one respect.

In *Facing Windows*, all perspectives have their own focus. What is more, these foci are also looking agents, which changes the traditional one-way relation between the holder and the object of the gaze. Metaphorically, Giovanna's gaze as a ray intersects with that of Lorenzo and, in their relationship, Davide serves as an intersection that allows the other two to connect with each other. In addition, the old man also connects past and present perspectives by unwittingly projecting past images on the present scenario. This multiplicity and intersection of different points of view enables Giovanna to reflect on her own position, outside the circuit of the narcissistic gaze, while the spectator is also caught in a moment of reflection.

In the scene when Giovanna and Lorenzo are finally together in the latter's apartment, Giovanna goes to his window to spy on her own life – her husband, her children, her friend, and eventually the reflection of her own discontented self, – and decides to leave Lorenzo for her family and to give herself the opportunity to change her carrier and start baking professionally. This cinematic moment, which "diverges from the traditional cinematic perspective that champions the male gaze, and . . . assumes male spectatorship" (Occhipinti 532), also challenges cinema's role of providing pleasure for the viewer, because it reveals that the point of view we have been identifying with was affected by Giovanna's delusions. As a symbolic gesture, she takes off Lorenzo's glasses and finally sees her lifeworld as Lorenzo's fantasy in which her own self is absent and her family members are reduced to silhouettes. While voyeuristic vision often results in entrapment in classical narratives, Giovanna's development implies a process of gaining clarity, of coming to terms with her own repressed desires. This is why it is so important that her

[6] In fact, one can imagine Giovanna ambiguously addressing the audience in the same way as Davide addresses his old love, Simone.

two selves are facing each other. The contact between her still deluded and later, more experienced self prevents her from satiating her voyeuristic drives, helps reveal her true dream that was formerly substituted with an erotic fantasy and, in a broader sense, it also reinstates the potential of the gaze to create empathy, understanding and intersubjectivity. Thirdly, and most importantly, even though Giovanna does not address us directly, she is positioned in a way that directs the filmic gaze at us, thus turning the whole fabric of the narrative into telltale eyes.

Although, as mentioned above, there is no instance of direct address in ninety-nine percent of the film, Giovanna as half-actress and half-character, a half-fictitious and half-real-life narrator plays a crucial role in conveying this story.[7] As such, she could occupy a "superior epistemic position within the fictional world," which is usually allotted to characters who perform direct address in movies, and who consequently seem "to know more – or are in a position of greater knowledge within the fiction – than other characters" (Brown 14). However, since she does not acknowledge the spectator's presence but only seems to be more sensitive to it, her position cannot arise from a heightened sense of knowledge but rather from heightened sensibility – as in sensory perception –, which manifests itself in her genuine flair for non-verbal communication – her voice, gaze, gestures, facial expressions and body language – to impress others and convey meaning. Since these abilities make the character Giovanna occupy a position which one might call superior sensorial, her eyes can be perceived as projecting the filmic gaze per se.

Giovanna's superior sensorial position is epitomised by the closing scene in which we see her walking in a park and hear her voice-over: it is almost clear that she is reading out or reciting a letter written to Davide, explaining how difficult it is to forget him and all the things he had taught her. She says that when she is working in the pastry shop, she still feels the elderly man's guiding presence by her side, which recalls the definition of memory as intersubjectivity, and at the same time alludes to the assumption that the relationship between film and audience can also be regarded as intersubjective. As if to enact this concept, the closing shot features an extreme close-up on Giovanna looking directly into the camera; her eyes are smiling as if knowing something: telltale eyes.

In this light, one could claim that the story is told through Giovanna's eyes. Yet, it remains difficult to decide whom Giovanna's voice and gaze are addressed to: Davide or the viewers outside the diegetic world.[8] It is, however, exactly this ambiguity of address, entailing

[7] An interesting fact that underpins the idea of the film initiating a form of intersubjective communication with viewers is that the characters of Giovanna and her husband Filippo are played by actors with the same names. This detail, along with the actress Giovanna's natural demeanour in relation to the camera, creates a sense of watching real people, real lives, or, of hearing a first-hand account of a personal story.

[8] It seems that addressivity is in crisis from the very beginning; the miscommunications within the family, Giovanna talking to thin air about love, the undelivered letter written by Davide to Simone, let alone Giovanna's voyeuristic fantasies about Lorenzo, all demonstrate that it is impossible to express desire without misdirecting it.

both the possibility and impossibility of understanding others completely, that makes human communication intersubjective and, consequently, intersubjective communication human. As I argued, it is due to Giovanna's ambiguous cross-diegetic gestures that the filmic gaze of *Facing Windows* oscillates and that at moments such as during Giovanna's hallucination we have a sense as if the film itself was looking at us.

Conclusion

By bringing *Rear Window* and *Facing Windows* into dialogue, this paper has traced a trajectory from classical narrative cinema's suture-bound spectator to a more ambiguous, self-reflexive spectatorial agency made possible in contemporary auteur film. Hitchcock's *Rear Window* has served to exemplify a cinematic logic that, in my interpretation, looks through the spectator, suturing them into the protagonist's restricted point of view and exposing their lack of visual control through meta-cinematic devices. In contrast, Facing Windows has served to introduce a more permeable form of cinematic address. While operating within the framework of classical narrative, Özpetek's film complicates the spectatorial position by creating moments of intersubjective contact, shifting focalisation, and self-reflection. Through Giovanna's sensorial and emotional perception – epitomised by her "telltale eyes" – the film projects a gaze that does not dominate but invites reflection, empathy, and shared vulnerability.

This filmic gaze, as I have argued, invites neither full absorption in fiction nor complete disengagement. Instead, it oscillates between identification and distance, absorption and reflexivity, thereby granting the viewer a fragile yet meaningful form of agency. In Facing Windows, the gaze becomes a mode of seeing that allows for self-discovery and tentative communication across the boundary of fiction. In this sense, the film not only constructs a polyphonic and gender-sensitive visual field but also gestures toward the possibility that cinema itself may look back – not to implicate or accuse, but to invite the viewer into a fleeting moment of recognition. Through its intersubjective mode of address, Facing Windows reclaims the gaze not as a mechanism of control, but as a site of mutual acknowledgment – offering the viewer, however briefly, the feeling of being seen.

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Reichmann Angelika

Sins, Debts, and Food in *Fargo* Season 5

> "The debt must be paid. A man's flesh was taken. Now a pound is required in return."
>
> (Ole Munch, hitman in *Fargo* Season 5)

> "It feels like that. You know, what they do to us. Make us swallow – like it's our fault. Bet you wanna know the cure? You gotta eat something made with love and joy. And be forgiven!"
>
> (Dot Lyon, the hitman's target)

Mentioned in the context of crime fiction, food most probably evokes associations with the crime itself in the first place: poisoned food most obviously offers itself as a murder tool. Yet, as the lines quoted above from the resolution of recently aired *Fargo* Season 5 (1923–24) clearly suggest, the situation is somewhat more complicated than that. A high-end television drama adaptation of the Coen brothers' iconic film from 1996, the series has a history of working with the often-noticed food motif contributing to *Fargo*'s neo-noir critique of patriarchal American consumer society. Heavy with Shakespearean allusion, the hitman Ole Munch's above-quoted words are only the culmination of an underlying discourse connecting debt with violence, which features prominently throughout the season. Dot Lyon's retort, in turn, is the essence of a counter-discourse, which replaces the conventional final shootout scene in crime films to offer food, nurture, solidarity and inclusion instead. Intrigued by the centrality and the implied complexity of the food motif here, the present study aims to discuss food and eating in Fargo Season 5 against the intertextual backdrop of *film noir*, the Coens' neo-noir and the reiteration of the food motif in *Fargo* Season 3. I will argue that, inseparable from the two other central motifs of the series, sin and debt, food and eating are used to contribute to a poignant critique of commodity culture, the way patriarchal consumer society promotes the commodification and concomitant violation of human beings – in their physical, moral and emotional integrity. Re-associated with the maternal and the logic of nurturing, unconditional love, the postfeminist re-appropriation of the food motif in season 5 is still not free from its own ironies, in close parallel to the polysemy of food (cf. Gunkel 246–47) in the Coens' *Fargo*. Premised on the truism that "[i]f there is one sure thing about food, it is that it is never just food" (Eagleton 204; cf. Goldstein 43), the present case study of *Fargo* Season 5 aims to demonstrate how food is able to convey intricate messages concerning gender, social and political critique – even political activism – and artistic self-reflexivity in the context of crime drama.

Establishing the Pattern: Noir and Abject Consumption

Recent research on food in crime fiction urges readers to look way beyond the self-evident association of food with the murder weapon. As Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezotti highlight in their *Blood on the Table*, prior to the publication of their own volume in 2018, research on food in crime fiction was relatively scarce.[1] But even what was available, regarded food not only as an excellent murder weapon, but also as a motif prominently contributing to the investigator's characterisation, as well as a device adding to couleur locale and "credibility" (4). With what signifies a major turn in the discussion of food in crime fiction, Anderson et al. call attention to the fact that diverse theoretical contexts – notably cultural semiotics, gender studies and the Kristevan theory of the abject (5–6) – offer a much more nuanced view of the roles food plays in the crime genre. Also drawing on the insights of Elspeth Probyn and Peter Messent, they see food as central to representing "family […] and gender," as well as to "reflect[ing] political and social issues at a personal level," and to "problematis[ing] national and supranational identities" (7). This, in turn, recommends an interdisciplinary approach to food in crime fiction and drama, very much in accordance with the fundamental approach of literary food studies. The field is, to quote Gitanjali Shahani, "omnivorous" in its use of theoretical frameworks and methods to study the "body and its political, racial, and gendered economies," employing "feminist, queer, and gender studies as well as critical race studies" (17; cf. Tigner and Carruth 5).[2] Taking its clues from the interdisciplinary field of literary food studies and the existing body of research on the Coens' Fargo, the present analysis aims to employ a broadly feminist approach, informed by a Kristevan theoretical framework, on the one hand. On the other hand, the analysis inevitably incorporates film studies discussions of the *film noir* and neo-noir tradition, with a special focus on the role of food.

If there is one neo-noir film[3] in which the centrality of eating as a leitmotif cannot be overlooked, it is the Coen brothers' *Fargo*. Indeed, reviewers have made much of Marge Gunderson and her husband's constant eating (Grace 42) and the one consistent study of the motif to date, Pamela Grace's feminist reading (41–50), clearly bears in mind the Coens' conscious dialogue with the *film noir* tradition. This dialogue, a definitive feature of neo-noir,[4] gestures towards the treatment of food in *film noir*, which offers a solid

[1] Indeed, literary food studies as such is a fairly recent development. It was only in 2018 that two comprehensive literary studies volumes came out, *Food and Literature* in the *Cambridge Critical Concepts* series, and *Literature and Food Studies* by Routledge.

[2] This clearly resonates with the interdisciplinary popular culture studies approach to food (Gunkel 245), which slightly predates that of literary food studies.

[3] Though for various reasons and to varying extents, the Coen brothers' *Fargo* is consistently categorised as neo-noir (comedy), see Grace 33; cf. Sterritt 16; Sharrett 70.

[4] "The term neo-noir describes any film coming after the classic *noir* period that contains *noir* themes and the *noir* sensibility. […] These later films are likely not shot in black and white and likely do not contain the play of light and shadow that their classic forerunners possessed. They do, however, contain the same alienation, pessimism, moral ambivalence, and disorientation"

pattern, recognised by Jay Telotte as early as the 1980s. As he explains, partly inspired by the naturalism of Italian neorealism, post-war *film noir* turned food into a focal component of its critique on American consumer society (399). As if to corroborate Shahani's insight that although "culinary moments" might appear to be "digressions," they are never really "incidental" (4), Telotte's survey blatantly demonstrates how eating emerged in *film noir* as a signifier of self-destructive desire, perpetuated by consumer society (407–9) and associated either with perpetrators (404) or cops lacking moral integrity (407). For instance, in Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958), the corrupt Hank Quinlan's "bloated, unwieldy body" (407) is clearly presented as abject,[5] though Telotte's study was published before the term became common currency in Anglophone criticism. The moral responsibility of investigation, in turn, is associated with shunning food – prioritising the task at hand over self-sustenance (406). Also, as a constant of its critique of disintegrating family structures in modern American society, *film noir* turns the roadside diner into the primary scene of eating, as opposed to eating in a family environment and consuming home-made food (399).

Grace's analysis of *Fargo*, unfortunately, does not take into consideration the established patterns of *film noir* for her interpretation of the food motif. She relies heavily on a positive understanding of the Gundersons' eating habits and rituals in a feminist context: for her, they exclusively evoke maternal nurturing, with Norm playing the role of caregiver in the film's gender-bending scenario (41–44). This reading ties in with Grace's single-minded effort to interpret Margie as the "moral centre" of the film (33), who represents the "Law of the Mother" (50). Grace's reading apparently has a blind spot for the repulsiveness of the couple's eating scenes and, by implication, of Marge's pregnancy/motherhood. Conversely, Christopher Sharrett aptly notices both in discussing the couple's lunch scene in Marge's office: while Marge is commenting on the food Norm has brought her, "Oh yum, looks pretty good," instead of the lunch the camera cuts to the wriggling, disgusting bag of nightcrawlers she herself offers to Norm (73; cf. Grace 43). The abject worms are apparently commented upon as if they were appetising food – hamburgers, i.e. fast food,

(Conrad 2). As Mark Conrad's definition implies, neo-noir films consciously employ *noir* features and reinterpret the *noir* legacy (Conrad 2; see also Naremore 24–5, Silver and Ward 398).

[5] Since Julia Kristeva's own definition of the term in *Powers of Horror* (1–31) is notoriously unquotable, the following working definition is applied for the purposes of the present discussion: "Every social order defines itself as opposed to the non-signified, the non-structured […] the marginalised segments and elements are under the laws of prohibition and taboo: the filthy, the disgusting, the dirty, the perverse, the heterogeneous. The term *abject* includes all these elements that are not fixed symbolically, which are hardly encodable and are menacing for culture. The abject is the most archaic experience of the subject, which is neither an object nor the subject, but already articulates separation by marking the future space of the subject in relation to the disgusting, to the heterogeneous, and to the terrifying. […] it threatens symbolic fixation and the formation of identity. The aspect of the abject most imminently and constantly threatening the subject is the very existence and feeling of the body: it is this uncontrollable structure full of streams and flows that language, the word, and discourse must totally cover so that the subject can feel her/himself a homogeneous monad." (Kiss 19–20; translation by Nóra Séllei)

a "metonym for Americanness" (Gunkel 249) –, which creates an irony that is hard to ignore: the Coens' maternal detective engages in an excess of consumption traditionally associated with corruption, self-destruction and, ultimately, dissolution[6] in the *film noir* tradition. Regardless of the couple's cosy bonding, this sense of dissolution also pertains to their family and homestead: except for the breakfast, which Norm prepares for her on the first day of the investigation, Margie consumes in immense quantities products of the American service industry outside their home. The Gundersons seem to be just as obsessed with consumption as the perpetrators, with the difference that they restrict their desires to a socially acceptable form of fulfilment, eating, which – because of the sheer quantities of food consumed – suggests abject gorging and comfort eating rather than self-sustenance: a compensation for their imprisonment in their machine-like small-town existence.[7]

The neo-noir ambiguity[8] of the food motif, its connection with the abject and with a critique of global capital, is cast into relief by *Fargo* Season 3 (2017) through the figure of the villain, V. M. Varga. The faint implication of eating disorder behind the Gundersons' (over)eating is restaged as explicit bulimia in his case,[9] and thus distinctly abject overeating is used in true a *film noir* vein in the perpetrator's characterisation. Varga's involvement in global tax fraud, together with the season's central intrigue of filial conflict over the father's estate,[10] which leads to fratricide, suggests a sustained focus on consumer culture and its critique. Regardless of the money Varga owns, just like Marge, he is humble and moderate in his habits of consumption, with the single exception of food. The abject dissolution of Varga's body is represented in gruesome detail – close-ups on his rotten teeth and him picking his bleeding gums are hard to stomach or forget – and

[6] Marge's comically grotesque body, as Mikita Brottman's Bakhtinian reading of *Fargo* highlights, is only one of the many "distortions of communicative relations marked by bodies that bespeak the trauma, violence, and estrangement of the human condition," and who after a while appear to be "less funny than sad, incomprehensible and strange" (89).

[7] A certain machine-like quality is also implied in Hilary Radner's seminal reading of *Fargo*, who suggests that Marge – a crossover between the *femme fatale* stereotype of the *noir* tradition and a mother figure – is mad in her merciless pursuit of the perpetrators, who embody another type of insanity, that of the violence inherent in men's world (254–62).

[8] The ambiguity of characters and plot, as well as moral ambiguity, is a classic feature of *film noir* (Naremore 19), which is present in neo-noir with equal consistency (Conrad 2).

[9] Relying on Susan Bordo's insights, who asserts that consumer culture turns the bulimic personality into the norm (qtd. in Séllei 21), Nóra Séllei provides an exemplary interpretation of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) to demonstrate how a critique of consumer culture can be realised through replicating bulimic patterns in structuring a literary text (15).

[10] With a respectful nod to the Coens' film, the Stussy brothers fight over a vintage car versus a collection of high-value stamps. See Scott Lee's discussion of the Coens' film, which is focused on the interpretation of the car, this other embodiment of the American way of life (mobility). Lee argues that the conflict over the car is inseparable from the fight over being the symbolic Father figure in the Coens' world (69). The stamp collection references, with an intriguing twist – three-cent stamps versus a collection worth a fortune – the subplot of Norm's stamp design in the Coens' *Fargo*.

are clear indicators of his long-term and severe condition. As an intertextual interpretation of the Coens' *Fargo*, the season underscores the significance of (abject) food and eating in a sustained dialogue about consumerism, corruption and self-destruction with *film noir* in its own visual terms.

Reversals and Ambiguities: Food in *Fargo* Season 5

Regardless of its fundamentally comic tone, *Fargo* Season 5 has an explicit feminist political agenda: it is a blatant protest against hegemonic masculinity and concomitant domestic violence. It creates a platform for advocating female agency and resistance by refocusing the narrative on the Coen brothers' victimised housewife character, Jean Lundegaard, whom it re-presents as Dot Lyon, a woman actively resisting victimisation. The serial narrative links itself intertextually to the Coens' film by replaying its kidnapping scene, which triggers a sequence of events that ultimately reveals Dot Lyon's hidden past and identity. That is, originally called Nadine Bump and married to Sherriff Roy Tillman, she was the victim of brutal physical abuse at his hands and, fearing for her life, was forced to run and hide. She has, as she puts it, "climbed through six kinds of hell" to establish her new identity as an angelic housewife and loving mother and is ready to kill to keep her possessions, her new life, "what is mine" (S05E02 00:23:46–24:10). When her carefully protected cover is accidentally blown and her first husband tracks her down, the chase begins with the above-mentioned kidnapping. A hyper-masculine patriarch commanding a private army and emanating violent WASP ideology, Roy Tillman does everything in his power to make Dot atone for leaving him. What ensues is, in my reading, a blatantly unequal fight between allegorical Father and Mother, commodification and its rejection, exclusion (abjection) and inclusion (commensality) – a bundle of conflicts spelt out in a discourse connecting sin, debt and food inextricably. The intricate connection of these motifs is highlighted by the incongruously fantastic figure of the Welsh sin-eater Ole Munch – one of the hitmen hired to kidnap Dot. The resolution of the narrative explicitly stages the victory of the maternal, even to the extent of re-forming the patriarch through divorcing food and eating from the baggage of abjection carried with the *film noir* legacy, and re-establishing the familial and even religious commensality of eating. Nonetheless, the season's critique of commodity culture remains poignant and – true to the Coens' all-encompassing irony and resistance to "binary logic" (Lee 75) – undercuts even its own all too utopian ending.

The Law of the Father, allegorised in Roy Tillman, is that of objectification and commodification, which, in turn, justifies all forms of violence. Casting Tillman as a God-like embodiment of patriarchy at its worst harks back to the Coens' interrogation of patriarchy through presenting an Oedipal struggle for becoming the figure of authority, convincingly extrapolated in Scott Lee's analysis (passim). Tillman's allegorical status is explicitly established in his "I am the law" quasi-soliloquy, which he delivers to the audience of two flabbergasted FBI agents, staring at his royal highness enthroned in an outdoor wooden hot tub on a pedestal (S05E02 00:17:00–20:00). The Law of the Father –

or at least the law of this father – entails the commodification of emotions and, by implication, the objectification and commodification of human, especially female bodies.[11] That is, Tillman is able to conceptualise his motivation behind chasing down his former wife after more than a decade, when both of them already have a new partner and children, exclusively in financial terms, as if broken promises and (hurt) feelings were goods with a price tag attached to them. Concomitantly, sin equals not paying the price – running up debts with interest: "[Nadine] made vows to me. A pledge […] an oath. Consider it a debt, unpaid, leaving me in limbo: husband yes or husband no? You see, she hid from me nine-ten years – interest accrued, until the debt could no longer be paid with money" (S05E02 00:06:03–27). What the debt can be paid with is the mortification of body and soul to the utter limit – death. The violence carried out under this pretext is repeatedly presented as God's law, most horrifically when Roy is trying to beat up Dot with a chain and chants biblical verses in the meanwhile, to teach her a lesson, as he claims (S05E08 00:34:38–35:02). Citing the Bible as a legitimising discourse does not change the fact of the underlying business mentality and commodification: what it highlights is the deeply entrenched nature of women's objectification in patriarchy – the inherent père-version (cf. Kristeva 2) of its paradigm.

If (female) bodies are the hard cash to pay off debt with in Tillman's commodified patriarchal world, that is also connoted by a polysemous use of the food motif, tying in with the above discourse of sin as debt, but also complicating it by featuring woman as both a consumer and an object of (cannibalistic) consumption. That is, Dot's own narrative of her first marriage – her puppet-show (S05E07 00:35:31–40:07) as a counter-story to Tillman's monetary concerns – exemplifies how women are often compelled to assess their identity in patriarchal terms and view themselves as transgressive consumers who deserve (corporeal) punishment. Her story of how she 'ran up this debt' with Tillman is built on allusions to two mythical narratives prominently featuring food – the Fall and the fairy-tale "Little Red Riding Hood" (S05E07 00:35:31) – to evoke two stereotypical images of women as objects of consumption (prostitutes) and consumers (thieves, even kleptomaniacs) in commodity culture (cf. Roberts 817–27). Dot is first shown contemplating an apple in her hand in an Edenic forest setting. Her 'original sin' appears to be twofold: she runs away and shoplifts. As for the first, the moment she reaches puberty, she is threatened by being consumed: drawn by the smell of blood, wolves/boys hunt her for their edible/sexual prey, in a visual evocation of "Little Red Riding Hood." Whether she becomes a consumer, the classic sexually active female victim of crime fiction, remains unclear: she is shown fumbling around with the apple, but not having a

[11] For a brief but useful overview of the critical history of commodification – inevitably starting with its Marxian definition –, see Jackson 96–7. The present study relies on traditional accounts of commodification, defining it as "the extension of the commodity form to goods and services that were not previously commodified" (Jackson 96), which "reduc[es] human relations to an economic logic where everything has its price" (97). It is a matter of critical consensus that commodification "objectif[ies] social relationships" (105), resulting in the fact that women, in particular, are "seen as objects of consumption" (Rita Felski qtd. in Roberts 818).

bite. Her running away might imply her trying to avoid the inevitable: consuming and being consumed, reaching sexual maturity and becoming what she is at the time of telling her story – a wife and a mother. Yet, this is exactly what happens to her, with a vengeance. When Dot attempts to steal food (chocolate chips, a luxury item not essential to sustenance) and is caught, Roy's first wife, Linda saves the girl from being taken into custody. Consecutively, the first Mrs. Tillman adopts the homeless girl into her family, complete with a son, twelve-year-old Gator, from then on Dot's foster-brother. Dot's sustenance costs too dear, though: as she puts it later, Linda appears to "feed" her to yet another wolf, her own husband, so that she, Linda, could escape from her abusive marriage (S05E07 00:17:17–00:17:20). A girl-woman of fifteen, Dot ends up in a marriage that is hardly better than legalised prostitution: in exchange for her sustenance, she has to take Linda's place and become Roy's "puppet" (S05E07: 00:40:00), enduring both his sexual advances and regular beatings. Dot's self-narrative is deeply embedded in patriarchal discourses of femininity, representing the post-puberty female body as abject and sinful. She cannot conceive of becoming an adult in terms other than those of entering the commodity market, as both transgressive consumer and objectified 'food' for sexual predators, becoming someone who has to pay with her own body for her consumption – transgressive or otherwise. The Law of the Father ideologises this market economy in terms of order and lawful punishment: she is forced to believe – as she later says, forced to "swallow" (S05E10 00:42:54) – that adult femininity equals being a victim and she even owes it to be a victim for being tempted to sin/consume. That is literally the traditional message of a Gothic family romance (Kilgour 37–8) – a generic convention Dot's puppet show clearly evokes in a *noir* visual language, with transgressive eating/consumption as a central component.

Apparently, Dot is unable to conceptualise her traumatic experience of becoming a woman in any other terms but those of the founding narrative in Judeo-Christian culture and patriarchy: upon reaching puberty, she becomes abject, with the threat of disposal looming large above her ever after. That is, Tillman apparently uses objectified human beings just as predators consume their prey for sustenance and ultimately he disposes of them like abject human waste. He actually killed Linda (S05E08 00:36:20) and disposed of her body – the now useless earlier object of his desire – buy dumping it in the "grave" (S05E09 00:32:50) on his ranch. This is a huge pit with a wooden cover, with nondescript stinky thick liquid covering its bottom, and with content that is disinfected with lime when a new body – like the corpse of Attorney Danish Graves in episode eight – is added to it. At one remove from a cesspool – maybe it is a cesspool – this abject location connotes getting rid of (female) bodies as abject, as decomposing biological waste, without the saving grace of a (sacred) burial. As Tillman makes it clear for Dot, this is also the fate awaiting her (S05E08: 00:36:10) – indeed, she comes closest to being killed when she hides from Tillman in the "grave" and is found there by one of his accomplices.

If Dot's narrative provides a critique of patriarchy and commodification through a mythic narrative of transgressive consumption (abject eating, eating and becoming

abject) consistent with the *noir* tradition, Ole Munch's story does the same, with an even more conspicuous insistence on the intertwined motifs of food, sin and debt. As is spelt out in a flashback to Wales circa five hundred years ago, this fantastic character – in a clear parallel to Dot's narrative – became an archetypal scapegoat, an abject figure (see Kristeva 84–86; Hartland 157) excluded from human community by transgressive eating, i.e. taking a dead man's sins in the form of food, for money. Sin-eating has been associated in folklore with cannibalistic rituals (Hartland 155), a connection brought into the fore by the Shakespearean allusion in episode ten (S05E10: 00:30:53–31:06; cf. Goldstein 47) quoted above, which underpins the parallels between Dot's and Munch's respective narratives even further. Munch's exclusion is both spatial – he has become a wanderer, finding home only for a while with a Native American tribe, themselves associated with a migratory lifestyle – and physiological: slightly reminiscent of Frankenstein's creature in his grotesque looks, he has been unable to sleep and eat since his transgression. Sub- or superhuman, he also appears asexual, and with a fashionable though historically inauthentic turn, wears a kilt, like a cross-dresser. Potentially reflecting an internal split between the human and non-human, he speaks of himself in the third person, as "a man." In general, he uses an outlandish version of the English language, with which he keeps struggling – he does not fully appear to belong to the realm of the Symbolic. Yet he, too, is trapped in the logic of symbolic exchange marked out by debt–sin versus payment–revenge. To point out the obvious, his fatal decision to consume another man's sins, at the dawn of the modern era, is tied to monetary concerns: he decides to take the unwholesome food – to become a debtor and a sinner – out of poverty and hunger. He sells his soul (see Hartland 147), without which his body, a male counterpart to Dot's, becomes abject.

Ole Munch is not only Dot's mythical male counterpart, but also a double to Roy Tillman, an allegorical embodiment of the Law of the Father. Therefore, the sin-eater's narrative stages a myth of origin for violent oppression in patriarchy – and offers a possibility for reversing that scenario, to be addressed later. Munch is a reincarnation of the Coens' taciturn thug, Grimsrud, who is – in Lee's interpretation – "the letter of the law" (68), "the arch-Father who like God is identical to his own origins" (69). Indeed, Munch has a code of his own – or rather, similarly to Tillman, he is a law to himself – a mixture of the Old Testament *lex talionis* and medieval chivalry. Central to this code of honour are respect for the mother, a fair fight with the enemy, equal retaliation and the indelibility of debts. The first is exemplified when he punishes the disrespectful and unloving son of the old junky woman whom he chooses to be his landlady–foster mother by simply moving into her house: he kills the son with an axe (S05E07 00:02:40–04:47). Gator Tillman, who incidentally kills said old boozer (S05E07 00:29:08), has to pay – literalising the meaning of *lex talionis* – with his eyes for his crime (S05E09 00:04:02). As for a fair fight, Much rescues Dot from the "grave" during the final shootout on Tillman's ranch, on the pretext that it is unfair for Roy to fight the "Tiger," as Munch calls Dot, when she is caged (S05E09 00:40:20–42:40). Yet, not unlike Tillman, Munch is inseparable from the mercenary attitudes of consumer society: he wants to settle the humiliation he suffers

from Dot during the failed kidnapping mission by a triple fee from Tillman, regardless of Dot's escape. Apparently, Dot's cutting off a part of his ear, let alone defeating him in the kidnap adventure, scars him for life. Since Tillman refuses to pay him, Munch ends up with two debts to settle and a war to wage on two fronts: against Dot, who wounded him, and Tillman, who owes him money. In this convoluted business transaction for Munch, just as for Tillman, broken vows and hurt feelings are commodified as debts – to be paid by money or flesh. To further strengthen the parallel between the sin-eater and Tillman, Munch delivers an – unwitting – parody of Tillman's grand soliloquy from a tub of his own, during which the camera cuts to Tillman every time Munch says "king" (e.g. S05E04 00:35:14). Just like Grimsrud, with his near-supernatural power, grotesque looks and strange speech impediment, Munch is an arch-patriarch who, however, is also abject due to his transgression, an act of consumption that inseparably ties him to the discourse of food, debt and sin. Even more powerful than Tillman, he is an embodiment of patriarchy, whose back-story as a pariah (see Hartland 148) locates the mythical origins of violent patriarchy in victimisation and exclusion, which perpetuate themselves in undying, ever renewing forms – including objectification and commodification.

Thus, *Fargo* Season 5 continues the *film noir* tradition in associating food and eating with the Law of the Father and concomitant abjection, exclusion. Dot as a mother figure, in contrast, is linked with feeding rather than eating, to suggest a postfeminist re-appropriation of the food motif with a focus on nurture, inclusion and commensality – that is, "food in its relational aspect […], eating conceived as a network or as a principle of connectivity" (Goldstein 41). Dot's character, a housewife who is willing to protect at all costs her domestic idyll and motherly identity, resonates with postfeminist sensibilities. Her fragile figure of a doll-like, young, even girly-looking, white, middle-class, heterosexual woman, who identifies herself as first and foremost a mother and a wife (S05E07 00:35:31), is an embodiment of the postfeminist ideal (cf. Gwynne and Muller 2–4), in many ways a return to traditional concepts of femininity. For Dot, providing her beloved with food has an anchoring function in normalcy, which is best exemplified by her hectic biscuit-making in the dead of the night right after breaking free from her kidnappers (S05E01 00:50:22). Indeed, food seems to be metonymically identified both with her maternal identity and her beloved, as the shots of Dot's intense and prolonged stare at a box of Bisquick indicate at the petrol station before her kidnappers catch up with her in the chase. Cuts to a joint image of her second husband and their daughter (S05E01 00:35:50–36:08) suggest that she is collecting the stamina needed to fight her kidnappers from remembering, through food, the reasons worth fighting for, that is her family and the motherly identity that family defines for her. Similarly, in one of her climactic dialogues with Tillman, when she comes as close as she can to begging for being released from captivity on his ranch, her first argument is that she is Scotty's mother (S05E08 00:10:28). She spells this out in terms of care and feeding, care as feeding, with repeated references to food ranging from ice-cream cakes to shepherd's pie. She does not only take care of her beloved – by feeding them to give them pleasure rather than simply nurturing them – she is also a mother to teach her daughter how to take care of others –

kittens, in this case. Dot's claim that Tillman is also doing to her family whatever he is doing to her suggests that the three of them are one continuous body, bound together by love, care and shared food (S05E08 00:10:28–11:37). When after the final shootout she chances upon Gater Tillman, her now fatherless and blinded foster-brother/step-son, who is facing a jail sentence, in response to his apology and request for a visit she promises to see him – and to take cookies with her. In fact, after more than a decade, she still remembers which ones are his favourite (S05E10 00:14:24–15:50). She re-adopts Gator into her new family by sharing the bond of food with him – not for sustenance, cookies are not essential for that, but as a gesture of love. All in all, fully relegating eating and feeding to the domestic sphere with Dot, the fifth season of *Fargo* shifts focus to the traditional aspects of care, motherly attention, commensality and inclusion associated with food (see Assmann 239, Goldstein 47), in stark contrast to the *film noir* tradition.

It is with this complex web of meanings in mind that the final showdown of the series (S05E10 00:28:28–44:53) – structured around debts as well as jointly prepared and consumed food – is worth addressing. Consistently with his code of indelible debts and honour, Munch shows up in the Lyons' house a year after Roy Tillman's defeat to seek revenge on Dot for his mutilated ear. When he voices his claim about the pound of flesh quoted above, Dot resolves to methods consistent with her maternal identity to counter Munch. She first appeals to his charity, offering the New Testament law of forgiving instead of revenge. Then she starts to ratiocinate with him while also mothering him. That is, she practically orders him to wash his hands and help her make biscuits, as if he was a child. Indeed, his response - baffled obedience – is that of a child. In other words, the acculturation of this timeless, archetypal figure of patriarchy is restarted from square one by a strict but loving mother. She even explains to him – while preparing food together – that being wounded is an occupational hazard for a hired gun, so he has no legitimate reason for seeking revenge. Yet, she succeeds in convincing him only when she recognises their shared victimhood: Munch, too, ran up debts by taking money for eating the unwholesome food of another's sins, for which he was punished by ritual exclusion from humanity, becoming an immortal monster. What Dot offers him is compassion: inclusion in the community of humans through shared food. The vicious cycle of debt, interest and repayment is broken by the comically heart-warming image of Munch munching biscuits in a moment of bliss, instead of taking the Shakespearean pound of flesh. With that, the narrative takes viewers back indeed to square one, to the discourse of the unclean and the abject informing the biblical Law of the Father at the foundations of patriarchy and countered by that of an inclusive ritual communal meal. To oppose hegemonic and violent masculinity, the scene re-establishes core values of motherhood and domesticity, the conviviality of eating in a clear reminiscence to the Holy Eucharist. Though the scenario of abjection and exclusion is apparently magically reversed, the realisation of the patriarch's utopian reformation is left to viewers' imagination: the series ties up this last loose end with the closing image of Munch's utter bliss.

Is this too good to be true? Obviously so. Regardless of this neat ending – or rather, a sequence of neat endings, taking up about thirty-five minutes of the last episode, dealing out rewards and punishments, like a good old Victorian three-decker – the series does maintain some fundamental ambiguities, inseparable from food and consumption. To start with the end, the last episode is titled *Bisquick*, since Dot uses this emblematic pre-packaged American baking mix in the joint preparation of biscuits – the same product she stares at in the shop at the petrol station and uses in her hectic culinary activity after her escape from her kidnappers in episode one. In brief, the series is enframed by Bisquick – or, to remain with food, it is like delicious filling in mass-produced, pre-packaged biscuits or pancakes. True, Dot does add a personal flavour to the standard baking mix by using milk instead of water, of which she makes a special point (S05E10 00:36:34). Other than that, this almost mystical, magical, sacred food item is only at one remove from fast food, that emblem of Americanness – and whatever it entails (see Gunkel 249–50).[12] What is behind Bisquick is the American food-industry complex, which is dependent on the consumption of highly processed, packaged meals. What Dot seems to have been fighting for is a return to a version of commodity culture and consumer society – sold as a pre-packaged dream of postfeminist utopia – with the sole difference that, as opposed to the Tillman ranch, she can make deals on her own terms here. The mass-produced, pre-packaged nature of the eponymous Bisquick – an identification of the season with Bisquick – is a perfect reminder "that all cultures are 'commodity cultures' to varying degrees" (Jackson 101).

Indeed, the world outside Tillman's ranch – starting with Dot's own home and encompassing the sphere of her mother-in-law's financial influence – seems to be governed by the same financial considerations of debt, interest and commodification, in more or less sophisticated forms. The major difference is that a matriarch is running the show. As Mrs. Lyon Sr. explains to Police Deputy Indira Olmstead, in poignant critique of consumer society, "[o]ver 90% percent of American adults are debtors," which metaphorically imprisons, cages them. In other words, the whole US is a giant zoo, in which she, Mrs Lyon, runner of a debt management business, is the "zoo-keeper" (S05E05 00:29:26). The metaphor strikes home with Indira – she immediately starts to protest – because she, too, feels imprisoned and suffocated by the huge loans she had to take out because of her husband, who does not work at all, but has expensive hobbies and demands. And just like Munch, she sells her soul to get out of that cage – and to end up in another, certainly more gilded one, which grants her some dignity as a woman and a professional, at least: she leaves the police force to work as security chief for Mrs. Lyon, who also starts to manage her debts. Mrs. Lyon herself, regardless of her feminine outlook, is surrounded by an air of almost toxic masculinity – she is the female version of

[12] A baking mix otherwise is one of the most redundant food items in a household: it is easy to have a reserve of the simple ingredients needed for pancakes or biscuits, like flour and eggs – the latter of which Bisquick does not even include among its many artificial ingredients – and there is no significant difference in preparation time.

Jerry Lundegaard's father-in-law, one of the central father figures (Lee 69) in the Coen brothers' movie. She is the agent of the final showdown with Roy Tillman (S05E10 00:21:55–27:28) for a reason: they are each other's equals in power and lack of moral scruples. This is what allows her to turn tables on Tillman and break him by taking care of his victimisation through physical violence in the prison – repaying Dot's 'debt' to him in kind. In clear indication of her monetary concerns, Lorraine Lyon has offered money before to her son's wife on condition that she disappears from her family's life, when the kidnapping made her even more suspicious and antagonistic to Dot than before. Dot, in her turn, has argued that she has held up her end of the "deal" and her husband loves her (S05E02 00:22:59–24:11) – quite a different story from the one she tells Tillman, according to which she is in love with her husband. Regardless of her longstanding distrust, however, while Dot is held hostage at the Tillman ranch, Lorraine symbolically adopts her by calling her a "daughter of mine" (S05E09 00:23:32–37) on the phone. So at the end Dot apparently returns to a world of postfeminist sisterhood, in which she is welcomed by her family and the two women instrumental to her survival: Lorraine and Indira. Below that surface, her world shows disturbing similarities with Roy Tillman's: it is permeated by an unhealthy mix-up of emotions with finances, which leaves women – and men – trapped in various prisons of consumption.

To what extent mainstream viewers are susceptible to such nuances as the above remains an open question. Yet the season also makes other subversive gestures regarding its own too neat and optimistic endings: Dot's experience of Camp Utopia, a version of the Tillman family romance without casualties, in which Linda establishes an all-female community for victims of domestic violence, turns out to be a dream sequence at the end of episode seven. It is a profoundly disorienting experience for unknowing audiences – that is, those who see the season for the first time – since indications about the dream nature of the events throughout the episode approach zero. As a result, Tillman's claim in episode eight that Dot's captivity on the Tillman ranch is the reality – in fact, she has never left – and her life outside has been a dream (S05E08 00:35:40–46) does not come across as the abuser's clichéd attempt to undermine the victim's sense of sanity and reality, but as an actual possibility. The narrative has broken with verisimilitude for good by including the sin-eater's fantastic figure – but how much of the season exactly are viewers supposed to consume as fantasy? After all, this is the Fargo universe, supposed to be disorientating and ambiguous in a true neo-noir fashion, as viewers are forewarned by the very first shots of the series, a surreal mob fighting at a parents' meeting, carefully choreographed and filmed in slow motion. It is the world of *Minnesota nice*, "[a]n aggressively pleasant demeanor, often forced, in which a person is chipper and self-effacing, no matter how bad things get" (S05E01 00:00:31), as the season's first intertitle announces. Food, far from being incidental in this crime narrative, contributes to the same disorienting effect. Embedded in an intricate discourse of sins and debt to contribute to a critique of both patriarchy and commodity culture, the polysemous use of food – relying heavily on the *noir* tradition but also conspicuously diverting from it – showcases that there is no outside of the systems the season criticises. Thus, its complex set of implications self-reflexively

undercuts the season's optimistic resolutions, revealed to be pre-packaged fantasies of commodity culture – in a box of Bisquick called *Fargo* Season 5.

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„Csak a lehetetlent érdemes megpróbálni."

Svégel Fanni interjúja Pető Andreával, a CEU professzorával

Az elmúlt években a gender studies, a társadalmi nemek tudománya egy marginálisnak számító társadalmi-történeti stúdiumból a kortárs társadalmi viták egyik legfontosabb gyújtópontjává vált. Hirtelen mindenkinek lett véleménye olyan kérdésekről, amelyekről korábban szakértők vitáztak szűk fórumokon, jobbára egyetemi előadókban, konferenciákon és szakfolyóiratokban. A tényleges érdeklődést és a párbeszédet szorgalmazó, vitára invitáló, főként civilek által folytatott diskurzussal párhuzamosan a társadalmi feszültségek generálásának szándékos tendenciái is egyre inkább tapinthatóvá válnak azzal, hogy a magyar kormány következetesen a Magyarország előtt álló, leküzdendő problémák egyikeként aposztrofálja a „gender" kérdését, annak meglehetősen konfúz, előítéletekkel terhelt értelmezéseit kommunikálva a lehető legszélesebb társadalmi nyilvánosság felé. Ez a diskurzus mintegy védekező pozícióba szorítja azokat, akik a társadalmi nemek kérdéseiről elméleti, kritikai módon gondolkodnak és társadalomformáló szándékkal karolják fel a kérdést A Közép-európai Egyetem (CEU) Budapestről való elűzése, az ELTE Társadalomtudományi Karán működő társadalmi nemek akkreditált mesterszak betiltása, a homofób „gyermekvédelmi" törvény és a felsőfokú tanulmányokat folytató nők elleni támadások csak a jéghegy csúcsai. Pető Andreával, a CEU professzorával beszélgettünk a tudomány szabadságáról és a nők helyzetéről az illiberális rendszerekben.

2018-ban az Európai Akadémiák (ALLEA) Kulturális Értékteremtésért járó Madame de Staël-díjjal tüntették ki, 2021-ben pedig a stockholmi Södertörn Egyetem díszdoktorává választották. Mindeközben távozni kényszerült Magyarországról az az egyetem, amelynek szinte alapításától munkatársa volt, és amelynek kitüntetett szerepe volt a rendszerváltás utáni demokratikus átmenetben. Mit jelent ma a demokrácia az oktatásban?

A CEU első alkalmazottainak egyike voltam, mikor 1991-ben megkezdtem az ottani munkám, így nyilvánvalóan erős a kapcsolatom az egyetemmel és annak küldetésével. Amikor azonban állami tulajdonú újságok címlapján kiáltanak ki az állam ellenségének, megpróbálhatsz nem tudomást venni róla, de egyszerűen nem érzed magad tovább biztonságban egy ilyen gyűlölködő légkörben. Ez nem igazán tesz jót a tudományos munkának, így a CEU politikai alapú elűzetése óta Bécsben élek és dolgozom. A felsőoktatás olyan lett, mint egy gyár, ez világtrend, és sajnos hihetetlennek tűnik, hogy az, amit tanítunk, bizony, számít és felelősséggel tartozunk érte. Sőt az oktatás tartalma élet és halál kérdése lett. A kockázatvállalás hiánya a felsőoktatásban pedig gyáva és rossz tudományt eredményez.

A magyar felsőoktatás magánosításával az egyetemi oktatói béreket a duplájára emelték, ezért cserébe az egyetemi autonómiát és a tudomány szabadságát kel- lett beáldozni a kollégáknak. A korábbi, valamennyire átlátható és demokratikus döntési mechanizmusokat az egyszerű politikai lojalitás követelménye váltotta fel. Ugyanazon kollégáknak

hasonló érveik vannak az öncenzúrára és az elhallgatásra, mint a kommunizmus idején voltak: „ha én, aki ugye kiváló vagyok, nem csinálom meg, illetve nem vállalom el, akkor jön majd más, aki rosszabb és majd megcsinálja, elvállalja, megírja ő”.

Az antiintellektualizmus az illiberális államok egyik működési módja, amely kétirányú stratégiát alkalmaz: a gyakran kritikus értelmiségiek erőforrásait a hozzájuk hűséges támogatókhoz irányítja, ugyanakkor manipulálja a sebezhető, alul- informált polgárokat, azáltal hogy az egzisztenciális félelmeikre hat. Az egyetemeket támadják, és párhuzamos, illiberális egyetemeket és kutatóintézeteket alapítanak, hogy alternatív forrásokat teremtsenek a tudományos minőségbiztosítás és a tudástermelés számára. A tudás létrehozása állampolgári jogból bizton- sági kérdéssé változott. Az egyetemek könnyű célpontot jelentenek az illiberálisok számára, akik populista retorikát használnak a tudományba és a tudósokba vetett bizalom aláásására.

Nemrég tüntették ki az Oslói Egyetem Emberi Jogi Díjával, amely kapcsán Ase Gornitzka úgy fogalmazott, hogy Ön az „akadémiai szabadság és az intézményi autonómia félelmet nem ismerő védelmezője”. Többször beszélt arról, hogy milyen támadások érték a munkája és értékrendje miatt. Veszélyes szakma lett a tudomány?

A felsőoktatás valójában kockázatos munkává vált. Volt kolléga, akinek kicserélték az irodájában az ablakot golyóálló üvegre. A támadások több területen is érzékelhetők, de a társadalmi nemek kutatói olyanok, mint a lakmuszpapír. Figyelmeztetek az előttünk álló veszélyre. A genderkutatás kritikus terület, amely a nőmozgalomból, annak társadalomkritikájából, valamint a tudás és a tudástermelés kritikájából nőtt ki és társadalmi változásra törekszik. Amikor 2017. március 2-án egy álnéven bejegyzett felhasználótól angol nyelvű üzenetet kaptam, amely az ördögöt, átkot, valamint a fajtám kiirtását helyezte kilátásba, megrémültem. Ekkor már globálisan zajlott a társadalmi nemek tudománya elleni harc. Az, hogy az academia.edu oldalon valaki regisztrál, majd letölti a mesterséges terhességmegszakítás magyarországi szabályozásának történetéről szóló cikkemet, és a letöltés magyarázataként sátánista verset hagy hátra, minőségileg új volt. Az ilyen üzeneteket hívja Abby Ferber „nyilvános internetes zaklatásnak”. Azaz a fenyegetett személy a közéletben elfoglalt helye miatt válik zaklatás célpontjává, de ez már a magam számára is meglepő módon, észrevétlenül beleépült a mindennapjaimba.

Ez a zaklatás egy új jelenséghez kapcsolódik, amely fenyegeti és megkérdőjelezi a nemek közötti egyenlőséget és a gender studies politikai és tudományos legitimitását. Célpontjai elsősorban tudósok, oktatók, gondolkodók; az elkövető célja pedig a félelem és a bizonytalanság felkeltése, nem pedig a fizikai fenyegetés. A kollégáktól és barátoktól kapott nagyon kedves javaslat, hogy „vigyázzak magamra”, csak azt érte el, hogy elkezdtem attól félni, hogy az én hibám, ha nem vigyázok eléggé magamra. A félelem megeszi a lelket, és eltünteti körülötted a levegőt. Amikor elmeséltem az ügyet másoknak a társadalmi nemek tudománya közösségén belül, ők is előjöttek a saját történeteikkel. Ők mind a budapesti társadalmi nemek tudományos közösségének tagjai voltak. A magyar rendőrség nem nyomozott, mert arra nem volt képes, hogy bekérje az academia.edu-tól a felhasználó adatait,

aki a mai napig aktív a platformon. Nagyon fontos volt a CEU támogatása, mert rögtön akartak egy testőrt felvenni mellém, de én visszautasítottam, mert nem akartam az életemet a biztonság alá rendelni. És itt érünk el a tágabb kerethez, a fenyegetés okához. Az új jelenség, az antigender-mozgalmak megjelenése és a gyűlöletre alapuló nyilvános beszéd a társadalmi nemek egyenlőségének politikai és tudományos legitimációját kérdőjelezik meg és olyan élet megélésére kényszerítenek, ami nem a tiéd. Ezért nem kellett a testőr, és nem hagyom, hogy olyan témákról beszéljek, amelyek másoknak fontosak.

Említette, hogy a gender studies alapvetően kritikai tudomány, amelyet az elmúlt években számtalan támadás ért itthon és a nemzetközi térben egyaránt. Mennyire jellemző, hogy történészek társadalomformáló diskurzusokban vesznek részt, kiállást tanúsítanak általuk fontosnak vélt ügyekben, vagy komoly társadalmi ügyeket képviselnek akár aktivistaként is? Mennyire tolerálja a hazai közeg, ha valaki markáns álláspontot képvisel egy-egy ügyben?

Mikor egy MTA doktori bizottság tagjaként azt javasoltam, hogy a szöveges értéke- lésbe írjuk bele, hogy népszerű stílusban publikál a jelölt az adott témában, akkor a teremben mindenki más egyszerre hördült fel: azt nem lehet, akkor nem tudományos. Alapvető hiba, hogy a történetírást akkor tekintik tudománynak, ha bikk- fanyelven van megírva. Az én szakmám a 2000-es évek elején teljesen lényegtelen szakma volt, de most már iszonyú fontosak vagyunk. Alapvető változás következett be, ami nekünk nagy segítség, ennek kapcsán tudunk beszélni olyan kér- désekről, amelyek korábban nem feltétlenül voltak témák. Egy paradigmaváltás tanúi vagyunk, amelynek megértéséhez bevezettük a társadalmi nem mint „szimbolikus kötőanyag” fogalmát. Ez azt jelenti, hogy az illiberális populista szereplők számára a „genderideológia” koncepciója metaforájává vált a jelenlegi társadalmi- gazdasági rendből fakadó bizonytalanságoknak és igazságtalanságoknak. Ez a metafora lehetővé tette, hogy az illiberális aktorok megragadják az emberek elé- gedetlenségét az őket körülvevő világgal kapcsolatban, és az egyenlőségi kérdések felé tereljék. Mivel a társadalmi nem és az egyenlőség központi fogalmakká váltak az illiberális mozgalmak számára, számos politikai elemző úgy tekint rájuk, mint a problémák gyökerére. Értelmezésük szerint az illiberális retorika és a fundamentalisták mozgósítása nem más, mint visszacsapás az emancipációs politika, illetve a feminizmus és a szexuális kisebbségek jogai terén eddig elért eredmények ellen, továbbá a rejtett nőgyűlölet előtörése.

Magyarországra is importálták ezt a retorikát, amely egyre intenzívebbé vált a sajtóban és az internetes kommentekben, különösen, miután 2016-ban elindult a magyar nyelvű, államilag finanszírozott társadalmi nemek mesterképzés az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetemen. Egy csapásra mindenkinek lett véleménye a sajtóban és a parlamentben arról, mi a társadalmi nemek tudománya, mit tanítanak, melyek a képzési és a kimeneti követelmények. Magyarországon ugyanazokat a gender témájú – legfeljebb elővigyázatosságból más címen futó – kurzusokat most is megtartó kollégák is mondják, hogy soha ennyien nem jelentkeztek az óráikra. A genderellenes támadás a „gender mainstreaming” (a társadalmi nemek a szakpolitikák általi középpontba helyezésének) legjobb eszköze lett. A tiltás

politikai lehetőséget teremtett. Rajtunk, a szakmán múlik, hogy ezt a lehetőséget ki tudjuk-e használni, és tudunk e fontos és releváns dolgokat mondani. Az érdeklődés biztosítva van.

Paradox módon ez a hidegháború is jót tett a szakmának, mert az a gender-ellenesség, ami a putyini Oroszország szoft diplomáciájának eddig sikeres és igen olcsó fegyvere volt, mára szalonképtelen lett. Az Oroszország Ukrajna ellen indított véres háborúja miatt az illiberális internacionálé felbomlott. De ne legyenek illúzióink. Mivel az illiberális erőknek a működtetésen kívül nincs eredeti ötletük, egészen biztos, hogy kitalálnak egy újabb ellenségképet, hiszen az életükért és az egzisztenciájukért küzdenek. A feminista politikának épp ezért két feladata van most. Először is önkritikusan választ kell adnia arra, hogy a rendszerváltás óta tartó időszakban miért nem tudott a progresszív politika fősodrába betagozódni, miért maradt meg „mellékletként”. Másrészt képesnek kell lennie a valós társadalmi problémák megfogalmazására érthető nyelven. Az értékharcot a mindennapokban, így a tudományba is beszivárgó pusztító gyakorlatok (árulás, gyávaság, köpönyegforgatás, gyűlölködés, haszonlesés, korrupció) ellenében a mindennapokban kell megnyerni.

Az akadémiai szférában dolgozó nők helyzete nem éppen rózsás. Milyen nehézségekkel kell szembenéznie egy tudományos pályát választó nőnek ma? Hogy látja, milyen módon formálják, akadályozzák a 2020-tól egyre élesebben és egymással összefüggésben jelentkező válságjelenségek – a pandémiától az orosz–ukrán háborún át a gazdasági válságig – különösen a fiatal kutatónők esélyeit a pályán maradásra?

Amikor Novák Katalin az Axióma-videóban meghirdette, hogy a nőknek nem kell magasan kvalifikált, szellemi munkát végezniük, akkor már világos volt, hogy megkezdődött a nők közvetlen kiszorítása a magyar felsőoktatásból. Itt azt mondja, hogy nem kell harcolni, hogy majd minden nagyon jó lesz, és nagyon jó, hogy a nők otthon gyereket nevelnek. De ez nem kapcsolódik a magyar realitás- hoz. Ez különben az 50-es évek Amerikájából importált elképzelés: a feleség otthon ül a nagy házban, és várja, míg a férj megjön az egyik autóval, miközben a másik autó bent áll a garázsban, amivel ő bevásárolni megy a szupermarketbe, és semmi problémája nincs a számla kifizetésével. Ez a magyar valóságban nem így van. A csökkenő erőforrásokat férfiaknak kell megkapniuk, mint ahogy a numerus clausus is eredetileg a nőket szándékozott kiszorítani a magyar felsőoktatásból, csak már akkor se hagytak parlagon egy jó válságot, és gyorsan a zsidókat is meg- regulázták. Most folyik a közvélemény tesztelése és a megkülönböztetés normalizálása. Kíváncsi vagyok, a lányos szülők mit szólnak, hogy gyerekeik életesélyeit megint államilag határozzák meg. Az ÁSZ ún. pink education jelentése után, mely megkérdőjelezte, hogy a női állampolgárok felsőoktatására közpénzt kéne áldozni csendesen bevezették a szóbeli felvételi vizsgát a Semmelweis Egyetemen, amely megint teret ad a nők elleni bújtatott diszkriminációnak.

Ami a kutatói életpálya konkrétumait illeti: ha annyi gombóc fagylaltom lenne, ahányszor egy értekezleten én mondtam valamit, amire senki se reagált, aztán egy férfi kolléga

elmondta ugyanazt, és utána elfogadták és ünnepelték, nyithatnék egy fagylaltozót. A felmérésekből az látszik, hogy a nőknek háromszor annyit kell publikálniuk ahhoz, hogy ugyanazt elérhessék, mint férfi társaik. Ehhez jön még a fizetetlen gondoskodó munka, amit a férfi kollégáknak a feleségeik biztosítanak. Az egyik akadémikus férfi kolléga kérdésemre, hogyan tartja rendben az idézettségi listáját, szerény, de magától értetődő mosollyal azt válaszolta: az amúgy szintén sikeres történész felesége csinálja neki ingyen és bérmentve.

Az MTA Nők a Kutatói Életpályán Elnöki Bizottság előző ciklusában javasoltuk, hogy az MTA ne adjon helyet kizárólag férfiakból álló konferenciáknak, és ezt az ajánlást el is fogadták. Az egy másik kérdés, hogy nem tartják be. Most a férfi kollégákon múlik, hogy mikor felkérik őket és látják, csak férfiak szerepelnek, írjanak a szervezőknek, hogy így nem vállalják el a szereplést. Ha aztán a szervezők a férfiakat is férfiakkal pótolják, akkor nincs más hátra, mint amit én is szoktam csinálni: megírom a szervezőknek, hogy ilyen konferencián nincs módomban részt venni. Jó lenne, ha azok a kollégák, akik már révbe értek és nincs mit veszíteniük, követnék ezt a példát. Ezek a kis, mindennapi hősies gesztusok fognak változást hozni.

2010-től a családpolitika egyértelműen „felfelé kedvez” az adóvisszatérítésekkel és a hitelezéssel, miközben a szegénység egyre inkább konzerválódik, az oktatási rendszer szegregálódik, az interszekcionális hátrányok pedig egyre inkább ledolgozhatatlanná válnak. A „családbarátsággal” kampányoló kormány, akkor mégsem minden család barátja?

Az, hogy egy társadalom hogyan kezeli a gyengéket, a különböző strukturális okok miatt megbélyegzetteket, kirekesztetteteket, meghatározza az adott társadalom élhetőségét, értékrendszerét, és azt, hogy miként viszonyul az emberi méltósághoz. A jelenlegi magyar uralmi rendszer leírására a polypore-állam meghatározását javasoltuk Weronika Grzebalskával. A polypore (taplógomba) a fa törzsén élősködik, és semmi mást nem hoz létre, mint újabb polypore-t, nincs önálló léte. A polypore- állam működési módjának egyik jellegzetessége a familializmus. Nem nőpolitikája van, hanem családpolitikája. Az állami szociálpolitika is a családokat, azaz a házasságban élő heteroszexuális párokat támogatja. A magyar nőmozgalom szó- kincse, elvégzendői, cselekvési terve, valamint nemzetközi intézményrendszerbe való beágyazottsága a nők egyetemes jogait védi. A párhuzamos familializmus a nőjogi keretből indult ki, de a nőt mint a szakpolitika célcsoportját helyettesítette a családdal. Ez a fordulat váratlanul és felkészületlenül érte a feministákat. Először is, mert az egyes kormányzati intézkedések, mint például a gyermekgondozási segély melletti munkavégzés lehetősége, amely jelentősen növelte a kisgyermekes nők munkavállalását, széles körben igen népszerűek. A családi adózás, amelynek könyvtárnyi nemzetközi irodalma van arról, hogy mennyire hátrányos hosszú távon a nők számára, szintén népszerű.

A politikában is azt látjuk, hogy nem női témával házalnak, hanem azzal a bizonyos társadalmi nem mint szimbolikus kötőanyaggal. Mert ha a női témával foglalkoznának, akkor mondjuk például a CitizenGO – a legfontosabb nemzetközi lobbi- szervezet, amelyik

Brazíliából és Amerikából kapja a pénzét, és Magyarországon is nagyon aktív – nem azért gyűjtene aláírást, hogy az LMBTQ+ emberek ne gyarmatosítsák Magyarországot. Amit nem lehet pontosan tudni, hogy mit jelent, de több mint százezren aláírták. Ehelyett lobbizhatna például azért, hogy legyen Turán gyerekorvos. Magyarországon több mint százezer embernek nincsen háziorvosa, és több tízezer gyereket nem látott orvos. Az illiberális polypore-állam családpolitikája a saját rendszerének, saját klientúrájának a fenntartására szolgál.

Visszatérve a nőket célzó szociálpolitikára: ma leginkább a fizetetlen, gondos- kodó munka határozza meg a nők helyzetét. Ez azt jelenti, hogy a nők lényegesen több időt töltenek azzal, hogy a gyerekekre vigyáznak, leckét írnak és tanulnak velük, a gyerekeknek főznek, különböző helyekre, foglalkozásokra, orvoshoz viszik őket – és ugyanígy tesznek az idős szülők esetében is. Ők azok, akik gondoskodnak, akik megpróbálják bepótolni az összeomló egészségügyi rendszer hiányait. Ezt hívják „szendvics generációnak”. Mert a gyerekekről is, meg a saját idősödő szüleikről is ennek a generációnak kell gondoskodnia. Most elkezdődött Magyarországon a főállású anyaság diskurzusa. Ami azt jelenti, hogy fizesse meg az állam azokat a nőket, akik otthon vannak, és teljes állásban a gyerekekre vigyáznak. Ezzel az a fő probléma, hogy a válságban megkezdődik a munkaerő kiszorítása mint a munkanélküliség kezelése. Nagy valószínűséggel a kormánynak az lesz a csodafegyvere, hogy felajánlja ezt a fizetett anyaságot azoknak a nőknek, akiknek különben sem volt olyan magas a fizetése. Fizetett gondoskodó munkát fognak otthon végezni. Ezzel az a probléma, hogy egyrészt nagyon sok pénzbe kerül, másrészt ez a legbiztosabb út az időskori szegénység felé. És az is biztos, hogy valakinek meg kell termelnie azt a pénzt, amit a kormány kioszt.

A családpolitika egyes elemei viszont, igenis támogatják azt, hogy a nők dolgozzanak és karriert építsenek. De ahogyan ezt csinálja, az komoly egyenlőtlenségekhez vezet. Adókedvezmény van, a családtámogatási rendszer munkabér alapú. Tehát nincsen univerzális támogatás, tegyük hozzá: egyelőre, mert ha bekövetkezik a fizetett anyaság, az alanyi jogon járna mindenkinek, hacsak nem kötik előzetes munkavállaláshoz, amivel a népesség nagy részét kizárnák belőle. A családtámogatási rendszernek tehát az a problémája, hogy fogyasztást serkentő rendszer. A magyarországi eladósodottság az elmúlt időszakban borzasztóan növekedett, mert nagyon sokan bevállalták a gyerekeket a pénzért, amiből lakást, illetve autót vásárolnak. Az is biztos, hogy egyelőre nem látni ezeknek a családpolitikai intézkedéseknek a hatását.

Az állami familializmusnak tehát két fontos következménye van. Az egyik, hogy egyes női csoportoknak valóban nőtt a jövedelme és az életminősége a Fidesz- kormányok alatt. Ha egy nőnek választania kell, hogy szinte ugyanannyi pénzért, minden szakmai előremenetel nélkül, kizsigerelő körülmények között munkahelyen dolgozik több óra utazás után, vagy fizetett otthoni, gondoskodó munkát végez, amit legalább szavakban elismernek, akkor világos a döntés. A másik pedig, hogy az illiberális familializmus sajátos szókincset használ: a nők nem áldozatok, akiket védeni kell, hanem méltósággal rendelkező

büszke emberek, akik panasz nélkül és önfeláldozva, egyéni ambíciók nélkül dolgoznak a családjukért. Egy olyan társadalomban, ahol a legbiztosabb hosszútávú női karrierstratégia a „jó parti”, nem szabad azon csodálkozni, hogy az az életstratégia nem olyan népszerű, melyben egy nőtől a munkahelyén elvárják, hogy küzdjön, de bármikor kizsákmányolhatják, zaklathatják. Eközben sokkal alacsonyabb a fizetése, mint a férfi kollégáinak, és ha ezért szót emel, sehonnan sem várhat segítséget. A női időskori szegénységről és kiszolgáltatottságról igen nehéz cukiskodva beszélni.

A Pintér Sándor által szignózott abortuszrendelet-módosítás tiltakozásokat váltott ki. Statisztikai adatokból tudjuk, hogy az abortusz a legnagyobb arányban a szegény, aluliskolázott, fiatal nők körében terjedt el, miközben a fogamzásgátló eszközök drágák, beszerzésük sokszor akadályokba ütközik, használatuk, működésük sokszor nem egyértelmű a nők számára. Ezzel párhuzamosan pedig a kormány lényegében megszüntette a szexuális edukáció lehetőségét az iskolákban, „családi hatáskörbe” utalva azt. Hová vezethetnek ezek a tendenciák és az abortuszt érintő „lopakodó szigorítás”?

A nők teste ismét politikai csatatérré vált. Az Egyesült Államokban az abortuszhoz való jog eltörlésére irányuló projekt része annak a globális kontextusnak, amelyben a konzervatív erők a nők jogait támadják. A reproduktív jogok elleni támadások globálisan nagyon különböző erőket egyesítenek: konzervatív politikai mozgalmakat, vallási fundamentalistákat, illiberális pragmatistákat és Vlagyimir Putyin orosz elnök háborús uszítóit. És sokkal több forog kockán, mint az abortuszjogok: a cél az, hogy a liberális demokráciákkal szemben egy élhető és kívánatos ajánlatot teremtsenek saját támogatóik számára.

Az általános és középiskolában lecsökkent a tankönyvek száma, és ezek köz- pontilag meghatározott tankönyvek, melyek egy nagyon hagyományos nőképet közvetítenek. Harcok voltak a különböző szakmákban akörül, hogy ezt miképpen lehetne befolyásolni. A biológusok csinálták a legjobban, ők csendesen meg tudták akadályozni, hogy kreacionista tankönyvek jöjjenek létre. A művi terhességmegszakítások száma folyamatosan csökken, és a felmérések szerint elsősorban a szegény, kiskorú, illetve már több gyermeket nevelő nők tekintik a mesterséges terhességmegszakítást a születésszabályozás olcsón hozzáférhető egyetlen eszközének. Ezért pedig a megfelelő szexuális oktatás hiánya tehető felelőssé, hiszen a fiatal lányoknak fogalmuk sincs arról, hogy mi történik a testükkel. A civil szervezetek iskolákból való kitiltása, az egyházi oktatás anyagi támogatása és a pedagógusok módszeres megfélemlítése ezt a tendenciát csak fokozni fogja.

A szülés és születésszabályozás témákban jelenleg is fontos szakmai-politikai viták zajlanak. A hálapénzről, a szülészeti erőszakról, azaz a szülő nők jogairól folynak viták a túlmedikalizált, lélektelen és alulfinanszírozott magyar egészség- ügyben. Az abortuszról szóló politikai vitát az amerikai keresztény fundamentalista érveket – mint például a „szívdobbanás” elvet – Magyarországra importáló, és adófizetők pénzéből támogatott, egyre erősödő abortuszellenes hangok generálják, melyeknek célja a mesterséges születésszabályozás legitimációjának megkérdőjelezése. Ennek a folyamatnak egy újabb lépcsőfoka a legfrissebb szabályozás-módosítás, amelyet semmiféle társadalmi egyeztetés nem

előzött meg. Megelőzte viszont egy olyan, nőjogi szervezetek által észlelt, évek óta tartó gyakorlat, amely a legális abortuszok akadályoztatását célozza. Kérdés, hogy miként reagál erre a szakma és a társadalom, illetve hogyan ültetik át a gyakorlatba azt a „szívhangrendeletet”, ami nem a szívhangról szól, hanem arról, hogy hogyan lehet a lehető legkisebb kockázattal és befektetéssel a legnagyobb politikai hasznot bezsebelni, persze annak a rétegnek a kárára, akik a legkiszolgáltatottabbak.

Az utóbbi évek egymást követő krízisei mindnyájunkat megviseltek, és nem igazán látszik még a vége. A hétköznapokhoz és a munka folytatásához reményre van szükségünk, méghozzá „radikális reményre”. Mit tehetünk akkor, amikor úgy tűnik, semmit sem tehetünk? A jelen számban magyarul megjelenő kiáltvány – a Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya és Nancy Fraser tollából származó, a marxista feminizmus által inspirált A 99% feminizmusa – éppen erre a kérdésre reflektál, felvetve, hogy a változás ereje a nők szerepvállalásában és a valamilyen szempontból marginalizált, háttérbe szorított csoportok összefogásában és az ún. „civil kurázsiban” gyökerezhet. Hogy látja, Magyarországon jelenleg milyen lehetőségei vannak az alulról szerveződő, a társadalom átalakítását célzó mozgalmaknak és szervezeteknek, és milyen szerepet vállalhatnak a nők itthon a „radikális remény” megteremtésében?

A félelmet, különösen annak egy típusát, az „egzisztenciális félelmet”, az utóbbi időben az illiberalizmus és a populizmus különböző formáinak ismételt megjelenésének magyarázataként használják. Az ember fél az elszegényedéstől, a munkahely elvesztésétől, az alulfinanszírozott egészségügyi rendszer hiányosságai és kockázatai (például kórházi fertőzések) miatti korai haláltól, a magánytól, és a félelem tárgyainak valódi listáját még hosszan lehetne folytatni. De a félelem trükkös érzelem, amelyet Rainer Werner Fassbinder (A félelem megeszi a lelket című film írója és rendezője) nagyon jól ismert. A test részévé válva felemészti a lelket, és nemcsak az ember cselekedeteit irányítja, hanem a méltósággal megélt életet is lehetetlenné teszi.

Amit hiányolok jelenleg az életemből, az a civil kurázsi, vagy az új divatszóval: az ellenálló képesség. Az együttműködés és a megfelelés megvitatása a kollégákkal nehéz kérdés, hiszen erkölcsi dilemma, hogy valaki elvárhatja-e, hogy másvalaki is vállalja azt, amit ő önfeláldozó cselekedetnek érez. Ezek a viták még nehezebbek, mivel a világjárvány az elszegényedés veszélyével és a munkahelyek elvesztésével jár. Mindez egy olyan országban, ahol a cimboraság befolyásolja, hogy ki kaphat munkát, a képzettségére vagy az elért eredményeire való tekintet nélkül. Az ellenérv, hogy valaki pótolhatatlan, vagy akár csak jó szakember, nem működik. Úgy döntöttem, hogy nem fogadok el meghívásokat olyan vitákra, amelyeken csak ketten vesznek részt. Nem akarom, hogy sarokba szorítsanak, ahol csak két lehetőség van az érvelésre: pro és kontra. Az élet ennél bonyolultabb. Megpróbálok a munkámban másfajta nyelvet is használni. Amit tehetünk, hogy a vitákban elkerüljük az ideológiailag terhelt kifejezéseket, amelyeket például Oroszországban vagy az Egyesült Államokban a konzervatív jobboldal használ a gender studies leírására, és ezzel új csoportok felé nyitunk. Beszélhetünk erről értelmesen, beszélhetünk helyette a

társadalmi különbségekről és azok okairól, és nem kell belemenni egy értelmetlen iszapbirkózásba, amit éppen azért találtak ki, mert maga az iszapbirkózás a cél.

Néha azonban nagyon világosan kiderül, hogy mi a rossz és mi a jó: vannak pillanatok, amikor ez egyértelművé válik. Mint egy villanás a sötétben. Ha méltó és értelmes életet akarsz élni, nincs más lehetőség, mint azt az életet élni, amit helyesnek tartasz. Ha nem azt tenném, amit teszek, hogyan tudnék tükörbe nézni? Mindenkinek meg kell cselekednie a maga részét: én taníthatok, írhatok és beszél- hetek arról, ami történik. Nem vagyunk egyedül, ezt nem szabad elfelejtenünk. Nem szabad elfelejtenünk, hogy a feminista szolidaritás az alapelv. És nem szabad elfelejtenünk, hogy ez a harc egy maraton, nem pedig sprint. Azért írom a könyveimet és a cikkeimet, mert változást akarok elérni a világban, nem csak azért, hogy tudományos érveket fogalmazzak meg. Azért írom őket, mert fontosnak tartom. És azt akarom, hogy így emlékezzenek rám, mint aki fontos könyveket írt olyan témákról, amiről korábban senki sem beszélt. De azt hiszem, mások úgy írnának le engem, mint akinek látszólag korlátlan energiája van, aki sokat publikál, és akinek mindenről határozott véleménye van. Nehéz idők járnak, de optimista vagyok, mert mi, tudósok még nagyon sokat tehetünk azért, hogy jobbá tegyük a világot, ha azt csináljuk, amit egy tudósnak kell: gondolkodunk és írunk.

Köszönjük a beszélgetést!

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