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Table of Contents

Introduction

We've arrived at a moment in history where humanist thought, or more exactly the humanist endeavour, must again migrate from bookish realms of detached abstraction to a place where it will act as arbiter and advocate in the substantive arena of everyday life and human interaction. Humanism must once more find ways to be critically relevant in the course of human events, much in the manner of XIV century Italians and of d'Alembert and Diderot in the XVIII century. Like them, humanists must again find a way to cross the bridge that unites intellective with substantial, helping find ways to change our lives and alter the terrifying direction that our species' journey has taken.

Now, in the midst of a global pandemic that is distracting humanity from its unconcerned demolition of the planet, we may have a better opportunity to infiltrate policy with humanist ethical values. I say this because I believe that humanism and humanist thought have the potential to interfere with the sightless ferocity with which human beings are now destroying the ability of future generations to provide for themselves. And this pandemic, likely caused by human recklessness, is a clear prognosis of things to come. But can an assortment of scholars and intellectuals intervene in an effective manner? Well, history tells us that humanism –perceived in broad terms – has the ability to intrude into and inconvenience the mechanisms with which authority sustains its follies. But to do so humanists must once more cross the bridge that leads from our world of unobtrusive, graceful disquietude to the vulgar realm of antagonistic political action.

This does not mean that we should put away our pens, chisels and brushes and start to make banners and design projectiles. It means that humanism can be an effective lubricant for the gears of positive change. During its most celebrated moments, humanism was not just an instrument to analyse and try to improve the human condition through formalistic postulates; it was a device endowed with the power to create a perceptual space within which we could reconsider our societies, our place in nature, the character of our interactions with fundamental questions of injustice and corruption, and a strong citadel from which to resist the onslaught of ethical turpitude. In this regard, Michelangelo's David (1501-1504) was a critical building block in Florence's edifice of civic morality and identity, while Goya's "Disasters of War" (1810-1820) provided early XIX century Europe with an eloquent testimony of moral revulsion against conflict and of the human cost of imperialism.

In the manner of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and other XVIII and XIX century Romantics, we remain rooted in the belief that the expression of our true self and self-realisation are somehow commensurate with moral accomplishment. In the present, the continuing trend towards individualism and away from community might help us explain, with a reasonable amount of accuracy, how so much of the humanist endeavour remains subscribed to the inviolability of the subjective – objective divide. In the inevitable allocation of territory that this divide originates, humanism is separated from the field of social agency and assumes the role of serene depository of ethical codes, when a more favourable employment of our energies would involve ensuring the compatibility between the moral grounding that is inherent to humanism, and the social, political and economic environment within which it thrives. Moral accomplishment cannot be coextensive with cloistered aesthetic achievement.

The articles herein demonstrate resilience and strength of purpose in the face of this pandemic that has ravaged so much of the planet. Much in line with today's dreadful events, Nelya Babynets affirms that John Donne's theological as well as secular creations are impregnated with images and ideas dealing with death: murders, ghosts, corpses, epitaphs and deaths inhabit a great number of

his work. Nevertheless, death in the poetry of John Donne not only is a thematic focus, but also plays the part of a poetic device that adds sensual liveliness to the poem. Karl Pfeifer proceeds on the basis of reports of a proposal in 2011 to criminalize public flatulence in Malawi, considering the normative significance of flatulence from the respective standpoints of aesthetics, etiquette, and ethics; it is suggested here that aesthetics and etiquette may themselves also have ethical significance. He concludes that etiquette and ethics may both require that certain violations of etiquette and ethics should sometimes be ignored. Neha Soman and B. Padmanabhan argue that the Ethnic Democracy model hinges on a complex political principle that sanctions undisguised bias in favour of a specific ethnic group. Thus, it is a system whose hierarchical design must, by its very nature, ignore any notion of democratic equality, as the organising principle of Ethnic Democracy holds that the dominating or majority ethnic group shall have exclusive access to power, self-determination, and will have superior status in the socio-political life of the nation. Mohammad Hossein Abedi Valoojerdi speaks of Nick Joaquin's (Nicomedes Márquez Joaquín, [1917-2004]) interest in the Spanish colonial period and its culture in the Philippines. In his *The Mass of St. Sylvestre* (1946) and many other stories, Manila's Intramuros neighbourhood not only has an important role as a physical place, but also conveys identity elements and cultural meanings. By retelling the stories from Manila's magnificent past, the writer recalls the link between Filipino identity and the formation of culture during the period of Spanish colonialism.

Luis Mora-Ballesteros presents an analysis of topics related to discourse and imagery as articulated in Héctor Bujanda's novel *La última vez* (2007). This novel is a modern archetype for a sort of literature that employs apposite sets of images and establishes relevant metaphoric spaces as underpinnings for a historical frame of reference. In the case of this novel, that frame of reference is the wave of unrest in Venezuela known as the *Caracazo* (1989). Chinedu Nwadike offers an analysis of Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* as a poetic project in which Brathwaite vigorously both establishes his concept of *tidalectics* and furthermore undertakes what is described in his essay as an "excavation" of history. Najoua Stambouli argues that much of Sylvia Plath's poetry is an eloquent expression of her own factual experience. "Daddy", one of the best-known poems in her *Ariel* volume, incorporates several autobiographical details worthy of note. Stambouli investigates the diverse autobiographical elements present in "Daddy", while subsequently offering an analysis of Plath's faithfulness in transforming details about her private life into art.

Kayode Olla proposes the concept of "Psychofictive Reality" through the prism of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic ideas of Internal/External Realities and Aristotle's dramatic notion of Catharsis. He establishes key notions such as Artistic Reality, Psychic-Material Reality and Mirrorness/Relatability, in the concept of Psychofictive Reality. Anna Maria George studies the "no-touch taboo" among opposite genders in India, exploring the underlying role of sexuality, patriarchy and conventional gender roles in perpetuating the established social structure in the country. Ankita Chakravarty explores the contrary messages that are delivered to Indian audiences through the films featuring sportswomen, and Gurpreet Singh and Sushil Kumar attempt to trace the Punjabi peasants' attachment and love for their land during the colonial period, with particular reference to Sant Singh Sekhon's novel *Blood and Soil* (*Lahu Mitti*).

It is hoped that the present volume will draw readers to the work of these researchers and motivate them to follow their scholarship in the future.

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Death as Poetic Device in John Donne's *The Dampe*

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Abstract

John Donne's theological as well as secular creations are impregnated with images and ideas dealing with death: murders, ghosts, corpses, epitaphs and deaths inhabit a great number of his work. Nevertheless, death in the poetry of John Donne not only is a thematic focus, but also plays the part of a poetic device that adds sensual liveliness to the poem. Thus, in this essay I propose to go beyond the thematic boundaries of the concept of "death" in John Donne's poetry and analyze in depth its operation within poetic discourse, specifically focusing on its metaphorical nature and its ability to create sensual liveliness in the poem. With this purpose in mind, I have approached John Donne's poem "The Dampe", in which death does not appear only as a thematic concern, but also emerges as a poetic device in its own right, one able to create vivid imagery in the verse. My analysis shows that in "The Dampe", death, which always displays its gruesome primary meaning regardless of discursive contextualization, rules the process of the suspension of primary predicates and determines the way new semantic relevance is created. These new connotations, which arise from semantic irrelevance on the denominative level, introduce ambiguity into the poetic discourse and offer numerous interpretative possibilities – in other words, they deepen the meaning of the poem and intensify the aesthetic experience of its readers.

Keywords: death, metaphor, conceit, metaphysical poetry

Introduction

"In all its branches, [Renaissance literature] is not a particularly joyful or happy literature. It is on the whole rather grim and sad; even at its most intense moments there is something defeated in it. Something in the nature of its subject, one may reflect, dictates this prevailing tone" (Toulalan, 2007, p. 196). This is how Sarah Toulalan, the author of *Imagining Sex. Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England*, refers to the Renaissance written tradition. Indeed, the overwhelming sensual vividness of images of death in poetry and drama of the above-mentioned period upsets the conception of the Renaissance epoch as a reign of the vigorous affirmation of life. I argue that more than a kingdom ruled by skepticism and mundane pleasures, the Renaissance should be considered as an epoch of transition between medieval and modern times, when the syncretism of the foulness of death and the celebration of life was part of theological and secular thought.

In particular, the work of John Donne represents a clear example of this cultural tendency: his theological as well as his secular creations are impregnated with images and ideas dealing with death. The concept of death disturbed and, at the same time, fascinated the author: numerous letters to his friends as well as many of his sermons and poems demonstrate that the end of our terrestrial existence and the damage this concept brings about dominated Donne's thought.

Indeed, the thorough investigation of John Donne's correspondence, theological work as well as his poetry undertaken by Donald Robert bears witness to the fact that death not only governed the poet's thought, it even embodied life itself (Roberts, 1947, p. 960). For instance, the funeral sermon *Death's Duell, or, a consolation to the soul against the dying life and the living death of the body* reveals that, in Donne's judgement, existence and earthly pleasures symbolize continuous annihilation:

> And all our periods and transitions in this life are so many passages from death to death; our very birth and entrance into this life is *exitus a morte,* an issue from death, for in our mother['s] womb we are dead, so as that we do not know we live, not so much as we do in our sleep [...] this issue, this deliverance, from that death of the womb, is an entrance, a delivering over to another death, the manifold deaths of this world; we have a winding-sheet in our mother's womb which grows with us from our conception, and we come forth into the world up in that winding-sheet, for we come to seek a grave (Donne, 2001, pp. 575–578).

Here Donne declares that human existence is ruled by the destructive principle that everything tends to its end; in other words, he abolishes every distinction between life and death, a tendency that was very common to the medieval and even the Renaissance psyche (White, 1974, p. 26).

In this context it is no surprise that thirty-two of the fifty-five erotic poems of John Donne's treat the concept of death in one way or another: murders, ghosts, corpses, epitaphs and deaths inhabit a great number of his verses. Nevertheless, death in the poetry of John Donne not only is a thematic focus, but also plays the part of a poetic device that adds sensual liveliness to the poem. As David Reid puts it: "[In Donne's poetry] death is his regular figure for screwing experience up to a pitch of infinite intensity" (Reid, 2000, p. 35).

Without a doubt, the word "death" in itself has an undeniable rhetorical effectiveness: when it is pronounced, it releases a chain of reactions in the human body, from a slight shudder, to the

pains of love. In the language of poetry, "death" amplifies meaning, that is, it intensifies and deepens the message of the poem, magnifying its content. The rhetorical efficacy of the word "death" is increased if one adds to it the strength of its eloquence, whose power derives from the linking of two apparently incomparable, in effect, opposing ideas: life and its end. This ability of the word "death" to link semantically distant concepts is a metaphorical part of its nature that is fundamental to the creation of a metaphysical conceit that, according to Dr. Johnson, yokes the most heterogeneous ideas in a violent way (Huntley, 1969, p. 103).

Thus, in this essay I propose to go beyond the thematic boundaries of the concept of "death" in John Donne's poetry and analyze in depth its operation within poetic discourse, specifically focusing on its metaphorical nature and its ability to create sensual liveliness in the poem. With this purpose in mind, I have approached John Donne's poem "The Dampe", in which death does not appear only as a thematic concern, but also emerges as a poetic device in its own right, one able to create vivid imagery in the verse.

Methodology

In order to examine the word "death" and its metaphorical nature, I will make use of the concepts Paul Ricouer puts forth in *The Rule of Metaphor. The creation of meaning in language* and those that Herman Parret suggests in his book *Epiphanies de la presence. Essais semio-esthetiques.*[1] Since I argue that the union of discursive and emotional aspects of language is what produces sensual liveliness in a poem, I think that the approaches of these two scholars are accurate because they allow us the opportunity to observe the development of the nominal and referential function of the metaphor within the discourse. This is of great importance in the analysis of poetry since the construction of meanings in a poem takes place at all of these levels.

The essential postulate of Paul Ricoeur that I use in my paper states that one of the principal aspects of the creation of a verbal image is the tension inherent in its meaning, produced by the coming together of ideas that are semantically distant from one another. According to Ricoeur, the function of distance plays a crucial part in the mutation of meaning that makes a self-contradictory and self-destructive statement another expression of a significant self-contradictory nature. Thus, two ideas are superimposed, creating a verbal image. The other concept of Ricouer that I incorporate into my textual analysis of the macabre metaphor refers to the referential function of this trope in the construction of the sensual liveliness of the poetic discourse. This is due to the ability of the metaphor to connect fiction and reality by means of emotions projected by the work. This converts the emotions of the poetic language into another tool fundamental to the construction of meaning and the creation of the verbal image. In particular, Ricoeur comments: "When I speak, I know that something is brought to language. This knowledge is no longer intra-linguistic but extra-linguistic; it moves from being to being-said, at the very time that language itself moves from sense to reference" (Ricouer, 2004, p. 360).

From Parret's study *Epiphanies de la presence. Essais semio-esthetiques* I have adopted the term "sensual vividness", which refers to the creation of imagery by means of perceptions and

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[1] In my essay I approach Spanish edition of Parret's book, published by the University of Lima in 2008. Parret, H. (2008). *Epifanías de la presencia. Ensayos semio-estéticos*. (D. Blanco, Trans.). Lima: Universidad de Lima. (Original work published in 2006).

mental images. Nevertheless, I have paid special attention to the role of extra-linguistic elements such as memories, icons, signs, cultural constructions and experiences in the creation of sensual vividness in verse, since, for Parret, the extra-linguistic references constitute the essential condition for poetry to create the world by means of the sentiments and memories that the author expresses. In the end, it will be up to the reader to reconstruct the world of the work based on the descriptive references. This is how the didactic function of language is put on hold in order to create sensual vividness through the use of fiction and emotions. Parret's proposition seems to me to be especially pertinent in the particular case of Donne since for this poet not only "a thought […] was an experience" (Eliot, 1951, p. 287), but the experience itself was the source of his inspiration.

Given that the poetry of Donne is highly connotative, in which secondary denotations are always given preference, it is necessary to take into account the tension between the world of his work and reality. That is why I consider it crucial to have a clear idea of the different forms of expression related to death in Western culture that the author uses. This is essential to gain access to the meaning of his poetry, through an understanding of the reality and emotional atmosphere of the period in which Donne lived and wrote.

Death in Renaissance Literature and Art

Thus, I wish to begin the analysis of *The Dampe* with a brief study of the pervasive presence of a syncretic relationship between life and its end in Renaissance literature and art. The transitory nature of worldly pleasures, a reflexion on mortality known as *memento mori*, was a frequent concern during medieval times. However, in the course of the sixteenth century, the idea that life was nothing other than the path leading to one's tomb gradually lost its didactic power until becoming converted into a new and disturbing association of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. Renaissance paintings, better than any other form of art, unveil this fascination with macabre eroticism. The work of the unknown author of *Dead Lovers* (c. 1480-1528), which portrays rotting corpses clinging together in the grave, is one of the first pictorial representations that embodies this syncretism between dust and sexual pleasures. According to Jacques Le Goff, the author of *A History of the Body in the Middle Ages*, the snakes emerging from body orifices and the frog biting the female reproductive organs are symbols of lust and, likewise, the conventional punishment awaiting adulterers in hell (Le Goff & Truong, 2003). In light of this observation, the painting *Dead Lovers*, whose erotic context is clearly implicit, suggests more than one interpretation.

James Clark suggests that at the end of the fifteenth century, this macabre representation of eroticism attained new shades of meaning and became the theme of *Death and the maiden,* whose female nudity symbolized that dark bond between sexuality and death (Clark, 1986). From this moment on, the female figure was not involved in a final dance, but rather in intercourse with the decaying corpse, an image that grew increasingly daring over time. These paintings did not include didactic verses, and thus their instructive power lost a great deal of intensity. Instead, the main focus shifted to female nakedness and the heroine's sexual interaction with the male figure of Death. The skeleton – the dreadful seducer – became a conventional motif of Renaissance pictorial representation, especially celebrated in the German pictorial tradition.

According to Clark, one of the most famous paintings of this nature is Hans Baldung Grien's work *Eve, the Serpent and Death* (1510-1515), in which death and lust embody essential parts of its composition. Eve, with an apple in her hand, holds the serpent's tail while flirting with

Death. The image of the nude female body is enthralling, the striking pallor of her skin becoming the visual focus of this artwork. Death, in its turn, hidden in the background, appears as a hideous lover whose coquettish look contributes an unsettling tone to the painting. Without any doubt, Eve shows no passive submission, helplessness or horror; on the contrary, her image displays a sexual attraction to Death (Clark, 1986). During the Renaissance, this shift in aesthetic judgement toward macabre eroticism is considered by Philippe Ariès as the origin of necrophilia, which reached the highest point of its expression in the nineteenth century (Aries, 1974).

Death in John Donne's Poetry

Jonathan Dollimore, the author of *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture,* affirms that the enjoyment of corpses was also found quite often in Renaissance literature (Dollimore, 2001). John Donne, for instance, frequently plays with this strange fusion of life and death, with cadavers and *post mortem* putrefaction used as recurrent themes in the author's secular and theological thought (Targoff, 2008). If we consider his 160 existent sermons, we can see how persistent is his fear about decay in the grave and how often the author tries to find the ways to decrease the length of this posthumous phase. *Death's Duel, or, a consolation to the soul against the dying life and living death of the body* is one of the most celebrated sermons in which the author expresses this concern:

> We must all pass this posthume death, this death after death, nay, this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrefaction, of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave, when these bodies that have been the children of royal parents, and the parents of royal children, must say with Job, "Corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister" (Donne, 2001, p. 581).

Here we see that Donne reveals his anxiety by sharing the horrors of bodily corruption and disintegration in the tomb with his readers. However, the sermon he preached on one of his favorite biblical verses - "And though, after my skin, wormes destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26) – depicts physical decay in even more gruesome terms:

> Painters have presented to us with some horrour the *sceleton,* the frame of the bones of a mans body; but the state of a body, in the dissoltion of the grave, no pencil can present to us. Between that excrementall jelly that thy body is made of at first, and that jelly which thy body dissolves to at last; there is not so noysome, so putrid a thing in nature (Targoff, 2006, p. 222).

These lines show that the dissolved corpse along with "excrementall jelly" and "putrid" smells are the images that Donne dreads the most. The author just cannot deal with the idea of the posthumous decomposition and destruction of his earthly being. Still, the reference to painters who portrayed dead bodies in a post-mortem state suggests that Donne was familiar with the artistic movement of macabre realism and that in his mind bodily decay after death was not only a source of anxiety, but also constituted the origin of his perverse fascination with it.

The Dampe **and its Macabre Seductive Discourse**

A rotten corpse is also a frequent guest in Donne's erotic poetry. This baffling link between existence and its end creates striking images that surpass such Renaissance conventions as

"dying of a broken heart" or "being love-sick" and transcend patterns of mere poetic comparison. Such is the case of the poem "The Dampe", in which the seductive discourse delivered by the deceased dissolves all the distinctions between decay and voluptuousness and turns rotten cadavers into an essential part of the erotic conquest and the construction of its meaning.

> When I am dead, and Doctors know not why,
>   And my friends' curiositie
> Will have me cut up to survay each part,
> When they shall find your Picture in my heart,
>   You think a sodaine dampe of love
>   Will thorough all their senses move,
> And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
> Your murder to the name of Massacre.
>
> Poore victories! But if you dare be brave,
>   And pleasure in your conquest have,
> First kill th'enormous Gyant, your Disdaine;
> And let th' enchantresse Honor, next be slaine;
>   And like a Goth and Vandall rise,
>   Deface Records and Histories
> Of your owne arts and triumphs over men,
> And without such advantage kill me then.
>
> For I could muster up, as well as you,
>   My Gyants, and my Witches too,
> Which are vast Constancy and Secretnesse;
> But these I neyther looke for nor professe;
>   Kill mee as woman, let me die
>   As a meere man; do you but try
> Your passive valor, and you shall finde then,
> Naked you'have odds enough of any man.

"The Dampe" is precisely the poem where the cadaver, besides being granted a voice, emerges as an essential poetic device, a conceit that embraces semantic, emotional and extra-linguistic levels of poetic discourse and transforms the commonplace of the game of seduction into a source of powerful imagery. Diana Fuss entitles this body of literary works, in which the cadaver refuses to remain silent, as "corpse poem". According to the author, this kind of poetic writing creates extremely powerful imagery through the use of incompatible images that tend to annul each other:

> Corpse poem is a curious paradox. A dead body and poetic discourse are mutually incompatible, two formal states each precluding the other. A poem implies subjective depth while a corpse negates interiority. A poem signals sensual vividness of voice while a corpse testifies to its absence. A poem quickens language while a corpse stills it. The fantastical coupling of corpse and poem denotes an extravagant rhetorical conceit, an impossible literary utterance (Fuss, 2003, p. 1).

Clearly, then, in the case of John Donne's poem "The Dampe", this unimaginable conceit, in which sexual fantasies are interwoven to create an epitaph is, without any doubt, the source of

one of the poet's most striking images as well as the origin of an unsparing conceptual discrepancy that produces extreme levels of sensual vividness in the discourse.

Indeed, to give voice to human remains is to turn the corpse into a figure of speech, since such a metamorphosis evokes different levels of real life experience in the minds of the readers, and, consequently, increases the emotional intensity of the verse. Diana Fuss in her essay "Corpse Poem" substantiates this point:

> Speaking cadaver [creates] that improbable body of literature one might more properly identify as *ars essendi morti*, the art of being dead. *Ars essendi morti* names a powerful oxymoron, since "being dead" annihilates the very possibility of "being" as such. Stretching the limits of ontology beyond the point of reason, the corpse poem poses a series of difficult questions about death, survival, and the animating power of language (Fuss, 2003, p. 2).

This conjecture allows us to understand that the speaking corpse in "The Dampe" does not only represent the irresolvable paradox of life and death, a thematic concern and source of inspiration for John Donne, but it also embodies a powerful rhetorical device in its own right.

As we have seen earlier, in poetic discourse macabre conceits of any type turn commonplace events into exceptional episodes that demand an immediate response on the part of the readers. Macabre conceits intensify and deepen the meaning, functioning as rhetorical tools of amplification (Tuve, 1947), since even the bare mention of eternal rest induces a wide range of adverse reactions in the human body. Still, the major source of the eloquent power of these grim images resides in the ability of death to knot together dissimilar ideas (life and its end, corruption and erotic desire), as well as to create semantic tension in poetic discourse, in other words, to produce metaphors.

A close look at the meaning of the construction of macabre conceits reveals that it is a binary process, in which the interaction of linguistic elements and sensory perceptions related to poetic language is of great concern. On the one hand, the merging of dissimilar notions, such as sexual desire and death, represents a crucial moment in the production of verbal images, as during this process, primary semantic categories are destroyed and new logical connections are created. This mutation of meaning that occurs as a result of the dismantling of semantic networks turns an eloquent, self-contradictory statement, which arises from a self-destructive utterance, into an image. Thus, this verbal image is the result of the superimposition of two dissimilar ideas, which produces an apparently new connection, a semantic proximity, between the two terms, despite the distance in their meanings. The key concept of this process is the extreme conceptual heterogeneity of the combined denominations, since only through the shock of contradiction, it is possible to achieve the interaction of multiple semantic fields that opens unlimited possibilities for interpretation and turns connotations into primary meanings.

On the other hand, it is important to take into consideration the affective aspect of the construction of verbal images, since it determines the way the conceptual perception is delivered. That is to say, rather than being completely dependent on the linguistic elements of a written work, the interpretation also integrates the readers' cultural backgrounds and their emotional responses, since it is precisely these factors that dictate which semantic categories are brought together and which new logical connections are established. The above-mentioned peculiarity is quite significant in relation to the construction of the meaning of a macabre

conceit, as the loss of life is a totally personal experience, it can neither be taken on by others, nor communicated by the person experiencing it.

Indeed, no clear register exists that refers to the act of dying; the only thing we can count on are near-death experiences. To put it another way, death belongs to the flow of lived experiences; nevertheless, it is quite different from that which we sense and perceive. It is not possible to establish a link between this concept and personal experience, which is how a phantasmatic presence is created, which, according to Parret, is always determined by the cultural context (Parret, 2008).

Roughly speaking, death is a culturally-constructed notion, due to the fact that the conception of passing away differs widely among societies. Namely, the macabre Western tradition and the Mexican celebration set out different approaches to this existential question: while for the Western world death represents mourning, Mexican culture celebrates death, while also mocking it. Therefore, the interpretation of the macabre conceit in great part depends on the extra-linguistic aspects of the work, given that in great part the cultural context is what transforms the imaginary experience into a gloomy modality, which, together with the emotions, neutralized the concept of "death".

Hence, this macabre metaphor merges visual and verbal aspects of poetic discourse. The visualization of thoughts related to death is an intuitive process that cannot be taught or governed by any rules, since the emergence of the stream of images escapes voluntary control. Still, the verbal aspect of this macabre metaphor is attached to its meaning and the readers' ability to create pictorial reflections. The associative richness of the concept of "death" enables the creation of a large number of vivid metaphors: although the arc of resemblance is bent to the limit, the arrow of meaning will always follow a predetermined direction. This multiplicity of associative possibilities is what grants death the potential to establish bonds between the missing parts of each context, to display the unlimited stream of meaning through extra-linguistic references related to the readers' cultural backgrounds. The synthesis of all of these processes creates the iconic moment of the emergence of the metaphor, which embraces a fragment of reality shaped by the readers' imagination as well as by the functioning of poetic language.

This is exactly how new meanings are created in "The Dampe". Right from the first stanza, the semantic link between opposite notions discloses the stream of connotative meanings within the very functioning of the language and not just in its figurative use:

> When I am dead, and Doctors know not why,
>   And my friend's curiositie
> Will have me cut up to survay each part,
> When they shall find your Picture in my heart,
>   You think a sodaine dampe of love
>   Will through all their senses move,
> And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
> Your murder to the name of Massacre.

Indeed, the language of this stanza is simple and pure. There is not one word in these lines (with the exception of "dampe"[2]) that could possibly complicate the process of the construction of meaning. The morbid conceit that manifests the deadly nature of love is created by "the richness of association" (Eliot, 1951, p. 244) that the terms "dead", "murder", and "Massacre" bring to the poem. The work of resemblance that nourishes this metaphor evolves from a symbolic notion (the concept of love) to a concrete one, in which the image of the autopsy represents the bond between the abstract idea and reality. The metaphorical process of the first stanza, therefore, merely provides a rational solution to the oxymoronic expression "the living dead", which produces this juxtaposition. This new figurative meaning is not only the result of the semantic clash but is also a consequence of the new relevance created on the denominative level. It is worth mentioning that this new and purely lexical relevance is not mediated by the context, quite to the contrary. The associative richness of the terms employed in the poem is what produces connotative meanings, an unlimited stream of images, a brief discourse in itself. Along with the concepts that evoke a contemporary cultural context and arouse an emotional response in the reader, the connotative plurality of this stanza leads the metaphorical process to a discursive level, where new meanings are constructed.

The image of the corpse in love creates new connotative relevance that reveals the interconnection between the horror that death induces in the Western mind and the anguish that sexual desire has come to represent in this culture. Batalle, in his study *Erotism. Death and Sensuality*, makes evident the prevalent nature of this macabre erotic drive:

> I can link my revulsion at the decay (my imagination suggests it, not my memory, so profoundly is it a forbidden object for me) with the feelings that obscenity arouses in me. I can tell myself that repugnance and horror are the mainsprings of my desire, that such desire is only aroused as long as its object causes a chasm no less deep than death to yawn within me, and that this desire originates in its opposite, horror (Batalle, 1986, p. 58).

Capitalizing on Bataille's approach in the context of this analysis, it becomes clear that the associative richness of the conceit of the first stanza not only embodies the moment of dramatic intensity. It also represents the definitive extra-linguistic reference that consolidates the conception of sexual desire as fatal and governs the way that the new meanings are constructed. Besides, it establishes the tension between metaphorical truth and materiality while nourishing and intensifying emotions. Paul Ricouer denotes this capacity of the metaphor to create a new reality as the function of poetry:

> If metaphor adds nothing to the description of the world, at least it adds to the ways in which we perceive; and this is the poetic function of metaphor. This still rests upon resemblance, but at the level of feelings. In symbolizing one situation by means of another, metaphor 'infuses' the feelings attached to the symbolizing situation into the heart of the situation that is symbolized. In this 'transference of feelings,' the similarity between feelings is induced by the resemblance of situations. In its poetic function, therefore, metaphor extends the power of double meaning from the cognitive realm to the affective (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 224).

This statement demonstrates that the metaphor is precisely the medium by which language

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[2] Although the meaning of "dampe" in a contemporary context is linked to moisture, in the Renaissance it signified a noxious vapour of some kind. See Nutt, J. (1999). *John Donne: The Poems.* Palgrave.

reaches the symbolic level, where a new reality is constructed.

Yet, perhaps, in the case of the macabre conceit of the first stanza. the extreme discrepancy between the compared concepts constitutes the most important aspect in the construction of sensual vividness in the verse. Indeed, the terms "dead", "murder", and "Massacre" do not only testify to the destructive nature of love, but also determine the degree of sensual vividness – it grows as the intensity of the meanings increases. In other words, "Massacre", the ultimate expression of savage killing, produces a supreme moment of dramatic tension, stemming from the enormous semantic disparity of the terms compared.

Thus, there are several factors that contribute to the construction of sensual vividness in the first stanza. Nevertheless, the macabre image of the deceased body entranced by the "sodaine Dampe of love" is the main source of this rhetorical efficacy. The capacity of this macabre representation of sexual desire to link the multiplicity of points of disparity between death and passion, as well as its ability to decrease the extreme conceptual rupture between these opposed notions, greatly expands the interpretative field of the poem by the transformation of connotative meanings into primary ones. In other words, the metaphorical process of "The Dampe" is not manifest unless all of the literal meanings are destroyed, giving rise to a new conceptual category, which creates a new meaning. It is this innovation in the creation of meaning that constitutes a living metaphor and produces the sensual vividness of the poem.

Regarding the importance of the construction of new meanings on the ruins of the original ones, it is worth mentioning that this issue becomes clearly evident in the second stanza, where new semantic relevance is created mainly on the nominative level of the poetic discourse:

> Poore victories! But if you dare be brave,
> And pleasure in your conquest have,
> First kill th'enormous Gyant, your Disdaine;
> And let th' enchantresse Honor, next be slaine;
> And like a Goth and Vandall rise,
> Deface Records and Histories
> Of your owne arts and triumphs over men,
> And without such advantage kill me then.

Perhaps, in comparison to the first stanza of "The Dampe", the second one is somehow more obvious in terms of its poetic functioning. For instance, the fact that the term "kill" belongs to the semantic field of erotic discourse is quite evident and even anticipated. Along with the unostentatious language of the fragment that facilitates the perception of its meaning and reveals the message of the verse almost in its entirety, this point lessens the intensity of the sensual vividness of "The Dampe" to some extent. Moreover, the exclamation "Poore victories!" establishes the link between the content of the first and the second stanzas as well as revealing the goal of this poetic temptation that lies within the boundaries of carnal satisfaction. The reference to fantastic creatures such as "Gyant" and "enchantresse" (Renaissance commonplaces proper to seductive discourse) (Marotti, 2008) expresses the cynicism of the erotic conquest undertaken by the poetic voice. Thus, the ambiguity that should arise from the interaction of the passionate and macabre semantic fields disappears, and the artifice of this seductive endeavor emerges on the surface of the text, diminishing somewhat the rhetorical power of this composition.

However, the grandiloquence of the second stanza rests on the highly connotative nature of its

extra-linguistic references, in particular, of the term "deface". As Valentín Groebner suggests in his study *Defaced. The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*, this term could refer to disfigurement (*denasatio*,[3] to be more precise), a quite conventional punishment for excessive promiscuity during the Late Middle Ages.[4] Taking into consideration that executions were quite common spectacles at the time, this conjecture does not sound that implausible, allowing us to consider "deface" both as a conventional representation and as a direct reference to the concept of empirical reality.

It is worth mentioning that the sensual vividness of this verse, constructed by means of the above-mentioned extra-linguistic reference, is the result of the activation of the fixed experiences, perceptions, and feelings that have accumulated in the readers' subconsciousness. This process condenses the sensual and visual aspects of the verse and converts these general and unquestionable truths stored in the memory into reality. Language usage, powers of recall, personal censorship, affection and desire, as well as social control – everything that allows readers to immediately enhance and convert the connotative references of the given text into past events – determine the way fixed experiences are built up in literary discourse. In other words, the readers' perception of these realities and their socio-cultural context is what matters in the construction of meaning. However, it is worth bearing in mind that this sensual vividness does not come into being unless these accumulated experiences undergo linguistic and emotional transformation.

Hence, in the context of the present discussion, to "deface" is precisely one of those patterns of behavior that form part of the Western cultural legacy, one able to be mentally accessed, though not consciously present in the readers' minds. This means that in the case of the word "deface", even the smallest allusion to it is enough for readers to start establishing semantic associations between eroticism and the violence implied in this word, and the images related to this denotative discrepancy begin to unfold in their minds. This evolution of interwoven images modulates the perception of fixed experiences, since it does not only reveal extra-linguistic information hidden in the text, but also transmits sentiments expressed by the poetic voice.

Therefore, the intensity of sensual vividness is even greater in the case of fixed experiences due to the subjective nature of this process that evokes deeply familiar and even intimate images in the minds of the audience. This is by far the most efficient way to create sensual vividness in verse, since the perception of the world is based on the accumulation of verbal and non-verbal allusions, which represents the innate experience of every human being. In a broader context, these references modify our comprehension of reality, as innate images are what we think and what governs our interpretation of the world.

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[3] *Denasatio* is the amputation of the nose. The face was considered the noblest part of all of the human body due to its apparent resemblance to the divine image. Therefore, the disfigurement of the face was a procedure that absolutely dishonoured the person subject to it.

[4] Prostitutes, adulterers of both sexes, and homosexuals were punished by the amputation of the nose. The Augsburg books of punishment, for example, mention among the delinquents exiled from the city a "noseless Anna" and a "noseless whore from Ulm". In 1462 two young men who had engaged in a homosexual act were sentenced to this form of mutilation. In the same fashion, popular culture shows interest in the above-mentioned form of penance. Marie de France in one of her *Lais* narrates the story of the virtuous werewolf Bisclavret, whose unfaithful wife deceitfully condemned him to remain forever in his animal form. Bisclavret's revenge was ferocious: he bit off his wife's nose. See Groebner, V. (2008). *Defaced. The Visual Culture of Violence in the Late Middle Ages*. (P. Selwyn, Trans.). New York: Zone Book.

The term "deface", then, does not only introduce a verbal reference to public punishment into the poem. It also allows the establishment of clear links between immediate reality and a determined intrinsic experience. Again, the importance of the irrational side of the human mind in the construction of meaning can hardly be overestimated. Valentin Groebner is one of the authors who has brought to light the relevance of this aspect of the construction of meaning. "When we speak of violence", observes the author, "we are always speaking of imagination: the images of mutilated and disfigured bodies in the media function as visual stimuli, as effectively orchestrated exoticism" (Groebner, 2008, p. 28). Taking into consideration Groebner's viewpoint, it is quite plausible to suggest that the visual imagery of the second stanza is, on the whole, the result of internal processes working in the mind of the audience, where the unfolding of connotative multiplicity is predetermined by the array of signs that the text reveals. So, in this way emotional fiction is rewarded with meaning, since it joins the world of the work and the real world, turning sensations and mental images into reality.

Hence, it becomes quite evident that the associative extravagance of extra-linguistic references is an important component of the process forcing the readers to search for metaphorical truth within the logical absurdity that arises as a result of the use of terms with antithetic literal meanings. This process of combination and selection plays an important part within this stage, as it defines the logical boundaries of newly created predicates. Although "deface" establishes the link between two different semantic fields (those of sexual interaction and of punishment), the process of metaphor creation does not begin until the disparity of meanings is replaced by the reduction of this conceptual distance. Indeed, the figurative meaning cannot be conceived of prior to the instant when the new semantic relevance is produced. This is true in the case of the term "deface", where the verbal image is created by the associative richness of the extra-linguistic reference as well as by the semantic detachment of literal meanings from the original context. Even though at first violence and the feeling of shame (the primary meaning of "deface") rule the construction of the message, the final stage of image production is still based on an erotic context.

Thus, there are certain differences in how sensual vividness is constructed in the first and the second stanzas. Even though in both cases, the importance of primary semantic categories in the creation of meaning is undeniable, the first stanza mostly relies on the associative richness of terms, while the subsequent verse emphasizes the key role of the readers' emotional responses induced by the extra-linguistic references. As for the last stanza, it is worth mentioning that the associative richness of the terms employed here loses its strength, and its sensual vividness is essentially constructed through the superposition, overloading and thickening of the series of images that had already emerged earlier in the poem:

> For I could muster up, as well as you,
>   My Gyants, and my Witches too,
> Which are vast Constancy and Secretnesse;
> But these I neyther looke for nor professe;
>   Kill mee as Woman, let mee die
>   As a meere man; doe you but try
> Your passive valor, and you shall finde then,
> Naked you' have odds enough of any man.

The connection between passion and death that nourishes the third stanza lines "Kill Woman as mee, let mee die / As a meere man" does not produce any feeling of amazement, quite the opposite. Although the climax of sexual intercourse is introduced by semantically unrelated

concepts such as "kill" and "die", in the context of this verse, the figurative character of this representation loses its dramatic power and evolves into a mere commonplace. Therefore, the conceit of this passage lacks ambiguity and implies nothing but the statement of the fact that the erotic conquest reaches its predetermined outcome.

However, the third stanza of "The Dampe" is not entirely lacking in sensual vividness, since its imagery embodies the sum of the images found throughout the poem. Namely, the sensual vividness of the third stanza essentially rests on the ability of metaphor to erect and to extend parallel structures, as well as on its capacity to continually disclose new meanings. Even though the juxtaposition of love and death no longer brings about astonishment on a semantic level, the iconic nature of this unusual bond keeps manifesting itself through the net of recurrent images that interconnect both the voluptuous and the macabre aspects of sexual intercourse. The sensual vividness of the third stanza, therefore, is the result of the interaction of various metaphors that emerge at the nominative level and evolve within the discourse. On the one hand, the macabre images offset the semantic discrepancy; on the other hand, they erect a network of intertwined concepts that create indefinite connotative possibilities and open up an unlimited field of interpretation.

Conclusion

John Donne's poem "The Dampe" is a work where death does not only appear as a thematic concern, but also emerges as a poetic device in its own right. It possesses extraordinary dramatic force, since even a brief reference to this inevitability demands an immediate emotional, intellectual and even physical response on the part of the readers. Even a slight allusion to the extra-linguistic references that represent death within the Occidental cultural legacy turns the subjectivity of the poetic voice into the subjectivity of the readers and links empirical as well as imaginative aspects of the poetic discourse – that is to say, it creates sensual vividness. Associative richness and the ability of death to establish links between opposing ideas is another way the rhetorical power of this grim concept emerges in the poetry of Donne. In "The Dampe", death, which always displays its gruesome primary meaning regardless of discursive contextualization, rules the process of the suspension of primary predicates and determines the way new semantic relevance is created. These new connotations, which arise from semantic irrelevance on the denominative level, introduce ambiguity into the poetic discourse and offer numerous interpretative possibilities – in other words, they deepen the meaning of the poem and intensify the aesthetic experience of its readers.

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The Normative Significance of Flatulence: Aesthetics, Etiquette, and Ethics

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Abstract

Proceeding on the basis of reports of a proposal in 2011 to criminalize public flatulence in Malawi, the normative significance of flatulence is considered from the respective standpoints of aesthetics, etiquette, and ethics, and it is indicated how aesthetics and etiquette may themselves also have ethical significance. It is concluded that etiquette and ethics may both require that certain violations of etiquette and ethics should sometimes be ignored.

Keywords: flatulence, ethics, aesthetics, etiquette, normativity, manners, Malawi

An Odd Legislative Proposal

Many jurisdictions have laws governing activities that produce unwanted noise. Laws may specify maximum decibel levels for outdoor music venues or restrict them to certain times of day; they may require mufflers on motor vehicles but ban Hollywood or glasspack mufflers; they may mandate lower sound levels for hospital zones; they may bar some people from producing certain kinds of sounds (e.g. ordinary folks aren't allowed to use sirens on their vehicles). Many jurisdictions also have laws (often in the form of zoning laws) directly or indirectly regulating the production of noxious odors: chemical plants, pig farms, feedlots, and tanneries may not be located in certain areas; people may not keep livestock in their suburban backyards. All of this is unexceptional and, within reason, unexceptionable.

So what, then, are we to make of the bill proposed in 2011 by Malawi's President Bingu wa Mutharika, which purported to criminalize the passing of gas in public? The relevant clause in the bill stated:

> Any person who vitiates the atmosphere in any place so as to make it noxious to the public [or] to the health of persons in general dwelling or carrying on business in the neighbourhood or passing along a public way shall be guilty of a misdemeanour. (*BBC News*, 2011, February 4).

This was interpreted by Malawi's Justice Minister George Chaponda to include farting. When asked about enforcement, Chaponda replied that it would be similar to laws banning public urination. However, Solicitor General Anthony Kamanga contradicted Chaponda, saying that "fouling the air" just means pollution, and "How any reasonable or sensible person can construe the provision to criminalising farting in public is beyond me" (*BBC News*, 2011, February 4). Quite. Nor have I found any evidence that anyone was ever charged or prosecuted for publicly farting in Malawi; reason has apparently prevailed.

The case is nevertheless interesting insofar as it concerns both unwanted noises and unwanted odors. Yet it is not the noise that is being subsumed in the wording of the legislation, but it is the odor that, if noxious, is being taken as an indication of "vitiated" atmospheric quality. The noise would just constitute audible evidence that an air-befouling event had occurred. To be sure, such noise is not always accompanied by a noxious odor, though admittedly vitiated air quality is not always detectable by olfactory means. Nor is the expelled gas always accompanied by the noise, whether offensively odoriferous (as per the vernacular idiom, "silent but deadly") or not. In any case, the brevity and volume of the noise would not seem to rise to the level of what is nowadays regarded as noise pollution, and any associated malodor would not seem to be sufficient to constitute a health hazard.[1]

Chaponda's motivation for seeking to criminalize farting is not predicated on levels of noise or air-quality anyway; instead, he expresses a moralizing rationale for such criminalization: it would promote "public decency" (*BBC News*, 2011, February 4). In short, 'The government of

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[1] Or at least not the health of the *general* public. The link between airway reflux and asthma is discussed in Morice (2013). Morice mentions the early work of J. J. Floyer, who refers to "True Flatulent *Asthma*" (Floyer, 1698, preface) allegedly caused by "Windy Spirits". Floyer, himself an asthmatic, describes as "extraordinary [*sic*] offensive … any … ill Smell during the Fit" (Floyer, 1698, chap. 1). Whether the wind from an "Inflation of the Stomach", which breaks downwards as flatulence instead of upwards as reflux, can actually *cause* (as opposed to merely being correlated with) an asthma attack is not established, but if we take an asthmatic like Floyer at his word, the smell could conceivably still cause or increase physical discomfort.

Malawi plan to punish persistent offenders "who foul the air" in a bid to "mould responsible and disciplined citizens"' (Fernandes, 2011, January 28).

However, we must remember that, at least for most of us, farting is a middle range behavior, falling between the extremes of reflexive behavior on the one hand and deliberate action on the other. Some people can sometimes fart at will, some people can sometimes control or suppress an incipient unintended fart, whereas some people sometimes have no control at all. For the last group, with the absence of any intent, Chaponda's proposed application of the bill would be tantamount to a strict liability law, and given that "ought implies can" the purported rationale of improving moral character would be otiose.

Any phenomenon that is unwanted and offensive is *pro tanto* undesirable in a normative sense, so we might raise the general question of what the normative significance might be. In addition to the moral significance intimated by Chaponda, but downplayed if not actually denied by his detractors, flatulence also has normative significance pertaining to other distinguishable albeit interrelated normative categories, namely aesthetics and etiquette. In what follows I will first briefly discuss the aesthetics and etiquette of flatulence and then in the final section return to the question of the ethical significance of flatulence. It will be seen that we can agree with Chaponda that flatulence has moral significance without agreeing that such significance is worthy of our attention, let alone enshrining in law.

The Aesthetics of Flatulence

In his science fiction novel *Galápagos*, Kurt Vonnegut takes finding flatulence funny to be one of the enduring traits of the human species, which, unlike brain capacity, could survive even a million years of evolution:

> And people still laugh about as much as they ever did, despite their shrunken brains. If a bunch of them are lying around on a beach, and one of them farts, everybody else laughs and laughs, just as people would have done a million years ago. (Vonnegut, 2009, p. 223)

We may agree that flatulence has been commonly and perennially regarded in a humorous vein; indeed, the world's oldest known joke is apparently a Sumerian fart gag from 1900 BC (Spiegel, 2015, August 17). Moreover, the production of fart humor in the form of jokes and cartoons, as well as slapstick videos recording both real and simulated farts, seems to be an ongoing cultural industry, as some modest googling will readily confirm. Numerous famous folks have also made more literary contributions to fart humor (Spiegel, 2015, August 17) and one also finds classical artworks devoted to the subject (*Daily Mail*, 2012, February 21).

So far we have been talking about representations of flatulence in words or images. Cultural creations that are verbal or pictorial have aesthetically relevant properties and hence are subject to aesthetic judgements, so presumably there is no issue in judging on aesthetic grounds jokes, cartoons, videos, paintings, texts, literature, and so forth that deal with flatulence. This is bolstered by the fact that farting is associated with humor, and humor is nowadays also considered to fall within the remit of aesthetics. And since aesthetic judgements can be normative, there should be no problems as regards judging representations of flatulence or the roles played by such representations in normative terms. Whether cultural creations qua being of a certain genre are regarded as lowbrow or highbrow is of course itself an aesthetic

normative judgement, but that is a separate issue from whether a representation within the genre is judged to be well or badly executed or deployed.

But what about live flatulence in public, a presentation, so to speak, instead of a mere representation? Again there are precedents, such as Joseph Pujol, the famous Le Pétomane, who elevated his flatulence to the level of a comedic performing art, short melodies included (cf. Moore, 2013). It is no accident that Pujol was referred to as a *fartiste*, with its implicit allusion to the normative cachet of artiste.

The Etiquette of Flatulence

Notwithstanding this broadly aesthetic phenomenon, many would still regard deliberate[2] public farting as rude, crude, bad-mannered, uncouth, offensive, shameful, or disrespectful, as well as an embarrassment for the perpetrator. Thus, there appears to be a double standard, with farting regarded as a tolerable occurrence giving rise to mirth and merriment on the one hand, or provoking disgust and censure on the other.

Certain behaviors, that is, belching or slurping one's tea or noodles, which are regarded as crude or indelicate in some cultures, are considered normal and pass without notice in other cultures. Indeed, in some cultures belching after a meal is virtually obligatory as a polite sign of appreciation and satiety. Allegedly, farting after a meal is likewise a sign of appreciation in Inuit culture.[3] Whether or not such farting might actually be thus authorized by rules of etiquette, it is surely not controversial that in some circumstances, intentionally farting is not a breach of etiquette that evinces disrespect but rather a mock breach that is not intended to be taken seriously; that is, in some circumstances the normal rules of etiquette are suspended. For example, boys in a boarding-school dorm or a group of young men gathered in front of a TV to watch a football game and drink beer, may engage in deliberate farting without restraint and with much hilarity and conviviality. There is a time and a place for such behavior, and what is "bad form" in one situation may be indifferent or even applauded in another.

The Ethics of Flatulence

We might ask what makes behaviour that is unobjectionable in private as well as in a few public situations, become objectionable in other public situations. Although Chaponda sought to criminalize farting under the legislative category of a harm potentially injurious to public health, that was rightly regarded as laughably unreasonable. One can of course imagine logically possible cases of potential harm, for example, someone entering a highly sensitive biosecure area without proper suiting and compromising biosecurity by, *inter alia*, maliciously passing gas; however, to regard such an unlikely possibility as warranting the specific mention of farting in legislation (or in the interpretive judgements pertaining thereto) would still be bizarre.[4]

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[2] Even if involuntary, Islam regards flatulence as engendering a state of impurity that, out of respect for Allah, requires ritual ablution (*wudu*) before prayer; cf. Huda (2019, June 25).

[3] Numerous websites make this claim, but I have not found an authoritative source for it. So it might just be an urban myth.

[4] I'll leave it to readers to decide how or whether to accommodate the possibility of an antagonist who triggers an asthma attack by maliciously farting in an asthmatic's vicinity; cf. n. 1 above.

"Would you be happy to see [*sic*] people farting anyhow?" Chaponda asked on the popular "Straight Talk" programme on Malawi's Capital Radio, and when asked about enforcement, replied "it would be similar to laws banning urinating in public" (*BBC News*, 2011, February 4). Chaponda's rhetorical question suggests that he regards farting as an affront that would make his radio audience (and himself) *unhappy* and his remark about enforcement invites the supposition that in his mind public farting and public urination are cut from the same cloth. If so, public farting would not be simply a petty violation of etiquette but more closely associated with the kind of disgust that might be evoked by excreted bodily wastes. Accordingly, public farting could be regarded as evincing a lack of concern for and violation of the sensibilities of others, and in that sense, unacceptably disrespectful.

However, I don't think we need to look to the extreme of excretal associations to make the case that flatulence can have moral significance. If we regard a moral code as (*inter alia*) promoting or regulating actions that promote a set of values, where values are the things that are intrinsically good (e.g. happiness) then it should be clear that both aesthetic properties and etiquette can also have moral significance. Etiquette may be a means to achieving certain values that are intrinsically good, and certain aspects of etiquette may even manifest aesthetic features that are either intrinsically good or conducive to an intrinsic good (e.g. happiness, again).

First, let's consider ethics and aesthetics. It is commonly claimed nowadays that certain forms of humor are unethical because hurtful or gratuitously denigrating in certain ways, and inasmuch as humor lies within the domain of the aesthetic, its aesthetic properties (e.g. its role in an aesthetic object or the nature of the funniness involved) will also have moral significance (which is not to say that the aesthetic properties are themselves moral properties). Can fart humor be unethical? Let me give one example that could potentially fit the bill. In Grace Metalious's novel *Peyton Place*, the character Mary Kelley recounts:

> The Doc leaned down and whispered in my ear. 'Mary,' he said, 'don't you know that niggers fart black?' [...] I can tell you, I watched that black man. He couldn't even burp, much less anything else, without me right there by his side to see what I could see. I watched him for days, and finally one morning The Doc came out of the ward and walked up to me in the corridor. 'There,' he said, 'what did I tell you?' 'What're you talking about?' I asked him, and he looked at me, surprised. 'Why, Mary, didn't you see it?' 'See what?' I asked him. 'Come on, quick,' he said, and led me over to the ward by the hand. Of course, there was nothing there, and The Doc looked around, all innocent and puzzled, and he said, 'Hm, that's funny, it must have all gone out the window.' 'What?' I asked him, all excited by this time. 'The soot,' he said, and right away I got mad, thinking he was making remarks about the way we kids in training kept the room. "What soot?' I asked him. 'From that black feller,' he said. 'So help me, I was in here a minute ago and that black feller farted and this whole room was black with soot!' (Metalious, 1999, bk. 1, chap. 19)

Note that I am not advocating kneejerk political correctness here. Whether this example *actually* does fit the bill, is inconclusive, since the answer will depend on nuances of context and how the passage relates to other elements of the novel and to the nature of its readership.[5]

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[5] For example, it might be claimed that *omnibus perpensis* the butt of Metalious's humor is not blacks but laughably ignorant and racist small-town Americans.

All I want to suggest here is that a passage of this sort, occurring in *some* contexts rather than others, could constitute unethical fart humor.[6]

Secondly, as regards ethics and etiquette, I contend that etiquette and morality are purposefully entwined, and that etiquette may be a means to some of the goals for which morality exists to promote.

Consider for a moment utilitarianism, the view that morally right actions are those that produce the greatest good of the greatest number. A distinction has often been made between act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism.[7] Without going into fine theoretical details, the distinction can be illustrated with a simple example. It is the middle of the night and you are driving home; there are no other cars or pedestrians out and about. The traffic light at an intersection is red. What do you do? If you are an act-utilitarian, you might for the nonce just treat the red light as if it were merely a stop sign, that is, you stop, look both ways, and proceed even though the light is still red. No one is harmed, there are no witnesses that you might corrupt by your example, and you have gained a small benefit, namely, you will get home a few minutes sooner and you will not have suffered the unpleasantness of impatience. You have broken the law for the greater good. On the other hand, if you are a rule-utilitarian, you will stop, wait for the light to change, and then proceed, all in accordance with the law. A rule-utilitarian might reason that acting in accordance with the rule of law, although not of immediate benefit to anyone, will reinforce habits that in the long run benefit everyone. Rule-following can indirectly be means to the most beneficial end.

One doesn't actually have to be a utilitarian to appreciate the distinction; all that's needed is to accept that sometimes utilitarian-style consequentialist reasoning plays a legitimate role in moral judgement and decision-making. Traffic conventions have no intrinsic ethical significance, nor any kind of intrinsic value. The traffic-light rule is arbitrary; "stop on green, proceed on red" would serve the same purpose[8]; likewise the convention for which side of the road to drive on could be the reverse (as indeed it is in some countries).

Similarly, certain aspects of military etiquette (a.k.a. military courtesy), to take another example, have no intrinsic value. The conventional forms of address according to rank or occasion, as well as for simply identifying an individual's role, exist to reinforce discipline and the chain of command, and hence have instrumental value, including morally instrumental value – there are after all exigent circumstances in which ingrained habits of discipline and obedience in a chain of command are morally called for. Arbitrary conventions or rules of etiquette can serve a moral purpose.

Etiquette per se is not ethics, but conventions of etiquette and ethics or morality are nevertheless entwined and overlap to an appreciable extent.[9] Judith Martin (1993, p. 350) tells us, "When modern philosophers mention etiquette at all, they do so blithely presuming that

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[6] We might also remind ourselves that similar things have been said about jokes that blacks tell amongst and about themselves, where the jokes are such as would be unacceptable in a different context.

[7] I don't deny that this distinction could ultimately be shallow inasmuch as rule-utilitarianism may just turn out to be a special case of act-utilitarianism.

[8] Apparently Chairman Mao's Red Guards sought to adopt such a reversal because of the symbolic value the color red had for communism (proceed on red ≈ "Great Leap Forward").

[9] This is forcefully argued against a number of naysayers in Judith Martin & Gunther S. Stent (1990).

everyone now agrees that etiquette is at best frivolous and at worst, repressive." The various reactions to Chaponda also cast his stance in a frivolous and absurdly repressive light and we can readily agree with that assessment, insofar as it's limited to his extreme proposal to criminalise public flatulence. But would it be equally frivolous or repressive considered as a proscription of etiquette? In that regard Chaponda's rhetorical question – "Would you be happy to see people farting anyhow?" – is pertinent. Special circumstances apart, surely no one welcomes willful and disrespectful farting.

Without going into fine details, I will borrow and repurpose Martin's example of the history of the social regulation of smoking, which she herself offers as an "exemplar of the historical dialectic between etiquette and law" (Martin, 1993, pp. 352–3). She contends that separating smokers from nonsmokers was once accomplished to a satisfactory extent by prevailing rules of etiquette, although the rules changed over time, first becoming lax in favor of the smoking majority, then:

> Sometime later, non-smokers managed to change the rules back: It has again become rude to smoke near non-smokers without first seeking their whole-hearted agreement. However, a declining recognition of the need to obey etiquette when it goes against one's personal wishes has made enforcement of these rules difficult. So we have rude smokers who refuse to comply with the new rules, and rude non-smokers who refuse to comply with other etiquette rules against insulting people....

> At this impasse, the law began to take over from etiquette, on the grounds that medical findings that indirectly inhaled smoke might injure the health of non-smokers made the conflict a sufficiently serious matter for the law's attention. (Martin, 1993, p. 352)

So once serious harm was recognized and became an issue, the rules of etiquette also assumed a moral importance of sufficient degree to call for legal intervention.

Now let us reimagine this history slightly. Suppose the history is as represented, *except* that secondhand smoke was in fact *not* harmful, but many people just found it to be a very unpleasant sensory stimulus. In such a possible world, subjecting others to secondhand smoke that could not be easily or reasonably avoided by those who detest it would be a moral transgression, not a major one perhaps, but certainly sufficient for moral disapprobation. Smoking per se may not be a moral vice, but willfully subjecting to secondhand smoke those who find such smoke unpleasant would exemplify the moral vice of being inconsiderate and disrespectful.

Not all moral transgression can come within the purview of the law, but when there is significant harm it will be a deciding factor. In a possible world where the only effects of secondhand smoke are unpleasantness and distaste, factors such as likelihood and frequency of being subjected to violations of smoking etiquette, as well as allocation of resources to legal enforcement, would be among the deciding factors. Supposing there to be few smokers, and the number of willfully offensive ones even fewer, there would not be much point in enacting legal prohibitions. To all intents and purposes, public farters in Malawi would be comparable to inconsiderate smokers in our reimagined world. Legally proscribing public flatulence is frivolous precisely because it is unwarranted "overkill" for an infrequent and (absent implausible logical possibilities) physically harmless occurrence.

Conclusion

A familiar saying is that "virtue is its own reward" and one might go on to suggest that part of the reward of virtuously following rules of etiquette is the mutual respect and harmony evinced in and reinforced by social relations governed by the rules of etiquette. Such respect and social harmony also give etiquette a moral imperative. Therefore Chaponda was not entirely off the mark in invoking such moral notions as "public decency" in regards to public flatulence, since public flatulence would in most circumstances violate an implicit rule of etiquette. However, to openly censure a violation of etiquette may engender even more disharmony than the violation and indeed may itself constitute a violation of etiquette; a self-righteous moralistic reaction to small matters may itself be regarded as "bad form", as well as counterproductive and morally inappropriate. Chaponda would have done better to heed the wise counsel of Judith Martin (a.k.a. etiquette columnist Miss Manners) to whom it is fitting that, by way of conclusion, we give the last word regarding public flatulence:

> Polite fiction is a sort of useful falsification — one that is aimed inward. It requires that one school oneself not to see, hear or notice certain things.
>
> By not acknowledging that material for possible etiquette disasters actually exists, one renders awkward reactions to them unnecessary. No reaction at all is required when something didn't happen, not even an apology or statement of forgiveness.
>
> The classic example of a fact of life that cannot be commented upon in any edifying way is the unfortunate and involuntary minor physical gesture. Does Miss Manners make herself clear? One reason she doesn't mention it by name is that she is offering this as an example of the unmentionable....
>
> Besides registering disgust, the complainers want to know what they should say or do (other than running for cover) or what the offender should have done (after what, in the best of worlds, that person should not have done).
>
> The answer is: Nothing. There exists a polite fiction that such a thing never happened. (*Miss Manners*, 1993, September 12)

So even though Chaponda may be correct in some cases in attaching moral significance to rules of etiquette that apply to farting, the appropriate moral response may nevertheless just be to "turn the other cheek".

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Ethnic Democracy and the Case of Israel: A Parallel Reading of Sayed Kashua's
***Let It Be Morning* and Sammy Smooha's "Ethnic Democracy"**

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Abstract

The Ethnic Democracy model hinges on a complex political principle that sanctions undisguised bias in favour of a specific ethnic group. Thus, it is a system whose hierarchical design must, by its very nature, ignore any notion of democratic equality. The organising principle of Ethnic Democracy holds that the dominating or majority ethnic group shall have exclusive access to power, self-determination, and will have superior status in the socio-political life of the nation. Over and above its moral shortcomings, the feasibility of this model for governing in deeply divided societies should be examined to understand how Ethnic Democracy variously affects different social groups and how its architects envision the state's commitments to its citizens. To that end, this paper has examined the case of Israel as example of this system. The social inequalities that separate Jews and Arabs are clear indication of an institutional bias that favours the Jewish ethnic group to the detriment of Israeli Arabs, despite Israel's reputation as an impartial parliamentary democracy. In order to develop a cogent line of reasoning with which to analyse Israel's ethno-democratic traits, this paper offers a parallel reading of *Let It Be Morning*, a novel written by the Arab Israeli writer Sayed Kashua, and the ground-breaking essay "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype", written by the Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha.

Keywords: ethnic democracy, Israel, Jewish-Arab coexistence, Sayed Kashua, Sammy Smooha

Introduction

The rise of Jewish nationalism and the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in 1948 had an unarguable impact in the narrative of Palestinian nationalism. The waves of Jewish mass immigration during the 19th century to Ottoman Syria and later to the Palestine Mandate marked the implementation of the Zionist ideology of entitlement with regard to the "Promised Land". The persecution and near annihilation of Jews during WWII had activated the urgency to identify a homeland for Jews, a place to safeguard their community and bring it back from the verge of extinction. But at the same time, Jewish nationalism disrupted the Palestinian discourse of national identity and their dream of establishing a homeland. In 1947, a plan for division was offered by the United Nations to create independent Jewish and Arab nation-states, but the plan was rejected by Arab leaders. The following year, on May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the head of Jewish Agency, announced: "the establishment of Jewish state in Eretz-Israel to be known as the State of Israel." (Clark, 1992, p. 20) The recognition of a Jewish democratic state was followed by the infamous Arab-Israeli War of 1948, which is referred to as *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) in the Palestinian narrative. Israel's victory in this, their "War of Independence," and the contentious process of nation building resulted in the expulsion of a great number of Arabs from the new state of Israel to the neighbouring Arab countries. However, nearly twenty per cent of the Arab population remained in Israel and were subsequently identified as Arab citizens of Israel.

But the national identification of Israeli Arabs remained a politically charged topic since the majority of the Arab population thought – and still think – of themselves as Palestinian citizens in Israel. Though this population has been granted Israeli citizenship, they nevertheless drive a robust Palestinian nationalism within Israel, living in closed Arab communities and excluding themselves from the dominant social and political life of the state. The social exclusion of Arabs is a product of the failure of Israel's system for Arab integration and the manifest absence of Arabs from the social image of Israel. Oren Yiftachel states that this failure is the result of Palestinian indentitary concerns: to accept "Israelisation" would be tantamount to "accepting Jewish exclusivity and privilege and the Arab inferiority that comes with it" (Yiftachel, 2006, p. 95). Unfortunately, during the initial years of Israeli statehood, Arab citizens were victimised and mistrusted by both the Israeli government and Arab countries, being portrayed as spies and traitors. After the initial conflict, the state enjoyed a period of political passiveness among the Arab citizens until the wars broke out in 1967 (Six-Day War) and 1973 (Yom-Kippur War). The image and the attitudes of Arabs in Israel then changed, as Arabs saw the necessity to actively engage in state affairs. A shared comprehensive narrative of their social and political condition in Israel became consensual among Arabs even across the Green Line (Smooha and Peretz, 1982). The surge of Palestinian nationalism was anathema to the divisive political philosophy of the Jewish majority, so tension between Jews and Arabs intensified. Though Israel is the only practising democracy in the Middle East, the righteousness of its democratic system remains a point in question.

As per the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics of October 2019, 74.24% of the state's total population is Jews from all backgrounds, 20.95% covers Arabs of any religion other than Jewish and the remaining 4.81% are called "other," a classification that includes people who are not registered at the Interior Ministry as Jews, Muslim non-Arabs, Christian non-Arabs, as well as other residents of the state without a specific religious or ethnic affiliation. These figures explain why state's Jewish majority is able to monopolise political power and accumulate privileges in a state that was established *for* Jews. This Jewish nature of the state of Israel, even after more than seventy years of its establishment, continues to produce

discrimination in obvious and subtle forms. Claims to the same land tend to perpetuate and gradually escalate the process of Arab exclusion. Though Israel has proclaimed itself as a democratic state, the Arabs reject the validity of its democratic system. (Smooha, 1997, p. 203) The institutions of the state, its national heroes, its symbols and official holidays are exclusively Jewish, while the Arabs are neglected (Smooha, 1997, p. 206). The ethno-democratic nature of the state will always complicate and make unfeasible any peace process in Israel.

Israel's Arab Minority – Literary Documentations

The socio-cultural subjugation of the Arab minority and the inequality of citizens are still a reality in Israel. Since the late 1960s there have been inordinate attempts initiated by Arab scholars and writers to challenge the dominant narrative by articulating the lived realities of Arabs in Israel. They not only speak of social oppression in Israel, but also offer justifications for not taking part in the Palestinian Exodus of 1948 and staying back in a new country that disrupted their national aspirations. Sayed Kashua is one of the prominent Arab voices of Israel who fearlessly criticise the divisive politics of the ethno-democratic state. Born in the Israeli Arab town of Tira, Kashua grew up understanding what it is to be an Arab in Israel. As a Palestinian citizen of Israel, Kashua's novels and humorous columns speak of the calamitous future of Jewish-Arab coexistence. In 2014, Kashua announced that he had decided to leave Israel following the events of political and religious extremism that caused fatalities among Arab citizens. In one of the interviews that he granted at the time, Kashua stated that he had tried hard to assimilate to the state of Israel as much as an Arab possibly can, but reality prevailed and he no longer wants to try to conflate the narratives of two peoples whose worlds are far apart, to the point that they cannot agree to live together.

Kashua's novels explore the vicissitudes of Israel's political actions and their often aberrant and destructive consequences for Arab citizens. His novel *Let It Be Morning* (2004) spins around the uncertain lives of Israeli Arabs through the prism of one family. The novel encapsulates the bigotry of Israel's political decisions, inhuman treatment of Arab citizens, overriding militarism and their repercussions. Kashua's satirical style of narration highlights the inefficiency of the Israeli government to equally accommodate its citizens, irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliations. He questions the democratic status of Israel by portraying the real plight of Israeli Arabs and gives impulse to the notion that Israel is a democracy only for the Jews.

Through *Let It Be Morning*, Kashua observes the discrepancy between Israel's democratic pretensions and reality. The gradual development of the plot begins with the return of an Arab journalist to his village and initially spotlights the miserable lives of Israeli Arabs. In this regard, the novel reflects the stark contrast between Jewish and Arab lives in Israel and questions the state's claims regarding social and economic equality. Through the detailed exposé of people's everyday existence, the model of ethnic democracy/ethnocracy is revealed as inherently unjust, redefining the state's image as a democratic country.

There have always been difficulties when attempting to classify Israel's political system. Portraying it as an anomaly on the world stage, political scientist Emanuel Gutmann observes that "Israel is usually, though not always, omitted from comparative analysis. Moreover, when Israel is mentioned, it is usually as a 'most baffling case' or 'a case by itself." (Gutmann, 1989, p. 295) This assumption has emerged from the notion that Israel's democratic traits do not fit the three types of conventional models of democracy, namely liberal, consociational and Herrenvolk. Thus, Smooha identifies a missing typology labelled "ethnic democracy" to

examine the causes of social cleavage between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority as they problematise Israeli democracy (Smooha, 1997, p.198). A parallel reading of Kashua's *Let it Be Morning* and Smooha's characterisation of Israel as an archetype of Ethnic Democracy will expose the bigotry in Israel's governance and social life.

Sammy Smooha on Ethnic Democracy

Israeli sociologist Sammy Smooha defines Ethnic Democracy in his essay "Ethnic Democracy: Israel as an Archetype" as "a system that combines the extension of civil and political rights to individuals and some collective rights to minorities, with institutionalization of majority control over the state" (Smooha, 1997, p.199). He has also identified some peculiar traits of those states that practice ethnic democracy, where all the political and social actions of the state are driven by ethnic nationalism.

1. The state observes the creation of a homogenous nation-state, a state of and for a particular ethnic group.
2. The state acts to promote the language, culture, economic well-being and the political interests of that particular ethnic group.
3. Minorities are treated as second-class citizens even if they enjoy citizenship and voting rights.
4. Minorities are feared as threats and are excluded from the national power structure.
5. Minorities are often placed under control.
6. Minorities are allowed to conduct a democratic and peaceful struggle for incremental improvement within their status.

Smooha distinguishes ethnic democracy from other models by the fact that an ethno-democratic state identifies critical ethnic differences though it observes some universal collective rights. He emphasises the inability of ethnic democracy to treat all the citizens equally because of ethnic non-neutrality. The state under this model of democracy will be owned and ruled by the majority group and minorities are involved neither in autonomy nor in power-sharing. (Smooha, 1997, p.200) Thus, minorities are blatantly excluded from mainstream politics.

A Parallel Reading of Smooha and Kashua

Kashua's novel provides a fictional version of reality to Smooha's theoretical perceptions of Israel as an ethnic democracy. The unnamed protagonist of *Let It Be Morning* is an Arab journalist who works for a Hebrew newspaper in the city. He is forced to return to his Arab village in Tira following the fatal attacks on Jews by terrorists from the West Bank. Though Israeli Arabs were not involved in plotting the tragic incident, they were considered a potential threat against the security of Jewish citizens. The protagonist nearly loses his job and rushes back to his village in the hope of being secure among his people. But his decision to return is unfortunate, as the village is seized by the Israeli military. The people of the village undergo considerable distress and difficulties as they are deprived of their basic needs and of access to the city. Kashua paints the image of a ruthless government whose actions reveal Arabs as a despised second class. The descriptions of the events move in a parallel with the characteristics of ethnic democracy as defined by Smooha, surveying the hopeless future of Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel:

> I'm not saying they're all like that. But now, with the things getting more and more tense and all, it's just getting worse. They can't tell the difference between people like us, living inside Israel, and the ones living on the West Bank. An Arab's an Arab as far as they are concerned. I bet you thought I was from the West Bank too when you came in and saw me in all my dirty coverall. I bet you were scared. (Kashua, p. 13)

This excerpt from the conversation between the protagonist and a villager in Tira reveals the increasing tension between the Arabs and the Jews of Israel. There is a clear indication that the Israeli government does not recognise any difference between its Arab citizens and the Arabs from neighbouring territories. They see a potential enemy in every Arab, and Israeli Arabs are no exception. As the excerpt shows, the government fears that the terrorists will invade Jewish territories and unleash violence with the help of Israeli Arabs. This fear has also swamped the Jews with fear causing them to resist the assimilation of Israeli Arabs into their society. Kashua provides a clear indication that the state fails to acknowledge Israeli Arabs as citizens of Israel, and this attitude of aversion has caused Arab retraction from Israel's social assemblage.

But how does the incident discussed above indicate the ethnic nature of Israel's democracy? Given the fact that the Arabs are given Israeli citizenship and voting rights, how are they discriminated against in a democratic environment? Sammy Smooha discusses some of American social scientist Raymond Duncan Gastil's ideas in order to validate his argument that Israel is an archetype of Ethnic Democracy. In his article titled "The Past, Present and Future of Democracy", Duncan affirms that an Ethnic Democracy is the "definition of the state as belonging to a particular religious or ethnic group" (Gastil, 1985, p. 163). He also observes that several democratic countries that are currently considered as liberal or consociational are ethnic democracies, Israel being one among them. Thus the first indication of a state's Ethnic Democratic nature is that the state belongs to a particular religious or ethnic group. In the case of Israel, the state was legitimately established as a product of the Jewish cause and, as a result, the security of the Jews becomes the state's foremost priority, even many years after its establishment. As seen in Kashua's novel, though Israeli Arabs are considered citizens of the state, they are also seen as potential threats to national security. Smooha reaffirms this notion, stating that an Ethnic Democratic state will recognise ethnic differences though it does accord some universal collective rights (Smooha, 1997, p. 200). Similarly Kashua's novel is a protracted reflection upon the ethnic nature of the state of Israel and the effects this has on its Arab population. Passages like this abound:

> I was the only journalist who saw the fear in the eyes of the veiled women whose hearts would skip a beat every time someone was brought in, who would cry every time a shot was heard. I was there, and I knew that nobody had expected the police to react so harshly, so relentlessly. Like me, the demonstrators had always thought of themselves as citizens of Israel, and never imagined they would be shot at for demonstrating or for blocking an intersection. (Kashua, p.18)

Being an Arab, the protagonist was perhaps the only journalist reporting from the scene of an Arab demonstration in the Wadi Ara after the Israeli cabinet members appeared at the al-Aqsa Mosque. The protest was against Jewish intrusion into a Muslim area of exclusivity, so the Arabs had blocked an intersection to express their dissent and concern. The protest was violently curbed by the police, who shot at the protestors and caused several fatalities. Kashua's protagonist is traumatised by the police's unleashing of violence against a peaceful demonstration, and pities the dead and injured who truly believed that they were the citizens of Israel. The protagonist feels that the protestors would never have anticipated being shot to

death for a nonviolent protest aimed at registering their common concern. The divisive governance clearly sidelines the Arabs as second-class citizens, deeming them a burden and a threat to the majority group.

This trait of Ethnic Democratic systems is elaborated by Smooha, where he mentions the works of Israeli political scientist and activist Yoav Peled. Peled has accepted Smooha's classification of Israel as an ethnic democracy with some refinements. In his article titled "Strangers in Utopia: The Civil Status of Palestinians in Israel" (Peled, 1993), Peled distinguishes among three types of guiding principles in Ethnic Democracy, namely ethnic, liberal and republican. The ethnic principle provides preference to the Jews who are the ethnic majority. The liberal principle gives individual rights to all citizens, and the republican principle preserves special rights to people who actually belong to the community and contribute unreservedly to the common goal, which makes them the "good citizens". In the case of Israel, the Israeli Arabs are merely regular citizens of the state and not "good citizens" like the Jews because they do not contribute to the collective goal of the nation. They can enjoy liberal rights but they are denied republican rights because, as Arabs in a Jewish state, they cannot earnestly contribute unreservedly to Jewish ascendancy. Thus, the practice of Ethnic Democracy affects the Israeli Arabs in two ways. The application of ethnic principles makes their lives less significant than those of the Jews, and the denial of republican rights separates and excludes them from the core ethnic configuration of the nation and constrains their ability to be "good citizens" of the country. This comes across very clearly in Kashua's novel:

> Some of the journalists in the Hebrew press- non-Zionist left-wingers allowed themselves to lash out against the occupation and against the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian inhabitants, but I no longer dared. The privilege of criticizing government policy was an exclusively Jewish prerogative. I was liable to be seen as a journalist calling for the annihilation of the Zionist state, a fifth column biting the hand that was feeding it and dreaming each night of destroying the Jewish people. (Kashua, p.20)

In the quote above, the protagonist, despite his position as a journalist, is scared to report the subordination experienced by the Israeli Arabs. As Shourideh C. Molavi indicates (2013, pp. 23–26), the authority to criticise the political actions of the government is exclusively Jewish, and Arabs have no right to involve themselves in state affairs. Especially during the times of Intifadas or the Arab uprising, the entire Arab population of Israel was treated with disgust and mistrust. The Jews scorned them for protesting against a government that had provided them with citizenship, voting rights and a better standard of living, but the lives of the Arabs became more difficult as they were suspected of treason even in public forums. The status of their social life deteriorated and they were portrayed as anti-nationalists aiming for the destruction of the Jewish national homeland. The state was never sure about its Arab citizens and excluded them from almost all sectors that would define the core ethnic nature of the state.

The attitude of mistrust and social exclusion against the Israeli Arabs are apparently the weaknesses of Israeli democracy. Though the Jewish national homeland had withstood several social and political challenges, it is still irresolute regarding the assimilation of its Arab citizens. Smooha discusses the three weaknesses of Israeli democracy that complicate the equal accommodation of the citizens. These weaknesses are the incessant implementation of Emergency Regulations, suspension of civil and political rights by the authorities, and political intolerance. What makes Arab incorporation more difficult is that the state of Israel has declared itself a homeland for Jews, which automatically makes outcasts of the Arabs within

the state's borders. Thus, Hebrew is the official language of the state and Arabic is given an inferior status. The Law of Return allows Jews to enter the state freely and the process of naturalisation is inherent and seamless for the Jews. On the other hand, central immigration legislation excludes Palestinian Arabs and their immigration and naturalisation are limited and tightly controlled (Smooha, 1997, p. 205-206). These discriminatory practices manifest the state's unequal treatment of its Arab citizens, who are deliberately excluded from the mainstream social picture in order to advance the Zionist complexion of the state.

> Well, you know how it is. You've been, haven't you? You meet people. Your friends are active in the party, so you decide you want to be active too, but it's mainly because of how they treat me. Suddenly I see our problems. Suddenly I understand what it means to be hated, what racism and discrimination are. In the dorms, they make sure you're put into the Arabs' rooms, which are the worst rooms there are. One room for Arabs on each floor, to make sure there aren't too many of us in any one place, to keep us in a minority status even on the floor. (Kashua, p. 116)

This is an emotionally charged conversation between the protagonist and his younger brother who is a graduate student. When the protagonist returns to the village, he is shocked at hearing the news that his brother has joined the Communist party. He ridicules his brother for fancying a political ideology without much knowledge about it. But his brother's reply unravels the discrimination faced by the Israeli Arabs even in an educational institute. He states that he had very good reasons for joining the Communist party and that he was not peer-influenced. Being a victim of racist discrimination in the college, he realised what it is to be an Arab in Israel. The reality shook him and he experienced hatred and isolation. Though he was ignorant of the political propaganda behind the Communist Party, he sought refuge in its ideology of equality between Jews and Arabs.

In Kashua's novel, Israeli Arabs are constantly reminded of their inferior status amidst the Jewish majority. Israeli Arabs are racially, ethnically, economically and socially discriminated by the majority, a reality that demotivates them in their willingness to assimilate and integrate. This discrimination leads to a disparity in the treatment of minorities in a presumably democratic country. Smooha states that the Arabs are only an ethnic minority and not a national minority in Israel. However, in reality, Israeli Arabs are both an ethnic and a national minority and they are entitled to special collective rights in addition to their liberal rights as citizens of Israel. But Israel does not recognise them as a national minority thereby denying their rights to self-determination. Smooha also observes that the denial of national rights to the Arabs stems from the Jewish fear of losing exclusivity of their own claims to the land of Israel. He also states that since the Arab minority of Israel is a part of the wider Arab world across the Green Line, any nationalistic rights given to them may cause a cultural and demographic threat to the state of Israel. Unfortunately, the national minority status for Israeli Arabs is yet to be provided and the status as an ethnic minority is manipulated and used against them for subordination (Smooha, 1990, p. 410). Kashua's novel ubiquitously reflects Smooha's analysis. For instance:

> "The Israeli Arabs", I can hear someone say after the commercial, "never felt part of the State of Israel. They're really Palestinians, whose relatives live on the West Bank and in Gaza. The transfer of lands to the Palestinian Authority has spared Israel the enormous danger of a rising Islamic Movement and other nationalist movements from within…. They've always complained about being discriminated against and about their minority status, and we should be pleased that our democracy will finally have real meaning." (Kashua, p. 269)

In the closing part of the novel, the Arab village and its residents are given to the Palestinian authority in exchange for other territories. The seven days of the blockade was a pre-emptive action taken by the Israeli government to avoid any commotion from the side of the villagers. When negotiations were taking place between the state and the Palestinian Authority, the village was entirely muted and offered as bait to attain the state's political goals. The protagonist, like any other villager, knows the danger awaiting them in the future and expresses his fear and discomfort. The Israeli government was ingeniously disposing of unnecessary burden by exchanging the village, and it justifies its action by stating that it helps the Arabs by reuniting them with their relatives in the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli authority glorifies its democratic stand in the issue but the protagonist disdains its political strategy as an attempt to get rid of the Arabs. Though they would be reunited with the Arab world, the protagonist knew that their future under the Palestinian authority would be more uncertain, insecure and more subject to underdevelopment. All they had wished for was an equal life in Israel, one marked by mutual respect and a civil tolerance of differences and incongruities.

Conclusion

The episodes that come to make up *Let It Be Morning* are a reminder of the intense ethnic nationalistic nature of the state of Israel. The traits of an Ethnic Democracy identified by Smooha are aptly dramatised in the novel. Therein, Israeli Arabs are considered potential threats to national security and their abrupt swap to the Palestinian authority confirms the state's preference for the Jewish majority. The situation raises two significant questions. What shall be the future of Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel and what form of democracy shall ensure peace and harmony in the state? The post-Zionist narrative believes that the liberal and consociational democratic models will replace Ethnic Democracy because of their practicality and desirability. Yuvah Peled thinks that Ethnic Democracy will continue to disrupt the peace process in Israel by deterring political stability. He opts for a consociational model that will entitle Israeli Arabs to autonomy and constitutionally acknowledge the presence of two ethnic groups, negotiating their peaceful coexistence through mutual respect. However, Smooha states that the state of Israel will remain an Ethnic Democracy for the foreseeable future, as the Jewish self-righteous majority will prioritise the Jewish cause over any other. He states that the Jews will continue to preserve the state's Jewish nature and type of democracy, and that the process of coexistence will evolve positively due to the gradual improvement of Arab life and the negotiated response to Arab demands.

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Place and Cultural Identity in Joaquin's *The Mass of St. Sylvestre*

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Abstract

Nick Joaquin (Nicomedes Márquez Joaquín, 1917-2004) is widely known for his interest in the Spanish colonial period and its culture in the Philippines. He employed the "Walled City" or Intramuros (Old Manila) as the setting for *The Mass of St. Sylvestre* (1946) and many other stories. Intramuros not only has an important role in Joaquin's short story as a physical place, but also conveys identity elements and cultural meanings. This cathedral city has a glorious but neglected past and Joaquin, by retelling the stories from this magnificent past, recalls the link between Filipino identity and the formation of culture during the period of Spanish colonialism. His approach to the issue of identity corresponds to what Stuart Hall classifies as the "Enlightenment Subject" (1996, p. 597). This paper attempts to explore the role that place and the experience of landscape play as markers of cultural identity in *The Mass of St. Sylvestre*.

Keywords: Joaquin, place, landscape experience, cultural identity

Introduction

Obviously due to his status as national hero, many scholars have studied the works of Rizal (José Protasio Rizal Mercado y Alonso Realonda, 1861-1896), yet only a few have examined the work of Joaquin, presumably a writer as important as Rizal. Among those few, even fewer have paid much attention to *The Mass of St. Sylvestre*, a work that challenges deep-rooted ideas and ranges across an array of complex concepts to upend assumptions about Filipino culture, confronting the reader with a variety of unconventional potential interpretations.

The Mass of St. Sylvestre is the juxtaposition of two tiers that come to make up a single reality, one in which each tier offers its own peculiarities. The story thus becomes the manifestation of a latent, repressed tier cloaked under another, more recognizable tier; an invisible history hidden within the conventional past. In this short story, Nick Joaquin re-narrates the local story of St. Sylvestre as an archetype of the culture that is concealed and in danger of being obliterated. He embeds the story within a historical catastrophe in Manila after the Second World War. As a historian and writer, Joaquin employs concrete space, time, and local culture to reveal the struggle between the past and the present, as well as the tension between the official and the repressed culture.

In the story Manila becomes the site of the battle between the repressed past and a present that has evolved from the effects of that repression, a place to experience colonial tropes and postcolonial reality concurrently, and thus a place to see the past haunting the present. A revision of history through the fictional world of *The Mass of St. Sylvestre* can give the reader clues with which to discover the hidden side of history and its relevance to the present.

In this field, the lack of research resources is a significant problem. According to Arong (2016), "Despite the emergence of Gothic criticism in postcolonial writing, Joaquin's works have rarely received the attention they deserve in this critical area". As Rommel A. Curaming (2016) points out, the absence of reference to any Filipino scholars in the field of postcolonial studies is telling. (p. 64) Paul Sharrad (2008) argues that Filipino writing in English suffers from lying outside the bounds of Commonwealth literature (p. 355).

This paper aims to be useful for scholars and students who wish a better understanding of Nick Joaquin's works and especially about his ideas on Filipino identity. It should also provide grounds for further studies.

Place, Landscape, Experience and Identity

The relationship between place, on the one hand, and culture and identity on the other, has always been a main concern in postcolonial studies, and Joaquin's works have reflected this concern very well. In *The Mass of St. Sylvestre*, it seems that, Joaquin employs Walled City or Intramuros as the setting to manifest how culture (as history) and place (*here*, Intramuros), interact. Place, as Cresswel (2004) writes, "is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world." (p. 11)

Intramuros as setting helps Joaquin pursue two objectives: first, to show to what extent Filipino identity is constructed upon Spanish cultural foundations, particularly in Manila as capital of the archipelago; and second, to perpetuate a heritage that is being forgotten. In Joaquin's world, space conveys culture and identity. Manila has been a walled city and a cathedral city for centuries, and this exclusivity distinguishes it among other cities. In this sense, the premises of

the Enlightenment Subject theory of cultural identity can help us trace the prevalent sense of loss all along the narrative. According to Hall (1996), the Enlightenment subject "is based on a conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action" (p. 597). If in Joaquin's story we understand Manila as having a dual function as city and as a metonymy for its inhabitants, we'll appreciate how it projects its identity onto its inhabitants. The identity of the city here acts as the "inner core" which emerged "when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or 'identical' with itself – throughout the individual's existence" (Hall, p. 597).

> Manila has been a cathedral city almost from its foundation; for centuries it was one of only two cities (Goa being the other) to whose gates the New Year's key-bearer made his annual visitation. For this purpose, St. Sylvestre always used the Puerta Postigo, which is—of the seven gates of our city—the one reserved for the private use of the viceroys and the archbishops. There he is met by the great St. Andrew, principal patron of Manila, accompanied by St. Potenciana, who is our minor patroness, and by St. Francis and St. Dominic, the guardians of our walls. (2017. p. 32)

As analogy for its citizens and their circumscribed identity, Manila has many stories to reveal from the past and the present. Its walls mark the border between belongs and what does not belong in the city. The city has had patrons and guardians. According to Viic (2011), the human being makes sense of the world "by creating spatial and temporal unities, and borders between them" (p. 103). Intramuros, or Walled City, can be explored as a colonial space in two different ways. One is through the analysis of the Spanish cultural elements, and the other is the examination of Filipino identity. The first tends to explore the role of the architecture brought to indigenous people by Spaniards. The second accepts the Walled City, as it was during the Spanish period, as a focal point of Filipino identity.

The relationship between people and the place in which they live is not necessarily bound to routine tasks: some places have the ability to provoke us emotionally. Viic (2011) classifies these places to touristic landscapes, sacred and memorial places, virtual places such as fictional landscapes in literary fictions or in paintings, and also virtual places created by the collective imagination,

> such as the physical universe presented to us in scientific theories, nature presented to us in photographs in National Geographic, the promised land of the Old Testament, hell and purgatory, the ancient land of a people, the sacred place that can be found inside me according to some esoteric traditions, etc. (p. 104)

According to Knaps and Herrmann (2018), territories become significant to people due to memories related to them or symbolic meanings that are given to and derived from them. Being a cathedral city, Manila has a regional identity that gives it a sense of distinction and peculiarity. According to the story, it is one of only two cities to whose gates the New Year's key-bearer made his annual visitation. Although the annual mass of St. Sylvestre has been a great honor bestowed upon Manila, it may be considered more as an experience in the imagination of people who share a collective identity than an uncomplicated event in reality.

The question here becomes, why did Joaquin choose an American soldier and leave him inside Intramuros to actually witnesses the Mass while so many Filipino believers would have been keen to participate in the Mass of St. Sylvestre? The answer is that by this device the author

underscores the existence of the two tiers of the Philippines' postcolonial reality. If the ritual had been witnessed by a Filipino, the reader could have considered it not an expression of underlying culture and identity, but a delusion resulting from the cultural and religious beliefs of Filipinos, a virtual place created by the collective imagination.

Joaquin creates a character that lives on Barnum Street in Brooklyn, and does not believe the story about the mass, and even has no idea about what he had witnessed. He is not a believer; we can learn it from the very first sentences of the letter written by the character (Francis Xavier): "I didn't know all that about living a thousand years or I might have acted otherwise. If that stuff is true—what a chance I missed!" (2017, p.37).

Therefore, the appeared mass is not a delusion. Francis Xavier has seen it in detail. His description of the scene is in accordance with the detailed description of the Mass of St. Sylvestre in the story. It is not correct to attribute Francis Xavier's observations to illusion for the following reasons:

1– The place is a determinative element here, since the mass is held at the supposed place in the Walled City. Xavier writes: "I turned my head just then—and there was the Walled City, and it wasn't smashed up at all." (p.38)

2– The time is definitive as well. The Mass is held only once a year, in New Year's Eve at midnight. Xavier has witnessed the ceremony at just that moment:

> That night –it was New Year's Eve— I'd come back to camp early because I was feeling homesick… Around midnight I woke up from a doze and heard music. So I stuck my head out and I saw a kind of parade coming up the road. (p. 37)

Considering the fact that he is not a native Filipino and had never heard about the Mass before, it cannot be considered a case of hallucination, as it would not have been possible to experience the mass with its exact details. What Francis Xavier has seen is a perfect match for the mass that is described at the beginning of the story. Xavier stipulates that even after leaving the scene and returning, the Mass was still going on:

> Then I said to myself: what a picture you could make of this, to send home. But I hadn't brought my camera and I decided to get it. So I ran out and down the street and past the open gate and into our camp. Nobody was around. I got my camera and raced back. When I reached the cathedral I could see that the Mass was ending. (p. 37)

So now the question is, if his experience is not a delusion, what is it? Why does it disappear at a specific time? Where did the people at the mass go? Moreover, where do they live?

We might be able to explain this event as what Husserl calls 'a landscape experience'. In this vein, the landscape is not a natural object; it is, instead, a cultural object.

> In terms of Husserl, landscape is seen as an intentional object (*Gegenstand*) of experience – that which exhibits itself in an individual consciousness during the act of a landscape experience. The physical objects on a terrain just are there; but they can be meaningful as belonging to something that is called a landscape only if somebody views and understands them in such a way. (Viic, 2011, p. 105)

According to Viic, an act of landscape experience must be an elaborate act of consciousness, a series of perceptions of physical objects like a natural landscape or houses, roads, people, and so on, or discursive images of the same objects. As Husserl points out, it makes no difference whether the objects of experience are real or imagined, whether they correspond to how things are in nature, or are a misrepresentation of the natural order. The landscape must be perceived from a certain distance and angle, like unique site-seeing sites and platforms, but not from above as in aerial photos, and not from the height of human eyes (p. 105).

As Francis Xavier says in the story, he had a determined point of view towards the scene, which persuades us that he had undergone the landscape experience referenced above: "We were camped just outside the walls –on the grassland between the walls and the Port Companies…I saw a kind of parade coming up the road" (p. 37).

There are two features by which the landscape experience could be recognized here: first, there are several objects, like road, people, and Walled City:

> I turned my head just then –and there was the Walled City, and it wasn't smashed up at all. The walls were whole all the way and I could even see some kind of knights in armor moving on top of them. Behind the walls I could clearly see a lot of rooftops and church towers and they were none of them smashed up at all. (p. 37)

Therefore, we can conclude that thanks to "a normative scope and range of objects, real or imaginary," Xavier had experienced a landscape. As Viic writes, "the experiencing of a landscape must include the perception of such objects as its part-acts" (p. 105).

Secondly, there is a particular point of view toward the landscape, which Francis Xavier as viewer is experiencing. In order to experience the landscape, we need not only a certain scope and range of objects, but also a very precisely determined point of view toward them that enables us to create a *perspective* specific to the landscape experience. It is an interesting fact that the normative (or desirable) height of the perspective constitutive of landscape experience is often set considerably higher than human eyes are from the ground, suggesting that a way of seeing that defines a landscape does not belong to our ordinary day-to-day experiences (Viic, 2011, p.106).

The landscape experience in this story promotes the idea of a two-tiered world derived from different presumptions about reality. One is founded upon the misrepresentation of present circumstances, and the other one upon a heterodox experience that denounces the repression of an authentic past, a suppression that has resulted in the loss of critical elements of identity. The characters in this postcolonial world are in a constant commute between the past and the present as the environment shifts from one tier to the other. Both tiers are real and alive.

The story epitomises a sense of loss. It is interesting that the narrator of the story himself has never seen the Mass. The story concerns the Mass of St. Sylvestre and of the old Intramuros as two intertwined features of identity that are both lost, both missing from the narrator's perspective. These lines reinforce the sense of loss in the story and clearly associate that loss with American colonial rule: "And just as soon as the liberation forces opened the Walled City to the public, I went to see what war had left us of our heritage from four centuries. Nothing had been left…" The narrator, as protagonist, tries to figure out into what city would St. Sylvestre make his annual entry:

> In what cathedral would he say his Mass? The retablo of the Pastoral Adoration has been smashed into pieces and dispersed into dust. Does that release Mateo the Maestro from his enchantment- or must he still, on New Year eve, reassemble a living body from stone fragments to fulfil his penance of a thousand years? (p. 37)

This narrative thus becomes a confrontation between the past and the present, a conflict between the identity that has already been formed (according to the enlightenment subject) and the reality of life, including many changes and contradictions. Now we can realize the reason for the final part of the Mass of St. Sylvestre. After centuries, everything is still the same. The old narrative of the Mass happens precisely with the same detail, but in front of Xavier's eyes. What Xavier tells about the ceremony matches the old narrative about the Mass. The insertion of the old and repressed narrative at the heart of current events manifests the core and the formative component of Filipino identity that corresponds to the enlightenment view of identity and, moreover, stresses the point that the identity of Manila has never changed. However, this identity has been repressed by American colonialism, and the landscape experience, here, functions as a reminder of the past.

Let us compare the two narratives.
First narrative, by the protagonist:

> At the Puerta Postigo the heavenly multitude kneels down as St. Sylvestre advances with the Keys to open the noble and ever loyal city of Manila to the New Year. The city's bells ring out as the gate opens and St. Andrew and his companions come forth to greet the heavenly embassy. The two bishops embrace and exchange the kiss of peace, and proceed to the cathedral, where the Pontiff celebrates the Mass of the Circumcision. The bells continue pealing throughout the enchanted hour and break into a really glorious uproar as St. Sylvestre rises to bestow the final benediction. But when the clocks strike one o'clock, the bells instantly fall mute, the thundering music breaks off, the heavenly companies, vanish - and in the cathedral, so lately glorious with lights and banners and solemn ceremonies, there is suddenly only the silence, only the chilly darkness of the empty naves; and at the altar, the single light burning before the body of God. (p. 33)

Second narrative, by Francis Xavier:

> The parade had stopped at a gate in the wall and a bishop was opening the gate and bells began ringing. There was another crowd waiting inside and they had a bishop too and the two bishops kissed and then they all went through the gate and I followed. Nobody took any notice of me. Inside, it was a real city, an old city, and hundreds of bells were ringing and they had a park with fountains all around and beside the park was a cathedral. Everybody was going in there, so I did too. (p.38)

However, the city, as the manifestation of identity, has been destroyed, facing the changes imposed by the American colonial rule. And this is the consequence of the new colonial circumstances:

> The bright light was only moonlight and the music was only the wind. There was no crowd and no bishops and no altar and no cathedral. I was standing on a stack of ruins and there was nothing but ruins around. Just blocks and blocks of ruins stretching all around me in the silent moonlight… (p. 38)

The abovementioned description is the saddest exposition of loss presented by Joaquin in his works. This loss is the result of the conflict between identity on the one hand, and the colonial reality, on the other hand. This conflict can be examined through Stuart Hall's theory of the Enlightenment subject.

Conclusion

In Joaquin's short story, Manila as a place acts as the nucleus of Philippine identity. He manifests an intense feeling of belonging to Manila. He called himself a Manila old-timer and repeatedly employed Manila as the setting for his stories and reports. Harold M. Proshansky, in his essay *The City and Self-Identity* (1978), argues that physical dimensions help to define an individual's identity, and "it is important to conceptualize place-identity as a specific component of each individual's self-identity" (p. 147). According to Porshansky, place-identity as a concept emphasizes the conscious and unconscious relationship between the individual and the environment around him.

Qazimi (2014) classifies place-identity as one of the substructures of identity, like gender and social class:

> It is composed of observation and interpretation regarding the environment. These elements can be divided into two types; one of them consists of memories, values, thoughts, ideas and settings, and another type consists of the relationship between different settings: home, neighbourhood and school. (p. 307)

In this sense, Manila is a specific component of identity in *The Mass of St. Sylvestre*. The way that Joaquin depicts Manila as the place-identity in the story reinforces the belief that Manila's identity is an entirely centred and unified concept which first emerged when Manila was born. "Manila has been a cathedral city almost from its foundation," and this fact has never changed. This approach to depicting identity corresponds to what Stuart Hall classifies as the Enlightenment subject.

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Rhetoric and Imagery of the Caracazo in *La última vez* and its Link to the Political Narrative of Chavismo

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Abstract

The present paper is an analysis of topics related to discourse and imagery as articulated in Héctor Bujanda's novel *La última vez* (2007). Critics broadly regard this work as a modern archetype for a sort of literature that employs apposite sets of images and establishes relevant metaphoric spaces as underpinnings for a historical frame of reference. In the case of this novel, that frame of reference is the wave of unrest known as the *Caracazo* (1989). Strictly speaking, the work's discursive register displays traits and context that revolve around those protests and their aftermath. Due to the manifest political character of the novel's context, it will be necessary to evaluate the characters' idiosyncratic verbalisation of their experiences as emblems of the author's political identity. The article's analytical direction, therefore, is intended initially to identify descriptive patterns that demonstrate the author's political proclivities, starting with the way the city of Caracas is represented as a den of persistent crime, culminating in the events that led to the coup d'état of 1992. It then proposes a reading strategy that should enable critical insight into the demonstrable features of 1990's Venezuelan society. In particular, such insights will shed light on particular contemporary issues linked to *Chavismo* and its methods of governance. Lastly, and in view of this particular novel, I aim to explain the set of aesthetic and ideological tendencies that characterise XXI century Venezuelan narrative and political rhetoric.

Keywords: discourse, *Caracazo*, *Chavismo*, imagery, Venezuelan studies, political rhetoric

Introduction

Although in the novel *La última vez* (2007) the argument seems to refer – exclusively – to the imagery of the *Caracazo* or *Sacudón*[1] turmoil, the course of the narrative also negotiates a timeline that is attuned to the contemporary history of Venezuela. This is accomplished by showcasing, among other issues, the fissures experienced in the nation's democratic system and the political rhetoric extant during the beginnings of the political process known as *Chavismo*. The pattern of reading that allows us to link *La última vez* discursiveness with the revolutionary rhetoric of the Chavist utopia attends to the following factors that are exhibited in the novel:

- Claims for order and for an iron fist in the exercise of political power
- Denunciation of the economic bourgeoisie forged under the auspices of the Venezuelan "oil democracy"
- A account of the inequalities in the nation's social framework
- Opposition to traditional political parties
- The appearance of rebel groups (parish/popular borough) of unchallenged legitimacy
- Rejection of the neoliberal policies of capitalism
- An emphasis on the social origin of the insurgents (popular class/proletarians)

Bujanda portrays Caracas through a murky filter of persistent crime and the coup d'état of 1992. The narrative follows the search of one character – the journalist José Ángel Rodríguez – who treks through separate roads of the social topography in two distinct layers: a physical one, leading him into the bowels of the city, and another, symbolic one, – through an intimate past – searching for explanations to justify the *Caracazo*, attempting to understand his life and his country. All of which gives rise to two relevant questions: first, in what way is the novel's fictional discourse linked to the Chavista Movement's political narrative? Second, to what extent does José Ángel's search endorse the rhetoric and imagery connected to the Caracazo disorders and thereby echo the Chavista ideological discourse?

Hereafter, to answer the questions posed, an analysis of narrative strategies and relevant depictions will be undertaken.

Caracas. Residencias Junín. Jonathan Méndez on unsplash

[1] In Margarita Lopez Maya's (2003) opinion "On 27 February 1989 a popular revolt, which was to escalate dramatically, broke out in Venezuela. Both Caracas and most of the main and secondary cities of the country witnessed barricades, road closures, the burning of vehicles, the stoning of shops, shooting and widespread looting. The revolt lasted five days in Caracas, slightly less in the rest of the country. The cost in material losses and human lives was very high; the deaths, numbering almost four hundred, were largely of poor people residing in the capital" (p. 117).

Strategies for Representing the Violence

On the occasion of Ricardo Rodriguez's death – the protagonist/journalist's brother – Bujanda portrays the General Cemetery of the South, a gloomy urban space represented in dark tones. The reference is to a real place located in Santa Rosalia's parish in Caracas that gives its name to the adjoining neighbourhood: El Cementerio. The neighbourhood's description is as follows: "marginal, full of contrasts and threats" (*La última vez,* 2007 p. 24)[2]. According to the plot, Ricardo's body is interred at La Nueva Peste. A spot "wherein almost a hundred nameless execution victims were buried during the social outbreak of February 89" (p. 16)[3]. We can observe here that La Peste – the real name of the common grave where over 400 victims of the Caracazo were buried (according to COFAVIC figures[4]) – appears renamed as La Nueva Peste.

Bujanda then begins to elaborate a set of intrigues surrounding the death of José Ángel Rodríguez's brother and his father's disappearance, which occurs minutes after the end of the burial. Into the story, we find that the General Cemetery of the South becomes an analogy for for the city, with its marginality, desolation and grief. The city overspills its boundaries onto the graveyard; the cemetery sits on "land that had been mistreated by Caracas's excess and incontinence" (p. 22)[5]. The heroes commemorated by statues there had been "immortalised in the marble dream of a Caracas now definitively extinct" (p. 23)[6]. The author, then, is picturing a national state of affairs where national symbols and mythologies no longer play an important part in the public discourse. There is an obligatory antinomy between the moral order envisaged by those heroes, whose statues populate the cemetery, and the national disarray. Thus, the cemetery's geometrical order allows José Ángel to recreate that bygone, conceptual moral order as a lifeless terrain, to "reconstruct the old history of the city by walking through those forgotten streets, conceived as reproductions of the outer city" (p. 23)[7].

Bujanda's narrator, through dramatic depictions, employs disquieting adjectives to sum up the neighbourhood: "A human garbage dump where those who will never appear in any newspaper obituaries and will never be given fond farewells by honourable government committees end up. More than a place of death, it is a place to abandon refuse" (p. 24)[8]. Similarly, the post-funeral portrayal of the city is that of an inferno: "It was noon: Caracas brought to light the

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[2] *La última vez,* 2007, "marginal, lleno de contrastes y amenazas".

[3] *La última vez,* 2007, "donde enterraron a casi una centena de ajusticiados sin nombre durante el estallido social de febrero del 89".

[4] According to Maye Primera's newspapering work (2018), "In 1995 Cofavic efforts began before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to denounce the violations that the Venezuelan State had incurred, between February, and March 1989, in its attempt to quell the known social revolt as The Caracazo, On June 7, 1999, the IACHR applied to the case before the Court and requested that it be declared that in Venezuela, the right to life, individual liberty, personal integrity, and judicial guarantees of 46 of Venezuelans, who were victims of these events. Then, on November 11, 1999, the Court decided in favor of the plaintiffs and ordered the opening of a procedure for reparations" (p. 16). Translation by the author.

[5] *La última vez,* 2007, "terreno que había sido maltratado por la Caracas desbordada e incontinente".

[6] *La última vez,* 2007, "inmortalizadas en el sueño marmóreo de una Caracas definitivamente ausente".

[7] *La última vez,* 2007, "sería relativamente sencillo reconstruir la vieja historia de la ciudad paseando por esas callejuelas olvidadas, concebidas como reproducciones de la ciudad exterior".

[8] *La última vez,* 2007, "Como un basurero humano al que van a parar los que jamás salen en las notas necrológicas de los diarios, ni son despedidos por honorables comitivas gubernamentales. Más que el de la muerte, éste es el lugar de la ciudad para abandonar bagazos".

apocalyptic magma that has besieged it for so long and has transformed its streets into minor human infernos"[9] (p. 26).

The above descriptions, which depict the cemetery as a dumping ground for the dispossessed and Caracas as a chaotic city, congested with traffic and choked with the disinherited masses, showcases the literary parallel. It is a narrative resource that, in this context, gives an account of precarious urban spaces, offers a singular rendition of the violence in Caracas, and announces the upheavals known as the Caracazo. These details, centred upon Ricardo's death from AIDS and the father's disappearance after the burial, allow the narrator to construct a narrative argumentation that will focus on the violent city, highlighting the uncivil and illegal goings-on that are prevalent in Caracas, and by extension, in Venezuela. In view of the chaos, the writer is making the case for welcoming an iron-fist handling of the situation. "What is lacking, brother, is an iron fist. Open fire on the underworld"[10] (p. 85).

As we observe, the social atmosphere in this fictional country is characterised by marginalization and death, a situation that justifies, for the author, the iron fist as valid and necessary governance principle. If, in the discursive logic of the *La última vez*, the robust authoritarian approach to crisis is a legitimate way to make the city prosper again, does it imply that the author is attempting to legitimise Chavismo's distinctive ideology?

La última vez and its Link with the Political Rhetoric of Chavismo[11]

Firstly, it is valid to consider that Héctor Bujanda fiction epitomises the "salvation through exceptional means" rhetoric associated with the role of leadership in Chavismo. The novel's discourse proposes a messianic leader: a strong man that shall handle the future reigns of government, someone who will bring to fruition a revolutionary utopia through armed revolt. Secondly, it is implied that without radical change the country will not have a pleasant future for generations. The narrative projects into the future, an unfortunate time of suffering that citizens will endure during the Rafael Caldera presidential period (1993-1998). Times when, as the plot goes, assaults and murders of citizens will be the norm.

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[9] *La última vez,* 2007, "Se había hecho mediodía y Caracas sacaba a relucir el magma apocalíptico que la asedia desde hace mucho, y que ha transformado sus calles en pequeños infiernos humanos".

[10] "[L]o que hace falta, hermano, es mano dura. Plomo al hampa." Regarding the *Hampa* term, it is frequent to find the translation as the noun *Underworld*; however, Hampa could be translated as an array of criminal organizations. Besides, in the Venezuelan case, Hampa is linked with the violence in Caracas's streets. Indeed, the newspapers highlight in their news that somebody has been the victim of the Hampa in order to refer to assault or armed robbery.

[11] According to Martínez Meucci and Vairberg de Lustgarten (2014), one of the general features of the discursive structure of what they call "Chavismo's revolutionary narrative" is that: 'both in the endo-group and the exo-group are associated with 1) a principle, orientation or general ideology (socialism in the endo group vs. capitalism in the exo-group), 2) transcendental sociopolitical subjects (people vs. bourgeoisie/empire) and 3) archetypal characters that function as representations of good and evil (heroes vs. villains). Thus, the discursive construction inherent in this narrative presents and frames the political struggle in Venezuela, not only from a typically revolutionary conception as a whole (in accordance with what Parker maintains in this regard and in the sense of clearly establishing a 'subject revolutionary' which opposes another 'counterrevolutionary'), but it even comes to represent the relationship between both groups/subjects as that of the eternal struggle of good against evil, in a sense of revenge and epic victory over the oppressors "(p. 485). Translation by the author.

In addition, *La última vez* recounts the 1998 presidential campaign, whose protagonists are Irene Saenz, "The 90-60-90 Barbie wants to grab the coroto"[12] (p. 31) and "Chavez going from town to town organising assemblies" (p. 30)[13]. Likewise, the citiscape depicted in the novel is torn between gangs of the Cota 905 – a real place in the city – and motorized collectives. These gangs control the most vulnerable boroughs and often have Caracas in fear due to their violent disputes for turf, weapons and drug traffic. These criminal groups provoke terror in the citizens and have banking and commercial institutions at their mercy. Their usual criminal practices include kidnappings and robbery, among other scourges.

Descriptions above demonstrate that the city, a represented in the novel, serves as a scenario – *justification*? – for the eventual widespread violence linked to insurgencies and popular revolts. It is insinuated that a coup d'état is imminent, given the growing political corruption and the rise of organized crime: "This has gotten screwed up and tangled, you know? Every day a rumour, a military assault, some student bochinches,[14] some prisoners. Oh, God, I don't know how far this is going to take us" (p. 57).[15]

These are a few details recounted by José Ángel in email messages to his sister, who lives in Madrid. Their contents highlight aspects such as "nobody assaults you or kills you to take off your shoes. After living in Caracas, that [Madrid] must be Fantasy Island" (p. 30).[16] "You know that this country is not the same since 1992. Now everyone talks about a coup d'état, about lieutenants conspiring. There is a lot of tension in the street" (p. 30).[17]

It can be argued that the narrator makes these interdiscursive insertions – emails within the narrative frame – to reiterate the violent environment that is endemic to the Venezuelan capital in the late nineties, thereby justifying an insurrection. Such uprising is the brainchild of groups of citizens and military men who rebel against the status quo and against government authority. In turn, the comrades' expectations are that there will emerge a "brave man who will put to all those bastards in front of a firing squad and establish order once and for all" (p. 85)[18]. The plot's discourse supports this: Venezuela has turned into a country where "[b]eauty queen

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[12] "La Barbie 90-60-90 quiere agarrar el coroto". Coroto usually alludes to personal belongings. To grab the Coroto in this context, means to take presidential power.

[13] "La Barbie 90-60-90 quiere agarrar el coroto". "Chávez anda de pueblo en pueblo haciendo asambleas".

[14] The Dictionary of Spanish Language [Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (2014)] defines Bochinche as follows "1. m. Tumulto, barullo, alboroto, asonada" (Tumult, hubbub, fuss or brouhaha), meaning disordered or loud situation. In this passage, an appropriate definition would be instability, since the Bujanda's narrator describes the political disorder and the absence of law in the country.

[15] Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (2014). "esto se ha puesto jodido y enredado, ¿sabe? Todos los días un rumor, una asonada militar, unos bochinches estudiantiles, unos presos…Ay, Dios, yo no sé hasta dónde vamos a llegar".

[16] Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (2014). "nadie te atraca ni te mata para quitarte unos zapatos. Después de vivir en Caracas, eso debe ser la isla de la fantasía".

[17] Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (2014). "Tú sabes que este país no es el mismo desde el 92. Ahora todo el mundo habla de golpe de estado, de tenientes conspirando (…) hay mucha tensión en la calle".

[18] Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (23rd ed.). (2014). "un carajo arrecho que pase por el paredón a todos esos… y ponga orden de una buena vez".

candidates want to be president; the guerrilla fighters, neoliberals; the revolutionary military and the astrologers, subversive"[19] (p. 31), complains Bujanda's narrator.

In an attempt to avoid a complete affinity with Chavismo rhetoric, the narrator says that the insurgency could be a mistake, since investigations surrounding the rebellion have not yielded accurate results. He insists that the spread of the insurgency might be a consequence of the struggle between the state security bodies, as weapons stolen by the insurgents are a precious booty that has increased the "rivalries between the National Guard and the Scientific Police" (p. 101)[20]. Bujanda asserts this as part of his intention to untangle the history of the supposed armed uprising. However, we also think that Bujanda recurs to this strategy to cover his rhetorical affiliation with the Chavismo narrative. Perhaps he does not want to make his sympathy for the Bolivarian insurgency or his kinship with the rhetoric associated with it so obviously clear and forceful.

In what seems like a journalistic chronicle, written as an email message to his sister, the narrator character informs the reader of three socio-political events that shook Venezuelans in the last decade of the twentieth century: "In the last seven years everything has happened: a social war, two attempted coup d'états, presidential pardons to drug traffickers and even the bankruptcy of the financial system" (p. 31).[21] It is important to note that, simultaneously, while the victims of the year 1989 are remembered and vindicated sympathetically in the first part of the novel, Bujanda progressively erects a violent and chaotic framework to the city through the analogy with the El Cementerio neighbourhood, that "miserable parish in the South of the city" (p. 25)[22] that infuses Caracas with *Caracazo* imagery.

In this sense, we note that the narrator also reports the widespread chaos that confronts the country when he informs of: (a) the coup d'état/military rebellion of 1992 and the uprisings of November, (b) the pardon of Larry Tovar Acuña during 1993 by President Ramón J. Velazquez and, (c) the fall of the financial system and the 1994 banking crisis; along with the court cases of the Latino Bank, Republic Bank, and The Latin-American Progress Group. By gradually outlining these events that took place from 1989 to 1994, Bujanda appraises several milestones in contemporary Venezuelan socio-political history. It is a temporal insertion that disrupts the development of episodic linearity. But Bujanda does not employ temporary evasions nor does he force narrative digressions. The order of the chapters allows for the cogent unravelling of the novel's intrigues and the ultimate uncovering of José Ramón Rodríguez's hiding place: Santa Rosalia Parish. He is there because "the centre of Caracas is the only place where a man can disappear in this city" (p. 46).[23]

Exposing the father's whereabouts allows the reader to consider Bujanda's tone as he describes one of the city's characteristic parishes, a place the author presents as the unlawful and uncivil heart of a foundering city. Likewise, José Ramón Rodríguez is one of the keys to unveiling one

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[19] "La mises quieren ser presidentes; los guerrilleros, neoliberales; los militares revolucionarios y los astrólogos subversivos". This last reference is to astrologer José Gómez's predictions. He was arrested in October 1996 for daring to predict the standing President's death.

[20] *La última vez,* 2007, "rivalidades entre la Guardia Nacional y la Policía Científica".

[21] *La última vez,* 2007, "En los últimos siete años ha pasado de todo: una guerra social, dos intentos de golpe de estado, indultos presidenciales a narcotraficantes y hasta la quiebra del sistema financiero".

[22] *La última vez,* 2007, "parroquia miserable del Sur de la ciudad".

[23] I *La última vez,* 2007, "el centro de Caracas es el único lugar donde puede desaparecer un hombre en esta ciudad".

of the most newsworthy events in *La última vez*: a military uprising, of which José Ángel keeps track because "he is hunting some history of subversion" (p. 40).[24] If we look in more detail, the possible participation of José Ramón in a subversive group attempting to overthrow President Rafael Caldera, who faces a governance crisis, is, to some extent, more than an aesthetic insertion. His disappearance seems to be intimately linked with the rebellion. José Ángel presumes that he is a conspirator, and also the main suspect in the theft of military rifles from Fuerte Tiuna, a Venezuelan military facility.

Bujanda adds a certain enigmatic load onto the fiction, putting the reader on the trail of the potential conspirator and, therefore, participating in the plot. However, the attempt to make the reader an accomplice in following the footsteps of the alleged rebels, makes evident that the novel follows a pattern that is common to stories that support/justify the eventual ascent to power of political groups that are antithetic to the status quo. It is also evident that its inferential bias, that is to say, the perspective from which the author wants the reader to conceptualise the political environment, differs ideologically and aesthetically from the traditional politics of "representative" and "oil" democracy during the period of 1959 -1998 in Venezuela.

As an instance of this practice, *La última vez* sets the year 1996 as a starting point, the point in time that records the emergence of the Bolivarian Movement for Justice subversive group (MBJ in its acronym in Spanish), led presumably by José Ramón Rodríguez. This event demonstrates a peculiar synchronism between the fictional environment and the socio-political events of the period. This is a novel that in a way calls for the emergence of the revolutionary utopia and, moreover, discursively validates the rise of Chavismo. In *La última vez*, the insurgent group is born after the coup attempts of 1992 and, as Bujanda's narrator informs us, has a political cell in the low-income neighbourhoods of Caracas: El Observatorio and 23 de Enero.

On the other hand, José Ángel Rodriguez's journalist has before his eyes a noisy, insurgent, foggy, and uncivil city. Bujanda's plot makes clear that Caracas is the product of urban collapse and, perhaps, the result of neoliberal policies or even the topical failure of capitalism. The solution to the urban conflict seems, then, to demand for the emergence of the revolutionary utopia in order to bring order and offer welfare in a violent cosmos ruled by the military. By contrast, the pre-Chavismo social conditions, with its miserable and poverty-stricken urban spaces, crammed thoroughfares characterized by infernal automotive exhausts and narcotics consumption, "resembled a hell on fire"[25] (p. 103).

In summary, as has been shown in the present article, the novel's content seems to be an endorsement of the revolutionary utopia and therefore of its leader, who is later embodied in the founder of the Fifth Republic Movement[26], the eventual candidate of the unitary platform of the forces of the left: Hugo Chávez, flag-bearer of the so-called Patriotic Pole. The endorsement becomes more evident when the narrative, touching upon the 1998 presidential election, includes the following paragraph:

This Caracas is staking its entrance into the 21st century, betting everything it has on a Barbie who believes that with a little nip and tuck here and there, along with a bit of localised anaesthesia, the country will be like new, like everything else around here, fixed with a beauty

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[24] *La última vez,* 2007, "anda cazando alguna historia de subversiones".

[25] *La última vez,* 2007, "parecían un infierno en llamas".

[26] *La última vez,* 2007, Movimiento Quinta República (MVR)

for the next Miss Universe contest. This Caracas, the dirtier, the more consumed by its blood and its wounds, the more it wants to be governed by a silicone doll (p. 104).[27]

This silicone doll is Irene Saez, former mayor of the Chacao municipality and pre-candidate for president. She was endorsed by Copei, one of the traditional parties that, together with other allied organizations, will subsequently build a political platform that will be named "The Democratic Pole"[28], much caricatured in the novel.

Conclusion

Our validity of our hypothesis regarding the function of *Caracazo* imagery in *La última vez* is self evident because that imagery is recurrent: a view of the violent Caracas that triggered the *Caracazo* upheavals permeates the narrative, demanding a negative view of pre-Chavismo Venezuela from the reader. The Venezuelan capital is endowed with chaotic, marginal and apocalyptic features in a novel that stresses its heterotopic character. The technique employed to construct the narrative becomes an exercise in interdiscoursivity due to the constant use of parallels between cemetery and city and the insertion of real events taken from journalistic chronicles, emails, televised programs and legal records.

An outcome of our attempt to relate the novel's discourse with the political rhetoric of Chavismo would be the explicit ideological positioning of *La última vez* within the field of artistic production. In the Venezuelan case, the cultural field holds two polarities and two sites from which the authors set forth. A first trend includes the novels supporting the emergence of the revolutionary utopia and Chavismo, in full view of the failure of representative democracy. From the other side, there is a set of stories testifying to the violence, tragedy and social fractures occasioned by the policies and control practices of the Chavista regime.

Bujanda adopts narrative strategies that allow for the evocation of revolutionary topics. For example, he is able to portray the misery of the pre-Chavismo city through the search for the narrator's father. Moreover, the uses of these materials are compelling because, regrettably, many victims of the Caracazo have yet to be identified. Many of the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the Caracazo revolt, unfortunately, are still being felt. Secondly, the novelist may appeal to these revolutionary topics because they are current: the February Fourth armed movement and the Chávez election of 1998 perform a relevant role in the present Venezuelan political environment. The rebellion's protagonists have been in government and have established a political regime based on a one party hegemony for the last two decades.

Indeed, *La última vez* invokes memory construction from the notion of collective remembrance (Candau, 2001) for some of the novelist's creative purposes. Retro optics of the nineties is important in that it exposes the urban confines of a previous Caracas, which contrasts with the Caracas of the decade under study. Bujanda's plots offer information on forms of socio-cultural interaction among Venezuelans today after a series of milestones that are related to the

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[27] *La última vez,* 2007, "Esta Caracas que se juega su entrada al siglo XXI apostando todo lo que tiene por una Barbie que cree que con un poquito de bisturí aquí y allá, y algo de anestesia local, el país queda como nuevo, como todo, una belleza para el próximo Miss Universo. Esta Caracas que mientras más sucia y carcomida está por su sangre y sus heridas, más quiere que la gobierne una muñequita de silicona".

[28] As the records show, the Democratic Pole will in the end have as its candidate for president Mr Enrique Salas Römer, former governor of Carabobo state. He will oppose Hugo Chávez, the eventual victor of the 1998 elections.

Caracazo. These signposts have marked recent political history in Venezuela: February 04, 1992, the 1998 elections and the political exercise of Chavismo for twenty-one years. Accordingly, descriptions and illustrations of these milestones in the city of the text are important, but the reflective potential offered by its representation of the socio-political processes is essential, given that the text offers clues for a "correct" interpretation of them. In other words, we insist that from a literary standpoint the Caracazo is not an event with fixed residence in aesthetic terminology. In *La última vez*, the insertion of its historical referent is more than evident and has a compelling political logic.

Finally, in light of the above, we've strived to provide an analysis showing that Venezuelan literature of the 21st century establishes a parallel between the urban narratives that emerged in the first decade of this century and the Chavismo process. Secondly, we've tried to demonstrate that the urban novel of the 21st century reinforces the allegorical, symbolic, and illustrative traditions of the Venezuelan cultural dynamics.

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Tidalectics: Excavating History in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*

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Abstract

Poetry, as can be seen in Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants: A new world trilogy*, is a captivating, entertaining and informative form of literature. It is also in this capacity that it can be deployed to perform specific functions in society. *The Arrivants* is a poetic project in which Brathwaite vigorously both establishes his concept of tidalectics and undertakes what is described in this essay as an excavation of history. Events in history brought up for excavation to highlight their features and social impacts include the slave trade and the colonial era. By means of a critical approach, this essay points out that full appreciation of the circumstances of the slave trade requires it to be treated alongside the era of colonialism since these two events began, interacted and ended almost at the same time. Furthermore, from a close study of all the poems in the work under study, this essay shows that these poems achieve their common objective of foregrounding the experiences of African slaves during those dehumanizing centuries and spotlighting challenges people of African descent in the Caribbean islands and elsewhere continue to face in the modern world. In other words, Brathwaite's excavation of this tidalectic history furnishes a strong argument that modern society should engage in meaningful dialogue with this past rather than pretend further discussions are not needed and that it is by so doing that the modern world can checkmate repetition of those mistakes in the forms of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism which are already undermining multiculturalism.

Keywords: Brathwaite, Caribbean, colonialism, poetry, tidalectics, transatlantic slave trade

Introduction: Some Preliminary Considerations Concerning Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*

In an important work, "Transubstantiating the intimate: the role of autobiographical elements in the poetry of Kamau Brathwaite," Vettorato (2013/14, p. 497) points out that Kamau Brathwaite's personal experiences or personal encounters played decisive roles in shaping his thought. For instance, in a work entitled "Timehri," Brathwaite reflects on how the eight years he spent in Ghana served as a catalyst for his intellectual awakening and how it motivated his call for a "nation language" as part of the struggle for decolonization in the multicultural Caribbean world.

Similarly, in a relevant essay, "The poetics of multiculturalism in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry: A study of selected poems," Abd-Aun and Abdulridha (2017) underscore the point that interwoven with Brathwaite's poetic project is his deep interest in the exploration of the impacts of cultural dislocation, multiculturalism, identity politics, the politics of difference and the politics of recognition on African societies and on the African psyche in the modern world. This also comes in affirmation of the levels of changes and transformations that have emerged in many parts of the world especially since the Age of Discovery and the Industrial Revolution.

"Caliban playing Pan: A note on the metamorphoses of Caliban in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's 'Caliban'" is a work in which Doumerc (2014) argues that Brathwaite's use of terms and names in his poetic project cannot rightly be considered random but are rather meant to achieve stated objectives by playing allegorical roles in a work. An overarching objective of Brathwaite's poetry is the criticism of all human activities and social structures that enslave or undermine the independent human integrity of people of African descent or jeopardize their ability to stand on a strong footing with respect to the rest of humanity.

However, it must be taken into consideration that while a number of scholars have expressed views similar to those of Kamau Brathwaite, he still brings in something unique to the table by reason of the features of his poetic style and vision. Nevertheless, while Brathwaite invents and introduces the captivating neologism of tidalectics as a framework for the interpretation of a certain class of demographic movements and historical events -that took place during the entire era of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries- he does not fully succeed in establishing a distinction between tidalectics and dialectics, as will be shown in this essay. In addition, it would be futile to presume that Brathwaite's personal experiences as well as his personal viewpoints on certain historical realities provide sufficient grounds to approach those social realities based on those perspectives.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite (1930-2020) hailed from Barbados and was one of the most important and award-winning poets of the English-speaking Caribbean islands. As part of his personal project of reconnecting with his African roots, he felt a strong pull towards Ghana and actually spent some years working at the Ministry of Education of Ghana (1955-62) teaching and writing. During that time, his presence and contributions were specially recognized by the Ghanaian government. When paying a visit to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Kenya, the scholar's mother had cause to name him "Kamau", which became an essential part of his reconnected African identity.

Brathwaite's understanding of the importance of exploring the era of slave trade and its impacts on people of African descent led to the collection of poems entitled *Rights of passage*, which was published in 1967. Another collection of poems entitled *Masks* was published in 1968,

while a third collection entitled *Islands* was published in 1969. These three poetry collections make up the trilogy called *The Arrivants*, published in 1973.

The Arrivants: A new world trilogy: Rights of passage, islands, masks is a work that deserves close reading before one can appreciate the creativity and vision behind Brathwaite's poetic project. Central to Brathwaite's response to the slave trade and colonial history in Africa is his concept of tidalectics which he effectively deploys in the excavation of that history.

As Braithwaite's poetry indicates, the era of colonialism also has to be brought into the picture since both the periods of European-led transatlantic slave trade and colonialism began and ended almost at the same time. There was an important interaction between these two events because the same social structures that functioned for colonialism also served the interests of the transatlantic slave trade.

The work under study, *The Arrivants*, is divided into themes, sections, poems, and parts of poems. When our discussion is about a poem (particularly, "Prelude") that happens to share a title in common with another poem in another section of the work, the theme and section in which it occurs will be included and written in italics but separated by a colon, while the title of the poem will be in quotation marks. Parts of the poem and lines relevant to the citation are written out. This comprehensive approach is necessary for clarity of citation in-text.

Understanding Tidalectics and Dialectics

Tidal dynamics is basically about waves surging forward, hitting shores, rolling around and retreating to the sea only to repeat this process for as long as the tide lasts, whether in high tide or low. Applied to symbolize the era of slave trade, it is important to note that these tidal dynamics did not originate from the shores of Africa, as many are wont to assume, but from Europe. This is because it was from the shores of Europe that the first forward tides conveyed sea vessels (ships deployed for purposes of slave trade and colonialism) across the ocean to shores on African coastlines. On arriving at Africa's shores, same tide rolls around a bit, which depicts the dynamics during which Africans were captured, bought or tricked into captivity ("blackbirding") and herded out in chains back to those sea ports. It also depicts the dynamics during which colonial transmissions (personnel, information, and materials) were moved to and from the ports.

Thereafter, same tide retreating back to the sea depicts next sea voyage of those vessels laden with human and material cargoes across the Atlantic to chosen destinations on the other side of the ocean. The Middle Passage is the triangular trade whereby ships left Europe or British North America (New England for instance) with manufactured goods for West African (or African) markets, traded them for African slaves there, shipped those slaves to the New World (European colonies in the Americas and Caribbean Islands) to be traded for money and/or raw materials and which in turn were shipped back to Europe. It is with respect to this historical development that Gargaillo (2018, p. 159) points out that, "The obvious historical reference here is to the West Indian slave trade, and the distinctly sinister transformation implied in the voyage to a new life in chains."

It is also significant that the worldview of tidalectics has inspired a number of art exhibitions, a significant one being the TBA21-Augarten in Vienna which was organised by the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Academy with Stefanie Hessler as curator from June 2–November 19, 2017. This art exhibition entitled, *Tidalectics*, showcased works by thirteen

artists and was considered an "experiment to formulate an oceanic worldview, a different way of engaging with the oceans and the world we inhabit. Unbound by land-based modes of thinking and living, the exhibition is reflective of the rhythmic fluidity of water and the incessant swelling and receding of tides" (2017, n.p.).

Brathwaite's poetry usually has to be situated within the background of colonialism and its impacts on people of African descent (an impact that includes neocolonialism) before it can be meaningfully understood. According to Kpanah (2017, p. 68), the experience of colonialism and slavery left some psychic wounds in the consciousness of their African victims and created a crisis of identity among people of African descent.

Many of Brathwaite's poems are reflections on the colonial era (16th to mid-20th century) during which Europeans engaged in the forceful takeover of non-European territories in Africa, the Americas, and Asia/Pacific principally for their economic and political interests. There was the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, also known as the "Scramble for Africa" conference at which European powers made deals between themselves in order to avoid military conflicts during seizures of parts of Africa. The colonial era was complemented by approximately four centuries of transatlantic slave trade (16th-19th century) during which 10 to 15 million Africans were forcibly shackled and transported to the New World and some parts of Europe while 2 million or more died en route and in Africa as a result of the practice. Denmark was the first country to end its participation in the Atlantic slave trade in 1802, followed by England in 1807, the United States in 1808, Holland in 1814, France in 1818, Spain in 1820, and Portugal in 1832.

In "The Cracked Mother," part 4, lines 13-16, Brathwaite (1973, p. 183) establishes tidalectics in a verse descriptive of dynamics between beaches, the rolling tides of the sea, and the conveyance, droping and/or picking up of stuff (human and material):

> We wished the sea as it should be:
> coming and going on the beaches
> leaving a line of dried moss and black
> sticks at its uttermost reaches.

This phenomenon can be considered connected with cargo cult practice in Melanesia (Papua New Guinea), where since the nineteenth century it has been believed that performing certain rituals would bring in a haul of Western goods (industrial products and wealth) through the help of ancestors in ways similar to how, in bygone times, Europeans brought in loads of Western goods by means of ships, aeroplanes and vehicles. Cargo cult emerged in the wake of colonial contacts between Europeans and indigenous populations of Melanesia.

One has to acknowledge that there can be no certainty as to whether tidal dynamics are characteristically circular or perpendicular or whatever other form one can construe in relation to space and time. This is because shorelines come in different shapes and sizes just as tidal waves and it will be an error to impose just one form on them. Thus, contrary to the view of critics like Dalleo (2004, p. 6) for whom "The image of ebb and flow emphasizes the circular and the repetitive, rather than the progressive and teleological" and DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) who considers tidalectics as operating with "a cyclical model," the rather fluid tidalectic indeterminacy in time and space can be read into a verse from Brathwaite (1973, p. 122) which is found in "The White River," part 2, lines 2-4:

> This was at last the last;
> this was the limit of motion;
> voyages ended;
> time stopped where its movement began.

Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems* (1994) provide good insights about tidalectics. In respect of social processes to be best understood from the angle of their tidalectic interaction with sea vessels and ocean tides, DeLoughrey (2007, p. 6) maintains that,

> It is by insisting on the tidalectics between land and sea and by remapping the Caribbean and the Pacific alongside each other that particular discourses of diaspora, indigeneity, and sovereignty can be examined in ways that challenge and complement each other, foregrounding the need for simultaneous attention to maritime routes and roots."

In addition, as DeLoughrey (2007, p. 43) says, "The concept of the vessel renders tidalectics visible – it is the principal way in which roots are connected to routes, and islands connected to the sea."

While Glissant uses arrow-like movement, Brathwaite (as cited in Dalleo 2004, p. 6), describes European culture as a missile (such as in "History," line 33: "We came across the Atlantic in this space capsule within the missile of the Europeans") and opposes the use of imageries such as womb and pebble which, according to Galleo, all share a concavity and circularity like Glissant's circular nomadism. For Dalleo (2004, p. 6), all of this "represents a progress-driven movement foreign to the Caribbean reality of what Brathwaite calls tidalectics and Glissant describes as the interplay of the beach and the ocean."

Brathwaite (as cited in Reckin, 2003, p. 1), declares that tidalectics is a "rejection of the notion of dialectic, which is three–the resolution in the third. Now I go for a concept I call 'tide-alectic' which is the ripple and the two tide movement." For Reckin (2003, p. 1):

> Even the word-play between these terms, with its unsettling near-anagramming of "tida-" and "dia-," seems to perform a tidalectic movement in microcosm. On a larger scale, Brathwaite has suggested that it describes the structure of trilogies such as *Mother Poem*, *Sun Poem*, and *X/Self*, and the reprise of these three in *Ancestors* shows the "tidalectic" as a creative process....The tidalectic also describes a nexus of historical process and landscape, as in the following passage in *ConVERSations* [1999] which provides a defining image of the Caribbean and its origins, an "on-going answer' in Brathwaite's words (29): the image of an old woman sweeping the sand from her yard very early in the morning.

DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) understands tidalectics as a "geopoetic model of history" and a methodological tool that foregrounds how a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production, providing the framework for exploring the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots.

In addition, as DeLoughrey (2007, p. 2) opines,

> Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an 'alter/native' historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This 'tidal dialectic' resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement

and rhythm of the ocean. Tidalectics also foregrounds alter/native epistemologies to western colonialism and its linear and materialist biases.

Dialectics, an ancient concept in philosophy elaborately used by Plato, G. W. F Hegel and Karl Marx, is a scenario whereby forces or factors within a system come in conflict with one another and from this generate something higher or different in the general format of thesis–antithesis–synthesis. Brathwaite's tidalectics neither displaces, replaces nor excludes a dialectical reading of social history. On the contrary, dialectics plays out in tidalectics just as tidalectics plays out in dialectics as can be seen in circumstances whereby forces at work on one shore, namely, Europe (the unfolding of the age of exploration and the rise of the age of industrialization which heightened the demand for labour and markets overseas) proceed to come into conflict with forces on an opposite shore, namely, Africa (which was largely agrarian and communitarian) by means of the sea and sea vessels moving with the tides to synthesize a new form of social reality (transatlantic slave trade, slave labour, colonialism and multiculturalism).

Although forms of slavery have been in practice in some cultures from ancient times, it was never at that intercontinental magnitude seen in the tidalectic European operation in Africa. This point of view also dovetails with Reckin's (2003, p. 2) description of tidalectics:

> In terms of connecting lines, back and forth, not only across the surface of the ocean–and there are clear parallels here with Glissant's "poetics of relation" and the shipping routes that Paul Gilroy discusses in his *Black Atlantic*– but also in the form of airwaves and "bridges of sound" (radio broadcasts and sound recordings, for example) that connect colony with colony and colony with metropole, often enacting tidalectic echoes.

About this new social reality and its pycho-social challenges, Dalleo (2004, p. 6) states,

> For Martí as much as for Glissant or Brathwaite, the chaos brought on by economic and cultural exchange ([or] globalization) simultaneously threatens Caribbean identity and cultural production, while highlighting its possibilities. As an example of this dialectic, in a chapter of *Poetics of Relation*...Glissant discusses the role of the computer in freeing the world from its scribal prison.

A *Tidalectic* Excavation of History in *The Arrivants*

A critical exploration of Brathwaite's application of tidalectics in *The Arrivants* in his project to excavate history will require looking at constitutive poems to uncover what they say about ocean tides, ships, and shores in relation to social processes and slavery. For instance, Brathwaite (1973, p. 35) uses the word-imagery of a tidalectics "that tides us to hell" ("The Journeys," part 1, line 26) to refer to the human costs of that notorious trans-Atlantic interaction between Europe and Africa. By means of slave ships and colonial ships, African peoples came to be subjected to exploitative rule by foreigners who had divided up the continent. 10 to 15 million Africans were carried off to slavery while 15% or more of them (2 million or more) died en route and in Africa as a consequence of that practice. In this wise, as Brathwaite says (1973, p. 164), "The sea is a divider. It is not a life-giver" ("Jah," part 2, line 11).

Brathwaite (1973, p. 189) also talks about the symbolism and horrors associated with slave routes connecting African homesteads with harbours and the sea. In this wise, he says, "their cross is the street / that runs down to the harbour; / it is cobbled with voices" ("Shepherd," part

2, lines 20-22). In addition, "The streets' root is in the sea / in the deep harbours" (lines 24-25). These lines of poetry hit at the trauma of a new social reality that saw African families and communities ripped apart by slave raiders, slave traders, and their local accomplices. Brathwaite has a point then in describing slave sea vessels and sea routes as symbols of the utmost debasement of the African person.

African slaves were treated like disposable cargoes and crammed together in dark or poorly lit cargo holds with little or no room for the head and legs or pinned to floorboards. Slave traders fastened them to the ship with chains on the legs and/or necks and wantonly exposed them to unhygienic conditions, hunger, dehydration and diseases (mostly amoebic dysentery, scurvy, smallpox, syphilis, and measles). Olaudah Equiano is among the few former slaves who had the opportunity to write an account of such appalling conditions. The many that died on the way were usually thrown overboard. There was also the matter of suicides from slaves jumping overboard or refusing to eat or to take medicines. The *Slave Trade Act 1788* of the parliament of the United Kingdom, which was introduced by Sir William Dolben, an abolition advocate, was the first time the British government stepped in to regulate conditions under which slaves were transported. The Quakers led the slave abolitionist movement.

Indeed, such a cargo experience, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 232) says, makes the sea "deep mourning waters under the mornes" ("Coral," line 7). Furthermore, in Brathwaite's (1973, p. 35-36) opinion, this tidalectic interaction between sea-faring Europeans and African shores unfolded like "Hell / in the water" ("The Journeys," part 1, lines 27-28). In the midst of all this, "salt of the wave-gullied / Ferdinand's sea" (lines 33-34), one might hope for some light at the end of the tunnel, as it is said. On the contrary, the forlorn reality that faced many African slaves was that there was (as in lines 38-40):

> ...no Noah
> or dove to promise us, grim
> though it was, the simple sal-
> vation of love.

For Braithwaite (1973, pp. 208–209), the plight of slaves couriered across the ocean and the tsunami of unforeseen circumstances that hardly gave them a second chance to hit reset on their lives cried out in surrender to that sea vessel which was a symbol of this ordeal, "Ship / house on the water / I salute you" ("Wake," lines 1-3), "I am a bale of straw / swish of your cask's laughter / darkest cling of your gudgeon" (lines 4-6) and "there are shadows about me / eyes like mine / pores sweating fears like mine" (lines 7-9). This also includes a plea to that sea vessel as it returns to the shores of Africa for more slaves, "and on arrival / if someone should ask you how you left us / we on these islands" ("Wake," lines 29-31), say "that you left us / eyes still closed / fists still curled" (lines 34-36) and "tell our never-returning grandfathers of old / that the houses are damp, the verandahs are cold / with the wind weeping in from the sea" (lines 51-53) but in hope, "let there be rain" (line 55).

The Middle Passage is a term that refers to that enclosed pattern drawn by ships deployed to trade in manufactured goods and slaves as they travelled from Europe to Africa, from Africa to the New World, and then back to Europe. Brathwaite (1973, p. 194) provides an insight into the conditions of slaves during the Middle Passage, an experience that includes occasional suicides by jumping overboard and the dead being discarded into the water: "long dark deck and the water surrounding me / long dark deck and the water is over me" ("Caliban," part 3, lines 16-17). As all this unfolded, it was like that which makes the entire human race *human*

has been suspended and time paused: "*limbo / limbo like me*" (lines 18-19) so long as "stick is the whip / and the dark deck is slavery" (lines 20-21).

It was an overwhelming experience for many Africans, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 11) puts it, as they saw themselves being herded out and marching in chained lines in a silence imposed by shock and broken only by the clank of metal, the crack of a whip, agonizing voices, and a slave driver's commands: "and we filed down the path / linked in a new / clinked silence of iron" ("New World A-Coming," part 1, lines 72-74). In this wise, Brathwaite (1973, pp. 4 and 81) establishes a connection between the frequent "drum skin whiplash" and "I shout / I groan / I dream" (*Rites of Passage: Work Songs and Blues*, "Prelude," lines 1-9, and "Epilogue," lines 1-9).

Brathwaite (1973, p. 18) further highlights the grave psychological impacts of their ordeal which each of them found so humiliating personally that even "my own mock / me; my own seed" ("All God's Chillun," part 2, lines 4-5) who "struggle / to strike me" (lines 7-8). In addition, the racist oppression and exploitation they faced at every level of social existence, as he (1973, p. 30) affirms, also triggered self-loathing in many African slaves: "I am a fuck- / in' negro, / man, hole" ("Folkways" part 1, lines 1-3) "in my head, / brains in / my belly" (lines 4-6).

When Brathwaite (1973, pp. 57 and 48) says, "By these shores I was born" ("South," line 4), he refers to generations of African slaves born in slave colonies and by whose slave labours "The islands roared into green plantations" ("Calypso," part 2, line 1). He also says of those descendants of slaves that later got an opportunity to travel, "Since then I have travelled; moved far from the beaches" ("South," line 7), but who met a world crippled by racism and injustices. It is about such an unfair world that continues even to this day that Brathwaite (1973, p. 55) says, "Once when we went to Europe, a rich old lady asked: / Have you no language of your own / no way of doing things" ("The Emigrants," part 5, lines 1-3) while "a bow-legged workman / said: This country's getting pretty flat / with *nègres en Switzerland*" (lines 7-9).

It is arguable that oppressed people display a deeper understanding of humanism than their oppressors, despite the oppressors' claim to superior knowledge. In addition, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 7) puts it, African peoples terrorized by slavery and colonialism and traumatized that "It will be a long long time before we see / this land again, these trees" ("New World A-Coming," part 2, lines 1-2) stridently prayed to God for wholesome release "from robbers and from those who plot / and poison while they dip / into our dish" (*Rites of Passage: Work Songs and Blues*, "Prelude," lines 136-138), and for "warm fires, good / wives and grateful children" (lines 139-140).

Brathwaite's poetry incorporates a highlight about the close connection between human suffering and religious sentiments particularly in relation to African slaves and their descendants. For him (1973, p. 68), even when unforeseen circumstances keep sabotaging one's best efforts and good intentions, if every new day, "Yuh does get up, walk 'bout, / praise God that yuh body / intturnin' to stone" ("The Dust," lines 184-186). As a matter of fact, religion provided many African slaves with the hope and determination they needed to live through every horrible and arduous day and to wait and long for a better day. This religious sensibility was of course a derivative of the characteristic strong religious disposition of Africans in contradistinction with their enslaving and exploitative European contemporaries.

In a sense, neither oppressor nor oppressive circumstances have internal access to confiscate one's power to dream or to hope for better times. However, some schools of thought disparage religion for playing that role in society, that is to say, for helping the poor and oppressed cope with and in a way accept their painful existence. Marxism, for instance, considers divinities as natural forces deified and religion as an illusion that will inevitably fade away at the dawn of a perfect, that is, communist society. Marxism also notably describes religion as inspired by human suffering and about which Karl Marx famously declares, "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (as cited in *On Religion*, p. 39).

Brathwaite (1973) makes the point that African slaves really went to great lengths to move on with their lives despite their traumatic experiences. There were feelings of anger and hatred for their oppressors, but apart from occasional acts of resistance or rebellion while being force-marched, at the harbours, inside slave ships, or in the plantations, they also accepted they lacked sufficient resources and access to social institutions by which to fight back. In other words, African slaves and their descendants realized they have to come to terms with their situation and overlook their sufferings.

In this respect, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 22) describes it, each of them has to honestly or conveniently "smother" that bitterness and hate "to the bone / to suit the part / I am playing" ("Didn't He Ramble," part 1, lines 5-7). This was a necessary step and any of them might even get to travelling to other parts of the world when the opportunity turns up: "So to New York London / I finally come / hope in my belly" (lines 1-3).

Brathwaite (1973) insists that the modern world has to be honest about its past and do more to create a better future from its mistakes. But if the modern world rather chooses to pretend that those centuries of slavery and colonialism do not deserve the attention some Africans and Diaspora are calling for especially while core indices of that continue in the form of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism, then, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 28) puts it, "Memories are smoke" (*Rites of Passage: The Spades*, "Prelude," line 1) and "no dreams / for us / no hopes" (lines 13-15).

A scenario like that, as Brathwaite (1973, pp. 28-29) points out, will only jeopardize peaceful and humane coexistence in societies around the world: "Just give us / what we earn" (*Rites of Passage: The Spades*, "Prelude," lines 26-27) or "we / smash / and grab" them (lines 30-32) and "To hell / with Af- / rica" (lines 34-36) and "Eu- / rope too" (lines 38-39). In addition, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 71) indicates, in a neo-colonial world where "No one / knows Tom now, no one cares. / Slave's days are past" ("The Cabin," part 1, lines 49-51) probably but what about if they are still "un- / forgiven"? (lines 54-55). Society no doubt will be on a better footing by engaging in meaningful dialogue with the past and not by hurriedly or arrogantly shoving it under the carpet. Brathwaite (1973, p. 164) underscores the fact that failure in this regard will only worsen the threats the modern world is facing in the wake of globalization and multiculturalism, "For the land has lost the memory of the most secret places" ("Jah," part 2, line 1).

For Brathwaite (1973, pp. 42–43), a modern world torn asunder by the double-standards of powerful countries and groups predispose Third World peoples to rise and confront the world: "Brother Man the Rasta / man, hair full of lichens / head hot as ice" ("Wings of a Dove," part 1, lines 14-16) "reached for his peace / and the pipe of his ganja" (19-20). "And I / Rastafar-I" (lines 27-28) "hear my people / cry, my people / shout" (38-40) against the "con / man" (lines

43-44) saying "Down down / white / man, con / man" (lines 41-43) and "Rise rise / locks- / man" (lines 54-56).

Countries and people with the means to do so may decide to go on playing God with other people's lives, just as slave masters and colonial masters did. Brathwaite (1973, p. 73) notes that Africans were sucked into "the pain of waiting for the whip rope / tamarind lash, hurled by the thick / necked sweating God who ruled" ("Mammon," part 1, lines 19-22), but the fact remains that craze for wealth and power can never justify dehumanizing people. In this wise, Brathwaite (1973, p. 106) argues, "And what wealth here, what / riches, when the gold returns / to dust" ("Timbuctu," lines 14-16). Indeed, all of world's vanities can be summed up as "the immemorial legacies of dust" ("Mammon," part 1, line 28).

Brathwaite (1973) joins his voice to that of scholars and pro-Africanists who foreground the necessity and capability of Africans to celebrate their socio-cultural heritages and to derive a characteristic worldview and spirituality that will sufficiently empower them to step up to their rightful position in global politics ("Masks," *Masks: Libation*, "Prelude," "The Making of the Drum," and "Atumpan"). In this sense, an African renaissance will be like a return back from slavery and colonialism ("The New Ships," "The Awakening," and "Homecoming").

The project of neo-Africanism is relevant to modern society even though, as Brathwaite (1973, p. 216) remarks, "Such history we write / is stripped and torn / by whip, by wind" ("Unrighteousness of Mammon," lines 7-9). Success of the project will require Africa coming to terms with its pre-transatlantic slave trade/pre-colonial past as well as facing up to the challenges of the post-colonial times ("Cane"). It will also require Africans to equip themselves sufficiently to (re-) create their future ("Negus").

With all these in mind then, like a leopard defying the confines of its cage, Africa must break free of its chains both on the domestic and international scenes and realize its potentials ("Leopard"). This line of thinking is equally advocated by the concept of decolonization explored by scholars like wa Thiong'o (1986), Smith (1999), and Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980), and by the concept of coloniality (the psycho-social impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized people) explored by scholars like Quijano (2000), Mignolo (2001) and Escobar (2004).

By saying that, "his- / tory bleeds / behind my hollowed eyes" ("Sunsum" lines 4-6), Brathwaite (1973, p. 148) makes the point that collaboration for an African renaissance extends to modern African Diaspora especially since many of them are still impacted by a past they "borrowed" (1973, p. 4) from bygone generations who had been sold off and enslaved by Europeans. The sudden arrival of Europeans on the shores of Africa and in the hinterlands triggered a significant level of disorientation and disunity among African peoples as many responded differently to the allure and threats associated with that phenomenon ("The New Ships"). But on the average, it left "the slave at the crossroads" ("Vèvè," part 3, line 30), as Brathwaite puts it (1973, p. 263).

As a matter of fact, the same tide that conveyed slave ships and colonial ships stimulated more rapid development on both sides of the Atlantic ("The Cabin"). Peoples of African descent in modern times can effectively use this feature from their past to their advantage to emerge stronger in the modern world ("Epilogue," and "Caliban"). In addition, humanism requires them not to treat fellow Africans and other people in the horrible way they were treated ("Axum, and "Legba").

Though many Africans have chosen to follow foreign religions ("Korabra"), history underscores the point that the integrity of religion is undermined when religion is manipulated for material or selfish interests ("Trade-Winds" and "Legba"). Talk about the hot theological and politico-economic debate whether Africans have souls or are worthy of heaven! In description of this seriously prejudiced Euro-centric mindset, Brathwaite (1973, p. 66) says, "But you int got to call / the Lord name in vain / to make we swallow" ("The Dust," lines 144-146) inhumanities meted out on Africans like it was God's will or a natural law.

This critical point of view equally extends to tendentious legal frameworks such as the *Jim Crow* laws in the United States and the *Code noire* laws in France developed specifically to justify and protect social institutions of slavery and colonialism beyond moral judgements. However, all said and done, it can never be a crime for "Tom" (who typifies the African person and his/her struggles) to be a black man in a multi-racial world ("Postlude/Home").

Conclusion

Kamau Brathwaite's work, *The Arrivants: A new world trilogy: Rights of passage, islands, masks* as well as his introduction of the neologism of tidalectics have provided an effective background and tool for the evaluation of the social impacts of the eras of the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism on Africans. They also highlight the social circumstances of people of African descent in modern times wherever they reside around the world.

It is also in this wise that it comes highly recommended that the modern world should continue to engage in discussions concerning this historical event rather than try to gloss over it. Whatever lessons that have been learnt should be applied in respect of the current milieu of neo-slavery and neo-colonialism that are already leaving their own marks on the modern consciousness. Indeed, Caribbean people and all peoples of African descent should be unrelenting in their call for a more humane and fairer world.

Brathwaite's vision and poetic art must be appreciated for contributing in no small measure to the advancement of literature and social criticism. They are captivating, informative and entertaining.

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Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" as Autobiography

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Abstract

Sylvia Plath's *Ariel* collection of poems placed her among the United States' most important confessional poets of the twentieth century. Almost all the poems in *Ariel*, which were written during the last few months of Plath's life and published after her death, are "personal, confessional, felt" (Lowell, 1996, p. xiii). Several events that are mentioned in these poems make reference to the poet's own life experience. Plath, indeed, "transformed her own life into writing" (Bassnett, 2005, p. 5). Analyses such as these have led some critics to consider much of Plath's poetry to be an eloquent expression of her own factual experience. "Daddy", one of the best-known poems in the *Ariel* volume, incorporates several autobiographical details worthy of note. The first part of this research paper is an investigation into the diverse autobiographical elements present in "Daddy"; the second part is an analysis of Plath's faithfulness in transforming details about her private life into art.

Keywords: confessional poetry, autobiography, personal reality, Confessional School

Introduction

Sylvia Plath is considered one of the prominent figures of the confessional school of poetry. Both her prose and poetry are marked by the confessional mode. Because the purpose of this paper is to explore the way Plath handles and unmasks very personal life details directly in her poem "Daddy", it will be crucial to shed some light on the confessional style adopted in her poetry. Confessionalism, which emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is the style adopted by the contemporary American poet Plath in her poems to lay open her life experiences, often in an autobiographical manner. Her writings are consistently drawn from her personal experiences and her personae are usually related to her self. Confessional poetry, indeed, is "dedicated to, and preoccupied with, the 'self' with the larger world" (Stratman, 2015, p. 239). Christopher Beach elucidates in the *Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth Century American Poetry* (2003) that the confessional mode "allowed poets to articulate feelings, thoughts, and emotions that challenged the decorum of an era marked by its containment of psychic needs and desires" (qtd. in Gale). Poems become spaces for the authentic display of the poet's bittersweet life experiences and memories. "Describing the poetic characteristics of the confessional mode, Beach states, 'the poems were presented in the first-person voice with little apparent distance between the speaker and the poet; they were highly emotional in tone, autobiographical in content, and narrative in structure'" (Gale). In "Daddy", there is a little gap created poetically between the poet and the created persona, or the "I" of the poem.

"Daddy"

The poem "Daddy" includes many autobiographical details. One major detail is that Plath's German-born father died when she was young. She confesses, "I was ten when they buried you". Actually, Otto Plath died from a cardiac embolism on 5 November 1940 after being hospitalised for nearly a month in order to receive the proper medical attention. The father's tragic death haunted her throughout her life. Undeniably, losing the paternal figure at an early age made a seemingly irreplaceable void in her life. Her dad left her at a very sensitive age; an age that requires forming a strong, close emotional bond between the child and the father. Because at ten he left her, "at twenty [she] tried to die /and get back, back, back to [him]". The constructed persona "thought that even the bones would do", which expresses her readiness and eagerness to die because only death would reunite her with her father. The recurrence of the plosives /t/, /d/, /b/, and /k/ in these lines creates an abrupt, sharp effect that projects the daughter's breathlessness and agony at the time of speaking. Yet, the main questions that arise at this point are: what does the death of the father really evoke in the speaker's memory? What does the persona truly mourn? Does she express grief for the life of insecurity and deprivation she led after the physical loss of her father? Or does she rather express sorrow for the lost miserable and irrecoverable past that she experienced with him? Whatever the reasons are, Plath was influenced by her father's sudden death to such an extent that it affected not only her private life but also her writings. "Daddy" stands as the best example among her poetic writings, a poem that incarnates the presence of her dead father. Put differently, "Daddy" is a confessional poem where the presence of the father figure is strong and overwhelming.

The poem under study examines the complex relationship between the daughter and her dead father. In the first stanza, Plath assumes to be the victim of her father's life and death as she was left for "thirty years" "poor" and "barely daring to breathe or achoo". "Instead of saying 'sneeze' Plath uses the onomatopoeic 'Achoo'. Using the sound of the sneeze rather than the word sneeze, Plath is able to rhyme with the 'oo' sound that runs throughout the poem. It is a sound of fear and dread and of surprise and release" (Gale). It expresses the speaker's mingled

feelings of sorrow and melancholy for paternal loss but also of freedom from paternal authority and power. Using a gloomy depressive tone, she blames him for not doing "any more, black shoe / in which she has lived like a foot". The comparison of the speaker to a foot living in a black shoe has a disparaging significance. The common symbolism of the shoe as a shelter and of the father as a protector is mocked by the black colour of the shoe. For thirty years, the daughter has been deprived of the sense of security and protection that any male parent may afford his child. "The world she has lived in, like a black shoe, is severe, formal, confining, and constricting. She experiences herself to be more like a foot, a limb or appendage, than a person, integral unto herself" (Gale). Even after his death, the world is still limiting and suppressing. She is still enslaved and objectified by the dark shade of the shoe. "Plath is expressing a claustrophobic condition that has haunted the narrator lifelong" (Gale). "Daddy" is a confessional poem through which the poet narrates and divulges one of the intricate mysterious father-child relationships.

In the second stanza, the poet's tone changes from a child's tone to that of a hostile and aggressive woman. The poet "rejects her role as victim and asserts that violent revenge" (Bloom, 2001, p. 42). This is obvious through what she confesses, "[D]addy, I have had to kill you". This line may have an equivocal meaning. On the one hand, it may connote the idea that the daughter does not want to kill her father, but to exterminate the memories associated with him that are haunting and tormenting her. It seems that the daughter has been overwhelmed with feelings of pain and suffering since his death and that she fails to get rid of his influence and release herself from his reminiscences. Accordingly, Harold Bloom emphasises that the first line of the second stanza is "partially a wish and partially means that she has had to kill his remaining presence in her life" (2001, p. 42). On the other hand, this line may also denote the idea that Plath has really meant killing her father. By confessing, "[D]addy, I have had to kill you / you died before I had time", it sounds as if she is bothered by his death before she has a chance to murder him metaphorically. Plath's real intention to deprive her father of existence may be proved by what she once revealed as far as her relationship with him is concerned. Indeed, she reveals, "I   adored and despised him, and I probably wished many times that he were dead, I imagined that I had killed him" (Steiner, 1973, p. 21). Nevertheless, this poem makes the reader feel confused and unable to have a clear understanding of Plath's real intentions and attitudes toward her parent. Indeed, while in the second stanza she seems to be out of control and to have the feelings of hatred and disgust toward him, in the third stanza she asserts that "[she] used to pray to recover [him]"; which means that she really wishes he were still alive. "Daddy" is an autobiographical poem that projects a daughter's feelings of ambivalence toward her father.

In her book *A Closer Look at Ariel*, Nancy Hunter Steiner advocates that Plath describes her father as an "autocrat" (1973, p. 21); which means a dictator. As a matter of fact, in "Daddy" she portrays him as an evil German dictator:

> I have always been scared of *you,*
> with your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygook.
> And your neat moustache
> and your Aryan eye, bright blue.
> Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You——
>
> Not God but a swastika
> so black no sky could squeak through.
> Every woman adores a Fascist,

>   the boot in the face, the brute
>   brute heart of a brute like you. (41-50)

The father is depicted as a "Panzer[1] man", "a brute", and "a swastika".[2] The poet confesses that she is terrified by the image of her dad as a cruel hard-hearted "fascist" with his "Luftwaffe"[3] "neat moustache", "Aryan [and] bright blue [eye]", and "brute heart". The reference to the authoritarian role of the father and to the claustrophobic condition to which the daughter's life is doomed, which is first unveiled through the image of the black shoe, is once again proposed in the poem through the metaphor of the "black swastika". Indeed, the latter, which stands as a symbol of Nazism, compares the father to a constricting sphere, or rather a maze through which the daughter fails to walk in order to find the exit. Even the "sky", the epitome of freedom and emancipation, fails to "squeak through" that maze and illuminate its darkness. The metaphor of the father as a swastika does not only project the state of confinement and bewilderment of the daughter but also identify the type of father-daughter relationship, which seems to be intricately complicated. What seems to be striking is the daughter's acknowledgement that she "adores a Fascist" like her father in spite of the pain, scare, deprivation, and degradation caused by him. "The speaker [who] embraces this identification of self as victim, becomes, in stanza ten, an apparently unashamed masochist [through] the bravado claim that 'every woman adores a Fascist'" (Gill, 2008, p. 62). Still, it could be suggested that the persona's masochism is paralleled with the father's sadism, which is implied through the emphasis on the image of the father as a "brute" thrice in the above-mentioned lines. The daughter's apparent submissiveness to sadistic paternal power spotlights her gratification with that sadomasochistic relationship.

The father is seen not only as a Nazi and a sadist but also as a devil. The monstrosity of the paternal figure, which is already evoked through the image of the brute, is further projected in the subsequent lines:

>   You stand at the blackboard, daddy,
>   in the picture I have of you,
>   a cleft in your chin instead of your foot
>   but no less a devil for that, no not
>   any less the black man who
>   bit my pretty red heart in two. (51-56)

The freakishness of the father is displayed in the verses, "a cleft in your chin instead of your foot / but no less a devil for that", which suggests that the speaker correlates a cleft with the devil's hoofs. Still, paternal grotesqueness is also spotlighted through the frightful image of the devouring black man who fragments her fragile tiny heart into two pieces. The lexical register of darkness used throughout the poem and conveyed through the recurrence of the term "black", in addition to the diction of evilness, accents the image of the monstrous father who fails to love his daughter. The frequent exploitation of monosyllabic words throughout the poem, which are indicated in "eye", "foot", "face", "heart", "chin", "bright", "brute", "boot", "bit", "man", "no", "not", and "red", intensifies the daughter's intermittent suffocation and hence emphasises her fear of the male parent. The different imageries attributed to the father

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[1] Panzer refers to "a German tank of World War II" (The New Penguin English Dictionary, Robert Allen).

[2] Swastika means "a symbol with arms extended clockwise as the emblem of the German Nazi Party and Third Reich" (The New Penguin English Dictionary, Robert Allen).

[3] Luftwaffe is "the German Air Force, esp. during World War II" (The New Penguin English Dictionary, Robert Allen).

do not only imply Plath's feelings of fright but also of hatred and anger toward her dad who did not love his daughter enough to want to survive for her. She is mad at him for dying and abandoning her at a young age. It has been argued that "the rage expressed in the poem and its excessive accusations, that [D]addy is a Nazi devil, a brutish torturer and a vampire, are evidence that the speaker's fury is on-going and self-destructive" (Gill, 2006, p. 39). Yet, Plath's self-revelation in "Daddy" becomes an outlet for a possible release from the shackles of the many traumatic memories she holds of her father.

Other autobiographical elements are strongly present in "Daddy". The word "toe" in the second stanza is not used randomly in the poem; it has a rather important significance in Plath's life experience. Indeed, Otto Plath's leg was amputated on 12 October 1940 after an operation for a gangrenous toe. In *Sylvia Plath*, Peter K. Steinberg turns to the autobiographical record of Plath and offers important facts. He states:

> In August 1940, Otto subbed a toe on his left foot and shortly thereafter developed gangrene. Incapacitated by pneumonia, he spent two weeks at the hospital in Winthrop. Accompanied by a nurse, Otto entertained his daughter only briefly through the days of September. Sylvia, writing poems and drawing pictures, gave them to her father, which pleased him to no end. By October, gangrene had set in so badly his doctors decided he needed to have his entire left leg amputated. (Steinberg, 2004, p.13)

After the surgery, he had been hospitalised until he died from a cardiac embolism on 5 November 1940. It is interesting to note that "'Daddy' [is] composed on 12 October 1962, the anniversary of her father's leg amputation in 1940" (Gill, 2006, p. 40). It seems as if Plath is celebrating the anniversary of her father's leg amputation by writing this poem and referring to that sad incident that disturbs her life. The reference to that painful event is made explicit through the use of the word "toe". Still, critics have different perspectives on Plath's real intentions of writing "Daddy" on that particular day. Jo Gill, for instance, asserts that "Plath [is] attempting to amputate daddy from her own psyche", and that we should "read 'Daddy' in Freudian terms as a symbol of castration of her father, an attempt to rob him of his sexual power over her" (Gill, 2006, p. 40). In this context, "Daddy" becomes a celebration of feminine self-liberation from masculine power, more precisely, from his paternal omnipotence over her. It has been declared that "in the 1970s 'Daddy' was celebrated perhaps more as a confessional anthem of female oppression, subversion, and resistance in a world dominated by male power and the power of male definition than it was celebrated as a poem" (Gale, 2016). The influence and potential of this poem lies in its reliability on genuine events and images in Plath's life to produce an autobiographical account about her failures as a submissive woman and triumphs as a rebellious woman against the masculine order.

Plath spent much of her earliest childhood years near the ocean. In "Daddy", third stanza, the references to the "freakish Atlantic" and "the waters off beautiful Nauset" reflect her enduring familiarity with these natural landscapes in her life. "Nauset" is the "old name for a town on Cape Cod where her father originally arrived in America from Germany" (Bloom, 2001, p. 42). Nauset beach, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is near Plath's childhood home. Plath had always contemplated the beauty of the beach at Nauset especially "the colours, the hubbub, and the throbbing, deep-summer tenor of the place" (Steiner, 1973, p. 25). This sandy area, "[her] favourite tawny beach, she once called it" (Duffy, 1971, p. 388), forms one of her cherished pleasant childhood recalls. In "Daddy", Plath prays that her father recovers in the radiant Nauset waters, the place which reminds her of their memories during the past years. Obviously, Plath adores the natural elements mentioned above effectively enough to influence her and

make her pray for the recovery of her dear dad. In contrast to the second stanza where Plath seems to be revengeful and hostile toward her parent, elements of nature in the third stanza tend to create a harmony and make a kind of reconciliation between the daughter and her father.

Plath's relationship with her husband Ted Hughes is another element in the poem that alludes to her own life experience. The bond between Plath and men is once again tackled in "Daddy" through spotlighting the ups and downs of her marital life. On February 26, 1956, Plath first met the English poet Ted Hughes and she fell in love with him. Their passionate love relationship led to marriage in June 1956 in London, England. Plath expresses that Hughes is "the only man in the world who is her match" (Bloom, 2001, p. 12) and she portrays him, as Bruce Bawer confirms, like "the strongest man in the world . . . with a voice like the thunder of God" (in Bloom, 2007, p. 14). Even though she failed through her first suicide attempt to rejoin her father, Plath "did not surrender the wish to get back to him" (Gill, 2006, p. 39). By marrying Ted Hughes, she intends to make "a [D]addy substitute" (Gill, 2006, p. 39). This is made conspicuous in the poem: "and then I knew what to do / I made a model of you". Undoubtedly, Plath's attempt to make a model of her father is due to her inner sense of deprivation from the indispensible paternal care and affection. Put it differently, "out of her need for a paternal figure..., she is now connected to a new man who is just like him" (Bloom, 2001, p. 43). Hughes in "Daddy" is portrayed as "a man in black with a Meinkampf [4]look". Here Plath tends to say that her husband has the same look of her father, that sharp gaze of a Nazi leader, and she associates him with the black colour that is attributed to the father in the first stanza. In the beginning, the couple's marriage "was idyllic and generally a happy one. Her home and husband became Plath's top priorities and she felt that she had found her true soul mate in Ted" (Agarwal, 2003, p. 17). Yet, the peaceful romantic marriage did not last.

Plath's marital relationship to Hughes exacerbated in summer 1962. Indeed, just after the birth of their son, their marriage was increasingly threatened by Hughes's infidelity. Plath discovered the mutual attraction between her husband and his friend Assia Wevill. The instability of their private life made the couple decide to separate. It has been claimed that "Daddy" "is written just after Plath split up with her husband because of another woman" (Bloom, 2001, p. 43). Some critics clarify that "at the time Plath wrote 'Daddy', either during the last months of 1962 or the first of 1963, they were in the process of divorcing. The poem was first published in Ariel, posthumously, in 1965" (Gale, 2016). During those particular moments of separation from her partner, Plath was mentally and psychologically tormented. She felt disappointed and depressed not only because of the bitterness of her husband's betrayal but also the bitterness of the sense of loneliness she experienced once again in her life. Through these two lines, "the black telephone's off at the root" and "the voices just can't worm through", the poet tends to explain that "again she is confronted with a lack of communication" (Bloom, 2001, p. 43). Indeed, the first time Plath is confronted with the lack of communication is when her father dies and leaves her without "the love of a steady blood-related man" (Gill, 2006, p. 42), and the second time is when her husband abandons her for the love of another woman. "Written in the wake of her separation from Ted Hughes in October 1962 reactivated Plath's sense of abandonment and unleashed the full tide of negative feelings towards the male image" (Agarwal, 2003, p. 86).

In the light of this poem, Ted Hughes no longer epitomises the perfect image of a man in the eyes of Plath. He is rather seen in the metaphor of a "vampire" who "drank her blood for a

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[4] *Mein kampf*, German for "my struggle" or "my fight", refers to "the autobiography (1925-27) of Adolf Hitler, setting forth his political philosophy and his plan for German conquest" (Dictionary.com).

year/seven years . . .” Obviously, through this poetic device of imagery, Plath confesses that in the same way a vampire sucks the blood of its victims, her marriage to Ted Hughes, which lasts for seven years, “has drained her by drinking her blood, or figuratively sucking the life out of her” (Bartleby Research, 2016). Along these lines, it has been reported in “A Disease of the Blood? The Chronic Loneliness of Sylvia Plath” that in the volume that includes a dozen letters sent by Plath to her psychiatrist before her death (published between 2017 and 2018), this woman writer “accused Hughes of beating her and causing a miscarriage, as well as wishing her dead” (Alberti, 2019, p. 40). In this vein, the metaphor of the vampire relates to the dramatic act of miscarriage in Plath’s life. The husband’s beating results in expelling the foetus from her womb, and hence, draining her body from blood and life. The loss of blood and the foetus projects the loss of her body-self. The vivid imagery of the vampire reveals the extent to which this woman has been the victim of her husband’s possession, mutilation, and oppressive dominance. Undoubtedly, this correlates with how her husband is a model of her father; both of them “have stripped [her] of her sense of self” (Bartleby Research, 2016). Indeed, Plath “married . . . a surrogate figure and significantly, a daddy substitute who would punish her, repeating a masochistic relationship to a dominant male figure” (Gill, 2006, p. 39). By saying “if I’ve killed one man, I’ve killed two”, Plath intends to say that as she killed her father, she killed her husband too. As she murders her father, she releases herself from all those sado-masochistic ties and shackles. The poet of “Daddy’” exploits the confessional mode to celebrate female submission, oppression, subversion, and resistance in a world dominated by male power and control.

Another important autobiographical detail mentioned in “Daddy” is Plath’s first suicide attempt when she was twenty years old. Plath confesses that “at twenty I tried to die / and get back, back, back to you”. On 24 August 1953, she tried to kill herself by taking an overdose of sleeping pills; she recovered, however, being treated with “intense psychotherapy and electroshock therapy” (Agarwal, 2003, p. 17). After her failure to commit suicide, Plath expresses that “[she] couldn’t even succeed at killing [her] self” (Steiner, 1973, p. 21), which intensifies the idea that “her desire to die won out over her struggle to live” (Chapman, 1994). Plath’s suicide attempt may have the following reasons. First, Plath, whose father’s death evidently impacted her life emotionally and psychologically, finds that only death can save her from her deep desperation and endless suffering. Besides, Plath’s first suicide attempt may be related to the daughter’s need to return to her father because she misses him badly. “The slowness and quiet” of this line, “I thought even the bones would do”, “reinforces her sad anguish in trying to be near him, even if it meant her own death” (Bloom, 2001, p. 43). Moreover, “one explanation Plath seems to be formulating for the first suicide attempt is [her] internalised guilt for wishing her father dead and having that wish fulfilled” (Gill, 2006, p. 40). Plath’s “Daddy” is an attempt to exteriorise this inner, tormenting feeling of guilt. Through disclosing her story of suicidal intention, this confessional writer seeks to free herself from an old burden.

This poem, which draws on Plath’s life experience, does not just point to events that occurred in her past life, but also it foreshadows her coming death. The two expressions “I’m finally through” in stanza four and “I’m through” in the last line of the poem, foretell what life holds in store for Plath, which is death. It seems as if Plath is finally able to resolve her conflict with herself and her father and to find her own path, which is self-extinction. Because she is exhausted, she decides to end those conflict-laden relationships that subjugate and objectify her, to quit life, and to cross to the other side. “‘Finally through’, however, is ambiguous. It means ‘I have finished with this false-self conformity to your model which they have forced on me’. But it also means ‘I have at last got through to you, into the realm of death and I find

that your death was terminal'" (Holbrook, 176, p. 2013). As she jaunts through the path of death, she kills those tormenting traumatic experiences living within her, and hence, ensures the death of the father. Effectively, this American poet committed suicide four months after the composition of her poem "Daddy". Grieved by her father's death, disillusioned by her husband's unfaithfulness, and unable to stand alone in life and take care of two children, Plath had been "too exhausted by these emotions to go on living" (Chapman, 1994). "Daddy" echoes the poet's contentious relationships, emotional imbalance, and presages her tragic end.

Critics agree that Plath's poetry is autobiographical and that she is "a strong autobiographical writer" (Bassnett, 2005, p. 2). It is worth noting that her poems became more autobiographical during the last few months of her life. In other words, "during the fall of 1962, Plath's life experience and art experience coalesced, and the results were poems uniquely her own" (Martin, 1988, p. 9). It has been widely agreed that the poems in the collection *Ariel*, in particular, have been feverishly confessional. These poems, which "were written mere months before Plath's death in February 1963 . . . are some of the best examples of confessional poetry, or poetry that is extremely personal and autobiographical in nature" (Gale, 2016). Accordingly, several events mentioned in her poem "Daddy" allude to Plath's personal life. The autobiographical details that the poem straightforwardly unmask and represent include the illness and the death of Plath's father when she was young, her prayers for her father's recovery at the Nauset beach, her relationship with her husband Ted Hughes, and the first suicide attempt at the age of twenty. However, it is erroneous to believe that Plath is completely faithful in giving the reader the exact truth about some details in her life. In other words, Plath's faithfulness could be challenged. For instance, in "Daddy" she confesses: "I was ten when they buried you"; whereas, in *Sylvia Plath's Bell Jar*, Bloom asserts that the poet's father died "a week and a half after Plath's eight birthday" (2001, p. 9). Likewise, in *Sylvia Plath*, Peter K. Steinberg declares that "Otto Plath died in the New England Deaconess Hospital on November 5, just nine days after Sylvia's eight birthday" (2004, p.13). It sounds as if Plath writes "ten" deliberately in coordination with "twenty" in order to endow the poem with sound effect and musicality. Besides, while the constructed persona expresses that her first suicide attempt is a means to get close to her father and to relieve the sense of abandonment she felt after his death, one cannot deny that the real and direct motive that lies behind Plath's suicide attempt at the age of twenty is actually the tremendous sense of depression she felt when she is not accepted in Frank O'Connor's summer school writing course at Harvard. Put it differently, "on 24 August 1953, Sylvia Plath attempts suicide after learning that her application to Harvard's fiction writing course is rejected" (Kirk, 2004, p. xviii). It is true that Plath uses an autobiographical, direct and personal style, yet keeps a small, apparent distance between the poet and the persona.

Still, what is the advantage of adopting the confessional style in her poems? Plath breaks out of the snare of silence and lets the unconscious flow. The result is a life-like narrative loaded with autobiographical content and with strong and deep emotions. Plath seeks to confess "those 'very difficult feelings' best designated, in the language of psychology, as traumas" (Horváth, 2005, p. 14). It has been stated that "'Daddy' is a brilliant piece of work and is very artfully compiled. In this she used autobiography with huge, horrific events to convey how she felt herself" (Agarwal, p. 87). The expression of her paradoxical, perplexing feelings in art helps her recover.

The sturdy relationship between autobiographical writing, confession, and psychotherapy in "Daddy" has been scrutinised by many critics. In *Psychoanalysis, Historiography, and Feminist Theory: The Search for Critical Method*, Plath's "Daddy" is interpreted as "notes

upon an autobiographical account of paranoia" (Kearns, 1997, p. 78). Depression, alienation, self-diminishment, suicidal ideation and intention, and death fantasies, which are aspects of the speaker's emotional illness, are unabashedly voiced in the poem to project Plath's real story of psychological disturbance. Yet, this autobiographical account is given for therapeutic ends. Indeed, "the text is like a poetic equivalent of psychoanalysis as 'the talking cure'. Whether we construe Plath's poem as autobiographical, 'Daddy' operates in the form of a kind of confession" (Bennett and Royle, 2016, p. 313). Confessional writing has a therapeutic power. It is a means of healing those wounds within her. It is a way to go beyond those traumatic experiences that still haunt her in life. Plath's moods, feelings, thoughts, and behaviours are translated into words that work to set her in a positive direction and regenerate her self. In *Signifying Pain: Constructing and Healing the Self through Writing*, Judith Harris asserts that "the journals of Sylvia Plath offer insights into her psychiatric treatment and the relationship between the creative and therapeutic process" (Harris, 2003, p. 85) adding that "on multiple levels, Plath's poem stimulates a patient's talk in psychotherapy" (Harris, 2003, p. 85). "Daddy" makes a journey into the female psyche and disengages its unconscious impulses and internal conflicts, visualizing by that a scene of psychotherapy between the patient and the therapist.

Conclusion

To conclude, even though Plath died at a young age, she gained fame and made her name by the poems that were published after her death. The huge success and recognition that these poems achieved are actually due to Plath's skill and power in bringing her private life and intense convoluted personal feelings into her art of writing. Undoubtedly, many autobiographical elements are strongly present in "Daddy" in which the poet takes on the persona and uses the discourse of a child. The daughter's discourse is highly emotional in tone, autobiographical in content, and narrative in structure. There is a noticeable close relationship between the "I" of the poem, or the constructed persona, and the poet. To truly understand and recognise the value and importance of this poem as autobiographical, one should discover Sylvia Plath's life story and delve into her inner world.

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Reality, "Fiction" and Psychorealising the Fictive

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Abstract

Readers of literature, listeners of music, appreciators of visual art – indeed, all recipients or "audiences" in any form of the creative and performance arts – do sometimes connect with the artistic work on a deeply personal and subjective level when the work strikes a relatable chord in them. Audiences tend to find themselves and their everyday reality mirrored, or "place-able," in the work's creative or enacted reality. This subjective experience has been termed "Psychofictive Reality". This article proposes this concept through the prism of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of Internal/External Realities and Aristotle's dramatic notion of Catharsis. It establishes key notions such as Artistic Reality, Psychic-Material Reality and Mirrorness/Relatability, in the concept of Psychofictive Reality.

Keywords: archetypes, realism, catharsis, subjectivity, Sigmund Freud, psychic reality

Introduction

This study begins with a definition of the notion of psychofictive reality in the appreciative engagement of the arts in general, particularly the creative and performance arts. Its illustrative analyses will draw from the fields of literature, drama and music. Moreover, the term "audience" will be used throughout this study in a very broad sense. Its comprehensive range embraces recipients of any work of the creative or performance arts as appreciators of such work, however lay the audience or unpremeditatedly it engages with or relates to the artistic work. It is in this sense, therefore, that the reader of a work of literature, the viewer of a work of visual art, or the audience of a theatrical production or cinema can be said to be included suitably under the said umbrella.

As an initial sketch we may characterise Psychofictive Reality as the associative connection in the mind of the audience to a work of creative or performance art. It is the connection that is established between the artistic reality (that is, the work's creative or enacted reality) and the audience's psychic-material reality (which involves, but is not limited to, events, experiences and standards in the audience member's everyday life, involving his/her psychological "realities" such as emotions, desires, wishes, dreams, and so on). Furthermore, it is the subjective experience that takes place in the mind of an audience of a work of creative or performance art when the work strikes a perfect chord in his/her mind and s/he feels able to place him/herself psychologically in, or interpret his/her everyday reality within, the context of the created or enacted reality.

The notion of psychofictive reality, put in other words, is what may be termed the psychological experience of an audience of any work of art has when the work becomes so relatable that s/he can connect with an event, character, dialogue, etc. in the work of art on a deeply personal and subjective level. It is a reader's personal, impression-based interaction with a literary work, for instance; a listener's emotional or psychological connection with a musical piece, or a member of an audience's subjective engagement with a dramatic performance.

However, since such interaction with a work of art is characteristically psychological, personal, emotional and subjective, it follows that a preliminary analysis of it cannot determine what parts of the work will be *psychorealised* by an audience or in what manner different audiences will *psychorealise* it. In other words, one cannot predict what part of a work of art its audience will be able to relate to his/her own reality.

What Psychofictive Reality Is and What It Is Not

While Psychofictive Reality refers to a subjective experience, it does not equate with everything that the world of subjective experiences offers. To avoid a misinterpretation of its essence and operational dialectics, this article will illustrate and evaluate psychofictive reality to demonstrate what it is and what it is not. It shall also be made clear in what terms psychofictive reality is to be construed, interpreted or contextualised in its dialectical relationship with the arts, both the creative and performance arts.

Psychofictive reality is…
Psychofictive reality thus relates, for instance, to when teenagers appreciate a musical piece by emotionally responding in a manner that suggests the lyrics of the piece were in fact written for them. He or she appropriates the pronoun "me" used for the persona and substitutes

him/herself in the imaginary setting and situation created by the lyrics. This happens because fantasies, wishes and aspirations, pain and fear, and indeed all other sentiments are an integral part of a person's psychic-material reality. Likewise, all wishes, fantasies, fears and such like are rooted in the present: they are simply projections or manifestations of the person's present reality (Freud, 2010, p. 147–157).

The moment a listener places him/herself in music, the experience may advance beyond the music's melody or lyrics. What happens in fact is that it feels, at that instance, as though the music has simply come alive, as though it has simply been *embodied*. This is perhaps better typified in the Karaoke pop culture in Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. The moment when a karaoke singer passionately lip-sings a touching music track by his or her music idol in a karaoke box (or "noraebang" in Korean), so much so that at that moment s/he 'owns' not merely stage but, in fact, the imaginative lines of the music piece, at that instance s/he sees him/herself *place-able* within the creative work. Hence, s/he can cry in total abandon, lip-singing the lines of the song. This happens because the appreciator of the work of art now imagines his or her own reality in the light of the work's reality. S/he has simply psychorealised the musical work, or the work is psychorealised within him or her.

At the point of an imaginative story when we can remark: *If it were me, I'd do this, or I'd do that*, we can say that we have simply introduced ourselves into the story's distinctive scenarios. Thus, we do not get angry when seeing a fictional character behave in some silly or wicked manner, not until we place ourselves within the work's environment. That is to say, it is not until we comprehend the fictional (or artistic) reality in terms of our own reality that psychofictive reality ensues. This is the psychological objective of most works of art: that the audience will personally relate to the creative or performance work.

In engaging a musical work, furthermore, the *psychorealitic* experience occasionally may not have any connection with the lyrics but have everything to do with the musicality and melody of a song. This is why creative writers at times play a melodious or emotive tune when writing a deeply moving poem or story: it inspires them. That inspiration may come simply from the melody, with the writer producing thematic content that is very different from the song's actual lyrics. Thus the writer may create something as different in thematic content as a sober, reflective poem on life's contingencies from psychorealising a soulful musical piece about love.

Psychofictive reality is not…
While psychofictive reality is what we have previously defined, it is, however, not many things. Psychofictive reality is not a verification of the plausibility of a fictional plot, for instance, nor is it substantiation of how close to real life fictive events are. It is, on the contrary, simply picturing the self within the fictional material. It is an art of functionality perhaps best portrayed as an audience psychologically "reimagining" the fictive material of an artistic work in terms of his/her own psychic-material reality.

Psychofictive reality, furthermore, is not a calculated art nor is it a deliberate venture: it is, in contrast, a response to art peculiarly rooted in spontaneity and un-intentionality. This is why the process of a work of tragedy becoming psychorealised by the audience, resulting in a moment of emotional release or catharsis, is altogether uncalculated and unpremeditated by the audience. Spontaneity is the distinctive characteristic of psychofictive reality, and it confirms it as a private, subjective and personal engagement with a work of art. Hence, the audience does not know beforehand what part of the work will be psychorealised. Neither can s/he know

for certain exactly how the process of psychofictive reality plays out. Therefore, it is a sincere, natural and uninhibited form of engagement with a work of art.

In addition, psychofictive reality is not a process through which one interprets a work; it is not a critical method of interpretation, but a concept not yet subjected to diagrammatic methodology. Saying that someone has *psychorealised* a work does not directly suggest that an interpretative method has been used to analyse the process. Psychofictive awareness refers to the realisation of a subjective connection with an artistic work rather than an analyst's interpretation of such idiosyncratic interaction. The exception only is when the artistic concept of psychofictive reality is used in the fields of psychotherapy and medical psychology. We necessarily bare ourselves to therapists as well as lawyers simply because we consider ourselves helpless in a medical condition or a legal case without them.

Thus, conceptualising psychofictive reality does not involve an analysis of how a person psychorealises an artistic work. This is because psychofictive reality is essentially a private experience evoking the psychorealising audience's core emotions amid reminiscences of personal and sentimental life experiences. Hence, the audience member inhibits the slightest intrusion of analytic thought into the private experience of psychofictive reality.

Let us consider the example of a literary critic opting to critically analyse the process of a person's psychofictive reality. Let us say in the realisation of an empirical analysis the critic collects data from interviews conducted on a few people about their experiences of psychorealising a particular work. The critic then makes a comparative analysis of how each of the audience members psychorealises the work vis-à-vis their collective psychic-material reality, deploying artistic archetypes as motifs. This kind of textual analysis is problematic in its very essence, as the critic's analysis is necessarily deficient in systematised parameters to be objective. On the one hand, the critic can only interpret a reported, belated (rather than real-time or live) account of the audience member's psychorealitic moment or experience. Due to its idiosyncratic nature, an analysis of a psychorealitic experience cannot render an audience member's idiosyncratic experience of psychofictive reality in generic terms with an acceptable degree of accuracy. Adding to the complications, the analysed audience will necessarily hold back elements of the experience that are deeply personal, as expressing such elements goes against human nature; the very personal and subjective elements of psychorealitic moments are those that typify psychofictive reality the most.

On the contrary, we can show in a critical analysis how a character in a narrative, for instance, psychorealises a work of art in the narrative as an imaginative or fictional representation of the concept of psychofictive reality. That is to say, it is only absolutely justifiable in textual analyses to critically analyse the representation of the concept of psychofictive reality as creatively portrayed in a work of art. It is, however, to the extent it suffices to admit that empirical observations themselves are allowed rough values of inference due to unavoidable human error – it is only to this extent that a literary psychorealitic interpretation of an audience of a work of art through private diaries, personal interviews, questionnaire inputs, and so on, can be excused as equally valid. This, in my perspective, is absolutely understandable and correct.

Psychofictive reality: Key notions
Intrinsic to the understanding of the dialectics of psychofictive reality in the appreciation of works of art are a few primal notions that require simultaneous emphasis. In giving attention

to them the paper shall both critically engage and build on the work of Aristotle and Sigmund Freud particularly.

Artistic reality/psychic-material reality
This article's usage of the "fictive" component in the term "psychofictive reality" reflects etymology in *Oxford Living Dictionaries: English* (n.p.), with its latest derivation being from early 17th century English, in turn etymologically rooted in French (as "*fictif, -ive*") and Medieval Latin (as "*fictive*"). Its French and Medieval Latin etymology translates in its verbal form as to "contrive or form". By an etymological-semantic development, its English derivation signifies the quality of being 'created by the imagination' (def. "fictive"; 1st entry). This captures the peculiar essence of the "fictive" component of our usage of the term "psychofictive reality"; as all forms of art, however realistic or abstract, are creations of the imagination – a contrived/formed reality. It is this component that gives character to the notion of *artistic reality* in the conception of psychofictive reality. It is in this sense, thus, that artistic reality translates to imaginative scene, plot, action, experience, imagery, mood, representation, symbol or such like portrayed or relayed in any work of art, whether fiction, visual art, film and so forth. It is the reality of the artistic work; bearing the sense of the *Oxford Living Dictionaries: English* (n.d.) definition of the "fictive" component of "psychofictive reality": that is, the reality that is "created by imagination" (def. "fictive"; 1st entry). Hence, the term: *artistic reality*.

On the other hand, Sigmund Freud conceptualises material reality, also called external reality, and psychic/psychical reality, or internal reality. The two notions, though of binary opposition in their properties and characters, share a paradoxical interrelatedness and inter-functionality. The *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (2018) in an article on Freud's notions of external versus internal reality, explains *material/external reality* as subsuming 'the object of our physical environment, the subject's body, and the subject's inscribed place in the society' (Internal Reality/External Reality, para. 2). Freud's *psychic reality*, however, refers to a person's "internal reality [which] corresponds to a collection of processes, representations, and affects that are essentially (but not only) unconscious" and "contains representations of the world that the subject has formed, fantasies stemming from unconscious desires, and universal fantasy structures: the primal fantasies". The "existence and efficiency" of these are, in fact, said to be "comparable to physical reality" (*International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, Internal Reality/External Reality, para. 1).

It is, therefore, in this sense of material reality and psychic reality that this essay has developed the second notion in the concept of psychofictive reality, called the *psychic-material reality*, which is an alternate notion to artistic reality. In essence, this study's notion of psychic-material reality articulates the dialectical interrelatedness between Freud's psychic reality and material reality with regards to the appreciative concept of psychofictive reality.

Psychofictive reality vis-à-vis archetypes
Reality necessarily becomes more subjective, personal and individualistic when we narrow it down from collective to personal. However, within several audiences' psychic-material reality, there is the possibility of an intersection of such realities, and only made possible by the agencies of society (whether micro or macro) and archetypes/universal phenomena such as love, revenge, death and so on.

It is the possibility of this idea of a collectivity of psychological and material experiences that is evident in Caruth's (1996, p. 8; as cited in Alford, 2011, p. 196; Andermahr, 2015; p. 502)

conception of collective trauma and historical trauma. In this, she establishes that traumatic experience may go beyond being private and personal to belonging to a society or group of people, or to a people's history. By extension, reality (or, a person's psychic-material reality) can go beyond being personal and private, to becoming shared with other persons at particular points due to an intersection or overlap conditioned by the agency of society. The fact of this intersection of realities is also enhanced by the fact of archetypes – that is to say, universal phenomena, notions and ideas existent in societies cross-culturally and globally – typified in works of art and are understandable and relatable to audiences across cultures simply because of their universal nature.

However, as universal as archetypes such as love, revenge, death or sacrifice are, there are varying degrees to people's reception and reaction on both the cultural and, more significantly, individual levels of relating to universals. For instance, while love is universal and archetypal across places/cultures such as India/n, Pakistan/i, France/French, the United States, and Nigeria/n; the manner in which individual cultures relate to the universal idea differs considerably. Hence, Hindustanis by and large may relate to the archetypal love in terms of its emotional cum patriotic essence. To most Pakistanis, it may be perceived as relating to religious devotion. To the Frenchman, moreover, love may equate with bold, sensuous or else clandestine romance. To the "pop-cultured" American, it may evoke sexuality with a sense of self-fulfilment; while among Nigeria's cultural nations and ethnic groups, love especially in a marital relationship may be widely expressed in terms of duty.

Also, archetypal revenge may be perceived in some ancient or modern societies cum philosophies as justice. In some others, it is equitable with crime. To yet some others, it is synonymous to sin. Some, still, may conceive it in moral terms of the metaphor of a poison to a noble soul. These examples show that, as universal and cross-cultural as archetypes are, societies' reception may differ considerably from culture to culture, or from place to place. This means that archetypes, however universal they may be defined to be, are essentially subjective on a cultural level.

Someone might argue that if there are archetypes, then psychofictive reality can only be collective or shared, meaning that its personal and individual nature and essence is defeated. This, however, is not the case with psychofictive reality, because even archetypes that are interlaced with a culture-specific or society-specific substance are predisposed to individual subjectivity. Even if archetypes are, in fact, subjective in the manner in which cultures relate or react to them, there is still the plausibility of a variant personal response to, and interpretation of, archetypes rooted in the person's (psychic-material) reality.

Therefore, it is not only at the cultural level that the reception and reaction to archetypes are subjective; they are, in fact, also on a personal and individual level. When an audience engages a work of art with archetypes, it still only psychorealises the work on a personal, subjective and individual level.

Mirrorness and relatability
Pivotal to the poetics of all forms of the creative or performance arts are its characteristic inclination towards reflecting life, or reality, and the aspects that make it relatable to an audience. These are what this research has termed its *mirrorness* and its *relatability*. It has become a tradition that all forms and expressions of the arts expectedly reflect, or else are some form of interpretation of, life – that is, reality. All works of literature, theatre/film, music, fine art and so on, are either a mirror or a lens with regards to reality. They either reflect reality, as

with realistic works of fiction, or else, they simply magnify or *microfy* reality, as with sci-fi novels, films and comics or allegorical and abstract works.

Achebe (2007) disputes the coherence of Pablo Picasso's remark that all art is false. According to Achebe, Picasso himself produced *Guernica*, a compelling, truth-bearing canvas, a work that has the quality of being relatable. Achebe notes that Picasso, in his assertion, must have merely been drawing attention "in the exaggerated manner of seers and prophets to the important but simple fact that art cannot be a carbon copy of life; and thus, in that specific case, cannot be 'true'…" (p. 107).

Furthermore, Achebe's redefinition of art captures the very perspective with which that particular argument analyses the arts. He asserts: "Actually, art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence *through his imagination*" (p. 107). By this, he corroborates the idea that art has a reality that is a reflection of human psychic-material realities. Moreover, it is popular in modern analyses of literature, particularly, that art is a product of its society, that it reflects the society that produces it. Modern criticism as well as postmodern owe much of their features to literature's *relatability* and *mirrorness*. A criticism in ethnic studies is possible, for instance, in Adichie's *Americanah* simply because her fiction *mirrors* the sociocultural realities of colour and racial identity question, migration, Afro-diaspora, and the like, among migrant Afro-descendants in the United States. A feminist criticism of the text is equally possible merely because the novel also *mirrors* the social realities of the postmodern woman standing to upturn instituted feminine stereotypes in a densely patriarchal world. A postcolonial reading of Soyinka's *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known* will be appropriate as well because most of its poems deal with issues that are readily visible in postcolonial Africa. Postcolonial themes such as corruption, military dictatorship, overturned government, failed elections and poverty are explored in the collection through engaging Nigeria's recent history of the alleged assassination of a military dictator and a presidential candidate.

Conversely, the notion that literature is a reflection of society can be viewed from the perspective of a modern critical reestablishment of the *universal*, disregarded by Plato in his classic *Republic*. Reacting to Plato's deliberate exclusion of poets from his imaginary ideal society -because poets (artists) "allegedly misrepresent the world" through lies- "poststructuralists (including historicists, feminists, deconstructionists, postcolonialists, and queer theorists)" show and continue to prove the mirror relationship between the literary text and the world as "offering a window onto the world or (in Hamlet's words) holding up a mirror to nature". They *re*-establish the idea of art's *mirrorness* in the classical notion of art being *mimesis*; that is, an imitation (Bennett, A. & Royle, N., 2004; p. 27–28).

If a work of art is, therefore, a reflection or interpretation of life, if it is a mirror or lens of reality, then it best strikes a sentimental chord in the audience merely in relation to reality. For instance, for the audience of a work of visual art to make intelligible meaning out of an artistic representation, whether the work is abstract or realistic, then, s/he connects the art with his/her relatable world via his/her particular mindset. Also, an audience of a futuristic work such as sci-fi or Afro-futurism subconsciously draws from reality to best engage and psychologically connect with the artistic reality of such work of future realism.

We Have Always Psychorealised Art

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, through *katharsis* (or, "catharsis" in English: translated from classic Greek as the purgation – that is, the release – of emotion) the audience feels "compassion for the vulnerabilities of others" (Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, D., 2007, p. G17). This experience of catharsis or a release of emotion, producing compassion, pity and fear, according to Aristotle (*Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Butcher, 2000, p. 10, pp. 18–20), is achieved in the audience's mind just after the climactic moment of the play. Moreover, this compassion occurs simply because the audience knows that "the destruction of hopes and dreams are very much part of what really happens in the world" (Kennedy, X.J. & Gioia, D., 2007, p. 884).

In essence, the said empathy owes largely to the work's *relatability*, and which in the case of tragedy is peaked in the climactic scene. We can affirm that an audience necessarily first finds him/herself place-able in the work of art *before* the empathy that produces Aristotle's concept of catharsis is evoked in him/her. The fact of the work's relatability will, in turn, be due to tragedy's characteristic feature of reflecting reality, to whatever degree it does: its *mirrorness*.

Aristotle's notion of catharsis only goes to highlight the fact that we tend to psychologically and emotionally connect with a work of art at its most relatable points. The notion itself exists because of the fact that members of the theatre audience feel the tragic hero is deserving of pity and empathy because s/he is a reflection of the intersection of the archetype with their inner selves. Humans have always psychorealised works of art, even though we may not until now have been able to conceptually define and designate the natural psycho-subjective experience.

If literature, for instance, is a reflection of life that makes relating possible, then there is no way people can relate with a literary work on a personal level unless via the subjective *psychorealitic* experience. If literature reflects life, then psychofictive reality engages it on a personal, subjective level. It is in this light that the form of literature which by its generic nature best privileges psychofictive reality is realistic narrative, especially popular fiction. Readers readily imagine, fantasize, dream of and weep about events in such super-realistic works as popular fiction because it mirrors their own reality; and far more than they would respond if they were reading literary fiction. This is mostly because popular fiction is essentially plot-driven (and actions are those that directly mirror reality) while literary fiction is theme-driven (themes being only mouthpieces for "preaching" artistic truths).

It is easier, however, for narratives (fiction), enactments (theatre, film, and mime and dance performance), lyrical/melodious music and realistic fine art to be psychorealised by audiences, than other forms of art. This is because the micro form of reality they recreate is usually a closer reflection of the relatable materials of reality itself.

Poetry, however, owing to its elevated, stylized and elliptical use of language, will naturally distance a reader from psychorealising its content. This explains why readers of poets are mostly poets; such is the consequence of poetry's characteristic difficulty for its readership. The exception, though, is some contemporary forms of poetry with their very prosaic, day-to-day and lyrical style of language use. This brings back a possibility of psychofictive reality to poetry, particularly the contemporary prosaic, lyrical and emotive styles of poetical practice.

Abstract art, on the other hand, is one of the most typifying examples of works with deliberate techniques for the audience's detachment from a personal, subjective engagement of such works. The only plausibility for an abstract work of art to strike a psychorealitic chord in the

mind of the audience engaging the artwork is when the piece becomes "a piece of a whole jigsaw puzzle", as it were; and s/he psychologically fits the image of the artwork within the rest of the figurative puzzle. That is to say, the psychorealitic experience happens only when the artwork is physically connected to, or associated with, a larger frame of things (reality) such as a physical place, a haunting or soothing past experience, a locale bearing a particular sentiment to the audience, and such like. If the audience of the artwork feels psychologically connected to the abstractions, such as the colours, symbols and imagery; when he recalls a real place, an experience, and so on – or vice-versa, then, we do have the possibility of psychofictive reality, even with abstract art.

Psychofictive Reality in Contemporary Art

Contemporary culture is replete with documentations, narratives and metaphoric portraits of psychofictive reality in the engagement with the arts; only that critics are only not as aware that such experiences or portraits are parts and parcels of this psycho-subjective process.

The psychorealitic experiences across the arts and contemporary history have been triggered by elements in works of art resonating with the audience in strong, powerful ways. The resonance can come from the characterisation in the work of art being engaged by the audience or the setting, the tone or mood, the tune or sound/melody or the motif, the dialogue, the plot or the climax or any number of any artistic elements.

The Korean drama *It's Okay, That's Love*

An apt representation of psychofictive reality in a work of art is its portrayal in a Korean episodic drama. Executive Producer Kim Young Sub's *It's Okay, That's Love* (2014) is a psychological drama with its fictional story developed upon a possible diagnosis in neuropsychiatry. The protagonist, the rich prominent fiction writer Jang Jae Yeol, who is diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder, habitually sleeps only in the bathroom of his luxurious homes. On the wall over the bathtub in which he sleeps every night, he hangs an artwork that soon makes sense vis-à-vis his compulsion. The art is a split-scene painting of a camel tied to a tree in a desert by night; by morning the rope with which it is tied is loosened from the tree, but the camel remains fixed to the point it is previously seen to be at in the night scene. Jae Yeol relates to his girlfriend Ji Hae Soo, what psychological import the artwork bears for him. In the dialogue subtitled in English from Korean, he says:

> Do you know what this camel painting is about? The people who live in the desert tie their camels to trees at night. They untie the rope in the morning, as you can see. But the camel doesn't run away… it remembers being tied to the tree at night. Just like we remember our past wounds. Our past wounds… the trauma… weighs down our feet in the present. For me, the bathroom… For you, anxiety… (Kim Young Sub, *It's Okay, That's Love*, 2014; Season 6).

Hence, author Jae Yeol finds his traumatic past (his psychic-material reality) place-able in the context of the artistic reality of the work. Jae Yeol's obsessive compulsion does stem from a traumatizing experience in his childhood: his father's repetitive abuse of his mother has made mother and son to flee home one night and take shelter in a polluted public bathroom. He recalls this along this line, speaking again to Hae Soo: "I dove down into that dirty place. From that time on, I feel the bathroom is the safest place" (Kim Young Sub, *It's Okay, That's Love*, 2014;

Season 5). While his mother cannot find sleep unless it is in an airy, spacious place; Jae Yeol can only find sleep in a bathroom.

Jae Yeol's bathroom art piece best interprets his psychological state to him in a manner that begins as a first step in his journey of self-realization, and consequently diagnosis and therapy. He has simply psychorealised the artwork.

Oscar Wilde's Novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Furthermore, psychofictive reality is a bold metaphor and pervading motif in Oscar Wilde's novel of the Decadent literary tradition, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When vile and corrupt Lord Henry "Harry" Watton makes a painting portrait of the charming male protagonist Dorian Gray through an artist, it becomes the mirror reflection, in a metaphoric sense, of Dorian Gray's moral soul throughout the plot.

As Wanton deliberately corrupts Gray's moral character and integrity, Gray grows even more charming and debonair. He views his portrait often but he always finds his image in the painting gradually decaying and decomposing, at the same rate in which he advances in looks. This continues until Gray himself eventually dies when his image in the painting reaches the furthest extent of decomposition. In the novel, Dorian Gray's psychic-material reality is reflected off the artwork as Gray does see his reality place-able in the painting. Beyond that, however, this story of Oscar Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* is essentially an extended metaphor for what we now designate as the concept of Psychofictive Reality.

Sinatra's music *My Way* and killings in Philippine Karaoke Bars

Lastly, a critical case of psychofictive reality is that of American singer Frank Sinatra's hit song *My Way* and the killings that took place in direct relation to the song in Philippine karaoke bars between 2002 and 2012 (Onishi, 2010; Brown, 2017, "How My Way Exposed the Truth," para. 8). According to Onishi (2010) in the *New York Times*, Sinatra's iconic song, which many of his fans have become obsessive about (especially in karaoke bars) resulted in killings among his fans in the Philippines while they sang the tune in karaoke bars. Killings in the way of shootings and stabbings were recorded during singing sessions in karaoke boxes. Fans at the height of emotional involvement with the song stirred up a fight against someone who sang the tune off-key or incorrectly and shoot or stab the other person in the process (Sinatra's Song Often Strikes Deadly Chord, paras. 1–4).

Onishi's (2010) article in the *New York Times* puts it thus:

> The authorities do not know exactly how many people have been killed warbling "My Way" in karaoke bars over the years in the Philippines, or how many fatal fights it has fueled. But the news media have recorded at least dozen victims in the past decade and includes them in a subcategory of crime dubbed the "My Way Killings" (Sinatra's Song Often Strikes Deadly Cord, *NYT*, Feb. 7, 2010, para. 4).

Moreover, the reaction to the musical work throughout much of the world is one of eagerness and excitement, but it is notably not a motive for violence in other countries as it is in the Philippines. Brown (2017) in the *Financial Times* notes that Sinatra's song, when it was released in 1969, had a successful reception in the United Kingdom, "where it stayed on the charts for 122 weeks" ("How My Way Exposed the Truth," para. 6, 9). It has been reproduced

by Sinatra in more contemporary times and has been sung by many artists through the 1980's, 1990's and up to 2017, and all with first-rate reception (para. 9).

The "My Way Killings" in the Philippines, therefore, show that a work of art can psychologically resonate with an audience so much so that s/he feels as if s/he owns the "reality" of the work. Roland B. Tolentino, a pop culture expert in the Philippines (as cited in Onishi, 2010), puts this thought in the manner this essay has previously established about psychofictive reality. He observes: "The Philippines is a very violent society, so karaoke only triggers what already exists here when certain social rules are broken" (Sinatra's Song Often Strikes Deadly Chord, par. 14). This highlights the idea of the subjectivity of psychofictive reality we have earlier established. In addition, Albarracín (as cited in Onishi, 2010) puts the psychological impact of the music on its audience, thus: "'I did it my way'—it's so arrogant… The lyrics evoke feelings of pride and arrogance in the singer, as if you're somebody when you're really nobody. It covers up your failures. That's why it leads to fights" (Sinatra Song Often Strikes Deadly Chord, par. 12). Also, the mere fact that not every Filipino psychorealizes Sinatra's musical work in a violent manner, furthermore, highlights the notion that response to artistic archetypes are rather subjective even within the same culture.

Conclusion

When music feels alive to the point where the listener feels more a part of it and less apart from it, or a creative book's fictional characters seem to merge with the reader's id; when fine art paintings are not just a play with colours, and creative writings are not mere play with words; when the emotional psyche finds itself place-able in art; when art audience "own" a piece of art – that experience of ownership is what has been termed *Psychofictive Reality*.

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The No-Touch Taboos: An Understanding of Sexuality and Gender in the Indian Context

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Abstract

The sensation of touch and the need for physical contact are fundamental in the development of human behaviour. As an intimate medium of communication, tactile interactions between men and women can make their social bonds more profound. But there are both "contact" and "no contact" societies that differ in their attitude towards tactile communications. While "contact" cultures are largely touchy-feely communities, "no contact" cultures like India problematise touch between opposite genders due to reasons related to the caste system, fear of sexual vulgarity, subversion of gender roles, and so forth. On close observation we find that all these reasons are interconnected and interdependent. With its prime focus on the "no-touch taboo" among opposite genders in India, this paper explores the underlying role of sexuality, patriarchy and conventional gender roles in perpetuating the established social structure in India. A deeper understanding of these mechanisms reveals that, in India, a touch-averse culture is essential in the preservation of its systems of power.

Keywords: taboo, touch, sexuality, obscenity, disciplining, power, gender roles

Introduction

Touch is one of the five senses of human body and a powerful medium of interaction between human beings. From anger to love, touch communicates human emotions perhaps more effectively than words. In his book titled *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1978), British-American anthropologist Ashley Montagu analyses how tactile experiences, or their lack, affects the development of behaviour and explores what he calls "the mind of the skin." According to him, touch is the "mother of all senses":

> Touch is the earliest sensory system to become functional in all species thus far studied, human, animal, and bird. Perhaps, next to the brain, the skin is the most important of all our organ systems. The sense most closely associated with the skin, the sense of touch, is the earliest to develop in the human embryo" (Montagu, 1978, pp.1–2).

We physically experience the world around us through our skin. The external environment gives continuous stimulation to the skin and the skin, in turn, gives sensory feedback to the brain. This feedback from skin to brain is operational even during sleep. We can live without senses like sight, but not without the sense of touch.

Both humans and animals use their sense of touch to create deep familial, social and emotional bonds. In her work *Skin, a Natural History* (2006), American anthropologist Nina Jablonski calls attention to how the significance of touch is reflected in our language and daily affairs. We use phrases like "I am touched" or "how touching", and so on, to show that we "feel" about things. Montagu too shows how the feel of a thing is important to us. We talk of persons having a "soft" or "happy" touch. We tell our close ones to "keep in touch". Some are "thin-skinned" for us while others "thick- skinned". "Through 'feeling' we frequently refer to emotional states, such as happiness, joy, sadness, melancholy, and depression, and by that term often imply a reference to touching" (Montagu, 1978, p. 6).

The lack of touch also affects our conduct and demeanour. Jablonski notes that touch deprivation in newborns, including human infants, can result in behavioural inadequacies: "Infants deprived of reassuring contact with their mothers after birth and in early infancy suffer biological and psychological stress that has ramifications throughout their lives" (Jablonski, 2006, p.152).She goes on to state that in studies conducted among primates, it was found that, like massage, "grooming" reduced the "stress hormones" of both the grooming and the groomed. At the same time the lack of touch resulted in increased stress hormones. Another interesting fact found was that primates used touch to resolve conflicts among them and that this strengthened their social bonding. Regarding human infants, mothers, caregivers and midwives undoubtedly agree that infants who are touched more are both calmer and sounder sleepers. It is also understood that "depressed mothers who regularly massage their babies lessen their own depression"(Jablonski, 2006, p. 154). Thus to put it simply, touch as a physical sense has got a significant role in our biological and social exchanges, which equally facilitate the formation of our social selves and our close interactions with others.

To touch is to erase the distance or the "space" in between. That is, touch brings people together. But as much as touch is necessary and good for physical and emotional wellbeing, it can be equally abusive and physically coercive. There may be nothing more detestable than an undesirable, unwanted touch. Thus, a touch can be good or bad depending on its intention. As a medium of communication, people touch each other differently in different cultures. At the same time not all societies encourage communication through touch. Stella Ting-Toomey's

book *Communicating across Cultures* (1999), analyses touch behaviours in different cultures. She identifies five communicative functions of touch: "1) ritualistic interaction such as shaking hands or bowing; 2) expressing affect such as kissing and kicking; 3) Playfulness such as flirtatious stroking and poking; 4) a control function such as grabbing someone's arm; and 5) a task-related function such as a nurse taking a patient's pulse at the wrist" (p.130). As she states, all these interactions differ in varying degrees according to cultural values, conventions and practices in different cultures. For example, hand shaking or hugging as a way of greeting came to India from the west. Before the arrival of the British, Indians used to put their palms together and say *namaste* to welcome others. Today, even though they use both practices, the former has gained a considerable popularity over the latter.

Expressing passionate emotions through touch also depends on the cultural and moral circumstances of different societies. While western societies are more open to hugging, kissing, and so forth, in public, India still frowns upon it. The cultural values of the country are considered to be at stake when affections are displayed publically. There are other factors like the context of a touch, the gender and age of the people involved etc, which also alter the way a touch is perceived. When it comes to the context of a touch, there are certain people who can engage in certain kinds of touch in specific contexts. For example, a doctor touching one's private body parts as part of a medical examination is not considered offensive (unless it is abusive). Communication through touch is monitored the most when it comes to the matter of gender. Taking into account the gender of the people involved, different cultures practice different touch patterns. Each society has its own expectations on who should touch whom, and how much, in diverse interactions.

> While Chinese view opposite-sex handshakes as acceptable, Malays and Arabs view contact by opposite-sex handshakes as taboo. Furthermore, different cultures uphold different gender norms for embracing and handholding. The friendly full embrace between males is much more acceptable in many Latin American cultures than in Britain or the United States. Likewise, the friendly arm link pattern between two males in Arab and Latin American cultures is a commonplace practice. The friendly handholding pattern between two females in many Asian cultures is also common nonverbal practice. (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p.130)

Comparative studies conducted on touch behaviours in Latin American, U.S and Canadian cultures show that Latin Americans engage in more touch communication than U.S Americans and Canadians (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 131). But both Arab and Latin American societies prefer same-sex touch communication over opposite sex interaction. Nina Jablonski (2006) too notes that modern American culture is highly touch-averse in social settings like schools, hospitals and workplaces. The situation is even worse in many Asian cultures where open displays of affection– from a friendly hug to a passionate kiss – are thought to be abominable and viewed with contempt. Thus, in different cultures the "standards of permissible and desirable touching, both in public and in private, can vary widely" (p. 157).
Beyond its physicality an act of touch may have different cultural meanings as well. A recent touch that became a subject of talk all around the world was the handshake between American President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, kicking off the nuclear summit of 2018 in Singapore. This touch was celebrated as the "historic handshake" of the century. It symbolized the end of an age-old rivalry between two countries.

Sometimes not just touch but also its denial sends social signals or has cultural meanings inscribed in it. Take the example of India. Being the breeding ground of one of world's oldest

religions and cultures, India is a land of many cultural taboos. The anchor of the Hindu religion is the social hierarchy it builds on the basis of its "caste" division. This social hierarchy is the source of the many taboos that India maintains to this day. "Untouchability" is the brutal practice of naming lower caste people as untouchables and denying them the privileges of normal life, including that of "touch". That is, no lower caste people are allowed to touch upper caste people because their touch is considered to be polluting. This makes them vulnerable to exploitation, violence and discrimination of other types as well. Here, denying touch to the lower caste serves to ensure the "purity" of the upper caste. Thus the practice of untouchability carries the cultural implication that certain castes are superior and naturally dominant over certain other castes, and these two shall never come into contact with each other. Additionally, "Untouchability, like racism in the Western world, has served to rationalize and maintain a vast pool of cheap labour" (Joshi, 1983, para. 7).

Apart from caste, gender categorization is the other driving force behind India's touch-averse culture. Any kind of a touch between a man and a woman in public is dreaded in India. This "no touch" practice between opposite genders in turn increases the possibility of gender segregation as well. Co-educational institutions are the ideal agencies of power where this practice is fully enforced. The fright arises out of two things mainly. One is the fear of "sexual explicitness", which began to be equated with "obscenity" in India after exposure to Victorian morality, and the other is the deep rooted "caste sensibility" Indian society upholds.

Let's look at how ideas of Victorian morality have altered the way the touch between a man and woman was perceived in India. Ann M.C Gagne, in her doctoral thesis titled *Touching Bodies/Bodies Touching: The Ethics of Touch in Victorian Literature* (1860-1900), submitted to the University of Western Ontario, analyses how touch between opposite sexes was perceived in 19th century etiquette books and contact manuals in Britain. According to her, these texts designed the proper decorum for all kinds of interactions. One of these, Count Alfred D'Orsay's book *Etiquette; or, a Guide to the Usages of Society* (1843) states: "Etiquette is the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offences the "law" cannot touch– it is a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper and the vulgar" (Gagne, 1860-1900, p. 12). Thus etiquette functioned as moral code and reinforced propriety in 19th century Britain. D'Orsay says that during a waltz performance, a man's touch on a woman should not be a clasp or tight hold but a light one. His comment on handshake is even more interesting: "one must ―never, indeed, offer your hand, unless well assured that it is in a presentable state of frigidity; for the touch of a tepid hand chills the warmest feelings" (Gagne, 1860-1900, p. 13).

Another manual by Oliver Bunce titled *Don't: A Manual of Mistakes and Impropriety More Or Less Prevalent in Conduct and Speech* (1884) says that touch should not have a place in social interactions. "Don't touch people when you have occasion to address them—says Bunce—, catching people by the arms or the shoulders, or nudging them to attract their attention is a violation of good breeding" (Gagne, 1860-1900, p. 13). These instructions and codes gained access over the social life of 19th century England and tactile interactions between opposite sexes began to be questioned on the grounds of their ethicality and morality. When along with the British these ideologies came to India, they were assimilated into Indian culture as well. Thereafter, tactile interactions between opposite sexes became a symbol of sexual explicitness in India, which made it a subject of surveillance. This system of surveillance is at its worst in co-educational institutions, a practice that may prevent children from having healthy social relationships with each other.

When it comes to caste sensibility, the system makes use of disciplinary laws and rules in order to ensure that no intimate interaction that could subvert the heredity of the caste system will survive. It takes special interest to ensure "distance" between men and women so that they do not develop "wrong types" of close bonds with each other. What is this wrong type? All relations that transgress the boundaries of caste are wrong and pose a threat to the system. In such a cultural backdrop, what else can be a suitable agency other than co-educational institutions to enforce a non-tactile culture? And thus our co-educational schools make separate seating arrangements for girls and boys, ensure at all cost that a particular "gap" is maintained between opposite genders and impose a strict system of surveillance in the name of discipline to check whether they violate the norms.

At the same time, when we talk about the "permitted" and the "forbidden" in different cultures, we must not forget the influence each culture has over other cultures. The digital revolution that shook the world in the latter half of twentieth century ushered in the 'information age'. Computers, information networks and Internet connectivity paved the way for global information exchange and became platforms of "digital acculturation". There is no doubt about the fact that exposure to varied cultural practices, habits, customs and traditions has influenced the younger generation of the twentieth century to a great extent. This has altered their thought processes, perceptions and ways of interactions as well.

Some two or three decades ago, neither adults nor adolescents in India would have dared to openly hug or kiss a person of opposite gender in public. But today with the spread of social media and the exposure to western cultures, our young generation has become more open about their relationships and the displays of affection. In the year 2014, a non-violent protest against moral policing, called "The Kiss of Love" was organized at Kerala's Kochi, where the protesters organized a public event to openly kiss each other. The event got support from educational institutions outside Kerala, including universities. Following this, similar protests were organized by youngsters in other parts of the country. In another recent incident where a couple was beaten up for standing too close in the Kolkata metro, a group of youngsters organized a "free hug" campaign in protest. Youngsters protest because they identify the system and its ways as power that controls their agency. Thus when authoritative institutions like schools address the changes that have happened in the public behaviour of our youngsters, their exposure to modern media culture and its assimilation should also be taken into account.

Touch: Sexuality and Law in the Indian Context

The word "obscene" in today's general understanding pertains to "the portrayal or description of sexual matters, offensive or disgusting by accepted standards of morality and decency" ("Obscene", n.d.). Thus literally everything sexual is obscene and therefore immoral by nature. But where does this idea of obscenity originate? The Victorian age with its harsh stand on moral values and ethics is identified as the significant contributor to this anathema against sexuality. In 1868, the British court held the view that obscene materials carry a tendency to corrupt those people who have an inclination towards such immoral ideas. Thereafter works of obscene literature were branded in this manner by taking into account the negative influence it might have on people. This perception later became the basis of anti-obscenity laws in the legal systems of all those countries that were once part of the British Empire, including India. But over a period of time, the cultural understanding of obscenity has also altered.

The advent of the Internet and technology in the 20th century has enabled anyone with a computer or even a smart phone to view sexually explicit texts, photos or videos from any

source. This has resulted in the identification of obscenity with "pornography" in modern times. However, from "written texts" to "visual media", obscenity is equated with sexually explicit content. Like beauty, sexuality too is in the eyes of the beholder. But what often happens is that the system enforces its idea of sexuality over its subjects. In today's India two people hugging, kissing or even walking and sitting together is considered to be against the "cultural heritage" of the country. Therefore, every intimate interaction between two people is treated as obscene and injected into the minds of citizens through agents like schools, laws, and so forth. The nation's idea of "obscenity" is engraved in section 292 of the Indian Penal Code:

> A book, pamphlet, paper, writing, drawing, painting, representation, figure or any other object, shall be deemed to be obscene if it is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect… tend to deprave and corrupt person, who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it. (Sec.292 (1) (2))

Thus obscenity is grounded upon "sexuality", and the law penalises it based on its "corruptive content". What often happens is that the two are conflated, such that whatever is sexual becomes corruptive, offensive and obscene. Sexuality is thought to work against the moral principles and ethics on which the nation is built. As a law, the definition of obscenity is hazy. It should explain, specify and contextualize the different aspects of "sexuality" it penalises. Otherwise, this very vagueness creates loopholes whereby the chance of misinterpreting and misusing the law is strong. Until and unless the state clears its stand on sexual obscenity, even "non-sexual" relations are vulnerable to the threat of punishment.

Disciplining: Control of Agency

Educational institutions generally follow certain codes of conduct in order to ensure "discipline", codes which, if disobeyed, make the wrongdoer answerable to the law. Now what is our idea of discipline? Schools have specific time and space arrangements to maintain order and ensure a disciplined environment; this always means that its conception of time and space is imposed on the students. So basically discipline is the control of agency. In his book *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (1975), French philosopher and theoretician Michel Foucault traces the history of the western penal system from public executions to discipline-oriented prisons based on historical documents from France. Torture, the corporal punishment aimed at the "body" paved way to imprisonment and confinement intended to correct the "soul" during eighteenth century. But the "body" then became an intermediary that got caught in a "system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions" (Foucault, 1975, p. 19).

The classical age identified the human body as object and target of power. Power that could manipulate, train and shape a body according to its needs. The idea of "control" became a matter of interest in penal procedure, providing the law with "an infinitesimal power over the active body" (Foucault, 1975, p. 137).As Foucault explains, the law imposed compulsion over gestures, movements and actions of the active body. "These methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called disciplines" (Foucault, 1975, p.137). Thus discipline enabled modern institutions like prisons, factories and even schools to individualize bodies in order to train and manipulate them according to their requirements:

> The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. (p.138)

According to Foucault, the secondary schools were a site of this political economy from an early period. Later it spread to primary schools and slowly into hospitals and military organizations during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. But how does discipline function? Discipline acts its best in enclosed places. But more than enclosure, partitioning is what defines the discipline machinery. "Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault, 1975, p. 143). Partition marks off the subjects within a place so that the individuated bodies can be used, subjected and transformed. Thus attributing specific spaces to individuals are a way of taming them. This space partition can be physical as well as cultural. In their physical sense cellular prisons, monasteries and schools are enclosed spaces that made it possible to locate individuals, monitor their ways, evaluate and judge their merits. Assigning different spaces for girls and boys and regulating them on the basis of a prejudiced hierarchy is an example of cultural partitioning. "In organizing "cells", "places" and "ranks", the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical" (Foucault, 1975, p. 148).

To put it simply, disciplining is supervising and to be disciplined is equal to being constantly watched. This disciplinary system that spread in the West came to India with the arrival of the British. The numerous hospitals and schools they established in India followed the same practice and this discipline machinery remained even after the British left. Disciplining has evolved into a fully-fledged "mechanics of power" today. Apparently, it is the duty of the schools' disciplinary machinery to ensure that "order" is not interrupted. What is order? Order represents and reflects power. And what are the characteristics of power? Power is patriarchal, morally conservative and sexually intolerant. Thus discipline ensures the creation of docile bodies upon which "power" can enact its codes of conduct; knowingly or unknowingly our educational institutions become devices for the enactment of power. If the individuated bodies that are made docile attempt to come out of their passive state, then it shows the inefficiency of the disciplinary apparatus, resulting in the loss of reputation and reliability for those devices of power. It is no wonder that authority has made individuals internalize that discipline (in the way the system requires it). The system attributes an organic nature to the discipline it demands, that is to say, it needs docile bodies to believe that the disciplined activities "expected" of them are "natural" to them. Over a period of time, this "force" that maintains a precise system of command –"the order" – will make discipline a norm.

> That order does not need to be explained or formulated; it must trigger the required behaviour and that is enough. From the master of discipline to him who is subjected to it the relation is one of signalization: it is a question not of understanding the injunction but of perceiving the signal and reacting to it immediately, according to a more or less artificial, prearranged code. (Foucault, 1975, p. 166)

An attempt to break away from the established disciplinary codes is equally a subversion of the system. It is said that education aims at the all-round progress of children. Evidently, this all-round progress includes emotional and mental health in addition to intellectual growth. Children spend more time of their growing years in school than with their families. The

proximity of peer groups, the bond and camaraderie they share with friends and teachers in schools, their respective age, and the academic and non academic atmosphere of the school all influence the mental formation of a child. Therefore, it is a must that the teachers, especially those who teach the adolescents, should have a proper understanding of what adolescent boys and girls go through in coping with the physical and mental changes that they experience.

School authorities enforce moral and disciplinary codes without giving a second look at the instinctual attraction that an adolescent pupil naturally experience. In an attempt to nullify anything called "adolescent sexuality", schools' moral codes include separate seating for girls and boys, no public display of affection, no touch, no talk and the like. Thus teachers will take up the role of "moral guardians" and students always become subjects of surveillance. This entire endeavour has harmful impact on the students. They find this natural change they undergo as something "unacceptable" in the society in which they live, making them feel like "offenders". This equally crushes their sense of self, individuality and self-confidence.

Foucault identifies four characteristics of discipline that ensures its place in the society. It is cellular (through a play of spatial distribution), organic (through coded activities), genetic (through an accumulation over time) and it is combinatory (by the composition of forces).Accordingly, discipline obtains its combinatory forces from Tactics – "Tactics, the art of constructing, with located bodies, coded activities and trained aptitudes, mechanisms in which the product of the various forces is increased by their calculated combination are no doubt the highest form of disciplinary practice" (Foucault, 1975, p. 167). Put simply, the system functions through tactful disciplinary measures called "norms" through which it produces individuated, docile bodies that are expected to have the same attitude, thought processes and viewpoints as those promoted by the system.

Addressing the subject of punishment during the classical age, Foucault notes that though judgments passed on crimes and offences are defined by a juridical code, "Judgments are also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effect of environment or heredity" (Foucault, 1975, p. 25). They are assessed as "attenuating circumstances" which include knowledge of the criminal, one's estimation of him, what is known about the relations between him, his past and his crime, what might be expected of him in the future, etc.Being the agents of power over a period of time, schools and other institutions establish themselves as the holders of power. Thus they evolve to become parallel judiciaries of a sort. But when the real judiciary itself fails to define what it means, like the vague definition of obscenity in the Indian Penal Code, these parallel judiciaries frame their own mechanisms of punishment and use them at their own discretion.

Family, Gender and Social Order: A Feminist Perspective

We already saw how, in the name of order and discipline, the system has been taming individuals to suit its requirements. Apparently, the existence and maintenance of the gendered binaries are a necessity for the system to survive. What particular characteristic of the system fears the subversion of its ideals? Feminist writer Nivedita Menon, in her book *Seeing like a Feminist* (2012), attempts to read gender and sex in the social context of India with a feminist perspective. Social order, according to her, is like nude make up. We spend time painting our face to make it look natural, like we haven't done anything. Similarly, the maintenance of social order requires uninterrupted repetition of established practices, so much so that it should appear unquestionably natural and inherent. She completely agrees with Judith Butler in saying that there are complex networks of cultural production involved in the construction,

identification and assimilation of gendered identities of "man" and "woman". In her opinion, "a feminist perspective recognizes that the hierarchical organizing of the world around gender is the key to maintaining social order; that to live lives marked 'male' and 'female' is to live different realities." (Menon, 2012, p. viii)

According to her, the soul of this social order is in the "institution of marriage", which is identified to be the backbone of the Indian society that has to reinforce its casteist and sexist ideologies. Family, being the anchor of the social order, is an institution rooted in an inequality that follows clearly established hierarchies of gender. In this configuration, men are superior to women. "The question of gender- appropriate behaviour is thus inextricably linked to legitimate procreative sexuality" (Menon, 2012, p. 4). This setup anchors the patriarchal social order and the social order demands the family be so structured. Thus, family too becomes an agent of power that cannot defy the system by itself. In fact, like schools, the family ensures that "men and women who do not conform to these characteristics are continuously disciplined into the appropriate behaviour" (Menon, 2012, p. 62).

In this backdrop, the question to be asked is how long has sex/gender been the basis of social differentiation? And have all societies at all times followed this separation? Nigerian scholar Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that it was the advent of modernity in the west that resulted in a patriarchal culture, which made gender difference a crucial distinction in society. Many of the pre-colonial African countries lacked such a categorization (p. 15). Similarly, Native American culture considered hermaphrodites as having 'two spirits' and saw them as blessed because they possessed spirits of both man and woman (Smithers, 2014, pp. 1–2). Until the mid-nineteenth century, there was considerable fluidity in gender identification, but colonial modernity began policing it afterwards.

> Until the middle of the twentieth century in the West, for instance, pink was the colour for boys and blue for girls! In the 1800s, most infants were dressed in white, and gender differences weren't highlighted until well after they were able to walk. At that point of time in the West, was considered to be more important to distinguish children from adults than boys from girls. But when the interest in differentiating between boys and girls emerged in the early twentieth century, the colour associated with boys was pink, and it was blue for girls. (Menon, 2012, pp. 62–63)

The above instances reveal gender identities as constructs of society. They have been changing in accordance with societal changes and can be altered for society's general good. But in Nivedita's opinion the patriarchal family setup survives on gender hierarchies and this can only be achieved by a cultural reinforcement of the biological difference between the two genders. Thus gender segregation or differentiation somehow becomes a necessity for the survival of the family setup and the patriarchal ideologies it nurtures. In the light of the subject under study, let's look at how schools as social institutions achieve this aim.

Gender Stereotyping in Classrooms

Schools play a major role in the identity formation of children rather than families. Imagine a co-education kindergarten with a group of girls and boys of same age brought together for the first time as a class. Given that they have already been trained in the conventional boy/girl stereotype by their families, it is obvious that they will distinguish each other on the basis of what they have seen and learned. Since their understanding of the other gender is pre-set, their identification of one another will no doubt be characterized by the "differences" they have.

What happens here is that children will connect the differences in expected behaviours of the two genders with the physical or anatomical differences they now spot in others of their same age and incorrectly assume that gender roles are inherently related to sex.

Now, what if the schools also follow the policy of separate seating arrangements for boys and girls? The partition at the centre that marks a fixed distance between girls and boys is not a mere division. As far as a young child is concerned, it is an official confirmation of the "differences" between gendered identities that has been habitually taught as natural. The strict adherence to this segregation by authorities makes the child believe that, indeed, genders are and should be differentiated because the gendered essences are fixed, rigid and unchangeable. What will become of these children when they become adults? What else can we expect them to be, other than conventional "sexists"? This practice of gender segregation in co-ed schools actually takes away the possibility of a childhood experience that could have been more inclusive and productive. By denying their right to a more vibrant childhood, these schools also nurture a "hate culture" among children of different genders. At some point, every girl or boy in a co-education school go through the "we hate girls/boys phase".

It is possible that educational institutions risk the psychological and emotional health of the children under their care. All through their schooling years, they are expected to keep away from the other gender. By the time this practice manifests as the "hatred phase", children would have framed "pre-set" notions about the other on the basis of the visibly separated sexed bodies. On passing this phase and reaching adolescence, underlying all their natural and instinctual desires would be the very same conventional misconceptions regarding the other gender. Nothing really does change when they become adults.

From the previous analyses we can deduce that when children of different biological gender are allowed to mingle right from kindergarten, when they are allowed to play, talk and eat together, slowly through the growing years they will realize that all those conventional gender roles, that the stereotypical identities the system prescribed and enforced, are not fixed but fluid. Only when they find out that there are "girls who love soccer" and "boys who love cooking", they can understand that it is normal to diverge from conventions. Above all they will see that these "gendered identities" are nothing but social constructions and one's anatomy as a girl or boy has got nothing to do with his/her behaviours. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990), Judith Butler states "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that "man" and "masculine" might just as easily signify a female body as well as a male one, and "woman" and "feminine" a male body as easily as a female one" (Butler, 1990, p.9). When girls and boys interact closely and share a strong emotional bond right from their young days, there will be no need to draft "vigilante circulars" to check on them because the stronger the bond, the less may be the chances of abuse.

Conclusion

If we are to make the future citizens of the country physically and emotionally healthy beings, then it is high time that we change existing conventions and taboos regarding gender. Schools are considered to be the place where identities are made. If it's so, then it should be the place where identities are unmade as well. To build a physically strong and emotionally healthy younger generation, we need to foster a culture of healthy and positive touch in our families and schools. With the increased threat of "sexual abuse" always lurking behind our children, it is a must that they should be made aware of "good" and "bad" touch. When an adolescent girl

and boy interact with each other with proper understanding of one's sexuality and accept it as natural, the fear of the "erotic" will fade and they will start sharing a deep, strong and close companionship and camaraderie. The physical interactions within this bond will obviously be much healthier, which will equally help them to identify even the slightest possibility of a "wrong touch" advanced towards them outside their circle. The moment "sexuality" ceases to be a taboo, our vision will be clear enough to acknowledge non-sexual, platonic relations that are nothing but a sublime form of "love". It is time to help them unlearn so many of the wrong notions fed into young minds. Let them touch. Let them talk. Let them play, eat and fight together. And without any pre-set notions, let them "find" each other.

Acknowledgement

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Teaching Gender Through Films on Sportswomen: Contrary Messages

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Abstract

It is increasingly essential that teachers focus on media-based ways of teaching and learning. Hence, educators include films to provoke discussions and analyses of concepts. Scholars investigating women in films have shown the dominance of gendered constructions and representations. However, there have been few studies evaluating films on Indian sportswomen, although there have been numerous films on this, from *Chak De India* to *Mary Kom*, *Dangal* and, more recently, *Panga*. Specifically presented within the context of a developing country like India, these films have been heralded as life-affirming narratives for women, which will supposedly help in improving the life conditions of girls and women in society – the stark reality of our country being reflected in adverse gender ratios, female foeticide and infanticide, among other ills. However, in fact, many of these films actually reaffirm conventional notions of patriarchy and masculinity. This article assesses the utility of teaching gender and empowerment through two prominent films on sportswomen – *Chak De! India* and *Bend it like Beckham*, which continue to be seen as iconic films. By engaging in critical content analysis and a systematic reading of the narratives, the article highlights that these films, ironically, predominantly identify sports with masculine achievements, wherein women's successes are reduced to supporting narratives. Hence, the gender order is upheld with the identification of the "masculine" with the aggression and vigour associated with sports, while the "feminine" is identified and marked as secondary and inferior, with "her" worth being determined by, and reflecting, "his" success on the sports platform.

Keywords: cinematic representations, Indian sportswomen, patriarchy, teaching

Introduction

One of the most important tools of teaching in the 21st century is the film or visual medium. Due to the ubiquity of images, videos and visual flow that students, and indeed, society is exposed to, it is essential that teachers, educators and courses focus on innovative and media-based ways of teaching and learning. An integral way to do so is of course, to include films or television shows or even video snippets that can provoke thought, reflection, discussions and analyses of different concepts and issues addressed in the course. Indeed, cinema has been highlighted as one of the most important cultural expressions of the increasingly globalized information society that we inhabit (Moura, Cachadinha, & Almeida, 2017). Consequently, utilizing films for analyses relating to important concepts like gender, sexuality, power and discrimination, is indeed a fascinating enterprise.

There has been a growing tendency of investigating the representations of women in films as it helps to shed light on and to question the dominant gender stereotypes that prevail in popular culture. Scholars have focussed on the underrepresentation of women as compared to men in television and films (Signorielli, 2001), the desirability and sexual attraction of women being linked to their younger age (Bacue, 1999), women being rendered and represented as sexualized, objectified and shown as helpless as well as incompetent (Witt, 2000) along with other related themes. There have also been analyses of the role of heroines and female characters in Disney films which have revealed the specific gender constructions and representations they have focussed on – for instance, a depiction of the female characters as being emotional, sexually and socially passive, dependent and romantic as compared to their male counterparts (Wiersma, 2000). Analyses of such films have also revealed how, despite the overt messages of women as powerful and liberated, there are often insidious subtexts of domestic violence, sexism, racism, ageism and a culture of complicity with sexual violence, that is being encouraged (Towbin et al., 2008).

However, there have been far fewer studies on the issue of women in sports as well as their representation in cinema (Muller, 2013). Nonetheless, most of these studies have showcased the very limited number of films being made on this issue of sportswomen, as well as the disproportionate focus on the sexuality and sexualisation of the women (Cahn, 1994; Caudwell, 2009; Pappas, 2012) in which many of these films have engaged. Interestingly, however, very few such studies of evaluating films being made on sportswomen have been done in the Indian context (De, 2013; Mukherjee, 2018). This article is an attempt to analyse the utility of teaching gender and related concepts through the use of two of the most prominent films made on sportswomen in recent times, the first structured within the Indian context, and the second focussed in and around the Indian Diaspora – *Chak De! India* and *Bend it like Beckham*.

Films on Sportswomen of Indian Origin: The Case for Analysing *Chak De*! *India* and *Bend it like Beckham*

It is undoubtedly the increasing global success of Indian sportswoman that has resulted in a higher number of films being made on this issue. Typically, as sports is largely understood as a patriarchal and male-dominated sphere where women have rarely, and only recently, been given increased access, most of the films on Indian sportswomen have focussed on the challenges confronted by these pioneers. If we merely try to list out the total number of films focussing on sportswomen in India, we find that almost all of these films have been released in the last two decades or so. If we take the case of the largest film industry in India, the Hindi language film industry, we find that Bollywood – as it is popularly known – has released

important films like *Chak De! India*, *Mary Kom*, *Dangal*, *Sultan* and the Tamil-Hindi film *Irudhi Suttru* (Hindi film released as *Saala Khadoos)*. Apart from these, there was *Kousalya Krishnamurthy*, a Telegu language remake of the Tamil film *Kanaa*, which have both been released in the recent past. It is a logical argument that these films have only been possible due to the success enjoyed by the actual Indian sportswomen at the global sporting arena – for instance, the successes of the Indian sportswomen at the Olympics. Taking a cue from the real life glories of the Indian sportswomen, cinema in India has tended to reflect the rising role women are playing in the traditionally men's world of sport, and professional sport at that.

The films are especially dedicated to highlighting the role played by sport in freeing women from the fetters of a patriarchal society that has always strived to restrain women from accessing and succeeding in the masculine world of sports. Indeed, several scholars have pointed out how sports has traditionally had a huge role to play in celebrating and shaping masculinity and its expressions (Connell, 1995; Rajendran, 2017). The new message or lesson however, is that women have now managed to wrangle their way into the high stakes arena of professional sports. This is also in keeping with the increasing social awareness of feminist issues and the construction of a conscious demographic that will consume films or other aesthetic products that assert such messages.

While almost all of these films have been released after the 2012 and the 2106 Olympic Games where Indian sportswomen won medals and captured the popular imagination like never before, one of the most prominent films on Indian women's sports was of course, *Chak De! India*, which was released in the year 2007. It focuses on the meanings of national identity while being premised on a failing national women's hockey team, and highlights the evolving definitions of Indian womanhood as well as how they play out in the wider space of cultural politics (De, 2013).

In a similar vein, scholars analyse the British-Asian comedy-drama film *Bend it like Beckham*, and attempt to locate the possibilities of sports as an avenue for inclusion, in the context of the construction of a multicultural society like Britain (Abdel-Shehid & Kalman-Lamb, 2015). The film was released in 2002, when in Tony Blair's Britain, multiculturalism was more than just the flavour of changing times. Indeed, in this British film about people of Indian origin or the Indian Diaspora, the trope of multiculturalism as a socio-political strategy of the new Labour government becomes ironically an aspirational idea, while in actuality, doing little to challenge the pressure towards conformity to the white English norm. They also note that the film's apparent feminist commitment, with the context of sport ostensibly offering a scope for the women to overcome their gendered life and opportunities, however, fails to mount a sustained and realistic challenge to the hetero-normative values of patriarchy premised around conventional constructions of masculinity and femininity.

The basic purpose of this paper then is to engage in critical content analysis of these two culturally influential films in order to understand the varied readings and constructions of gender, sexuality and feminisms that these films can be considered to represent. The films have been understood to represent women's empowerment through their successes in sports, however, a more analytical reading of the films suggests that there are in fact, messages contrary to the empowerment narrative that are obvious in the themes. In fact, despite the fact that after the release of these two films, there have been a number of such films that have been centred on sportswomen, some of the more problematic gendered themes that we identify in these two initial films continue to remain relevant in the latter films as well. Consequently, these two films can be considered to have had a lasting impact on the genre, which is what

makes them particularly suitable to use as tools to aid in teaching about gender and its related constructs.

As the following arguments in this paper note, most of the themes in these films are consistent with the constructs of conventional notions of patriarchy and masculinity. Despite the distinctly women-centric premise of both films, the prioritization of the masculine values of authority, pride and aggression as stemming from and being synonymous with the male characters in the film helps to buttress the traditional constructions of men as the decision-makers and change agents within these films.

Teaching Women's Empowerment through *Chak De! India*: Patriarchy Prevails

The film *Chak De! India* essentially starts out by showing that the Indian men's Hockey team captain Kabir Khan had apparently intentionally lost an international match, where he seemingly intentionally misses a penalty shot in a match against Pakistan, causing India to lose the match. Consequently, the media hound him and he is branded a traitor and forced to move out of his home and neighbourhood. With his reputation in tatters, he disappears from the public eye for quite some time before resurfacing years later in order to apply for the post of Coach for the faltering Indian women's hockey team. The film clearly highlights the intrinsically gendered and biased attitude of the Hockey Association officials. The Head of the organization expressly says that the women's hockey team exists merely because of the state providing subsidy, and that there is no inherent value at all that it serves. He believes that the woman's place is only in the home and cooking and cleaning are the only two things that the women should focus on, leaving the sporting activities to the men. By starkly showing the audience what the sportswomen are up against, the film reaffirms its commitment to be a watershed film on women's empowerment by highlighting that nothing is, in fact, impossible for women to accomplish, despite the existence of sizeable obstacles.

The storyline of the film follows how the team falls apart even more due to, firstly, the patriarchal attitude of the officials and the management body, as well as the internal divisions and regional divides between the players themselves. It is only with the talismanic Coach, played by Shah Rukh Khan, and his tremendous self-belief and determination, that the players are united as a team and learn to play like, and eventually become, champions. Apart from asserting the unshakeable patriotism of the coach and his redemption at an international sporting event, the film also intends to serve as a celebration of girl power, Indian womanhood and the solidarity of women.

Indeed, it must be recognized that *Chak De! India* played a significant role in the popularizing of the issue of women's sport as well as harbouring a keen sense of nationalistic fervour. However, while attempting to read the film as a visual text in order to interrogate the meanings of women's empowerment that it claims to envision, I would like to point out that despite the film-makers' attempts to reconceptualise sport as an avenue of liberation for women, the end result is much more contradictory and complex.

Since the movie is so predominantly premised on the trope of the "hero" – represented by the mentor cum coach figure of Kabir Khan, and his redemption through success at an international sporting event, the focus on the women becomes secondary, and instead is subverted by the male figure of the coach emerging as patronising and decisive, who needs must direct the women as they have to unite to win the ultimate sporting event. The male as rescuer of a troubled women's team becomes another variation of the trope of the male as saviour of the

damsel(s) in distress (Wiersma, 2000), who are unable to help themselves and rendered voiceless and agency-less, unless and until the central hero of the film comes to their aid. Indeed, the underlying narrative of the film is overwhelmingly masculine and patriarchal – as revealed by the figure of the coach as not only embodying the role of the paternal protector, but also serving as a potential source of threat to the female characters whenever they serve to challenge his masculine authority. For instance, the coach Kabir Khan warns the senior-most player that despite her obvious seniority and experience, she cannot be the "goonda" or undisputed leader, the trouble-making masculine entity (De, 2013), since every team can only have one such character, and in this case, it is he, himself who fills that role. Hence, the implicit violence that has been identified by feminists as part of the structure of control of patriarchy (Krishnan, 2018) has, ironically, been showcased by this film celebrating the power of Indian women as well.

Teaching Gender Stereotypes and Women's Agency through _Bend it like Beckham_: Locating Sport as Avenues for Reclaiming Masculinity

The second film that I seek to read in order to understand its gender implications is _Bend it like Beckham_. It tells the story of two eighteen-year-old aspiring professional footballers in the United Kingdom: Jesminder "Jess" Bhamra and Jules Paxton. Jess is from a British Asian Sikh background while Jules is from a white ethnic background. Following the Orientalist trope of the European initiating the Asian (Said, 1978), she initiates Jess into the local women's football team. Both the women have their own battles to bear as Jess is shown to come from a very conservative family where her mother is extremely concerned at her lack of femininity, as well as her overt challenge to traditional gender norms, whereas Jules is plagued by the presence of a hyper feminine mother who believes that sporting activities lead to undesirably masculine traits among women along with the possible spectre of turning her daughter into a lesbian, in keeping with the close cliché association of sportswomen being likely to be lesbian in terms of sexual orientation (Caudwell, 2009).

Further, there is an attempt to address the construct of multiculturalism as integration in the film; however, the structuring is such that Jess' attempts to embrace typically English practices are seen as an entire contrast to traditional Asian Indian values and hence, her transformation into adopting the English lifestyle and practices are almost constructed as rejections of her devalued Indian identity and cultural values, revealing the relatively overt way in which the colonial narrative of the whites as offering a respite from the barbaric nature of Indian culture seems reemphasized.

Sport as Inherently Masculine: The Failure of the Case for Empowering Women

Sport can be located as one of the last few legitimate spaces for men to claim, emphasize and reassert their masculinity. As it is an elaborate ritual for men to display their physical strength and aggression in a publicly accepted and approved way, feminist critics have frequently been critical of its inherently gendered and exclusionary character. Sporting activities have been noted as being the foundational basis for the development of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, as well as offering men the cultural ideals of the perfect masculinity to aspire to (Connell, 1995). Additionally, the female body in sport has tended to be scrutinized in terms of its levels of sexualisation and desirability. Traditionally, the women, and by extension the female body, have been held up as the rewards or spoils of victory in sporting events, and more recently served in the role of the overtly sexualised objects, important as diversionary spectacles but not as intrinsically competent competitors (Muller, 2013).

In both these films, despite the celebration of the actualization of women as sportspersons being the manifestly obvious focus, the essential significance attached to authoritative, patriarchal figures – what may be referred to as the role of the "benevolent dictator" – is played out by the central figures of coach Kabir Khan in *Chak De! India*, and by Jess' father Mr Bhamra, as well as by the ethnically white coach Joe, in *Bend it like Beckham*.

Mr Bhamra is consistently portrayed in a largely sympathetic light, as a victim of systemic racism while Joe, a much younger coach who could not go the distance in his own men's football career due to injury, is similarly treated as the source of masculine authority, direction and guidance for Joe and Jules. And indeed, in the ultimate and predictable victory of the women's team when both Jules and Jess are selected to go for the much-coveted US-based soccer scholarship, it is as much an affirmation of Joe's capacity to participate in and find success/fulfilment in the ultimate sporting arena of football.

As for the coach Kabir Khan in *Chak De! India*, his journey towards the retrieval of his erstwhile reputation as a loyal player, which had been "lost" due to the clearly undeserved allegations of betrayal and cheating that he had faced earlier, is addressed through his reclamation of the lost masculine identity and potency with the success of the women's team. This journey is, of course, complicated by his Muslim identity in a Hindu-majority country like India and the allegation of cheating having been made in a match against Pakistan; the background of war and antagonistic relations between India and Pakistan is of supreme significance in this context.

Conclusion: Movies, Masculinity and Messages

It can be argued that *Bend it like Beckham* falls within the lens of post-feminism as a "sensibility" wherein ideas of women's empowerment are gradually affirmed through the agency of the individual woman, as against the structural and systemic nature of sexism that must be combated as a matter of course by women across the world. The trope of the sportswoman finding fulfilment and success through sport and becoming empowered is still a shying away from the acknowledgement of the need for a collective correction of structural inequalities. Both *Chak De! India* and *Bend it like Beckham* are, indeed, sports films centred on women engaged in sports as vocation with the emphasis on the liberating potentials of sports. The twin contexts of the developing world and the developed world – as evident through these films – may differ in terms of basic facilities but the approach to women in sports seems to be quite similar. The perspective of the man as coach, and to a lesser extent, as the protectionist *Pater*, largely renders women as agency-less subjects who need to be taught and trained in the ways and skills of masculine sports. Additionally the male coach and/or the *Pater* is one who had inevitably failed in men's sports in some way – either in terms of breaking into the world of professional men's sports – as exemplified by Joe and Mr Bhamra in *Bend it like Beckham* – or failed as a model sportsman who epitomizes loyalty and commitment to sport and his nation, as exemplified by Kabir Khan in *Chak De! India*. Hence, the failure of the man is an implied and yet clearly articulated failure of him in terms of his masculine identity. Subsequently, their success in the women's sporting arena, even as it comes through the sportswomen's triumphs, becomes a way for the emasculated sportsmen to almost reclaim victory, and therefore, their masculinity.

Consequently, teaching these two foundational visual texts as premised on the meaning and nature of women's empowerment becomes a complicated and ultimately problematic exercise, since these films celebrate the importance of sports as an avenue for masculine achievements,

wherein women's successes only become supporting narratives in the overwhelmingly male tropes of success and glory in sports. Therefore, teaching gender and the related concepts of femininity and masculinity, as well as the complexities of sexuality, through two seemingly women-centric films becomes an exercise in contradictions, due to the implicit but clearly antithetical messages that they seem to express.

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**Mapping Love for Land among Punjabi Peasants in the Colonial Era:
A study of Sant Singh Sekhon's *Blood and Soil* (1949)**

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Abstract

For Punjabi peasants, land determines socio-cultural and economic status, providing a level of financial security. It determines the magnitude of a family legacy. Thus, land has been more than a simple asset or source of livelihood for Punjabi peasants during the Colonial Era. For the Indian peasant, the land is the underpinning of the quality of life; all social and economic concerns as well as the individual's stature in public life ultimately revolve around land tenure. Ian Talbot writes particularly about the sentiments of colonial Punjabi peasantry when he observes, 'Colonial Punjab had a rural society and an economy based on agriculture as around two thirds of the total population was dependent on agriculture for its livelihood' (p. 6). The present paper is an attempt to trace the Punjabi peasants' attachment and love for their land during the colonial period with particular reference to Sant Singh Sekhon's *Blood and Soil* (*Lahu Mitti*).

Keywords: agrarian society, agriculture, canalization, colonial period, culture, economy, heritage, land, love, peasant, Punjab

Introduction

Historically, land has played a significant role in all social, economic and cultural activities in the lives of Punjabi peasants. Consequently, the Punjabi peasant's dependence upon the resources provided by land tenancy presents manifold features. The land determines their socio-cultural and economic status. Besides, the land provides economic wellbeing and safety. Family legacies depend upon the land, and it has been more than an asset or source of livelihood for Punjabi peasants, especially in the Colonial Era. Qadeer Ahmed states: "land was of real significance to practically every one of the general population of the India in light of the fact that most of them relied upon agriculture for their subsistence" (p. 15). As such, social, economic and political transformation depends largely on changes in land relations. Karna writes, in this regard, "It is the land which saves the peasant. Historically, for the Indian peasant, land is his hope and glory. From time immemorial, land continues to be the mainstay of the people and it constitutes […] the structural feature of the Indian countryside" (p. 70). Ian Talbot writes particularly about the sentiments of colonial Punjabi peasantry when he observes: "Colonial Punjab had a rural society and an economy based on agriculture, as around two thirds of the total population was dependent on agriculture for its livelihood" (p. 6). The present paper is not an attempt to quantify intangible sentimental attachments, as that would be essentially fatuous; the idea is to describe the Punjabi peasants' attachment and love for their land during the colonial period as expressed in a work of fiction: Sant Singh Sekhon's *Blood and Soil* (*Lahu Mitti*). Keeping in mind that the relationship between land and peasants has been ever evolving and dynamic, the study will focus on exploring the Colonial Era.

The Historical Background

In 1849 the British annexed Punjab; this annexation brought many socio-economic and cultural changes to the state. The effect and influence of British rule on Punjab can be seen in Punjabi folk culture and literature. The major economic resource, land, was not properly managed or utilized before canalization. The *Raj* recognized the significance of land and introduced a canalization policy in Punjab. The policy had its positive effects and the land that was out of use was made to produce once more (Thorburn, 1904, p. 279).

Some new crop patterns and more productive methods of cultivation were introduced during the colonial period to increase the production and to improve the miserable condition of the poor and marginalized peasants, but their condition did not appreciably improve. The government gave important monetary support for use of these new techniques; these efforts increased the production in the agrarian sector but, as a corollary, the traditional style of agriculture gave way to a commercial one and a new type of commodity production began to emerge. The changing pattern of the agrarian economy created a new allurement for the ownership of land. It has been established, in the words of Walter C. Neal, that to own "land is to rule". According to Neal, the person "who has land" is a powerful entity of village community life and "can do anything" in rural society (p. 47). With the changing patterns of agricultural production, the moneylenders, supported by the westernized legal system, began to mortgage the land belonging to marginalised farmers. Rekha Bandyopadhyay observes that "colonial land settlement led to the creation of a large agrarian proletariat. The beneficiaries of this change were the moneylenders and traders. They had a parasitical attitude to agriculture" (p. 151). This phenomenon necessarily led to a generalised feeling of insecurity among marginalised peasants.

The Novel

Blood and Soil (*Lahu Mitti*), written by Sahitya Akademi awardee Sant Singh Sekhon, is set in rural Punjab during the Colonial Era in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It begins with the establishment of canal colonies in the 1880s and ends with the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh in 1931. The novel, revolving around the rural contours of Punjab, aims to illustrate the dreams, pain and suffering of the peasant community. In the colonial period, peasants from eastern Punjab were eager to migrate to a new environment, that of western Punjab (present day Pakistan) for the improvement of their livelihood. Some migrated in search of work while the others sought productive land in newly colonised tracts. One reason for the migration was, that peasant landholdings in eastern Punjab were rapidly vanishing. At the same time, the productive value of land in the western Punjab was relatively higher, "[t]he soil was virgin, colonized only three years since. Crops had all been bumper, and that poverty under whose blows father and son had been buffeted for the last twenty years and more seemed after all to be taking its leave" (Sekhon, p. 1). Therefore, Jagat Singh, the father of the protagonist Baij Singh, had to leave his village *Rawelpur* because his land was mortgaged by the moneylender. They migrated to a *Chak,* a locality set up by the colonial rulers. Tejwant Singh Gill, in his work entitled *Sant Singh Sekhon,* examines the reasons behind the migration, the significance of land and the changing character of human relations in the peasants' life:

> Due to some legal wrangling, his land in his native village has got mortgaged, but to save him from destitution, his *jawai* (son-in-law) gives him land he has got in excess and the old man is able to settle the newly wedded couple there. In a subtle way, this arrangement shows that in the rural life then, the sense of *bhaichara* (fellow-feeling) has given way to ill sense of *sharika* (jealousy) as a result of which even petty issues become bone of contention between the collaterals. (p. 59)

Under financial compulsion and endemic poverty, Jagat Singh has lost his small ancestral holding and he is left with no other option than to work for Hari Singh, who, being a *namberdar,* has got land in the canal colonies awarded by the colonizers. The chief concern behind the foundation of canal colonies was to attract the local Chiefs/*Chaudharies.* Being pro-British, such Chiefs/*Chaudharies* got land in the canal colonies as a token of their service to the *Raj*. The British land distribution policy was selective. Every person from the *Jatt* community did not get land under the policy. Consequently, a sense of dissatisfaction began to emerge among those who were neglected or excluded. Agriculture has been the mainstay of the majority of people of the area from times immemorial. In the Colonial Era, peasants were not skilled to do any other work except cultivation. As M. Darling's encounter with a *Jatt* confirms:

> *Jatt*: 'Why does the *Sirkar* not give me land? Our work is cultivation. What else can we do? Where else can we go? We must have land.'
> Darling: 'The *Sirkar* cannot give land to everyone. *Jats* are many, and the land is limited.' (p. 24)

The British land distribution policy not only polarized society between the haves and have-nots but it also divided the peasant community between the *Bisvedar*, *Mujahra* and *Siri*. The policy, furthermore, created new modes of exploitation between the landlords and the peasants. The policy widened the gap between the rich and the poor and also created economic boundaries among the peasants. Neeladhari Bhattacharya explains this phenomenon in detail:

The Colonial state classified North Indian rural society into the three categories: *zamindari, pattidari,* and *bhaiachara*. Nineteenth century revenue manuals defined these categories for the benefits of administrators, and official tables annually enumerated the number of village tenures in each of these classes. As the categories gained currency, their truth was taken for granted and their validity continually affirmed. (p. 109)

It can be said that these categories are colonial constructs. These categories redefined the meaning of custom, the shape of social relations, and the nature of property. Under the *Zamindari* system, landlords grew richer, the intermediaries continued to flourish, the state was deprived of its share of legitimate increase in revenue and the peasants lived a hand to mouth existence. Mridula Mukherjee claimed that in the Colonial Era "the peasantry's agricultural prosperity was misconstrued because taxation and debt burden had broken the spine of the peasant" (p. 2). In the areas where the *Zamindari* system was operative, the peasants lost their lands and became subtenants of the moneylenders. "One estimation indicates that in the year of 1911 the total debt on peasants amounted to Rs 300 crore, which increased to Rs.1800 crore by 1937. The whole procedure turned into an endless loop" (p. 17). The condition of peasants deteriorated under British rule because British rulers were only concerned with the revenue of the state. Sahib Khan, a peasant from the old district of Salivahnkot, composes a couplet: "Take care of your turban, O peasant, take care of your turban; You lost your *Raj* (Kingdom of the Punjab); not long before now you are losing your land (p. 33).

The title of the novel clearly suggests a close bond between land and peasants. Land ownership has its cascading affect on other social institutions as well. The most affected institution is the institution of marriage. In the beginning of this period, economic disparities were not as important as they turned out to be for the second generation. Despite being the son of a *Mujhara,* Baij Singh got married to Daya Kaur, a member of a landholding family. As land is an important source of livelihood, so parents give importance to land-holding while match-making for the next generation. This results in problems in getting married for those prospective brides and grooms who have less land. Unable to find a suitable partner in their own caste, class or religion due to not having land, some people try to buy their brides among poor people of other states. Similarly, Prof. Rajesh Gill in *Gender, Culture and Honour* points out, "It was also observed that due to poverty and lack of property or resources, men remained bachelors till late age, as none was prepared to marry their daughters to them. In order to cope with the situation, one of the brothers would marry and others would share his wife" (*The Tribune,* October 30, 2019).

It was common among the families of marginalised peasants in Punjab province during the colonial period that the parents could afford to marry only one child, and the rest of the brothers or sisters would necessarily remain unmarried. Similarly, in the novel, the newly–wedded couple, Baij Singh and Daya Kaur, hailing from a peasant community in the first quarter of the twentieth century, struggle hard to survive. Baij Singh is a man of many qualities but none of his qualities count for anything because he does not own land and he is a *Mujahra* (tenant). This turns Baij Singh into a tragic character. His wife, Daya Kaur, condemns him for his bad traits as well as for all the mishaps that occur in their house. Madan, the elder son of Baij Singh and Daya Kaur, has received poverty, misery and pain as his family legacy. It is hard for Baij Singh and Daya Kaur to educate and marry both the sons (Madan and Sardul) due to their circumstances. Besides, the parents know that it is difficult to marry off both sons.

The criterion for marriage alliances changes in the second generation, and now people are even more conscious about a family's socio-economic status. The village barber (the main instrument in match-making), who was a close friend of Baij Singh, often suggests the house of Baij Singh to those who were looking for an acceptable bridegroom. Those people come and talk ten to fifteen minutes about boy's education, his maternal families, and their ancestral land at *Rawelpur*. Unsurprisingly, they all leave without even accepting water or tea. Daya Kaur knew that it was difficult to find an alliance in such situations. "When they would learn on further inquiry from someone in the village, the friendly barber himself, that Madan was a landless peasant's son" (p. 154), there was nothing more to say or do.

The protagonist, Baij Singh is a man who is lost in the changing mindsets of Colonial Era. The family are living at *Chak* 22 because they know that they do not have land ownership at their native region, *Rawelpur*. The family feel that living in *Chak* 22 is like living in *banwas* (exile). According to Ian Talbot, "land was the major source of an individual's *izzat* (honour, reputation) in traditional societies. Especially, Punjabis referred to their land as their *patlaj* (source of power and respect) even till today" (p. 20). Because of this emotional connection, both Daya Kaur and Baij Singh get nostalgic for the native village. Daya always asks Baij to return to their ancestral village *Rawelpur*, and she blames him for the fact that, among the women of *Chak* 22, her status is like a *Mujhara's* (landless peasant's) wife. Being the *Mujhara*, Baij Singh is unable to save enough to buy the gold ear-ring for his wife. Once Daya Kaur asks:

> "Can you bring me the same ear-ring which Nand Kaur wears"?
> "You already have an ear-ring", Baij Singh answers as he does not know the difference between gold ear-ring and silver ear-ring.
> I have a silver ear-ring and Nand Kaur has gold ear-ring, don't you know? (p. 28)

Daya Kaur is worried that their son Madan is not married yet. She constantly accuses Baij Singh for being a *Mujhara*. So here Baij Singh is a tragic character whose tragic anguish is due to his low status. For his entire life, Baij Singh has had the yoke of economic depression that his father had placed on his shoulders; when his sons Madan and Sardul become mature, Baij places the same yoke on their shoulders. Being landless, they know that education is the only panacea that can save their family, especially their children, from poverty. Therefore, Baij Singh and Daya Kaur want to educate their son Madan by any possible means.

To get back their mortgaged land and to educate their son, Baij Singh and Daya Kaur decide to forgo all luxuries in their life. The family believes that there is no hope for anybody in the family except for Madan. They are willing to sacrifice much for his education. Madan is their only hope. It was their opinion that "one such soldier was enough, others might engage in the more immediately productive jobs" (p. 240). The younger son Sardul was yoked along with his father Baij Singh to Madan's future. They both work hard and Sardul takes up many responsibilities and burdens at the age of nine. Sometimes Madan was pained to see his younger brother labouring in the fields. Here, Sekhon compares poor and developing third world countries like India to the rich and developed countries of the world. He writes:

> The weak and immature in civilization and the arts shall grow corn to fill the earth's pit of a stomach and cotton to cover its leper's torsos, while the strong, the grown up, the civilized will be busy in higher kinds of activities to raise its status. (p. 242)

In chapter twenty, entitled "The Sacrificed Kid", Sekhon also illustrates the poor economic condition of Indian peasantry. Baij Singh is determined to go to any extent for Madan. We get a clear picture of his determination from Baij Singh and Daya Kaur's dialogue:

> Do you think that you have a house here and Madan will get an alliance? Daya Kaur repeated.
> He said proudly, 'you are right, I do not have any land but I will educate my son more than any landlord'. (p. 163)

Daya Kaur depends on Madan for an anticipated economic wellbeing. The ultimate dream of the husband and wife is that one day Madan will get the mortgaged land back. Baij Singh also believes that education can bestow more power on a person than even the land. In spite of it, the ultimate dream is to get their ancestral land back after Madan's procurement of a lucrative job.

The novelist portrays the peasants' economic crisis as so severe that they have to sell their livestock. They do not have any other option: Baij fell ill, "So the cow was sold. It brought three hundred rupees which was soon disbursed among the creditors" (p. 136). He explains Baji's predicament in general terms:

> The Punjab peasant has a permanent home, the permanence of which is endless as eternity. So long as the ancestral land is there, so long as the clan lives and his origin is traceable to it, so long as he looks to the village as his home. A generation, two or even more, may live outside, but whenever opportunity offers, the person will come back. It is only when he comes to own land at another place, that he takes root at that place. His land is his root, and you have to dig it up from a place and fix it somewhere else, this few acres of land, to transplant the peasant. (p. 274–275)

Land is identity. Land is survival. In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, Nathan the protagonist is a person who cannot see his life without land. He asserts, "If the land is gone our livelihood is gone, and we must thenceforth wander like jackals" (p. 48). So is the case with Sekhon's *Blood and Soil*. Because they are landless, Baij Singh and Daya Kaur cannot fulfill their hopes and their dreams turn into nightmares. Tejwant Singh Gill states, in the Introduction to the book, that "Dreams are changing into nightmares and dispositions into obsessions" (p. XXII). The only reward for the family's hard work was that they were able to educate Madan.

> "This life", he would tell one who passed by him, ploughing, hoeing or reaping, stopping to sympathize for his hard life. "This life I regard as a labour in the service of Madan. And only four years of active service are left for me. After that I will receive a pension". (p. 222)

The novelist portrays Baij Singh as a man who deviates from his culture and tradition and subdues his ego in order to provide security to his child. In the end, Baij Singh builds a house by taking loan from moneylenders in his ancestral village of *Rawelpur*. Madan fulfills his parents' dream by settling them back in their ancestral village. The family's long-cherished desire to get the ancestral land back and build their own house on it is fulfilled at the end. The transformation happens when Madan becomes a lawyer and his education makes it possible to achieve what the family has desired for the last fifty years.

The study underlines that for a peasant, love for land in the Colonial Era is not necessarily spiritual, but rather the outcome of circumstances. Land is the principal source of production of the material means of subsistence; therefore, a peasant depends on land for his existence. Land is necessary for survival and owning it is a source of pride and honour for peasants during the colonial period. Robin Mearns states "Land plays a dual role in rural India: aside from its value as a productive factor, land ownership confers collateral in credit markets, security in the event of natural hazards or life contingencies, and social status" (p. 1). Besides, in the Colonial Era, people of the Punjab consider land as an integral part of their identity and their heritage.

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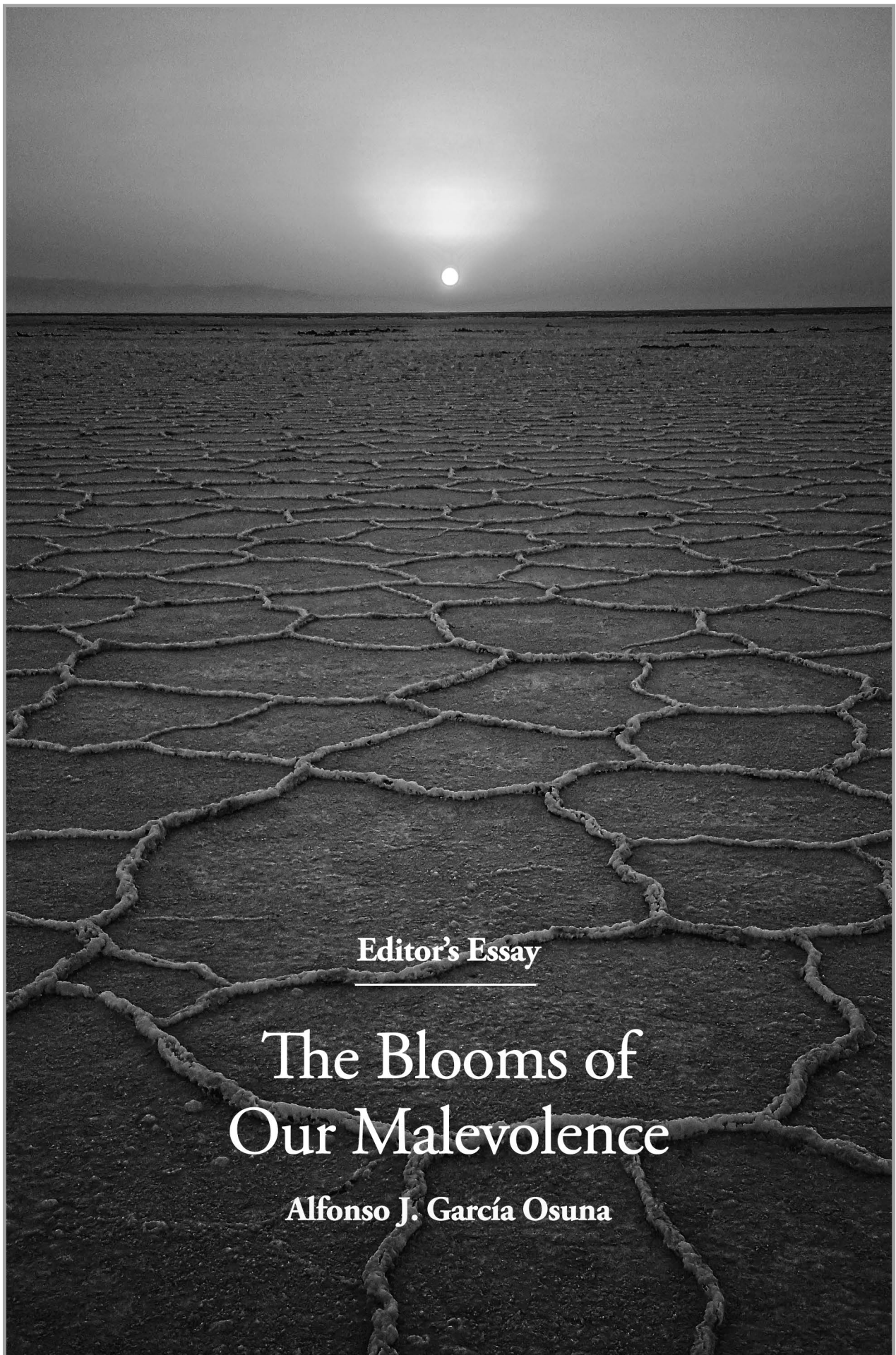
Editor's Essay

The Blooms of Our Malevolence

Alfonso J. García Osuna

Image: Hasan Almasi on unsplash

In the first story recorded in writing, the sage Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh of the events leading to the great deluge. As the story goes, the gods ordered this immense flood in order to get rid of a harmful and malevolent species (mankind) that was doing much to destroy the balanced, harmonious world envisaged by the all-powerful deities. In Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, Critias tells the story of Solon, a Greek traveller in Egypt who consults with an Egyptian priest called Sais. In essence, Sais tells of the many destructions of man and portends that there will be many more in the future. In the Old Testament story, mankind needs to be destroyed by the rising waters for disobeying the mandates of a just and loving God. All of these stories have human transgression as leitmotif, and the punishments that bring destruction to humanity are always portrayed as telluric events: plagues, floods, earthquakes, storms and the like. It strikes me that what is represented as the work of God might be seen by modern readers as an analogy for the works of nature. Nature, then, would need to be considered as possessor of an atypical sort of sentience, one that guides the efforts it makes to protect itself.

This is a peculiar analogy indeed. If we push the analogy we would be compelled to ask if the biosphere could be senseless and apathetic and still be able to activate seemingly sophisticated self-preservation mechanisms. I am convinced that it can. This belief is not based on scientific analysis; it is merely the product of my particular cognitive appraisal of the present pandemic and of the emotional response that it has elicited. Be that as it may, the current contagion leads me to believe that for this living, balanced, harmonious ecosystem, the human population, with its ever-increasing rates of environmental exploitation, has become an existential threat. The planet, then, might be seen as mounting a courageous defence against us, against an organism that behaves much like a devastating virus.

Beyond doubt, the initial success of the planet's most recent actions against us can be measured objectively: in the few weeks that the Earth has been hostile, the atmosphere that allows life to prosper has – to an unexpected degree – cleaned itself from the infection's destructive by-products. Emma Newberger reports in a recent *CNBC Environment* article (para. 3) that "[t]he north-eastern U.S. has seen atmospheric levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution drop by 30% in March [2020] compared with the same period last year, according to new satellite data from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre."

The conjecture that the planet is consciously resisting aggression is not so fanciful. In a recent article in *Futurism*, Dan Robitzski speaks of the conclusions to which several researchers have arrived through their work with the intricate mathematics of Integrated Information Theory:

> The model, known as Integrated Information Theory (IIT), has long been controversial because it comes with an unusual quirk. When applied to non-living things like machines, subatomic particles, and even the universe, it claims that they too experience consciousness, *New Scientist* reports.
>
> "This could be the beginning of a scientific revolution," Munich Centre for Mathematical Philosophy mathematician Johannes Kleiner told the magazine. (paras. 2-3)

To further reinforce the hypothesis of a conscious planet employing its resources to exterminate us, I should add that the planet's water is also perceptibly cleaner two months into its response to the human contagion. In a March 20, 2020 article in *Axios, Energy and Environment*, Amy Harder reacts to news of fish returning to Venice's canals by stating that "fish swimming in Venice's canals are a glimpse of what it might look like if we took better care of the Earth"

(para. 2). Unfortunately, not everything on the planet can recover so quickly. A slower recovery would be that of the diversity of species that we are in the process of wiping out. Our actions in this regard have been so destructive, that according to Peter Kotecki (2018) "the planet's evolutionary diversity won't recover for 3 to 5 million years" (para. 1). Evidently, one can only start counting those 3-5 million years after the biosphere succeeds in disinfecting itself from us.

The idea that the biosphere is in any way *behaving* in self-defence or *reacting* to danger might sound preposterous to many readers, especially those who are not acquainted with Lovelock and Margulis's Gaia Principle, with the maths of Integrated Information Theory, or with the work of scientists like V.A. Kostitzin, V.I. Vernadsky and R.V. Rizpolozhensky. How, one may ask, does the biosphere know that we are destroying it? The confusion may stem from the fact that human beings' ability to incorporate extrinsic, passive forms of knowledge – call it quiescent consciousness – within the range of their experiential frame of reference is very limited. In his *Discourse on Method* (1998, p. 6), Descartes suggests that the individual's own experience is the *only* thing that is directly and categorically obvious; everything that exists and happens does so within the individual's experiential pith. Such a suggestion, I'd argue, serves to explain the type of relationship that mankind has with its environment. For human beings, the environment is a sphere of potential pursuits and interests ruled by a set of strategies that are fairly conspicuous, that is to say, they are evident in the manner in which humans construe their natural surroundings as passive objects of consumption. So while it is true that other organisms consume, that activity occurs within the limits of a synergistic system meant to preserve the conditions that make life possible on the planet. Early humans also consumed (and in turn were consumed) within those limits; the problem for the planet begins when humans transcend those boundaries and threaten the continuity of the system.

So our intrinsic characteristics serve to nullify any blossom of compunction for our transgression, making us largely indifferent to the planet's warnings. Ergo, the scope of our interactions with nature is still reduced to activities governed by a logic of asset-accumulation that has, to a perilous degree, largely ignored the manner in which the biosphere is delicately balanced and fine-tuned to deliver the necessary ingredients for a healthy environment. We have never stopped to think that such a balancing act necessitates an awareness of the conditions under which a system as a whole functions, as well as cognisance of the role played by each constituent part. Balancing, fine-tuning and corrective measures make it evident that nature is not just *being*, but also methodically *doing*.

So now, after treating the planet as an object to be subjugated and devoured, we are encountering an opposing contestant in our arduous game of survival. Is it too late to attempt to frame a new relationship with nature that allows it to forgive our trespasses? Perhaps, but this would require that we ascribe a certain level of apperceptive subjectivity to the flora and fauna that we have so mercilessly decimated, to the minerals that we've irresponsibly exploited, and to the seas and atmosphere that we are inexorably turning toxic. This means that we'd have to learn to see nature as an interlocutor and stop *processing* it. Can we?

Maybe. In order to have a dialogue with the planet we should start by recognising that there is a certain type of anonymous consciousness at work in it, one that detects transgressions and takes actions to address them, just like our bodies do when detecting a viral or bacterial infection. In these cases, we don't deliberately command our body to take specific, directed action against infection, and yet it does take action with an amazing degree of intricacy and complexity. Up to the present day, we have not believed that the planet has a comparable

potential to antagonise its adversaries. Perhaps this pandemic is our wake-up call: We must stop being the infection against which our host planet keeps releasing antibodies.

In the end, it is entirely possible that we will survive the planet's latest attempt to clean itself of this resilient contagion called humanity. One thing is certain: the Earth will keep trying until it succeeds. If it succeeds, as the ancients tell us it has in the remote past, it may be that the compassionate and forgiving planet will again take pity on us and allow another Utnapishtim or Noah to restart humanity's story.

Or perhaps it has had enough.

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