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SPECIAL ISSUE

Fiction of the Roaring Twenties: 100 Years Later /
La narrativa de los locos años veinte: 100 años después

INTRODUCTION

Mihaela Mudure & Begoña Lasa-Álvarez

Babeş-Bolyai University (Romania) & Universidade da Coruña

The beginning of a new decade, the 2020s, led to a rising interest in the cultural, social or political realities that shaped the world a century ago. Furthermore, the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in 2019, almost exactly a century after the Spanish flu had shaped post-World War I realities, led to further comparisons and analytical exercises. Indeed, both the years 1920 and 2020 were marked by waves of pandemics that would kill more people than many military conflicts. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the literature of the 1920s. As Chris Baldick has noted, “[t]he Twenties have become an almost invisible decade in British literary history” (2012, 1). Similarly, some years earlier, Thorp argued that: “Despite the fact that the Twenties became a name and a symbol even before the decade had completed its cycle, comparatively little which is substantial has been written about the authors who gave it distinction and a voice” (1955, 635). Possible exceptions to this severe judgment are Frederick Hoffman’s monograph that looked at this period as “a bright interim” (O’Connor 1955, 691), a little American Renaissance, Malcom Bradbury and David Palmer’s collection on the American novel in the 1920s, the study of the 1920s radicalism by John Lucas.

In an article published in 1983, Paul Lauter draws the attention of (professional) readerships that the canon (including the 1920s canon) must be re-considered. Of course, Lauter refers to American literature, but his considerations are applicable to other literary spaces as well: “The map of American literature which most of us have used was drawn fifty years ago. Its mountains, bumps and flats were charted; its deserts certified unfit for cultural habitation. Only during the past decade, in response to the movements for change of people of colour and of women, have we begun to face the task –not systematically undertaken since the 1920s– of resurveying the territory” (1983, 435). If we accept Lauter’s definition that “[t]he literary canon is, in short, a means by which culture validates social power” (435), and social power validates culture, looking back at the novel written a century ago enriches our knowledge of a decade that should not be overlooked or oversimplified. Centennial anniversaries make us re-think, re-evaluate, juxtapose the evolutions that led to the world as it is today. For instance, studying the evolution of the detective

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story, Brazil (1981) realizes that “[t]he classic detective almost never was motivated by a burning sense of justice. More often he was answering a literal need to set things straight. Crime demanded attention because it represented an aberrant disruption in an otherwise wholesome, coherent social order” (169).

The 1920s deserve to be under special critical scrutiny. This period that marked an age of prosperity and joy after the sufferings of World War I was referred to as the “Roaring Twenties,” the “Jazz Age,” the “Golden Twenties” or “*les Années folles*” (“Crazy Years”), all these denominations emphasizing the dynamism, the buoyancy, the exhilaration that supposedly characterized the whole world. In fact, this fervour came mostly from the countries that had won World War I and from a capitalism that aimed at controlling the whole world.

It is during this period that American oil companies began to exploit oil in Venezuela, while the political influence of the USA was growing in Haiti, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic. The USA was becoming more and more influential all over the world. At the same time, the 1924 Immigration Act limited immigration from Central and Eastern Europe or from Asia. America was suspicious of the “darkies” from these areas. Prohibition influenced radically American economy, lifestyles and culture. The Harlem Renaissance made visible an exceptional Afro-American cultural and artistic elite, whereas the writers of the Lost Generation showed that the scars of the Great War would not heal too quickly.

In Europe, the advent of extreme political ideologies, Fascism and Bolshevism, showed that the world was at a crossroads that could endanger democracy and lead to a new World War. The decade was also the last act in the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Egypt became independent, but under British influence, Saudi Arabia appeared on the map. In Iran, the Pahlavis, the last dynasty in the history of the country, took hold of power. The Irish War of Independence and the appearance of the Republic of Ireland foreshadowed the downfall of the British colonialism in spite of Britain’s victory in World War I.

Ordinary people’s lives were influenced more than at any other time in history by scientific discoveries and technology. The car, the telephone, the radio, household electricity, the airplane made communication much faster. The discovery of penicillin and insulin improved people’s health. Diseases that had been considered fatal could be cured, or their evolution could be better understood. From the social point of view, the decade was characterized by a rising urban culture “in whose body survived the old ... spirit, its agrarian ... virtues (in short: the province)” (Ickstadt 1983, 128). In other words, change went hand in hand with continuity. The cinema became a wide spread entertainment and in the most developed countries of Europe or North America “mass culture reached across the boundaries between the rural and urban sections of society” (Rhodes 1996, 389). A significant year in this respect, is 1928, when the Walt Disney Studios created the first cartoons with Mickey Mouse.

From the social and political point of view, an important achievement of the 1920s was women’s vote. In several countries women had achieved full political rights before 1920 (Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Sweden), while in other countries they received unrestricted right to vote during the 1920s (Great Britain, Ireland, USA, Iceland). As Raub (1994)



has noted, “[o]ur image of the Twenties woman is that of the flapper, who has thrown off the conventions of her Victorian predecessors to crop her hair, shorten her skirt, and dance the Charleston” (109). The flapper was able to push the boundaries of her gender farther than any generation before her. On the other hand, domesticity was not completely abandoned. Getting married, having children and caring for a home was still a popular ideal especially among women from certain social milieus. Gender and the literature of the 1920s often meet in the studies of Gay Wachman (2001)¹, Jenny Glennon (2011)², or Melissa Homestead (2013)³. During this decade “the primary image of woman [was] psychological archetype rather than social being” (Hoffmann and Hoffmann 1979, 63) and clear proofs of this statement can be found in the greatest novels of the decade: *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (see Knuth 1974). The 1920s is not only a decade of very significant literary creations, the influence of the literary metadiscourse increased as it became “an academically sponsored activity” (Rovit 2014, 116).

The 1920s witnessed very radical developments in visual arts. Art Deco was fashionable at the beginning of the decade and it was followed by a clear evolution towards the non-figurative with such artists as Pablo Picasso or René Magritte. The definition of art and the relationship between the artist and the beholder changes thanks to such violent experimenters as Marcel Duchamp. The discovery of Pharaoh Tutankhamen’s tomb by Howard Carter in 1922 spurs an overwhelming interest in Egypt and its civilization: The Egyptian craze. The irrationality of war, the horrendous human price paid during World War I by so many innocent people, led to the appearance of several trends, such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Expressionism, which rely on an aggressive and powerful understanding of reality.

Art and science no longer pretended to be opposite fields of human creation as science offered hypothesis that surpassed the immediacy of the universe which is at our sensorial approach. New models of the universe that led to different

¹ Wachman (2001) dealt with lesbian writing, forbidden sexualities and silenced desires.

² Glennon authored an applied study on the significance of jewelry in Wharton’s fiction of the 1920’s: “American women continued to be financially dependent on men, even while considering themselves more liberated than previous generations. In accepting the big bribe, these women become depthless objects, indistinct from one another. This in turn reflects the novelist’s concern that expense had become a substitute for taste in the post-war period, and that an affinity that conspicuous consumption would permeate the world, as she had seen it permeate the nation’s social classes” (2011, 17).

³ Homestead’s study uncovers the hidden aspects of Willa Cather and Edith Lewis’s collaboration and of their joint textual enterprise: “Cather and Lewis lived together openly for thirty-nine years, their partnership recognized and respected by family and friends” (2013, 410). On the other hand, she challenges the critics who “safely place Lewis outside the garret by assigning her quasi-wifely secretarial and domestic duties in support of Cather’s solitary authorial labours. ... Cather gets a special pass to enter the masculine garret, where canonical geniuses write in solitude, but the (female) social remains safely outside (Homestead 2013, 436-37). The present collection responds to Homestead’s invitation to renew our perspective on women writers: “It is time, then, to unlock the garret door in our scholarly imaginations to let in the woman with whom (rather than for whom) Cather wrote her fiction” (2013, 437).



understandings of space or time were offered by Albert Einstein and Werner Heisenberg. Niels Bohr constructed another atomic model; Edwin Powell Hubble went beyond the Milky Way and explored the entrails of the cosmic space reachable by our human instruments and discovered new nebulae and galaxies. Sigmund Freud overpassed prudish views about the human being and explored the innermost layers of human mind and psychology. The Freudian craze was followed by other psychological crazes less well remembered nowadays, such as Émile Coué and George Gurdjieff. Both relied on the cult of the self and non-hypnotic suggestion. The idea behind the popularity of Coué and Gurdjieff was that “the unconscious mind through autosuggestion could cure even organic disease” (Rapp 1987, 21).

It is generally accepted that this flamboyant, noisy age characterized by economic growth, increasing consumerism, fundamental changes in artistic and scientific outlooks ended on 29 October 1929, the day known as the Great Crash on Wall Street. The Great Depression would follow, a new age was about to begin.

Fiction responded to the challenges of this time and literary historians tried to keep up. The fiction of the twenties is the novels of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Joyce, or Willa Cather as well as the short stories of Katherine Mansfield, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf or Agatha Christie. Ronald Berman’s study, for instance, “displays the relevant social and philosophical backgrounds informing the works” (Beuka 2001, 158) of Hemingway and Fitzgerald. The attention paid to Hemingway is more than justified: “More than John Dos Passos, more than Scott Fitzgerald, more than Thomas Wolfe, more than William Faulkner, all of whom published works of genuine distinction in the late 1920s, Hemingway was hailed at the beginning of his career by literary critics as the brightest star in American fiction and its best hope for the future” (Raeburn 1975, 118). Bruce Barnhart (2009) paid attention to the connection between the novel and jazz. In his opinion, they both perform “similar functions. Both respond to a “dissonance of existence” (216).

This collection enriches the extant bibliography with new perspectives. Scholars from Spain, Germany, and Romania, who are at different stages of their career and who rely on different methodologies, look at the 1920s and their echo in the fiction of the time. Sascha Klein and Anca Bădulescu analyse the novel of the 1920s taking a close look at the sonorous and the musical values in John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* and in Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point*. The former novelist dealt with the American metropolitan panopticon and its influence upon the human subject. The latter experimented with the musicalisation of fiction, starting from the “jungle of noise” metaphor. Loredana Bercuci deals with the intersection between class and race in *Home to Harlem* by Claude McKay and with the writer’s attraction to the Communist ideology. José María Díaz-Lage, for his part, delves into some manifestations of camp aesthetics, such as the reliance on dialogue and the tendency of using tableau-like plots, in Ronald Firbank’s *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* and Ivy Compton-Burnett’s *Pastors and Masters*. As the 1920s marked a change in women’s history by the appearance of two new female types, the woman voter and the flapper, several essays deal with women’s novels and the gender constructs during this period. Iulia Andreea Milică tackles the representation of the flapper and her fashionable clothes in *The Offshore Pirate*



and *The Ice Palace*, two of Fitzgerald's earliest short stories. Mihaela Mudure deals with Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, a forgotten novelist of the 1920s, whom she tries to rescue from undeserved oblivion. Then Alina Preda focuses on lesbian love and desire in Radcliffe Hall's works written or published in the 1920s and the effect of external or self-inflicted censorship upon this writer. Also focusing on a woman novelist, Carmen María Fernández-Rodríguez's analysis on Pearl S. Buck's *East Wind West Wind* addresses the powerful winds of change coming from the West that were affecting China during the 1920s, particularly concerning women. During this decade children's literature gained momentum and was fully established as it is identified nowadays. Two of the essays of the volume examine very different facets of this genre: Begoña Lasa-Álvarez analyses *Just Jane*, the first of a series of books for girls by Evadne Price, concentrating specifically on the new suburban lifestyle showcased in the text, and in the final essay, Andrea Valeiras-Fernández and María Jesús Lorenzo-Modia offer an insightful study of the illustrations created for the new adaptations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published for the 1920s generation.



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ARTICLES

HUXLEY'S "JUNGLE OF NOISE" IN *POINT COUNTER POINT*

Dana Bădulescu

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University (Romania)

ABSTRACT

Point Counter Point, Aldous Huxley's experiment with the "musicalisation of fiction" (*PCP* 384, –References to *Point Counter Point* will be abbreviated hereon in *PCP*–) was published in 1928, the end of a decade of post-war trauma, conflicting ideologies, proliferating scientific theories, new technologies and reckless hedonism. These amalgamated aspects found their expression in the novel's cubist montage, contrapuntal orchestration and cynical tone. I argue that, in tandem with the experimental poetry and prose of Huxley's contemporaries, *Point Counter Point* set the tone for a new literary culture on both sides of the Atlantic. This approach accounts for the novel's experimental techniques and design, starting from the "jungle of noise" (65) metaphor.

KEYWORDS: Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, intellectualism, degeneration, crisis, fragmentation, cacophony.

LA SELVA DE SONIDOS DE HUXLEY EN *POINT COUNTER POINT*

RESUMEN

Point Counter Point (*Contrapunto*), el experimento de Aldous Huxley con la musicalización de la ficción, se publicó en 1928, al final de la década del trauma postbélico, de las ideologías en conflicto, de las múltiples teorías científicas, las nuevas tecnologías y el hedonismo temerario. Estos aspectos amalgamados encontraron su expresión en el montaje cubista de la novela, su orquestación a contrapunto y tono cínico. Sostengo que, junto a la poesía y la prosa experimental de los autores coetáneos de Huxley, *Point Counter Point* estableció el tono para una nueva cultura literaria en ambos lados del Atlántico. Este trabajo considera la técnica y diseño experimentales de la novela, comenzando por la metáfora de la selva de ruidos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, intelectualismo, degeneración, crisis, fragmentación, cacofonía.

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A jungle of innumerable trees and dangling creepers –it was in this form that parties always presented themselves to Walter Bidlake’s imagination. A jungle of noise; and he was lost in the jungle, he was trying to clear a path for himself through its tangled luxuriance. The people were the roots of the trees and their voices were stems and waving branches and festooned lianas –yes, and the parrots and the chattering monkeys as well.

(*Point Counter Point*, V)

Chapter V in Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* opens with Walter Bidlake, assistant editor of a literary review, visualising parties as a profuse jungle of proliferating shapes and noises. In the context of the novel, which is a large canvas of the British intelligentsia in the 1920s, Walter Bidlake’s fancy may read as a metaphor for a culture and civilization with a flamboyant appetite for a lush extravagance of the intellect and a cacophony of voices. Walter’s luxuriant exotic image expands into a hyperbole, “the growths of sound shooting up, through the height of three floors” until they “break clean through the flimsy glass roof that separated them from the outer night” (*PCP* 65). This rich natural entanglement goes “up and up, loaded with orchids and bright cockatoos, up through the perennial mist of London, into the clear moonlight beyond the smoke..., the last thin aerial twigs of noise” (65).

Point Counter Point multiplies not only perspectives, points of view, voices and aspects but also settings. In Chapter VI the reader is taken to India, where Philip and Elinor Quarles attend a party and then drive off in their car through “the sordid suburbs of Bombay” that look ghastly and bone-white under the moon” (96-97). There, under a full moon, Elinor, in a romantic disposition, takes her husband’s hand and reminds him of their evenings “in the garden, at Gattenden” (93). Philip replies reluctantly “across gulfs, and in the rather flat and colourless voice of one who answers an importunate telephone” (93). Huxley’s novelist, a fictional projection of himself, looks and sounds distant and detached, his only interest lying in matters of the mind, which once caused Elinor to compare him with “a monkey on the superman side of humanity” (100). It is in this later chapter that the jungle image in Chapter V unravels: Philip is one of “the chattering monkeys” (65) in Walter’s fancy. The exotic landscape is strange and fantastic in both chapters. In Chapter VI it is countered by the flattening technology of the telephone, the car, and “the wireless across the Atlantic” (97) that Elinor feels is the only means by which Philip loves her. As a matter of fact, the multifarious East and the ideologically and scientifically cacophonous West are not even counterpointed –rather they are superimposed, like pieces in a cubist montage.

Jerome Meckier argues that Huxley’s trip to India, Burma, Malaya, and across the Pacific to America gave him an insight into “humanity’s multitudinousness” (1977, 448). That trip was recorded in *Jesting Pilate*, a travelogue published by Chatto and Windus in 1926. With that newly acquired sense of a polymorphous human and natural universe, Huxley set forth the outline of *Point Counter Point*, published two years later. Considering the impact of the manifold cultural experience that Huxley transfers to Philip Quarles in the novel, Meckier states: “If a sense of the world’s unparalleled complexity is the hallmark of modernity, India sends Quarles



home a modern novelist” (448). To Meckier’s account, it was not only Huxley’s crude experience of the world’s complexity translated into the figure of Walter’s jungle that propelled him to a new level, but also the process of recording it in a book that contributed to the experimental nature of *Point Counter Point*.

In the structure of a novel whose central theme is the sterility of an exaggerated intellectualism that severs the mind from the body and from the soul, Chapter VI is a contrapuntal intervention that reveals the multiple facets of dissonance. Foreshadowed by Walter’s image of the uncontrollable overgrowth of jungle on London in Chapter V, the Indian chapter, which immediately follows it in *Point Counter Point*, irradiates the entire novel. India’s profusion of colours, odours and noises is the underlying model of the early twentieth century proliferation of scientific theories, clashing ideologies and telescoping images. India’s mesmerising force resonates as far as Chapter XXII, where it sets Philip’s authorial imagination whirling. If in Chapter V Walter fancies the jungle eating up London and translates the chatter of the society around him into jungle noise, in Chapter XXII Philip associates the contrast between Lucy Tantamount’s pale tongue and gums and the scarlet rouge on her lips with “the sacred crocodiles in the palace gardens at Jaipur” showing their “almost white” (*PCP* 383) cavities when fed by the guide with chunks of meat. It is the flash of “all India” echoing through his head “while she’s showing... those gruesomely bloodless crocodile’s gums and palate” (384) that gives Philip the idea of his experimental technique of “the musicalization of fiction” (384), maybe putting a novelist and then multiplying the novelists in the novel. The cinematic image “all India rushes like a cinema film” (384) is a conflation of India’s elemental force and the new technology of the cinema that has the capacity to reduplicate it. Philip sees a great potential in this note of “strangeness and fantasticality” (384) that juxtaposes India’s spiritualised multiplicity and Western technological reproducibility in the contrapuntal and cubist montage of the book. Meckier contends that “Quarles and Mr. Sita Ram collide as clumsily in Chapter VI as Lord Edward Tantamount does against Webley in the preceding chapter or Lucy with General Knoyle in the one succeeding” (1977, 455). The effect is that connection is simply not there. Dissonance, disconnection and cacophonous proliferation is everything there is to this world.

Huxley thematised this intellectual relativism in an age when Werner Heisenberg and other scientists of the 1920s were formulating theories based on the uncertainty, or the indeterminacy principle. As Meckier shows, “characters in *Point Counter Point* regularly see each other as foreigners” (1977, 455). Each speaks his or her own language but they do not really communicate. More often than not, they clash, like Illidge and Walter Bidlake in Chapter V. Their conversation starts after Walter selects Illidge’s figure from among the society engaged in simultaneous exchanges. Illidge’s reply to Walter’s introductory question “How’s science?” is delivered in a tone of provocative irritation: “Less fashionable than the arts, to judge by this party” (*PCP* 66-67). As the conversation progresses, Illidge’s grudge escalates when he maliciously remarks that “the place fairly stinks of art” and then when he sardonically blurts out “I envy you art mongers your success. It makes me really furious when I see some silly, half-witted little writer...” (67) to Walter’s



face. The art versus science controversy sparked by Illidge sounds like an echo of Prufrock's "tedious argument / Of insidious intent" leading to "an overwhelming question" one would rather not ask. While Illidge's reproachful retorts may seem to rekindle the old science versus art conundrum, it would probably be close to the mark to see in them the character's cynical understatement of art's consumerism in an age Walter Benjamin (2007) called "the age of mechanical reproduction," a state Huxley deplored. In note 13 to his essay, Benjamin inserts an extensive quote from Huxley's *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, a travelogue first published in 1934, six years after the publication of *Point Counter Point*:

Advances in technology have led ... to vulgarity... Process reproduction and the rotary press have made possible the indefinite multiplication of writing and pictures. Universal education and relatively high wages have created an enormous public who know how to read and can afford to buy reading and pictorial matter. A great industry has been called into existence in order to supply these commodities. Now, artistic talent is a very rare phenomenon; whence it follows ... that, at every epoch and in all countries, most art has been bad. But the proportion of trash in the total artistic output is greater now than at any other period. (qtd. in Benjamin 2007, 247-248)

However, Illidge's antagonism in the conversation with Walter is underpinned by class and ideological antagonism. Illidge knows he looks "undistinguished" and, with a perversity that spares almost no character in *Point Counter Point*, he "remind[s] himself of the unpleasant fact, like a man with an aching tooth, who is for ever fingering the source of his pain, just to make sure it is still painful" (PCP 68). This gives him the occasion to bring Webley up with the insulting words "enormous lout" (68) and to bring to the fore the issue of the unfair treatment of "an intellectual of the lower classes" (68) by the European society of the time. Heated by the two stories he tells Walter about how he was once detained by the police in Chesterfield and once searched "from tip to toe" in Genoa just because his face looks "subversive" (68), Illidge grows more and more verbally aggressive towards the rich until he deprecatingly exclaims his disgust, adding that "there's something peculiarly base and ignoble and diseased about the rich" (69). What he means is that money makes them emotionally dry because it "breeds a kind of gangrened insensitiveness" (69).

Illidge's position is typical of his professional and social class but of course it is just one of the many in a world whose roar is money and consumerism. Across the Atlantic, responding to the same roar, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* rings with money. Fitzgerald's key characters fabricate their personae and reinvent themselves to perform their roles in a world of glamorous parties and careless consumerism. Through Illidge, Huxley's novel is an ironic counterpoint to Gatsby's American materialism. Keith M. May reads Chapter V in Philip's contrapuntal key when he argues that "Illidge's moralizing hatred of the upper classes is placed beside Walter Bidlake's obsession with Lucy, and Lord Edward's indifference to politics is brought into conflict with Webley's preoccupation with 'saving England'" (1972, 85). Pitted against each other, *The Great Gatsby* and *Point Counter Point* are contrapuntal approaches to western materialism on both sides of the Atlantic: if in Fitzgerald's



American novel money is a lure and a dream, in Huxley's English book it is simply the prerogative of the upper classes. In both novels it is essentially a sham.

In the next counterpointing chapter emotional insensitiveness is not the outcome of a person being socially and financially privileged but of the mind thinking at one remove from living. This is the case of Philip Quarles, who "in the ordinary daily world of human contacts" is "curiously like a foreigner, uneasily not at home among his fellows, finding it difficult or impossible to enter into communication with any but those who could speak his native intellectual language of ideas" (*PCP* 98). That is what turns his wife Elinor, "born with a gift of intuitive understanding and social ease," into "his dragoman" (98-99). The world of *Point Counter Point* is in very short supply of Elinors and Rampions, and that penury of individuals emotionally fit to survive is the alarming symptom of a serious crisis in which most of the characters dwell. Meckier reads Chapter VI in terms of irreconcilable cultural counterpoints in which "India unmasks Quarles as the archetypally disconnected man, a perpetual alien" (1977, 456). Relating Huxley's view with Forster's Bloomsbury faith in connections posited in *A Passage to India*, a novel published four years before *Point Counter Point*, Meckier deems Huxley's book to be pervaded by the "anti-Bloomsbury theme of missed connections" (457). Meckier's argument sheds light on counterpointed values held by the British intellectuals in the 1920s. However, if one considers the tenuousness of the intercultural connections in Forster's *A Passage to India* and of the connections between the social classes in England and the sexes in *Howards End*, Huxley's philosophy may look not exactly anti-Bloomsbury but maybe just more radically skeptical than Forster's. When confronted with India and with Mr Sita Ram, Philip Quarles is completely inept for connection or sympathy. As far as Elinor is concerned, her role as a "dragoman" connects her with Forster's Mrs. Moore in *A Passage to India* and with Margaret Schlegel, maybe even Ruth Wilcox in *Howards End*, although the success of these women's schemes of connection is rendered problematic by the uncongenial cultural climate. To Meckier's mind, Huxley's skepticism is so poignant that *Point Counter Point* reads as a parody of *A Passage to India*, especially in Chapter VI but also in its other chapters. Even Elinor, who is praised for her emotional intelligence, fails the test: in Meckier's reading, she "fares no better than Philip" (1977, 458). To prove Huxley's anti-Bloomsbury thesis, Meckier adds that in *Point Counter Point* he echoes parodically not only Forster's *A Passage to India* but also Virginia Woolf's 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse*. Both *A Passage* and *To the Lighthouse* have the neat structure of a sonata, with a thesis, an antithesis and a synthesis, a design that makes their Bloomsbury ideal of connection ultimately triumph. Rejecting their view, Meckier shows, Huxley imparts "a cacophonous human fugue of eighteen hundred million parts" to suggest "the multitudinousness of modern life" (460).

If the Illidge-Walter controversy is dominated by Illidge's leftism, the one between Lord Edward Tantamount and Everard Webley in the same chapter focuses upon the future of humanity in a civilization where all political agents, left and right, squander the planet's resources in the name of false causes. Their conversation echoes some environmental and ecological concerns of the British ruralists between the two World Wars. Through Lord Edward, whom Webley considers a "dotty



old lunatic" (*PCP* 75), and especially through Mark Rampion, *Point Counter Point* is a panoramic view of the whole of modern society with its political parties and ideologies, and a rather worrying approach to the state of civilization in the 1920s, in the wake of World War I, when preparations were being made for a new world conflagration. Anticipating the dystopia projected by Huxley two years later and published in 1932, Rampion argues in a conversation with Philip Quarles in Chapter XXIII that all the politicians "want to land us in hell" (391). The tendencies he notices are "industrialism" and "Americanization," and he adds that "they're all equally in a hurry. In the name of science, progress and human happiness! Amen and step on the gas" (391-92).

Mark Rampion, the only mentally and emotionally stable character in the society of *Point Counter Point*, warns the other unbalanced characters of the most terrible aspects of an "industrial civilization" (523), where the human values are alarmingly replaced with professionalised amusements and sterile theories of unstoppable proliferation. In Chapter XXXIV Rampion catalogues the written press, the radio and the cinema as "the fruits of intellectualism," "the result of the systematically organised, professional intellectualism of the last two hundred years" (523) that are responsible for the scientist's "inner psychological degeneration" coupled with "infantilism /.../ and all sorts of madness and primitive reversion" (524). Rampion's worries in *Point Counter Point* materialise grotesquely in the feelies of *Brave New World*, while at the same time his critique of these forms of popular culture harks back to Huxley's own in a 1923 essay titled "Pleasures," where he singles out the cinema as the most negative "fruit," with the most damaging effect of all:

The horrors of modern "pleasure" arise from the fact that every kind of organized distraction tends to become progressively more and more imbecile ... In place of the old pleasures demanding intelligence and personal initiative, we have vast organizations that provide us with ready-made distractions –distractions which demand from pleasure-seekers no personal participation and no intellectual effort of any sort. To the interminable democracies of the world a million cinemas bring the same balderdash ... Countless audiences soak passively in the tepid bath of nonsense. No mental effort is demanded of them, no participation; they need only sit and keep their eyes open. (2000, 356)

One cannot fail to notice how Rampion's diction in the novel echoes Huxley's in the essay, and this shows how keen Huxley was on alerting his contemporaries to the stakes and perils of the new technologies both in his fiction and non-fiction writings of the 1920s. In a 1925 essay "Where Are Movies Moving?" Huxley likens the combined effect of darkness in the cinema theatre and "the monotonous music" to "a kind of hypnotic state" (2000, 176) similar to that induced by drugs. In "Huxley's Feelies: The Cinema of Sensation in *Brave New World*" Laura Frost argues that Huxley denounced the intoxicating impact of talkies upon body and mind, and she contends that "far from being a technological advancement, cinema is symptomatic of cultural degeneration, and the introduction of sound was a particularly alarming development because of its implications for bodily pleasure" (2006, 447).



In the same conversation with Spandrell, Quarles and Burlap at Sbisá's, Rampion, challenged by Burlap, launches into a tirade about what he argues to be the contemporary scientists' "non-human truth" (*PCP* 524) whose "faint notion of the universe" (524) appears as "if looked at through non-human eyes" (524). Rampion claims that the most recent theories "do really seem to have got a little way outside humanity" (524). Rampion's tirade is a vitalist's plea for "the relevant human truth" that "is something you discover by living" (525). His constant case for striking a balance between body and mind, which in his view is seriously upset by the intellectualism of the present, stands in sharp contrast with the cacophonous "jungle of noise" (65) produced by science and technology, which in their turn yield the obnoxious "fruits" of modern entertainment.

Rampion's metaphor of "the fruits of intellectualism" (*PCP* 523) ties in with Walter's "jungle of noise" and both translate an eerie sense that the modernity of the 1920s is an overgrowth of intellectualism, the most serious and alarming disease of those times. In *The Waste Land* T.S. Eliot visualises the post-war scenario as a "dead land" and wonders "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?" Side by side, Eliot's and Huxley's visions of the same decade amount to cacophony, disconnectedness and fragmentation. Rampion laments the "decaying fragments" (526) and *The Waste Land* is "a heap of broken images." In Peter Bowering's account, "The attack on intellectualism in *Point Counter Point* is largely embodied in the figure of Philip Quarles, the deliberately autobiographical character whom Rampion considers 'an intellectual-aesthetic pervert'" (1968, 85). Thus, the unpalatable critique in the novel focuses upon Huxley's fictional alias, which absorbs "all the vices of cerebration" (Bowering 1968, 86) and becomes an almost caricatural incarnation of the artist's "impersonality," a concept developed by T.S. Eliot in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Ironically, Philip finds his match in Molly d'Exergillod, the cerebral conversationist, and the effect is hilarious: "Conscious and civilized, he had been defeated by someone even more civilized than himself. The justice was poetic. But what a warning! Parodies and caricatures are the most penetrating of criticisms. In Molly he perceived a kind of Max Beerbohm version of himself. The spectacle was alarming" (431).

What Huxley, T.S. Eliot, Joyce, Pound, Kafka, Proust, Cummings, Auden, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald did was to take the scattered pieces of the world before the Great War and paste them into their montages, where they would show their incongruities. Paul Fussell accounts for this radically new literary culture of the 1920s:

Indeed, the literary scene [of the 1920s] is hard to imagine. There was no *Waste Land*, with its rats' alleys, dull canals, and dead men who have lost their bones: it would take four years of trench warfare to bring these to consciousness. There was no *Ulysses*, no *Mauberry*, no *Cantos*, no Kafka, no Proust, no Waugh, no Auden, no Huxley, no Cummings, no *Women in Love* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. There was no "Valley of Ashes" in *The Great Gatsby*. One read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language. (2000, 23)



The “traditional moral action” and “traditional moral language” are shattered to pieces in *Point Counter Point* by a society of perverts and intellectual maniacs. Spandrell is their epitome, and his perversely staged suicide is preceded by a futile demonstration “of God’s existence and the superiority of Jesus’s morality” (PCP 563) made to Rampion, who will not allow his vitalist self to be persuaded by music’s “most perfect spiritual abstraction from reality” (565). Spandrell’s heaven lasts so long as the gramophone, a fairly recent technological invention, plays Beethoven’s Lydian melody from the *heilige Danksgeasang*. On his way to Rampion’s place, Spandrell walks along the Thames “whistling to himself over and over again the opening phrases” (562) of the melody. His perception of the reality around him is that the modern city of London is filthy and grim. When the violins stop playing, “what then?” he asks himself, and the implacable answer is “Garbage and stupidity, the pitiless drought” (562), an echo of *The Waste Land*. When the demonstration is almost over, “the revelation of heaven” (567) is short-circuited by “a deafening explosion, a shout, another explosion and another” (567). “The jungle of noise” (65) has its momentum, it is followed by silence, then the music fades into “still and blissful convalescence” (568) until there is “no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc” (568). Ironically, the last drop of life in Spandrell’s dying body is concentrated in the mechanical gesture of his hands, which open and shut several times, “scratching the boards” (567) like the needle of the gramophone on the rotating disc. It is not his death that concludes the scene but his dying, an agony of no significance and of no consequence, the last futile act of his life, a “mockery” (567) Rampion read in “the lines” (567) of his face a few seconds before the noise of the pistol was heard.

Huxley’s metaphor of “the jungle of noise” (65) resonates throughout *Point Counter Point*, a novel of “failures and fragments” (Woolf 1924, 22) and of sounds of “breaking and falling, crashing and destruction” that Virginia Woolf could hear “all round us, in poems and novels and biographies, even in newspaper articles and essays” (20). Four years before the publication of *Point Counter Point*, Woolf sensed and captured the violence of this cultural roar in her own essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” and she accounted for it as “the prevailing sound of the Georgian age” (20). In what she declared to be a “sanguine” (21) state of mind, Woolf pleaded for the necessity that “the very foundations and rules of literary society” (21) be destroyed so that Joyce could “breathe” even if that may take a smashing of windows. Woolf also heard the sound in T.S. Eliot’s poetry, and at the same time she exclaimed: “But how intolerant he is of the old usages and politeness of society –respect for the weak, consideration for the dull!” (21). The Edwardian Arnold Bennett, Woolf’s targeted point of her counterpoint in the essay, reviewed Huxley’s novel on a note of complaint: “The book is almost, if not quite, wholly destructive. It is a very formidable and uncompromising attack on the society which it depicts, and there are few or no implications which might pass for constructive criticism. The ground is littered with the shapeless rubble of demolished images. Never was ruin so ruthlessly accomplished”. ([1929] 1975, 174-175)

For all these Georgian writers, the source of the roar was a strong sense that the very foundations of European civilization at large were undergoing a serious moral,



spiritual, ideological and political crisis, which resulted in a pervasive intellectual pessimism. The models of a mathematically designed universe developed by Newton, the optimistic belief underpinning the eighteenth-century Enlightenment tenet that progress is linear, and the Cartesian notion that knowledge is cumulative had been thoroughly shaken. Those models entered a stage of decline in the late nineteenth century when an incipient modernism started to take shape. In the first decades of the twentieth century their plinth was shattered by the Great War. Rampion's diagnosis of "inner psychological degeneration" (*PCP* 524) is surely an echo of a societal disease analysed by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*, a book published in the aftermath of the Great War, between 1918 and 1922. In the same tormented decade when World War I was scarring European society mentally and physically, the rational humanist idea of progress was thrown into serious question by T.E. Hulme's essay collection *Speculations* published posthumously in 1924, where Hulme was developing Nietzsche's ideas that humanity will always be prone to wrongdoing. In his poem "The Second Coming" written in 1919, first printed in *The Dial* in 1920 and then included in the collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, Yeats translated the Christian imagery of the Second Advent or Parousia from the *Gospels*, from the *Book of Revelation*, and from other biblical texts into an Apocalypse of Europe's post-war present. Yeats's vision, like Spengler's and Giambattista Vico's before him, is that the historical ages are cyclical. The Irish poet visualised them as "gyres," i. e. twisting cones, and "The Second Coming" is a metaphor for what Yeats thought was the end of a historical gyre and the uncertain origin of another. The apocalyptic atmosphere of the poem has been invoked by many who consider it to be symbolic of the chaos, fragmentation and indeterminacy embedded in the *Zeitgeist*. The epigraph Huxley chose for *Point Counter Point* consists in six lines from Fulke Greville's "Chorus Sacerdotum," of which the last two are "What meaneth nature by these diverse laws, / Passion and reason, self-division cause?" Greville was an Elizabethan poet with whose sense of dualism Huxley probably wished to connect his own. The religious freight of this sense of dualism in Greville's poetry also permeates Yeats's poem, though in 1920 the chances of redemption are questionable. In an alternative scenario, the first stanza of Yeats's "The Second Coming" might be, alongside Greville's lines, a fitting epigraph to *Point Counter Point*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Robert S. Baker looks into what he calls "the painful dualities of human experience" (103) in *Point Counter Point*, arguing that its characters tackle "a broad range of subjects, including religion, aesthetics, science, psychology, history, and politics" (102-3). Though no particular character seems to be at the nub of the story



or of the polemics in the novel, one feels that Rampion's balanced stance towards all these issues is as close to a deferred centrality as possible. Baker's insightful approach to Huxley's sense of modern history in *Point Counter Point* singles out Rampion's "vision of history as an erratic cycle of alternating 'peaks and declines' (291)" (103), which is so much in the spirit of Yeats's "gyres." Apart from this vision of history shared by Rampion and Quarles, Baker also sees in Huxley's novel "[t]he idea of an instinctive tendency towards entropic mechanism" (109) that runs through "the plot-lines involving Illidge, Webley, Lucy Tantamount, and especially Spandrell" (109). Indeed, the world of *Point Counter Point* is one of various and serious forms of entropic disorder in a closed system. Spandrell, called by Baker a "Sadean nihilist, who overshadows the others, insinuating himself into the lives of fascist and communist alike as the death-intoxicated presiding spirit of a 'collapsing' culture" (*PCP* 126), opposes Rampion not only verbally but also mentally. Thus, Spandrell becomes the embodiment of what Rampion deems to be the disease of their culture – "inner psychological degeneration" (524), a notion Rampion must have taken from Max Nordau's *Degeneration*, where Oscar Wilde epitomised the phenomenon described in the book.

Writing a conclusion to the analysis of a novel that breathes the air of indeterminacy typical of its times may sound preposterous. *Point Counter Point* is a limbo of proliferating ideas. For Woolf's "Georgians," the age also brought about a crisis of meaning that applied both to history, which for them was no longer governed by rules of progress, and to their own writing, rendered by Huxley in the contrapuntal style and cubist design of *Point Counter Point*, where ideas, opinions and situations are perceived simultaneously from the clashing angles of the characters' viewpoints. Rampion's arguments are of no consequence, Spandrell's death is pointless, Burlap's duplicity is never resolved. When he argues that the novel is plotless, Alexander Henderson does not mean that "there is no action" (1964, 42) in *Point Counter Point*. On the contrary, Henderson admits that "[t]here is a good deal of violent action" (42) and "[t]he form of the book, the pattern, is obtained by weaving together, generally with ironic effect, variations on one or two themes which the different sets of characters represent" (42-43). The novel ends irresolutely, ingloriously and anticlimactically, after exhausting the polemical zest of its characters, with Burlap in the tub. "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven" (*PCP* 569), the novel's last line, is an inverted promise of transcendence, a mockery of faith, which is absolutely lost on all its characters.

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THE REMAKING OF THE RADICAL IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: CLAUDE MCKAY'S *HOME TO HARLEM*

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ABSTRACT

Home to Harlem, one of the first successful African American novels, inspired from the urban lower classes' life, produced both revulsion and fascination. W.E.B. Du Bois stated that Claude McKay had proved African Americans were “buffoons, thugs, and rotters anyway” (245). However, the novel was successful, pointing to a 1920s fascination with the lower classes. This article analyzes the intersection of race and class in *Home to Harlem* and shows that the novel proposes a composite model for a radical subject.

KEYWORDS: 1920s, class, Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, Harlem Renaissance, radical subject.

LA RECREACIÓN DEL RADICAL
EN EL RENACIMIENTO DE HARLEM:
HOME TO HARLEM DE CLAUDE MCKAY

RESUMEN

Home to Harlem, una de las primeras novelas afroamericanas de éxito, se inspiró en la vida de las clases más bajas urbanas, provocando tanto repulsión como fascinación. W.E.B. Du Bois manifestó que Claude McKay había demostrado que los afroamericanos eran bufones, brutos y sinvergüenzas en cualquier caso (245). Sin embargo, la novela fue un éxito al aproximarse a la fascinación por las clases bajas de los años veinte. Este artículo analiza la intersección entre raza y clase en *Home to Harlem* y muestra que la novela propone un modelo compuesto para un sujeto radical.

PALABRAS CLAVE: años veinte, Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, renacimiento de Harlem, sujeto radical.

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INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was considered an aesthetic movement for a long time. This perspective on the famous intellectual and cultural black revival produced by the Great Migration that followed the First World War dates back to 1925. That year, Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* defined the aims of the movement that had, until then, been heterogeneous. Locke set a "culturalist" (Hutchinson 2007, 3) tone to the movement and tried to allay the panic sparked by the Bolshevik Revolution. He stated that the New Negro had surpassed "the arid fields of controversy and debate" and moved on to "the productive fields of creative expression" (Locke 1925, 631). Locke calls this "a spiritual Coming of Age," in which the New Negro was "lay[ing] aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization." (634). Locke allows that "the thinking Negro has shifted a little toward the left with the world-trend, and there is an increasing group who affiliate with radical and liberal movements" (633), but argues that it is a forced radicalism that is only present in matters of race. In his later essay, "Art or Propaganda?" (1928), Locke asks whether the Harlem Renaissance should be "a generation of the prophet or that of the poet" (2007, 260), claiming that socially engaged fiction does nothing but supplant and thus place its authors in a position of inferiority to the mainstream.

A conservative for most part, Locke represented only one side of the debate on the political meaning of the Harlem Renaissance which was raging in the second half of the 1920s (see Mallocci 2018). This aesthetic view of African American literature was opposed to "propaganda," a derogatory term meant to criticize more socially engaged literature. Rather than making excuses for socially engaged fiction, W.E.B. Du Bois sees "all art [as] propaganda," and states that the term "propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent" (2004, 782-783). He is against African American art conforming to mainstream standards that are prejudiced against blacks. According to him, "until the art of black folk compels recognition, they will not be recognized as human" (784). In spite of this, Du Bois does advise a radical reworking of mainstream culture, but states that African Americans "want to be full-fledged Americans" (778). Langston Hughes also criticizes "the urge to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization" (2004, 1311) in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926). He contends that mainstream white culture only accepts art that confirms previously held views, thus creating a 'double bind' for African American writers. Hughes wants African American writers to have the freedom "to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame" (1314). Claude McKay goes even further stating that "propaganda ha[d] now come into its respectable rights and [he was] proud of being a propagandist" (1923b, 61).

W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes as well as Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, Jean Toomer, and Eric Walrond were considered the "literary Left" (Smethurst 1999, 20). However, Claude McKay, whose work I will discuss here, was perhaps the most dedicated to Communism from the group, up until the release of his anti-Communist autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*



(1937). Du Bois, on the other hand, supported the idea of the Talented Tenth, exceptional African American men who would “guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races” (1903, n.p.).

The ultimate aim of this group was to help African Americans achieve respectability and integration. As a consequence of the Red Summer of 1919,¹ the Talented Tenth, i.e. some of the members of the Harlem Renaissance, endorsed “incremental black progress pursued through cultural means” (Maxwell 2007, 173) rather than a more radical approach.

Taking this into consideration, it comes as no surprise that W.E.B. Du Bois, in his famous scathing critique of *Home to Harlem*, claims to be repulsed by it. He says that “white people think we are buffoons, thugs, and rotters anyway” (1928, 202) and that Claude McKay had done nothing but prove them right. Du Bois’ negative opinion reflects his Talented-Tenth approach in that he does not approve of the representation of Harlem as low class. He also sees the novel’s depiction of Harlem as pandering to white audiences through its recourse to primitivism – a trope that appears in the works of other Modernist writers of the time like Ernest Hemingway or D.H. Lawrence. Since Du Bois’ initial review, some have sided with the reviewer while others, especially in more recent analyses, have recuperated the novel “through the lens of oppositional politics” (Wang 2019, 785).

This study aims to analyze how race and class intersect in Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* taking into account the author’s black internationalist radicalism. I contend that through Jake and Ray, *Home to Harlem* depicts a composite model for a radical subject. In the first part of the article, I will examine Claude McKay’s views on class, especially through the lens of his writings about Soviet Russia. I will then analyze the novel, focusing especially on the two main characters. Ultimately, I seek to find out if the representation of class in *Home to Harlem* might have allowed McKay to continue to be considered a Harlem Renaissance writer in spite of the aestheticization of the movement after 1925.

CLAUDE MCKAY’S POLITICAL VIEWS

Born in Jamaica in 1899, Claude McKay was one of the “many Caribbean migrants in New York [who] also helped to radicalize Renaissance politics” (Chaney 2007, 47). By 1930, a quarter of the inhabitants of Harlem were from the Caribbean (Pedersen 2007, 187). He was born in a wealthy farmer family, but migrated to the United States, along with many others from the Caribbean islands, because his country was undergoing social, economic as well as cultural changes, the consequence of the direct rule imposed by the British government in 1866. McKay was introduced

¹ The Red Summer of 1919 refers to the anti-black riots and the repression by the U.S. government of activities suspected of association with communism. This was a reaction to the Russian revolution of 1917 (See Foley 2003).



to Fabian socialism, British literature, German philosophy, and free thinking by his brother, as well as by his British mentor, Walter Jekyll (Pedersen 2007, 185). The latter, an upper-class clergyman who had become a planter in Jamaica in order to pursue his passion for Jamaican folksongs and stories, encouraged McKay to write in Jamaican dialect (185). Jekyll also helped McKay publish his first volume of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* (1912), before leaving for the United States. According to Carl Pedersen, “McKay’s early dialect verse was part of the development of a national literature free from the constraints of the British literary tradition” (2007, 186).

In the United States, McKay enrolled in Tuskegee Institute with a view to becoming an agronomist in Jamaica (Pedersen 2007, 187). But McKay did not acclimatize to that institution. Through his famous philosophy – “cast down your bucket where you are” (1895)– Booker T. Washington, the leader of the institution, epitomized “Old Negro accommodationism” (Foley 2003, 17).

After arriving in New York, the writer “fell in with two groups at either end of Manhattan: radical Greenwich Village intellectuals and Caribbean and African American writers and intellectuals in Harlem” (Pedersen 2007, 187). As a reaction to the East St. Louis race riot of 1917, McKay wrote one of his most famous poems, “If We Must Die.” The poem urges those who face mindless violence to strive for a noble death: “Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!” Such sentiments express cultural affirmation and pride in the interactions with mainstream white society. Some of Claude McKay’s poems were published in Locke’s 1925 anthology along with other works that would come to define this movement. “The White House,” the title of his perhaps most radical poem from this anthology was changed by Locke into “White Houses,” “in an attempt to excise the protest element out of the New Negro and to ‘aestheticize’ the ‘movement’” (Stewart 2007, 16). “The White House,” like “If We Must Die,” speaks of showing pride and grace when confronting hate, and contains several references to “anger” and “discontent” lodged in the “wrathful bosom” of the African Americans. The poem presents a situation that seemed to have reached its boiling point, while suggesting that those about to unleash their anger are pressed against the metaphorical doors and windows of the White House. In the aftermath of the First Red Scare, such a radical poem would have created paranoia in the eyes of the government.

That paranoia materialized after Claude McKay’s stay in the Soviet Union in 1922-1923, when “the FBI issued orders to stop and search McKay to officials in every major American port” (Maxwell 2007, 174). In spite of the U.S. government’s fears, in his speech at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, McKay expressed “doubts about recruiting southern blacks to the communist cause” (Pedersen 2007, 189). In this speech, called “Report on the Negro Question,” McKay describes the Third International as honest in its stand for the “emancipation of all the workers of the world, regardless of race or color” (1923a, 16) while stating that the Constitution of the United States supported emancipation “merely on paper” through the 15th Amendment. The reason why McKay did not believe that the blacks in United States could be easily recruited to the Communist cause was the practice of the American government of pitting whites and blacks against each other, and “setting out to mobilize the entire black race of America for the purpose of fighting organized



labor” (17). According to McKay, this happened especially in Southern states, where mixed-race organizations were illegal, and ‘propaganda’ could not be delivered easily. McKay also links the subjugation of the African Americans to the “highly organized exploitation of the subject peoples” by the European colonial empires (16), making thus a connection between anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and class struggle.

McKay, like other Harlem Renaissance intellectuals who travelled to Soviet Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Langston Hughes, was pleasantly impressed by the way he was received. He published his next books *The Negroes in America* (1923), an analysis of the situation of African Americans, and *Trial by Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in North America* (1925), McKay’s first collection of short stories, as a consequence of this visit. Claude McKay and Harry Haywood² would influence the Soviet policy on race. Significant in this regard is the “Black Belt Nation thesis on the crucial role of African American workers in securing communist footholds in the USA” (Chaney 2007, 49).

Shortly after his return from the Soviet Union to the United States, Claude McKay published “Soviet Russia and the Negro.” The article appeared in *The Crisis*, the NAACP³ magazine, in December 1923. This text sums up McKay’s views not just on the Soviet Union, but also his internationalist ideals. McKay describes Europe and America as extremely prejudiced against the blacks, seeing them only as “the Negro minstrel and vaudevillian, the boxer, the black mammy and butler of the cinematograph, the caricatures of the romances and the lynched savage who has violated a beautiful white girl” (1923b, 61). Because of ignorance and apathy, he says, the First World War brought about ‘serious clashes’ in countries like Britain, France, and Germany, where black men fought in the war as soldiers of the armies of the colonial empires. He also mentioned the contribution of the African Americans as soldiers in the U.S. army during the First World War. On the other hand, the Soviet Union is described as a classless and anti-racist utopia where gender equality and sexual freedom thrived.

There are two causes that McKay identifies for the state of things in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, McKay believed that the tsarist government could be compared to the United States government because the status “of the submerged lower classes and the suppressed national minorities of the old Russia” was similar to “the grievous position of the millions of Negroes in the United States” (1923b, 64). The situation of the blacks in the United States at that time is compared to the Jewish pogroms that the United States had condemned. The Bolshevik Revolution had solved these issues, condemning the United States for its treatment of the blacks. McKay saw Soviet Russia as a model for the way in which the United States could promote racial equality. On the other hand, he described Russia as fundamentally

² Harry Haywood (1898-1985), a child of former slaves, American Communist and leader of the international Communist movement in the 1930’s.

³ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a civil rights organization formed in 1909. Its founders included W.E.B Du Bois. The organization played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement.



different from the United States, claiming that even before the Bolshevik Revolution “a Jewish pilgrim in old Russia could find rest and sustenance in the home of an orthodox peasant” (63). He claimed that fierce racial hatred had never existed in Russia as “[t]he Hindu, the Mongolian, the Persian, the Arab, the West European” were mixed in the population of Moscow (63). McKay uses his own experience to support this claim: he felt more respected amongst the anti-bolshevists of Moscow and Petrograd, whom he describes as more inclined towards the arts, than amongst the proletarians whom he describes as being “diligent, elementary school children” (62). The essay ends with the remark that, from some points of view, Russians are not white. McKay’s interpretation of Russia speaks more about his own preconceptions and ideals than about the realities of Soviet Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. To him, the ideal society was a hybrid one in which different social groups cohabitated; in it there was gender equality, and sexual freedom.

Having raised the suspicions of the FBI, but also of the British authorities and the French police because of his anti-colonial connections and attitudes, Claude McKay did not, in fact, make it home to Harlem until 1934. He wrote the trilogy consisting of *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), in France and in Morocco. According to James Smethurst, at that time Tangier was a “complex network of local and regional ties, polyglot communities, and relatively diffuse sacred and secular authorities [which] provided a space for unusually free artistic, political, sexual, and cultural congress and exchange” (2009, 364), which fed McKay’s internationalist views. He considered North Africa black, just like Russia. In his memoir, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay says that North Africa is: “divided into jealous cutthroat groups, the Europeans have used their science to make such fine distinctions among people ... I found more than three-quarters of Marrakesh Negroid” (2007, 304).

McKay’s view of Soviet Russia as very tolerant is debatable. He himself moved away from Communism and Soviet Russia as Stalin’s grip of power increased. For my analysis here, it is important to emphasize McKay’s conception of an ideal society that is anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, a society in which there is gender equality and sexual freedom. William J. Maxwell makes a sagacious observation, “black radical internationalists cultivated vagabond souls at the cost of criminalizing many chosen movements” (2007, 175). Claude McKay’s travels and views seem to anticipate Paul Gilroy’s notion that “the curse of homelessness or the curse of enforced exile” during the transatlantic slave trade “gets repossessed” (1993, 111), which offers a privileged perspective on the modern world. Indeed, others have found intersections between McKay’s works and canonical white Modernist writers (Rosenberg 2004, Holcomb 2007, Xavier 2008, Wang 2019), but in what follows I will look particularly at race and class in *Home to Harlem* in order to analyze the Modernist conceptions of internationalism and primitivism present in the text.



HOME TO HARLEM: A QUEST FOR AN APPROPRIATE POLITICAL VIEW

Home to Harlem examines the ‘vagabond souls’ who populated the interwar period, giving a different perspective on ‘masculine impotence’ (Holcomb 2007, 71). It tells the story of Jake Brown, an African American longshoreman from Harlem who enlists and is stationed in Brest, France, during the First World War. Having enlisted to fight Germans, he is disappointed by the racism of his company. African Americans are used for menial jobs and never see combat. Pretending to go on leave, Jake deserts and returns to his beloved Harlem via the Havre and London, on a mixed-race freighter. Once in Harlem, Jake picks up a prostitute named Felice, for whom he meanders through Prohibition-Era Harlem. In the second part of the novel, another protagonist appears: Ray, a university student from Haiti who works as a waiter on the same train as Jake. Ray is obviously a stand-in for the author, and while he is very different from Jake, both in terms of class and of worldview, the two become close friends. Eventually, both characters leave Harlem: Jake runs away to Chicago with Felice, while Ray leaves the country, taking a job on a freighter. Like McKay’s next novel, *Banjo*, which is subtitled “A story without a plot,” *Home to Harlem* is a rambling picaresque tale, whose sole purpose is to put the two characters together so they can learn something from each other. In what follows, I will show how the two characters changed after their encounter and became non-conforming subjects.

In spite of being a deserter, Jake is a working-class hero. As Wayne F. Cooper states in the “Foreword” to the novel, Jake is a “symbol of primitive Afro-American decency and vitality” (1993, xxiii). Jake is the more instinctual of the two characters:

Each human body has its own peculiar rhythm, shallow or deep or profound. Transient rhythms that touch and pass you, unrememberable, and rhythms unforgettable. Imperial rhythms whose vivid splendor blinds your sight and destroys your taste for lesser ones. Jake possessed a sure instinct for the right rhythm. He was connoisseur enough. But although he had tasted such a varied many, he was not raw animal enough to be indiscriminating, nor civilized enough to be cynical. (McKay 1993, 15)

It is evident from the paragraph above that *Home to Harlem* depicts the so-called civilization, which we are to understand as middle-class white values, as corrupting. However, it does not advocate for ‘animal’ traits as those are said to make one ‘undiscriminating,’ i.e. incapable of understanding one’s position in the world and how to fight for its improvement.

It is important to note that Jake did not desert out of cowardice or fear, but because of racial discrimination, “[t]hey didn’t seem to want us niggers for no soldiers” (McKay 1993, 331). Upon his return to Harlem, he regrets having enlisted and believes that black soldiers were only used as servants and manual laborers in the war. They were not, in fact, participating as citizens. This belief of Jake’s is reflected in the rhetorical questions from the beginning of the novel: “Why did I ever enlist and come over here?... Why did I want to mix mahself up in a white folks’ war?” (8). Jake decides that African Americans should not participate in “white folks’ business” (8).



This idea opens and closes the novel. Felice repeats the same notion in the last pages: “What right have niggers got to shoot down a whole lot a Germans for? Is they worse than Americans or any other nation a white people?” (331-332). While Jake has changed some of his views by the end of the novel, this aspect remains constant and it is relevant that Felice reiterates this. As her name suggests, Felice represents happiness. Jake only finds her again at the end of the novel, once he is transformed, which suggests that he could not have achieved happiness without the changes he made to himself. Still, his interpretation of the relationship between those in power and those who are powerless remains constant. The fact that Felice confirms his views gives off a sense of alliance between the two and stresses that it is important to stand together against oppressors.

Jake is portrayed positively, as a sort of “natural man” (Smethurst 1999, 368), with powerful working class values. For instance, he refuses to be a strikebreaker: “I ain’t nevah yet scabbed it on any man” (McKay 1993, 45). However, he also refuses to join a union for the same reason he deserted the army. While he mentions getting along with his Irish co-workers, when talking to a white fellow worker, Jake mentions that he had been a union member when he had “longshored in Philly” (45). Then, in New York he discovered that the union had given “worsen piers and holds the bes’n a them foh the Irishmen” (45). This scene foregrounds both the divisions between white and black workers at that time (reminiscent of what McKay mentioned in his Comintern speech) and Jake’s lack of class solidarity.

Another positive attribute of Jake is that he accepts all kinds of outsiders who would be excluded from mainstream American society. Like many a Modernist protagonist, Jake exudes traditional masculinity in his sexual pursuits, but he also has non-conformist friends. For example, his friend Zeddy become a “sweet-man,” that is the kept lover of a relatively well-to-do woman, in this case he was the lover of Gin-head Susy. Zeddy does not conform to a traditional male gender role and for a while manages to “hold out under the ridicule of his pals” (59). Another friend of Jake’s, Billy Biase, is gay and constitutes one of the first positive queer characters in American literature. Finally, Ray, who becomes Jake’s best friend, is a foreigner whom Jake accepts and respects wholeheartedly in spite of their many differences. Some critics have even read Ray as a queer character (see Holcomb 2007).

Much of the novel describes the daily lives and nights of the working class: “[l]ongshoremens, kitchen-workers, laundresses, and W.C. tenders ... bell-boys, butlers, some railroad workers and waiters, waitresses and maids of all sorts” (1993, 294). Jake, the prototype of these working people, spends his time pursuing women and fulfilling his sexual desires in speakeasies around Harlem. This milieu is described as an essentially black one that does not conform to the norms of white middle-class American society. Catherine Rottenberg notes that Harlem is sexualized and feminized in Jake’s descriptions (Rottenberg 2010, 122). Its streets are filled with “tantalizing brown legs” (McKay 1993, 8). Rottenberg claims that this is a “way of presenting working-class black protagonists who are unfettered by middle class white moral norms” (2010, 121). Rather than being a “white cult of the primitive” (Worth 1995, 470) it is a celebration of an essentialized blackness.



One of Jake's flaws to be corrected by the end of the novel is his Americanness. The novel implies that, like all Americans, Jake sees the rest of the world through the lens of imperialism: "Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world" (McKay 1993, 135). It appears that, in spite of his travels to Europe, Jake has the same misconceptions about his own race as McKay claimed white Americans and Europeans did (see McKay 1923b). It is Ray who teaches Jake about the history of slavery, Haiti and Africa. Ray's explanations raise Jake's self-consciousness.

Ray is, in many ways, Jake's opposite. While Jake intuitively believes that white norms do not apply to him, nor are they to his advantage, Ray holds some of those values through the education he has received. In this sense, Ray is more similar to Du Bois' Talented Tenth, whom McKay dismissed as too middle class. This is evident in the scene where Ray has a conversation with Grant:

"Can't a Negro have fine feelings about life?"

"Yes, but not the old false-fine feelings that used to be monopolized by educated and cultivated people. You should educate yourself away from that sort of thing."

"But education is something to make you finer."

"No, modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like—like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for." (McKay 1993, 242-243)

Grant's reference to hogs is reminiscent of the same reference in "If We Must Die." In the poem, hogs represent sacrificial animals who put up no resistance to their own slaughter. Here, it is implied that education incorporates a bias against people of color, while also not being aligned with interwar notions of culture any longer.

Jake is the namesake of Hemingway's protagonist from *The Sun Also Rises* and Ray is said to be "impotent" like Jake Barnes: "Ray felt that as he was conscious of being black and impotent" (154). Ray is deprived of power in two ways. On the one hand, he is powerless as a person of color. Thinking of his home in Haiti, he feels powerless because he could not defeat the Americans, he could not prevent them from invading his country, arresting his father, and killing his brother. Ray imagines how he might feel if he were white and powerful. The text also implies that Jake is impotent. He is humiliated as a soldier and is never given the opportunity to overpower even the white enemies of his own country. Paradoxically, in the aftermath of the war, Jake Barnes feels impotent because he does not have access to more vital energies which he would associate with the space from where Ray comes, while Ray feels impotent precisely because he comes from those spaces.

Ray also feels impotent because of his education and middle class upbringing. This causes him to feel a lack of connection with the working class and his race,



except for Jake. During a sleepless night, which also implies anxiety and losing touch with one's own body, Ray observes his sleeping fellow workers:

Intermittently the cooks broke their snoring with masticating noises of their fat lips, like animals eating. Ray fixed his eyes on the offensive bug-bitten bulk of the chef. These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature had put them in the same race. He ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything). He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him. They were all chain-ganged together and he was counted as one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room, except Jake. (153)

It is only when Jake initiates him into the lifestyle of Harlem and other black spaces that Ray gets in touch with his instincts. In a drug-induced dream –he takes Jake's cocaine in an attempt to sleep– Ray travels back to Haiti to see it anew. The country is described as a tropical paradise in which phallic symbols suggest desire and fertility: “Giddy-high erect thatch palms, slender, tall, fur-fronded ferns, majestic cotton trees, stately bamboos creating a green grandeur in the heart of space...” (153).

Ray also conforms to middle-class rules about relationships. When Jake meets him, he is engaged to be married. Agatha, his fiancée, is described like a submissive animal: “He saw destiny working in her large, dream-sad eyes, filling them with the passive softness of resignation to life, and seeking to encompass and yoke him down as just one of the thousand niggers of Harlem” (265). By the end of the novel, he realizes that adhering to hetero-normative white gender roles would make him feel trapped and decides to leave the country. Jake, on the other hand, seems to have found a more conventional partner in Felice, but the last time he meets Ray, he expresses a desire that destabilizes that symbol of hetero-normativity. “If I was educated, I could understand things better and be proper-speaking like you is. [...] Then we could all settle down and make money like educated people do” (273). This suggests that it is Ray and not Felice with whom Jake really wants to stay together.

CONCLUSION

Home to Harlem imagines the type of radical that McKay also describes in his political essays and in his autobiography, where he envisioned a world unfettered by prejudices against certain races, classes, or genders. In describing the Soviet Union and Tangier, he imagined a society at the intersection of several races, ethnicities, languages, classes and genders. Ray, the character who resembles McKay in *Home to Harlem*, does not become the radical subject that McKay supported until he renounces his stifling middle-class education and norms, and learned from the working classes represented by Jake. On the other hand, Jake does not achieve his full potential until he is taught by Ray about the history of his race. While we might interpret Ray's transformation into someone more instinctual as pandering to the Modernist white obsession with primitivism, the exchange between Jake and



Ray surpasses their individual traits that might be associated with the glorifying instinct. By the end of the novel, Jake has internalized some of Ray's traits and Ray had learnt from Jake as well. This exchange creates a composite identity that includes a connection to the physical as well as social awareness and solidarity. The novel's perspective does not fit neatly into any of the radical traditions of the era, which is presumably why it was not excluded from the Harlem Renaissance.

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A CAMPER SHADE OF ROAR: RONALD FIRBANK'S
*CONCERNING THE ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL
PIRELLI* AND IVY COMPTON-BURNETT'S
PASTORS AND MASTERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at some of the manifestations of camp in two very different novels from the 1920s: Ronald Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* and Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Pastors and Masters*. Emphasis is placed on those elements which derive from camp's detachment, theatricalization and fixation on the surface. Two specific aspects are examined in both novels: their use of dialogue (particularly its discontinuity) and their use of static, tableau-like plots. The final considerations address the relationship between camp and irony as seen in camp's rejection of moral judgement.

KEYWORDS: Ronald Firbank, Ivy Compton-Burnett, camp, detachment, dialogue, static plot.

EL CAMP EN DOS NOVELAS DE LA DÉCADA DE LOS AÑOS VEINTE:
CONCERNING THE ECCENTRICITIES OF CARDINAL PIRELLI,
DE RONALD FIRBANK, Y *PASTORS AND MASTERS*,
DE IVY COMPTON-BURNETT

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza algunas de las manifestaciones del camp en dos novelas de la década de los años veinte muy diferentes entre sí: *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, de Ronald Firbank, y *Pastors and Masters*, de Ivy Compton-Burnett. Se presta especial atención a los elementos derivados de características del camp como el desapego, la teatralización y la insistencia en la superficie. Se examinan dos aspectos específicos en ambas novelas: su uso del diálogo (en particular su discontinuidad) y su uso de tramas estáticas similares a los cuadros teatrales. Las consideraciones finales abordan la relación entre el camp y la ironía tal y como se evidencian en el rechazo camp de los juicios morales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Ronald Firbank, Ivy Compton-Burnett, camp, desapego, diálogo, trama estática.



INTRODUCTION

Whilst the novels of Ronald Firbank and Ivy Compton-Burnett are not the first texts that come to mind when we think of the Roaring Twenties, there is also a certain chronological incompatibility between the two authors: Firbank published some of his most important novels, such as *Valmouth* (1919), before the 1920s, whilst Compton-Burnett's best-known novels –for instance, *More Women than Men* (1933), *A Family and a Fortune* (1939) or *Manservant and Maidservant* (1947)– were published much later. However, the texts with which we shall be concerned here do belong to the same period: thus, Compton-Burnett's *Pastors and Masters* appeared in 1925 and Firbank's *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* was published in 1926, shortly after its author's death. The similarities between the two authors are not immediately obvious either. Both authors are inextricably bound in the bibliography on camp, starting with Susan Sontag's 1964 "Notes on 'Camp'" (1996, 278). Admittedly, such a reduced canon will not allow us to reach wide-ranging conclusions, but it may provide an apt illustration of some manifestations of camp in the 1920s.

Following Sontag, I will be focusing on what she terms the essence of camp: "its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (275). Following Robert F. Kiernan, camp is here understood to "proliferate in all forms of art and behavior that offer the opportunity for a contrast between negligible content and elaborate form" (1990, 12); to return to Sontag's classic formulation, camp emphasizes "texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content" (278). In this paper, camp is not read as a phenomenon pertaining exclusively to homosexual culture, although there is an undeniable connection between the two (see Clark 1993; Kiernan 1990, 16; Sontag 1996, 290). It should not be understood, despite the title of Kiernan's book, to be synonymous with frivolity, even though frivolity is an important component of camp: for instance, there is a sense in which the novels of Compton-Burnett are not frivolous at all. Rather, camp is "a frivolity unbound by conventional considerations of morality" (Kiernan 1990, 148). The detached way in which both of our authors deal with potentially indecorous situations is an eloquent example of this type of frivolity. For instance, *Cardinal Pirelli* famously opens with a scene in which the eponymous protagonist baptizes a dog: this is indicated, in the first paragraph of the novel, by the supremely aloof phrase "a christening– and not a child's" (Firbank 1950, 333).

Of all the distinguishing qualities of camp, the most relevant for this paper is its peculiar motionlessness: it is incompatible with many of the conventions of the realist novel, particularly with the notion of a character evolving. Sontag (1996) argues as follows:

What Camp taste responds to is "instant character" ... and, conversely, what it is not stirred by is the sense of the development of character. Character is understood as a state of continual incandescence– a person being one, very intense thing. This attitude toward character is a key element of the theatricalization of experience embodied in the Camp sensibility ... Wherever there is development of character, Camp is reduced. (286)



Sontag's argument hints at an essential aspect of the texts that are discussed in this paper: if the camp sensibility renders character theatrical, it requires a spectator, as hinted by Scott Long (1989): "All the energies in the camp object are directed toward bringing such a moment in the consciousness that views it. More than almost any other aesthetic, camp thus turns continually outward. The camp moment is incomplete, it is not camp, without the satisfactory response from its audience" (55). A similar point is made by David Galef and Harold Galef (1991): "the presence of inhibition is crucial, just as the discharge onto an audience is an essential end-point. The camp practitioner needs an auditor; otherwise, he is like Berkeley's tree that falls in the forest with no one to hear it" (18).

These points, along with the view that camp is primarily, but not exclusively, a way of looking at things (Sontag 1996, 277, 279), lead us to the issue of intention. It is one thing to look at a phenomenon –say, to take one of Sontag's examples, old Flash Gordon comics (278)– from a camp perspective, so that we appreciate it in a frivolous, aesthetic and somewhat detached manner, and quite another for an artist to knowingly produce a work which is camp. Kiernan acknowledges that this is one of the central problems in any attempt to understand, let alone theorize, camp: "with the exception of Firbank, who knew he was camping, it is doubtful that the novelists discussed in these pages would happily hear themselves described as camps... Compton-Burnett thought of herself as a serious novelist" (1990, 149).

It is for this reason that this paper chooses to discuss Firbank, a novelist whose works are generally considered to be consciously, supremely camp, alongside Compton-Burnett, who is often (see Sontag 1996, Goldman 1999 –even though he refers to frivolity rather than to camp–, Hotz-Davies 2019, Kiernan 1990, Long 1989), but by no means unanimously, related to camp. Taken at face value, both novels are radically different; however, we are concerned with some of the similarities between them brought about by the presence of camp.

CONVERSATION PIECES

Both of our authors have in common a virtuosic reliance on dialogue. *Pastors and Masters*, specifically, excels at using dialogue to drive the narrative, to the extent that it is the main narrative resource. In Goldman's words, "voices float upwards from a murky, vague world" (1999, 296). Let us illustrate this procedure by means of a –necessarily long– extract from chapter IV, which describes the prize-giving fête at the school. Mr. Merry, the headmaster, has just been talking to his wife. With no narratorial intervention or any other type of transition, he is suddenly interacting with a different set of characters, some of whom have not been introduced yet:

"Well, Mr. Merry," said another father. "And what have you to say for those two boys of mine?"

"Ah, the little fellows! My wife, she has a soft spot in her heart for them."

"And how do they do at their books? John is a scatterbrain, I am afraid. I suppose these long holidays nowadays are a good thing?"



“Ah, little John! Well, some boys haven’t the brains to scatter. And all work and no play, you know!”

“He would not like to be called little John,” said a grown-up sister, who was with the father.

“Wouldn’t he?” said Emily. “Not when we only keep them until they are fourteen! But the young are cruel.”

“Ah, Miss Herrick, you will talk in your way to us,” said Mr. Merry. “You know Miss Basden, do you not, Mr. Bentley?”

“No, I think not,” said Mr. Bentley, simply.

“Why, she is always here, Father. Every year,” said the daughter. “How are you, Miss Basden?”

“She is always here. Every year here with us,” said Mr. Merry, lifting his hands on and off Miss Basden’s shoulders. “Always here, so that people don’t notice her any more than they do one of ourselves. Because she is one of ourselves, if she will be, aren’t you, Miss Basden?” (67-68)

This exchange is carrying out a fairly complex narrative function: first of all, it provides an implicit *dramatis personæ* that is not alluded to in any other way; thus, we know that the conversation takes place between, in this order, Mr. Merry, Mr. Bentley, Miss Bentley, Miss Herrick and Miss Basden (who does not intervene). This is a frequent technique of Compton-Burnett, perceptively described by Mary McCarthy (1969): “one by one, the characters at the table materialize in a ghostly way, like lights turning on. Until they gave tongue, you did not know they were there; their place on the stage was dark” (121).

Secondly, the conversation establishes a distinction between the characters who are associated to the school and those who are not. The former –Mr. Merry, Miss Herrick and Miss Basden– have all appeared in previous chapters; the latter –Mr. Bentley and Miss Bentley– appear here for the first time, Delia Bentley being as yet unnamed, and will subsequently be the protagonists of chapter V.

Thirdly, and most importantly, subtle characterization is taking place. The reader will not fail to recognize Mr. Merry’s evasiveness –often represented by the interjection “ah”– which here, as it normally does, resorts to trite sentimentality (“my wife, she has a soft spot in her heart for them”) and flattering cliché (“some boys haven’t the brains to scatter”). Emily Herrick’s penchant for abrupt, epigrammatic, frequently discomfiting wit (“but the young are cruel”) is also in evidence.

Mr. Bentley is immediately portrayed as one of Compton-Burnett’s family tyrants (see Hardy 2016, 13; Kiernan 1990, 126; McCarthy 1969, 121) through the way he refers to his sons: “what have you to say for [rather than “about”] those two boys of mine?” Unfoiled by Mr. Merry’s unctuousness, he single-mindedly pursues his train of thought: “how do they do at their books? John is a scatterbrain, I am afraid.” His immediate allusion to long school holidays introduces the fact that Mr. Bentley quite dislikes the company of his sons, as he explicitly states in chapter V.

In many of Compton-Burnett’s novels, her characters have an unnerving way of saying the unspeakable: “the sort of thing that is generally thought unsayable– the sort of thing that belongs to unconscious awareness inasmuch as it seems anterior to the censoring function of the superego” (Kiernan 1990, 129). This is truer of other



novels than of *Pastors and Masters*, where the dialogue is comparatively mild. The acerbic wit of Emily Herrick can often verge on the cynical: “I thought it mattered about Mr. Merry’s not being educated, as we were having him for a schoolmaster” (1952, 26); but no character utters words that we might consider unspeakable.

What is present in *Pastors and Masters*, however, is Compton-Burnett’s ability to suggest the inner thoughts of her characters by means of their lines of dialogue: in Goldman’s cogent formulation, her dialogue “functions to depict the process of character thought” (1999, 297). To take just one example:

“I have been a long fool, idle through seventy years of a good life,” said Herrick. “But I don’t know that I can wish that about Crabbe. I feel as if I should not have written this book, apart from his death; as if it would not have shaped itself in my mind as I now feel it. Of course there is no connection. None at all. None. But it came to me, as I sat there, the whole thing, the whole book. There it was. I can’t explain it”. (Compton-Burnett 1952, 30).

Readers might not be able to guess from this paragraph that Herrick did not write his book but stole it from the dying Crabbe; but they certainly realize that Herrick is lying and –via the masterly sequence “no connection. None at all. None”– that there is some sort of unsavoury link between his sudden plan for a book and Crabbe’s death. Herrick’s assertion “I can’t explain it” ostensibly means “I find no explanation for it,” but readers come to realize that the assertion also means “I am not to explain it.” Much later in the novel, when this link is revealed, albeit just to some characters, Herrick’s thought process is rendered in a similar way as he realizes that the book he stole did not belong to a dead man (Crabbe) but to a living one (Bumpus) who will not fail to notice the theft: “Old Crabbe’s room? That night he died?” said Herrick. “Did you leave your book in the room, did you say, Bumpus? Ah, yes, it was a sad night, that, for us. Good old Crabbe! I always wondered that he never wrote. I have often said it. Did you leave your book in the room, did you say, Bumpus?” (Compton-Burnett 1952, 92).

In other cases, Compton-Burnett is able to evoke a character’s thought even where there is no speech. This is the case of a scene in chapter V where Mr. Bentley is reproaching one of his sons for not inviting his school friends to his home:

“It does not look as if you had no friends to ask to your home, as always seems to be the case, when I ask you why you do not bring them here ... Anyone would think you would be proud to let them see your father and your sister and your surroundings. I can’t think what makes you so affected and self-conscious about it. Now, once for all, what is it?”

“Well, do not speak, then, do not speak ... Go away, then, and do not speak. Behave as my children always do. Go away, without a word, to your own concerns.” (88)

Again, it is plain to readers what the child’s unspoken reply would have been. The empty space between his father’s two interventions makes it clear: it is the domestic tyrant himself who makes his children so self-conscious and reluctant to bring their friends home. This is a trait that McCarthy (1969) highlights: “you can



follow what [the characters] are thinking as plainly as if they said it aloud, which often they dare not do” (123).

Even though his narrators are more likely than Compton-Burnett’s to explain a character’s thoughts, Firbank has a similar talent for suggesting things that are not spoken aloud. This talent, however, is at the service of a very different aesthetic project: Firbank’s dialogue is not designed to portray the character’s thought processes but a complex series of allusions, double entendres and risqué meanings. The most salient formal feature of his dialogue is its discontinuity: “his characters’ thoughts about morality do not even reach syntactical completion as a rule” (Kiernan 1990, 62). Let us consider an excerpt from chapter V, which presents a conversation between Conca, Marchioness of Macarnudo, and Luiza, Duchess of Sarmento:

“Conca, Conca; one sees that you’re in love.”
“He’s from *Avila*, dear– the footman.”
“What!”
“Nothing *classic*– but, *oh!*”
“Fresh and blonde? I’ve seen him.”
“Such sep...”
“Santiago be praised!” (Firbank 1950, 357)

It is probably idle to try to decide for which word the truncated “sep” stands: not even the most conscientious of Firbank scholars, Brigid Brophy, attempted to do so. In keeping with Firbank’s frequent allusions to the language of flowers (see Brophy 1973, 341-90), the word might be “sepal”; in keeping with the “pæan to her husband’s ‘...’” (Firbank 1950, 361) written by Diana Beira Baixa, it might be “septer” or some such archaism. It is more productive to focus on Firbank’s use of italics in this fragment. Firbank often engages in a very specific use of italics: “italics are another signal of frivolity’s non-signifying nature ... Italics in Firbank’s novels stress the failure of highlighted words to contain anything extraordinary, instead emphasizing the word as word” (Goldman 1999, 293). That is the case, to a certain extent, in the extract above, but at the same time the italicized words indicate that they are more meaningful than they seem at first glance although, crucially, the referent of the allusion is unavailable. Thus with “*Avila*”: the footman’s place of origin is signalled as significant but there is no way for readers to understand why or how. Likewise, it is impossible to ascertain exactly what “*classic*” means in the context of this conversation.

Both of these instances suggest a shared code between the interlocutors, who have known each other for a very long time, “since the summer the sun melted the church bells and their rakish, pleasure-loving, affectionate hearts had dissolved together. But this had not been yesterday, no; for the Marchioness was a *grandmother* now” (Firbank 1950, 357). The conversation between the two ladies is overheard by Mother Saint-Mary-of-the-Angels, who is moving around the party at the DunEden palace: the eavesdropper is not privy to the full significance of what she hears, and neither is the reader. In his everyday life Firbank was, according to Brophy, “a collector and connoisseur of overheard remarks either non-understandable (because the context was unknown) or open to misunderstanding” (1973, 426). This ability



is deployed in his writings to such an extent that it merits Brophy's description of him as "a virtuoso of the overheard" (426).

The italicized "*oh!*" is probably the clearest instance: there is little doubt that the Duchess is aware of the full meaning of the exclamation—the narrator is probably aware, too—but it remains outside the grasp of the nun and the reader. It is a remarkable trait of Firbank's technique that he can make such elliptical dialogue so evocative.

A similar use of dialogue can be found in chapter VII, between two pupils of the College of Noble Damosels:

"You can tell *that* by his eyebrows!" a girl of thirteen, and just beginning as a woman, remarked.

"*Que barbaridad.*"

"Last summer at Santander Maria-Manuela and I bathed with him, and one morning there was a tremendous sea, with *terrific* waves, and we noticed unmistakably". (370)

Italics are put to different uses here. "*Que barbaridad*" merely signals a different language being used, whilst "*terrific*" is a straightforward case of italics being used for emphasis. It is "*that*" which displays a relevant use of italics: as in the previous extract, the reader—again an eavesdropper—has no way of knowing what "*that*" is. Italics act as another of Firbank's graphic indicators that the unspoken is unspeakable, as described by Kristiaan P. Aercke: "Firbank's phrases that may or may not be puns, his exclamation marks, rows of dots, gaps and pauses solicit the reader to yoke together semantic connotations that legalized verbal definitions and conventional, hierarchical syntactic flow try to keep apart" (1995, 174). What adds to the mischievousness of this formal strategy is the fact that the unspoken might well be considered comparatively innocent.

EXTERNALITIES

The discontinuities and hidden depths in Firbank's and Compton-Burnett's dialogues are a paradoxical manifestation of camp's concern with surfaces and its rejection of realist narrative techniques that suggest a sense of profundity. Amongst other such manifestations we may number the tendency to develop action by means of tableaux. Both of the novels under scrutiny here present scenes and chapters which are notably static.

Firbank's novels are located in what Aercke simply—and cogently—calls "Firbankland" (1995, 169). In *Cardinal Pirelli* the setting is Clemenza, "in white Andalusia" (Firbank 1950, 342). Although it seems specific, this location is essentially a vaguer Southern European, Catholic, Romance-language territory, as seen in the composite nature of its toponyms and anthroponyms, which not only relate it to Spain (Calle de la Pasión, Cartuja, Amalia Bermudez, Santander, Rambla, Lake Orense), but also to Italy (Clemenza, Pirelli) and Portugal (Diana Beira Baixa, Madame Always Alemtajo, Duchess-Dowager of Vizeu).

Settings are mostly circumscribed to Clemenza, including the cathedral (the sacristy, the church itself and several adjoining areas), the archiepiscopal palace



(including its garden), the DunEden palace and the College of Noble Damosels. Chapter IV constitutes an exception in that it is not set in Andalusia but in a Vatican loggia; chapter VIII is located at the Monastery of the Desierto. As befits a connoisseur such as Firbank, references to artists and their works are more specific and they contribute to the setting of the novel much more than geographical details do: amongst many others, they include paintings by Valdés Leal (1950, 343), Ribera (345) and El Greco (396, 405) in the cathedral, “a dozen old Zurbarans” in the monastery of the Desierto (382) and works by Murillo (357), Winterhalter and Isabey (359) in the DunEden palace.

The way in which each of the chapters of *Cardinal Pirelli* changes the setting of the previous one makes one think of Firbank’s first method of plot arrangement: at least in the earlier stages of his career, he wrote “phrases on long strips of paper” (Brophy 1973, 69) which he then arranged in the appropriate order. Describing this technique, William Lane Clark (1993) points out that “plot structure in Firbank’s work consequently develops mechanically, rather than organically, from the interrelated arrangement of discrete elements instead of through causal linear progression” (141). This is a very apposite observation, except for two details: first, Clark seems to suggest that all of Firbank’s novels were composed following this method, which does not seem to have been the case (see Brophy 1973, 173). Second, the notions of organic and mechanic form to which Clark is alluding can be traced to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s lectures on Shakespeare: “the form is mechanic, when on any given material we impress a pre-determined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material ... The organic form, on the other hand, is innate, it shapes, as it develops [sic], itself from within” (Coleridge 1937, 46; see also Fletcher 1970, 15-19). However, not even those novels which adhere to the conventions of realism develop in a truly organic manner. They resort to a number of textual strategies that give an impression of organicism: in Peter Bürger’s apt formulation, “the organic work of art seeks to make unrecognizable the fact that it has been made” (1999, 72). Such works strive to suggest organic development— but they are, in actual truth, as completely artificial as Firbank’s novels.

The description of Firbank’s plots as following a mechanical development is most appropriate, but it must be understood as a deliberate choice which is a central part of his aesthetic: “it is an aspect of Firbank’s modernism that the reader is always conscious of the disciplines of realism playing no role in the narrative” (Kiernan 1990, 63). Artifice is always foregrounded in Firbank: writing about his use of images, Brophy (1973) argues that “These he does not dispose as if they were building-blocks, squarely one on top of the other, in the expected continuities of narrative, argument or exposition, where so much is put in merely for the sake of the narrative’s, argument’s or exposition’s thread and an impression of solidity is built up by the cheat of the writer’s telling the reader a great many things the reader could supply for himself” (69).

Firbank’s deliberate avoidance of realism poses the question of where to locate his artistic practice. Of course, this paper reads *Cardinal Pirelli* as a camp novel; but, as Kiernan (1990, 148) suggests, camp is too elusive—and too dependent on the reader’s response—to be thought of as an independent genre or a tradition. Barbara Hardy argues that Firbank’s genre—like Compton-Burnett’s, Henry James’s and Thomas Love



Peacock's— is the conversation novel (2016, 28, 39; Peacock, Firbank and Compton-Burnett are also grouped by King *et al.* [1979] and by Kiernan [1990]). Plausible as this view is, the conversation novel seems to me as elusive a notion as the camp novel and just as hard to be conceptualized as a genre (see, for instance, Thomas 2012).

Don Adams's choice is to read Firbank as a practitioner of the pastoral: this is an interesting approach, but it is not without problems. It is, I believe, absolutely correct to argue that “we have traditionally looked for a novel's argument in its narrative progress ... Firbank's narratives progress in an almost arbitrary manner, in which reliance on plot is reduced to a minimum” (Adams 2009, 75), but I find it difficult to acquiesce with the view that “the aspects of Firbank's novels that are most confusing and off-putting to contemporary readers and critics are pastoral in nature” (77). On the contrary, it seems to me that those aspects are related to camp—which does not play a significant role in Adams's reading of Firbank, except for a passing comment (92)— rather than to an alleged “pure pastoralism” (82).

The view that Firbank should be considered a modernist seems to me more tenable. Several critics, including Adams himself (2009, 75), Kiernan (1990, 50), Brophy (1973, 97-8) —to a certain extent— and Mahoney (2020), have made this point. I have argued elsewhere (Díaz 2012) that there is a strand of Anglo-American modernism which, far from delving in the inner thoughts of its characters, presents them externally and, as it were, mechanically; and which, instead of the usual emphasis on symbolism, resorts to allegory to articulate its narrative practice. Although this issue is beyond the scope of the present paper, I believe that there are significant coincidences between this strand of modernism and the novels of Firbank.

The locations in *Pastors and Masters* are much more limited than those in *Cardinal Pirelli*. The action takes place in and around a boys' school in an unnamed “old university town” (Compton-Burnett 1952, 13). The settings comprise the different areas of the school (mainly indoors, with a few references to school grounds), three homes (the Herricks', the Fletchers' and the Bentleys') and, just as an aside, a set of college rooms. Compton-Burnett's “astonishingly concise, encapsulated, staccato prose” (King *et al.* 1979, 132) would not easily tolerate the same types of allusion that Firbank so deftly includes; and her aesthetic is incompatible with such a wealth of detail.

However, despite its very different use of location, Compton-Burnett's novel displays a similar development of plot as a series of plateaux. Settings in the novel are just backgrounds for conversation and, insofar as there is action, it consists of a series of changes in setting. The clearest example is the way in which school rooms are repurposed to serve different functions. After the prize-giving function, which has thrown the usual room arrangements into disarray, Emily Herrick comments that this is the appropriate moment to ask the Bentleys to dinner: “this room has to be regarded as the drawing-room, and a classroom made into the dining-room, and the boys' basement dining-room suppressed, to have anything at all. And Mrs. Merry can't be asked to do that often” (Compton-Burnett 1952, 71). Mr. Merry, for one, resents this change: “all this pretending that we do not live as we do, but in different rooms, and in a different way, as if the ordinary way did not make work enough!” (107). He is not aware, and neither is the reader, that Emily Herrick is there whilst he



gives vent to his frustration. Once again, Compton-Burnett displays in real time, so to speak, his embarrassed realization that this is the case, symbolized by two dashes:

“A second rate kind of thing, I call it, for all of us to be doing. And it isn’t as if Miss Herrick will not give us away, so that all of it is as good as nothing —Ah, Miss Herrick! Ah, I did not see you, Miss Herrick. We were just saying how you would give us away, you know, and talk as you will to us, so that our guests would see through all our little changes. Ah, Miss Herrick, you and I both have our way of talking, haven’t we?” (107-108)

Emily Herrick’s reply is, as usual, detached and biting, although it is not too clear whether the use of the adverb “honestly” is her irony or the author’s: after all, the school’s practice seems to be unencumbered by honesty. Mr. Herrick, proprietor of the school and its nominal head, devotes ten minutes a day to school matters and is keener on stealing the book that a dead man wrote; Mr. Merry, headmaster, does not have a degree but is quite resourceful in the areas of hypocrisy and minor deceit: “Yes, I am sure we have everything due to us. And it is so suitable for you not to like the second rate. But I am afraid the basement dining-room is that. I believe Mr. Bentley would think so. We ought to be going to the study, which is the drawing-room tonight. We have honestly left that as it is” (108).

It is not infrequent for critics to resort to theatrical metaphors when discussing Compton-Burnett’s novels: for instance, McCarthy (1969) refers to her “stage directions” (113), the “stichomythia” in which her characters engage (114), the “lights turning on” and the characters’ “place in the stage” (121). The changes in room arrangement can be added to this list: they are, as it were, stage changes effected from the flies by a number of hands, the servants, anonymous but for Fanny. The limited cast of characters move between those different stages with very few mentions of motion: rather than go from one locale to the next, they often seem to remain in the same place whilst the locales themselves change.

Furthermore, the characters of both novels display an element of performance that is entirely in keeping with camp’s need for an audience: for instance, in Compton-Burnett’s, after histrionically scolding his son, Mr. Bentley “went upstairs and stood by himself, repeating his speech with additions which had not occurred to him” (1952, 83). And in Firbank’s, shortly before his death, “dispossessed of everything but his fabulous mitre”, Cardinal Pirelli addresses an invisible audience, “some phantom image in the air” and announces, “as you can perfectly see, I have nothing but myself to declare” (1950, 405; as pointed out by Brophy [1973, 566], this is a Wildean echo). These examples lead us, one more time, to camp as a sensibility that relies on “the theatricalization of experience” (Sontag 1996, 287).

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“Frivolous”, “superficial” and “camp” still possess pejorative implications that brand a work as minor, the usual assumption being that major works are not superficial but deep, not frivolous but positively earnest. Those implications do not



apply to these novels: they are never simply droll, although they are, each in their way, very funny. Their breezy detachment is in itself a refusal to judge characters and their actions, however questionable or deplorable they might be: both authors have in common, as Hardy (2016, 10) says of Compton-Burnett, a soft spot towards their characters. This affection is, in turn, very closely related to the amoral nature of camp laughter (see Kiernan 1990, 16-7), which is devoid of satire's inherent moral intent.

This is not to say that camp and irony are incompatible, and in this sense Sontag's view that pure examples of camp "are dead serious" (1996, 282) is overly reductionist; she qualifies this view later in her essay when she argues that "Camp is playful, anti-serious ... One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious" (288). Rather, the amorality that Kiernan identifies as the main feature of camp imposes a type of irony that must be unrelated to the "morally correct laughter" of satire (1990, 16).

It is in all likelihood pointless to dwell upon whether camp's attention to the surface stems from the absence of moral intent or, on the contrary, the refusal to peer into the unseen depths of characters and their motivations leads to the abandonment of the moralizing purpose. Camp, in the words of Sontag, "proposes a comic version of the world. But not a bitter or polemical comedy. If tragedy is an experience of hyperinvolvement, comedy is an experience of underinvolvement, of detachment" (1990, 288). Whatever must be revealed about the inner world of the characters can be displayed externally and aloofly.

It is a critical cliché to use the terms "subversive" or "transgressive" as the ultimate seal of approval, and yet these terms constantly spring to one's mind when trying to summarize the appeal of these novels. The features that I have tried to describe are best seen as instances of refusal, as Adams points out about Firbank: "Firbank's refusal to delve below the surface of his character's words and actions in search of motives and complexes is a refusal to play the game of essentials that is at the heart of the modern mania with uncovering the truth of sexuality. For Firbank, appearance *is* essence" (2009, 86). Such refusal is every bit as challenging as those manifestations of early-twentieth-century narrative which purport to fathom the hidden psychological depths of their characters, even when those depths reveal themselves to be lack-lustre: Compton-Burnett's ability to allude to inner turmoil by means of "ellipsis, circularity and non sequitur" (Goldman 1999, 298) is a case in point. The forms of discontinuity that I have been trying to describe, be they in truncated, unanswered or overheard dialogue or in the mechanical presentation of plot in the shape of tableaux ought not to be seen as subordinate to more realistic narrative modes –and even less as evidence of artistic failure– but as specimens of a different and highly sophisticated approach to some of the same concerns that those modes address.

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‘THE TIMES HAVE CHANGED’: AMERICAN SELF-DISCOVERY IN PEARL S BUCK’S *EAST WIND WEST WIND*

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ABSTRACT

East Wind West Wind registers the coming of age of Chinese women as seen with Western eyes. Buck’s novel deals with the clash of two ideologies: the Chinese tradition, which assigned a specific and very limited role to women in society and promoted submission, and the Western world, which is epitomized in multiple ways in the story. The image of 1920s American society as a liberating force is perceived in the relationship with the husband and the daughter-in-law representing alterity and sorority at the same time. Buck makes her political allegiance to the West explicit and *East Wind West Wind* showcases how the Western world helps the protagonist to know herself better and to accept herself.

KEYWORDS: Pearl S. Buck, *East Wind West Wind*, Chinese women, gender studies, American literature.

‘LOS TIEMPOS HAN CAMBIADO’: EL AUTODESCUBRIMIENTO AMERICANO
EN *VIENTO DEL ESTE, VIENTO DEL OESTE* DE PEARL S. BUCK

RESUMEN

Viento del este, viento del oeste revela cómo las mujeres chinas han llegado a su mayoría de edad y lo hace desde su mirada occidental. La novela de Buck se centra en el choque de dos ideologías: la tradición china, que asignó un papel específico y muy limitado a las mujeres en la sociedad y promovió su sumisión, y el mundo occidental, que se personifica de múltiples formas en la historia. La imagen de la sociedad americana de la década de 1920 como fuerza liberadora se percibe en la relación con el marido y la nuera que representan la alteridad y la hermandad de mujeres al mismo tiempo. Buck es muy clara al hacer explícito su credo político y *Viento del este viento del oeste* muestra cómo el mundo occidental ayuda a la protagonista a conocerse mejor y aceptarse a sí misma.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Pearl S. Buck, *Viento del este, viento del oeste*, mujeres chinas, estudios de género, literatura americana.



1. INTRODUCTION

American writer Pearl S. Buck (1882-1973) enjoyed literary success in the 1930s and 1940s. Her condition as the daughter of American missionaries to China and the years she spent there herself as a missionary made her acquainted with the life of Chinese women. Buck was a prolific writer who became politically engaged as an activist fighting for civil rights. Her writings dealt with women's rights, China, immigration, the family, missionary work, war and violence. Encapsulating the careers of wife, mother, author, editor, international spokesperson, and political activist, Buck approached topics like racism, sex discrimination and the plight of Asian war children. Her corpus includes autobiographies, biographies, short stories, children's books and a good deal of novels. In comparison with other works by Buck, *The Good Earth* (1932), which gave her the Nobel Prize in 1938, is the subject of a great deal of research though, *East Wind West Wind* (1930) was her first work and would be followed by others, like *Son* (1933), *The House of Earth* (1935), *The Mother* (1933) and *Pavilion of Women* (1946), to name just a few.

East Wind West Wind has to be examined within the framework of several political and cultural events that paved the modernization of China, a fact that Buck knew well. Hao Gao (2018) analyzes how the 1910 had witnessed the birth of the New Culture Movement led by scholars like Chen Duxiu, Cai Yuanpei, Chen Hengzhe, Li Dazhao, Lu Xun, among others. It aimed to promote a new society based on unconstrained individuals rather than the traditional society. Also, on 4 May 1919 a group of students protested against the German occupation rights in Shandong Province to Japan granted by the Versailles Treaty of April 1919. With a populist base and away from traditional intellectual and political elites, this movement triggered the consolidation of Chinese nationalism and a political mobilization away from cultural activities. Yuhui Li (2000) points out that this movement walked hand in hand with May Fourth Feminist movement that concluded that the problems within the Chinese family structure were among the main reasons for China's underdevelopment and weak status. Women's lack of education and bound feet, the activists argued, prevented them from bearing and raising a healthy and strong future Chinese population. Consequently, women's liberation had to be achieved in order to save China from disarray and humiliation (Li 2000, 31). Nevertheless, May Fourth Feminist movement had its own limits. As Jin Feng points out, intellectuals "invoked traditional female roles in their discussion of women's liberation, if only for the alleged purpose of promoting their own version of Chinese modernity" and they assumed their right to speak for Chinese women (2004, 30-31). Another point to bear in mind is that Western missionaries, like Buck's parents themselves, spent a long time in China trying to understand the country from within and even to help its progression towards modernity. Missionary educators established universities and schools according to the Western model in major cities and cultural centres such as Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai. Some Chinese intellectuals received education in the West and were influenced by Western thinking. These winds of change are reflected in Buck's novels and the view of woman as presented in the novel.



In this paper I argue that *East Wind West Wind* is basically about communication between the sexes, cultures and generations. The lesson that the protagonist learns is self-knowledge and self-acceptance in a process where America is the liberating force or the West wind. When Xiongya Gao analyzes Pearl S. Buck's Chinese woman characters, he highlights that the protagonist's typicality shows "how the Chinese people strived to adapt to the change of time and to survive the conflict between the East wind and the West; with it, Buck reveals her conviction that the two cultures can embrace each other rather than one completely obliterating the other" (2000, 58). Another scholar, Robert Shaffer, maintains that Buck's approach to Chinese women is neither optimistic nor restricted to that country: "[Buck] increasingly used her position as an expert on Asia, not to show that women's roles in the US were better than women's roles or status in China, but to critique women's status in American society itself" (2016, 2). Buck was aware that the Roaring Twenties meant a break with tradition, but she did not hold that westernization would lead directly to the improvement of women's status. Shaffer also sees a paradox in Buck: "... over time, Buck became more accepting of a sexual division of labor for Asian women and men, but she consistently portrayed her American heroines in her fiction and in her essays as struggling against relegation to a private, or women's sphere" (2). I assume that feminism is not oriented to the defense of women, but to social reform and that Buck saw that neither men nor women could feel comfortable in a society that impedes communication.

2. THE WESTERN TONGUE

East Wind West Wind hinges on the relationship between an upper class Chinese girl, Kwei-lan, and her husband, who has never met her until their marriage. Both have been brought up in traditional families, but Kwei-lan has been trained in the art of pleasing and her values greatly differ from her husband's. He has lived in America where he trained to become a doctor and his foreign ways are criticized now that he has just arrived in China. Kwei-lan tries unsuccessfully to attract her husband's attention, which she finally manages to do after allowing him to unbind her tiny feet. Once Kwei-lan has given birth to a boy, the couple decides to leave Kwei-lan's parents' house and welcome Kwei-lan's older brother and his wife Mary, an American woman whom he has married disobeying his parents. Kwei-lan's family rejects Mary, who feels miserable and misunderstood in China. Towards the end of the novel Kwei-lan's mother dies and the brother is disinherited as he refuses to marry his Chinese betrothed.

From the narrative point of view, Buck puts into practice several strategies that make *East Wind West Wind* a highly attractive story. What grips the reader is Buck's choice to tell the story of a Chinese woman though Buck did not actually experience living as such. Buck makes us accept the imposture that we are actually reading the story from an Eastern point of view. Some scholars, like Lydia de Tienda, westernize Buck's novel. De Tienda interprets that what we have is a representation and not a testimony and that the objects and practices that puzzle Kwei-lan would



have the same effect on a Western person (157). Nevertheless, no matter how we examine it, the story is deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Another feature is the very poetic language that she uses throughout the narrative, like when she describes the maternal home: “I would walk among the flowers and examine the lotus-pods to see if the seeds were ripe within. It was late summer and nearly time for them. Perhaps, as the moon rose, my mother would bid me fetch my harps to play the music she loves: the right hand singing the air, and the left hand drifting into a minor accompaniment” (1941, 32).

Besides, Buck aims to give the impression of closeness and Kwei-lan restricts her scope to a limited audience, her sister from America to whom she opens her heart: “You have lived among us all your years. Although you belong to those other lands where my husband studied his Western books, you will understand. I speak the truth. I have named you My Sister. I will tell you everything” (1941, 1). Buck makes clear her political allegiances: she supports American culture and is very critical with tradition. And it is her privileged point of view as an American woman that makes Kwei-lan’s awakening possible. In fact, in *East Wind West Wind* there is not one single positive image about China and the necessity to make changes can be seen registered at different levels, as I show.

3. WITHIN THE PATRIARCHAL HOME

The novel’s setting is very specific from the geographical and social perspective. Even though patriarchy is assimilated to the oldest generation and Kwei-lan’s parents, a distinction has to be made regarding their attitude. Thus, Kwei-lan’s mother is a victim more than a victimizer and she sees herself represented in her alterity, the concubines. A rigid mother and the prey of an old ideology which cannot accept changes either, she feels in a subservient position but she keeps an imposing façade as the bearer of tradition. This attitude changes when Kwei-lan confesses to her the desperate situation she lives in and the matriarch tells her to submit to her husband’s desires and let him unbind her feet in order to please him:

‘Nevertheless. My child, there is only one path in this world for a woman –only one path to follow at all costs. She must please her husband. It is more than I can bear that all my care for you must be undone. But you no longer belong to my family. You are your husband’s. There is no choice left you save to be what he desires. Yet, stay! Put forth once more every effort to beguile him. Clothe yourself in the jade green and black. Use the perfume of water lilies. Smile –not boldly, but with the shyness that promises all. You may even touch his hand– cling to it for an instant. If he laughs, be gay. If he is still unmoved, then there is nothing left but to bend yourself to his will.’ (42-43)

The mother-daughter relationship is affected and Kwei-lan’s mother has to fight against love and duty. She is an oppressor that feels oppressed. Rather than enjoying her privileged position as Kwei-lan’s oppressor, she knows Kwei-lan is suffering and tells her to comply to her husband’s wishes even if this means



unbinding her feet. She thinks as a woman and puts herself in Kwei-lan's shoes. The moment Kwei-lan's mother gives up means the patriarchal collapse and the defeat of maternal pride. Later, Kwei-lan's mother sees her son rebelling and marrying an American woman without their consent. In a way, she has to put on a face, but she feels as a woman too and her tragedy lies here:

For several days I was troubled for my mother because of my brother's disobedience. Bur she never spoke of it to me. She buried this sadness, like all others, in the unseen places of her spirit. It has always been her way, when she perceived suffering to be inevitable, to close her lips upon it for ever [sic]. Therefore I, surrounded by the familiar faces and walls, and accustomed to my mother's silences, gradually thought no more of my brother. (38)

Most analyses pay attention to the contrast between the East and the West, but another point has to be borne in mind. Social class plays a remarkable role in *East Wind West Wind* and it is linked with patriarchal oppression. Kwei-lan's mother is a haughty upper class matron who rejects the concubines as women of lesser category, her alterity in the novel, and she has transmitted this bias to her daughter. Kwei-lan's mother may seem a woman rejecting her own sex, but her attitude reflects the patriarchal system she has been brought up in and class is just a tool that makes her hate other women. In fact, female communities only exist through blood relationships until the middle of the novel, when they are superseded by affective ones, the Western values imposing themselves over the East.

As in traditional China, Kwei-lan's parents arranged her marriage when Kwei-lan was only a baby. Despite the parallelism we could draw with Western society, this comparison does not work. Kwei-lan and her fiancé have not seen each other and Kwei-lan feels the prey of a rigid education that allowed no criticism but consolidated censorship and not progress at that time in China. Kwei-lan anxiously awaits their meeting from the beginning of the narrative: "My lord, did you mark this day how the dawn began? It was as if the dull earth leaped to meet the sun. Darkness. Then a mighty life like a burst of music! My dear lord, I am thy dull earth, waiting" (1941, 2). Revealing her story to her sister works as a therapy and will facilitate the realization that things must change.

4. BREATHING THE WEST WIND

America is the Otherness in the novel and becomes more important than it seems, not only because the author is an American woman, but because America alternatively becomes an uncomfortable source of suffering and suspicion or reconciliation (rather than liberation) that Kwei-lan experiences at the end. Kwei-lan's husband has been educated in America to become a doctor and comes back to his birthplace to marry Kwei-lan. Though a man, he is simultaneously respected for his position and despised for his American ways. Kwei-lan's American-educated-husband faces as much incomprehension as the American woman that Kwei-lan's brother marries.



Few authors could have included in a book such beautiful images as Buck does in *East Wind*. The most powerful symbol is Kwei-lan's feet standing for the oppression Chinese women endured for generations. The East is reproduced through the violence against the female body. Footbinding was a tool for social control aiming to enforce chastity and gain the respect of the in-laws, as Fan Hong highlights: "The bound foot transformed a woman into a fetish but it also enforced a social morality, established sexual boundaries and expressed social relations" (1997, 48). For de Tienda, when the protagonist's husband unbinds Kwei-lan's feet, a physical and psychological aggression takes place: "su mayor virtud, su belleza, está despreciada y se le impone un canon nuevo para el que ella no tiene sensibilidad, y, por ello, simplemente, no puede comprenderlo. Se ha visto mutilada: espiritualmente y físicamente mutilada" (2018, 164).¹ Recovery is achieved thanks to her husband.

Apart from the fetishistic interpretation of feet, it cannot be ignored that it was women themselves who were in charge of perpetuating it. Just as Kwei-lan has been educated to become the perfect submissive Chinese wife and please her husband, Kwei-lan's mother prides herself that Kwei-lan's feet are so small. For her, this achievement represents social order, but it really reproduces repression—Chinese women cannot voice their thoughts and behave as they would want to—and oppression—social control on women is accepted and sanctioned. Though performed in the private milieu, the removal of the bandages is a conscious political act of rebellion for Kwei-lan's husband. For her, it means a psychic breach. Had the writer actually been a Chinese woman, she would have certainly gone deeper into this point: "I bowed my head to hide my tears. I thought of all those restless nights and the days when I could not eat and had no desire to play—when I sat on the edge of my bed and let my poor swing to ease them of their weight of blood. And now after enduring until the pain had ceased for only a short year, to know he thought them ugly!" (Buck 1941, 33-34)

The story that her husband tells her about the anonymous woman who tried to commit suicide to avoid her mother-in-law makes her realize that times have changed and her values have little meaning: "That night I laid the jade ornaments sorrowfully in their silver case and put the satin garments away. I had been taught all wrong, I began to realize. My husband was not one of those men to whom a woman is as distinctly an appeal to the sense as a perfumed flower or a pipe of opium. The refinement of beauty in body was not enough. I must study to please him in other ways" (46).

The rejection of Kwei-lan's values comes hand in hand with her husband's contact with the West. His American education has opened his eyes to a life where men and women are equal and superstition has been replaced by science. When he comes back to China, he marries Kwei-lan because their families have previously

¹ "her greatest virtue, her beauty, is despised and a new canon is imposed on her for which she has no sensitivity, and therefore simply cannot understand it. She has been mutilated: spiritually and physically mutilated" (my translation).



arranged it without courtship or romantic relationship between them. Kwei-lan's husband rebels against this when he unbinds her feet, which do not only stand for femininity, but the old world. Also, in his attempt to Westernize Kwei-lan, her husband condemns make-up in women –which both Asian and American women put on their faces– and plans to buy Kwei-lan a piano and teach her to play like a Western woman. Buck's conservative stance is shown here: it is the man, not the woman who decides what and how to do it:

'We will endure this together, Kwei-lan' he said. 'It is hard to see you suffer so. Try to think that it is not only for us but for others, too –a protest against an old and wicked thing.'

'No!' I sobbed. 'I do it only for you –to be a modern woman for you!'

He laughed and his faced lighted a little, as it had when he talked to that other woman. This was my reward for pain. Nothing seemed quite so hard afterwards. (1941, 51)

The removal implies a reversal of Kwei-lan's idea of a Chinese wife. Kwei-lan's husband rejects her assuming the traditional role of a Chinese wife. For him, Kwei-lan is an equal and a friend, while in traditional Chinese society the wife is voiceless. The kind of relationship that the husband wants to establish between them is based on confidence and closeness, so when Kwei-lan pours some water at her mother in law's, her husband supports her. In this regard, narrative technique goes hand in hand with the story. Kwei-lan confesses her thoughts to her sister, but she never dares to act on her own:

'It is not to be supposed that you would be drawn to me whom you behold for the first time, as I behold you also. You have been forced into this marriage as much as I have. We have been helpless in this matter until now. Yet now that we are alone we may create our life according to our own desires. For myself, I wish to follow the new ways. I wish to regard you in all things as my equal. I shall never force you to anything. You are not my possession –my chattel. You may be my friend, if you will' (21)

If Kwei-lan suffers in the novel, both her husband and her brother experience incomprehension too. Despite Kwei-lan's brother's position as a man, he is the victim of oppression too and reacts against tradition. Not only does he have as many problems with his parents as Kwei-lan, but he wants to have a profession in China, earn his living as a doctor and be independent. Science is seen as opposed to tradition and in chapter six his vivid account about the evils of superstition in woman represents an accusation against patriarchy from patriarchy itself. Kwei-lan's husband explains to her how hard he has fought against superstition and the unsuccessful results he obtained: "I beg that you will not mind me. I am truly glad that you have returned. But this whole day I have been fighting against superstition and sheer stupidity, and I have lost. I can think of nothing else but that I have lost. I keep asking myself, did I do all that could be done? Was there an argument that I did not bring forward to save that life? But I think –I am sure– that I did everything –and still I lost!" (45)



Men and women face a common enemy in the novel and that is prejudice, which handicaps the fulfillment of happiness and professional realization regardless of the sex. Thus men feels as much pressure on themselves as women and leaving the patriarchal home is a problem for Kwei-lan's brother who must have children as soon as possible to honour the ancestors. The individual will is subservient to social needs. The thirst for culture is not welcome, even in men. Like Kwei-lan's husband, her brother wants to increase his culture and faces an obstacle: "I have no desire for marriage. I wish only to study more science and learn all concerning it. Nothing will happen to me, my mother. When I return –but not now– not now!" (37-38)

The contact with the Western world means abandoning a typical role. The separation of the sexes becomes diffuse and this happens when they visit the wife of a foreign teacher. Kwei-lan sees a new role model when she speaks confidently and in a relaxed way, as if she were a man. It is her husband's reaction to that woman's demeanor that triggers Kwei-lan's change of behavior: "She talked a great deal with my husband, and I sat listening with drooping head. They spoke of things of which I have never heard. Foreign words flew back and forth between them. I understood nothing except the pleasure on my husband's face" (48). The communication between the sexes is not only possible, but desirable.

5. THE NEW CHINESE WOMAN

East Wind West Wind deals with human relationships in a very particular setting and culture, China at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of Buck's merits is that the protagonist, Kwei-lan, a Chinese woman of the upper class, identifies herself with other characters and experiences an awakening moment. The fact that both the husband and her mother say that times have changed makes Kwei-lan realize her mistake. The core of the novel lies here and Pearl S. Buck denounced the situation of woman, even though hers was definitely not a revolutionary feminism.

Buck relates conjugal love to communication between husband and wife and the first step to start a dialogue of the sexes is when her husband talks to Kwei-lan about science. Joy and mutual understanding are established in the couple and poetically expressed:

How may I put into words the beginning of my husband's favour [sic] towards me, My Sister? How did I know it myself when his heart stirred?
Ah, how does the cold earth know when the sun at spring-tide draws out her heart into blossoming? How does the sea feel the moon compelling to her? (56)

In a way, the Western world penetrates Kwei-lan and pregnancy takes place immediately afterwards, but the West wind brings changes in the family too. Following tradition, Kwei-lan wants to take care of her son herself and is surprised by her husband's reaction, which implies a new patriarchy:



I took my son, and I placed him in his father's arms. I presented him with these words:

'My dear lord, behold thy first-born son. Take him. Thy wife gives him to thee.' He gazed into my eyes. I was faint with the ardent light of his regard. He bent nearer to me. He spoke:

'I give him back to thee. He is ours' His voice was low and his words fell through the air like drops of silver.

'I share him with thee. I am thy husband who loved thee!' (71)

East Wind West Wind is full of sufferers. Kwei-lan's brother sees how his wife is looked down on by his family for the fact of being an American woman while Kwei-lan's husband explains about the charm of American women: "We Chinese men have been kept so separate. Our women are reserved, demure. They reveal nothing. And to a young man –and your brother is young– these others, these foreign women, with their beautiful, swan-white flesh, their exquisite bodies offering themselves in the dance" (92). The prejudices against the sexually liberated woman, who flourished in 1920s American literature are filtered through Kwei-lan's rejection of her and her change of attitude happens when her husband makes her think about the American woman and herself:

'And what if she loves your brother thus? Her nature does not differ from the nature of all women because she happens to be born over the Western seas. You are women, and you are alike in your spirit and desires.'

I had not thought of her like this. I see that I have understood nothing clearly. It is ever my husband who teaches me.

'Oh, I am afraid –afraid! I begin to understand a little now. What shall we do if there is love between the foreign one and my brother?' (98-99)

Sisterly affections battle against daughterly duty as Kwei-lan beautifully explains: "Yet I cannot forget either my brother and that one whom he loves. I am torn hither and thither like a frail plum tree in a wind too passionate for its resistance" (102). The American woman wants to be accepted as she is and Kwei-lan pays attention to her voice ("It has the rich note of the harvest thrush in spring, when the rice is waiting to be cut into sheaves" [106]) and her attitude ("This foreign one has no fear of anything in her, although she is not beautiful as the Fourth Lady was beautiful. She does not trouble herself. She accepts as her right the interest of men. She makes no effort to win their glances. She seems to say, 'This is I. I am as you see me. I do not care to be otherwise'" [107]). Kwei-lan finds it difficult to understand that the foreigner shows affection to her husband:

I do not understand this freedom of hers. And yet, most strangely, when I ponder it I do not discern any evil insinuation in it. She avows her love for my brother as simply as a child may seek its playmate. There is nothing hidden or subtle in her. How strange this is! It is not like our women.

She is like the blossom of the wild orange tree, pure and pungent, but without fragrance. (110)



The American woman is human and feels somewhat alone, but she seeks the company of others and her American sociability is condemned: “she returned full of talk about the streets, wondering at sights which others would not notice and seeing her beauty in strange places. I remember one day she came back smiling her quick smile, as though she had some inner amusement which others had not” (119-120). Seeing her daughter-in-law makes Kwei-lan supports her after talking with her: “my anger was wholly for my brother’s wife, and no longer against her!” (141). The body makes communication between people possible: “Kwei-lan acepta a su cuñada americana por la forma en que ella adora al hijo de Kwei-lan, la maternidad las une a las dos y no entiende de culturas porque el hecho fenomenológico es transversal. Este hecho biológico hace surgir el sentimiento de ternura al visionar a un otro que se siente como parte de sí, al que se respeta y cuida porque se le considera esencia constitutiva de uno mismo y no alternativa” (De Tienda 2018, 166).² The protagonist has an awakening moment even though there is no divorce or break with tradition. However, unlike what feminist scholars would expect, they stay in China and their child is brought up as a Western boy.

6. CONCLUSION

East Wind West Wind showcases the fight against tradition, against a world that has no meaning since times have changed, not only for women, but also for men, and the winds of change are Western. Buck’s feminism is not restricted to the defense of women, but to men since male characters in *East Wind West Wind* are as victimized as women. Kwei-lan has many communication problems. She masters the Chinese language, but no one has taught her to reveal her feelings since she lives oppressed. The novel contains a political reading of Kwei-lan transiting from her mother (China) to her husband (the West) and her subsequent coming of age. Likewise, it is easy to see Kwei-lan as the mother-oppressed daughter who is unable to free herself from Chinese precepts on female roles, but, in a more general way, both her husband and her brother face incomprehension too, so dichotomies do not fit well in *East Wind West Wind*.

Needless to say, Buck’s feminist stance cannot compare to other male and female authors (like Julia Kristeva, for instance, and later Chinese and American feminists) that would attack the situation of women later. Despite her lack of radicalism, she paved the way to some awareness of the situation of Chinese women in the American public. Her merit was to give a voice to the problems that Chinese women were facing in a text where neither America nor men are idealized: American

² “Kwei-lan accepts her American sister-in-law because of the way she adores Kwei-lan’s son, motherhood unites the two and does not understand cultures because the phenomenological fact is transversal. This biological fact gives rise to the feeling of tenderness when envisioning another who feels like part of himself, who is respected and cared for because he is considered a constitutive essence of oneself and not an alternative” (my translation).



women are simply in a better (not perfect) position in comparison with Chinese and men have a more comfortable social position in some regards, but they can suffer as much as women.

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THE ROAR OF MODERNITY: METROPOLITAN SOUNDSCAPES AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN SUBJECT IN JOHN DOS PASSOS' *MANHATTAN TRANSFER*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the specificities and psychological effects of urban noise in John Dos Passos' novel *Manhattan Transfer*. It seeks to elucidate how Manhattan's soundscape is represented on the novel's formal and content level and how it assumes an agency in its own right, when ceaselessly enveloping the novel's characters. The city's specific acoustic regimes, therefore, prove much more instrumental in constituting the characters as modern subjects than other sensorial dimensions. Within a thus enacted metropolitan panacousticon, the urban subject is crucially defined not only as a noise source in itself, but as always already overheard by a supposed other.

KEYWORDS: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, soundscape, noise, metropolis, subjectivity.

EL RUGIDO DE LA MODERNIDAD: LOS PAISAJES SONOROS DE LA METRÓPOLIS Y LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL SUJETO MODERNO EN *MANHATTAN TRANSFER* DE JOHN DOS PASSOS

RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia las particularidades y los efectos psicológicos del ruido urbano en la novela *Manhattan Transfer* de John Dos Passos. Trata de esclarecer cómo el paisaje sonoro de Manhattan se representa en la forma y en el contenido de la novela y cómo asume un rol por derecho propio en la misma, al rodear de forma incesante a los personajes. Los regímenes acústicos específicos de las ciudad resultan por tanto mucho más decisivos en la creación de los personajes como sujetos modernos que otras dimensiones sensoriales. En un panacústico metropolitano así escenificado, el sujeto urbano se define fundamentalmente no solo como una fuente de sonido en sí mismo, sino como alguien a quien ya escucha un supuesto otro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Dos Passos, *Manhattan Transfer*, paisaje sonoro, ruido, metrópolis, subjetividad.

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Why is it that the 1920s are commonly referred to as “roaring” in the American context? What is so special about this decade’s sonic dimension that it has come to define it in public discourse? After all, the 1920s are also identified with other aspects in various Western countries. In Britain and Germany, one generally talks of the *Golden Twenties* or *Die Goldenen Zwanziger*, obviously indicating this decade’s economic upturn and prosperity. In Spain and France, one refers to the mad (*les années folles / los años locos*), the happy (*felices años veinte*) or also to the golden twenties (*veinte dorados*) –equally emphasizing the age’s economic prosperity, but also its political and social turmoil, its metaphoric ‘madness.’

The most popular explanation for the decade’s peculiar name attributes the 1920s’ roar to its exuberant popular culture, its jazz music, extravagant parties, speakeasies, flappers and general hedonism. Yet, one might also argue that the 1920s added a number of roaring technological products to the modern Western urban noise- and soundscape that had been invented earlier, but saw a large-scale commercial introduction and spread during this very decade. This included the automobile and the accompanying significant expansion of motorized traffic, but also that of the phonograph and the radio as media of individualized sound consumption. These significant noise sources joined an already existent metropolitan roar of rail and naval transportation, industrial and construction work as well as an ever-increasing number and density of urban populations living and working in tenements and skyscrapers or roaming crowded urban boulevards.

While the notion of the Roaring Twenties is generally associated with positive connotations, the decade’s characteristic growth and multiplicity of metropolitan noise sources was, indeed, perceived as a threat to health and thus a serious problem to be met by urban government and planning. Following the privately organized Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noise, already founded in 1906, the municipality of New York City, for instance, created a Noise Abatement Commission in 1929 as a response to the ever-increasing ‘sonic pollution’ of its urban spaces. In the city’s decade-long ‘war on noise’ measures ranged from traveling noise laboratories, scientific studies and reports on city noise to elaborate signposting, awareness campaigns, extensive legislations and noise abatement weeks (see Thompson 2002, 144-168; Bijsterveld 2008, 93-136 and Rueb 2013).¹

It is not unsurprising that the urban noise, and soundscape –among other aspects of metropolitan life– turned into a preferred subject of the modernist artistic practice during the 1920s: however, among these modernists, writers and filmmakers faced the problem that they were not able to include actual sounds in their works –apart from live musical scoring in the case of silent films. Given this basic lack of a sonic dimension to their creative practice, one might wonder how writers and

¹ These phenomena have been the object of Sound Studies in the wake of R. Murray Schafer’s seminal study *The Soundscape* (1993). A collection of typical 1920s New York urban sounds is accessible via historian Emily Ann Thompson’s interactive online project *The Roaring Twenties* (2013, revised 2019).



filmmakers intending to illustrate and document the modern urban roar in their media managed to tackle this striking lack of acoustic ambience. Astonishingly, the 1920s saw the introduction of a peculiar soundless ‘musical’ genre, namely the city symphony, denoting a number of experimental films that documented the life and shapes of one or several cities –comprising such films as *Manhatta* (1921), *Nothing But Time* (1926, about Paris), *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927) or *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929, about several Soviet cities), to name but the most prominent ones (Dähne 2013, 164-278, Beddow 2010, 6-9). Without their respective, but never codified musical scoring, however, these films constituted visual rather than sonic or musical symphonies at the time of their release. The city symphonies, however, found their literary counterpart in a range of celebrated 1920s metropolitan novels, most notably James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and, in the U.S., John Dos Passos’ *Manhattan Transfer* (1925). In each case, the creators of these literary city symphonies did not only intend to relate scenes from the life of one or countless individuals during intervals from one day (*Ulysses*) to a rough thirty years (*Manhattan Transfer*), but they also aimed at capturing the modern metropolitan experience in highly innovative and experimental literary ways. But properly illustrating the modern cityscape also necessarily entailed special attention to its characteristic soundscape, that is, its very specific roar.

Surely, the noise and sounds of metropolitan life had featured as characteristic elements of the modern city already in earlier American novels, such as those by Theodore Dreiser. The American novelist specifically connected the magnetic attraction of the modern metropolis with its sonic aspects in the opening chapter of his urban novel *Sister Carrie* (1900): “A blare of sound, a roar of life, a vast array of human hives, appeal to the astonished senses in equivocal terms” (Dreiser 1998, 4). To the youthful small-town protagonist, Chicago’s metropolitan soundscape is not only new, but also associated with promises of hitherto unknown amusement, freedom and possible emancipation from moral and gender codes.²

In his 1925 experimental city novel John Dos Passos took the literary documentation and exploration of metropolitan soundscapes to another level. With its countless characters and episodic, yet often intertwining plotlines, expressionist city descriptions as well as its collaging of all sorts of secondary material, it has been rightfully argued that the city of New York itself rather than any of the many

² Still bound to Victorian moral standards, Dreiser’s narrator also clothes his warnings of the morally corrupting metropolis in sonic metaphors: “Without a counselor at hand to whisper cautious interpretations, what falsehoods may not these things breathe into the unguarded ear! Unrecognized for what they are, their beauty, like music, too often relaxes, then weakens, then perverts the simpler human perceptions” (Dreiser 1998, 4). Quickly enough the once luring urban soundscape may also trigger the opposite feelings of isolation and disillusionment in Carrie: “Amid all the maze, uproar, and novelty she felt cold reality taking her by the hand. No world of light and merriment. No round of amusement” (11).



human characters constitutes the novel's actual protagonist (Gelfant 1954, 11; Brevda 1996, 94; Goodson 2000, 92).³

In his modernist literary portrayal of the metropolis Dos Passos also aimed at capturing its characteristic acoustic dimension. These very acoustics of *Manhattan Transfer* have not remained unnoticed by literary scholarship. Especially in the wake of Philipp Schweighauser's seminal 2006 study *The Noises of American Literature, 1890-1985. Toward a History of Literary Acoustics*, which also addresses Dos Passos' novel, several scholars of the emergent field of Literary Acoustics or Literary Sound Studies have continuously returned to *Manhattan Transfer* as a particularly 'noisy' text and extended or detailed Schweighauser's analyses of the novel's acoustics. Among these, articles by Beddow (2010) and Eisenberg (2016) as well as a dissertation by Iglesias Quadrado (2018) should be highlighted. While the articles discuss the text's acoustic dimensions in the context of visual art genres and the author's critique of metropolitan life (Beddow 2010) or in comparison to the acoustics of European modernist city novels (Eisenberg 2016), Iglesias Quadrado (2018) follows various strands of acoustic analysis with regard to the novel. His detailed analyses of the articulated forms of urban noise, namely the spoken word and popular music are most innovative and resourceful. In my article, however, I would like to contribute to this existing scholarship on *Manhattan Transfer*'s acoustics by focusing on the text's rendition of unarticulated noisescapes as well as their psychological and subjectivizing effects on the characters in the light of philosophical and sociological concepts provided by Georg Simmel (2010), Jean-Paul Sartre (1992), and Michel Foucault (1979). Particularly, I want to argue that the specific roar of Dos Passos' Manhattan is instrumental in constituting his characters as truly modern subjects within a panacoustic urban regime.

As the above mentioned scholars have also shown in their work, Dos Passos literally brings the urban cacophony to life in *Manhattan Transfer* by way of including and collaging all kinds of both articulated sounds, such as passing chatter (often in audiographically precise renditions of slangs and dialects), advertisement slogans, popular songs, and also the unarticulated noises of urban traffic, construction work and machines.⁴ These unarticulated noises are rendered palpable via

1. a richly metaphorical language, often culminating in almost synesthetic descriptions of the city that mix images and adjectives of the visual, acoustic and olfactory realm (examples follow below).

³ In this respect, Gelfant (1954) categorizes *Manhattan Transfer* as a synoptic novel that presents "the total city immediately as a personality in itself" (11, also see 133-134).

⁴ It is true that the distinction between articulated and unarticulated sounds is not as clear-cut as one might think. Articulated sounds, such as human speech or singing, might well, especially if coming from many sources simultaneously, when technically distorted or in any other way muffled, be perceived as undifferentiated noise and thus have similar effects on the human mind as purely unarticulated, non-human sounds.

2. a whole range of onomatopoeia that make sounds palpable on a level between articulated and unarticulated language by imitating the sounds of the city verbally. Besides countless standardized onomatopoetic noise nouns and verbs, such as ring, clang, clatter, rattle, bang or boom, one also comes across a number of innovative onomatopoetic creations such as “rattat” (Dos Passos 2000, 50), “rumpetybump” (79) or “brrr” (356).⁵ Such mergers of urban noise and language certainly culminate in the transposition of the novel’s title “Manhattan Transfer” (originally the name of a train station) into the rhythm and sound pattern of train wheels on rails: “The wheels rumbled in her head, saying Man-hattan Tran-sfer, Man-hattan Tran-sfer” (111). If even the novel’s title may be read as a verbalized rendition of an urban sound, does not Dos Passos invite the reader to interpret his entire text as a vast collage of metropolitan noise in and outside the heads of its characters, sometimes symphonic, but all too often dreadfully cacophonous?⁶

And yet, Dos Passos did not only desire to document these urban sounds and noises or include them as formal elements of text composition as part of a “modernist aesthetics of noise,” but also explored their effect on the city’s inhabitants, especially their mental life, which he opened up via the extensive use of interior monologue and the stream of consciousness technique (see Schweighauser 2008, 53).

The effect of the sensory overload on the human mind in modern urban settings was an object of study not only for early twentieth-century artists and writers, but also for early sociologists and psychologists. One of the most prominent among these early studies was German sociologist Georg Simmel’s essay on “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” already published in 1903. While not specifically differentiating between visible, acoustic or olfactory stimulations in his essay, Simmel was convinced that a specific apathetic –or as he calls it: “blasé”– outlook of the urban dweller is

⁵ Even though Eisenberg has rightfully argued that Dos Passos’ text does not reach the level and frequency of onomatopoetic innovation and experiment of Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (2016, 36), there is no denying that it must be considered a particularly noisy text given its constant focus on urban sounds as well as its sheer amount of standardized onomatopoetic verbs, nouns and adjectives. This can be verified by a corpus analysis: sound, sounds: 26 times; ring, rings, ringing, rang, rung: 25; rattle, rattled, rattling: 22; roar, roared, roars, roaring: 21; clatter, clattered, clattering: 18; whistle, whistled, whistling: 16; rumble, rumbled, rumbling: 14; scream, screech: 14; jangle, jangled, jangling: 9; buzz, buzzed, buzzer, buzzing: 8; noise, noisy: 8; boom, boomed, booming: 7; clang, clangs, clanging: 7.

⁶ Schweighauser has convincingly argued that apart from the text’s imitation of the urban soundscape by way the creative tools of language, *Manhattan Transfer*’s specific noisiness is rather a product of its “sudden shifts in and multiplication of points of view, his formal ruptures, and disintegrations of linear narrative [which] reject the codes of what we might call instrumental communication,” thereby “mak[ing] noise a principle of literary form [...]” (2008, 51). By fragmenting his narrative into short snapshots and scenes while leaving sometimes years’ long gaps between them or not taking up certain plotlines again, Dos Passos deliberately “impedes processes of communication between texts and readers and thus injects noise into the channels of cultural communication” (51).



at first the consequence of those rapidly shifting stimulations of the nerves which are thrown together in all their contrasts... Just as an immoderately sensuous life makes one blasé because it stimulates the nerves to their utmost reactivity until they finally can no longer produce any reaction at all, so, less harmful stimuli, through the rapidity and the contradictoriness of their shifts, force the nerves to make such violent responses, tear them about so brutally that they exhaust their last reserves of strength and, remaining in the same [i.e. urban] milieu, do not have time for new reserves to form. This incapacity to react to new stimulations with the required amount of energy constitutes in fact that blasé attitude which every child of a large city evinces when compared with the products of the more peaceful and more stable milieu. (2010, 105-106)

According to Simmel, the permanence and contradictoriness of urban noises represent a lasting burden on metropolitan dwellers, exhausting them and molding their minds and characters towards an apathetic state drained of emotional response (see also Beddow 2010, 2-3).

But Dos Passos' text proves that prose fiction might provide both a richer and more detailed exploration of these relentless metropolitan stimulations than any minute sociological analysis might be capable of. In fact, his richly sensuous and metaphoric prose style appears to be specifically apt for capturing not only the city's often-aggressive visual qualities – with a special emphasis on color, often reminiscent of the polychromatic quality of expressionist painting⁷ –but also its olfactory dimensions. Both the visual and the olfactory experience come together in this striking scene towards the end of the novel:

Rosy twilight was gushing out of the brilliant west, glittered in brass and nickel, on buttons, in people's eyes. All the windows on the east side of the avenue were aflame. [...] She bought a bunch [of arbutus] and pressed her nose in it. May woods melted like sugar against her palate. [...] Through the smell of the arbutus she caught for a second the unwashed smell of his body, the smell [...] of crowded tenements. Under all the nickelplated, goldplated streets enameled with May, uneasily she could feel the huddling smell, spreading in dark slow crouching masses like corruption oozing from broken sewers, like a mob. (Dos Passos 2000, 352)

The same is true for the city's acoustic features, which just as easily seem prone to mingle with other sensorial input, such as in the following short passage featuring the view of downtown Manhattan from a skyscraper, wherein the urban noise literally becomes visible: "He stood looking out over the harbor of slate and mica in the uneven roar of traffic, voices, racket of building that soared from the downtown streets bellying and curling like smoke in the stiff wind shoving down the Hudson out of the northwest" (93).

⁷ The painterly qualities of his text betray the often-overlooked fact that John Dos Passos was also a talented painter in the expressionist and cubist tradition (see Pizer [2013] and Pizer, Nanny and Layman [2017] for painting's influence on Dos Passos' literary work).



Despite such frequent instances of an almost synesthetic documentation of the city's sensorial overstimulation, however, I would argue that the metropolitan acoustic dimension plays an even more important role on the content level than the visual, olfactory or tactile dimensions, as urban sounds and noises are instrumental in molding Dos Passos' characters into truly modern subjects and thus also prove fundamental for the writer's critique of life in the modern metropolis.

In fact, it seems as if Dos Passos' Manhattan characters are constantly accompanied, annoyed, exhausted, intimidated or even scared by the urban roar surrounding or rather enveloping them wherever they go. On streets that "throb [...] with loudening pain" (159) they are suddenly overwhelmed by "cars [and] faces flicker[ing] past [them]" and struggle with the "moaning turmoil and the clanging of the fireengines [that] wont seem to fade away inside," keying them up "so that everything is like chalk shrieking on a blackboard" (356). Yet the urban drone follows them even into the alleged privacy of their apartments. Besides blaring buzzers, phonographs or telephones, it is thin partition walls and the sheer number of people boxed next to and above each other in their "squirrelcage[s]" (296) and "shoebox[es]" (346) –to name but two striking metaphors used for describing people's cramped housing conditions– that turn urban buildings themselves into restless acoustic resonance chambers:

Voices came through the thin partition. A young girl was crying through her nose: [...] Susie Thatcher stirred in bed moaning fretfully. Those awful people never give me a moment's peace. From below came the jingle of a pianola playing the Merry Widow Waltz. O Lord! [...] A wagon clattered by down the street. She could hear children's voices screeching. A boy passed yelling an extra. [...] Oh I'll go mad! She tossed about in the bed, her pointed nails digging into the palms of her hands. I'll take another tablet. Maybe I can get some sleep. (31-32)

As this example vividly demonstrates, the urbanites in *Manhattan Transfer* do suffer from noise.⁸ No other character demonstrates that better than Ellen, one of the novel's recurring characters who changes names, jobs and husbands several times during the course of the narration.⁹ Despite her being born and raised in roaring Manhattan, she nevertheless seems to have inherited a specific oversensitivity towards noise from her mother Susie (see quote above). Indeed, Ellen never appears to grow used or rather oblivious to the urban cacophony, but on the contrary remains most sensitive towards it throughout the novel. This leads her to react bodily to or even explicitly complain about it on countless occasions.

⁸ By shifting seamlessly from objective third-person narration to the subjective perspective of Susie's interior monologue, Dos Passos highlights how noise sneaks just as unhindered from the urban or architectural space into the human mind (where it may prompt various nervous reactions) as it seems to seep through the permeable walls of the city's public and private spaces.

⁹ Indeed, as Iglesias Quadrado has rightfully argued and demonstrated, Ellen's story, its painful as well as its triumphant moments "throughout *Manhattan Transfer* [...] is told acoustically" (2018, 90).



It is “the roaring and the rattat outside” (50) that frightens her at night as a child.¹⁰ There are “shivering beady tentacles of sound” reaching out from the telephone that just does not stop ringing during her time as a Broadway actress, eventually causing her ears to “ring sickeningly” (235, 236). When she walks the streets, she is “groping continually through a tangle of gritty sawedged brittle noise” (129). It is the “endless chirruping of typewriters, the endlessly repeated phrases, faces, typewritten sheets” that tire her out in her later job as an editor (333). And time and again it is roaring and screeching traffic sounds that turn her nerves into “sharp steel jangled wires” or make her mind “go brrr all the time like a busted mechanical toy” (333, 356). Wherever she goes and whatever she does, Ellen seems to be caught in constant acoustic pain. With her sensorium constantly exhausted by the metropolitan soundscape, Ellen might just be the one character in Dos Passos’ narration that proves to be most exemplary of Simmel’s “blasé outlook” of the urban dweller. Emotionally hardened –she frequently perceives of herself and is perceived by others as ironclad, mechanic or doll-like¹¹– cynical and overly rational in her private life decisions that almost always go hand in hand with career decisions. In fact, it seems that Ellen’s marriages do not so much grow out of love or affection, but rather out of career calculations connected to the professions and standing of her respective husbands. Her first marriage to the much older actor John Oglethorpe opens her the doors to Broadway fame; her second marriage to journalist Jimmy Herf ushers in her second career as a fashion editor and her anticipated third marriage to district attorney and mayor-to-be George Baldwin is about to make her the city’s first lady.¹²

Yet sounds, especially if articulated, may also be productive of more than just nervous pain in *Manhattan Transfer*: Random snippets of conversations, popular songs or advertisement slogans overheard while roaming the streets or riding busses and cabs can turn into trigger moments for new thought processes and action patterns. Several times, Dos Passos demonstrates how such articulated sounds intrude into his characters’ minds and start resonating with or prompting certain memories, fantasies and plans. Picking up the words “But she’s made the

¹⁰ Ellen’s suffering from city noise as a child is echoed later by her baby son’s painful sensorial overstimulation in his crib when “[f]rom outside above the roar of wheels comes a strangling wail clutching his throat” (Dos Passos 2000, 333) –an (over-)sensitivity that little Martin seems to have inherited from both his mother and grandmother (31-32).

¹¹ On various occasions Ellen senses herself to be “a stiff cast iron figure in her metalgreen evening dress” (Dos Passos 2000, 237) or “rigid as a porcelain figure under her clothes, everything about her seemed to be growing hard and enameled” (335), while others perceive of her as “a porcelain figure under a bell glass” (272), a linotype with “a gulping mouth with nicklebright rows of teeth” (296), an “Elliedoll” (273) or even “an Effenbee walking talking doll” (356, see also Brevda [1996, 81-84] on this).

¹² Considering Ellen’s rise to Broadway fame and social ascent through her attachment to various influential men, Brevda has contested that “Ellen Thatcher is the cynical younger sister of Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*, hardened by her additional years in the modern city” (1996, 85) and one should add in Simmel’s logic: her additional years exposed to the metropolitan cacophony.



biggest hit ever been made on Broadway” from a random conversation while on a bus is enough to trigger a most sensuous and again strikingly synesthetic reverie of stage success and stardom in the ambitious actress’s mind:

Ellen smiled happily. Greatest hit on Broadway. The words were an elevator carrying her up dizzily, up into some stately height where electric light signs crackled scarlet and gold and green, where were bright roofgardens that smelled of orchids, and the slow throb of a tango danced in a goldgreen dress with Stan while handclapping of millions beat in gusts like a hailstorm about them. Greatest hit on Broadway (Dos Passos 2000, 144-145, see also Iglesias Quadrado [2018, 101] on this passage).

But Dos Passos reveals yet another dimension of the urban roar than its mere capacity to, on the one hand, overpower and stupefy the metropolitan subject, or, on the other hand, to infiltrate and thus ultimately interfere with and drive its psychological processes. I would like to argue that the urban noisescape in *Manhattan Transfer* is central in constituting the metropolitan dweller as a truly modern subject in the sense that such philosophers as Jean-Paul Sartre (1992) and Michel Foucault (1979) have theorized the subject as someone who is always already aware of and thus subjected to some sort of scrutiny by an ‘other,’ an internalized experience of constantly being under someone’s eyes –or for that matter: someone’s ears– as its specific mode of being in the world. In his 1943 philosophical opus magnus *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre captured the subject’s constitution by way of another’s presence in the famous words: “If there is an Other, whatever or whoever he may be, whatever may be his relations with me, and without his acting upon me in any way except by the pure upsurge of his being –then I have an outside, I have an essence” (1992, 321). That very idea has been popularized even more widely in Sartre’s play *No Exit*, first performed a year after *Being and Nothingness*’s initial publication, where he has one of his characters exclaim the even more famous words: “So this is hell. I’d never believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the ‘burning marl.’ Old wives’ tales! There’s no need for red-hot poker. Hell is –other people!” (1989, 45). Michel Foucault has certainly built on these notions, but crucially extended them by implementing them into his historical-sociological account of power and discipline and their central role in the formation of the modern subject. His analysis of the panoptic prison structure in *Discipline and Punish* ultimately amounts to an account of the subjectivation process such as it becomes automatized in modern disciplinary societies. While the panoptic regime is, just as in Sartre, centered on the visual dimension, it may just as convincingly work as a panacoustic regime. In fact, visible/visibility could easily be exchanged with audible/audibility in the following passage:

The cells of the periphery [...] are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible [...]. Visibility is a trap. [...] Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. [...] He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which



he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault 1979, 198-200)

In *Manhattan Transfer* the individual is not only overwhelmed and subconsciously driven by the urban roar. More importantly, this noise is a perpetual reminder that the individual is never really alone in the city. Never, in a strict sense, does he or she enjoy any privacy—even within his or her private spaces—but is ultimately also and at any time audible and thus potentially always already being overheard by someone. Indeed, *Manhattan Transfer* abounds with instances of characters desperately trying to carve out some acoustic privacy for themselves or reminding each other of their audibility and possible eavesdropping within the giant resonance chamber of the metropolis:

“Keep quiet cant you ... here take yer shoes off ...” (Dos Passos 2000, 60)

“Shush you can hear everything through the partition”. (125)

“The telephone reached out shivering beady tentacles of sound. She slams the window down”. (235)

“Now for chrissake keep still”. (270)

“Jez you make me nervous with your whimperin an cryin... Cant you shut up? [...] I thought I heard somebody movin in the bushes ... This goddam park is full of plainclothes men ... There’s nowhere you can go in the whole crummy city without people watchin [but also: overhearing] you”. (318)

To remain within the Foucauldian terminology, in Dos Passos’ text the modern city appears more like a giant panacousticon than a panopticon. The city also emulates the latter’s ability to constitute the modern subject, yet not so much as someone who is aware of and has internalized that he or she is always already overseen, but rather as someone who is always already overheard. Indeed, it is audibility, the state of overhearing each other on city streets, busses and subways, in packed tenements, shops, bars and offices, that is as much or even more so a trap than visibility in the modern metropolis and its “permeable architectures” (Klimasmith 2005, 5).¹³

The existential forlornness of the acoustically constituted subject, the modern noise-enveloped individual that appears to be private and non-private at the same time, is perhaps best described in this passage:

¹³ Betsy Klimasmith elaborates on the permeability of modern architecture: “In urban boarding houses, apartment buildings, and hotels, [s]ound, heat, and smells traveled between residences. Urban dwellings thus exemplified permeable architecture... In the modern urban landscape, theatricality, voyeurism, and proximity simultaneously fragmented the broad notion of public space into individual stages, performances, and stories, and transformed private spaces into shared spaces” (2005, 5); the same holds true for work spaces: while the use of sound-abating materials helped to turn modern office skyscrapers into “acoustically efficient refuges from the noises of public life,” a thus created silence also transformed them into panacoustic regimes on the inside with an obvious disciplinary effect on the workforce (Thompson 2002, 168).

[Ellen] got into bed. [...] She drew her knees up to her chin and sat thinking. From the street she could hear the occasional rumble of a truck. In the kitchens below her room a sound of clattering had begun. From all around came a growing rumble of traffic beginning. She felt hungry and alone. The bed was a raft on which she was marooned alone, always alone, afloat on a growling ocean. A shudder went down her spine. She drew her knees up closer to her chin. (Dos Passos 2000, 156-157)

In another striking and truly contemporary passage (which also echoes the passage of her noise-tormented mother in bed), Ellen is literally caught in the acoustic grip of the panacoustic cell of her apartment, variously resonating with a constantly ringing telephone, the door buzzer, the chatter of callers and visitors as well as the urban noise carried inside through the window variously opened in an attempt to ease the suffocating acoustic grip inside and closed again in order to shut out the urban roar outside or to prevent eavesdropping from neighboring apartments.

Under the skin of her temples iron clamps tighten till her head will mash like an egg; ... The telephone reached out shivering beady tentacles of sound. She slams the window down. O hell cant they give you any peace? ... She no sooner puts the receiver down than the bell clutches at her again. ... She starts walking up and down the room again. I am borne darkly fearfully afar... The phone rings. ... She throws up the window again She hears the burring boom of a big steamer from the river. ... The telephone is shiveringly beadily ringing, ringing. The buzzer burrs at the same time. ... Ellen's ears ring sickeningly. ... Those women'll drive me mad. Then the tension in her snaps, she feels something draining out of her, like water out of a washbasin. (235-237)

The subjectivizing effect of the metropolitan panacousticon is highlighted via the shift from the resonance chamber of the apartment as part of a larger permeable urban architecture onto Ellen's mind, which turns out to be a resonance chamber in its own right. Her mind reverberates not only from the noises directly thrown at her, but also from those non-diegetic 'silent' sounds, such as her own memories, associations and reasonings¹⁴ that produce –as seen in another passage– their very own “brrr” inside of her (see Dos Passos 2000, 356).

Thus, in *Manhattan Transfer*, an ever-increasing and ever-diversifying metropolitan soundscape becomes not only a major characteristic of, but also an agent within the city, which is ultimately reflected on both the text's content and formal level. Formally, the text collages all sorts of articulated chatter, slogans, songs, but also unarticulated noises via onomatopoeia, metaphors and neologisms into a vast urban cacophony. On the content level, the urban roar takes a toll on the novel's myriad characters, variously tormenting, stupefying, blunting, enticing or inspiring them –thus prompting reactions and processes within their minds that the reader is able to follow via Dos Passos' extensive use of interior monologue and stream of

¹⁴ Here specifically it is P.B. Shelley's *Adonais* elegy, whose stanzas are adapted to Ellen's own situation within her mind.



consciousness. In this sense, one is to witness here the fabrication of the overstimulated modern urbanite into an apathetic –or in Simmel’s words ‘blasé’– product of the urban milieu. Furthermore, *Manhattan Transfer*’s ceaseless urban roar proves to be crucial in constantly reminding the metropolitan dweller of his or her being never alone, of never having any real privacy. A thus enacted metropolitan panacousticon ultimately appears as a powerful agent in constituting the modern subject as someone who is always already overheard, always already under the curious ears of another. Once internalized and adapted to that panacousticon, it does not matter if there really is an eavesdropper –that eavesdropper has already found a place in one’s mind and audibility, just as much as visibility, in the panoptic regime, is a trap.

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A GIRL'S LIFE IN ENGLISH INTERWAR SUBURBIA: EVADNE PRICE'S *JUST JANE**

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ABSTRACT

Just Jane, the first of a series of books for young female readers written by the Australian-English writer Evadne Price, was published in 1928. The young heroine starring in the book and the members of her family represent the typical middle-class family living in an English suburban area, a type of neighbourhood which underwent an unprecedented growth during the 1920s. This article analyses Price's text in the light of the new lifestyle fostered in English interwar suburbia, as it illustrates how, together with the building of new houses and neighbourhoods, new values concerning family relations, gender roles, social networking and leisure activities were generated and promoted.

KEYWORDS: *Just Jane*, Evadne Price, 1920s, suburbia, children's literature, family.

LA VIDA DE UNA NIÑA EN LOS BARRIOS RESIDENCIALES
DE LAS AFUERAS EN LA INGLATERRA DE ENTREGUERRAS:
JUST JANE DE EVADNE PRICE

RESUMEN

Just Jane es el primero de una serie de libros para jóvenes lectoras que escribió la escritora australiana-inglesa Evadne Price y fue publicado en 1928. La joven protagonista del libro y los miembros de su familia constituyen la típica familia de clase media de las afueras de la ciudad, cuyos barrios residenciales crecieron de forma extraordinaria durante la década de los veinte del siglo pasado. Este artículo analiza el texto de Price a la luz del nuevo estilo de vida promovido en estas comunidades durante la época de entreguerras en Inglaterra, pues muestra cómo, junto a la construcción de nuevas casas y barrios, se generaban e impulsaban nuevos valores sobre las relaciones familiares, los roles de género, los contactos sociales y el ocio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Just Jane*, Evadne Price, años veinte, afueras de la ciudad, literatura infantil, familia.



1. INTRODUCTION

When addressing works for children and young adults published between 1910 and 1940, Chris Baldick claims, referring to the heroine of the book *Just Jane* (1928), that she is an appealing girl “who awaits rediscovery” (2004, 352). Indeed, the book is the first of a series, written by the Australian-English writer Evadne Price (1896/1901-1985) for young female readers. Observing the title of the book, *Just Jane*, it is evident that everything in the book is going to revolve around Jane, a feature that most children’s books share, their main characters habitually being children. However, although focusing chiefly on the heroine and her activities and whereabouts, the book also offers a very interesting portrait of family life in English suburbia. In fact, the very few studies devoted to Jane’s books address and mention the heroine’s family as one of the main components of her stories. The young protagonist and her family represent the typical middle-class family living in a suburban area, a type of neighbourhood which underwent an unprecedented growth during the 1920s. In a period of rapid changes and unstable social and political circumstances in the aftermath of the Great War, the modern suburban lifestyle had a great impact on the English household’s behaviour. In these new communities with more hygienic, healthier and more spacious homes, such amenities as electricity, hot running water or bathrooms were available for families in general. Together with the new houses, new values concerning family relations and child-rearing, gender roles and decorum, or new ideas about nutrition, hygiene and gardening were generated and promoted. Thus suburbia became very identifiable but also evocative literary and filming locations. Price does not devote much space to the description of setting, as she concentrates primarily on actions; however, some sentences and short paragraphs here and there, provide a fascinating background, which deserves further attention. Furthermore, this study intends to give a response to Baldick’s claim and introduce Jane to twenty-first century readers and scholars, focusing on the first book of the series. However, as a selection of stories from this book and the rest of the series were published in 1985 in a book entitled *Jane and Co.*, some details and contents of it will be used in order to illustrate the issues discussed in this article.

2. EVADNE PRICE (HELEN ZENNA SMITH) AND THE JANE SERIES

The author of the book, Evadne Price, was a writer and journalist, who also published under the pen-name Helen Zenna Smith. She is mostly remembered by her novel for adult readers *Not So Quiet... Stepdaughters of War* (1930). The idea for

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the book was suggested to Price by her editor, when he asked her to write a parody of the German novel by Erich Remarque *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929), which was translated into English as *All is Quiet on the Western Front*. Price, however, decided to write a first-person memoir of a woman ambulance driver during the First World War. As Acton notes, the war experience narrated by Price is “much more graphically brutal” than those depicted in other war memoirs written by women, such as Vera Brittain and Irene Rathbone (2004, 289). Price would publish more novels for adults; however, *Not So Quiet* is her only book still in print.

Regarding her publications for children, she wrote a series of books about Jane Turpin, which is considered a counterpart of the William series, created by Richmal Crompton, which was addressed chiefly to boys. However, while the William series has enjoyed a successful afterlife, the series starring Jane has fallen into oblivion. Price published 10 books about the young heroine: *Just Jane* (1928), *Meet Jane* (1930), *Enter – Jane* (1932), *Jane the Fourth* (1937), *Jane the Sleuth* (1939), *Jane the Popular* (1939), *Jane the Patient* (1940), *Jane Gets Busy* (1940) and *Jane at War* (1940). The books are composed of independent short stories, which can be read separately. *Just Jane* in particular includes 11. Years later, as mentioned before, 12 stories from the series were selected by Mary Cadogan to be published by Macmillan in 1985 with the title *Jane and Co.* The main protagonist is Jane, who is surrounded by some recurring characters: the members of her family, her friends and some neighbours. All of them remain the same in all the books; Jane, for instance, is always around 10 years of age. The young protagonist, being curious and possessing a particular view about justice, is going to mess everything up. Apparently, she is ruining conventional events and disturbing normal people; but at the end, in most of the stories she is actually doing things right. Indeed, thanks to her, two dangerous villains are exposed and caught in the first two stories of *Just Jane*. As occurs with most books for children, *Just Jane* and the rest of the series of books incorporate illustrations of some of the most striking events (Shavit 1985, Grenby and Reynolds 2011).

3. A SHORT APPROACH TO CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Seth Lerer begins his book about children’s literature with a meaningful statement: “Ever since there were children, there has been children’s literature” (2008, 1). Interestingly, the very term used for this specific genre of literature is defined by its target readers, children, which means that children’s literature is going to be inextricably linked to the history of childhood and will vary over time according to the transformations in the concept of childhood. Notions about children in any society are cultural constructs, which reflect in turn the dominant ideology of the epoch, affecting such aspects as the extension of childhood in people’s lives and education, among others, and indeed, the topics, purposes and form of the texts written for this audience.

In the history of children’s literature in Britain scholars have emphasised the relevance of the eighteenth century for its development, as it emerged and was



consolidated as an independent branch in print culture (Grenby 2011, Manuel 2015). At the end of this century, the Industrial Revolution played a decisive role in the evolution of the genre, as the values of the middle classes and the emerging bourgeoisie were observable in the texts for children by means of the promotion of merit, talent and hard work (Kramnick 205-6; O'Malley 2-3). In this regard, didacticism was considered a necessary ingredient in books for children in order to convey good examples for them. However, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, more entertaining fiction for children was also incorporated, following the steps of such narratives like *Robinson Crusoe*, by Daniel Defoe, which was starting to be marketed for children, chiefly through Robinsonnades (Knowles and Malmkjaer 2003, 4-5). Indeed, both these trends, didacticism and entertainment, coexisted during the nineteenth century and beyond.

According to Carpenter's book, the period from 1860 to the 1950s in particular was the golden age of literature for children, as many authors chose to write for children in order to portray their society and express their ideas and thoughts, including Lewis Carroll, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling. In those years, two different directions can be distinguished in British children's literature: realistic and fantastic. Later on, in the interwar period, children's literature left behind more ideologically engaged topics, such as imperialism, patriotism and nationalism, which characterised the narratives previous to WWI, in order to concentrate on those stories that children would enjoy the most, particularly adventure, both realistic and fantastic, as seen before (Knuth 2012, 115). Indeed, alluding to the title of the book on interwar Britain *The Long Week End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (Graves and Hodge 1940), Hunt defines children's literature of the interwar period as a "long weekend" (1994, 106), meaning a moment of leisurely uncertainty between the two world conflicts. Furthermore, this scholar considers that a "sea-change" occurred in children's literature during this period, which implied that "the tone of voice, the mode of telling, and the narrative contract between narrator and implied child reader of the children's book that we recognize today were fully established" (106) during these years.

On the other hand, writers of children's books exploited the financial potential of small adventures, in which the focus was on action, this being a powerful source of undemanding enjoyment and thus, a certain escapism. This type of adventure stories were addressed to boys and girls alike. Nevertheless, the 1920s and 30s were defined by Kevin Carpenter as "the heyday of girls' fiction", in which a high-spirited heroine is at the centre of the narrative (qtd. in Hunt 1994, 107). This was particularly so in girls' public school stories, with series such as the "Chalet School" by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer and the "Abbey Girls" by Elsie J. Oxenham. The girls in these books, like the women of the period, were portrayed as more independent and active, showing that life outside the house was possible for them (Nelson 2011, 498; Knuth 2012, 119-120), Price's young heroine, Jane, being a clear instance of this trend.



4. JANE TURPIN AND HER SUBURBAN ENVIRONMENT

The heroine of *Just Jane* is about ten years old; therefore, most of her life necessarily occurs within her family circle. However, as members of a particular neighbourhood, Jane and her family are in contact with friends and other acquaintances living nearby. Price's description of all these characters is full of irony and sarcasm, showing all their pettiness and snobbery, with which Jane's behaviour so starkly contrasts (Cadogan and Craig 2003, 248; Fox 2001, 390). Indeed, Jane's divergences with most of the characters around her, as she usually does not understand adults' behaviour, and the unfavourable consequences of her actions for them constitute one of the most attractive components of the book.

Jane lives in an imaginary village called Little Dupperry with her parents, Mr and Mrs Turpin, her elder sister Marjorie or Marge and her baby brother. They also have a cook and a nanny. In the same neighbourhood her best friends, "Pug" Washington and "Chaw" Smith, live in houses with such affected and weird French names as "Chez Moi" and "Mon Repos" (*JJ* 61),¹ which clearly suggest a *nouveau riche* attitude, also perceived in Jane's family, particularly in her mother and sister. Indeed, the physical and human environment in which Jane moves is going to be very influential not only in terms of the development of the stories, but also as an element which illustrates interwar suburban lifestyle, since, as Archer notes, "there is a necessary connection between the belief system (or ideology) of a culture and the material apparatus in which people conduct their daily lives" (2005, xvi).

The interwar years were crucial for suburban areas, as many families moved to semi-detached, detached and municipal housing (Whitehand and Carr 2001, 6; Scott 2013, 1). When WWI finished, in order to avoid any trouble with masses of demobbed troops, the social program known as "homes fit for heroes" was designed and developed to offer affordable housing to them (Jackson [1973] 2018, 90). However, the great expansion of suburbanization during the first decades of the twentieth century cannot be explained without mentioning some economic and technological changes, such as the growth and improvement of public transport, the rise of the motor car and the development of communication technologies, which connected cities and suburbs (Clapson 2003, 15). For the working classes council or municipal housing offered a great improvement, while the middle classes were able to buy their own house at a price they could afford (Jackson [1973] 2018, 93, 99). In both cases, they had to move to communities which were very different to those they had grown up with their parents in urban streets. The mass migration to suburban communities entailed important consequences for family life: "suburban estates were characterized by 'domesticated' lifestyles, encompassing a high standard of personal and domestic hygiene, family- and home-centred lifestyles even for adult males, and an increased commitment of material and psychological resources to the welfare and material advancement of children" (Scott 2013, 199).

¹ References to *Just Jane* will be abbreviated hereon in *JJ*.



Thus, there was also an aspirational component in the core of suburban expansion. The suburban aspiration is defined, according to Clapson (2003, 51-52), by three characteristics: First, an “anti-urban” sentiment that invaded people, mainly from the Industrial Revolution onwards, as cities had become overcrowded, unhealthy, dirty and dangerous. Secondly, a desire for a house with a garden. Historically, the single-family house is particularly prominent in Anglo-American culture because of various reasons, including the early rise of a mercantile economy, the growth of a prosperous bourgeoisie and the intense political and philosophical enquiry into the notions of self and property from the end of the seventeenth century onwards (Archer 2005, xviii). In the third place, there is also people’s aspiration for a “high-quality residential environment” (Clapson 2003, 52), which implies not only attractive houses, gardens, streets and roads, but also the appropriate social tone of the neighbourhood.

According to Clapson (2003, 2), who takes as a basis the sociologist David C. Thorns’ criteria, suburbs can be defined as follows:

- They are within the orbit of a town or city.
- Their geography is intermediate between the city centre and the countryside.
- They are habitually at a commuting distance of the city centre, as they were built as residential spaces.
- They are usually dependent on city centres as the source of goods and services, particularly, for shopping.

Little Dupperry in particular is near London, as Jane’s family can go by train to spend the day there (*JJ* 135). During the nineteenth century and especially in the second half, many Londoners moved to the city’s outskirts, a tendency which increased during the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, according to the General Register Office, if the population of London’s Outer Ring in 1881 was 936,364, by 1939, the figure more than quadrupled to 4,601,650, which implied that there were more people living in suburban areas than in Greater London (Georgiou 2014, 176). In the story “The Council of Three” in *Jane and Co*, Price describes how these areas were expanding more and more:

Whittington Avenue [...] was a new part of Dupperry recently opened up by an enterprising firm. Red villas of a peculiarly nauseating shade presented their awful newness to acres of muddy fields, ornamented with piles of bricks and corrugated iron roofing. At intervals a solitary tree brooded among its fallen fellows. But the allure of an efficient hot-water system and modern bathrooms was not to be withstood; the Avenue was populated as fast as the desirable residences were fit for habitation; almost before, in fact. (7-8)

Jane’s parents embody the new roles assigned to men and women in the suburban communities. Her father, being the breadwinner, barely appears in the stories, since, like the rest of men, he spends very little time at home, as he has to work long hours and spend more time in daily commuting to work. Mr Turpin, in fact, is



one of the many white collars who represented most of the male population in those residential areas (Jackson 2018, 166). On one of the rare occasions he participates in *Just Jane*, once he arrives home, “Mr. Turpin immediately buried himself behind the weekly edition of the local paper” (*JJ* 186), offering the traditional image of the *pater familias* who does not want to get involved in trivial everyday family matters. For women life was completely different in this new environment, the majority of them feeling bored and lonely, as they had to spend most of the day alone with their children. Hence, they ended up suffering from depression and anxiety. Indeed, Jane’s mother, as a housewife in such a suburban environment, displays symptoms of what is known in medical terminology as “suburban neurosis”, a term coined in the 1930s by a doctor who worked in South London (Clapson 2003, 126). This illness was said to be caused primarily by women’s lack of social contacts in those residential neighbourhoods; however, Jackson also mentions worries about money and the home, and even false expectations (2018, 168). As expected, Jane is the main cause for Mrs Turpin’s anxiety, as she is not able to make Jane behave properly, and on the first page of the book, she is described as a “long-suffering mother” (*JJ* 14-15). Indeed, at the end of *Just Jane*, Mrs. Turpin becomes physically sick, she is “utterly prostrated with a nervous headache which the presence of Jane had aggravated since breakfast” (209).

Families that moved to suburban areas were strangers to each other; however, leisure activities favoured social networking. Recreation was “an integral part of suburbia’s *raison d’être*”, as suburban areas were not just “the dormitory satellite of the productive city” (Georgiou 2014, 179-180). Activities such as sports, dinners and dances, and other minor gatherings and tea parties were habitual, the latter in particular being a pleasant break from women’s isolation and loneliness. Housewives in Little Dupperry seem to support each other thanks to these small events, as one of the mothers of Jane’s friends explains: “The Turpins have arrived home a week before they were expected, and as nothing is prepared for them, I just ran across and brought them back to tea” (*JJ* 63-64). They also have regular gatherings, such as “Mrs Turpin’s monthly ‘At Home’ to the socialites of Little Dupperry” (*JCo* 153).² This type of events were also used by women to involve themselves in charitable activities and share information on less favoured groups, but from far-away places, such as the “Keffir Babies” in South Africa (*JJ* 71), since for snobbish middle-class women like them, getting involved with poor people around them was not considered appropriate.

As Georgiou notes, religion was also central in creating social networks among suburban inhabitants (2014, 179) and Mrs Turpin along with the rest of women organized festivals to raise money for the Church, Jane’s mother being “the Queen of Ceremonies” with the celebration of an “Eccentric Fête” (*JJ* 125). Some members of the community, including the Vicar, are still commenting on the party some days later, sharing diverse opinions about the activities prepared by Mrs. Turpin,

² References to *Just and Co* will be abbreviated hereon in *JCo*.



which include: an “Ankle Competition”, “guessing the number of threepences in the cake”, and a “Letters from Celebrities’ stall” (125-127). Such recreational activities took place in an integral part of the suburban houses, the garden, which represented a great advancement when compared to the limitations of the open-air spaces in houses and flats in urban neighbourhoods.

Young people in Little Dupperry, such as Jane’s sister, Marjorie, and Pug’s brother, William, attended Club dances and birthday parties (107-108), in which they could meet other young men and women. Marjorie Turpin is 18 years and, like other middle-class girls like her, who had finished school, was at home “in elegant idleness” (Cadogan and Craig 2003, 241), waiting to get married and become a housewife, like their mothers. She is starting a relationship with Willy Washington, who is 21 and is already working at an office (*JJ* 110). Young people could engage in other activities, such as sports, as mentioned earlier, which is exemplified in the book by Marjorie, who plays tennis (209), and by William, who fondly remembers how he had enjoyed skating with Marjorie, his “beautiful red-haired siren”, during last Christmas holidays (110), as they are members of the “Dupperry Skating Society” (*JCo* 191). They also could participate in cultural associations, such as the dramatic society, in which Marjorie was going to read a play (103).

Families in such suburban communities shared forms of social behaviour based on consumption and material values. They had to come up to some standards regarding domestic service, clothing, furniture, and appliances. Hence, shopping was crucial for the inhabitants in Little Dupperry, particularly for women. Mrs. Turpin is arranging everything to go next day to London for the day: “Nana and Baby and Marjory and I will go on the early train”; however, as Jane has behaved badly and she “cannot curb [her] tongue”, she would stay at home (*JJ* 135). Apparently, their main purpose is shopping, as can be inferred from Jane’s reaction: “I don’t care. I don’t want to go with that Marje, seeing her spend threepences, when I’ve got nothin’” (135).³ As observed, money and consumerism was not an interest only shared by adults, as Jane and her friends appear continually thinking how to obtain money for their activities and favourite things.

In the chapter entitled “Letters from celebrities”, Jane is deprived for some time of her pocket money and she appears as a miserable girl: “Without threepence a week you have no social life. You are despised pauper among you fellows” (131), a statement that suggests the importance of money for all the inhabitants of Little Dupperry, even the youngest ones, and particularly for their social life. As Cadogan explains, children at that time could buy quite a lot with threepence (1985, vii). Without money, Jane cannot buy sweets and share them with her friends either: “you can’t eat people’s sweets when you’ve none to offer them in return for the simple reason that they won’t let you” (*JJ* 131). On another occasion, Jane is helping her sister Marjorie to give back a present to William Washington and the girl is going to obtain

³ When Price reproduces Jane’s speech, as well as the way of speaking of other characters, such as the cook and the gardener, she wrote their discourse as it sounded.



threepence for the errand. With the money Jane is going to be able to buy some of Chaw Smith's guinea pigs, as he "was selling his pets cheaply in order to buy a new kind of air-gun he had found in the catalogue of a big London store" (109). Hence, not only are adults entrapped in the capitalist economic system, which encourage them to acquire new products constantly, but children too, as the advertisement methods used by companies reached all. Furthermore, Jane's main financial feat is described in a chapter entitled ironically "A question of high finance", as she designs a "Great Accident Syndicate" in order to fool Locky Wall, one of the main objects of her mischiefs. It is a kind of insurance scheme, in which the children of Little Duppery have to pay every week 1d. and when they have an accident, Locky has to pay them a certain amount depending on its seriousness (*JJ* 73). Locky embarks on the business and, obviously, everything turns out badly for him at the end, as all the boys and girls in the neighbourhood pretend to have accidents and they are even able to bring a witness with them to prove it.

Together with her pocket money Jane is also deprived of "the Saturday matinee at the movies" (*JJ* 130), which means that she has to experience Mickey Mouse's adventures second-hand, which is regrettable for her, as "The comedy loses in the telling" (131). With the opening of picture houses in the 1920s in suburban neighbourhoods, cinema became a social institution. Most people went to the cinema at least once a week, keeping Saturday matinee for children, who watched "selections of cowboy, cartoon and comic films, shouting themselves hoarse the while" (Jackson [1973] 2018, 176). Going to movies was one of the main leisure activities of young people in residential areas, but not the only one, as Jane and her friends attended the performance of "Uncle Tommy Silver – The Greatest Revivalist in the World" (*JJ* 171). Obviously, they were not allowed to participate in such event; however, being free, it was particularly attractive for them. Besides, they do not want to miss it because Jane mistakenly thinks that a revivalist is a kind of mesmeriser, who "puts you to sleep ... An' once a Revilist gets you fixed with his eye ... you gotter do what he says all your life" (172). For the rehearsal, the revivalist uses a tent that the children think at the beginning it might be a circus tent, another type of entertainment already known by Jane and her friends; however, they are completely disappointed when they do not see "the customary wild animals, the clowns, the short-skirted bareback riders in tarlatan and spangles, the ring-master complete with black moustache, the gentleman with the tame snakes, and all the other ingredients that help to make up the thrills of a travelling circus" (170).

Clothing was another sign of status in Jane's neighbourhood and one of the aspects most visible to the rest of the people there. Hence Jane's mother struggles to keep her well dressed and clean: "I'm sure *I* don't deserve it, ... Do other mothers ... have a filthy dirty child like you? No. I slave from morning till night to keep you clean and tidy, but do *you* care? No" (*JJ* 40–41, italics in the original). For a naughty girl like Jane, it is really uncomfortable, but she has to dress properly for parties: "Little Jane Turpin, an unwilling prisoner in a blue frilly taffeta party frock trimmed with dainty pink rosebuds" (125). Later on, Jane is also said to be dressed according to fashion: "Little Jane Turpin, suitably attired, as the fashion experts might say, in a reefer jacket adorned with flat brass buttons" (208). The description



of her external appearance is very relevant in the stories, as it is totally the opposite of her behaviour. Jane has golden curly hair and beautiful blue eyes: she is described as “the angelic-looking Jane” (15), “this dear little golden-headed girl” (58), “Just like a Botticelli angel” (126), “a golden fairy girl” (127). Nevertheless, this portrayal is deceiving and some characters in the stories discover that her external appearance is a sort of “camouflage” (20) and they describe Jane as “that awful Turpin girl” (22), “little horror” (46), “wild tomboy” (64), “small savage” (152). Furthermore, in an “indignation meeting of the mothers”, one of them even says that “she’d rather see her wee ones playing with a stick of dynamite” than with Jane (42). In any case, Jane does not want to behave like a girly-girl, a sweet little lady, or better said, like a “soppy” kid, as she repeatedly says in the stories.

Keeping a suburban lifestyle like the one depicted in *Just Jane* was expensive and many families had to struggle to keep up with their mortgage repayments. This is the case with the Washington family, as can be read in the story entitled “Letters from Celebrities”, in which Jane and her friends put letters from their family members on sale. Thanks to the letters that Pug Washington, one of Jane’s friends, is selling, Miss Baldock, the village gossip, discovers that: “the Washington’s furniture is on the hire purchase system, and they owe money everywhere. Fancy selling their unreceipted bills, and threats to summons them, too. ... Would you believe it, dear. After all the airs she gives herself” (*JJ* 140). Evidently, not only did isolation cause anxiety among the inhabitants of such neighbourhoods, but also the necessity to achieve “the suburban dream of aspirational respectability” (Scott 2013, 140), which proved to be beyond the means of some of them. As Jackson notes, in the second half of the twenties, the cheapest houses in suburban areas were £600-£800 for semis, while detached houses were around £1,200 ([1973] 2018, 188). Over 75 per cent of them were bought by mortgage, meaning that the purchaser had to make an initial deposit of at least 20 or 25 per cent of the price of the house and to be able to pay regularly from 15s to £2 or more per week. Frequently, this plan came to be a heavy burden for many purchasers, who had to take additional loans from other sources (194). Jane’s family, however, seems to be doing well, as they are able to afford long journeys and to rent a house on the coast for summer holiday. Nevertheless, the general circumstances in Britain during this period are described as rather gloomy when Jane attends a show in the theatre. There, a magician says during his performance that “times are hard and money is tight” (*JJ* 200). Indeed, by the mid-1920s the prosperity of the post-war period was over: the interest rates rose, the investment levels fell, and more imports were needed, which led to economic depression in Britain (Jackson [1973] 2019, 101).

Hence, the dissatisfaction of many British citizens was also observable on the streets and in *Just Jane* one of the stories has as a backdrop a Bolshevik parade, which does not take place in Little Duppery, the suburban village where Jane lives, but in a bigger and older town, Coshington, where Jane’s Grandmother Pilk lives, and possibly with a more working-class population. The story is entitled “Jane the Bolshevik”, as her curiosity drives Jane to desperately want to see the parade, although middle-class children like her were forbidden even to go near it (*JJ* 89). The parade is on a Sunday afternoon, when Jane and her friends have to go to the Sunday school,



while other children attend the Red Sunday School, before marching round the town. These parades were organized by the Communist Party, which during the interwar period acquired a notable force in Britain due to social discontent. The parade is described in the book as:

a strange procession headed by a gentleman with a walrus moustache carrying a Red Banner with a strange device. Behind him marched a band of boys and girls in red sashes and a number of men and women adorned with red rosettes and determined expressions, chanting a doleful melody beginning “Then rise the Scarlet Banner eye.” Several yards in the rear a little girl in a red fancy dress wobbled precariously on a red-enamelled bicycle. A placard informed the observer that she represented “Red Liberty.” (89)

Jane wants to know why the Reds are called Bolshies, and another girl, the daughter of the Vicar, tells her what her father says about them: “Cause they want to take all the money off people and give it to themselves” (90). Jane’s response is very shocking for the other girl, but according to Jane’s logical reasoning and idea of justice, it is a rather common-sense remark: “I don’t see much different in Bolshers an’ your father. He wants to take all their money off people an’ give it to the heathens. I’d sooner give it to the Bolshers than the heathens, I would. That’s if I can’t keep it myself” (90). Additionally, she is informed by a boy about another attractive component of the Red parade, that children are paid threepence if they march in it. Jane’s comment is obvious, due to her interest in getting money: “An’ our ole vicar he makes us pay him to go to his ole Sunday school ... Fancy the Bolshers paying you” (91).

5. CONCLUSION

The stories in *Just Jane* and the additional examples from *Jane and Co* offer remarkable features of the suburban lifestyle of the 1920s as a background, and, interestingly, most of these details are expounded thanks to the intervention of the heroine and her particular view about what happens around her. As with other similar books for young girls, the book focuses on an independent and resourceful heroine, who does not understand how the adult world works. Indeed, Jane’s idea of justice is not mistaken: “She was always on the side of the oppressed” (*JJ* 30); however, her behaviour fails to comply with the social conventions in her pretentious neighbourhood. Thus, the results are often shocking and not the expected ones, and this fact is the source of much of the humour in the book.

Although children in the book are not so different from boys and girls in other adventure stories for young readers, the adults represent the new roles assigned to men and women in the new suburban lifestyle, which are indeed demanding. Thus, men seldom appear in the stories, as they have to work hard, while women are described as lonely housewives, who, thanks to service and new appliances, have a lot of spare time. They appear as individuals who are just interested in external appearances, trivial parties and shopping. Leisure time and social networking was



also crucial in suburban neighbourhoods, in which cinema was the main recreation, sports and cultural associations being more and more frequent. However, some episodes in Jane's stories also display other characters who are not so fortunate as Jane and her family and who are the victims, among other things, of unstable economic circumstances and consumerism.

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FASHIONABLE FLAPPERS: CONSTRUCTING FEMININITY IN FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE OFFSHORE PIRATE* AND *THE ICE PALACE*

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ABSTRACT

Transition, dynamism, prosperity, freedom, and youth characterize the Roaring Twenties. Women experienced some of the most radical changes in all areas of life, private and public, and fashion reflected this newly gained freedom: shorter dresses, short hair, make-up, deep necklines, and a boyish charm. Francis Scott Fitzgerald's writings mirror this world of contradictions: its enthusiasm and frivolity, its freedom and failures. This article analyzes two of Fitzgerald's earliest short stories, *The Offshore Pirate* and *The Ice Palace*, in order to point out the writer's ambiguous way of representing the flapper, positioned at the crossroads between rebellion and conventionality, emancipation and superficiality. The analysis is mainly based on an evaluation of fashion imagery, a tool into decoding Fitzgerald's manner of constructing femininity.

KEYWORDS: Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Roaring Twenties, femininity, flapper, fashion.

CHICAS A LA MODA: LA CONSTRUCCION DE LA FEMINIDAD EN *THE OFFSHORE PIRATE* Y *THE ICE PALACE* DE FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

RESUMEN

Transición, dinamismo, prosperidad, libertad y juventud son características de los Locos años veinte. Las mujeres experimentaron algunos de los cambios más radicales en todas las áreas de su vida, tanto privada como pública, y la moda reflejó la nueva libertad que alcanzaron: vestidos más cortos, pelo corto, maquillaje, profundos escotes y un aire masculino encantador. Los escritos de Francis Scott Fitzgerald reflejan este mundo contradictorio: su entusiasmo y frivolidad, su libertad y fracasos. Este artículo analiza dos de los primeros relatos breves, *The Offshore Pirate* y *The Ice Palace*, con el objetivo de señalar la ambigüedad del autor al representar a la chica moderna, situada en una encrucijada entre la rebelión y el convencionalismo, la emancipación y la superficialidad. Este estudio se basa fundamentalmente en la evaluación de la imágenes sobre moda para descodificar la forma en que Fitzgerald construye la feminidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Locos años veinte, feminidad, chica a la moda, moda.

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The “Roaring Twenties,” the most common name for the third decade of the twentieth century, describes a brief but intense period of contradictions when the glamour and flamboyance displayed by a restless generation was counterbalanced by racial inequalities, violence, and conflict. This period remains in the world’s imagination as an age of extravagance, freedom, arts and culture, youthful exuberance and an easy-going existence, consumerism and wealth, an age bordered by the Great War and the Great Depression, appearing to modern eyes as elusive and hard to grasp as a dream, or a fantasy. Americans, the victors of the Great War, now living in an economically booming society, thought that they were caught in the midst of a series of natural, technological, social, personal, and moral transformations. This awareness “was based on the extraordinarily rapid accumulation of both new knowledge and new experiences” (Susman 2003, 106). A larger number of people than before were engaged in the adventure of “knowing” more about themselves and the world in various manners: artistic, social, technological, psychological, etc. In such an age suitably characterized by these key-words: “abundance-leisure-consumer-pleasure” (112), both men and women started paying more attention to entertainment, gratification of personal needs and indulgence in pleasures of different kinds. These manifestations of curiosity, freedom, and excess were, without any doubt, the result of a longer process of modernization, industrialization, scientific and economic development that had started in the nineteenth century. However, some of the more radical changes in fashion, entertainment, gender roles and social behavior, in the 1920s, made people mistakenly believe that modernity was born in this period and the previous generations were just too traditional and conservative to be taken into consideration. This is one of the reasons why the third decade of the twentieth century is usually seen as a departure from the traditional Victorian mores, decorum, decency, patriarchal values, and work-ethics, which were gradually replaced by consumerism, materialism, liberation, a *laissez-faire* attitude, and nonconformity to traditional behaviors.

Some of the most visible changes of the 1920s regarded women’s appearance and behavior, creating the impression of a break from the previous ages and a huge step towards freedom. In fact, already in the nineteenth century industrialization and urban development had contributed to women’s emancipation. Feminist movements became more active as women left their domestic circles, took jobs outside the house, contributed to the financial support of the family, were more educated, and started militating for political and social rights. The right to vote was the outcome of a long fight and women eventually participated in the American presidential elections in 1920. Another step in the process of enfranchisement was women’s effort to keep the economy going while men were fighting in the Great War. This active involvement in the social and economic life also contributed to women’s growing awareness of their importance and worth in the public sphere, which led to a change in their behavior, attitude and expectations.

The New Woman reflected these changes that started after the Civil War. She was the woman who wanted to be more independent, self-reliant and educated, she was willing to participate in the social and political life and be unencumbered by child-rearing and household chores. Urbanization, industrialization and the rise of



the consumerist culture contributed to women's emancipation. Statistics are clear in this respect "increasing rates of higher education (in 1870, 21 percent of American college students were female, by 1910, 40 percent); changes in workplace, particularly in burgeoning white-collar fields such as clerical work (2.5 percent female in 1870; dominated by women by 1930); and, in the home, trends toward smaller families, later marriages or even lifelong singlehood, and an increasing acceptability of divorce" (Fleissner 2007, 37-38). The New Woman, therefore, "was more independent than her mother's generation, less reliant on men, and less willing to follow social rules. She rejected domesticity and demanded the same right as men to combine career with family" (Gendzel 2004, 29).

This emancipating environment fomented the appearance of the 1920s woman, defiant and free, who rejected her grandmother's and mother's values and customs. She dressed according to the new fashion, wore short skirts, comfortable clothes, discarded corsets and complicated attires, bobbed her hair, smoked, drank, and danced on the new rhythms of charleston and jazz, drove cars, played sports, and followed the life of the celebrities and movie stars. This new type of woman, the "flapper", replaced the "New Woman" in the post-war years of abundance, consumerism, and entertainment. The name –comical and exotic at the same time– is difficult to define. According to Kenneth Yellis, "the term 'flapper' originated in England as a description of girls of the awkward age, the mid-teens. The awkwardness was meant literally, and a girl who flapped had not yet reached mature, dignified womanhood" (1969, 49). The 1920s woman, embodied in the flapper, was an idealization of youth, energy and change, a symbol of America's modernity, challenging the "Victorian-American conception of sexuality and of the roles of men and women with respect to each other and to society" (47).

During the next decades the flapper benefited from a mixed reception and her emancipation was interpreted in various, sometimes contradictory manners, either as a symbol of women's freedom, or as a representation of further stereotyping and gender discrimination. The women in the 1920s definitely took advantage both of the economic prosperity of their times and the fight for emancipation led by their predecessors, whose behavior and mentalities they now challenged. On the other hand, the flapper was often disregarded by feminists, being considered materialistic and shallow. She was accused of worshipping the "god of entertainment", as she emulated the appearance and behavior of movie stars, taking advantage of a booming fashion and cosmetics market, with cheaper products available to more categories of women. Though winds of change and freedom were in the air, it seems that "during the 1920s, and in spite of the flapper image, the feminist movement weakened. The vote made very little difference to the majority of women. And it certainly did not transform politics as some feminists expected" (Juan Rubio and García Conesa n.p., 6). For working women, the reconciliation between belonging to the private or to the public sphere was strenuous and trying to overcome poverty was a more important issue than gaining more rights. The young generation of the 1920s had different concerns from the previous generation, namely suffragettes. Their interests lay in fashion, pleasure, sexual liberation, automobiles, dancing, smoking, and speakeasies. Since their predecessors had already carried out the difficult fight for



rights, researchers argue that young women had the freedom they wanted and they saw no need to continue fighting: “If young women wanted power and influence over men,” Lois Banner contends, “they could get it by playing standard female roles –by being a temptress on the dance floor or a companion on the gold course. They could drink, they could smoke, they could enjoy sex. Why choose the difficult paths that Susan Anthony and Alice Paul had followed?” (1984, 158).

If the relationship between feminist activism and the new type of woman embodied by the flapper is often contradictory, it cannot be denied that, visually, at least, the flapper is more striking than her predecessors. Therefore, rather than dissecting her qualities or flaws, her involvement in the feminist movement or her rejection of activism, it could be more useful to take her for what she was: an ideal representation of her contradictory and elusive age. The flapper is the first female modern type, just as the Gibson girl¹, her predecessor, is the last of the Victorian types, and both were emulated to a greater or lesser degree by many women. Connected to economic prosperity, the flapper is also an artificial creation of a growing advertising industry that takes advantage of the increasing number of professional women who have their own income, and are willing to spend money for themselves. The flapper’s dress and make-up also signal another change. Women may decide if they want to marry or not and they have fewer children than their mothers and grandmothers. They spend money on comfortable and fashionable clothes that can be purchased from shops, they love entertainment, and they are, in general, more daring and free. Consequently, is the flapper’s image promoted by various media a form of liberation, or of conformity?

Jane Hunter refers to the contradictory representation of women in the 1920s oscillating between symbols of emancipation and superficial dolls: “Historians have differed on how to interpret these various ‘female spectacles,’ with some seeing objectification, others empowerment” (2008, 335). Lois Banner suggests that the growth of the fashion industry damaged women’s newly-acquired freedom transforming them into shallow beings, avid for luxury and concerned about their beauty. “As the clothing and cosmetic industries began their phenomenal growth in the 1920s (a growth that was largely the product of advertising), women were shown as beings for whom fashion, beauty, and sex appeal were the most important concerns in life” (1984, 150). Carolyn Kitch’s approach is more drastic. She considers that

¹ The Gibson girl represents the ideal of feminine beauty in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century America. The name comes from Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944), an illustrator for the famous American publications of that time. The women from Gibson’s illustrations were fragile and sensuous at the same time, suggesting delicacy but also sex-appeal, though not in a vulgar way. The Gibson girl had a large bust and large hips, small waists, long, curly hair, and fashionable attire. These illustrations were meant to depict the beauty of the middle-class American girl and were contemporary with the emergence of the athletic, independent, and rebellious New Woman. The Gibson girl was a delicate blending of health and independence, domesticity and decency. She “was elegant yet approachable and charming, intelligent and capable without making demands of equality” (Boyer Sagert 2010, 2).



“through the flapper image, the new freedom of American women was symbolically reduced to flirting and touching, to exhibitionistic fun” (2001, 131).

The flapper’s fashion, therefore, becomes the focal point of appraisal and criticism, putting forward a conflicting representation of women’s status and identity constructions in the 1920s. Thus, a study of the multiple implications of fashion in gender construction could lead to a better understanding of women’s role and status in the 1920s. The role of clothes in the process of identification is complex and important. According to Elizabeth Wilson, “in all societies the body is ‘dressed’, and everywhere dress and adornment play symbolic, communicative and aesthetic roles” (2003, 3). Clothes transmit information about class, religion, gender, as well as about personal preferences, they may modify the appearance of body², embellish it, correct its flaws, or hide it. By choosing the way in which they dress, people generally comply with the rules and customs of their times, but they also send subtle messages about aspects of their personality that distinguish them from the others: “for both men and women, appearance is a primary mark of identification, a signal of what they consider themselves to be” (Banner 1983, 3). As a social phenomenon, fashion is submitted to the transformations and interests of a particular age, to everything that is modern and new by opposition to the stability and durability of tradition and custom (see Blumer 1968, 342).

Fashion plays an important role in gender construction. Being connected to ornament and ways of embellishing the body, as well as to novelty and change, fashion is more often linked to femininity than to masculinity: “Fashion, like femininity, is marked as the context of the other. Masculinity (especially hegemonic masculinity), by way of contrast, is more serious, changes in slower and subtler ways, and eschews elaborate ornamentation. Masculinity, in Euromodern terms, is unmarked” (Kaiser 2015, 125). In the nineteenth century, for instance, Thornstein Veblen saw women’s fashion as an ornament that complemented man. Woman’s sphere “is within the household, which she should ‘beautify,’ and of which she should be the ‘chief ornament’” (2007, 119). This attitude shows that fashion has often been connected to women’s objectification and obedience to codes that render them sexual objects for men. On the other hand, though, there is also the possibility to transform this “oppressing patriarchal tool” into a weapon, “part of feminist combat for more than 200 years” (Marzel and Dahan-Kalev 2015, 171). It is in this context that the flapper’s costume has often been seen as the most conspicuous symbol of women’s emancipation and desire to construct femininity on bases very different from the previous generations. Women’s fashion in the 1920s promotes a new type of women, unwilling to be constricted or limited in any way:

First and foremost, underwear, whose purpose had been for centuries to design the female body, was left to promote a “natural” body: the corset was discarded and replaced by a chemise or camisole and bloomers. For the first time, women’s

² For instance, corsets and high heels.



legs were seen, with hemlines rising to the knee as dresses became shorter and more fitted. A kind of masculine look, including flattened breasts and hips and short hairstyles, such as the bob cut, was adopted. Thus, abstract feminist ideas of freedom and equality of rights were translated into concrete forms and objects, as women first liberated themselves from constricting fashions and began to wear comfortable clothes. (Marzel and Dahan-Kalev 2015, 177)

Fashion may be seen as a form of liberation, but its association to consumption undermines much of these liberating claims: “For fashion, the child of capitalism, has, like capitalism, a double face” (Wilson 2003, 13). In the 1920s, the rebellion against the restrictive, prim, and proper Victorian dress is clear. Shorter dresses, colorful stockings, lower waistlines, and minimized breasts are in fashion. They contrast with the hourglass figure of the earlier decades. However, as Lois Banner points out, it was also “the decade in which hairdressing and cosmetic industries fully came into their own. Increased liberation had occurred, but only at the cost of the further commercialization of beauty” (1983, 16). Advertisements, as well as movies and movie stars, promoted the representation of a woman who was sexually freed, athletic, sensuous, and daring. She wore comfortable clothes which celebrated a life of consumption, pleasure and superficiality. The problem is that this representation is elusive, ambiguous, and conflicting. Undoubtedly, it remains the embodiment of rebellion and audacity, beauty and sensuality, health and youth, but, at the same time, it became a symbol of consumption and superficiality. It reminds one of a short-lived butterfly, looking for immediate pleasure and satisfaction, but secretly desiring stability through a good marriage. Interestingly enough, the great figures of the age, the stars of silent movies –from the childish Mary Pickford to Theda Barra, or Gloria Swanson, the vamps and the “femmes fatales” of the time– were idolized and imitated by other women because of the femininity types they re-presented. Nowadays, a new dimension can be added to our understanding of what exactly they symbolized. Molly Haskell suggests that the stars of silent movies remain fictional constructs forever elusive and muted: “by definition, silent film is a medium in which women can be seen but not heard. The conversational nuances of an intelligent woman can hardly be conveyed in a one-sentence title; an emancipation proclamation cannot be delivered in pantomime” (1974, 76). This can be extended to the manner in which women saw themselves, were seen and were represented in other 1920s media. The woman of this decade is the first modern feminine type, but like the women from previous ages she remains a voiceless and mysterious figure who transmits contrasting messages and is seen primarily through men’s eyes.

Literature was one of those media that made use of the image of the liberated woman, but the women writers of the time were less celebrated than the female characters depicted by more famous male writers. Though the presence of women on the literary market of the time was not negligible, “when it came to serious women’s fiction, the decade, according to literary historians, left us with little to celebrate” (Lutes 2012, 422). The novels written by women writers enjoyed public success, but “Pulitzer Prizes and blockbuster sales created contemporary buzz but did not guarantee literary staying power; indeed, women writers’ ability to attract



publicity could be and was turned against them, cited as a sign of their lack of artistic integrity. The enshrinement of high literary modernism as the most important literary movement of the early twentieth century helped to make women's novels of the 1920s seem unimportant" (422-423). The woman remains in the reader's mind as a reflection mediated by the gaze of the acclaimed male writers of the Roaring Twenties, while real women did not have so many opportunities to become free and emancipated in a world still dominated by men.

Such mediated reflections are the female characters in Francis Scott Fitzgerald's writings. They are reflections of the writer's imagination whom most readers and critics take as epitomes of their age. Rena Sanderson highlights Fitzgerald's role in promoting the flapper as a symbol of the Roaring Twenties:

F. Scott Fitzgerald is best known as a chronicler of the 1920s and as the writer who, more than any other, identified, delineated, and popularized the female representative of that era, the flapper. Though it is an overstatement to say that Fitzgerald created the flapper, he did, with considerable assistance from his wife Zelda, offer the public an image of a modern young woman who was spoiled, sexually liberated, self-centered, fun-loving, and magnetic. In Fitzgerald's mind, this young woman represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and liberation, and his earliest writings enthusiastically present her as an embodiment of these new values. (2002, 143)

Many of his female characters are inspired by his wife, Zelda, who, just like the flapper, remains a contradictory image in the memory of posterity. Flamboyant and rebellious, Zelda is, at once, the muse and the nuisance, the wife and the mother, the flapper and the mad woman, embodying a series of more or less conventional female types. Although she was a remarkable woman and a talented artist, she is remembered more as Fitzgerald's wife, always a second fiddle, or a pretty ornament.

Just like Zelda, the characters of Fitzgerald's fiction reflect the difficult situation of the Roaring Twenties' women. It is undeniable that the writer promoted the image of the modern woman, his young flappers becoming mirrors of the age. "Throughout many of his earliest stories –read by thousands of women– many golden girls, popular daughters, and debutantes adopt the deportment, fashions, and attitudes of the flapper and sprinkle the magic dust of their high spirits. In spreading these images, Fitzgerald helped to guide women's modernization" (Sanderson 2002, 146). On the other hand, the flappers' rebellion is rarely successful, either disillusionment or conventional marriage being the outcome of most of their adventures, which reveals Fitzgerald's ambivalence towards women's emancipation. This contradiction has been noticed by Sanderson: "the public mistakenly assumed that Fitzgerald, whose early success was tied to the flapper, necessarily endorsed her" (143). If the flappers are to be seen as the symbol of modernity, it means that this modernity stirs uneasiness and conflict in a society still too conventional to fully embrace it.

The Offshore Pirate and *The Ice Palace*, two short stories included in *Flappers and Philosophers*, Fitzgerald's first collection was published in 1920, at the dawn of the Roaring Twenties. The stories focus on the initiating adventures of Ardita



Farnam and Sally Carrol, two very young flappers, only nineteen years old. After a brief period of rebellion, their romantic illusions make them adopt a conventional life style.

Based on the opposition North / South, industrialization and modernism / tradition and nostalgia, masculine / feminine, *The Ice Palace* is apparently a failed romance. It presents the infatuation of Sally Carrol, a very young Southern woman, whose dream is to marry a Northerner and leave the lazy South for a life of adventure. Her prospective marriage with the Northerner Harry Bellamy is preceded by a visit to his home, an unnamed Northern town, where her dreams and illusions are shattered by cold attitudes and freezing weather. After getting lost and almost dying in an Ice Palace, she decides to go back home, reappraising the tranquility of the Southern life.

The two commanding symbols of the short story are the Southern cemetery and the Ice Palace, an audacious wonder of modern technology, the pride of Henry Bellamy and his townsfolk. The former is often visited by Sally Carrol who is drawn to the tomb of Margery Lee, a pre-Civil War belle, and that of the unknown and unnamed Confederate soldiers. The story is organized around these two symbols which create the contrast between the traditional, warm (in terms of weather and human contact), easy-going, nostalgic, relying on local mythologies and identity South and the masculine, modern, cold and impersonal North. Sally Carrol feels attached to the myths and traditions of her home, secure and rooted as she is in her sense of identity and belonging. The Southern cemetery and the two images that it evokes – the tomb of Margery Lee, a Southern belle, and the tomb of the unknown Confederate soldiers, become sites of memory, or “memorials” which “encouraged in her a loyalty to the idealized, collective and provincial mythologies expressed within these constructs” (Ullrich 1999, 420). Opposed to the values represented by the Southern cemetery, the Ice Palace is “an impressive example of Gilded Age can-do work ethic. ... a sign of the community’s enterprising commitment to technology and science” (424).

Fashion images, though not extremely numerous, subtly complement these two poles and suggest women’s complicated situation in the 1920s, mesmerized as they were by the fresh promises of the modern age, dreaming of change, but still imprisoned by a conservative mentality. Through small details connected to clothes and appearance, more profound implications regarding the construction of femininity in the Old and the New South are suggested. Sally Carrol is a young woman who wants to embrace modernity, but who is also drawn to the past and to what it represents for her region. The two Southern ladies, Sally Carrol and Margery Lee, actually embody two feminine types of a particular age: Sally Carrol is the modern “flapper” and Margery Lee is the Old South “belle”. Sally Carrol is a young woman with “bob corn-colored hair” (Fitzgerald 1998, 36), her “fluffy curls” rippling in the “savory breeze” (38). Just like her friends, she wears make-up, smokes, and enjoys “being swum with, and danced with and made love to in the flower-filled summery evenings” (36). The other woman, Margery Lee, is portrayed only as a figment of Sally Carrol’s imagination: “She was dark, I think; and she always wore her hair with a ribbon in it, and gorgeous hoop-skirts of alice blue



and old rose” (40). By imagining Margery dark haired and wearing hoop skirts, the blonde and modern Sally Carrol tries to differentiate herself from the belle of old. Thus, there is an apparent contrast between the young flapper and the belle of the past which illustrates the old/new, the traditional/ modern dichotomies. The connections are more telling than the differences, which raises the question whether women were (allowed to be) really emancipated in the 1920s. More precisely, the rose color, which appears in the description of both women –Margery’s “old rose” dress complementing Sally Carrol’s “rose-littered sunbonnet” (36)– becomes a sort of universal, feminine, delicate ground, bringing these two feminine types closer than expected. Sally Carroll has a very vague representation of Margery Lee, whom she associates with the traditional images of the Southern belle: beautiful, delicate, and elegant. But both women are also extremely feminine, sensitive, and benevolent. The past and the present, hopeful expectations for the future and a sense of rootedness and identity are made obvious by frequent references to the contrast between the old and the new: the energy and the youth of the nineteen-year old Sally versus the fifty-two year old sill on which she rests her chin, the “ancient Ford” (35), and the old cemetery opposed to the new Ice Palace, “the battered old library at home, with her father’s huge medical books, and the oilpaintings of her three great-uncles, and the old couch that had been mended up for forty-five years” (44). They all contrast, in Sally Carrol’s mind, with the library in Harry Bellamy’s home: “simply a room with a lot of fairly expensive things in it that all looked about fifteen years old” (44).

Margery Lee is an image of the past, a feminine ideal of the mid-nineteenth century known as the “Southern belle,” an idealized representation of Southern womanhood, symbol of purity, whiteness and domesticity gravitating around the white plantation owner, “adorning” his household, and functioning as an “angel in the house,” the only domain of her limited authority. These Southern women’s “hopes, dreams, and fantasies center on men and the family. If unmarried, they dream about the man they will marry. If married with children, they encourage their daughters to dream those dreams of love and marriage” (Tracy 1995, 51). The “belle” was a literary symbol, created by pro-slavery supporters and surviving in the post-Civil War period in order to reinforce the authority of the white man: “the existence of the belle was a tribute to the power, and the self-conceit, of the higher classes within the South: it reaffirmed patriarchy” (Wagner-Martin 2004, 2). Sally Carrol is nostalgically fond of this image of womanhood, but she tries to detach herself from this traditional representation by dreaming to marry a Northerner because, in her mind, such a marriage would allow her to “go to places and see people. I want my mind to grow. I want to live where things happen on a big scale” (Fitzgerald 1998, 38). Her desire to leave the safety of her home is an attempt to distance herself from what Margery Lee actually represents in terms of gender roles. She wants to have a modern, urban life, and more freedom.

In the second part of the story, Sally’s dreams come true. She travels north to visit her fiancée, but she is dismayed by the terrible cold –a constant torment for a girl born in a warmer climate– and also by the cold behavior of the Northerners whom she cannot understand. Upon her arrival, the first woman she meets is her future sister-in-law, Myra, “a listless lady with flaxen hair under a fur automobile



cap. Almost immediately Sally Carrol thought of her as vaguely Scandinavian” (43). This first impression places Myra in a sort of opposition that will be enhanced later: Sally Carrol, whose fluffy curls are covered with a rose bonnet, and Myra, another blonde, but with flaxen hair covered by a fur cap. One is delicate and elegant and the other is dull and comfortably dressed. They appear to be almost mirror-representations of summer and winter. This contrast is later emphasized when Sally Carrol comes to know Myra better. The latter “seemed the essence of spiritless conventionality. Her conversation was so utterly devoid of personality that Sally Carrol, who came from a country where a certain amount of charm and assurance could be taken for granted in the women, was inclined to despise her” (49). Sally expected urban sophistication and a more modern attitude in women, but she sees a starker gender division and less liberty than in her provincial, Southern town: “‘If those women aren’t beautiful,’ she thought, ‘they’re nothing. They just fade out when you look at them. They’re glorified domestics. Men are the center of every mixed group’” (49). Sally Carrol feels out of place in this male-centered society. She even feels marginalized by her future family and her behavior is snubbed: “She knew also that Harry’s mother disapproved of her bobbed hair; and she had never dared smoke down-stairs after that first day when Mrs. Bellamy had come into the library sniffing violently” (50). This obviously leads to a change in her behavior, as she tries to comply with the attitudes of the majority feeling that she is expected to play a part rather than be herself.

Dress and accessories subtly underline the Northerners’ cold attitudes and Sally Carrol’s disappointment. Welcomed by a “faintly familiar ice-cold face” (42) instead of the warm kisses shared with Harry when he visited her back home, Sally Carrol’s physical connection to her fiancé is almost always hampered by heavy, thick clothes that function as a sort of barrier underlining the stiffness and the frigid attitudes of her Northern family-to-be. One can talk about fur coats, complicated flannel caps, people bundled in sheepskin, undistinguishable from one another, mittens and gloves that prevent hands from touching, muffled figures communicating with difficulty. The barrier formed by clothes is an indication of the emotional barrier between the Southern woman and the Northerners she meets, her fiancée included. This limit is also a subtle way of undermining the Northerners’ claims at modernity. They are depicted as more conventional and less modern, despite their adoration of modernity and their appraisal that they live in a new town, which goes back only three generations since its foundation.

When Sally gets lost in the Ice Palace and almost freezes to death, she hallucinates that Margery Lee comes to rescue her: “‘Why, it’s Margery Lee,’ she crooned softly to herself. ‘I knew you’d come.’ It really was Margery Lee, and she was just as Sally Carrol had known she would be, with a young, white brow, and wide, welcoming eyes, and a hoop-skirt of some soft material that was quite comforting to rest on” (57). The return to a familiar representation is comforting, just as the soft material she imagines is soothing in comparison to the thick furs, sheepskin, and flannels. The belle, initially a blurred representation of an old world on which Sally ponders with nostalgia though not with yearning, becomes a more vivid image of Sally’s future marked by the need to return home and discard the search for



modernity and the North. In fact, when saved by Margery Lee, Sally Carrol finally accepts who she is, a Southern belle, part of a “tradition that stretched back before the confederacy, and that enchanted and hypnotized men for a century, permanent embodiments of a dream of beauty and youth and the romantic aspiration of the aggressive male” (Holman 1982, 61). Feminine, but resilient and determined, Sally Carrol becomes a “reincarnation of an archetypal predecessor,” suggesting that, “the South achieves perpetuity through empathy, a sharp contrast to the North’s preservation through refrigeration. As concomitant, Southern life-in death represented by Sally Carrol, the resurrected antebellum woman opposes Northern death-in life represented by Harry Bellamy, the kiss of death” (Kuehl 1982, 178). Sally Carrol rejects the control that Harry wants to exert on her and returns home, choosing freedom and tradition.

A foreshadowing of this outcome is the lovers’ first serious quarrel about an unknown man’s clothes, which generate Harry’s mean comments about the Southerners. At first, they are both instantly amused when they see a man with baggy trousers: “‘Reckon that’s one of us,’ she laughed. ‘He must be a Southerner, judging by those trousers,’ suggested Harry mischievously” (Fitzgerald 1998, 51). The humorous atmosphere is soon destroyed by an unexpected outburst from Harry: “‘Those damn Southerners!’” (51). He continues with another disrespectful, racist remark: “‘I’m sorry, dear,’ said Harry, malignantly apologetic, ‘but you know what I think of them. They’re sort of—sort of degenerates— not at all like the old Southerners. They’ve lived so long down there with all the colored people that they’ve gotten lazy and shiftless. ... ‘Oh, I know. They’re all right when they come North to college, but of all the hangdog, ill-dressed, slovenly lot I ever saw, a hunch of small-town Southerners are the worst!’” (51).

Harry proves to be not just “insecure about his own background” (Taniyama 311) as he “still feels the conqueror’s contempt for the South” (Taniyama 311), but also a racist whose “disapproval of the South is not a critique of the stark racism that has prevailed there in the form of extrajudicial lynchings of African-Americans or legal segregation, but, rather, of what he perceives as the South’s degeneracy” (Taniyama 2015, 311), namely the closeness to the black population. It is strange, though, that Harry makes such comments in front of the woman he loves, a Southerner herself. Taniyama analyzes Harry’s possible reasons: “Is Harry’s anger indirectly aimed at Sally or has he accepted her as someone who has renounced the South, having agreed to marry him and come North, and therefore someone he can share his intimate views with?” (311-312). According to Taniyama, both suppositions may be true. Clearly, for Harry, appearance seems to be of utmost importance while Sally Carrol, a warmer and kinder spirit, does not want to mock or criticize people based on appearances, she observes them with no trace of malice. Ullrich goes even further and considers Harry’s “vitriolic and over-determined reaction” a form of self-destruction. “His preoccupation with ethnic origins and social acceptance generates profound self-doubt, an affliction that corrodes even his vision of his prospective spouse” (1999, 430).

Sally Carrol’s return to her Southern hometown should not be seen as a renunciation of modernity in order to embrace a more traditional role. Her desire



to break free and experience new adventures is not a critique of the South, but a typical attitude of the Jazz Age flapper who wants to break from “the tribe” (Fleissner 2007, 49), separate herself from the traditions of her community, and discard the conventional gender roles. Sally Carrol’s journey North becomes an initiating quest into a more profound understanding of what the world in which she lives is capable of offering her in terms of emancipation and personal development. The idea of initiation is underlined by her symbolic death in the Ice Palace: “It was an icy breath of death; it was rolling down low across the land to clutch her” (Fitzgerald 1998, 56), after she got lost in the labyrinth of corridors. At this point the question arises whether the initiation is indeed fulfilled. Edwin Moses, who sees Sally Carrol as essentially passive, conditioned by the places in which she finds herself (1974, 12), considers that her quest failed: “But the fact that Sally Carrol (or anyone else) has to reject the Ice Palace to save herself does not mean that the South represents an ideal existence. At the end of the story she has not grown: the concluding scene is a carefully fashioned recapitulation of the opening one” (13). She left the South because she considered it a place stuck in time, where nothing happens, but eventually returns to that place, accepting this passivity because there are no other choices. Moses adds: “although the South is the wiser choice if one has to choose, what is really needed is a synthesis of the feminine qualities of the South and the masculine ones of the North. But Sally Carrol is hardly the girl to achieve such a synthesis. It is an ideal, after all, which better Fitzgerald characters than she never achieved” (13-14).

On the other hand, though, the light, warm and tranquil atmosphere of the ending is hardly a sign of total failure. Indeed, the ending repeats, to a certain extent, the beginning, with the provision that Sally Carrol is calmer and more peaceful after her return. Though she dreamt about emancipation and adventure, she tried to achieve this goal by following a traditional path. She considers marriage a form of advancement. The failure of the romance is a subtle suggestion that marriage should not be considered a step towards liberation, and marrying Bellamy would have given Sally Carrol even less freedom.

A different reading of the ending is offered by David Ullrich, who does not see her quest as a failed one: “Sally Carrol’s final position portrays a modernist woman isolated from every society she has inhabited. Within this no-win situation she flatly states ‘Expect to die any minute’” (1999, 433). Sally Carrol’s deliberate and concluding self-appraisal – “‘Hate to move. But I reckon so’ – indicates an existential awareness that real growth is inevitable and painful (433).

I would go even further and consider the ending a critique of the limiting possibilities women had in the 1920s (as well as in the previous ages, for that matter). Sally Carrol becomes the symbol of the Roaring Twenties, an age of emancipation, more rights and a wider array of choices. Margery Lee, the Confederate belle, is a token of women’s resilience during the Civil War. They both suggest that women demonstrated, time and again, their worth and strengths. Their hopes and dreams were constantly scorned and devalued, as men considered that all women wanted and needed was a comfortable life and superficial pleasures. The choices women had as active social actors remained limited in a world dominated by men, therefore women were still stuck in old conventions and traditional patterns of behavior. This



is the reason why, at the end of the story, Sally Carrol does nothing because there is nothing she can actually do. Her failure is not caused by her weakness, or flaws, but by society, at large.

Sally Carrol embodies, to a certain extent, Zelda Fitzgerald's high expectations from her marriage to Fitzgerald and moving up North. Obsessed with Zelda, Fitzgerald seems to have created in his mind "some *Saturday Evening Post* image of the smiling, modest housewife" (Wagner-Martin 2004, 43), while Zelda refused this role being, instead, a vivacious, fun-loving, flirting woman. Both for Zelda and for Sally Carrol, the character in this short story, marrying a famous Northerner was not only the chance to marry the man she loved, but also the hope of climbing the stairs of celebrity:

Of the men who pressed her to marry, and there was at least one suitor who was sure he could convince her to marry him rather than Fitzgerald, Scott was the most glamorous in that he could take her away from her history and her home. There was no question that she loved him, but she had loved other men. Marrying Scott had another advantage: he might also provide a route to some kind of fame and career for her. She had a better chance of being discovered, of finding a way to the stage or to film, living in New York than she did in sleepy Montgomery. And she had no idea how much she would miss her home place. (44)

But just like Sally Carrol's hopes, Zelda's expectations of the North and marriage, as a step towards emancipation and advancement, remained unfulfilled and her romantic illusions were shattered.

Another story centered on a flapper's strange love story is *The Offshore Pirate*. The young and rebellious Ardita Farnam rejects any form of limitation, any piece of advice, and any suggestion from her old uncle, adopting the typical behavior of an unrestrained and spoiled child. Her youth, however, is not only the source of her rebellion, but also her weakness, because she is easily tricked by her uncle to fall in love with the suitor he chose for her—a man of their own social class, disguised as a poor jazz player who acts as a pirate. The uncle uses to his advantage Ardita's youth and lack of experience, knowing full well that his niece will never accept to meet a respectable and rich American, but will be drawn to a poor man, a criminal, simply because he is not acceptable for her family. In fact, he uses Ardita's rebellion against her and subtly draws her to conform to the expectations of her class and race.

Just like the protagonist of *The Ice Palace*, Ardita has a certain representation of love, which will be dismantled at the end of the story. "It is ironic that the vehicle through which romantic disillusion is expressed is a young girl for, if ever there is a happy, golden time of life in Fitzgerald's fiction, it is childhood and adolescence" (Elstein 1979, 70). Sally Carrol goes through a process of initiation, at the end of which the hopeful serenity of the beginning is replaced by an acceptance of failure and the impossibility to fulfill her dreams. Ardita's rebellion is stifled not by force, but by a ruse through which her uncle makes her conform to his expectations. Her rebellion is undermined by the innocence and inexperience of youth, and her final conformity enhances the fact that society is not as modern and open-minded as it



appears. Restrictions of class, race and gender still operate. According to Jared Griffin, “Ardita Farnam, the heroine, reflects the anxiety for independence that many of Fitzgerald’s characters feel in this Lost Generation” (2011, 323). Griffin acknowledges the fact that there is more to this short story than amusement, which is also the main element characterizing the Jazz Age. The focus on amusement cannot be denied: a fairy-tale environment, sailing the blue tropical sea on a private yacht, stopping on a desert island-paradise, Jazz music and dancing, fun and joy and no real danger. Even the hijacking of Ardita’s yacht and her kidnapping by Curtis Carlyle and the six African-American jazz players turned into pirates is a mere trick, Carlyle being, in fact, the rich Toby Moreland, the man she had refused to meet simply because he was chosen by her uncle. Unlike *The Ice Palace*, the ending is happy as Ardita, already in love with Curtis-Toby, is not enraged by the trick played on her, she kisses her lover and accepts the ruse.

However, a closer reading reveals more than a light romance and Ardita’s rebellion highlights her desire to break free from conventions, enjoy the emancipating times and the air of modernity, and cross the boundaries of class and conventionality. The happy-ending is, in a way, a failure to fully embrace modernity and rebellion as Ardita succumbs to romance. As young as Sally Carrol (nineteen years old), Ardita does not have the experience to avoid the trap set by older, more experienced men and, probably, not even the courage to give up a comfortable life. Just like in the previously analyzed story, the fashion imagery points to the difficulty of constructing modern femininity, torn between rebellion and conformity, emancipation and obedience.

The story begins with a series of metaphors that foreshadow a young feminine presence:

This unlikely story begins on a sea that was a blue dream, as colorful as blue-silk stockings, and beneath a sky as blue as the irises of children. From the western half of the sky the sun was shying little golden disks at the sea—if you gazed intently enough you could see them skip from wave tip to wave tip until they joined a broad collar of golden coin that was collecting half a mile out and would eventually be a dazzling sunset. (Fitzgerald 1998, 5)

The color of the sky is later repeated in the “blue satin slippers” worn by Ardita, the children’s irises foreshadow Ardita’s youth, innocence, and childish behavior, and the golden collar of the sunset is reflected in her yellow hair. Not a very common way of describing the skies and seas, the fashion imagery is an urban, intellectual manner of characterizing nature and reflects the way in which educated, rich, townfolk might look at it. The rich fabrics and materials (silk, satin, gold) intensify the urban outlook, turning nature into a luxury commodity. Ardita, whose description corresponds chromatically to nature, becomes a luxury commodity herself, an object transacted between two men: an older caretaker (her uncle) and a younger suitor. Ardita is kept away from this secret business transaction, in a safe and comfortable space, out of harm’s way, reduced to the traditional gender role of ornament. Her carelessness, suggested by her first appearance in the story, indicates her marginalized position as a woman: “Her feet, stockingless, and adorned rather



than clad in blue-satin slippers which swung nonchalantly from her ties, were perched on the arm of a settee adjoining the one she occupied” (5). The America of the 1920s, despite its flappers and working women displaying a freedom of behavior unheard of before, is not, Fitzgerald subtly implies, as far from the traditional view of women (especially rich women). Women are still their husbands’ ornaments.

Men’s authorities over Ardita, the rebellious child, and, by extension, the still limited emancipation of women in the 1920s, are also suggested by the imagery connected to dress and appearance. Commenting on the color scheme at the beginning of the story, Jared Griffin foregrounds the importance of whiteness and masculinity that undermine the modern spirit brought in by Ardita’s attitude:

Consider again Fitzgerald’s opening paragraphs, scripted to contrast romantic imagery and the modern American woman. The colors that Fitzgerald uses and their anatomical counterparts that he ascribes them—blue and eyes, yellow and hair, white and an epidermal layer (paint, cloth, and skin)—illuminate the conventional features of an idealized white race. These images denote physical characteristics of what were thought of as the purest of whites—ivory-skinned, blue-eyed, blond-haired Aryans. Despite, then, the modernistic literary and sexual revolutions taking place with the representation of a seemingly liberated Ardita, the whiteness of the conservative, elder Farnam is maintained. (2011, 327)

Griffin’s assertion is also supported by the manner in which the two rich white men, the uncle and Toby, are depicted. Old Farnam has “orderly gray hair” and is “clad in a white-flannel suit” (Fitzgerald 1998, 5), these elements are in accordance with the image of a man of authority and means. Curtis Carlyle—Toby Moreland’s portrait seems a combination between a classical statue and an American athlete: “he was a young man with a scornful mouth and the bright blue eyes of a healthy baby set in a dark sensitive face. His hair was pitch black, damp and curly—the hair of a Grecian statue gone brunette. He was trimly built, trimly dressed, and graceful as an agile quarter-back” (10). Curtis—Toby’s appeal is enhanced by the tinge of danger and non-conformity underlined by his pirate persona and the heartfelt story about poverty and hardships he tells Ardita who is drawn to both his attractiveness and the rebellious, unconventional role he temporarily plays. The two men’s elegance is highlighted by the contrast to the six African-Americans: “They seemed to be uniformly dressed in some sort of blue costume ornamented with dust, mud, and tatters; over the shoulder of each was slung a small, heavy-looking white sack, and under their arms they carried large black cases apparently containing musical instruments” (11). These three male images: the elderly wise caretaker, the Prince Charming, and the funny, lower class (often racially distinct) foils to the hero seem to be taken out of a fairytale romance. But this should not make anyone forget that the authority of the patriarchal system and white supremacy depend on a strict and conservative separation of masculine and feminine gender roles, as well as on stark divisions of class and race, clearly suggested in the story by the chromatic elements, costumes, and physical depictions.

Ardita’s behavior, deemed “unbearable,” “selfish, spoiled, uncontrolled, disagreeable, impossible” (8) by her uncle, can also be seen as a form of self-protection



and survival. In her account to Carlyle, some stories from the past are revealed. Ardita's rebellion is the result of a form of depression caused by her family who tried to marry her off. After going through a phase in which she thought that life was not worth living, she discovered "courage," which, for her, meant "just to live as I liked always and to die in my own way" (24). Ardita's aggressive attitude towards her family can be translated into an attempt to take control of her life and avoid the dullness of conventional gender roles and proper living imposed on her by her family. Her attitude is not a superficial whim of a rich kid, but a desperate attempt to remain young and free, to avoid limitations and escape control: "courage to me meant ploughing through that dull gray mist that comes down on life –not only over-riding people and circumstances but over-riding the bleakness of living. A sort of insistence on the value of life and the worth of transient things" (24).

When Ardita invites Carlyle to dance on the jazz music played by the band of African-Americans, the readers witness a rare moment of synergy and union across gender, class, and race:

Over across the silver lake the figures of the negroes writhed and squirmed in the moonlight, like acrobats who, having been too long inactive, must go through their tricks from sheer surplus energy. In single file they marched, weaving in concentric circles, now with their heads thrown back, now bent over their instruments like piping fauns. And from trombone and saxophone ceaselessly whined a blended melody, sometimes riotous and jubilant, sometimes haunting and plaintive as a death-dance from the Congo's heart. 'Let's dance!' cried Ardita. 'I can't sit still with that perfect jazz going on.' Taking her hand he led her out into a broad stretch of hard sandy soil that the moon flooded with great splendor. (28)

This union is prompted by the black musicians who start playing the instruments, not by the white lovers. Jazz music, which gave its name to the Roaring Twenties, was, at that time, a novelty. Linda De Roche characterizes the Roaring Twenties using jazz as a symbol of modernity:

Some called it the Roaring Twenties, but "jazz," evoking both a type of modern music that meshed African-American with European traditions and a slang term, probably derived from Creole patois referring to strenuous activity, to quick-paced excitement, especially connected to sexual activity, captured precisely the era's tone. Used as a verb –"to jazz up" or "to jazz around"– or as a noun –"all that jazz," bright young things were right on trend. The word flouted conventions and expressed all the self-conscious indifference of a new generation to tired, outmoded standards that a world war and advances in technology had made to seem irrelevant. It was new, it was modern, and to its syncopated rhythms and improvised riffs, the twentieth century would finally spring to life. (2015, xvii)

The band's music is riotous, jubilant, haunting and plaintiff at the same time and the reference to the "death-dance from the Congo's heart" is loaded with the memory of the slave past of America and the racism and segregation that were still plaguing the twentieth century. Jazz brings everyone together, but it is a dream of union that dissipates when the music stops:



They floated out like drifting moths under the rich hazy light, and as the fantastic symphony wept and exulted and wavered and despaired Ardita's last sense of reality dropped away, and she abandoned her imagination to the dreamy summer scents of tropical flowers and the infinite starry spaces overhead, feeling that if she opened her eyes it would be to find herself dancing with a ghost in a land created by her own fancy. (Fitzgerald 1998, 28)

Jared Griffin connects the dance moment with the conciliating ending, but even if the dance appears to unite the old and the young, the white and the nonwhite, submission/obedience and rebellion, a real union of spheres is not possible: "Her temptation by the jazz music calls on a union between these spheres, but they cannot ultimately be joined because racial discourse will not allow it" (2011, 331).

The ending of the short story is as conventional as any fairy tale: the truth is revealed and the young woman kisses her Prince Charming. Conventions and rules are reinforced, races and classes separated, men and women confined to their prescribed roles. As in any fairytale, we do not know what lies beyond that kiss, how their married life will be and what will become of Ardita's courage and rebellion.

The exploration of dress and fashion imagery in the two short stories, *The Ice Palace* and *The Offshore Pirate*, reveals challenging constructions of femininity at the crossroads between modernity and conventionality. Both Sally Carrol and Ardita Farnam are identified as flappers, they are courageous, rebellious and self-assertive, but their initiating journeys lead them to outcomes they did not expect. While Sally Carrol is disillusioned after her contact with the modern North, Ardita ends up in a conventional relationship she had tried so hard to shun. Are they simple-minded, superficial rich children or are they women in search of emancipation and defeated by a conventional society? The answer is ambiguous because the flapper, a symbol of youth, is also ambiguous. The flapper's association with youth is both a mirror of liberation and modernity and a weakness connected to the transience of innocence and youth. Similarly, initiation is a necessary stage, but it implies growing up and confronting failure, pain, or resignation. In other words, the flapper is either expected to remain forever young, which is an impossible dream, or grow old and become conventional. "Flapperdom," therefore, is just a brief period in which emancipation and rebellion are tolerated simply because they are seen as mere whims of capricious children. However, women are expected to grow more conventional with age. Zelda, often represented in Fitzgerald's fiction, was such a flapper who turned into a mother and wife. "Zelda is for her public the new flapper grown up. ... One of the popular essays published under Fitzgerald's name, but written by Zelda, states that flapperdom is a necessary brief period in a young woman's development that will better prepare her to be safely settled as wife and mother" (Prigozy 2002, 7). Zelda's words are not a dismissal of the importance of the flapper, but a bitter reflection on the still difficult situation of women who, after having tasted freedom, are forced into conformity.

The transformations in women's fashion in the 1920s, mainly reflected in the length of the dress, the manner in which they outlined the body, hairstyles and make-up, had such a great visual impact that they seemed to suggest a great



breakthrough in women's status and roles in society. Behavior and aspect, however, should not be confused with rights and freedom. Indeed, the women of the 1920s benefited from the emancipation strife of their predecessors, they had more rights, were educated in larger numbers and joined the workforce to a greater extent. On the other hand, though, the age was frayed with contradictions and the rebellious flapper eventually fell into the old stereotype connecting women with sensuality and eroticism. She was often objectified as a beautiful ornament and her dreams still seemed to be associated to marriage and domesticity. The fact that the number of married women in the workforce almost doubled from the beginning of the century (5.6%) to 1930 (11.7%) (see Banner 1984, 160) did not mean that the conflict between career and marriage was easily managed by women. Discrimination against women at the workplace or lack of support for their careers from their own husbands still existed.

In this context, the flapper appears more as a dream of freedom, an illusion of youth, and Fitzgerald's works underline the ambiguity of this representation which also reflects Fitzgerald's own conflicting ideas about women and their roles in society. Though he is one of those writers whose psychological exploration of women is remarkable, he was "both fascinated and disturbed by women and by the changing distribution of power between the sexes" (Sanderson 2002, 144). His writings encapsulate the duality transmitted by the flapper's image, the fascination and the conflict, the rebellion and the sweetness involved in it, allowing for multiple and nuanced interpretations of a fascinating decade in American culture.

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PRINCESS ELIZABETH BIBESCO: A NOVELIST OF THE 1920S

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ABSTRACT

Princess Elizabeth Bibesco (1897-1945) was the daughter of Sir Herbert Henry Asquith, Prime Minister of Great Britain between 1908 and 1916, and wife of Prince Antoine Bibesco (1878-1951). During the 1920s Bibesco published two novels *The Fir and the Palm* and *There Is No Return* which include her into the same spiritual family as the literary impressionists of the time. Critics did not pay too much attention to this novelist of the 1920s who holds, however, a singular place in the literary life of the time. This paper is a close reading of Bibesco's novels from the 1920 which proves her indebtedness to modernism and literary impressionism.

KEYWORDS: Elizabeth Bibesco, literary impressionism, novel, psychology, style, paradox.

LA PRINCESA ELIZABETH BIBESCO: UNA NOVELISTA DE LA DÉCADA DE LOS AÑOS VEINTE

RESUMEN

La princesa Elizabeth Bibesco (1897-1945) era la hija de Sir Herbert Henry Asquith, Primer Ministro del Reino Unido entre 1908 y 1916, y la esposa del príncipe Antoine Bibesco (1878-1951). Durante la década de los años veinte Bibesco publicó dos novelas *The Fir and the Palm* y *There Is No Return*, que la sitúan en la misma familia espiritual que los impresionistas de su tiempo. La crítica no prestó demasiada atención a esta novelista de los años veinte, que, sin embargo, ocupó un lugar especial en la vida literaria de su tiempo. Este trabajo consiste en una lectura detallada de las novelas de Bibesco que muestra su deuda con el modernismo y el impresionismo literario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Elizabeth Bibesco, impresionismo literario, novela, psicología, estilo, paradoja.

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Elizabeth Bibesco (1897-1945) was born in an illustrious family of the British aristocracy. Her father, Herbert Asquith, was Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1908 till 1916. Her mother, Margot Asquith, was a well-known socialite of in between wars Britain. In 1919 she got married to Antoine Bibesco (1878-1951) who at that time was Romania's diplomatic representative in London. Proust writes in *Patiches et mélanges*: "Miss Asquith who was probably the most intelligent of all and looked like one of those beautiful figures from the frescoes one can see in Italy, got married to Prince Antoine Bibesco who had been the idol of those where he had lived. The wedding was very popular and there were cheers from everywhere" (1919, 35).¹ It was not a happy marriage. The age difference as well as Bibesco's sexual preferences² finally made Elizabeth look for consolation in other men's arms³ or in alcohol.

Elizabeth seconded her husband in his diplomatic missions in Madrid and Washington DC. In 1939, when World War II broke out, the Bibescos were in Romania. Romania joined the Axis (the alliance of Germany and Italy) hoping to get back the territories ceded to the Soviet Union in 1940. On 10 February 1941 Great Britain cut its diplomatic relations with Romania and on 6 December 1941 it declared war on Romania. Elizabeth Bibesco's daughter, Priscilla Bibesco, left Romania and, according to Anita Leslie, she hitchhiked through Europe and finally reached Lebanon where she worked as a journalist (See Blow 2004). It was a cover up job for her affiliation with the Secret Service. It was only at the end of World War II that she could reach Britain by ship and be reunited with Margot Asquith, her grand-mother, who died shortly afterwards, on 28 July 1945. Elizabeth and her daughter never got reunited. Nor would Elizabeth witness the Allies' victory. She died in April 1945 while listening to war news on BBC.⁴ Maurice Schumann sums up very adequately the tragedy of Elizabeth's life: "Extravagant, generous and liberal, Elizabeth seemed to foresee the cruelty of her destiny: she was to die in a Romania forced to join the camp of her country's enemies and she was never to see again the flowers from Kew Gardens or the apses of Notre Dame" (1984, 3-4).⁵

¹ "Mlle Asquith qui était probablement la plus intelligente d'aucuns et semblait une de ces belles figures peintes à fresque ce qu'on voit en Italie, épousa le prince Antoine Bibesco qui avait été l'idole de ceux où il avait résidé. Ce mariage fut grand bruit et partout d'applaudissements." (All French quotations have been translated by Mihaela Mudure).

² Guillaume Apollinaire's erotic novel *Les Onze Mille Verges ou les amour d'un hospodar* seems to have been inspired by Bibesco's reckless life. One of the main characters is a priapic Wallachian aristocrat with strange erotic tastes.

³ One of the best known such episodes was Bibesco's romance with John Middleton Murry. According to Brindle, "Bibesco was cultivating Murry with a view to publishing her work in the *Athenaeum*, and Mansfield disapproved of this in no uncertain terms, believing Bibesco and her work to be trite and of little artistic merit" (2020, 19). Katherine Mansfield sent Bibesco a short and blunt letter asking her to cut short any dalliances with Murry.

⁴ See *New York Times*, 9 April 1945.

⁵ "Extravagante, généreuse et libérale, Elizabeth semblait pressentir la cruauté de son destin: elle devait mourir au coeur d'une Roumanie jetée par contraintes dans le camps des ennemis de son pays natal sans avoir revu les fleurs de Kew Gardens ni l'abside de Notre Dame."

The 1920s are the period when Europe and the world tried to heal after the suffering of the war. Life must be lived at its best. The aristocracy was in decay and its refined life style became more and more a museum exhibit. New social forces arose. The people wanted leaders who grew up in modest milieus whose charisma and populist discourse could mesmerize and make one forget the ills of the day. Mussolini was such an example for the sympathizers of the right. Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades gave false hopes to those who thought the left was the solution. Both Lord Asquith and his daughter, Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, saw these developments with a worried eye.⁶ Already in the 1920s they became involved in social work and would offer assistance to the political refugees that would flood to England from the countries with totalitarian regimes (Italy and, then, Austria and Germany) (See Grenville and Reiter 2011).

For Elizabeth, the conservative and the extreme right political movements of the time went hand in hand with women's oppression. Although she was not an explicit feminist, she disagreed with the totalitarian leaders who thought that woman was just a biological machine to produce the offspring of the nation. In 1928 British women over the age of 21 were granted the right to vote by the *Representation of the People Act*. Elizabeth was not too enthusiastic. She knew the behind-the-scenes of British politics, she had noticed the social and political imbalance between man and woman, the inequality of chances, woman's marginalization, but she was not sure that century-old mentalities could be changed overnight.

Her literary aspirations, her desire to enter the public space relying on the authority of literary authorship shows that she disagrees with the stereotypical tenets about woman's modesty. A woman author is a woman who defies the traditional separation between the male public space and the female private space. Elizabeth Bibesco started writing at an early age.⁷ In the 1920s she was very active on the literary scene. Actually, she continued the spirit of the literary sorority that was very visible at the turn of the twentieth century: Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915), Ouida (1839-1908), Emily Gerard (1849-1905), Dorothea Gerard (1855-1915), or

⁶ Priscilla Hodgson, Elizabeth and Antoine Bibesco's daughter, related an episode relevant for the Asquiths's attitude towards these new populist leaders of the European extreme right. In 1920, Margot Asquith, Priscilla's grandmother and Elizabeth's mother is received by Mussolini. The Duke received her "in his immense study wearing a riding suit and boots that had previously been shined with wax" ["dans son immense bureau en culotte de cheval avec de bottes admirablement cirés"] (1975, 103). Upon leaving, Margot Asquith, the wife of a former British Prime Minister, is asked by an army of journalists. What impression did the Duke make upon her? Margot Asquith answered dryly: "I don't like men who ride indoors" (103).

⁷ Muica considers that Elizabeth was influenced in taking up literature by her husband, a sophisticated Francophile Romanian boyard, whose mother, Hélène Bibesco, had a famous salon in Paris (2017, 35). As Elizabeth grew up in an intellectual environment where literary preoccupations were common, it is more accurate to say that her husband stimulated and encouraged her to keep writing.



Rita Gollan⁸ (1850-1938) are among these minor(ized) female writers who belonged to a well-off elite but whose lives did not lack constraints.

Bibesco was also considered a woman spoiled by fate, an amateur who dabbled in literature in order to avoid the boredom of a rich life where there were no needs, only desires quickly to be satisfied. She tried to get in touch with the members of the illustrious Bloomsbury Circle: Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Katherine Mansfield or John Middleton Curry, but she was not accepted. They did not consider that Bibesco took literature seriously enough. Still, her literary method is not without connection with a predecessor of the Bloomsbury modernists: Henry James. Bibesco also relies on a central reflector and is painfully aware that life is just a beautiful golden bowl with a crack. Like Edith Wharton, Bibesco writes about the upper class women who can afford to translate the actual experience of living into complex analytical exercises. A convinced city lover, Bibesco's writing impresses by her fresh and salient observations. She is a subtle ironist and considers that only irony can make life acceptable and enduring.

Undoubtedly, Bibesco was aware of the peculiarities of literary impressionism as practised by Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, or Marcel Proust. It is well known that the great French novelist often confided in his good friend Antoine Bibesco. In a letter quoted by Paul Vernière, Proust wrote to Antoine Bibesco: "I think that it is only to the *involuntary memories* that the artist should demand the raw material of his work (apud Vernière 1971, 946).⁹ After her marriage to Antoine Bibesco, the young Elizabeth also became a member of the exclusivist circle of Marcel Proust's intimate friends. Like Proust, "Antoine Bibesco had chosen to turn his life into a work of art" (Palewski 1974, 123). From this point of view, the Bibesco spouses shared the same existential views and the same good taste. They abhorred washing the dirty laundry of their matrimony in public. Appearances had to look nice, whatever happened behind closed doors was supposed to stay there for ever. Marthe Bibesco also talks extensively in her writings about the friendship Marcel Proust had for François Mauriac, for Elizabeth and Antoine Bibesco. For instance, in an article published in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Marthe Bibesco melancholically describes the house "where, towards the end of his life, Marcel Proust came to meet Elizabeth Asquith, Antoine's fiancée, and where Mauriac often came after his meeting under the Coupole,¹⁰ on Thursday" (1970, 541).¹¹

During the 1920s Elizabeth Bibesco wrote two novels: *The Fir and the Palm* (1924) and *There Is No Return* (1927). Both novels are good samples of modernist sensibility grafted on cosmopolitan and intimate life experiences. She wrote about

⁸ Eliza Margaret Jane Humphreys.

⁹ "Je crois que ce n'est guère qu'aux *souvenirs involontaires* que l'artiste devrait demander la matière première de son oeuvre."

¹⁰ The Coupole built by Jean Alaux for the meeting room of the French Senate, in the Palace of Luxemburg.

¹¹ "où Marcel Proust est venu à la fin de sa vie pour faire la connaissance avec la fiancée d'Antoine, Elizabeth Asquith, où Mauriac venait parfois jeudi après la séance sous la Coupole."



the world that she knew best, the elite of her time, but her existential conclusions are universal because of her unique capacity to grasp truths that belong to us all.

The Fir and the Palm is a social comedy populated with aristocrats, diplomats, bourgeois men and women who meet at cocktails, tea parties or official dinners. The novel has a circular structure marked by Jean, the valet, “the deputy of fate, she called him – announcing lunch in tones which showed without a possibility of doubt that life is a well-regulated, ordered state and destiny, a benign force over which we have no control” (Bibesco 1924, 7).

An erotic triangle (Helen-Toby-Cyril) evolved against the background of the salon gossip and idle conversation. Some remarks are louder and they point to the rising anti-Semitism of the upper classes. Count Schröding proudly announces that Disraeli “was the only Jew he had ever dined with” (95). Comments where irony and ignorance are difficult to distinguish refer to international political evolutions, such as the rise of Bolshevism. “Lady Horsham is sure that all women in Russia have been nationalized” (146). Although she was raised in a world where the force of the British colonial empire was revered, Bibesco mocks at the illusionary colonial superiority exhibited by the upper class. “‘My husband believed in the Empire,’ explained Lady Raeburn; ‘we always called Indians ‘niggers.’ So foolish, don’t you think? and quite unnecessary. Fortunately he never went there or it would have been almost rude” (120). There is also an implicit orientalism in these conversations relying on rich metaphors. The Ambassador, another member of Helen’s circle, considers that “The East ... is a corridor of half-open doors” (202).

Guests cannot help noticing “the white flame of Cyril’s intellect which so pierced through his conversation that when he talked, his words seemed like alabaster through which light was shining” (58). Cyril compliments Helen upon her charm. Their guests are fascinated by the lady of the house. As Cyril says, “Some of them seemed to dive into your eyes and some to skate over them” (180). Metaphors for time and flow of life abound: “each anemone you want to keep is a demand on spring to stay for ever” (156).

The same characters meet again and again in different settings, they dissect the world they live in and tragically feel the emptiness of their lives. Discretion, lack of achievement, waste, these are their main features. Only random amours can give some excitement to these people whose refinement hides a genuine incompetence for living life plentifully. Helen and Cyril Baldwin, Lady Horsham, Helen’s mother-in-law, Toby Ross, Helen’s lover, Lady Alicia Raeburn, Ariadne Amberley, Christopher Tyldesley, Selina Cathcart, Ann Wendover, Netta Carstairs, or Virginia Sterling and Mathew, her lover, are rather variants of the same human type. They spend their time trying to find a meaning to life and in life. What is life and how can it be experienced to make the most of it? For Virginia life is a rack, one must conform to a code: “[I]f life is to be played as a game, an iron code has to be observed” (207). Selina Cathcart evaluates another existential strategy: “In fact ... you safeguard your emotions by having affairs without caring in order to insure against feeling?” (209). Bibesco’s capacity to depict silhouettes is remarkably pictorial and always accompanied by a subtle touch of irony. Here is, for instance, Mrs Carstairs: “Even the most billowy summery clothes contrived to look tight on



her, her lightest, most flowery hats managed to look heavy. A butterfly in youth, she had become a mosquito in middle age with the remnants of militant charm aggravated by fussiness” (16).

The meanders of salon conversation are spiced with witty paradoxes that remind those of Oscar Wilde. Toby admits, “I know very little about music, only just enough to know that I know what I like” (53-54). According to Victoria, “the Americans lack time to think about other things. Miners can’t get it and millionaires can’t use it. ... The poor have to think about money and the rich can think of nothing else” (117). Lady Raeburn assures everybody, “It is only necessary to marry once” (127). Metaphors are deftly used. “Helen tried to drag the discussion out of the clutches of her mother-in-law” (55). “Maps are anthologies for poets” (68). The connection between life and death, or between happiness and unhappiness is a favourite topic for discussion and ratiocination. “Unhappiness is the only synonym for happiness, isn’t it?” (149). Life is the gift made by death to Isobel.

Still, in spite of its lexical brilliance, the salon conversation is just a verbal exchange: “It is so tiring to talk lightly about one thing when you are thinking deeply about something else” (38). The life of these people is marked by dinners and parties. Organizing them becomes a fundamental concern, a way to divide time and one’s lifetime. Helen considers that in order to organize a successful party she needs four lists of guests: duty, pleasure, habit, and irresolution: “Irresolution is by far the most productive” (88). In the last list are included people who could bring a surprising element in the apparently smooth and predictable atmosphere. Helen “examined the cumulative effects of flowers and jewels and wine and noise ... while here and there a little pause filled by some glance or smile would give to a budding attraction a deepening touch of intimacy” (93-94).

Everyone is submitted to the most inquisitive scrutiny during these parties. The slightest change is cut and extensively commented upon because there is nothing else to do. Here is for instance, Helen. Amid the whirl of the party, she “danced and danced, shutting her eyes, trying to imagine that his [Toby’s] arms were round her, trying to keep his kiss on her lips” (105). At the same time, the Ambassador comments with “authoritative melancholy, ‘I have never seen anyone like her. Beautiful, radiant, glowing and without adventure” (105). For Helen life “is a most wonderful journey” (206), experiences are taken one by one as they come. The essence of her moral code is to accept what life offers. Selina, another member of her circle, brings clarifications: “Surely life is a journey with people getting in and out of your carriage and yet nobody getting in and out of your carriage and yet nobody going to exactly the same place, by exactly the same route” (218).

Certainly, some characters are more prominently pictured than others. Matrimony gives Helen no satisfaction, not even a child: “At twenty-two, after four years of marriage, she was just what she had been at sixteen –uncommitted” (49). Some matrimonial sexual deficit is suggested with elegance: “she revelled in his mind, she delighted in the flavour of his personality –of all of which he was forlornly, impotently conscious” (8). Cyril’s love is “an icicle from the equator” (129). The paradoxical expression points to some incompatibility that will increase in time.



Toby is a young man with an erotic history in London's salons. Initially, he thinks that "it would be a great sacrilege to put his old love for Janet into the fancy dress of a grand passion" (208), then he is attracted by the difficulties of an adulterous relationship with Helen. Toby thinks that Helen has never been in love and he will have the privilege to teach her passion. The rivalry between this young man and the husband is metaphorically represented: "Also he had the feeling that Helen was the net over which he and Cyril were playing on an unmarked court, a game without rules" (38). On the other hand, Toby Ross and Helen Baldwin have complementary features that facilitate their romance. Toby "loved a touch of hardness. He thought that women should be like jewels, not flowers, and men like petals, not plants" (210). The bystanders of their affair notice these correlatives: "Helen would be ideal – lovely and womanly and brilliant and serene and invulnerable, clever enough to fascinate Toby, charming enough to enslave him, gentle enough to soften him, aloof enough to spur him on, kind enough to let him down gently. Helen [is] unattainable and accessible, warm and sympathetic and patient, but capable of being immensely caustic and uncompromising" (217-218).

Cyril, the husband, married late. He had reached the age of forty and the only woman in his life had been his mother.¹² Bibesco discreetly suggests a very possessive matrimonial relationship between Helen and Cyril. Helen keeps asking her husband to tell her that he loves her but he is shallow and insensitive: "Does it need saying? / Everything needs saying hundreds and hundreds of times. / He looked at her with narrow, unsmiling eyes. 'I love you,' he said, and getting up to look for a book, he lit a cigarette" (29).

Matrimonial sex is an obligation deprived of passion: "She lay acquiescent. And then, with bitter self-reproach, she blamed her own ungenerous joylessness, while all the time she knew only too well that it was not herself that she was giving to him" (87). After a holiday in Scotland, Cyril realizes that in his marriage sexual intercourse meant nothing. It was just the selfish acceptance of "a generous, loving gift" (238) about whose source he never wondered: "His life had been the harbour in which Helen had sought refuge. He was proud and humble that she should have found it there. But perhaps she had wanted more than a harbour and perhaps he had been too proud and too humble to give it to her" (238).

Both the husband and the lover try to dominate Helen. Women's control by men is considered an inherent feature of civilized society. Toby draws "her lips into his, hard and masterful and greedy" (105). According to Bibesco, men's domineering nature has very deep roots, it is the expression of their sexuality and it is stimulated by the societal arrangements of patriarchal society. In the end, all characters, and particularly men, realize that "[i]t is so difficult in life to find anything beyond conquest and beyond possession" (103).

¹² There are dangerous similarities with Antoine Bibesco, whose mother, H el ene Bibesco had been one of the *grandes dames* of Paris in the 1850s.



The tragedy is that adultery is not the solution. It only soils and erodes the self. The possible physical satisfaction cannot justify this maculation, a kind of death of the soul: “in our heart of hearts we knew that in the turmoil of the future lies nothing but broken hopes and raging doubts and –at the end, perhaps– an aching world?” (121). The reader can easily detect here the influence of Chekhov, particularly of his famous short story “The Lady with the Dog”. The novelists and short story writers of the 1920’s were very much under the influence of the Russian classics (Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, Chekhov). They were translated into English during this period by Constance Garnett and Samuel Koteliansky. We do not know for sure if Bibesco had read Chekhov’s short story but Helen seems to have been responsive to the profound moral lesson given by the Russian writer. She prefers to remain “a water-lily rooted in some calm, unfathomed depth of water” (73), she is aware that this affair is temporary. She warns her lover, “Your passion will not survive the test of your ideals and your ideals will not survive the test of your passion” (191). Helen does not want to dominate Toby, she “had preserved his freedom intact for him” (169), but wanted “to be not ‘a woman’ but ‘woman’ ... perhaps a bigger, more important function of life than just to be herself” (192).

Her out-of-marriage experience will be a sad lesson: passion does not give much and cures nothing. “It was only through bitter disillusionment that she was to learn that intellect is not a guard against passion or physical fitness a guarantee of it” (126). In order to give a *mise-en-abîme*¹³ to Toby and Helen’s adulterous love story, Bibesco presents another couple as well: Virginia and Matthew. Their relationship is depicted in colourful nuances that remind the reader of maritime impressionistic paintings studded with an exquisite metaphor: “Virginia in apple green, lay on a golden beach throwing pebbles into a bright blue sea with a frayed edge of foam. Matthew, his pale gray eyes paler than ever in the brownness of his face, was wrapping her up with his smile. And even if she had tried to, her face had completely failed to keep the secret that he loved her” (234).

The amorous plot is influenced by the norms of courtly love. The kiss is an extremely important gesture that promises more intimacy, but the promise is all. Awaiting the sexual union is enough, the utmost pleasure is in the lover’s imagination. When Helen crept into her room alone, having refused more intimacy with Toby: “the air smelt of jasmine, his arms were around her, his eyes were smiling into hers, his burning lips were on her mouth cooling the fevers inside her and ... there was tomorrow” (106).

The love affair between Toby and Helen has grown from the human being’s normal needs of genuine affection, “this love of hers which had grown like a flower in the night, accepting its life simply, as a matter of course, without doubts or challenges” (142). As this bond grows, Helen becomes more and more maternal, while Tony gets more and more infantile: “When she said something her voice was low and chanting as if she were singing him a lullaby” (167). Finally, Toby

¹³ Story within story, background against another background.



himself pushes Helen back into her husband's arms because he does not want to be domineering. On the other hand, Helen is not sure whether she wants a new kind of relation being somehow too addicted to the traditional bond between man and woman: "His hold on her was relaxing. She could feel him almost falling away from her. ... She had preserved his freedom intact for him!" (169).

The relationship between Virginia and Mathew is not a model for Helen: "You don't want your lover to fall into your life like a coin into a money-box, to sing a song of yearning from his cage" (268). The novelist is able to suggest very delicately that society limits and even contradicts woman's freedom and desire to communicate. In the end, Helen remains isolated in a house and a garden which she populates with her memories. Her marital relationship is physical and not emotional. Some resemblance with Bibesco's matrimony is not impossible. Helen returns to her husband whom she loves "in every way except the one way, the only way that could help her" (270). The woman's body does not respond to her feelings and her feelings do not correspond to the impulses of her body. The novel ends with the two lovers' separation. Helen feels she is "a guest caught for life" (270) in her matrimony. Alienation is not painful, but soothing. All the characters are the victims of harrowing fatalism; the possibility of freedom is ridiculed: "To be a puppet with strings pulled by some invisible code was in a way less ridiculous than to pirouette about at your own initiative" (43-44).

Social problems are rather suggested, but they are not absent altogether. For instance, Bibesco mentions the inequality between man and woman as far as inheritance is concerned: "... if he [Lord Horsham] had a son, everything would be inherited by a tiresome cousin with an odious mother" (44). The Bank President, one of Helen's eternal guests, whom the writer does not consider necessary to name is sure that matrimony "is the highest ideal for a woman" (198) and that it brings beauty in a woman's life. Helen tries to move the discussion on another territory as she considers that "beauty is spiritual" (199).

Bibesco pays a lot of attention to women's condition. She is no feminist but she is a great observer. Woman's destiny is, after all, marriage. Lydia is a good example in this respect:

Lydia was forty and her hair was fading, rather than changing, from fair to grey, while the lissomness of her figure had drifted into a sort of irresolute thinness. It is a terrible thing, that steady drain of spinsterhood, how, not having children and illness and anxiety and quarrels gradually turns out the colours in a woman, though the most dissolute 'personal' life, marriage to a drunkard or a bully or a gambler nevertheless leaves the lamp lit, eyes able to shine, lips eager to smile. (101).

The women depicted by Bibesco are not independent, self-asserting individuals. They realize that society and cultural ways offer men more advantages, but ideologically feminism is not their choice. On the other hand, they long for a relaxation of mores. Lydia wonders why a single woman like herself "should not be entitled to at least one child without loss of reputation" (199). Victoria appreciates autonomy, but does not want to pay its price: "The point is that I am absolutely my own mistress. It is the most tiring thing in the world" (187).



All Bibesco's novels are a kind of debate on the Eros, a sort of 1920's *cors amoris*.¹⁴ Types of femininity are discussed with more or less competence and a streak of irony. The English woman "gives herself completely. There are no reserves. It is as if a fish not only swallowed the bait, but tried to climb up the line" (107). Helen wants to give herself to a man and get fulfilment through her partner but she realizes that –sadly– love is, in fact, not directed towards the Other, love is ipsism. Love is self-love: "lovers are so indifferent, so unintimate. They don't see the other person because the other person is simply their own passion" (218). The constraints of masculinity are suggested with feminine delicacy. The metaphor encounters the paradox: "'Why is it important to be hard, Toby? Please tell me. I long to know.' / 'It is a sort of athleticism,' he said, 'it prevents one giving way.' / 'It is a substitute for being strong,' she said. / 'No. It is strength –a great strength'" (165).

Bibesco's writing also suffered some influence from Proust. Beauty is a communicative target; wording is carefully selected and filtered. Toby is "brilliant and brittle, like air waiting to fill a balloon before sailing away into blue horizons of distant hopes" (59); "the memories of the night before would evaporate in the drowsy July afternoon, lulled into forgetfulness by the humming of the humble bee" (175). "The 'beloveds' and 'darlings' and 'blesseds' belong to everyone, they are the ordinary currency of love, blank cheques with changing signatures" (74). Like Proust, her great friend, Bibesco plays with memories and tries to understand the process of remembering, connect it to physical sensations. Helen's Court, the main character's residence, "may be haunted by the ghosts not of people but of flowers" (187). Handwork, a traditional feminine activity, is used as a metaphor of time: "every hour festooned with garlands of delight" (266).

There are in Bibesco's novels a lot of cultural and intertextual references. Only her preference for psychological investigation is modernist and *The Fir and the Palm* is no exception. For instance, the discussion between Toby and Helen about the beauty of a view is similar to the revisitation of a famous scene from the novel *Room with a View* by E.M. Forester: "'And the view,' she asked, 'mustn't one look at the view?' / 'Yes, and away from it'" (166). Literary impressionism and especially Virginia Woolf's fascination with light constitute the hypotext of the following passage: "he [Toby] could not write her a note because in the circumstances a note would irrevocably become a love letter –*a few words shining like lamps, glowing with an ultimate brevity which he was very far from desiring*" (136).¹⁵ The characters' moods are rendered by luminescent elements. "She turned the full light of her happiness on to Ned, talking to him..." (138). "He could feel her quivering with response, like a moon trembling in the ripples of a pool" (141). Tony's feeling for Isobel is "shimmering adoration" (104). Light is the raw material for the impressionist painter and writer: "Curling amber lights in her hair and laughing amber lights in her eyes

¹⁴ Debates about (courtly) love, presided by the grand ladies of early Middle Ages.

¹⁵ My emphasis.



–smiles playing hide and seek all over her face, peeping under half shut lights and re-emerging triumphantly through open lips” (159).

In conclusion, *The Fir and the Palm* deals with life, death, and love. The contrast between the intensity of the characters’ experience and the insensitive world that goes on and on as if nothing had happened is a main theme: “It is so callous of the world to go on without even a pause, one tiny moment to show you it knows that nothing will ever be quite the same again” (286-287). Helen and Cyril will continue their matrimonial existence. Helen’s erotic bypass with Toby will be forgotten.

Some of the issues from *The Fir and the Palm* will be resumed in *There is No Return*, the second novel written by Bibesco during the 1920s, but the emphasis in the latter is upon the confrontation with death. Isobel, the main character, is in hospital dying with an incurable disease. It is the moment when one sums up. Helen’s monologues or her discussions with her loved ones point to her profound regret for everything she has not experienced: “Why should I think of things to wait undone when there is so much that I shall never do?” (1927, 10); “I regret every temptation that I have resisted, every pain I have not felt” (11). It is painful to know for sure that “what you leave behind you will go on living –living its own life” (14). Bibesco is a very sensitive and compassionate painter of the body in illness: “Her eyes, her lips –nothing but shadows, even the undaunted brightness of her hair, a deep light in a deep shadow” (7). Convinced that “death is a part of life –of this life” (9), she rejects any suspicion that her considerations might be “[t]he lament of a dead woman over her still living virtue” (11).

As in *The Fir and the Palm*, the matrimonial relation is unsatisfying. Ironically, Isobel words the incompleteness of her matrimony: “Anselm really had been a perfect husband. He had considered her, and loved her, and appreciated her, he had smiled with her and smiled at her. It was with those smiles, Isobel reflected, that he had kept her out of life, that he had sterilised her” (16).

Bibesco’s message is that death is part of life and death is ours to the same extent as life is ours: “I regret every temptation that I have resisted, every pain I have not felt” (11). Doctor Ramsey¹⁶ and Nurse Gerard try to help her cross the border of this world painlessly. Their efforts are perceived differently by the members of the erotic triangle from this novel: Isobel, Anselm (the husband), and Tony (the lover). Tony taught Isobel what love really is because the husband enjoyed his marital rights, dominated her, but was not interested in the needs of the real woman called Isobel: “Without demanding anything from her, he had in a way taken everything both from and away from her. He had created her in his image, and to his creation he had been scrupulously devoted and infinitely considerate” (72). The education and the rules imposed upon Isobel make her wonder if she is actually made for love, if

¹⁶ Bibesco uses the proper name of the family from Virginia Woolf’s novel *To the Lighthouse* which was published in 1927, the same year as *There Is No Return*.



it is not her fault for all this. The simultaneity between this final disease and sex is too much to bear for her.

Some ladies pay visits to Isobel or haunt her past. Aunt Alicia, Lady Alicia Raeburn, or Helen Horsham remind Isobel of the superficiality of those lives wasted in the endless parties organized in London's salons. Lady Raeburn loves her nephew, Anselm, but she cannot help the couple mend what can still be mended in their relationship. Most of Isobel's visitors are, in fact, looking for a new topic for gossip, their interest in the patient is fake.

Isobel's disease surpasses the pathological. Nurse Gerard makes the subtle observation that Isobel is "a woman afflicted for the first time with a chronic, a mortal disease—life" (129). On the brink of death, Isobel remembers how she faced love for the first time; "when love comes, we long with bitter anguish for our lost virginity, we wish back that very ignorance which would have been a frustration of our love" (128). Now, in hospital, those around her, "they are taking" (17) her time and she does not have too much time.

As usual for Bibesco, she finds her inspiration in the life of the elites, those who do not care about making both ends meet but who experience suffering, nevertheless. Although she is well taken care of, even spoiled, Isobel is not allowed to live her life. Like the main character from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Isobel has to live in submission to conventions. The pathology of both characters is not only a matter of the body but rather the result of the connection between the mind and the body. Women are pushed toward minute and petty activities which bring no satisfaction. They are considered fragile beings, who should not tire themselves. In the end, these constraints affect these women's body as well as their psychology. Society and the hegemonic patriarchal culture obliges women to "rest," in fact to develop no significant action and this repose will finally become "the final rest." They are told that they cannot seize the general aspect of things; they cannot rise above the insignificant. "At the best of times women didn't really much like general ideas, they always skated over them on an inside or an outside edge of the personal" (24). Is liberty possible for women? What does liberty mean for women? Bibesco is very aware that liberty comes with the price of solitude, at least in the world of the 1920's she knows and she describes in her novels: "The burden of our loneliness [is] handed gracefully to us on a salver" (73).

Feminism is considered by Isobel—and she is the spokeswoman of the author—too noisy. It is an ideology on the brink of vulgarity because her social status, her wealth protects her from many gendered impositions: "Can it be true, the nonsense that is talked about the perpetual war between men and women? Are they inevitably ultimate enemies? Is it always a question of victory and surrender and occupation, of a vain attempt to defend your frontiers followed by an equally vain effort to lose them?" (77). Only love can bring peace between man and woman: "woman is nothing but a lamp lit until some flame of love has brought the torch that shines into the night" (87-88). She is also suspicious about the condition of professional women. Bibesco cannot get out of the sentimental frame of women's condition although she is sympathetic about her sisters regardless their class: "Remarkable women, useful women, professional women, unless they are also loved women, what are they but



poor little trained animals taken from one music hall to another, forbidden to run lest they should forget how to walk on their hind legs?” (87).

The solution would be a complete rebuilding of life and society from the bottom. This idea is present more or less overtly in many novels of the 1920s. The victory of Bolshevism in the Soviet Union had given hope that a better society could be founded on the basis of this ideology. Bibesco is a subtle, discreet, but efficient critic of the upper classes although she does not insist too much on the material aspects of life. This would be considered too vulgar. Even if it is very late, Tony wants to get Isobel out of the conventional and expose her to real life: “he now wanted to fold her up into layers and layers of intense and conscious living” (42). It is thanks to him that Isobel will get rid of conventions and approach death reconciled with herself and with life.

In the best impressionist tradition, Bibesco plays with light and words wonderfully luminescent pictures as in *The Fir and the Palm*: “To see her going from guest to guest, coming down the long dimness like a light so that, as she passed them, the very flowers seemed to shimmer, sharing for a moment the secret of her radiance” (78).

Some of the characters from the 1924 novel reappear and reinforce the thesis of the novel: “Life is difficult, but death is far more difficult still” (22). Bibesco’s modernist subjectivity relies on transient impressions which show the beauty of the world and life for ever flowing towards death. Lady Raeborn wonders: “[W]hy should fine impressions be more reputable than second thoughts?” (33). The rhetorical question is, in fact, a statement about Bibesco’s preference for and use of impressions.

The novel has something of Madame de La Fayette’s sober, restrained classicism. Time and space (in this case, the ward, the hospital) are hardly suggested. Characters spend their time thinking of the past. Death is feared, but also desired, for life means pain and risk: “While there is life, there is danger” (34).

Bibesco does not have the gift of long sentences like Virginia Woolf or Marcel Proust. Her style is closer to Katherine Mansfield’s epiphanies, short sentences which end up with suspension points because emotions are too powerful to be expressed verbally.

Contaminated by Proustian aestheticism, which is so powerfully expressed in the correspondence between Antoine Bibesco and Marcel Proust, the novelist Elizabeth Bibesco creates characters for whom human existence and art have the same measure: beauty. For instance, Tony expresses his erotic feelings in relationship with aesthetic values. “He thought he had chosen her among women, but he had chosen her among masterpieces” (47). Bibesco tends to construct abstract metaphors with concrete words. Tony is at hospital visiting Isobel and he wants “to fold her up into layers and layers of intense and conscious living” (42). Sophisticated aestheticism combines with the minute description of the sick body: “When she stretched out her fingers, they lay like shadows on her lap” (54). Isobel envisages suicide but then she changes her mind: “Suicide can never be anything but a desertion and she, Isobel, was not deserting, she was fulfilling some old contract, honouring an unwritten obligation” (184). As death approaches, Isobel



feels that she already knows what is to be known. Her experience is translated into the challenging form of paradox: “Later we learn to ask no questions in order to be told no truths” (184).

The approach of death clarifies, changes the relations between the spouses: “Ever since she had told him that she loved Tony he had unconsciously begun to think of her less and less as a possession” (56). The husband needs the confirmation of adultery in order to realize oppression of the traditional matrimonial rules. The allusions to courtly love and its conventions are very clear: “She would give both her hands to him [Tony], and he would kiss them and thank God very reverently for all His mercies. ... It was only on his knees that he had contemplated her –the image in which he had created her was altogether sacred” (60-61). The tragedy is that male desire can only be fulfilled by possession and for the husband this is an increasing feeling. Anselm looks at his dying wife and “he felt an infinite sense of possession” (188). Death brings her together both with her lover and her husband: “At last they were together” (190). The trio! The erotic triangle! Actually Isobel moves, as an object of desire, from the husband to the lover, but the impossibility of sexual contact enrages Tony: “She didn’t realize how the knowledge that she loved him must inevitably prevent him from having a moment’s peace until he possessed her, that he would never be able to be considerate and tender again until she belonged to him” (63). Paradoxically and tragically, Tony’s desire to know her body intensifies as disease destroys her more and more. Bibesco shares with Freud (1950) the conviction that satisfied desire resembles death: “There is nothing so dead, so dull, so lifeless, as satisfied senses ... But what a good thing to know that nothing is permanently necessary, that holes fill up, that wounds heal” (Bibesco 1927, 83, 156).

Two years after Isobel’s death, Tony got engaged and “Anselm sent his betrothed Isobel’s diamond chain. The young lady was at the age when one believes in significance” (191-192). Life goes on. Everybody moves on. Dr. Ramsey, who took care of Isobel, retires. Lady Raeburn sums up Isobel’s life: “Quite suddenly everything seemed to matter to her” (192). The moment of death made her realize the vacuity people of her class lived in.

Social issues, like the life of the working class, appear very discretely in this novel but this does not mean that Bibesco is selfishly unaware of these milieus. For example, Isobel feels deep compassion for the Japanese waiters who serve at Claridge’s because an earthquake had made a lot of victims in Japan and the waiters’ loved ones may be in danger thousands of miles away. Death connects all humans, be they rich or poor. We all die, in the end. But it is better if, at least, we die surrounded by the affection of our loved ones and we do not face our final moments in solitude.

It is beyond doubt that Elizabeth Bibesco’s novels of the 1920s show that the princess had a voice of her own. She does not roar, but she does deal with important truths. Bibesco’s fiction must be considered in the context of British literary impressionism, in a literary sisterhood that connects her to Virginia Woolf or Katherine Mansfield. A novelist of the upper classes, Bibesco convinces us that, whether rich or poor, life is the same in its essence for us all: superb in its incompleteness. A writer of remarkable prolificacy –she has left novels, short stories,



essays, children's literature, journalistic articles– Elizabeth Bibesco deserves more attention than she has ever received till now.¹⁷

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¹⁷ See Mudure 2020: “Elizabeth Bibesco: o prințesă între Anglia și România” [“Elizabeth Bibesco: A Princess between England and Romania”].

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BOUNDARIES AND DESIRE: CENSORSHIP AND THE ARTICULATION OF ROMANTIC ENCOUNTERS IN THE WORKS OF RADCLYFFE HALL

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ABSTRACT

Radclyffe Hall suscitated vigorous antagonistic reactions among her contemporaries, readers and critics alike, through her rendering of same-sex romantic encounters, which often provoked heated disputes on the literary stage and in society at large, ultimately leading to obscenity charges materialised in the banning of the books under investigation. This article focuses on the articulation of love and desire between women in the works that this author wrote and/or published in the 1920s, pointing to the narrative manifestation of self-censorship, as well as to the workings of external censorship and to the effects of these personally inflicted and socially imposed boundaries.

KEYWORDS: Radclyffe Hall, censorship, homosociality, sexuality, desire, feminism, fiction.

LIMITACIONES Y DESEO: LA CENSURA Y LA ARTICULACIÓN DE LOS ENCUENTROS ROMÁNTICOS EN LAS OBRAS DE RADCLYFFE HALL

RESUMEN

Radclyffe Hall suscitó fuertes reacciones contrapuestas entre sus contemporáneos, tanto lectores como críticos, por su representación de encuentros románticos entre personas del mismo sexo, que a menudo provocaron ardientes disputas en el panorama literario y en la sociedad en general, que condujeron en último término a acusaciones de obscenidad y a la prohibición de sus libros. Este artículo analiza la articulación del amor y el deseo entre mujeres en las obras de esta autora escritas y/o publicadas en los años veinte, y se centra en las manifestaciones narrativas de la autocensura, así como en los procedimientos de censura externa, y en las consecuencias de estas limitaciones infringidas tanto por ella misma como por la sociedad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Radclyffe Hall, censura, homosocialidad, sexualidad, deseo, feminismo, ficción.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the books banned in the United Kingdom for violation of obscenity laws, many date from the 1920s and were put on trial under the first Obscene Publications Act, which had come into force in 1857 with the eventual aim of safeguarding the underage children, the weaker sex and the feeble-minded against published material considered highly likely to shock or corrupt them. Once the Obscene Publications Act was updated, in 1959, conviction was not infrequently overturned on appeal, as the now-permitted defence of literary merit proved impervious to baseless accusations, specious arguments and fallacious testimony. That, of course, decreased the likelihood of bans being placed on works which previously would have been deemed indecent, such as *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), charged with obscenity almost immediately after making its appearance on the market. This article focuses on Radclyffe Hall's fictional rendition of same-sex romantic encounters in her prose written and/or published during the 1920s, in order to examine the narrative manifestation of self-censorship together with the effects of external censorship on the author's life and work, as well as on the readership and on the course of literary history.

THE FRAMING OF MORAL PANIC

One of the most significant developments which jolted the shaping of post-Victorian British literary and social history was Chancellor John Campbell's campaign against what he regarded as indecent publications. On May 9, 1857, the day he first tried an obscenity case, Lord Chief Justice Campbell decided to orchestrate a lobby to have his Obscene Publications Bill passed into law. Throughout the process, which in his imagination assumed the status of a moral crusade, Lord Campbell managed to garner support from fathers young and old, medical men and clergymen, newspapers and periodicals. Thus, the debate was "taken up, extended and amplified by the rapidly expanding London press to the point where it provides an embryo version of what sociologists have since come to describe as a 'moral panic'" (Roberts 1985, 611-612).¹

The inquisition-minded Lord Campbell succeeded in provoking an exaggerated outburst of public concern due to various factors. On the one hand, it was generally believed that the openness about sex drives characteristic of bawdy literature would enhance "the potential animality of the working classes" (Roberts

¹ The notion of moral panic was first developed in the United Kingdom in the early 1970s. Sociologist Stanley Cohen (1942-2013) coined the phrase in his 1972 book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. A moral panic is an often irrational fear that something or someone constitutes a threat to society's safety, values and interests. Such threats are the "folk devils" which, if formulated in a stereotypical way by members of the community and/or by mass-media, may aggrieve the greater public, so the resulting widespread concern will allow politicians to fuel the debate and ultimately pass new policies or laws that trigger social change (see Crossman 2020).



1985, 612); on the other hand, it was feared that respectable middle-class and lower-middle-class youth lacked the strength to resist temptation and their “pure minds” and “happy hearts” would be subject to “pollution” and “desecration” (614). Thus, it was hoped that the domestication of sexual instincts would preserve not only the physical and the spiritual health of families, but also the moral and social stability of society at large. Apart from these class-related concerns, there was the perplexing lack of response on the part of English writers, especially since in 1856 Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* had also been put on trial for obscenity. Apparently, English writers considered themselves much more morally responsible and their reaction was one of self-praise rather than apprehension (618). Consequently, with the support of Church Evangelicals and of the informal Palmerstonian coalition, determined to thwart “systematic institutional reform”, the bill passed without much opposition (618). It also benefitted from the change in mentality generated by the Indian Mutiny (May 10, 1857-July 8, 1859), as the general public grew even less inclined towards the acceptance of overtly expressed sentimentality or sexuality, and the progressive elites became “more receptive to a paternalist-imperial set of social priorities at home as well as abroad” (626).

Following the death of Queen Victoria at the turn of the century, mentalities started to change in the aftermath of the First World War and of the 1918 flu pandemic. The huge debt incurred by Britain during the war and the doubling of inflation between 1914 and 1920 led to soaring rates of unemployment, shrinking consumer expenditure to the point of economic collapse, and gave rise to more frequent social unrest and greater assertiveness of Commonwealth nations, whose diplomatic autonomy grew steadily in the 1920s. The subsequent “sullen discontent against all manifestations of authority” (Radu 2001, 52), coupled with an unquenchable lust for life, shaped a new literary trend that broke sundry taboos and overstepped many boundaries, as writers –influenced by the works of notable philosophers, psychiatrists, sexologists and psychoanalysts, such as William James and Søren Kirkegaard, Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung– explored a medley of desires, focusing increasingly on issues related to sexual and romantic identity, thus providing more intricate depictions of love encounters.

The social climate drastically transformed with the advent of modernity, an era that valued reason far more than tradition, and was, therefore, characterised by “the presumption of wholesale reflexivity” (Giddens 1990, 39) which seemed “to offer a sense of certitude greater than that provided by pre-existing dogma” (39). Marie Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, founder of Britain’s first instructional clinic for contraception, author of *Married Love* (1918) –which sold in hundreds of thousands of copies and *Contraception: Its Theory, History and Practice* (1923), played a significant role in “bringing individuals into the age of pleasure and health, mutuality and spiritual union” (Sigel 2012, 165).

Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Great War, which had drastically disrupted the traditionally sanctioned gender and class relations, the need to reinstate what had been known as “normality” was deeply felt. The cultural renewal of the nation represented an essential part of this process, and it was to be carried out with



and through “virility” –a term that had become the leitmotif in debates about the state of the nation. Consequently, a more significant meaning and a much higher power were bestowed upon the English novel, which thus became the focus of intensified censorship with the aim of ensuring that “forbidden subjectivities and sexualities” (Sidhe 2001, 3) would not find their way to the reading public. On the one hand, the nation, consistently described as a comradeship or a fraternity, found itself “compelled to distinguish its ‘proper’ homosociality from more explicitly sexualized male-male relations, a compulsion that requires the identification, isolation, and containment of male homosexuality” (Parker *et al.* 1992, 6). On the other hand, the national territory was typically depicted as a female body and the vigour of this representation depended on “a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly or maternal” (6). Moreover, the fact that motherhood was idealised by “the virile fraternity” automatically lead to a natural “exclusion of all non-reproductively-oriented sexualities from the discourse of the nation” (7).

Thus, although it was expected that the Obscene Publications Act would be applied less and less frequently after the undesirable shops on Holywell Street had been closed down, it turned out that the above mentioned Act had a long-term impact, despite its rather unsystematic implementation. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that inter-war Britain saw spectacular obscenity trials and blatant censorship attempts bound to have a considerable impact on literary history, such as those involving Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*.

THE UNWONTED, THE UNUSUAL AND THE UNCANNY

Born on August 12, 1880 in Bournemouth, Hampshire, England, Marguerite Radclyffe Hall started writing poems in early childhood and her poetry, just like her prose, is permeated by autobiographical particulars: tomboyish behaviour, an interest in psychology, feminist principles, a struggle to make society accept otherness, passionate love of women, a pervasive sense of guilt that often leads to self-sacrifice are just some such aspects featured in Hall’s writing. The last of her five volumes of poetry, for instance, *The Forgotten Island* (1915), contains erotic poems which provide no clarification as to the beloved’s gender, thus allowing an informed audience to read between the lines “somewhat veiled references to Radclyffe Hall’s 1913-1914 brief love-affair with Phoebe Hoare” (Preda 2012, 449). It was only later that Hall managed to complete her works in prose but, in the year 1924, *The Unlit Lamp*, a bildungsroman, was published. The main character, Joan Ogden, is a tomboy who dreams of becoming a doctor, even though her mother, Mrs Mary Ogden, berates the child for craving “an altogether ridiculous masculine role” (1924, Book 2, Chapter 18), while her father, Colonel James Ogden, insists that medicine is “[a]n unsexing, indecent profession for any woman” and utterly discourages her: “I’ll have none of these new-fangled women’s rights in my house; you will marry; do you hear me? That’s a woman’s profession!” (Book 2, Chapter 18). The young girl initially opposes her parents’ patriarchal mind-set and constantly attempts to resist their passive-aggressive manipulative tendencies but, despite the support of her



tutor, friend and would-be lover, Elizabeth Rodney, she can neither break free from the heavy chains of self-imposed guilt and responsibility, nor defy the implacable societal expectations imposed on women at that time. She remains captive in the south-coast seaside town of Seabourne, whose description strongly reminds readers of Radclyffe Hall's hometown.

One merit of the novel, which dwells on love between women quite extensively, though not very explicitly, is that it describes the relationship between Joan and Elizabeth neither from the congenital inversion perspective, nor in exclusively Freudian terms, but rather as a matter of choice, in line with the political determination characteristic of radical lesbians, who look for a reliable, fair, tender and supportive life-long partner likely to profess, as Elizabeth does to Joan: "I not only want your devotion ... I want your work, your independence, your success" (Book 3, Chapter 20). Yet, although the two women share strong feminist convictions which are, naturally, at odds with the prevailing patriarchal mentality of Joan's parents and of society at large, by the end of the novel Joan has become a heavy-hearted middle-aged woman much too old to benefit from the upcoming social change, yet aware of her failure, regretful over her fearfulness, and mindful of the on-going struggle that her younger contemporaries are engaged in: "But she, Joan Ogden, was the forerunner who had failed, the pioneer who feared his own prophecies. These others had gone forward, ... and if the world was not quite ready for them yet, if they had to meet criticism and ridicule and opposition, if they were not all as happy as they might be, still, they were at least brave, whereas she had been a coward, conquered by circumstances" (Book 5, Chapter 44).

Another merit of this pioneering work is that it attributes Joan's unhappiness to her having been born in the wrong era rather than in the wrong body: "without a support group she lacked the courage of her feminist convictions" (Faderman 1985, 319), and this prevented her not only from pursuing the desired educational path, but also from giving love a fighting chance: "she had not the courage to say straight out that she intended leaving her mother's home for that of another woman ... It was unusual, and because it was unusual she had been embarrassed; a hitherto unsuspected respect for convention had assailed her" (Hall 1924, Book4 Chapter 38).

As its motto suggests², this novel was inspired by *The Statue and the Bust*, a poem where Robert Browning outlines the love story between "two similarly frustrated heterosexual lovers" (Faderman 1985, 318) and points to "the sin of lukewarmness of will" (Organ 1943, 16) by arguing that all actions, even immoral ones, "should be done wholeheartedly" (16). Indeed, Joan is unable to fully embrace her love for Elizabeth Rodney and to take advantage of the career opportunities that their moving together to London would have opened; she chooses, instead, to sacrifice herself on the altar of daughterly love and to stay behind with her psychologically abusive and emotionally dependant mother.

² "And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost/Is – the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin" (Robert Browning—*The Statue and the Bust*).



An equally grim sacrifice marks the ending of Radclyffe Hall's 1928 novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, as Stephen Gordon, the novel's heroine, pushes her lover, Mary Llewellyn, into the arms of Martin Hallam, despite the passionate love, mutual attraction, and deep affection they still have for one another. Just like the novel's author, the main character is a guilt-ridden fervent Catholic on a mission to reveal the great suffering of homosexuals to the world, in the hope of gaining acceptance or, at least, tolerance for these unfortunate men and women. Since homosexuals are born this way, as part of God's plan, to persecute, torment and destroy them would mean to go against God's wishes. This is the deep conviction of both author and character, yet so is the assumption that life's hardships are much easier to bear when one is part of a relationship favoured, encouraged, and valued by society. Consequently, Stephen decides to let go of the woman she loves by pretending to be in love with another, knowing that in offering Mary "the gift of Martin" (Hall 1992, 439) she was also granting her the chance of having "children, a home that the world would respect, ties of affection that the world would hold sacred, the blessed security and the peace of being released from the world's persecution" (438).

Having been given a masculine name because Lady Anna and Sir Philip, her parents, wanted a son, Stephen was a tomboy keen on reading, riding and hunting. Once a teenager, the girl discovers her love of women and, whereas Sir Philip accepts Stephen's difference and tries to protect her, Lady Anna never does, hoping that her daughter would marry Martin Hallam. Yet he is Stephen's dear friend, and neither romantic love for a member of the opposite sex, nor sexual attraction for a man has any place in the young woman's heart. Thus, his proposal is met with "a kind of dumb horror" (96), "an expression of the deepest repulsion" (97), and "a look as of outrage" (97), which drive the suitor away. After seventeen years of estrangement, Martin re-enters Stephen's life as "an embodiment of heterosexuality" (O'Rourke 1989, 78) that "threatens and undermines what Stephen and Mary have" (78). Martin's successful conquest-attempts prove that *The Unlit Lamp* can be said to have anticipated the denouement of *The Well of Loneliness* and this reveals how Hall's self-censorship prevents her from articulating the possibility that two women in love can live together happily ever after. Moreover, although the novel portrays a love that can and does exist between women, it fails to accurately represent the essence of same-sex attraction due to its author's reliance on Krafft-Ebing's and Havelock Ellis's theses regarding 'congenital inversion' and 'sexual inversion'. Thus, as Heather Love pertinently points out, "Stephen's embrace of the medical discourse of inversion offers a textbook example of Michel Foucault's concept of 'reverse discourse', which he describes as the process by which a marginalized group begins to speak on its own behalf in the same terms by which it has been rendered marginal" (2000, 119-120)

Regrettably, Radclyffe Hall, who had announced herself through *The Unlit Lamp* as one of the foremothers of contemporary lesbian feminism by acknowledging the interrelation between female same-sex love and feminism and by revealing that "women often determine not to marry, that their affections go to other women – not because they are men trapped in women's bodies but because they reject prescribed roles" (Faderman 1985, 319), ultimately abandoned the feminist angle in her later



works. Consequently, both *The Well of Loneliness* and her story *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself*, published only in 1934, despite having been written as early as 1926, are patterned according to heterosexual social constructs and stereotypes, claiming that homosexuality is a congenital ‘defect’: “And there are so many of us –thousands of miserable, unwanted people ... hideously maimed and ugly– God’s cruel; he let us get flawed in the making” (Hall 1992, 207). *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* does feature some remains of a feminist perspective in its criticism of society’s exploitation of the more masculine women’s potential during wartime followed by their persecution once peace sets in. Thus, although Miss Ogilvy ends up dead, this short story does not merely constitute a gaunt portrayal of a failed invert or “a bleak assessment of lesbian possibility” (Glasgow), but rather amounts to a critical examination of “a failed culture, one that can accommodate its inverts only in times of national crisis without ever acknowledging their deepest, most primitive, and most natural sources” (Glasgow 2002, n.p.).

According to Maroula Joannou, Hall created female characters whose yearning to build a life together was considered “utopian and unrealisable” (2019, 213). This was the result of “the near absence of any literary tradition in which women were able to express same-sex desire clearly” (213). But a much more influential factor was the self-censorship grounded in an internalised homophobia that seeped through both the author’s life and her work. Socialised into believing that heterosexuality is the norm and the normal human condition, Radclyffe Hall, like many other non-heterosexuals for that matter, adopted society’s negative views of homosexuality and experienced feelings of self-disgust and even self-hatred. The resulting internalised oppression prevented the writer from endowing her rather masculine female characters with a stronger sense of personal worth and with a more positive outlook on the future of their lesbian relationships. Instead, they are made to sacrifice themselves and their happiness, letting go of their beloved (more feminine) sweethearts who, not being genuine congenital inverts, must be spurred to follow their “own true (heterosexual) nature” (Glasgow 2002, n.p.).

Called “John” by her lovers and friends as early as 1908, the writer was very keen to drop her feminine first name in a bid for liberation when she entered the literary stage: “Had I remained Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall, I am sure I should now never have written a word” (qtd. in Cline 1997, 18). It is, therefore, not startling that Wilhelmina –the main character in *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself*– insisted her real name was William, and that in the novel *The Well of Loneliness* the child of Lady Anna and Sir Philip Gordon is called Stephen. Both have tomboyish tendencies, masculine appearances, character features deemed manly and a desire to pursue traditionally male leisure activities and to embrace careers that men are normally encouraged to favour. Hall clearly fashioned these central characters according to her own making but, lacking access to other lesbian relationships, she failed to grasp the multifarious nature of lesbianism and, in telling her own story through fiction, put forward infelicitous generalisations that eventually undermined her struggle to open people’s eyes to the humanity of homosexuals, who naturally include all those endowed with affection and attraction for people of the same sex, whether masculine or feminine in appearance and personality.



With self-appointed scientific authorities such as Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, with no acquaintance of some literary tradition to draw inspiration from and given the subjectivity inherent to a perspective that had been warped by confusion, fear and guilt, it is not surprising that Radclyffe Hall became a prisoner of her own perceptions, unable to accurately portray the ramifications of homosociality, the depth of same-sex emotional connections and the particularities of homosexual desire. Moreover, the “social-corporeal economy” (Hope 1998, 143) of the 1920s regarded same-sex love “as the freakish trauma of difference, as perversion and aberration” (143) and saw in any same-sex relationship the masculine woman as corrupt and the feminine one as her prey, respectively the feminine man tainted and the masculine one his victim. This profoundly influenced Radclyffe Hall’s attempt to break the taboos and write, against the grain, her impassioned plea for forgiveness, understanding and recognition of homosexuals’ existence and participation in society.

THE TRIALS OF RADCLYFFE HALL

Radclyffe Hall’s intention was to counter society’s negative perceptions of sexual otherness, as well as the resulting intolerance and stigmatisation, through works that begged compassion, leniency and acceptance for all homosexual individuals. While her works coalesced around this noble goal, the political climate of the age and the position that homosexuality occupied in the cultural imagination of that time orchestrated Hall’s demise. *The Well of Loneliness* was subjected to a trial that lasted from November 9 to December 14, 1928. The novel was condemned as an obscene libel and all its copies were ordered to be seized and destroyed by burning in the King’s furnace. Many publicly acclaimed personalities believed that the novel should not have been withdrawn, but either refused to appear as witnesses in court, or were not given the opportunity by the prosecution: E.M. Forster, John Galsworthy, George Bernard Shaw, Vita Sackville-West, as well as Leonard and Virginia Woolf. As early as October 4, in fact, Dover customs officials had impounded the copies of the book meant to reach the United States and, even when they should have been released, once the two-week legal custody had expired, the Metropolitan Police re-seized them using Lord Campbell’s Obscene Publications Act of 1857. On December 15, however, the novel finally penetrated the American market, where over 20,000 copies were sold in less than a month. But on January 22, 1929 charges were brought against its publishers for the violation of Section 1141 of the Penal Code, pertaining to the circulation of indecent literature. Prominent figures of the day, ready to lend their support to the defence team, among whom there were Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Edna Ferber, Ernest Hemingway, Harry Sinclair Lewis, Upton Sinclair, American neurologist Dr Joseph Collins and Prof. Boris Sokoloff, Russian politician and cancer researcher, significantly contributed to the court’s decision that “[t]he book in question deals with a delicate social problem which, in itself, cannot be said to be in violation of the law unless it is written in such a manner as to make it obscene” (Brittain 1968, 148). One of the defence lawyers,



Morris Ernst, invoked America's constitutional right to freedom of expression, as he rhetorically asked: "who should or could determine the dangerous consequences of one subject rather than another? Would the 'unorthodox emotional complications' of *The Well of Loneliness* cause more havoc than sadism in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, abortion in *The American Tragedy*, the adulteries in contemporary fiction, or the murders, robberies and violence in crime novels?" (Souhami 1999, xviii). Thus came about the vindication of an author who had been compelled to sell her home in the aftermath of the British trial, and who, now, saw an American "victory edition" (xviii) of her novel published. Hall received royalty payments in the amount of \$64,000. Despite the American triumph, however, it was only in 1949, six years after Radclyffe Hall's death, that the British ban on the book got lifted.

The crucial victory secured in the United States and the "forbidden fruit" label attached to her novel turned *The Well of Loneliness* into an unusually controversial book for feminists and lesbians. Whereas Del Martin and Jane Rule considered it the "Lesbian Bible" (qtd. in Faderman 1985, 322), Romaine Brooks saw it as "a ridiculous book, trite, superficial" (qtd. in Gilbert and Roche 1987, 178), Violet Trefusis viewed it as "a loathsome example" (qtd. in Gilbert and Roche 1987, 178) and Vita Sackville-West as living proof that "a really good novel remains to be written on that subject" (qtd. in Gilbert and Roche 1987, 178). Virginia Woolf regarded it as so dull that "any indecency may lurk there –one simply can't keep one's eyes on the page" (qtd. in Souhami 1999, ii) and, consequently, Diana Souhami argued, this novel would simply have "passed into oblivion as an unremarkable piece of period fiction" (1999, ii) if only the main character had been a man. Instead, due to the obscenity trials, from 1928 to the 1970s at least, there cannot have been any lesbian "capable of reading in English or any of the eleven languages into which the book was translated who was unfamiliar with *The Well of Loneliness*" (Faderman 1985, 322).

According to some feminist scholars, the genuine Radclyffe Hall famous-lesbian-novel should have been *The Unlit Lamp*, even though it depicts the love between Joan and Elizabeth "elliptically, through metaphor and allusion" (Joannou 2019, 213). Muted as their love may be, since lesbianism is "never narratively realised" (Hope 1998, 126) in the 1924 novel, the articulation of desire is here untainted by congenial inversion theories, which allows even contemporary readers to empathise with the characters. Still, as Trevor Hope points out, although there are important dissimilarities in what regards these two works' representation of "community, politics, female homosociality and homosexuality" (1998, 125), there are also persistent ambivalences "across the two works" (125) inherent in the manner in which "lesbian sexuality and the lesbian body address themselves to the social gaze –and articulate themselves within and against the social body– of a modernity marked by the asymmetric economy of sexual difference" (125). Among the "cruces and crises" (124) revealed by the criticism of Hall's works, Hope mentions those

between feminism and lesbianism, between romantic friendship and lesbian pathology, homosocial continuity and the dialectics of desire; between woman-identification and gender transgression, gender normativity and congenial



inversion; between sociological and medical, or psychical and somatic readings of lesbianism; between social constructionist and biologically essentialist forms of critical and political practice; between optimism and pessimism, health and disease, inclusion and outlawry, sociality and criminality; between *The Unlit Lamp* and *The Well of Loneliness*. (1998, 124)

Oblivious as she may have been to the considerable variety of lesbian experiences, Radclyffe Hall was a rebel with a cause, and –as her lover, Una Troubridge, explained– “it was her absolute conviction that such a book could only be written by a sexual invert, who alone could be qualified by personal knowledge and experience to speak on behalf of a misunderstood and misjudged minority” (qtd. in Nair 2012, 36). Consequently, Hall was furious with her lawyer, who had structured the defence of the novel in such a way as to persuade the court that it merely portrayed simple friendships between women. Even when under the intrusive and unwelcome gaze of the law, the author refused to deny that one of the aspects she had been interested in exploring was the kind of physical intimacy which does not live outside romantic spaces, and that an element of sensuality plays into the ways in which Stephen interacts with female characters such as Collins, Angela Crosby and Mary Llewellyn. Hall, thus, refused to be disciplinarily bound “within the suffocating proximity of a hygienically censored rendition of homosociality” (Hope 1998, 144). As a result, despite the fact that it includes neither strands of blue language, nor steamy fragments, with the arguable exception of sentences like “she kissed her full on the lips, as a lover” (Hall 1992, 144) and “that night they were not divided” (316), *The Well of Loneliness* was condemned as an obscene libel to be burnt in the King’s furnace.

Ellen Bayuk Rosenman argues that this conviction on the basis of the Obscene Publications Act had a particularly strong impact in English literary circles: “That a writer of Hall’s stature should be so vulnerable was shocking, for she was one of only two writers to receive both the Prix Femina and the James Tait Black prize, two of the most prestigious literary awards in England.³ Society might be ready to read and reward women writers, but lesbianism remained literally unspeakable” (1989, 639). Virginia Woolf, for instance, whose widely acclaimed *Orlando*, also published in 1928, had escaped censorship due to the fact that the lesbian allusions contained within were “too aerial and fantastic to invite scrutiny by the Home Secretary” (Souhami 1999, xix), had intended to include in *A Room of One’s Own*’s fifth chapter a vision of the narrator that contained explicit references to Chloe and Olivia’s romantic and erotic partnership. It was the end result of Radclyffe Hall’s trial that determined Woolf to cut from her draft this vision, which would have evoked in the narrator’s mind “vivid images of a summons, an obscenity trial, a book burning” (Rusk 2002, 25). Lauren Rusk explains that Woolf’s reluctance to

³ Radclyffe Hall’s critically acclaimed novel, *Adam’s Breed*, published in 1926, had been awarded not only the Prix Femina, but also the James Tait Black Prize, which was no mean feat, as both these prizes had previously been won only by E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*.



mention Hall's trial in *A Room of One's Own*, although she had previously considered taking a stance against the censoring of lesbian fiction, sprang out of a "need for professional self-preservation" (25). This is but one indication that the outcome of the trial had deep and contiguous ramifications in English literary history.

Another after-effect was that the firm of solicitors hired to defend *The Well of Loneliness* would represent, twenty years later, Penguin Books Ltd., prosecuted under The Obscene Publications Act of 1959 for publishing an unexpurgated edition of D.H. Lawrence's 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, only this time "with a very different result" (Brittain 1968, 87). That, of course, was also due to the significant change brought to the Obscene Publications Act at the request of the Society of Authors, founded in 1884, change which permitted that defence be conducted by invoking artistic merit or public good. It was thus demonstrated that, although laws "confirm a primary function of moral panics: the reaffirmation of society's moral boundaries" (Critchler 2017, n.p.), when the perceived threat is "largely mythical" (n.p.), such laws become ritualistic rather than effective.

CONCLUSION

Living in a society whose institutional forces violently interfered in the personal sphere and writing at a time when heterosexuality was the national norm against which other sexualities were measured, Radclyffe Hall has evidently both triumphed and failed in her attempt to break the taboos in order to lay bare the tragedy of unspeakable wounds inflicted on a sexual minority by relentless agents of social injustice. It would have been impossible for any author at the beginning of the twentieth century to provide an accurate and all-encompassing depiction of homosexuality in general, or even of lesbianism in particular, without erasing any of its complexities. Hall merely produced an essentialised version of a butch lesbian because she had to rely on personal experience and on the limited knowledge available to her once Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Freud and Jung had pried open the doors to the bedroom. And whilst she did, woefully, endanger the peaceful existence of several manly-looking women who lived either alone or in romantic partnerships with a female friend or lover, she also offered many a woman the chance to, at least, read about a kind of love she had always dreamt of but could never find, and the hope that she one day would.

It is unfortunate, indeed, that, since Hall always wrote under the spectre of both self-censorship and outer censorship, the more or less explicit renditions of female same-sex emotional and physical relationships in her writings are blighted by the darkness of the portrayal. The characters in question are rebellious, yet often maddened and confused, so that they live their lives in quiet desperation, submitting to the will of others. On the one hand, the selflessness of the more masculine female characters gradually becomes a weakness and they embrace a painful martyrdom, whilst deploring their wasted chances. The more feminine heroines, on the other hand, inspired by sheer despair, eventually allow themselves to become victims of convention, unable to break the chains of traditional expectations.



That *The Well of Loneliness* was targeted by the architects of moral panic, gratuitous and distressful as this may have been, ultimately gained international fame for the author and brought same-sex desire into the public eye. Hall's writings are trapped in history because their self-limiting scope mirrors the heterosexualising cultural matrix of the Roaring Twenties in Britain and portrays the tragedy of hope in the case of a writer bent on eliciting social justice for those born, like her, under the sign of sexual difference. Hall was not aware that feeding that kind of hope was tantamount to ignoring the sturdiness of a social, cultural, religious and political mentality which would prove to be shockingly obdurate for decades to come. Yet the misrepresentation and thrashing of both the work and the writer throughout much of the lesbian and feminist scholarship is most regrettable and clearly unwarranted. Hall succeeded in making women's romantic and sexual attraction for other women the subject of literary focus in both poetry and prose. She pressured the authorities, as well as the reading public, to acknowledge the fact that other identities than the heterosexual one existed and, against the backdrop of aggressive neglect, provided visibility to a marginalised group whose presence had, until then, largely been erased. Posterity should, therefore, salute and pay tribute to Radclyffe Hall's audacity since, at great personal cost, she engaged in a calculated act of countercultural courage and resistance by employing the scientific and medical discourse of the day in her fictional works. Hall broke the silence surrounding the existence of a sexual minority for whom persecution is, to this very day, not only past but, painfully, present as well.

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NO FLAPPERS IN WONDERLAND? ILLUSTRATING *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND* IN THE 1920S*

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ABSTRACT

The social and economic context of the post-war period of the 1920s had a reinvigorating effect on children's literature, the fairy tale, and fantasy genres. Moving beyond their characteristic didactic and moral functions, these narratives began to be seen as safe places in which one could escape from reality and seek refuge in a world of adventure. Illustrations had a significant role in the new development of these genres, stimulating the imagination and helping to create fantastical realms for readers. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) had already served that purpose in the Victorian era, and editions and versions of the work for a new 1920s generation would present re-interpreted illustrations, ones which were rendered more appropriate for the new context and which reflected some avant-garde tendencies, whilst not overlooking the essence of the original.

KEYWORDS: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll, illustration, adaptation.

¿NO HAY CHICAS A LA MODA EN EL PAÍS DE LAS MARAVILLAS? ILUSTRANDO
LAS AVENTURAS DE ALICIA EN EL PAÍS DE LAS MARAVILLAS EN LOS AÑOS VEINTE

RESUMEN

El contexto social y económico de posguerra tuvo un efecto revitalizador para la literatura infantil, los cuentos de hadas y la fantasía: ya no se buscaba una función estrictamente didáctica y moralizante, sino que estas narrativas se veían como lugares seguros en los que escapar de la realidad y refugiarse en un mundo lleno de aventuras. La ilustración tuvo un gran papel en el nuevo desarrollo de estos géneros, estimulando la imaginación y creando reinos fantásticos. *Las aventuras de Alicia en el país de las maravillas* de Lewis Carroll (1865) ya había tenido esta función en la época Victoriana y las reediciones y versiones para la nueva generación de la década de 1920 reinterpretaron sus ilustraciones para acercarlas a nuevos públicos sin perder su esencia e incorporando las nuevas tendencias modernistas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Las aventuras de Alicia en el país de las maravillas*, Lewis Carroll, ilustración, adaptación.

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“And what is the use of a book... without pictures or conversations?” (Carroll 1865, 9). Through Alice, Carroll thus expressed just how important he considered illustrations to be in children’s literature. Indeed, the absence of pictures in the book that Alice’s sister was reading to her was one of the reasons why she journeyed into Wonderland. She created the images in her head, dreaming of the landscapes of a strange realm, at first awake, and later asleep, and she loved that world so much that she found a way to see these imaginings come to life. Just like Alice in this scene, many other children have grown up hearing and reading stories with no pictures, but their imaginations have always filled the gaps. However, this is not the case with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Carroll himself stated very clearly how important visual elements were in the book, and these would later be defined by Gérard Genette (1997) as “paratexts”. Indeed, Genette’s theoretical framework will be used in this essay, since for him they are thresholds of interpretation, points at which a reader can decide to enter the work or not (Genette 1997, 2). Hence, illustrations are a key element of the narrative and, even if Sir John Tenniel’s artwork for the original text is the best known and widely celebrated (matched only by Disney’s aesthetics of the 1951 film adaptation). Many artists have worked on later editions and versions of the book, seeking to reach new audiences in an ever-changing society. After the turn of the twentieth century, illustrated children’s literature had gained new popularity, and during the 1920s, the post-war climate and the social and economic malaise of the Great Depression led to the need for children to have fictional places into which they could escape, just as Alice did in her Wonderland. Texts like the *Winnie-the-Pooh* series (A.A. Milne, 1926-1928) appeared at this time, and the popularity of earlier works such as Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) persisted. After its publication, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* quickly became a classic of the genre of children’s literature, and over the years, with new editions and new illustrations, would be adapted to the tendencies and tastes of new generations of readers.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The visual aspect of modern children’s books took shape at the end of the Victorian era, embracing the richly embossed covers of adventure books, evocative line drawings, etchings and, later, photographs, all of which brought far-off places and events to life for children. Technical advances in book and newspaper production dovetailed neatly with a sensibility nurtured on the Pre-Raphaelites, the Arts and Crafts movement, and Art Nouveau (Lerer 2008, 257) in this period.

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Since the origins of literature, the image has played an important role in the construction of the meaning of literary texts, acting, for example, as a visual support for new concepts and helping to provide a more complete presentation of information. In terms of children's books, illustrations constitute an inherent element, sometimes even a dominant one, and often play a role comparable in importance to the written text itself. The words tell us things that the pictures cannot, but the reverse is also true; also, readers/viewers still need to fill in the gaps that neither words nor illustrations can provide (Sipe 2010, 239). If pictures are present, a book takes a step further than what can be achieved with textual descriptions alone: illustrations guide the reader's imagination, suggesting or even imposing the images that the mind associates with the story. This is a great responsibility for the artist, and consequently illustrations should be conceived of and presented with the combined postulates of aesthetics, psychology, and pedagogy in mind (Mazepa-Domagala 2017, 225-226).

Picture books help very young readers to become accustomed to new words and to build their vocabulary, thus playing a crucial role in establishing the basis for the immediate future, when the child develops their reading skills. Children need visual support, not only in assisting them to understand a text, but also to encourage those too young to read to participate in the act of storytelling as something more than mere listeners: they can look at images to help them follow the story, and even comment on them. Carroll was well aware of this, and in what we might consider the first *Alice* adaptation, *The Nursery Alice* (1890), he produced a simplified version of the story aimed at children up to five years old. In this book, the narrator is given a primary role, entering into dialogue with the reader, encouraging them to look at the illustrations and to make comments and ask questions about these. Moreover, the fact that the adult reader could become more involved in their part in the storytelling process was important in increasing the interest of these older readers in a story that until then had seemingly been addressed only to children. The role of adults as part of the target audience for this kind of literature also implied a change in their perception of children. The stories paid close attention to the poignancy of reality and make-believe in the lives of children, helping them and us to "see the world through the eyes of little ones as they negotiate the tasks of sorting out and mastering a world that often overwhelms and befuddles them, spatially, cognitively, and emotionally" (Zickler 2014, 131-132). Understanding this is an important element in any consideration of the genre, because some reverse processes occurred. At first, children were merely "cultural recyclers" (Carrasco 2006, 295), inheriting adventure books that adults had got tired of; when "children's literature" itself was born, it was considered as too simple for adults, aimed only at younger readers. Yet children's literature evolved into something more complex, and we can still see this today with fairy tales and fantasy in general, when such stories are often addressed to a general reading public and contain deeper meanings than what at first seems to be the case. "Children are only inexperienced. They are not innocent or speechless at all and actually they have their own wisdom to judge something" (Anshori 2016, 245). This implies that children are just beginning to learn about the world that surrounds them, and can make judgements within certain limits, which in turn helps them to understand reality through generating their own ideas to process and



evaluate it. Tales would become a useful format to teach children certain lessons (not only related directly to morals, but also explaining things about animals, nature, and human behaviour, for example). Prior to the emergence of children's literature, young readers had to do this with "literature that was not attuned to their level of understanding, neither in theme nor its language and vocabulary" (Kiefer 2014, 6). In order to tap into children's perceptions and sensibilities more directly, narratives had to be adapted and presented in an appropriate style, although with the content of a story still being universal: "The fairy-story is not then essentially connected with children –though there exist (or existed) a host of them especially made or adapted (according to notions more or less erroneous or foolish) to what was conceived as the needs or measure of children" (Tolkien and Anderson 2008, 189). One way of making a book more attractive to children was to include illustrations. One of the first popular books for children, published in the nineteenth century, was a translation of Grimm's *German Popular Stories* from 1823. The text was illustrated by the English caricaturist George Cruikshank. Until this point, pictures that had appeared in children's books served to underline a moral message or to reinforce a lesson. Cruikshank's drawings were the first that were intended to be entertaining in themselves (Parker 1969, 6). During the nineteenth century, along with the development of children's literature as a genre, texts for children that included pictures became more popular. Developments in printing technology were key here, making possible the mass production of illustrated books at more affordable prices. Thus, the middle classes were now able to enter the world of reading (Hladíková 2014, 20).

Over time, book illustration grew in importance and expanded its functions, going from a mere coadjutant within a text and coming to assume a certain primacy in relation to the written word (Pascolati 2017, 245). Images now served to complete information, to construct landscapes, to define the characters, and to provide emphasis for action. Images became, then, an integral part of the overall narrative. Furthermore, illustrations assumed a notable role in the domestication of reading, not only for children but also for adults. For example, an image can serve to help the reader imagine an animal that they have not seen in real life (this was crucial before the invention of photography); consequently, images became a powerful tool in the fantasy genre, which gained ground after the Victorian era, which had been a period when more didactic and realistic literature for children was seen as the priority. The preferred subjects for fantasy would revolve around what Sheila Egoff called "the imponderables of life": death, resurrection, faith and disbelief, moral courage and moral cowardice, trust and suspicion, as well as more common aspects of everyday life: poverty, cruelty, friendship, and doing one's duty" (1982, 239). So, whereas the main protagonists in Victorian children's books were expected to mature and come to terms with life, just as the intended readers were expected to do, in the following decades readers and writers began to turn towards "more speculative modes of fiction" (Lerer 2008, 255).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Beatrix Potter would emerge as a particularly influential figure. She wrote and illustrated her own books, planning and controlling every aspect of them. This combined role lent her work "an overall feeling of completeness, something that many illustrators of future generations



would admire and strive to achieve” (Parker 1969, 8). Her stories and illustrations described a variety of animals (rabbits, mice, hedgehogs, kittens) with an aesthetic that was familiar and easily relatable for children. Her books were published with cloth covers in a comfortable format (5 × 1 inches) for small hands, and included coloured pictures on every spread. The text was organized to display just one or two simple sentences on each page. Potter would be an inspiration for many subsequent authors, including Roald Dahl.

The fairy tale genre, often misunderstood and only intermittently popular in recent decades, enjoyed a new golden age immediately after the Victorian era, and its illustrators were as varied as the stories themselves. A good example of the renewed popularity of fairy tales at this time, as well as the attention given to the illustrations, was Andrew Lang’s series of coloured fairy books (1889-1913), which combined great scholarship and research, and which has been considered as one of the most wide-ranging series of fairy stories for children (Parker 9). The demand for fairy tales, and the great possibilities for illustrators here, attracted artists like Paul Gauguin, Max Ernst, and Salvador Dalí, who all explored the genre. Indeed, the latter two would both create their own illustrations for *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively.

DRAWING WONDERLAND

As noted above, an illustrator can be considered a co-author of a book and as such a crucial element to it (Mazepa-Domagala 2017, 225). Given the costs of producing, illustrating, and promoting his work, Lewis Carroll chose not to use his own original illustrations for *Alice’s Adventures Underground*, but to employ Sir John Tenniel as illustrator. This decision was a successful one, and the illustrations were praised by both readers and critics. For example, in July 1866, the young readers’ magazine *Aunt Judy’s* published a review in which the artist’s work was commended: “Forty-two illustrations by Tenniel! Why there needs nothing else to sell this book, one would think”. Both Carroll and Tenniel deserve credit here, since the illustrations were the result of an involved understanding that grew between writer and artist. Tenniel not only translated the words into images, but also made them communicate visually the sensations that Alice was experiencing. For example, the initial illustration of the chapter “The Pool of Tears” (Carroll 1865, 16) shows how Alice’s neck has grown disproportionately to the rest of her body, leading the reader to anticipate a sense of claustrophobia, feeling uncomfortable at how the frames and limits of the image are broken (Leitch 2007, 182). This in turn leads to an immersive experience, in which the audience can imagine vividly what the protagonist is experiencing. Furthermore, even if the descriptions are accurate and evocative, the ability to see the characters in images that depict how Lewis Carroll envisaged them provides a more realistic encounter, since the reader is “seeing” the same that Alice sees.

The first visual element that any reader encounters with a book is its cover, a key element in catching the attention of children and potential adult purchasers in



a bookshop or library. This was a complex issue, because the book needed to attract both children and adults, since “many children consume children’s reading and books which are brought and chosen by the adults” (Anshori 2016, 244). Consequently, Carroll was acutely aware of the need to find the best possible means of making the book attractive to this dual market. One of the strategies he evolved was to have a cover of red cloth, since he believed that it would stand out among the other books: “bright red will be the best—not the best, perhaps artistically, but the most attractive to childish eyes” (Carroll, quoted by Susina 2009, 62). Thus, the cover of the first edition was dark red, with details in gold, picturing a small monochrome image of Alice, part of the scene in which she is carrying the baby-pig (from the Duchess’ house) in her arms. To be assured that these decisions about the cover were right, Carroll used focus groups to sound out public opinion on potential covers for *Through the Looking-Glass* and *The Hunting of the Snark*. This approach to marketing is common nowadays, but not during the Victorian era, and thus Carroll took a ground-breaking decision here. With this system, he was able to test out different possible illustrations for the covers, with some thirty families consulted. Indeed, for *Through the Looking-Glass* his initial choice was an image of the Jabberwocky, but after consultation with his focus group he substituted it for one of the White Knight, a less menacing image, since it was noted that the monster might have scared the most easily frightened children (Susina 2009, 62-63).

Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’s copyright came to an end in 1911, and Tenniel’s illustrations in 1964. Since entering in the public domain, the text has continued to be reproduced, re-edited, and produced in many versions. In some of these editions, the original illustrations have remained, whereas in others new artwork has been included, with publishing houses preferring to establish a specific aesthetic for the text through the use of their own illustrators. In *The Illustrators of Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, Graham Ovenden suggests that *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* has in fact been the book with the greatest number of illustrations by other artists (Ovenden 1972, 15). To the hundreds of editions published over more than a century and a half, we must add countless adaptations in concept-art and many other forms of visual representation, such as fan-art. All these versions are products of their time, and can tell us a great deal about the literary and artistic trends and tastes that have influenced them.

CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AFTER THE GREAT WAR

The years after the First World War followed the same tendencies as the immediate end of the Victorian era, but with new limitations when it came to writing and publishing, due to the effects of the war and the economic situation that would ensue toward the end of the 1920s. However, the situation generated new opportunities, with an increase in school attendance by girls, which in turn led to the creation of stories about girls’ boarding schools, a domain that had hitherto had been dominated by narratives featuring boys’ schools. Thus, the target readership began to change: readers were of the same age, but the context was different; these



were “Children of the Depression” (Egoff 1982, 243). Many children had to work after school to supplement their family’s earnings, making them feel that they had an important role in the house. During this time, childhood was beginning to be demarcated as a separate stage of development (Halverson 1999, 238). However, this also meant that leisure time was limited.

Children’s literature is also a phenomenon of social history: “England could be reconstructed entirely from its children’s books” (Hazard 1944, 128). The genre, taken to be “children’s literature” in its own right, was emerging by the turn of the century, with new impulses and characteristics. Thus, while D.H. Lawrence’s work proclaimed themselves to be avowedly “M”, for mature readers only, Edith Nesbit’s books were as clearly categorizable as “C”, for children only (Hughes 1978, 544). After being the recipients of didactic and moral texts for such a long time, and being the secondary readers of adventure novels, children finally had at their disposal books conceived of and written expressly for them.

Fairy tales and fantasy stories were needed as a happy place, a respite from the past horrors of the war and the fears and concerns of the economic and social situation. In fact, sometimes the target readership of these tales would extend beyond children. J.R.R. Tolkien claimed that stories of this kind offered “recovery, escape, consolation” (Tolkien and Anderson 2008, 66), things that during a post-war period were needed even so by an adult audience. This growing demand led not only to new texts but also to re-editions and versions of some classics, leveraging the technical advances in printing and publishing in order to produce quality illustrations. For example, N.C. Wyeth made illustrations for re-editions of books like *Robinson Crusoe* (in 1920). This decade was also the moment of the peak recognition of Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), a genuine children’s poet. His post-Romantic view of childhood was the very opposite of the scientific approach of child psychology at the time (McCorristine 2010, 333). This was especially remarkable during the post-war era, when childhood was beginning to be considered as a separate stage of life, one that deserved its own experiences and treatment, with children not simply taken to be smaller adults, or indeed ignored. De la Mare’s focus on children, writing for them directly, had an impact on the genre of children’s literature (which not only included narrative but also poetry). Indeed, he would have a significant influence on one of the most popular fantasy writers of the century, C.S. Lewis (Nicholson 2011, 582).

Moreover, the values transmitted through these stories had a potentially great impact on the development of a child’s personality on the road to adulthood. Hugh Lofting, the author of the *Doctor Doolittle* books (1920-1948), argued that war-like tendencies arose from the traditional animosities bred into children through miseducation, literature, and folklore (Levstik 1990, 331). Lofting’s stories included reflections on the role that horses played in the war. Presenting animals in this way, and putting words into their mouths (through Doctor Doolittle’s interpretations) was a way of humanizing them, showing that they were also capable of thinking and feeling. In a post-war context, this was an invitation to think about them in situations like a battle, where horses suffered from injuries and stress, and in many cases death. On this issue, A.A. Milne went a step further with *Winnie-the-Pooh*



(1926). This story is not about humanized animals, but rather humanized toy animals. Even if Milne's own country house in Sussex influenced the setting of his stories, it was his son Christopher's nursery toys that were the direct inspiration for creating the characters: the teddy bear that Christopher used to carry around with him was the inspiration for Winnie-the-Pooh, Eeyore was an old stuffed animal whose head had started to sag, Piglet was a present from the Milnes' neighbours, and Kanga and Roo were gifts to the boy from his grandparents. However, for some of these characters, other postmodern feminist readings are also possible, for instance Donna Haraway's "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York 1908-1936" (1984-1985). Indeed, Owl and Rabbit were the only two characters that the writer invented from scratch (Kosik 2018, n.p.). The illustrations by Ernest H. Shepard followed Beatrix Potter's style, with gentle designs and colours, reflecting the softness of the characters and creating a cosy environment.

Hence, we can see how children's literature, fantasy, and fairy tales had transcended their previous didactic and moralizing roles to become mostly a safe place of adventures and storytelling. Carroll, six decades previously, had already pursued the same aim, with stories that did not have any overt moral content, but which were full of *nonsense* and absurd adventures; in the context of the Victorian era, these were accepted it as an exception to the rule, although they still attracted some criticism. Yet the 1920s seemed a promising new scenario for Carroll's work: would Wonderland serve as a refuge and a narrative playground for that generation? The original book was becoming more and more popular with the passing of time, and many publishers put their faith in the story and in their own illustrators to present the text to new readers.

THE ROARING 1920S IN ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

As noted above, illustration plays an important role when it comes to completing or filling-out the descriptions of characters. In the 1920s, society already had an image of Alice in mind: an 11-year-old blonde girl with pale skin, an innocent and curious expression, and an afternoon dress, preferably blue or yellow. As we will see, whereas some illustrators took the opportunity to adapt the protagonist to the style of the 1920s, many of these original considerations were maintained. Moreover, the first Alice movies (silent) had already been made, and it was during this decade that Walt Disney presented his first work related to the story: *Alice Comedies*, short films for the cinema combining live action for the "real world" and animation for Cartoonland (his adaptation of Wonderland). It would not be until three decades later, in 1951, that Disney premiered the feature film *Alice in Wonderland*, which is still the most popular adaptation, with its aesthetics being the best known, after Tenniel's illustrations. Nevertheless, *Alice Comedies* made its own aesthetic statements, maintaining the little blonde girl (except for a brief period when Alice was played by the actress Margie Gay, who had dark hair in bangs, similar to Alice Liddell, the inspiration for Carroll's work).



The case of *Alice*'s illustrations reflects the combination of the two tendencies: on the one hand, maintaining the Victorian-ness of the protagonist and Tenniel's style in general, with subtle innovations; and on the other hand, adapting the visual part of the book to the new generations. Below we list the illustrators of some of the most popular editions together with their visual decisions in publications following the expiry of the copyright of the text in 1948.

1. CHARLES FOLKARD (1878-1963)

He was previously known for works such as the illustrations of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* (1909), *The Children's Shakespeare: Being Stories from the Plays* (1911), Grimm's *Fairy Tales* (1911), *Aesop's Fables* (1912) and *The Arabian Nights* (1913). He entered the gift book market in 1910 with an illustrated edition of David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson*, published by Dent & Sons. His drawings of island flora and fauna reveal a mastery of technique (Dalby 1991, 109). However, before that, he had worked as a conjuror and demonstrated his artistic talent when he began to design the programmes for his own magic shows. He contributed humorous drawings to magazines like *Little Folks* and *Tatler*, and in 1915 created Teddy Tail, a popular cartoon character for the *Daily Mail* that would continue for several decades.

Folkard illustrated a book that compiled the songs and poems of the original text: *Songs from Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*, with music by Lucy E. Broadwood. It was published by Black in 1921, with a dust jacket, a very important element for Carroll, who had promoted the use of these. The cover shows Alice as larger in size than the other characters that appear in the image. This is a reference not only to the oscillations in her size in the story, but also to her main role as the protagonist. It is the girl whom the reader must pay attention to and follow, Alice is the "Virgil" during the journey through Wonderland. The colour blue predominates in the background, and is also the colour of Alice's dress, which has a style and pattern which is simpler than in the original illustrations by Tenniel, leaving Victorian fashion behind and incorporating details such as a belt. Most noteworthy is that this Alice is wearing a crown and holding a sceptre, thus representing "Queen Alice" as seen at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass*. It could be argued that the target audience is thus either familiar with the story, does not mind knowing the ending beforehand. Since this is a book of poems and songs from the book, the most probable option is the former. The target audience would probably be someone who had already read the book, and hence for whom this would not be their first contact with *Alice*; rather, the book is aimed at those readers interested in complementary materials. We cannot talk about "transmedia" at this stage, since this is only a compendium of the lyrics and melodies, and is still a book. In terms of the illustrations within the book, there are two types:

- Coloured illustrations, with intricate frames in black and white formed by lettering following Tenniel's aesthetics (i.e., the most recognizable for the readers). The images at the centre of pages, in colour, show well-known scenes such



- as the Tea Party. The characters' expressions are subtler or more intense, depending on the desired effect: kindness and naivety in the case of Alice, rudeness, bad manners and rage for the Hatter and the Queen, for example.
- Black and white illustrations on the sheet music pages. These are plainer and some of them show scenes that had not been depicted by Tenniel, for example, the Queen of Hearts cooking tarts. The world-play and the curious elements translated into pictures are still there, with details like a fish with its tale curved forming a question mark.

2. GWYNEDD M. HUDSON (1909-1935)

She was known for her work as a figure painter, illustrator, and poster artist, mostly in the fields of poetry and religious texts. She incorporated the contemporary and innovative art-nouveau style into her illustrations of Carroll's text. According to Zoe Jacques and Eugene Giddens, she had a "highly stylized and individual response to textual moments [and demonstrated an] innovative use of space and perspective" (Jacques and Giddens 2016, 174). Lori Waxman notes that Hudson "envisioned her in a pretty white party frock with ankle socks and dainty shoes" (Waxman 2014, 22). Hudson initially illustrated a limited edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1922, but her work would appear in many versions issued by other publishing houses, such as that by Dodd, Mead & Co. in the same year, and another by Boots in 1927. For each edition, a different image was chosen for the cover. The limited edition by Hodder & Stoughton imitated the original book in its first version, with a red cover and the title and details in gold. In this case, the scene featured does not exist in the original story: it is a composition that represents the silhouettes of some well-known characters (Alice, the Mad Hatter, the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar on his mushroom). A few years after that, in 1928, another edition was published, imitating this previous one but changing the red to baby blue. Later editions by different publishing houses chose different motifs, such as Alice and her kitten Dinah (in the edition by Boots in 1927) with dominant yellow tones, in reference to Alice's original dress, even if the one from these images was in fact white. Hudson's Alice features subdued colours and darker tones, which are "beautiful and slightly menacing at the same time" (Millikan 2011, n. p.). A few years later, further editions would also use her work, and we can find evidence of the increasing popularity of the text in the American edition by The Dial Press in 1935, which features a cover depicting the Mad Hatter and the March Hare during the Tea Party, but not Alice. This suggests that this scene was considered to be so well-known by their readership that they could sell the book even if the protagonist herself did not appear on the cover. That is, by now people knew not only Alice, but also the wider world of Wonderland and its characters. Hudson would go on to illustrate an edition of *Peter Pan and Wendy* (J.M. Barrie, 1904) published in 1931 by Hodder & Stoughton. As an artist she created a mural for the Wolseley Room in Hove, UK, entitled "The Spirit of Agriculture", and in that venue there an exhibition was held of her and her sister's paintings, in 1916.



3. DUDLEY JARRETT

He illustrated the *Alice* edition for Pook Press, in 1925. The cover is baby blue and portrays only Alice. The style is the same as in the illustrations inside the volume. They are pen and ink drawings, intricately done yet highly graphic. These images have very dark or completely white backgrounds. Most of the designs follow Tenniel's aesthetic, but some include new, more intense expressions, their greater expressivity evident in some particular sense, for example, a pleasing one in the Queen's courtesans, or a menacing one for the Cheshire Cat. Jarret was a new illustrator at the time, and would go on to collaborate as an artist in books associated with many canonical writers and topics. His subsequent contributions include: *Making Friends: Story Notes* (Cards produced in 1935), *The Pink Pony* (1951), *Crossed Keys and Crossed Swords* (*With special reference to The New Testament*) (1957), *Samuel Pepys in London* (1958), *A Country Doctor in the Days of Queen Anne* (1959), *British Naval Dress* (1960), *Bath in the Eighteenth Century* (1962), *Ancient Egypt* (1964).

4. A.[DA] L.[EONORA] BOWLEY (1866-1943)

She worked for Raphael Tuck as a postcard illustrator and designer, producing complex and beautifully coloured images (Summavielle n.p.). She used her initials and not her full name as an illustrator, which was significant as a veil to her identity in a patriarchal world. Her drawings can be seen in the *Alice* edition published by Tuck in 1921. The cover (initially framed in red but changed to baby blue in later editions) features the scene at the beginning of the story: Alice chasing the White Rabbit. This reflects the way in which the reader will enter the adventure. Her dress is baby blue and with a light print and a dark belt, as in Charles Folkard illustrations. The images inside include some coloured ones, but the majority are black and white (adapting Tenniel's original drawings to A. L. Bowley's style). Almost every character appears to be younger, even the Mad Hatter, and practically all of them seem dreamy and candid, showing a more pleasant side of Wonderland. The aesthetic is somewhat reminiscent of "kewpies", a brand of dolls and figurines by the cartoonist Rose O'Neill which were very popular toys in the 1920s. The target audience of this book seems to have been younger than the usual one, based on these details, and was probably the same as that for *The Nursery Alice* (children up to five). There was also a 1927 pop-up edition in the "Golden Treasury" series, which included a jigsaw. Ada Leonora Bowley was also the author and illustrator of other books of tales, including *Dame Wiggings of Lee* (1915), *Jack the Beanstalk* (1921), and *Cinderella* (c. 1921).

5. JESSIE MARION KING AND WINIFRED M. ACKROID

Jessie Marion King (cover) and Winifred M. Ackroyd (black & white illustrations) collaborated on the edition published by Collins in 1928. Jessie M. King



(1875-1949) was raised in a strictly religious household in Scotland where she was discouraged from making art, yet she managed to build a successful career as a painter and designer. Her work was rooted in folklore and fairy tales, in that she and her husband, E.A. Taylor, saw art-making as a quasi-magical, deeply spiritual endeavour. In fact, King herself was an ardent believer in fairies, stating that her art came from her inner vision of the unseen world that is hidden within nature (Windling 2011, n.p.). The image of Alice that she designed for the cover is very different from the popular one, especially at that time. Alice has a bob haircut with bangs, is still blonde, but seems like an older girl, indeed a teenager or young adult. The clothes have hints of medieval armoury, including a shield, and in the background we see a convoy of people riding camels in the night. This was a curious choice, since it not only breaks the prevailing norms in terms of illustrations of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* but also has nothing to do with the plot. It is likely that only people already familiar with the text would be attracted by such a cover. However, the images within the book, which are black and white, follow the traditional style, with a curly-haired child Alice and the familiar, comfortable images from the story. As an illustrator, King received notable commissions and contributed to books by a number of prominent writers and artists, including Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (189?), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1900), Edward Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayam* (1903), Sebastian Evans' *The High History of the Holy Graal* (1903), William Morris' *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1904), Oscar Wilde's *A House of Pomegranates* (1915), and Rudyard Kipling's *L'habitation forcée* (1921). She was a member of the group of artists known as "The Glasgow Girls," and contributed both to the British art-nouveau style and to the art-deco movement in Paris, where she lived from 1911 to 1928. Thus, the Alice in her cover art is an example of her avant-garde pictorial style.

6. WINIFRED M. ACKROYD

She was the author of *The Classic Book of Nursery Rhymes* (1886), published twenty years after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* but before *The Nursery Alice* (1890). During the 1920s, she published two books about dolls, *Dolls and How to Make Them* and *More Dolls and How to Make Them*. Her black and white illustrations for the 1928 edition of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (published by Collins) show that she used the style of her dolls to depict the book's characters, especially Alice. Ackroyd's interior illustrations portray the protagonist as a doll, with a round face, childish expression, and curls, very similar to the ones of the artist's mentioned books.

7. WILLY POGANY (1882-1955)

He was well known for his pen and ink drawings of myths and fables, and was heavily influenced by Chinese and Japanese art and illuminated manuscripts. Of Hungarian origins, he lived in Munich, Paris, London and New York, where he



participated in many Broadway productions as an illustrator. However, he also had a background as a caricaturist (for *Le Rire*, a successful French satirical magazine at that time), and his sense of humour had an interesting impact on the way he interpreted the text of *Alice* and how he created new images for the story. While in London, he contributed illustrations to Frances Jenkins Olcott's *More Tales for the Arabian Nights* (1904). In the USA he produced illustrations for Padraic Colum's *The Children of Odin* (1922), and provided illustrations for the magazine *American Weekly* from 1940 onwards. He illustrated the edition of *Alice* published by Dutton in the USA in 1929. Here we can find the "flapper Alice", with a typical 1920s look, wearing a mini-skirt and a white, short-sleeved shirt with a tie, lending her the aspect of a public school girl, which would be the equivalent status of the original Alice (that is, from the middle-high class, home-schooled, subject to Victorian manners and etiquette) but transported to the first decades of the twentieth century. The cover retains the idea of a brightly coloured cloth (in this case, purple) with details in gold, featuring Alice and the White Rabbit. The illustrations inside are mainly black and white, with one of the most curious elements being the introduction of an anthropomorphized deck of cards, and the portrayal of three types of people (including young girls) with very realistic legs. There was also a large, loose-bound edition, limited to 200 numbered copies, signed by the artist. Pogany was an illustrator for all age groups, and from the early 1920s was well known for his art-nouveau paintings and drawings.

CONCLUSION

The role of illustrations in literature has evolved from that of mere ornamentation to become a substantial part of the narrative. This has always been especially important in children's literature, and in subgenres like fairy tales and fantasy, since illustrations intensify the experience of the reader (or receptor, in the case of children who had not yet learned to read), thus serving to stimulate the imagination. The situation in the 1920s, after a World War and faced with the Great Depression at the end of the decade, encouraged the production of books of this kind, since people (mainly children, but grown-ups too) needed a safe place to escape the realities of the times and to immerse themselves in magical stories. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* had been playing this role since its publication in 1865, and new generations welcomed it. Publishers decided to adapt it to the tendencies and tastes of the 1920s, and this had an impact on the illustrations they produced.

One of the most obvious elements that potentially undergoes changes in adaptations is Alice's dress. The original one, drawn by Tenniel following Carroll's indications, was a faithful reflection of the girl's social position in Victorian society. This essence was often to be maintained, but the style was sometimes presented in a more relaxed way, without crinoline, and with fewer ruffles. One case of complete domestication was Willy Pogany's illustrations, which reflected the same Alice, but now a girl belonging to her class in the 1920s, that is, a girl of the same status



as the original Alice, but reflecting how she would now dress, thus in a way that contemporary readers would recognize.

Besides the question of the dress, illustrators had to choose how grotesque the characters would be. In general, these were exaggerated, and presented as either heroes or villains (this was the classic cinema era, in which audiences were accustomed to this kind of simplification) or, in the case of A.L. Bowley's work, they were softened for a younger audience, who might have been frightened by a menacing Mad Hatter, for example. As noted above, various illustrators in the 1920s presented a highly stylized individual response that reflected the age in which they lived, incorporating art-nouveau aesthetics and drawings that would reflect the notion of the new woman and the fashions of the time.

The growing popularity of the text is reflected in the decisions that publishers made for cover art. While some chose to show Alice falling or following the White Rabbit, mirroring how the reader would initially become drawn into the story, others opted to portray scenes like the Tea Party prior to Alice's arrival, or even situations not directly related to the story (for example, the one by Jessie M. King). Those choices were possible because the target readership was already familiar with the story, perhaps through having already read with the original text or having watched an early adaptation for the cinema or theatre, and would hence recognize key elements immediately. This tendency continued and, if we examine the history of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from its publication in 1865 to the present day, we can see how the creativity of adaptations and versions continued to grow as the text became ever more popular.

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MISCELLANY

RE-READING ROALD DAHL FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Concerning the study of children's literature, contemporary ecocritical research proposes to analyze how ecological narratives diverge from the logic of alienation, hierarchy and domination and move towards inspiring community and interdependence. Roald Dahl's (1916-1990) respect and deep knowledge of nature and animals are rendered in most of his children's novels, depicting underdogs working together to defeat oppression and abuse of power. Given that these stories have long been part of popular culture, as well as the school curricula, this paper studies them from an ecological perspective arguing that, through similar re-readings, these narratives could inspire environmental consciousness and agency in young readers.

KEYWORDS: Roald Dahl, ecocriticism, ecological narratives, children's environmental literature, nature, anthropomorphism.

RELEYENDO A ROALD DAHL DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA ECOLÓGICA

RESUMEN

En cuanto a los estudios de la literatura infantil, la investigación dentro de la ecocrítica contemporánea sugiere analizar la forma en cómo las narrativas ecológicas logran alejarse de la lógica de la alienación, jerarquía y dominación y en su lugar promueven la comunidad y la interdependencia. Gran parte de las novelas infantiles de Roald Dahl (1916-1990) expresan un profundo conocimiento y respeto a la naturaleza y los animales, y muestran seres oprimidos trabajando juntos para enfrentarse y derrotar el abuso de poder. Tomando en cuenta que durante mucho tiempo estas historias han formado parte de la cultura popular, así como de los temarios escolares, este artículo las estudia desde una perspectiva ecológica y argumenta que, a través de relecturas similares, estas narrativas podrían inspirar una conciencia y conducta ambiental en los jóvenes lectores.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Roald Dahl, ecocrítica, narrativas ecológicas, literatura infantil ambiental, naturaleza, antropomorfismo.

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Roald Dahl (1916-1990) wrote and published during World War II, the postwar period and the Cold War, a time that witnessed technological developments, but also a nuclear race and mass destruction. The former RAF pilot gained popularity thanks to his gothic horror short stories and fantastic children's novels –which even became part of the school curricula, while also facing challenges along the way. As a young man, Dahl lived in African rural areas and later became a countryman in Buckinghamshire, and several of his stories are inspired by his love and knowledge of the natural world, as well as his Nordic folk heritage. Most of the criticism concerning his works –which has increased during the last decades due to a growing interest in popular and children's literature– focuses on literary, philosophical, social, and pedagogical analysis, whereas little has been said about Dahl's depictions of nature, animals, and environmental takes throughout these narratives.

In this regard, *The Gremlins* (1943) and *The BFG* (1982) advocate against the destruction of the planet and other species, while *Billy and The Minpins* (1991) comments on habitat conservation and knowledge. According to Hollindale, Beatrix Potter “combined witty anthropomorphism with meticulous observation of wild creatures” (2011, 163), a remark that suits Dahl's works against mistreating animals like *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (1970), *The Twits* (1980) and the *Dirty Beasts*' poem “*The Pig*” (1983), as well as his novels devoted to discouraging hunting like *The Magic Finger* (1966) and *Danny, the Champion of the World* (1975).

According to Hollindale, the term “nature” has had different uses historically and literary regarding the “treatment of children and the emergence of children's books” (2011, 161). There has been a concern with both human nature –birth, education, socialization, and independence– and the natural world, and also with the relationship among them which, due to overpopulation, technology and climate change, has been acquiring new meanings that influence the study of children's literature (Hollindale 2011, 163-164). As a result, we first introduce a general approach to the relationship between children's literature and nature, followed by an analysis of selected works by Roald Dahl depicting the natural world and non-human beings; finally, we argue that rereading and studying these narratives from an ecological perspective could inspire environmental consciousness and agency in young readers.

NATURE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Before the second half of the twenty century and especially with the publication of Dr. Seuss' (1904-1991) *The Lorax* (1971) that marked the seventies as a peak for ecologically aware books for children, not only anthropocentric, but pastoral representations often created an idealistic portrait of nature making it a mere escape from the urban industrialized life (Sigler 1994, 148). Hollindale points out how young classics often employed magic and mystical tropes and depicted a special connection between children and the environment through “independent, secret and unsupervised play in natural settings” (2011, 163). Fantastic Victorian works took the same road creating worlds like Wonderland and Neverland as a metaphor



to existential growing pains and it is not until the emergence of a more radicalized pastoral that sought to retrieve children's literature didactic function—encouraging animal care and empathy to the underprivileged—that non-human beings were granted a voice, anticipating a modern pastoral tradition that went beyond civilized settings like gardens and parks, to represent wildlife (Sigler 1994, 149-152).

More recent contributions depict urban spaces as endangered and refer to real natural areas in the world, not only encouraging to appreciate their beauty or informing about their ecological dangers, but also urging on socio-environmental debates—that include topics such as multiculturalism, feminism, nuclear power, and animal rights— and empowering children for eco-activism (Sigler 1994, 149-152). Gaard argues that narratives for young readers that emphasize how to defeat alienation, hierarchy, and domination, often encourage community and interdependence, as well as anarchy and agency and in these stories, children consider the perspective of the non-human world and are open to change thanks to interaction and empathy (2008, 12-15). Values that can be found in Dahl's works where underdogs—often poor and orphaned children, vulnerable magical creatures and small animals— work together and mobilize to defeat authority and abuse of power.

In this context, Ecocriticism, as a theoretical framework, has expanded its scope during the last decades to include class disparities and feminist approaches which have connected environmental justice issues to oppressive structures (Gaard 2008, 12). According to Gaard, to study children's fiction from this perspective, we should first observe how are humans and the natural world's identities constructed in the narrative and how do they face alienation; second, identify how the narrative addresses the ecojustice problem and if the strategy to solve it is appropriate in terms of rejecting hierarchy and promoting participation and community, and in this sense, examine if the child is left on its own to solve an environmental problem caused by adults; and third, we must analyse the kind of agency that the text recognizes in nature questioning whether it is portrayed as self-reliant or if it is saved by the child hero (2008, 15-18). These matters will be addressed next throughout the analysis of Dahl's works with an emphasis on nature, to see how they extrapolate from the logic of domination towards encouraging environmental consciousness and agency in children.

“THE HUMAN BEANS IS MAKING RULES TO SUIT THEMSELVES”

Dahl's first story marketed for children *The Gremlins*—with illustrations by Walt Disney Productions— was published during World War II when Dahl served as a RAF pilot, and draws from aircrew folklore that attributed mechanical failures to mythical creatures. The story explains why the gremlins' goal is to destroy planes, stating that, long time ago, England was covered with forests and swamps where goblins, trolls, hobgoblins, pixies, and the gremlins—in the greenest of the woods—lived peacefully until the humans came (1943, 17). The story continues:



... for one morning their world was suddenly filled with a tremendous rumbling that shook their little houses and even the big trees. [...] From the trucks jumped hundreds of humans [...] who started cutting down the trees [...]. There was nothing for the little men to do but to move very quickly onto a hill nearby, where they just sat watching the humans who were destroying their homes. [...] And as the days went by, the little people saw a huge factory rise on the spot where the wood had been. (Dahl 1943, 17-18)

The gremlins realize that the factory is destined for aeroplane assembly and decide to make mischief with “those big tin birds” from then on (Dahl 1943, 18). Unfortunately, the story ends on a different note when the creatures change their mission to help one pilot –harmed after a war accident– to fly again and be able to go back to fighting against the German squadron.¹

A year later, the *New Yorker* published Dahl’s *The Sound Machine* (1949), a horror story about a device that allows the human ear to hear the sharpest sounds, where the inventor becomes deeply affected by the sounds that flowers and trees make when they are cut. Even if the story is directed to an older audience, this poignant idea is rendered in one of Dahl’s most popular children’s books, *The BFG*, the story of a dreams’ collector giant, who befriends an orphan girl named Sophie and work together –with a little help from the Queen of England– to defeat the horrible giants that eat children at night when they are asleep.

In one of their conversations, the Big Friendly Giant explains to Sophie that he can hear the sharpest sounds, like ladybirds and ants passing by, but also plants and trees –for instance, referring to picking a flower and twisting its stem till it breaks, the BFG says: “it is screaming just like you would be screaming if someone was twisting your arm right off” (Dahl 2016b, 37). This comparison of nonhuman to human pain is later expanded throughout the following dialogue:

‘... I is hearing a terrible sound coming from inside the heart of the tree.’

‘What sort of sound?’ Sophie asked.

‘A soft moaning sound,’ the BFG said. ‘It is like the sound an old man is making when he is dying slowly.’

He paused. The cave was very silent.

‘Trees is living and growing just like you and me,’ he said. ‘They is alive. So is plants.’ (Dahl 2016b, 38)

Even if the main plot of this novel is not about ecojustice, the BFG seems to be environmentally conscious. He does not only empathize with other creatures’ feelings, but also chooses not to eat humans out of respect because they do not harm giants, and he remains a vegetarian that only eats snozzcumbers. In this sense, the

¹ The plot is expanded in Dahl’s post-apocalyptic novel *Some Time Never: A Fable for Superman* (1948) –which has gone out of print but was “notable for being perhaps the first fictional account of nuclear war to be published” after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings (“Some Time Never,” *The Official Roald Dahl Website*).



BFG argues that the “little piggy-wig” says “I have never done any harm to the human bean so why should he be eating me?” (Dahl 2016b, 71), emphasizing how humans make rules only to suit themselves and are the only species that damage not only other species but its own, which brings back the debate around massive destruction.

Even if the destruction of the planet, other species, and among humans are highlighted topics in aforesaid novels and stories, these tropes became part of the main plot in Dahl’s last children’s novel *Billy and the Minpins*.² The story starts like many other classic fables, Billy’s mother warns her child against going to the Forest of Sin where all kinds of dangerous creatures live; the boy disobeys his mom and instead discovers human-like Lilliputian beings that in a Dr. Seuss’ Lorax tradition –or even similar to Dahl’s gremlins– are the voice of the trees and cooperate with birds, who are they transportation to travel and collect food. The Minpins are threatened by a fearsome beast known as the Gruncher that belches smoke from his nose which makes him blind, but can still smell its prey. Blake’s illustrations do not show the Gruncher, leaving it to the imagination of the reader, who can even see it as a metaphor for pollution and the burning of forests.

If we read this narrative from the suggested perspective to study children’s environmental books, we could argue that it defeats alienation and hierarchy by placing the child at the same level as the creatures, plants, and animals of the forest because Billy adapts to their way of living to devise the plan to defeat the Gruncher. Following the established cooperation between birds and Minpins, the child is aided by a swan who flies him in and, together, get to trick the beast into falling on a lake which puts out the fire, destroying the Gruncher, so even if Billy becomes the hero, nature preserves its agency. In the end, the Minpins warn the boy that if other humans know about them, they would ruin their forest, introducing again the notion of the inevitable human destruction to the environment.

The lesson that Billy learns is not the typical moral found in fables about not disobeying the elders. On the contrary, as Pinsent argues referring to Dahl’s views on education, we see that his writing supports “individual endeavour and outdoor pursuits” (2012, 71) and in this story, the protagonist learns that to acquire knowledge on how to respect and protect the environment accurately, he needs to “watch with glittering eyes the whole world around” (Dahl 2019, 81), an idea that is reappraised in Dahl’s stories concerning animals which will be addressed next.

SUBTLE ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Given the predominance of animal fables in children’s literature, this theme entered the scope of ecocriticism that seeks to study the rapport between culture and nature, as well as the objectivity and subjectivity regarding animals’ representation

² Previously known as *The Minpins*, the title changed in a 2017 rendition that included illustrations by Quentin Blake.



in these narratives (Gaard 2008, 14). When portraying interspecies' relationships, Dahl's fiction equates children and animals since they are both dominated by adult humans, and even if the latter are usually depicted anthropomorphically, their habitats are drawn from factual learning, while in fewer of these stories animals are presented more realistically.

In this regard, Geerdts argues that

On one hand, anthropomorphism may support analogical reasoning between humans and animals, helping children extend biological knowledge about humans to unfamiliar. On the other hand, anthropomorphism may promote a human-centered view of the biological world and encourage the attribution of human-specific properties to real animals. (2016, 10)

Hence, the scholar wonders if we should continue to use this tradition to engage children to learn about the environment and on an argument in favour, Geerdts explains that depictions of animals in storybooks expose children to information about non-human beings that are unfamiliar to them when there is little opportunity to have direct interaction with nature (2016, 11). In fact, research supports the idea that anthropomorphism is beneficial to increase psychological connections between humans and nature because personal analogy serves children as a conceptual bridge to help them make educated guesses on biological facts concerning the environment and therefore, storybooks that encourage closeness to the natural world could help foster ecological relations (Geerdts 2016, 12-13). On the other hand, extremely anthropomorphic representations could interfere with factual learning, especially in younger children and therefore, "research that varied the format (e.g., language, illustrations) and degree (e.g., behaviors, physical characteristics) of anthropomorphism suggests that more subtle forms" are effective in teaching students about animals—especially older children and adolescents as they are capable of recognizing metaphor—and hence, these works do not encourage anthropocentric reasoning (Geerdts 2016, 12).

A few works by Dahl provide more anthropomorphic depictions as his picture book *The Enormous Crocodile* (1978), as well as the *Giraffe, The Pelly and Me* (1985), offering a few facts about animals—for instance, what they eat and some of their abilities, but closer to traditional representations originated in fables. In *Esio Trot* (1990) something similar happens because the pet tortoises work only as a plot device—in the form of a courtship tool used by an old man in love with his neighbour. However, the remark that Dahl makes in the preface shows his concerns when he explains that the English government passed a law prohibiting to bring tortoises from places like North Africa since they used to be brought in boats in terrible conditions (Dahl 2016c, 5-6).

Already, in the short story "The Boy Who Talked with Animals," included in *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar and Six More* (1977)—a book aimed for tweens and teens—Dahl shows his concerns when telling the story of a sea turtle caught by fishermen on a resort beach in Jamaica where the owner expects to cook it as a meal, and rich tourists offer money to transform its shell into fashionable and decoration



pieces. Fortunately, a boy who can communicate with the turtle ends up running away with the animal to the sea and although alienation is faced in this story, the child is left alone to fight a problem already caused by the adults and in the end, eco-social hierarchy and domination structures do not alter because the grown-up characters do not reformulate their views.

On the other hand, Dahl's works offer several nods on animals that should not be our companions, and neither be at the service of human entertainment and exploitation. *The Twits* expands this perspective as Mr. and Mrs. Twit are not only mean to each other, but also mistreat their African Muggle-Wump monkeys training them like circus animals. The Roly-Poly Bird –another character, like the Muggle-Wumps, that also reappears in other stories and poems by Dahl– serves as the intermediary between the monkeys and the local birds, as this migrant bird can communicate with both, warning and saving the locals from the Twits' weekly bird pie. Later, they all help the Muggle-Wumps to put everything upside down in the Twits' house, while the couple is out shotgun shopping. Blake's illustrations portray the animals in a cartoonish graceful way that contrasts with the Twits' horrifying appearance (Scott 2012, 169). In this sense, Scott points out how

In the aesthetically remarkable drawings such as those in *The Twits*, and the serenity of those in *My Year*,³ Blake has captured Dahl's strong sense of the order and moral direction that lie deep in nature and defy the grotesque actions of wicked people, and has affirmed the energy and power of the human spirit working in harmony to set the world to rights. (2012, 173)

The Twits contain subtler anthropomorphic representations since the behaviour described in the text has been somehow acquired by the training the monkeys have received from the retired ringmasters –even in real life, circus and lab animals, as well as pets and other domesticated animals are at the mercy of humans and behave as taught. Happily, the monkeys end up leaving back to Africa with the Roly-Poly Bird, revisiting the argument that animals and plants should be free and be able to remain in their habitat.

“The Pig,” a poem from the *Dirty Beasts* collection, represents another revenge plot from animal to human and refers to real-life meat consumption –as the BFG argued. In this horror children's bedtime narrative, a highly intelligent pig thinks about his life purpose until he realizes:

They want my bacon slice by slice
To sell at a tremendous price!
They want my tender juicy chops
To put in all the butchers' shops!

³ In the posthumously published book *My Year*, based on Dahl's diaries, the author refers to his childhood memories, and describes vegetation and animals' behaviour and how their natural habitat changes through seasons—which are subtly depicted by Blake's watercolour illustrations.



They want my pork to make a roast
And that's the part'll cost the most!
They want my sausages in strings!
They even want my chitterlings!
The butcher's shop! The carving knife!
That is the reason for my life! (Dahl 2002, 4)

The poem ends on a frightful note when the pig decides to eat his farmer, which exposes how our daily practices may be atrocious to animals. Likewise, in *James and the Giant Peach*, there is a moment when Miss Spider tells how her relatives died in the most awful ways because of James' aunts. In this sense, Stallcup points out how Dahl "intertwines the oddly related pleasures of humour and disgust in order to create slyly satirical commentary" (2012, 31), exposing through these stories how these animal characters dread killing and torturing like humans do, which encourages empathy in the reader.

In this regard, *James and the Giant Peach* reinforces the child-animal bond and inspires emotional and psychological connection with nature. Even if the insects are illustrated and physically described anthropomorphically –for instance, they are portrayed as tall as James and wearing clothing pieces or accessories like the Centipede's boots– the narrative accentuates biological facts,⁴ for example, how earthworms and ladybirds are useful in farms, how centipedes do not have exactly one hundred legs and how grasshoppers' ears are in their bellies and not in their heads as James assumes, and also how important proves the silk from silkworms and spiders as flies and mosquitoes' catchers, and how beautiful the glowworm can be in our eyes.

Similar to Billy in relation to the Minpins' habitat, along the journey in the giant peach, James is the one that devices the plans to face the challenges in the story, but always considers the crew's abilities, so the boy and the insects end up working together. The child is again set at the same level as the animals and has to act as their intermediary when they first arrive in New York and the citizens are afraid of them. However, the ending is more promising than in the "Boy Who Talked with Animals" and *Billy and the Minpins* –where the boy has to keep the Minpins' forest as a secret to avoid future destruction– because, finally, the insects are not only welcomed by the youngest, but by the society as a whole.

HUNTERS, THE WORST KIND OF BULLIES

Putting oneself in nature's shoes and showing empathy to animals is taken to a further level in *The Magic Finger* where the heroine tries hard to convince her neighbours, the Greggs, to stop shooting animals and birds, but they ignore her

⁴ The only exception could be observed in the beginning when it is mentioned that James' parents were eaten by a rhinoceros, which is not possible as these animals are herbivores.



remarks and make fun of her. The fact that in this story the protagonist is a girl who must confront men about an activity that has been socially regarded as masculine and their reaction towards her emphasizes how she begins from a disempowered position –not only for being young but also for being a woman in this male environment– to one of empowerment when she wisely decides to use her ability. When the girl gets cross, she can point her magic finger at the person that causes her anger, but she tries to restrain herself from using her power because it could unleash terrible consequences. However, after realizing that the Greggs will not listen to her, the girl can no longer restrain herself and points her magic finger to the whole family, including the wife.

After a night out trying to shoot a family of ducks, the Greggs wake up in smaller bodies, with wings instead of arms, and when they decide to fly, they see from above that the ducks have grown and now, instead of wings, have human arms; soon the birds occupy the Gregg's home leaving the humans to build a nest to sleep. The descriptions and illustrations do not show a complete metamorphosis of the humans and the ducks –for instance, the Greggs are still able to speak English, while the ducks keep on quaking most of the time. A bodily deformation, similar to the one in "The Swan" –another story from the *Henry Sugar* collection, where Dahl equates hunters with the worst kind of bullies– makes the narrative more striking as it plays once more with humour and disgust to foster social commentary (Stallcup 2012, 36-37).

In the morning, after a hard night sleeping in the nest, another terrible surprise awaits the Greggs, they find the ducks pointing their guns in their direction and when they beg the animals not to shoot, the birds adopt for the first time the human language and reply:

'Why not?' [...] 'You're always shooting at us.'

'Oh, but that's not the same' said Mr. Gregg. 'We're allowed to shoot ducks!'

'Who allows you?' asked the duck.

'We allow each other,' said Mr. Gregg. (Dahl 2008, 40)

Again Dahl points his magic finger to the fact that humans always make one-sided rules regarding the natural world. Even when Mrs. Gregg tries to convince to the ducks not to harm their children, the duck replies: "Yesterday you shot my children' [...] 'You shot all of my six children'" (Dahl 2008, 41). Finally, the ducks make the Greggs promise to destroy their guns and not to shoot another animal again before releasing them, and suddenly, humans and ducks regain their physical appearance. The Greggs not only keep their promise but, to honour the birds, their family name is changed to the Eggs; they also make graves for the ducks they have shot and from then on, feed the birds that arrive at their farm.

In the end, the heroine finds out that another family is out hunting and gets ready to confront them, and as Pennell argues: "the girl child refuses to remain a captive of the private sphere and asserts her right to a voice in the public sphere; she successfully schemes so that male characters forswear a patriarchal practice" (2012, 108). Not only is the child heroine an empowered young girl, but also the



animals have been capable of standing for themselves and hence, the narrative also defeats another patriarchal construction which is the idea of human hierarchy over the environment because no longer the Greggs feel entitled to hunt or see animals as inferior creatures.

Other works that show this kind of agency are *Danny the Champion of the World* and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, where social inequality is paired with eco-justice problems. In the first novel, Danny and his father live in a caravan, own a gas station, and enjoy poaching pheasants from Mr. Hazel's land –only for their own consumption. On the other hand, the magnate hosts a shooting party each year for the rich and the royals and is already depicted as a bully when he is mean to the boy in the gas station. This leads the father and child to devise a plan to poach all Hazel's pheasants right before the party, thus succeeding. When the magnate frenetically arrives in the gas station to confront the heroes, the birds “exact a gooey, disgust-laden revenge” and occupy Mr. Hazel's Roll Royce scratching and damaging the painting of the car and making a mess (Stallcup 2012, 41), and finally, even to Danny and his father's surprise, the pheasants fly away in the opposed direction to Hazel's land, freeing themselves from all the humans in the story.

In this novel, nature is not depicted anthropomorphically, and once again Dahl's preferential views towards a practical education are emphasized when Danny's father teaches his child facts about birds, insects, frogs, and other animals that they find in their way to school, providing him not only with knowledge about habitats and the countryside but giving also a lesson of ecological respect and “love of the beauty of the natural world that, via Danny's father, Dahl is seeking to generate in the young reader” (Pinsent 2012, 75).

In *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, the animals also stand up for themselves against the cruel farmers Boggis, Bunce, and Bean, who have the monopoly of food and want to kill any animal that threatens their privilege. Like Danny's father, Mr. Fox steals from the farmers because that is the only way to feed his family even if he risks getting hurt –for instance, the last time he comes to the surface, the farmers try to kill him, but they just shoot off his tail. Later the farmers dig the Foxes' burrow using spades and excavators, but these animals, as natural diggers, manage to go even further underground to remain safe. However, they starve as they cannot go out because the farmers decide not to move from the spot, ready with their shotguns. Mr. Fox finds out how to carve a tunnel to the places where each farmer keeps his livestock, and extends an invitation to the Badger, the Moles, the Rabbits, and the Weasels for a great meal, bringing food for carnivorous and herbivores and tricking the farmers who are still waiting for the fox to come out. According to Scott, Blake's illustrations portray humans as uncivilized and beastly, whilst animals behave wittily (2012, 163), and even if represented anthropomorphically, their behaviour and eating habits are depicted accurately; more importantly, the narrative helps to question human superiority over nature and its creatures.



POINT OF DEPARTURE

Dahl's works explore nature deeply and have long been part of the school curricula and accessible in public libraries, aside from the fact that several of these stories have been adapted to films, TV shows, plays and a recent comic book. Considering that Children's and Young Adult fiction holds an aesthetic-didactic aim, ecological literature helps to expand knowledge and encourage the reader to appreciate and preserve the environment since it contributes to the assimilation of ethical values and ideology (Baratz and Hazeira 2011, 34-35). According to Gaard, "when assessing ecojustice problems, students seem to rely more on their emotions than on their intellectual knowledge of environmental science" (2008, 20), which grants children's literature a special role to foster ecological and socioeconomic discussions.

In fact, social inequality and power relations are often related to environmental sustainability, which is sometimes overlooked in the narratives we found in children's popular culture (Sturgeon 2004, 262-263). Nevertheless, we have analysed how Dahl builds these important connections through his works for young readers, whether these narratives are partly or entirely devoted to the natural world.

In this regard, Sturgeon argues that

... it is crucially important to examine what stories are being told, what values are being promoted, which actors get to have agency, and what solutions are being offered. What lessons are being learned, and what kind of environmentalism has become the medium of these messages? What connections are made for children between environmentalism and social justice, between nature and morality? (2004, 265).

Dahl's stories encourage a reflection on how much we actually know about the natural world that surrounds us, making us question if education goes in that direction. Through human depictions, especially those of adult males as uncivilized while nature retains its wisdom, as well as through the representation of bodily deformations and alterations among species, these dark fantasies raise awareness on human daily practices that are devastating for the environment and question human superiority over our fellow other-than-human creatures. Particularly, these narratives foster a discussion on how young people can be empowered to engage in eco-activism and suggest a few alternatives. Firstly, an education that encourages harmony with nature; secondly, learning to be assertive as spokespersons on behalf of the environment, with responsibility and respecting nature's agency and, lastly, working to defeat unfair social structures. Consequently, rereading and studying these familiar and beloved stories from an ecological perspective could serve as a good point of departure for inspiring environmental consciousness and agency in children.

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SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN THE LYRICS OF MIKE SHINODA: 'KENJI' AND 'NOTHING MAKES SENSE ANYMORE'

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ABSTRACT

A third-generation mix-raced Japanese American, Mike Shinoda is a renowned rock and rap musician. Thanks to his two bands, Linkin Park and Fort Minor, Shinoda has been able to raise his voice to condemn social injustices or environmental damage and degradation. The following paper will focus on two of his songs "Kenji" and "Nothing makes Sense Anymore," which include references to those issues. By analyzing the lyrics, we will evince how they distill criticism on social discrimination and environmental damage.

KEYWORDS: Mike Shinoda, social injustice, environmental damage, popular culture.

CONCIENCIA SOCIAL Y MEDIOAMBIENTAL
EN LAS LETRAS DE MIKE SHINODA:
«KENJI» Y «YA NADA TIENE SENTIDO»

RESUMEN

Mike Shinoda es un afamado músico de rock y rap perteneciente a la tercera generación de japoneses-americanos. Gracias a sus dos bandas, Linkin Park y For Minor, Shinoda siempre ha alzado su voz para denunciar injusticias sociales y daños medioambientales. El siguiente artículo se centrará en dos de sus canciones: «Kenji» y «Ya nada tiene sentido». Al analizar estas letras, veremos la crítica a la discriminación social y el daño medioambiental que rezuman.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Mike Shinoda, injusticia social, daño medioambiental, cultura popular.



In this technological era, music is a powerful tool for launching messages which can be spread immediately and heard by a wide audience around the world. Those messages can have an influence on achieving successful outcomes. As a subversive genre and a branch of hip-hop, rap music has always criticized and condemned social or political situations which make our world an unsatisfactory and deficient place to inhabit. In US slang, a rap is also “a judgement or a reaction” (Cambridge University Press & Assessment 2021) and that is precisely what rap music contains and provokes: a judgement and / or a reaction. This musical style was originally identified with black people and social deprivation; however, it was later acknowledged by white people and became a mass phenomenon.

The following paper will focus on the social and environmental messages Mike Shinoda’s songs entitled “Kenji” and “Nothing makes Sense Anymore” encapsulate. Considering that no in-depth study analyzing these songs has so far been published, it will be both interesting and relevant to scrutinize them. A third-generation mixed-raced Japanese American, Mike Shinoda is a renowned singer, rapper, music producer, and graphic designer. Born in 1977 and raised in Agoura Hills (California), he has always been inspired by rock, hip hop and rap music groups such as Public Enemy or Run DMC. Thanks to his two bands, Linkin Park and Fort Minor, and as a solo singer, Shinoda raises his voice in denunciation of social injustices or environmental damage and degradation.¹ With his second project, Fort Minor, he has produced hip hop that touches on many other issues.

It is generally accepted that social fragmentation entails dehumanization and generates inequality. Fort Minor’s “Kenji,” included in *The Rising Tied* (2005), deals with Japanese internment during World War II and how Shinoda’s father and aunt were relocated by the American Government and sent to an internment camp in retaliation after the attack on Pearl Harbor.² What makes this song unusual and unique is that it relates a story based on historical facts and supported by the words and opinions of the survivors themselves. On the other hand, “Nothing makes Sense Anymore” (*Post Traumatic*, 2018) was written after Chester Bennington’s death and includes metaphors for water as decline and renewal. As we will evince, Shinoda takes the opportunity to deplore unacceptable conditions in the environment due to the lack of responsibility shown by individuals.

Music, indeed, has the power to express and disseminate social or environmental concerns that can both raise awareness and have a deterrent effect on unfair situations or detrimental practices. For example, the values of social rights or environmental concerns, such as the protection of nature or the rights of disadvantaged collectives or groups. In hip hop urban culture,³ rap music has its root in “the African tradition of speaking rhythmically to a beat generally supplied by

¹ In both projects, Shinoda’s role as a singer is mainly that of a rapper.

² Shinoda makes clear that “Kenji” was written “as kind of a generalized version of [his] family’s experience during World War II” (Shinoda 2016).

³ Hip hop emerged in New York in the 1970s and was originally created by Afro-American people.



background music” (Richardson and Scott 2002, 176). Rap music is an intrinsically complex type of discourse which interweaves social practice –with the aim of tackling social inequalities– discursive practice, and the text itself (Filardo Llamas 2014, 13). Rap may also function as a form of catharsis. Artists feel a sense of powerlessness to change the way things are because the social, political and economic issues are so complex. This has led them to seek ways to express their discontent. For Richardson and Scott, rap music became a cathartic outlet (2002, 175) as it condemns political issues to change the world we inhabit into a better and fairer one through a cultural revolution which tends to censure power, morality, and the social injustices occurring nowadays. Regarding the relationship between power and morality:

There is an obvious tension between power and morality [...]. [P]olitical theorists through history have given us a rich body of thought on this question –from Aristotle’s insistence that virtue is both a cause and an end of good government, right through to contemporary writings in the academic study of International Relations addressing issue like humanitarian intervention, human rights, legality and legitimacy. (Garton Ash 2010, 72)

Be that as it may, some of the lyrics belonging to this style also seek environmental justice and defend marginalized groups. “In the last several decades, environmental justice movements around the world have grown out of convergences between civil rights movements, antiwar and antinuclear movements, women’s movements, and grassroots organizing around environmental issues” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 4). As human beings, we can adapt to the specific circumstances, conditions, or situations to fight for a world without blatant social injustices and for the protection of the environment. In *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, Murray Bookchin states that we can “innovate”:

Humanity did not emerge *ab novo*, without roots in animal evolution. The human being has been and still is an animal with emotional states that are animalistic, like “fight and flight” reactions and tormentingly basic fears. But humans are also animals of a very special kind: we are highly intelligent [...] [and] we have the ability not only to adapt to our environment but intentionally to alter them significantly. In short, we can do more than adapt; we can *innovate*, although we do not always innovate unwillingly if we can survive in a given environmental without doing so. (1996, 6)

Bookchin continues asserting that “our intelligence is also highly problematic” (1996, 6) and when it comes to social life, we must be empathetic and try to fully understand that our planet is shared by several species.

[W]e [...] have yet to find our way towards a self-conscious, human, cooperative, and empathetic social life. With our animalistic as well as human attributes, we evolve in an ever-changing world and face stark problems of survival and well-being. Apart from those people who inhabit places with benign physiographic conditions, we are subject to material insecurity, contesting wills, challenges to our sense of self and self-regard, fears of disease, diminishing physical powers with age, frightening dreams, and so forth. (1996, 7)



On the matter of empathy, environmental justice is determined to ensure proper living conditions for marginalized groups and to counteract the degradation of nature worldwide. “Environmental justice initiatives specifically attempt to redress the disproportionate incidence of environmental contamination in communities of the poor and / or communities of color, to secure for those affected the right to live unthreatened by the risks posed by environmental degradation and contamination, and to afford equal access to natural resources that sustain life and culture.” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein 2002, 4). Were music used as a pedagogical tool when defending the environment, the harm would be reduced. Therefore, music—particularly rap—fulfills the task of raising environmental awareness and embodies a commitment to those populations excluded from social, educational, or economic life. Additionally, it must be considered that “[a]ny serious environmentalist must now realize that for decades the worst forms of environmental degradation have been enabled by governmental and corporate policies of dumping problems on communities of color, poor whites, and the Third World” (Reed 2002, 146).

Living in a world in which every resource is exploited has led us to an environmental crisis. The structure of our society is hierarchical and only if we changed our relationship with all the elements of nature would we be able to improve the conditions on our planet. For Bookchin, “the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human” (2005, 1) and the environmental crisis has its roots in the structure of our society. Even though rap is an urban genre, Shinoda has always been aware that the environmental crisis constitutes a serious problem which must be eradicated and he takes this question seriously enough to decry the way our planet is being eroded by our harmful practices. Many of his songs—particularly those performed by Linkin Park—distill concern for nature and its devastation and through the NGO Linkin Park founded in 2004, Music for Relief, Shinoda himself has helped people suffering from poverty and the damaging effects of earthquakes or floods, such as the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami (2004) or hurricane Katrina (2005). The purpose of Music for Relief was to raise money for the victims of natural disasters, to provide them with aid and to make people aware that we must make a huge effort to protect nature.

The band’s conviction is that they might reach their audience and make people conscious of the way our planet is being annihilated by dangerous procedures or behaviors and the need to concentrate on sustainability. Motivated by the assumption that their audience could realize the damage done to the earth by human beings, they promoted an initiative through which all the band members tried to sustain life and foster recovery in underdeveloped countries severely affected by environmental degradation, hunger, climate change, and natural phenomena. When poor communities clamor for help and relief, music acts as a catalyst to stir up consciences and sensibilities and raise environmental and social justice awareness.

The first song to be analyzed focuses on an individual vision and experience of injustice. Fort Minor’s “Kenji” deals with Japanese internment during World War II. The song pays homage to all those Japanese people who were relocated from their homes and sent to internment camps after the Japanese air attack on



the American fleet at Pearl Harbor (Hawaii) on December 7th, 1941. At 7:55 AM, local time, the first Japanese dive-bomber appeared. Nearly 200 aircraft, including torpedo planes, bombers, and fighters destroyed more than 180 American planes at the Naval Air Station on Ford Island and adjoining Wheeler and Hickam Field. The ships anchored in the harbor saw intensive action and several American ships were bombed. The USS *Arizona* and The USS *Oklahoma* were completely destroyed, and more than 2,300 American lives were lost. The attack “precipitated the entry of the United States into World War II. The strike climaxed a decade of worsening relations between the United States and Japan” (Britannica’s editors 2020). On December 8th, President Roosevelt defined the previous day as “a date which will live in infamy” and finished his speech by adding: “I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7th, 1941, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire” (Roosevelt 1941).

Two months later, on February 19, 1942, Roosevelt signed the Executive Order 9066, in which military forces were provided with the authority “to exclude any persons from designated areas” (Ray, n.d.). Even though the word “Japanese” was not included in the text, it was fairly obvious that “the Japanese Americans were the focus of the initiative” (Ray, n.d.). Thus, “[b]etween 1942 and 1945, approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans were detained in 10 camps for varying periods of time in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Arkansas” (Ray, n.d.). They were forced to abandon their properties, after packing some belongings and clothes in bags they were confined in barracks. Certainly, those Japanese Americans had nothing to do with the attacks; however, the order was signed, and the President’s commands had to be complied with, as the U.S. Government was afraid of Japanese espionage and conspiracy. Furthermore, “[r]acial fears contributed to the decision to evacuate more than 11,000 people of Japanese descent from their Pacific Coast homes” (Leonard 1990, 465). After the confinement, some Japanese Americans were not welcome in certain places and hostilities continued in areas such as California. “Terrorists fired shots into the homes of no fewer than fifteen Japanese American families, and arsonists and vandals destroyed property belonging to at least fifty other families. By late 1946, most of the overt hostility had disappeared.” (Leonard 1990, 463).

As already mentioned, Shinoda’s birthplace is Agoura Hills, whose natural areas are part of California interior chaparral and woodlands.⁴ Being half-Japanese, he has always been aware of his racial heritage. The internment of his family in Manzanar during World War II made him shape and write a song which would honor all those Japanese Americans or Japanese descendants who were stuck in the camps –living under lockdown– and experienced racial tensions, even when

⁴ “Within [this] ecoregion, one finds a mosaic of grassland, chaparral shrublands, open oak savannas, serpentine communities, closed-cone pine forests, pockets of montane conifer forests, wetlands, salt marshes, and riparian forests” (Olson, n.d.).



the war was over. “Kenji” includes the voices of his own father and aunt. Shinoda planned the interview carefully to make them feel comfortable to recall and relate their experiences in the camp. He added:

I knew my dad would do the interview. They are two of 13 brothers and sisters. Nine are left. They are two different experiences that sum up the internment. My dad was 3 to 4 years-old and my aunt was in her 20s. [...] I had to plan my questions very carefully. I obviously wanted to get information she was comfortable telling. It took a couple of hours. She ran out of standard answers after an hour [...]. [T]hen they reveal what really happened. She told me about the way they set up the partitions in the room. They used thumbtacks and bed sheets. They had 20 to 30 people in one barrack. I don't believe there was a toilet; they had to go to center of camp. (Shinoda 2006)

Despite being written in verse and containing rhymes, “Kenji,” the core of which are the personal experiences in an internment camp, is eminently narrative. Having three narrators, the song begins with the words of Shinoda's father explaining how the family emigrated to America to make a living: “My father came from Japan in 1905 / He was 15 when he immigrated from Japan / He worked until he was able to buy respect and built a store” (2005). However, the American dream was interrupted by the relocation to an internment camp. In the sentence “He worked until he was able to buy respect and built a store,” his father makes clear that immigrants had to work hard to gain respect, which means that they were considered second class citizens who had to demonstrate that they were only interested in living honestly by running their own businesses.

The discursive disposition of the facts commences when Shinoda addresses the public by narrating “the story in the form of a dream” and requests them to close their eyes, “just to picture the scene” as he paints it for them (2005). Of course, he does not use the terms “picture” and “paint” randomly. His abiding interest in visual arts, such as painting and drawing, connects him with another *brand* of hip hop: graffiti. Many artistic trends originate in order to highlight the need to face political and social changes in history, and graffiti constitutes a good example. In this sense, Shinoda's career combines his facets both as a painter and a musician and it is his intention to place an emphasis on the former. So, he paints scenes in which small passages of his family's internment can be observed.

Kenji –a typical Japanese name and the keyword of the song– belonged to the first generation of Japanese immigrants, or “Issei,” who started arriving in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. They kept their customs, language and religion and sometimes they were perceived as a threat and faced discriminatory legislation. The unequal distribution of the benefits of immigration and discriminatory legislation jeopardized not only the welfare and security of this group, but also their lives. Bearing this in mind, the attack on Pearl Harbor would mean a turning point in the relationship between the US Government and the Issei. Social differences among groups constantly provoke inequality and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people are those who suffer more. This ultimately might lead to racial discrimination.



When Shinoda indicates that Kenji “was not a soldier” and was ready to have breakfasts before going to work in the little store he ran, he means that he was a man of peace whose main concern was to earn enough money to live and to feel respected. Serenity and endurance are part of the Japanese temperament which Shinoda highlights here. He does not hesitate even to include the word “Japs” when he remarks that “everybody was afraid of the Germans, afraid of the Japs, / But most of all afraid of a homeland attack” (2005). Although the previous abbreviation of “Japanese” is a derogatory and offensive term,⁵ Shinoda’s intention might be to show the word used those days. The American Government was afraid of another attack or even espionage and Japanese Americans were thought to have been traitors. Here, the tone of the song shifts completely, and, for the first time, the language used is a rough one. He has not used any aggressive word previously to describe the attitude of Americans towards Japanese; however, it seems that he attempts to underline ethnological discrimination.

Shinoda also depicts the horror and the tragedy the attack caused. The sentences “Pictures of soldiers dyin’ and runnin’ / Ken knew what it would lead to” (2005) underline that, after an attack that had caused the destruction of so many lives, and caused so much bloodshed, there would be an immediate response from the US Government and that response was President Roosevelt’s speech. The use of the adjective “evil,” when describing the President’s statement to relocate Japanese people (“The evil Japanese in our home country will be locked away”) (Shinoda 2005) confers the song more subjectivity as those words attempt to classify all Japanese people as guilty of an attack and a horrendous crime that the vast majority had no intention at all to commit and probably would not have approved of. The negative connotations included in the word “evil” accentuate the idea that the attack on the American harbor would separate these two countries and increase their opposition in the global armed conflict. The ensuing conflict destroyed millions of human beings and, indubitably, devastated the environment. At the same time, the adjective portrays the pain and anger that American society experienced after the attack. As matter of fact, Roosevelt did not pronounce that sentence. In “December 7, 1941, A Day Which Will Live in Infamy,” he admitted that hostilities existed and, as a consequence, American people, territories and interests were in grave danger (Roosevelt 1941). The social isolation of the Japanese community led to denials in fundamental rights. They were regarded with suspicion and could not remain in their houses anymore, practicing their tradition and culture. It made no difference whether they lived in America or in Japan: General John L. De Witt, “who was in charge of evacuating [them], indicated that there was no distinction between Japanese in Japan and Japanese Americans in the United States. ‘A Jap’s a Jap,’ he

⁵ “In the 1950s, Shosuke Sasaki launched a campaign to have the word “Jap” re-classed as racial slur and eliminated from print media.” Sasaki was an activist who immigrated to the US in 1919 and “was incarcerated at the Minidoka concentration camp for the duration of World War II” (Varner 2019).



asserted” (Hane 1990, 570). They were all politically suspect and “All the Japanese had to go” (Shinoda 2005). Thus, guiltless people were taken to the internment camps. Shinoda’s aunt asked herself why. For her, there was no reason to relocate honest citizens and it was an outrage. “They took Mr. Ni / People didn’t understand / Why did they have to take him? / Because he’s an innocent laborer” (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda implies that Japanese Americans had to pay a high price for the faults committed by someone else.

In an anthropocentric society, where individualism prevails, acknowledging that all individuals –no matter their race or ethnicity– are equal should be fundamental to the stability and the social welfare of the world. Concerning Japanese internment, avoiding injustice and certain racial prejudices was not possible, as the Executive Order 9066 condemned them to be relocated without any specific evidence for the whole community being responsible for the attack, or that some of them could even be spies. “The US is lookin’ for spies” (Shinoda 2005). Japanese people were removed for national security and were also feared as a risk due to war hysteria. Hence, they were given two days to pack their belongings “in two bags / Just two bags” in which they “couldn’t even pack [their] clothes” (Shinoda 2005). The question that arises now is how to pack a whole life in two bags. This is what Shinoda indirectly asks the public and he leaves room to create controversies surrounding questions of oppression and injustice.⁶ For Shinoda’s family, Manzanar was the place chosen. The internment had a decisive and negative impact on the quality of Japanese Americans’ lives. Furthermore, the verses “When the kids asked mom ‘Where are we goin’?’ / Nobody even knew what to say to them” (Shinoda 2005) illustrate how sad the situation was and how difficult for the Japanese families it was to explain what was happening. Although his life had changed completely, Kenji tried to reassure his wife and children. The conditions experienced in the camps were not optimum and the only solution for a stoic man was to endure till the end of the confinement. His hopes in the future could be summarized in “Someday we’ll get out, someday, someday” (Shinoda 2005).

The Second World War devastated not only millions of human lives but also amplified the hatred and antagonism existing between America and Japan. In “Kenji,” Mike Shinoda denounces the terrible and difficult situation his family went through in the camp. He reveals how, due to racial prejudices and contempt, relocating Japanese in internment camps caused apprehension and anguish. These camps, according Shinoda’s elucidation, had enclosed walls and towers with soldiers. Unable to experiment any feeling of frustration or scorn, Kenji opts for empathy and decides that hate must be avoided to survive and to be released one day. In his view, the soldiers watching the Japanese should not be blamed for that, since they are only doing their job: “Ken couldn’t really hate them at all; / They were

⁶ “Japanese were to bring, for each member of the family: bedding and linens (no mattress); toilet articles, extra clothing; knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups; and essential personal effects.” And “no pets were allowed” (Daniels 2002, 20-21).



just doin' their job and, / He wasn't gonna make any problems" (Shinoda 2005). Unquestionably, being trapped in camp is not what one expects and, on certain occasions, the need to survive and overcome a difficult but temporary situation—such as the internment—leads people to learn how to go about things unnoticed, or, at least, not to be known as the perpetrator of any riot. "He had a little garden with vegetables and fruits that / He gave to the troops in a basket his wife made, / But in the back of his mind, he wanted his family's life saved" (Shinoda 2005). In a metaphorical way, these vegetables symbolize a kind of truce between Kenji and the soldiers. Growing vegetables in a private garden in America was commonplace during both the First and the Second World Wars to supply the troops and prevent hunger. The sudden severe economic and financial crisis forced Americans "to contribute to the war effort by planting, fertilizing, harvesting, and storing their own fruits and vegetables so that more food could be exported to [their] allies" (Schumm 2018). After the First World War, these gardens reemerged.

On the other hand, the empathy which was perceived in the previous verses turns into resentment when Shinoda asserts Kenji and his family were "prisoners of war in their own damn country, / What for?" (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda utilizes rap music here to openly censure how absurd and unjust the internment was. It is the first time in the song he uses an adjective with negative connotations, "damn," to explain Kenji's feelings and to curse a country which repudiates innocent Japanese immigrants. This notion is reinforced with the name Shinoda gives to the camp: "prison town" (Shinoda 2005).

The desolation felt due to the confinement gave rise to the idea of escaping. One way might be to join the army, and yet, for Kenji, killing his own people was not the proper solution. "And supposedly, some men, went out for the army, signed on, / That 15 kiloton blast, put an end to the war pretty fast, / Two cities were blown to bits; the end of the world came quick" (Shinoda 2005). The incident mentioned in the previous lines corresponds to that of the devastating nuclear bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945, respectively, as a final response to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The attack on its navy had ended the United States' neutrality in World War II and the nuclear bombs put an end to the war with the surrender of Japan. All these events were responsible for the deaths of millions of innocent human beings.

After their confinement in the camps, it must have been difficult for the Japanese Americans to hope or even imagine that life would go back to normal and when they returned to their homes, what they discovered was that their houses had been vandalized. "These people had trashed every room, / Smashed in the windows and bashed in the doors, / Written on the walls of the floor, / "Japs not welcome any more" (Shinoda 2005). In addition, returning home was not an easy task and the Japanese Americans found many difficulties, since an anti-Japanese sentiment was spreading throughout California.

When the decision was made toward the end of the war to close the camps and allow the internees to return to their homes in California, another outburst of anti-Japanese sentiment broke all over the state. Earl Warren continued his campaign



against Japanese Americans.⁷ In opposing the return of the internees to California, he argued that every evacuee being released was a potential saboteur. There were seventy incidents of terrorism and seventeen shootings. (Hane 1990, 574-575)

In the last verses, Shinoda portrays Kenji's impression after being released and observing his house ruined and his whole life in a state of collapse. Desperate and with no words left, he shows resignation and says to his wife: "Someday we'll be OK, someday" (Shinoda 2005). The sentence, which is repeated in the song, epitomizes Kenji's hopes, despite the fact that they were never fulfilled.

It is worth indicating the power of the lyrics and how they make the listener aware of the awfulness of wars and internments. The song also condenses an implicit message that social conflicts, whatever and whenever they may be, maximize racial prejudices and discrimination and unleash inequality. The last three lines recap Shinoda's main intention, that is to say, to reveal a true story from the point of view of his family and the suffering they experienced in the internment camp. "Now the names have been changed, but the story's true / My family was locked up back in '42 / My family was there it was dark and damp / And they called it an internment camp" (Shinoda 2005). Shinoda is cognizant that being forced to spend three years in the camp was not constructive. He admits that, apparently, his family "sound relatively benign" when talking about it:

My dad was the second youngest out of 13 [kids]. They packed dozens of people in our family into one little barrack room. The barracks were quickly and loosely thrown together, and when you woke up in the morning you had to wipe off everything. These are stories that I grew up hearing. [My family] made it sound relatively benign and they played a lot of things down, but if you dug into a kind of detail with them, you could tell it was really an awful experience. (Shinoda 2016)

The second of Shinoda's songs analyzed also includes the emotions of the individual but extrapolates them and juxtaposes them with greater environmental issues. The track "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" was composed after Chester Bennington, Linkin Park's vocalist, died in 2017. The style is not exactly rap, but seemingly alternative hip hop in which significant influences of pop are detected. The title of the song is quite revealing, in the sense that it attests that the core will be a devastation, either personal or environmental. Shinoda himself explains that the whole album, *Post Traumatic*, was "a journey out of grief and darkness, not into grief and darkness" (Camp 2018). On December 15, 2017, a firestorm in Bel Air (Los Angeles), known as The Skirball Fire, burnt 422 acres with 100% containment. According to Los Angeles Fire Department, 12 structures were damaged and 6 structures destroyed. "[T]he investigators have determined the fire was caused by an illegal cooking fire at an encampment in a brush area adjacent to where Sepulveda

⁷ See *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (Weglyn 156). Earl Warren was Governor of California from 1943 to 1953.



Boulevard crosses under the San Diego (405) Freeway” (Stewart 2017). Harmful and irresponsible actions clearly destroy nature. We live in social structures and not understanding that our planet is shared by all of us will bring about severe consequences. “Ironically, the very period when long-term human impacts upon the planet have escalated to such an extent that our era has been dubbed the Anthropocene is also the era in which the entanglement of morality and materiality, social relations and natural phenomena, has become veiled” (Rigby 2015, 6).

Shinoda seized the opportunity to show his grief and decided to exhibit videos of the incident, which had a tremendous impact on nature, to corroborate the extent of the devastation, juxtaposing his own personal desolation with the destruction of the environment and he requested his fans to send him films recorded by themselves which would be used at the beginning of the video (@mikeshinoda, February 8, 2018c).⁸ Owing to Shinoda’s enduring interest in environmental problems, the use of the firestorm images is not by chance. The mastery of fire by humans can be traced back to primitive societies. In classical mythology, the Titan Prometheus stole fire from the gods to empower humans. As reported by Rigby, “[i]n availing himself of technologies powered by combustion of ancient biomass [...], the modern Prometheus is fashioning the Earth and its atmosphere in ways that are fast becoming calamitous” (2015, 112).

The first lines of the song indicate that Shinoda has always been able to control himself and has never experienced any trouble. The quietness of his life allowed him to feel safe and secure and he contemplated fear and difficulties from a reliable and stable position: “I used to know where the bottom was, / Somewhere far under the ocean wave. / Upon a ledge I was looking down / It was far enough to keep me safe” (Shinoda 2018a).

It should also be added that Linkin Park’s lyrics contain several images of water when talking about human feelings. In general, water is a symbol of fertilization, purification, and dissolution. Heavy seas and choppy waters imply bad omens or adversities. In literature, water connotes birth –or the origin of life– death or redemption by cleansing. Gaston Bachelard defends the concept of water as extinguishing fire and, as a result, water defeats fire (2011, 162). As Juan Ignacio Oliva points out, “this liquid element serves to exemplify the constant and slight mutation of human lives in their existential evolution. Likewise, water also presents its elusive condition which is used as a metaphor for the changing reality, which makes one doubt and shudder” (2016, 81).⁹ In this song, being far from “the ocean waves” conveys that Shinoda’s life was relatively easy and he was able to look at complications from a comfortable position. However, if life changes, everything alters in a flash: “But the ground was cracked open / Throw me in the ocean / Cast me out away at sea” (Shinoda 2018a). What generated Shinoda’s fall was Bennington’s death. Shinoda again uses an element of nature, “ground,” to describe the collapse

⁸ #FireVideoForMike.

⁹ My own translation.



he suffered. The prevailing images in the song are those of water. The fierce ocean and the sea are a metaphor for dissolution, destruction and death and the breaking waves convey the ferocity of the destruction, both physical and psychological. Meanwhile, the personal destruction is equated with environmental destruction, which means that feelings are mirrored in nature.

Another feature which should be mentioned is the prevalence of opposites. Shinoda delineates a world containing pairs of antitheses which complement themselves. Every noun and adjective has its counterpart, and both cannot be avoided to fully understand the real meaning of the song. The second stanza provides a good example of his mental and physical situation and the despair he feels: "My inside's out, my left is right, / My upside's down, my black is white. / I hold my breath and close my eyes, / And wait for dawn but there's no light" (2018a). The adjectives "black" and "white," in combination with the nouns "dark" and "light," emphasize the contrast between the positive and negative parts of human existence. Shinoda transmits the inconsistency and conflict he experiences and his difficulty overcoming this situation. In the phrases "the world was turned over / Washing out the lines" (2018a), water does not have a purifying function but acts as a destructive force which confuses him. More specifically, the end of the song exudes negativity, since Shinoda claims that he is lost: "I'm call without an answer / I'm a shadow in the dark / Trying to put it back together / As I watch it fall apart" (2018a). Again, darkness covers everything and he cannot escape from the nightmare.

The disastrous effects of the Skirball Fire are displayed in the video Shinoda recorded, which deals with the harmful effect and disastrous consequences of damaging or toxic practices. At the beginning, images of the Getty Center including the fierceness of the firestorm are displayed. Several cars and trucks circulate while mountains are being scorched by the fire and, subsequently, the opposition between nature and industrialization is patent. The next image is that of Shinoda himself walking through the burned terrain. The devastated environment can be brought into line with Shinoda's physical appearance. Looking thinner and visibly affected by Bennington's death and the landscape he is contemplating, he screams hopelessness "Nothing makes Sense Anymore" (2018b). On the edge of the precipice, the suffocating atmosphere does not allow him to breath properly. He even states: "I hold my breath and close my eyes / And wait for dawn, but there is no light" (2018a). Only a colorful cap hanging on a burned tree branch, which probably belongs to one of his children, suggests that there is hope and that light will shine. The same hope is felt at the end of the video, where images of green shoots constitute a symbol of recovery for both Shinoda and the environment (Shinoda 2018b). No doubt with this video he was trying to make the audience understand that thoughtless actions can deteriorate the planet. As a result, an enormous effort should be made to remedy its destruction.

The analysis of these two songs can lead to some conclusions about the role of Shinoda's music in raising public awareness of both personal and environmental issues. The subversive undertone contained in rap music allows artists to denounce unfair situations and social injustices. In the case of Mike Shinoda, what he is denouncing in "Kenji" is the internment suffered by his family. Throughout the lines



of the song, he exposes the negative experience his family went through. Without using a hard language, except for the occasional word or sentence, Shinoda's intention is clear: to condemn an act of racial discrimination such as Japanese internment during World War II. Of course, the use of certain hard words or expressions constitutes an example of the pain Shinoda has inside himself. Writing a song which reveals a traumatic experience is likely to have had a cathartic effect on him and, at the same time, he was able to pay homage to all those Japanese Americans confined in the camps and, more specifically, to his family. The song is not an act of revenge, but aims to open up the social debate around race and the consequences of war. Shinoda narrates a true story whose victims, his father and his aunt, are given voice so that the episode is not forgotten. The reason why he does not make use of hate and rancor may be found in the following words belonging to Martin Luther King Jr.: "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vault of opportunity of this nation. [...] Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst from freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred." (1963).

"Nothing makes Sense Anymore" is a good example of how inner and personal devastation may correspond to environmental destruction. If we do not pay attention to the fact that harmful practices and damaging human actions can annihilate nature, its devastation will be rapid. Shinoda's interest in protecting the environment is reflected in many of the songs he composes and in the specific projects he carries out with the NGO "Music for Relief." Providing marginalized communities affected by natural phenomena with aid is something the organization has been implementing since its inception. Both Shinoda's lyrics and actions exemplify his abiding interest in environmental problems. Those issues have led him to use his lyrics to raise awareness about the positive contribution we all could make to keep the environment safe and help social groups in need of aid.

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NOTES

“HERE’S TO THE FOOLS WHO DREAM”: HOLLYWOOD’S ILLUSION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN *LA LA LAND*

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ABSTRACT

The ideal of the American Dream has defined the lives of many people not only within the U.S., but also from all around the world, making it an international phenomenon. However, its significance has varied throughout time, adapting to the new circumstances of the people pursuing it and the opportunities coming their way. In such context, *La La Land*, the outstanding audiovisual 2016 production, deals with the newest conception of the Dream –the “Dream of the Coast”– by offering a glimpse at the true Hollywood lights and shadows through a nostalgic and flawed portrayal of the Dream and the real consequences of pursuing it.

KEYWORDS: American Dream, *La La Land*, Hollywood, nostalgia, identity.

“BRINDO POR LOS INGENUOS QUE SUEÑAN”:
EL SUEÑO AMERICANO COMO UNA ILUSIÓN DE HOLLYWOOD
EN *LA CIUDAD DE LAS ESTRELLAS (LA LA LAND)*

RESUMEN

El ideal del Sueño Americano ha guiado las vidas de muchos, no sólo dentro de los Estados Unidos, sino también en el resto del mundo, convirtiéndolo en un fenómeno internacional. Sin embargo, su significado ha variado a lo largo del tiempo, adaptándose a las nuevas circunstancias de aquellos que lo perseguían y a las oportunidades que estos encontraban en su camino. En este contexto, *La ciudad de las estrellas (La La Land)*, la aclamada producción audiovisual de 2016, aborda la nueva concepción del Sueño Americano –el «Sueño de la Costa Oeste»– mostrando la realidad de las luces y sombras de Hollywood a través de un retrato nostálgico e imperfecto del Sueño Americano y las consecuencias reales de perseguirlo.

PALABRAS CLAVE: El Sueño Americano, *La La Land*, Hollywood, nostalgia, identidad.



In his work *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation*, Jim Cullen defines the “American Dream” not only as a national, but also international phenomenon. He associates the “American” part of the term with the fact that the United States is a “country constituted of dreams, whose very justification continues to rest on it being a place where one can, for better and worse, pursue distant goals” (Cullen 2004, 182). From the first pilgrims who reached the East Coast and built their communities there to those who, still today, go through all kinds of obstacles to reach their destination, America represents the land of opportunities, continuously exerting “an enormous allure that has only grown more powerful” (178).

Following this line of thought, Cullen identifies the notion of the “American Dream” under the ideal of “good life,” thus, developing the idea of the “Dream of the Good Life.” This conception of life has taken different shapes throughout the history of the United States: the dream of the promised land the Puritans were looking for; the one of people’s equality that arose during the American Civil War, reaching its peak during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s; or that of “home ownership” that gave way to the U.S. Middle Class after WWII are just a few examples of how the Dream –and what dreaming means for people– has varied in over 400 years of the country’s history.

In this sense, one needs to address a more specific and geographically defined conception of the “American Dream:” the “Dream of the Coast” (160). This particular view of the “Dream” emerged in the mid-19th century, when California had just been officially incorporated to the United States, coinciding with the so-called “gold rush.” Thousands of people moved to the newest incorporation to the Union in search of gold in what Cullen considers as “the purest expression of the Dream of the Coast in American history” (170). Though the golden dream soon vanished, the potential of “the Golden State” continued to prove the “metaphorical power for generations of Americans” (170), especially showing to be “quite practical for some enterprises” (172). Among these, the industry of motion pictures found in California a place to settle its growing empire.

Up until the early 20th century, “much, though not all, of the early movie industry was concentrated in metropolitan New York” due to the fact that Thomas Edison’s trust “controlled key patents on projectors” (173) limiting the places in which filmmakers would carry out their work.

Edison believed that the key to mastery of the movie industry lay in controlling the means of production. A group of Jewish immigrants with names like Fox and Warner, however, realized the money really lay in the content, that is, in making movies that people truly wanted to see. (173)

Looking for a break from the restrictive east coast and the new potentials and new freedoms (Deneen 2002, 96) that California offered, some of these filmmakers moved to the West like many other American entrepreneurs had done before them. Hollywood –absorbed by Los Angeles in 1910– would soon become the “international capital of popular culture” (Cullen 2004, 173).



The American film industry suffered a major growth over the 20th century, becoming the largest one in the world. Nowadays, it is the one that greatly embodies the “Dream of the Coast,” calling people from many different places to the new “Promised Land” if they wanted to succeed in the world of the motion pictures. But this dream has suffered some changes since it first appeared.

Traditionally speaking, the notion of the “American Dream” represents:

a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position (Wright 2009, 197)

Thus, everyone has the possibility of moving forward –or upwards– in the social ladder no matter the step they begin their journey at. This ideal has prompted many people to try and reach their different life goals throughout the country’s history. One of these goals is the one that Los Angeles represents for actors, filmmakers, musicians and all the kinds of artists who every year travel to the West Coast looking for new opportunities to grow professionally. In fact, Hollywood has become the major factory of U.S. culture, constantly promoting and seducing audiences into the most basic American cultural values (Grady 2015, 1).

In this sense, Hollywood acts both as the embodiment of the modern version of the American Dream as well as the medium to promote it. Yet, Hollywood’s version of the Dream has become a corrupt one by changing the focus of its art to a more “impersonal product to maximize profits at the tremendous, tragic expense of our culture” (Payne 2004). Against this new trend, new filmmakers –the ones belonging to the so called “Indiewood” (Sánchez-Escalonilla 2016, 22)– have been developing, since the late 20th century, a “strong trend of cinema –big and commercial as well as small and personal– aspiring to be human, intelligent, respectful of the audience and director-driven” with the aim to “portray real people with real problems, real joys, real tears” (Payne 2004). An example of these new trending cinema is Damien Chazelle’s *La La Land* (2016) which tells the story of Mia –a young woman who wants to become an actress– and Sebastian –a young musician who dreams about owning a jazz club. The movie, shaped as a musical, includes various nods to the classic old Hollywood in which dreams come true.

The “Hollywood Dream” is one that calls people “to be on that screen/And live inside each scene” (Pasek and Paul 2016, “Another Day of Sun”). It is one that prompts those willing to try and reach the top of the hill, “chasing all the lights that shine” and to “get up off the ground” when they fail at climbing it (Pasek and Paul 2016, “Another Day of Sun”). The lyrics of the song from the movie’s first scene embody one of the most significant traits of the American character –and, thus, of the American Dream: individual agency and personal fulfilment (Cullen 2004, 39). Both aspects are related to the individualistic conception of the American people, whose success depends only on their individual actions and choices, fulfilling their goals on their own. The men and women dancing on the motorway promote, through their singing, the ideal that the only way to fulfil your wish is by working



hard yourself, even fighting against others to achieve it: “They say ‘you gotta want it more’ / So I bang on every door” (Pasek and Paul 2016, “Another Day of Sun”).

Hollywood movies have promoted this individualistic notion of “hard work” and “non-stopping” for decades, offering a big optimistic image of the Dream. (Pileggi *et al.* 2000, 210) The lyrics of “Another Day of Sun” seem to support the same ideal, except for the fact that all the dreaming dancers end the song by going back to their cars stuck in a traffic jam. “Another day of sun” refers, in this sense, to the act of getting back in the car where they will spend hours to reach their plain and ordinary job.

The movie offers, this way, a less idealized and more realistic image of the Dream by beginning with a scene of a number of people in their cars commuting to their jobs in the morning in the midst of a traffic jam, while showing how only a few of them are able to take the closer exit out of it at the end of the day –and the movie, as Mia’s dream of becoming an actress has been finally fulfilled. These two scenes –one at the beginning of the movie and the other close to the end– put together offer a critique of the usual representation of the Dream by the media, especially Hollywood, perpetuating the “myth that achieving the American dream is within everyone’s reach” (208) by projecting the “success of a few individuals” (210).

Mia and Sebastian appear to be two of these individuals. Trapped inside her car, while commuting to the coffee shop she works at, Mia takes the time to practice the lines for an audition she has that same day. Sebastian, sitting in his car right behind her, works on a music piece trying to get the song’s rhythm right. Both characters embody the main features a “dreamer” needs in the pursuit of their goals, using every opportunity to dedicate time to them.

In the end, Mia’s audition turns out to be a disaster before she has even reached the place as she bumps into a customer that splits his coffee all over her shirt. The audition getting interrupted in the midst of the performance’s emotional part is just the final straw that leaves Mia down for the day. However, the Hollywood world does not let people time to lament over lost roles, that is how Mia finds herself getting ready to attend a party in one of the luxury houses at the hill –as these events become yet another place in which to find new opportunities.

The movie’s first party scene offers one of the most meaningful songs. “Someone in the Crowd” brings to the front the real Hollywood, that in which standing out in a crowded party turns to be more useful for you career than going to auditions: “Tonight’s the casting call/If this is the real audition/Oh, God, help us all” (Pasek and Paul 2016, “Someone in the Crowd”). The scene introduces the reality of the industry in which people preparing their roles, practicing their lines and trying to show their acting skills are barely paid attention, whereas those who dress and behave in order to be noticed in a party are the chosen ones:

Someone in the crowd could be the one you need to know
The one to finally lift you off the ground
Someone in the crowd could take you where you wanna go
If you’re the someone ready to be found (Pasek and Paul 2016, “Someone in the Crowd”)



In other words, the “Dream of the Coast” has become one resting on “personality” rather than on “character:”

They were celebrities, people whose fame rested not on talent, however defined, but on simply being famous. One of the strangest paradoxes of subsequent American history would be the histories of other Americans, among them Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley, who emerged from highly particular cultural communities possessing enormous talent and yet who trivialized, even discarded, their gifts in a desperate desire to live the Dream of the Coast. (Cullen 2004, 177)

Because now the Dream is rooted in personality, talent is dismissed. Aspirant’s looks, behavior, willingness to submit to the new Hollywood norms are, now, more attractive features than talent or acting skills. In this sense, those moving to Los Angeles looking for this “Dream of the Coast” “fall into a form of enslavement –enslavement to a pursuit without end” (Deneen 2002, 97). *La La Land* shows that the real problem with the American Dream nowadays is that it has become “too incomplete a vessel to contain longings that elude human expression or comprehension” never reaching “the Coast we think we see [...] Still we go on dreaming” (Cullen 2004, 182). Thus, people have become slaves of the Dream as “the struggle for success is limited to the triumph of image and appearance, while people [...] are reduced to objects” (Sánchez-Escalonilla 2016, 32).

The same way Mia’s skills are frequently disregarded during the auditions, the talent of the other protagonist is also misused. Sebastian is an “old school” musician in love with jazz who wants desperately to save it from its approaching end:

“It’s conflict and it’s compromise, and it’s just... it’s new every time. It’s brand new every night. It’s very, very exciting! And it’s dying. It’s dying, Mia. It’s dying on the vine and the world says: ‘let it die. It had its time’. Well, not on my watch.” (*La La Land*, 00:45:22)

Sebastian’s resistance to “letting jazz die” represents the resistance to let the old traditional conception of the Dream die with it. There are two moments in the film in which he gives in to the system and becomes its compliant, and both times he ends up fighting against it.

Sebastian is the romantic artist, the music lover who dreams of a life of rhythm and vitality. But “empty bills are not romantic” (*La La Land*, 00:20:32), and so the urge to find a job to pay those bills leads him to the restaurant he used to play the piano in the past. That is why, at the beginning of the story, he is shown back to his former place of employment, being rehired by the manager with one condition: this time, he must stick to the setlist given by the manager. By adhering to the setlist, however, he is renouncing to his freedom as a musician to play what he loves and feels as meaningful, thus, becoming the performer of ‘elevator music.’ He becomes the factory’s worker assembling a product, losing his artistic side in the process.

This is Sebastian’s L.A., the one in which “they worship everything, and they value nothing” (*La La Land* 00:41:04). His critique of the shallowness of the *Dream*



today matches that of the Indiewood filmmakers, expressing themselves through their writing, their music and their films rather than giving in to the impersonal industry Hollywood has become (Sánchez-Escalonilla 2016, 31). Sebastian is a romantic in the sense that he keeps holding “onto the past” and letting “life hit me until it gets tired. Then I’ll hit back” (*La La Land*, 00:20:40). He cannot leave the past behind so he can conform to the present:

At the core of many American Dreams, especially the Dream of the Coast, is an insistence that history doesn’t matter, that the future matters far more than the past. But history is in the end the most tangible thing we have, the source of solace for all our dreams. (Cullen 2004, 284)

An old acquaintance of his, Keith, displays this ideal of focusing on the future and forgetting about the past, as he asks Sebastian how he expects to be a revolutionary when he is “such a traditionalist” (*La La Land*, 01:08:38). The problem in this sequence is that Keith’s vision of the world –like that of the new version of the “Dream of the Coast”– is not Sebastian’s ideal of it. Keith is asking him to be revolutionary and innovative, while Sebastian wants to keep jazz alive. Keith sees the aesthetic as key, something to attract people’s attention to his music in order to sell it. Sebastian feels the content and the essence of his music is more important. Like those first pioneers of the motion picture’s industry who moved to the West Coast wanting to make movies people were interested in watching, Sebastian focuses on the music, not the money or the fame. He is the “fool” who still “dreams.”

This way, Sebastian represents the classic Los Angeles and the old Hollywood, those in which talent was preferred over looks. Those in which “character” mattered more than “personality.” And it is his ability to look beyond the surface that makes him that “someone in the crowd” Mia sang about.

Mia: It’s pretty strange that we keep running into each other.

Sebastian: Maybe it means something.

Mia: I doubt it.

Sebastian: Yeah, I didn’t think so. (*La La Land*, 00:31:30)

Because the American Dream has been part of the U.S. history even before it was even born, it has functioned as the common ground, “binding together people who may have otherwise little in common and may even be hostile to one another” (Cullen 2004, 189). Sebastian and Mia seem to be these opposing people, coming together because of a shared notion of the Dream. He dreams of opening his own club, a place where jazz can be played and respected at the same time; her dream is to become an actress. Both of their goals are sustained by their nostalgic view of old clubs of jazz and the classic Hollywood movies Mia talks about. And that is their common ground: they both look at the future still holding to the past.

This shared perspective of the conception of the Dream is precisely what prompts them to support each other in their personal ambitions. In a very similar way to those working under the ‘Indiewood’ label –who portray the notion of independent cinema as the reflection of the director and their creative team (Payne



2004)– the traditional Sebastian is the one who suggests Mia should create her own script: “You could just write your own rules [...] write something that’s as interesting as you are” (*La La Land*, 00:43:08). Not only that but he praises her work when she does not feel very confident about it:

Mia: It feels really nostalgic

Sebastian: that’s the point. (*La La Land*, 01:04:06)

Mia’s script is nostalgic and that makes it personal and risk –the same way *La La Land* was described when it was first screened– but also totally worth it for Sebastian.

While Sebastian appears to be the biggest supporter Mia has throughout the movie, she also offers him a sense of stability that he was missing. Mia is the one who pushes Sebastian to accept Keith’s offer to join his band, so he can earn enough money to finally build his own club. However, time goes by and Sebastian stays in the band, something that Mia cannot understand. So, he explains: “This is the dream. Guys like me work their whole lives to be part of something this successful that people care about” (*La La Land*, 01:22:58).

Once more, the corrupted “Dream of the Coast” appears in *La La Land* as an ideal that limits the individual, placing him/her within a set of boundaries that erase the individual’s identity –of which his/her Dream is part of– when it does not fit in the system. In fact, Sebastian begins to lose himself the moment he accepts Keith’s offer despite the fact that he does not like their music or that he is forced to dress or pose differently. Los Angeles –representative of the State of California– is the paradise that lures people into its streets and buildings with promises of flourishing, only to leave them to merely survive trapped in an ordinary life (Wright 2009, 198). Both Mia and Sebastian are able to see the reality of the Dream, but they made different choices which in the end means they need to follow different paths.

The conception of the American Dream as a restraining ideal rather than a liberating one is also portrayed through clothing. Clothes carry great symbolism throughout the movie. A clear example resides on Mia’s clothing which seems to be very colorful at the beginning of the movie, always choosing bright and lighter colors in contrast with the more classic darker ones of other people in town –for instance, her ex-boyfriend Greg, his brother and sister-in-law or any of the casting directors she meets. Her vivid clothes can be clearly identified with her bright personality and her optimism, yet, they often play a major role in stopping her from being chosen or noticed in auditions and parties. In fact, Mia’s first audition goes wrong because she is wearing an electric blue jacket over the plain white shirt she is supposed to wear –the ordinary outfit every woman in the room is wearing, thus, making her “stand out” in the “crowd.”

At some point in the film, after a series of unsuccessful auditions, she gets called for a second one at a place where the presence of color seems to conceal a hidden message about the clothing choices for those tests. At the first audition for the role, even though Mia’s clothes are exactly the same as in the second one, the wall behind her is light green, while in the second –and shorter– one it is plain



grey. Thus, although the wall changes its color, Mia's appearance does not preclude any possibility of getting the role. It is not until later in the film, during her play's performance, when her wardrobe choices change into more classic ones—such as the striped suit at the beginning or the plain white shirt and dark skirt at the end. It is because of her performance in this passage that she gets the call from the casting director that finally launches her acting career. Five years later, she is a well-known actress and the spectator can now see her frequently wear somber and more classic clothes in her daily life while bright colors are relegated to her characters—as can be seen in the billboard announcing her new movie on the street. Sebastian, on the other hand, keeps wearing similar clothes from the beginning to the end of the movie.

In this sense, clothes become the more visual symbol of both characters' progression throughout the film, but also of the Dream's significant focus on physical appearance rather than on talent only. On the one hand, Mia is shown to have changed and adapted her wardrobe to fit in the Hollywood standard of clothing, losing a great part of her in doing so. On the other, Sebastian wears clothes that, although probably more expensive in prize, still reflect who he was five years prior—and who he still is.

In the end, the film is all about identity and the pursued Dream as part of it. The American Dream has always been part of what means to be American, brought by the pioneers who risked everything in search for a better life. The Dream creates an image luring the dreamer to reach it. However, the image the Dream projects is one that “can never be fully attained” (Downs and Stetson 2013, 691). Mia reaches her own dream only when she renounces to a great part of her—a part that defines who she is and that is symbolized in her clothes and in Sebastian's love. However, she participates in movies that present the notion of the Dream as attainable, playing women wearing colorful clothes like the ones she used to wear and creating the illusion that the Dream can be reached by being yourself. In this sense, the movie's end, with Mia and Sebastian's alternative and unreal view of what their Dream looked like, contrasts with the image of reality viewers see in the screen.

Thus, *La La Land* offers both a sense of optimism by showing that dreams can, in fact, come true while also acting as a critique on the ideal that is the Dream and its real consequences. While Mia loses herself in her actress persona, looking—thanks to her clothes in and out of the screen—like she is constantly acting in her daily life while being closer to her old colorful persona only on the movies she performs, Sebastian has become a successful club owner, but one who seems to keep looking at the past. Mia's embracing of the conception of the “Dream of the Coast” today and Sebastian's nostalgic view of it are portrayed in the movie as irreconcilable, offering an even more hopeless view on the prospect of the American Dream.

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